The Indians had a chance to separate themselves from the Tigers this weekend, and instead found themselves drawn closer into the Morass of Suck by losing two of three. With Cliff Lee on the hill today, there's still a chance to salvage some pride, but the season? That's not likely. Buff recaps the weekend, for which he deserves something extra. Write him a note, he deserves it.

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (28-33)	0	0	0	3
Tigers (24-36)	0	0	0	0

W: Byrd (3-5) L: Verlander (2-9) S: Borowski (5)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (28-34)	0	2	0	0
Tigers (25-36)	0	0	0	2

W: Miner (3-3) L: Kobayashi (3-3) S: Todd Jones (9)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (28-35) (	3rd 8.5 GB CHW	**)**	0	0
Tigers (26-36)	1	1	0	3

W: Galarraga (5-2) L: Sowers (0-1) S: Todd Jones (10)

June was going to be a better month because we are playing a lot of teams with sub-.500 records. The problem is, when *two* teams with sub-.500 records play, Cleveland shouldn't instantly be considered likely to win: it's a matter of failing to out-inept your opponent, and at this point, I'm not sure how many teams out there

are capable of out-inepting the Indians.

1) Degrees of prescience

In the Roundtable pre-season predictions , I wrote:

The past three seasons have essentially been the same: the rotation is good, the offense scores runs, and the bullpen controls the outcome. In 2005, the bullpen was very good, much better than expected, and we won 90. In 2006, it was dreadful, and we finished under .500. In 2007, it was outstanding and we won 90. I expect it to be good again with the addition of Kobayashi and the full-season availability of Lewis and Perez, so I expect 2008 to be another 90-win season. The offense has its plusses and minuses, but we did score runs last year and should do so again. I'm not worried about the starters, except insofar as we've been pretty lucky with the collective health of the rotation. Obviously injuries are a huge factor for any team, but Cleveland is better-suited to absorbing them than most, including its main rivals for playoff spots.

It seems pretty obvious that this team is not going to win 90 games, so at least at that level, I am roughly the prognosticating equivalent of Neville Chamberlain. I mean, that's just awful. And, in fact, the statement that I expected the bullpen to be good again is akin to stocking bottled water and machetes for the Y2K crisis. We will not talk about my ability to properly gauge our offensive output.

There are germs of good predicting in there, though, namely:

a) That our fortunes would be tied tightly to the performance of the bullpen
b) That we've been lucky with injuries but are better to weather them than most

The first is sort of meta-analysis: it's not a prediction *per se* in that it doesn't tell you what I think will happen, only what I think the most important factor with regards to the team's success is. And in that interpretation, it's an excellent prediction: the **bullpen** has been atrocious, nearly 2006-level bad ... and the **team** is ... roughly 2006-level bad.

The second is more or less a direct observation of fact, and it's been pretty true: despite missing Westbrook early, then Carmona, and now Westbrook again, the rotation has really been quite good. Sure, there are still problems: Sabathia had a grotesque first month and sports a dismal W-L record, and in fact it could be argued that there's a pretty poor correlation between W-L record and performance all around (consider the difference between Aaron Laffey and Cliff Lee), but even with two starters on the shelf, the rotation is not close to the primary concern of this club.

It is perfectly supportable to claim that the team's utter lack of offense played a bigger role in the syrupy morass that the season has become. You'd have a good point there. Not many contenders hit .218 for a month, at least not since Denny McClain was hurling well. But the fact that our bullpen is collectively one of the worst in the AL is clearly a primary factor.

2) What brought that up?

Surely you jest.

Clinging to a 3-2 lead in the 7th, Aaron Laffey ceded to Masa Kobayashi with two outs and a man on second to face the right-handed Edgar Renteria. Kobayashi walked him on four pitches. He then uncorked a wild pitch to advance both runners.

This was his "good" inning. (He got Placido Polanco to ground out to end the inning.

On the first pitch of the 8th inning, Kobayashi allowed a home run to Marcus Thames.

On the third pitch of the 8th inning, Kobayashi allowed a booming double to Magglio Ordonez.

Then Raffy Betancourt came in an began defecating in all directions: RBI single, sacrifice, intentional walk, swinging K, grand f*#^ing slam. Thanks for coming, don't forget to tip your waiter.

I know it was hidden in the heavily-stylized format of Friday's column, but I was suggesting that Raffy Betancourt is not pitching well and I'm concerned about an injury. Put him on the DL. Make up an injury. Hit him on the foot with a hammer. Rub his scalp with almond extract and announced he's been poisoned with cyanide. I don't care. He's not right. Make him right, don't keep running him out there to prove he's more wrong than we thought before. There are not degrees of

"wrong." There is only Really F*#^ing Wrong.

3) On the other hand

Scott Elarton and Eddie Mujica combined for four scoreless innings with a pair of whiffs apiece to prevent Sunday's game from ... aw, hell, it didn't prevent a damn thing, but it was good. Kudos.

4) This pair of puncture wounds on your ankle, doesn't that hurt?

Let's say you want to define what you'd like from a starting pitcher that is reasonable to expect. I mean, sure, you want 33 shutouts, great, not going to happen. Instead, let's say it's reasonable to expect that he gets into (through, preferably) the 7th inning, and gives up few runs. Let's say, for sake of argument, we're going to be greedy and say no more than two runs. I mean, that's a darned good start, right? Two runs in seven innings?

You oughta win a fair percentage of those games, like what, 80%? A Quality Start is actually 3 runs in 6 innings, this is even better.

