Despite interference from Mother Nature on Sunday, it was a good weekend to be an Indians fan. The Tribe offense sprang to life, erupting for a six run seventh inning on Friday night to beat Roy Halladay, then came back and scored six more in the first inning on Saturday to spearhead a 12-0 win for Aaron Laffey, who looked excellent once again. As he does each Monday, Buff recaps the weekend of action from the Indians ... and gets us ready for today's twinbill.

FINAL SCORE				
Blue Jays (17-20)	0	0	0	0
Indians (17-18)	0	0	0	0

W: Sabathia (2-5) L: Halladay (3-5)

FINAL SCORE				
Blue Jays (17-21)	0	0	0	0
Indians (18-18)	(T 2nd		1 GB MIN)	6

W: Laffey (1-2) L: McGowan (2-3)

Who the heck are these guys, and when do we find the pods they used to replace the previous Cleveland Indians' offense?

1) Good things come in sixes

I made an off-hand comment last week addressing the Toronto-Cleveland series, wondering if the two teams would combine to score 18 runs ... total ... over the four-game set. Toronto came into the series on a rather impressive run of offensive ineptitude: since scoring 11 runs against Baltimore on April 15, the Blue Jays had scored 4 or fewer runs in 17 of 22 games. They swept the White Sox while scoring a ridiculous 12 runs in 4 games (ridiculous in that that was enough to register a sweep), and scored 4 runs in 3 games against Boston before that. The fact that Toronto was able to win 5 of those 7 games helps underscore the strength of their roster, namely, excellent starting pitching (Roy Halladay lost to Boston 1-0, and Dustin McGowan got a no-decision against the BoSox in which he allowed zero runs), but it also under, over, and through-scored the fact that the Jays as a team hit like nematodes. Disregarding sample sizes, their second-highest batting average comes via Joltin' Joe Inglett. They signed Brad Wilkerson, who is done, and traded for Kevin Mench, who is pointless, to *improve their offense*. (It can't be to improve their *defense*: Mench is mobile in the way that tectonic plates are, and Wilkerson ... well ... did I mention he is done?)

This isn't to say the Jays are completely punchless, but we have fine pitching, too, and they are on a cold streak. Meanwhile, I don't think I need to recap any of the fantabulous numbers that show that the Indians' offense has been ... er ... struggling. So it was a pretty reasonable expectation that the weekend would be filled with low-aesthetic low-acoring games.

For 6 ½ innings on Friday, this seemed to be exactly what the (evil, sadistic) doctor ordered: C.C. Sabathia and Roy Halladay were locked in a pitchers' duel that saw Sabathia yield the only run of the game in the fifth, largely because of a Blind Squirrel Double to Rod Barajas.

(With the double, Barajas helped raise his current batting line to .226/.293/.340: he collected 25% of his extra-base hits on the season with that on stroke.) And then the Cleveland offense ... yes, the *offense* of
Cleveland
... broke out for 6 runs. Interestingly, the rally broke out because the struggling Travis Hafner started the inning with a single, and just as struggly Ryan Garko pulled a second single off Halladay. Asdrubal Cabrera drew a four-pitch walk to load the bases.

Now, frankly, this right here suggests that Halladay might have been losing his command. Asdrubal Cabrera is hitting "none" on the season (actually .181 at the conclusion of Friday's game). He was a knee-jerk bunt candidate. And he walked on *four pitches*. I know Halladay's a horse, but that's just poor.

Fortunately, Halladay was given a chance to redeem himself on the next hitter. Unfortunately for Halladay, the next hitter was New Clutch Hero Casey Blake, he of the .444 batting average with runners in scoring position. Blake wasn't able to lift the ball out of the ballpark, but he was able to strike the wall on a fly, and two runs scored.

After a reliever, an out, and an intentional walk, Ben Francisco was summoned to replace left-handed David Dellucci and draw in a new reliever, who promptly gave up another two-run double to Francisco in just about the same spot as Blake's. A wild pitch and sac fly later, Cleveland had a large enough cushion to bring in even Tom Mastny, which I'm sure they would have considered were Mastny an actual human being instead of an elaborate hologrammic hoax.

