Aaron Laffey was a hard luck loser last night in his 2008 Indians debut, holding the Yankees hitless through the first five innings before allowing four runs in a goofy sixth inning. The Tribe offense, sporting Dellucci in the leadoff spot and Jamey Carroll in the two hole, went back to sleep, doing little damage amidst a bevy of Mike Mussina slowballs. In today's B-List, Buff recaps the loss, Laffey's performance, and laments the rapid and shocking decline of one Travis Hafner.

FINAL SCORE				
Yankees (14-13)	0	0	0	0
Indians (12-14)	(2nd		3 GB CHW)	0

W: Mussina (3-3) L: Laffey (0-1) S: Rivera (8)

Did you know that bugs attacked Joba Chamberlain the last time he pitched in Cleveland? I don't know if you caught that on the ESPN broadcast.

1) Michelangelo's smudge

A quick glance at Aaron Laffey's performance after his fifth inning of work would have suggested a truly spectacular performace: Laffey carried a no-hitter through five innings, and had only walked one batter. And even a more careful perusal would have been impressive: the second, third, and fourth innings were perfect, with Laffey retiring a total of 14 in a row from the first through fifth between an error by Jamey Carroll in the first and a plunked Robinson Cano (hitting .153, so my guess is that this was unintentional) with two outs in the fifth. Laffey retired Jose Molina on his stock in trade, the ground ball out, to end the fifth.

Still, this was not necessarily your father's no-hitter: Laffey walked the first batter he faced, and Carroll's error meant that he was in scoring position with no outs. At this point, you really expected Laffey to turn to his primary weapon to induce a double play to expedite the inning's end. Instead, Bobby Abreu was able to drive a ball to center that hung too long for the first out. Alex Rodriguez fouled out to first, and then Jason Giambi scared the bejeepers out of me with what SEEMED like a long smash to right on a 3-1 pitch that turned out to be just a pretty deep fly out.

Now, look: if you take one thing from the game last night, it would have to be that Aaron Laffey retired 14 in a row en route to 5 hitless innings. I mean, that's damned good stuff. The Yankees may be struggling a bit at the plate this last week or so, but ... it's five hitless innings, dammit. That's real good.

However, Laffey's best pitches are those that dive at the end: a two-seam fastball-slash-sinker and a slider that he'll throw at any point in the count. Whereas last season, Laffey was conjuring up GO:FO

ratios in the sixes, last night was only 10:6. And that first inning made me gasp a couple times with runners on base: both Abreu and Giambi got under the ball slightly, but they hit those pitches pretty well, too.

Two hit batsmen and a 48:30 strike-to-ball ratio suggest that Laffey could work a little on his command.

2) The dirt-encrusted ruby

The stat sheet will show that Aaron Laffey is now 0-1 with a 6.35 ERA, having given up more runs (all earned) than Jeremy Sowers while striking out fewer hitters.

The stat sheet is full of shit.

Aaron Laffey was f*#&ing great last night. You want to talk about how he gave up four earned runs? He gave up:

a high-bouncing ground ball to deep short
a swinging bunt to third that took a spin-hop to prevent being fielded cleanly
a solid single to left
a hit batsman on a 1-2 pitch
two ground ball OUTS to first base
(Laffey exits here)

a Jensen Lewis Pablo Backyardigans Special

That's it. There's your four-run rally. One ball was hit as far as ten feet in front of an outfielder. There wasn't a single play where I will yell, "He wuz robbed!" because of severe butchery by a defender (although we'll touch on this later), but the balls that were outs in the first were hit better than all but one of these massive "hits."

If there was any really head-shakingly bad thing Laffey did, it was hit Alex Rodriguez on a 1-2 pitch. Rodriguez is clearly not 100% and can't run properly. He swung and missed at the first pitch, and in his previous two trips fouled out to first and grounded out to second. The odds of him doing anything with that at-bat were really low, and the chances for a double play on a guy with a quad injury were higher than normal. And you're *Aaron Laffey*, fer crine out loud! Ground balls are ... well, frankly, they didn't help you much in that inning. But that pitch pretty much sucked large rocks.

So, Aaron Laffey pitched 5 2/3 innings, gave up one solid single, and threw one execrable pitch that hit a slumping injured hitter. That's pretty damned good.

3) My kingdom for a clue!

So, with the bases loaded in a 2-1 game after Rodriguez was struck, the infield is at double play depth. I suppose this makes a certain amount of sense: Laffey was an extreme groundball pitcher last season,

and a double play would be a very good way to get two-thirds of the way toward the end of the inning.

However, what I can't quite figure out is that Ryan Garko, apparently having taken a lesson from the Ron Belliard School of Infield Positioning, is basically in short right field. This might be a prudent decision with the left-handed power hitters Jason Giambi and Hideki Matsui at the plate ... but I'm having a hard time reconciling this. The two men who reached on infield singles in this inning we there by virtue of balls that were hit *slowly*, not *sharply*. The only thing approximating solid contact was Abreu's single: everything else on the night had been something lifted blandly into the air or pounded into the turf. In fact, if anything, Laffey's ground balls tend to be of the "bouncer" variety than the "roller" type.

I'm trying to be careful not to do an *ex post facto* analysis that makes me mad only because the ground balls bounced to Garko each turned into a run. But it does seem like there were enough visual cues before those ground balls to suggest that Garko should have been playing as many as four steps closer to the plate. Of course, the hops were pretty high, and I would have been just as furious had one of them bounced over Garko's head for a piffle double, but that really does seem like we gave up two runs for no really good reason.

As for Jensen Lewis, would someone teach that boy to field his position? My mooglies are googled.