Aaron Laffey has made six of his eight starts of this type. For his efforts, he is 3-2 with a no decision in these starts, meaning he has won 50% of these starts. *(Note: I am being generous and counting a 6-inning start against the White Sox May 27.)*

Look, there's no way to spin his last start into anything attractive: you give up 8 runs on 11 hits in 5 innings, that's crummy no matter how hard the wind is blowing. Especially since you're supposed to be a groundball pitcher in the first place. But this start marks another start in which Laffey pitched very well: he has the highest Quality Start Percentage on the team, even higher than Cliff Lee (75% to 72.7%) and sports a nice WHIP of 1.17. His only real mistake Saturday was giving up a two-run homer to Carlos Guillen. Well, if you don't count letting the bullpen spray the field with manure

and sodium hydroxide.

5) Paul Byrd was good

Yep.

(To elaborate, Byrd got through 7 innings in only 80 pitches, 55 for strikes, but was prudently pulled after allowing a pair of solo shots in the 6th and 7th innings, suggesting that he was running out of handkerchiefs to pull from his gloves. Although three of his four hits were for extra bases ... it was only four hits! Come on! That's a good start.)

By the way, in Byrd's six Quality Starts this season, he is 2-0 with 4 No Decisions, a 33% win rate. His WHIP is 1.19 on the season.

6) A seamless replacement, except for the big honkin' seams

Jake Westbrook will undergo ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) replacement surgery, also known as "Tommy John" surgery, and will miss the remainder of the season. Given historical precedent, it would be a shock for him to pitch effectively in the majors at any point in 2009. (Actually, Will Carroll of Baseball Prospectus suggests he could be back after the All-Star break in 2009 ... but I'm watchin' Frank Liriano suck it up and I'm not holdin' my breath for that.)

Replacing Westbrook in the rotation for the time being (until Fausto Carmona is healthy enough to return, at least) is Jeremy Sowers. Now, I want to believe in Jeremy Sowers, but that point

has not reached me as of today. I don't. Hey, I've been wrong before, I'll be wrong some more. But right now, Sowers is Just Some Guy and I will wait him out.

Sowers didn't pitch dreadfully, giving up 7 hits and 5 runs in 4 innings with a pair each of Ks and walks. Okay, that's actually pretty dreadful, but, you know, I get this start from Paul Byrd every so often, it's not complete crap. It just wasn't very good.

This start including allowing a solo shot to Curtis Granderson, which the previous nine thousand left-handed pitchers had found it impossible to do. But even that, you know, you throw a bad pitch, Granderson's got skill, this kind of thing happens.

Here's what I consider a microcosm of frustration, though: in the 4th inning, Sowers' first pitch was driven to the wall by Carlos Guillen for a double. His first pitch to the next hitter was an RBI single by Ivan Rodriguez, who is, at this stage of his career, a philodendron. Guillen can hit, that's fine, and Pudge, well, he swings a lot. But then he goes 1-2 on Brent Clevlen (pronounced "CLEEV-len," like our city, despite being spelled "CLEV-len," as if rhyming with "Devlin"), gets a foul, and then:

Ball two
Ball three
Ball four

Now, this is just infuriating. Brent Clevlen is

a fine enough guy: he went to high school here in Austin, where he hit .900 or something like all great high school hitters do. I follow the guy because he's a local guy. I wish he were good. He's not. Carlos Guillen is one thing: walking Brent Clevlen (last season: 24 K in 54 AB: this season, 0 hits in 7 plate appearances) after having him down 1-2 is just enamel-erasing.

The next hitter made an out.

The next hitter made an out.

The next hitter drove in two runs.

Had Clevlen seen a strike, he would likely have made an out, and the two-run single would not have occurred.

Note that we still would have lost.

7) Squander Ball Inaction!

Or is that "in action?" I get confused watching this offense sometimes.

In Sowers' game, we loaded the bases in the 8th on a walk, single, and HBP.

Jhonny Peralta strode heroically to the plate, eventually faced the correct direction, and swung at three of the six pitches he saw from reliever Freddy Dolsi, who is ... er ... um ... I got nothin'. I've never heard of Freddy Dolsi ever. Not a clue. Anway, he fouled the first one off and missed the other two. With the bases loaded and one out, about the worst thing you can do is hit into a double play. Striking out is #2.

Ben Francisco eschewed the "watching balls go by" portion of the Freddy Dolsi Experience and simply struck out on three pitches. He swung at one of them.

8) Generic badness

Look, we lost because we couldn't score. To say we didn't hit with runners in scoring position would be to underplay the degree to which we simply didn't hit at all. We scored 8 runs in three games, leaving 7 on base in each game and getting double-digit hits exactly nonce (20 hits in three games, an average of fewer than 7 a game). We don't hit. This is less "analysis" and more "I can count." That's not interesting.

9) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Franklin Gutierrez had a pair of hits Friday. For this, he was moved into the two hole Sunday, where he got no hits (but did draw a walk).

Ryan Garko had a terrific battling AB which ended in a solo shot on Friday. He had RBIs on both Saturday (SF) and Sunday (RBI single).

Grady Sizemore had at least one hit in each of the three games, although he did strand two runners in scoring position Saturday.

Ben Francisco's rotund orange suit prevented him from accomplishing much all weekend long, although he is exploring opportunities to be turned into a carriage for a scullery maid in the future.

Shin-Soo Choo raised his average to .333 with 3 hits in 5 AB, including a pinch-hit RBI single that turned an 8-3 laugher into an 8-4 nailbiter. His double off Galarraga Sunday was one of the hits even seen at Comerica Park.

Jhonny Peralta did not strike out Saturday.

Joe Borowski earned his fifth save and lowered his ERA to a mere 8.00.

10) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Who cares?