43 1/3 scoreless innings pitched. Yes, you read that right. 43 1/3 shutout innings by the five members of the Indians starting rotation, which is currently without Jake Westbrook. It was C.C.'s turn last night, and the big man needed no help from the Tribe bullpen, blanking the A's with a dominating five-hit shutout. There's no bigger fan of excellent Indians pitching than Buff, and in today's B-List, he puts the streak in perspsective and gives the complete run down on last nights win.

FINAL SCORE				
Athletics (23-18)	0	0	0	0
Indians (21-19)	(1st		0.5 GA MIN)	1

W: Sabathia (3-5) L: Blanton (2-6)

A interesting contrast of styles: Joe Blanton is built like Rick Reuschel, but younger, and C.C. Sabathia is built like Ed "Too Tall" Jones, but bigger.

1) Local Greatness

Consider the question: was there a point during last night's game at

which you were legitimately concerned that C.C. Sabathia would give up a run? The A's stranded two men in scoring position and 5 men overall: surely they had opportunities.

Not really.

I mean, yes, in the literal sense, of course they were a threat to score. Frank Thomas hit a warning track shot that would have been a score by itself had he hit it just a little better. Bobby Crosby hit a double to deep right. Jack Cust is capable of hitting the ball out of any ballpark on those rare occasions on which he actually strikes the ball with his bat. But emotionally, even as a Cleveland fan conditioned to expect the worst and the epic collapsitude of your home team, was there a point at which you watched, poised on the edge of your seat, ready for the inevitable **Inning of Crap™** to yield a run?

Not really.

Consider: let's say you wanted to see a sign that Sabathia was going to be dominant. He retired the first three hitters in order, but none struck out, so maybe that wasn't it. Maybe next inning.

He gave up a walk and a double in the next inning, but the walk was erased by a double play; even so, that *definitely* wasn't it.

Maybe next inning.

He struck out two men in a perfect next inning, maybe that was it. Let's see the next inning.

No, he allowed a leadoff single in the next inning. Still on the razor's edge, although the inning-ending grounder was only not a double play by virtue of coming with two outs. Maybe next inning.

A walk and a single in the next inning, the same two-out potential DP grounder, but still, not exactly dominant. Maybe next inning.

The single in the next inning was erased by a double play after a swinging Cust. Probably not it. Maybe next inning.

The next inning was a six-pitch affair, but one guy hit it deep into the outfield on a flyout. Still not quite it. Maybe next inning.

The next inning had two swinging Custs ... looks good ... but there was a single, albeit of the bunt variety ... I dunno, seems close, but ... Maybe next inning.

The next inning had two more Custs, including one by Cust himself, but the other out was to the warning track ... maybe ...

... wait, there are no more "next innings." That would be ... a complete game shutout.

Look: yeah, he gave up 5 hits and walked two guys, but he also induced two double plays, struck out ELEVEN, and didn't require any of the highlight-reel defensive wizardry that Byrd needed the night before. He threw strikes (77 in 117 pitches), located very well ... I'm not sure he threw two pitches over the belt all night. By the (admittedly arcane) measure of "Game Score," Sabathia had the best score of the streak, the fifth best in the AL this season: it could be argued that his start was the MOST dominant of the group. With the exception of old nemesis Mike Sweeney (hitting .326 ... I had no idea ... I would have bet a significant sum he was done) with two solid singles, the A's simply had no one that mounted anything like a consistent good attack on Sabathia.

Really.

2) Global Greatness

Now that The Streak has made it one entire turn through the five-man rotation, it's time to take a short look at what it looks like:

Sabathia: 7 IP, 6 H, 2 XBH (2x2B), 2 BB, 9 K, 1 GIDP (gave up 1 run in 5th)
Laffey: 7 IP, 6 H, 1 XBH (2B), 1 BB, 2 K (actually a 2-hitter through 6), 1 GIDP
Carmona: 9 IP, 5 H, 0 XBH, 4 BB, 3 K, 2 GIDP
Lee: 9 IP, 7 H, 1 XBH (2B), 2 BB, 5 K, 1 GIDP
Byrd: 7 1/3 IP, 5 H, 0 XBH, 0 BB, 7 K, 0 GIDP
Sabathia: 9 IP, 5 H, 1 XBH (2B), 2 BB, 11 K, 2 GIDP

In some ways, you could argue that Sabathia's run-allowing start was actually better than Laffey's, except that he gave up a run after one of his extra-base hits. This helps point out one of the keys to a scoreless string, obviously: the absence of long hits. By definition you can't allow any homers: the fact that each man was able to induce a double play, and in fact each posted a GO:FO ratio of more than 1.0 ... you expect this from

Laffey and Carmona, but Lee has morphed from extreme flyball to somewhat groundball this season ... this helps infer that each men pitched a game in which he worked well down in the zone.

Look, not everything is perfect here: Carmona walked too many guys, and Laffey can't whiff anybody. If you give up a double, all it takes is a single and a guy who runs better than Frank Thomas to score. But seriously: Laffey's seven innings make him the *piker* of the group. Lee's seven hits made him most schmucky.

Think about this: the only pitcher NOT to win in this stretch was the guy with the 0.67 ERA. Who threw nine shutout innings.

That's just crazy.