The six-run inning felt so good that they Indians decided to reprise the experience on Saturday: after a leadoff home run by Grady Sizemore, the Indians pounded wunderkind Dustin McGowan on a night on which his command deserted him: single, walk, single, sac fly, HBP, groundout, single, single (by Blake with a runner in scoring position, of course), and there's your six runs.

The two three-run innings later were only half as satisfying. Aaron Laffey is listed as day-to-day with "pinch marks."

2) Holding up his end of the bargain

Fans may be more encouraged by Aaron Laffey's continued success, but the more important (in terms of the net success of the Indians' season) start was made by C.C. Sabathia Friday. Matched against a starter in Halladay who could end the year with Cy Young numbers in every category but the most important to voters (wins), Sabathia started the game about as dominantly as possible, striking out five of the first eight hitters in the first two innings. Three of the Ks were swinging, and the two men to reach base did so via the HBP and walk. Sabathia then threw six strikes to retire the side in order in the third.

But just as importantly as Pure Dominance, Sabathia was able to avoid the **Inning of Crap™** that had previously been his hallmark: after giving up consecutive singles to start the 4th, he induced a double play and recorded the third on on the next pitch. And after the double to Barajas turned into a run after a sacrifice and a single, Sabathia shook off a second double to retire a red-hot Scott Rolen on a

full-count groundout after Rolen had fouled off four pitches.

Having passed the **IoC™** threshold, Sabathia struck out two more in a perfect sixth and two more in the 7th, finishing his night with 9 Ks, 2 walks, and 6 hits in 106 pitches. He got to watch the six-run rally from the comfortable vantage point of the pitcher of record.

Three of Sabathia's past four starts could truly be considered flat-out excellent, and the real difference appears to be as simple as having good command: in those three starts, his K:BB ratios are 11:2, 8:1, and 9:2, whereas he walked 3, 4, 2, and 5 hitters in his wretched early starts (striking out 7, 2, 4, and 1). Although strikeouts are fine things in and of themselves, it was the walks that disturbed me a lot more than any lack of strikeout power: because he couldn't finish hitters off on two-strike pitches, he tended to nibble early and get hurt with extra runners on base. Although his previous start (4:1, 10 hits) wasn't really very good, Sabathia's track record and improved results make it a lot more reasonable to suggest that although a second Cy Young season might be out of the question, at least a return to Dependable Starter role may have already taken place.

3) Shut up, head!

My heart wants to believe in Aaron Laffey: he combines two of my favorite pitching traits as a left-handed groundball pitcher. He is only 23 years old and has posted nearly inconceivable numbers as the replacement for the injured Jake Westbrook. In 19 2/3 innings, Laffey has allowed only 13 hits, most of them singles, and hit ERA of 1.83 is grossly **inflated** by the location of infield ground balls against the Yankees. He carried a no-hitter into the sixth inning in his first start and nearly as far in his second. His WHIP of 0.86 includes three consecutive games in which he's given up fewer than a hit an inning, and his walk Saturday helped mark the first time he'd allowed as many baserunners as innings pitched.

Through six innings of work, Laffey was actually working on a two-hitter, although he somehow managed to give up a double to Marcos Scutaro, which is difficult. He pulled the difficult trick of giving up four hits in a scoreless inning in his seventh inning of work thanks to a double play and the arm of Ben Francisco, but it's hard to argue that his seven shutout innings were anything short of a roaring success.

Hard, but not impossible. Here is my concern: Aaron Laffey may not be consistently capable of getting through an order a third time.

Now, this hasn't been much of a concern: after all, because he has been so efficient and brilliant during the first two trips, the third trip doesn't get to happen until the 6th inning or so. As well as Sabathia pitched, for example, he faced all of the top three in the order in the 5th inning. That's awfully good. But in Laffey's start against Kansas City, he gave up three of his four hits to batters seing him for the third time: against Toronto, it was five of six (including a sixth-inning single by Alex Rios). (New York had the same results, but only one of the three singles they collected made it out of the infield, and two of the RBI were routine groundouts to first.) That means that a whopping 11 of the 13 hits Laffey has allowed have been to hitters making their third pass at Laffey's "stuff." To claim that Laffey has done a poor job is simply laughable, but let me say this: it would be neither a travesty nor injustice if Laffey were sent back to the minors when Westbrook is ready, and not simply because he has options. It may be that Laffey really *does* need One More Thing to be a long-term viable starter.