4) Anything you can do, I can approach its level of ineptitude

I have been frustrated in recent games in which left fielder David Dellucci took ill-advised angles to balls hit to the outfield (or executed an even more ill-advised dive), the results of which have been extra-base hits. And he seemed to shy away from doing such a thing in the sixth, choosing to play Abreu's liner "safely" and hold him to a one-base-advancing single to load the bases. Hey, that's a snap decision, it would have taken a Herculean play to catch that ball, that's baseball, move on.

However, Jason Michaels tried to cut off Matsui's shot to right center in the 8th, failed to get there in time, and Matsui's resultant double drove in the Yankees' fifth run. It may have been a trick of the camera, but it sure looked like he could have cut that ball off with a different approach angle, which would have prevented Johnny Damon from scoring from first. I didn't like that play.

5) The return of Squander Ball

Let me digress for a moment: my parents' families are originally from Maryland, and after the move of the Original Senators, they all became Orioles fans. I grew up rooting for the Orioles as well as the Indians, in a sense glomming on to my family's attachment, and have followed them with some degree of passion (current level: negative six: thank you, Peter Angelos!) over the years.

As such, I have always liked Mike Mussina. Never quite the best pitcher of his generation, Mussina still has to be considered a member of the true Upper Class of such pitchers, consistently throwing high numbers of high quality innings and being the true Ace of an Orioles staff that had some notable success in the ‘90s. A Stanford product, he pitched intelligently, with plenty of raw "stuff" to keep him from being considered simply a tricky pitcher.

So now that Mike Mussina has turned into Paul Byrd, it's a little disconcerting.

Listen to me now and believe me later: Mike Mussina has nothing. NUH-UH-UH-THING. The radar gun says his fastball hits 88, and I don't believe it. He still has movement, and he threw some changeups that would have looked at home on Eric Gagne's pre-injury highlight reel, but the man is tossing up unspeakable gunk, and, to paraphrase Dennis Green, we let him off the hook.

The first two innings were nothing to write home about: Garko did ground into a double play, but he is Ryan Garko. But in the third, after the first two runners reached, despite Steve Phillips' repeated bleatings, I had no problem with Jason Michaels (now at the Mendoza line! Huzzah!) sacrificing the runners to second and third. Hey, Laffey's on a roll, we can't score any freaking

runs, one hit should be very productive.

But David Dellucci can't hit three of the most grotesque slowballs imaginable to whiff swinging, and Jamey Carroll, after fighting off a million fouloffs, waited ... waited ... waited on a changeup and grounded out harmlessly to first.

In the next inning, with a runner on second, Garko grounded out to short. And even in the two-run "outburst" that defined the fifth inning, including an RBI single by Michaels and a solid single by Dellucci (nice timing, Dave! Phbt!), Travis Hafner waited ... waited ... waited on a pitch and hit a sac fly to the left field line. After Martinez walked, Peralta lined out to short with the bases loaded, and the ball wasn't really hit all that well.

That ended Mussina's night, but the Indians' offense as well. In all, we left 8 men on base, an inconscionable SIX of them in SCORING POSITION. We should have scored at least six runs last night: that we didn't is a teamwide indictment.

6) Indicting the team widely

Two hitters in the Cleveland lineup were hitting as much as .250. Two! And one was David Dellucci, who augmented his 1-for-5 night with two of the very worst strikeouts in modern history. Our #2 and #3 hitters both sported .219 averages. Two nineteen! However, with a very nice 2-for-3 night, Jason Michaels prevented anyone from ending the night below the Mendoza Line.

Ryan Garko has now made thirty-six thousand outs in a row.

7) Pronk suck!

I have had poor vision my entire life, sporting a brisk 20/500 prescription that I wear contact lenses for. It's only been in the last year that I've had to make the concession to reading glasses in low light, but it's kind of a notable state change: I'd never really had trouble reading before, so it was a little disconcerting to simply not be able to focus, an action that was automatic before.

With this in mind, I think I have taken the wrong approach to trying to glean positive things from Travis Hafner's willingness to hit the ball to the opposite field. I was wrong, and I apologize.

Travis Hafner has become Mark Teahen.

I literally believe Hafner does not *see* the ball in the way he used to. Instead of hitting being the more-or-less instinctual act of moving the bat through the zone with the ball, it has become a more arcane adjustment of trying to determine where the ball is going to end up, without having a complete set of information with which to determine this. He can't see the ball. He is waiting longer and longer in an attempt to gather more information, but he is having to "guess" at fastballs, and hitting everything the other way because he needs That Much More Time in order to properly locate the ball.

I would throw Travis Hafner three thousand consecutive fastballs on the hands and take my chances.

8) Eddie Mujica called, he wants you to join him for an imaginary coffee at Chimerabucks

Ryan Garko is hitting as poorly as humanly possible. Our outfielders are thirty-one flavors of struggling. And Casey Blake is ostensibly the "super sub," although how super one can be while hitting .224 is probably limited by one's definition of "super." Or "sub."

Anyway, I no longer believe that Andy Marte is on this roster. I believe he is a cardboard cut-out just to meet the minimum roster requirements.

As for Tom Mastny, I have evidence in Aaron Laffey that ironing one's hat brim is not sufficient action to remove one from roster consideration. I don't know if he can pitch any more. Watch out, though: he's prone to discard his fives when he's got the crib, so you might want to think twice about reflexively tossing in your king.

9) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Jorge Julio threw nine strikes in twelve pitches to record 4 outs without a runner reaching base. Yeah, I checked: it was Julio.

10) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro calls the Jim Rome show as "Bodi." I believe Rome has caller ID and would have exposed this by now, thus indicating this statement as false. Fire Travis Hafner's optometrist.