Now, hidden in the list above is one of the other features of The Streak: it's one thing to induce a potential double play ground ball, but it still has to be turned into an actual double play. The Indians' defense has managed to do this six times thus far (Sabathia's DP against Toronto 5/9 came in the 4th, before he gave up the run). But more completely, the defense has not made an error during the string: this isn't necessarily about the team making ungodly numbers of great SportsCenter Web

Gems behind the pitchers, but rather the fact that they're making *all* the plays. Sure, there HAVE been some spectacular plays, including diving catches and a bloody unassisted triple play, but it's the WHOLE defense, from turning ground balls into two outs, to ranging to prevent singles from becoming doubles or runners advancing from first to third on singles, to gunning down baserunners, to preventing stolen bases, to snaring line drives ... everyone hs made a notable positive contribution over the past week, even if some look routine. The fact is, a pitcher NEEDS the routine as *well* as the extraordinary. Not only does this record outs, but it infuses the staff with the confidence that they don't have to strike everyone out to get out of an inning.

In a sense, the rotation deserves a lot of credit because they've pitched very, very well, but it bears mentioning that until one of them strikes out 27 guys, the scoreless streak belongs to the TEAM and not solely to the starting pitchers.

3) Bullpen update

Jensen Lewis d. Rafael Betancourt 121-106
Craig Breslow d. Jorge Julio 121 - 89, skunk
Masahide Kobayashi d. Rafael Perez 121 - 113

Jensen Lewis d. Rafael Perez 121 - 109
Craig Breslow d. Masahide Kobayashi 121 - 104
Rafael Betancourt d. Jorge Julio 121 - 116

Craig Breslow d. Jensen Lewis 121 - 74, skunk
Masahide Kobayashi d. Rafael Betancourt 121 - 93 (no skunk)
Rafael Perez d. Jorge Julio 121 - 120

Jorge Julio d. Craig Breslow 121 - 107
Masahide Kobayashi d. Jensen Lewis 121 - 98
Rafael Betancourt d. Rafael Perez 121 - 112

Craig Breslow d. Rafael Perez 121 - 83 (skunk)
Masahide Kobayashi d. Jorge Julio 121 - 116
Rafael Betancourt retired, sunflower seed overdose

Congratulations to new Cribbage Champion Craig Breslow, who wins on head-to-head tie-breakers! When asked for comment, Tom Mastny did not exist.

4) Gark smash!

Ho hum, another day, another two-out home run to finish the scoring.

I guess as much as anything, the power component of Garko's swing is what is both encouraging and desperately needed: from the time Garko hit a home run on April 17 against Detroit to Tuesday night, Ryan Garko had exactly two extra-base hits in 63 at-bats, and both were doubles. As recently as this weekend, Garko's OBP was greater than his SLG, a relationship normally reserved for players like Juan Pierre, Jason Tyner, and large hamsters.

There isn't a single hitting stat in which Ryan Garko looks like an adequate hitter to this point in the season, but the

samples are still small enough to avoid drawing any career-threatening conclusions. I mean, if you split his season around about April 19 or so, you have one fine part (.317/.446/.483) and one truly, truly PEE-YOU-TRID part (Mike Rouse). Garko had a stretch like that last year as well: it just came later in the summer and depressed his numbers more slowly.

Anyway, having Good Garko return would help a lot. Huzzah!

By the way, 4 of Cleveland's 5 hits were by right-handed hitters. ALL FIVE of the hits were for extra bases.

5) Speaking of returned power

Grady Sizemore has hit twice as many homers in May as he did in April. More than half his hits this month were for extra bases.

6) Being Jhonny Peralta

Jhonny Peralta doubled twice last night, once to each outfield corner. The balls were well-struck, and he used a good, patient approach (taking a strike before each hit) to collect them. He has excellent career numbers against starter Joe Blanton (admittedly, this is not a large sample: 23 at-bats), and his second double was off reliever Keith Foulke. Peralta has been struggling as mightily as Garko, but does hit .227/.284/.413 with nobody on base.

With someone on base ... not so good (as if the stats above were actually good): .163/.222/.306. With runners in scoring position: .143/.242/.286.

Not surprisingly, the doubles came with no one on base.

Even less surprisingly, when presented with baserunners, Jhonny Peralta did not simply not get a hit, he COMPLETELY SELF-IMMOLATED.

Listen, I want you to imagine the setting here: after Ben Francisco doubled, Casey Blake got a strike, then walked on the next four pitches. Grady Sizemore got a strike, then walked on the next four pitches. Peralta, understanding that Blanton was not exactly "in the zone," took ball one. And ball two. And ball three. And that's good stuff there, because ostensibly you have "hitter's counts" from here on and can look for a pitch to drive, possibly even as far as to a middle infielder.

On the 3-1 pitch, he grounded into a 1-2-3 double play that defies belief. If you ground into a 4-6-3 double play, it's terrible because it's two outs, but at least you score a run. We scored no runs! None! Nary a one! Zero!

(By the way, this would be the only out Peralta would make: he was safe on a throwing error in his other non-hit at-bat.)

Although I question the strategy of batting Peralta 2nd, I would be willing to consider him batting 10th

.

7) Um, that's not good

Victor Martinez not only whiffed twice in 4 at-bats, his first out was a groundout to first on a 3-0 pitch with a runner in scoring position.

David Dellucci managed to leave 5 men on base, albeit only 3 to end innings. Three of them were Jhonny Peralta, the other two came after Peralta's 1-2-3 job. (He did hit the ball hard, especially in the first ... but he was out as out can be.)

8) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro is considering the Reverse Alex Cole by moving the outfield fences to a point immediately behind the infield grass, reasoning that the Indians' offense would score more runs and guys like Laffey and Carmona wouldn't be affected. This would also solve the problem of having corner outfielders who can hit well, because outfielders would not be needed at all. This strategy would also eliminate Grady Sizemore from the lineup, something I'm sure Shapiro is loathe to do, and the statement is complete piffle. Fire Derek Shelton.