4) A glimpse of things to come

I probably bend over a little too backwards in defending Jhonny Peralta, a guy I latched on to because he was able to hold his own in the majors at such a young age. It's sometimes sobering to realize that Peralta, with three whole seasons under his belt and parts of two others before that, won't turn even 26 until the end of this month. To "give up" on Jhonny Peralta would be foolhardy: he is over a year younger than the source of much wailing and gnashing, Brandon Phillips. Although never an Acutally Good defensive shortstop, he's a guy capable of putting up plus offensive numbers from a defensive-premium position, and as such can be a real asset. He is hitting poorly this season, but this distinguishes him in no way whatsoever from half his teammates.

However, I have seen the future of the Cleveland Indians at shortstop, and his name his Asdrubal

Cabrera.

Now, Cabrera is one of the players who is actually more offensively inept to this point than Peralta. He is hitting an honest .194, and his slugging percentage is not simply anemic, but all but exsanguinated at .245. But Cabrera is even younger at 22, and Saturday made several outstanding plays at shortstop, including snaring a run-saving line drive that Peralta would not only not have reached, but I would have thought it perfectly defensible for him not to have reached. I would like to see an overhead shot of that play to see when Cabrera started moving, as it seems inconceivable that he waited until the batter made contact.

Cabrera, in the fine tradition of Venezuelan shortstops, wears #13. It fits him.

5) Anguish for fun and profit

It is infuriating to see Jamey Carroll bat second in this lineup, for two primary reasons:

a) Jamey Carroll is a weak hitter: he is hitting .200, and does not appear capable of hitting a lot better
b) The decision to bat him second is completely reasonable

Under what circumstances is it "completely reasonable" to slot your weak-hitting utility infielder into the 2 hole? Well, who else are you going to put there? He's certainly out-hitting Cabrera. Hafner is struggling mightily and I embraced the decision to move him down in the order. Ryan Garko isn't hitting and is painful to watch move from base to base. David Dellucci is going through a cold streak ... and he's batting *third*, anyway. You could make an argument for Blake, I suppose, although he's really embraced the 9 hole and I greatly prefer him coming to the plate with runners in scoring position. (I also don't want to

putz about with his "comfort zone.") Ben Francisco might be a better choice, but who knows, and it's nice to have him in a run-producing slot while he's hitting, anyway. The team may lack speed in general, but at least it has a hard time making solid contact.

Anyway, I'm not so much picking on Carroll here as I am wondering if there ***is*** a configuration of these hitters that is actually conducive to scoring runs consistently.

6) St. Grady update

In Grady Sizemore's last ten games, he has 12 hits. EIGHT of them were for extra bases. He has raised his slugging percentage from .372 to .481 in those ten games, and now sits at .282/.395/.481 on the season. He has almost as many walks (21) as strikeouts (25) and is second on the team with 20

RBI.

7) Bullpen update

Jensen Lewis threw 16 strikes in 22 pitches, although four of the balls were to one batter. He still pitched a scoreless inning despite giving up a single as well. Masa Kobayashi threw a perfect inning with a strikeout. Craig Breslow fought off reports of his non-existence with two scoreless innings of relief of Aaron Laffey, because you always want to bring in the lefty after they've seen a lefty all game long. (Actually, you bring in Breslow because he never pitches: he struck out three, so he got some good work in.)

8) Transactions primer

Hologram Tom Mastny was sent to Beefalo to call up Jason Tyner. This answers the age-old question, "Is Jason Tyner better than anyone, even an imaginary player?" I am happy to report that, yes, Jason Tyner is now considered better than an imaginary player.

But no one else.

9) Promising signs

Travis Hafner got two hits Friday, including a double. Ryan Garko collected singles in each game. Asdrubal Cabrera had two hits Saturday, including a two-RBI single, and drew the aforementioned walk off Halladay. Ben Francisco had the clutch two-run double to put the game out of reach. Victor Martinez collected three more singles in his attempt to become the slowest Ichiro ever: he also drew a pair of walks Friday and drove in three

runs Saturday. Jhonny Peralta had a plate appearance in which he did not strike out.

10) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro hired a CGI programmer from Pixar to simulate Tom Mastny in order to save on travel expenses and hotel costs. The Players' Union would raise a fuss about this, and it is patently untrue. Fire Jason Tyner.