Buff is back! Finally ... cause I'm sick of the hate mail. People get nuts when this cat goes on a vacation. I wish we had a better game to welcome Buff back to the site after a well deserved week long respit. The Tribe headed out west to Colorado and got spanked by the Rockies last night. Paul Byrd got hit hard in the Mile High city and the Indians squandered a bases loaded, no outs opportunity in the sixth inning. It's the best daily Indians column in existence. It's The B-List.

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (33-38)	(T3rd 6.5 GB CHW)			0
Rockies (29-42)	0	0	2	2

W: G. Reynolds (2-4) L: Byrd (3-7)

So, really, Paul Byrd pitching in Colorado against a no-name opposing pitcher ... the Not Surprise Factor was pretty high here, right?

1) Hey hey! Ho ho! When Paul Byrd pitches, watch it go!

In 1986, while pitching for the Minnesota Twins, Hall of Famer* Bert Blyleven went 17-14 with a 4.01 ERA while pitching an incomprehensible 271 2/3 innings. He struck out 215 batters and walked only 58 with 16 complete games, but his claim to fame was his uncanny ability to give up home runs: his 50 home runs allowed stands

as a record today, something that has stood the test of the Steroid Era, smaller parks, livelier balls, and the Texas Rangers pitching staff. 50 home runs is a lot of home runs. He started 36 games that season, so he gave up almost a homer-and-a-half in each game (on average).

Now, giving up home runs in an of itself isn't a hugely giant deal: Blyleven gave up another 46 homers in 1987, finished with nearly-identical stats (starts, innings, batters faced, ERA, hits, runs, wins, losses), and the Twins won the World Series. Bert Blyleven was who he was, and, to some extent, so were the Twins. He still finished with a career ERA of 3.31 with 60 shutouts and a barely-conceivable 3701 strikeouts. (As an aside, Blyleven threw 278, 287, 325, 281, and 275 innings at ages 20 through 24, numbers that would get Dusty Baker tarred and feathered in the 21st century.)

Every year, someone steps up and tries to give Blyleven a run for his money, giving up taters at an historic pace for a couple of months, but unlike the recent records set in terms of whiffing prodigiously, the homers allowed record tends to be pretty safe for one main reason: it's very hard to give up 50 home runs in a season without being a terrible pitcher. A guy who gives up 2 homers a game tends to be a guy who begins giving up zero home runs a game because he is seeing the country by bus or commentating on his replacement from the confort of the broadcast booth.

If someone has a legitimate shot at Blyleven, though, it might

just be Paul Byrd, because he passes the Blyleven Test: he can give up home runs and still be an effective pitcher. Oh, not all the time: if you give up more runs than innings pitched, that's pretty bad, and you get pulled early, and you lose the game. Byrd now has five such outings where he basically "doesn't have it" or "gets figured out" or "steadfastly remains Paul Byrd," and by golly, he's lost all five of those games. But he's also had five outings in which he's given up no more than 2 runs, and in 4 of those 5 outings he's gone at least 7 innings (he went 6 in the other), which is basically Ace-Quality Work. (I'm not saying that Byrd is an Ace, just that 7+ shutout innings, which he's done twice, is as good as a pitcher can be.) So, basically, you trot Byrd out there every fifth day, and sometimes you get Excellence and win and sometimes you get Putridity and lose and a handful of other times you get Abject Mediocrity and you can expect Cleveland to lose because they hit like Compleat Wankers but you can't really blame the starter.

Anyway, Byrd gave up a pair of homers, although one was the always-exciting inside-the-park variety, as Jeff Baker struck the center-field wall on the fly and the ball bounded away from Grady Sizemore in deep center. (Baker is apparently fast. I would not know him from Jim Baker, Bake McBride, or Baked Ziti.) The other was simply a pounded meatball by Brad Hawpe. Byrd has made 14 starts on the season and has given up a homer in 10 of them; in six games, he has given up multiple homers, although it should be noted that he WON two of these six games. The problem for Byrd was that each of the

homers came with a runner on base: the last time he gave up two homers, he gave up two runs, which was the key to winning the game 4-2.

Look, the man gave up 9 hits in 4+ innings, but the problem was that 3 of the 4 extra-base hits he allowed drove in all 5 of the runs he allowed. He struck out 4, walked 1, and threw strikes, but it was really this simple: giving up extra-base hits with runners on base leads to a loss. It was bad and we all get on with our lives.

Here's the discouraging thing: I have to believe that Byrd, a player who plays no role in future Cleveland Indians season, would be an attractive trade option because he really can still pitch and is very efficient. The problem is, after a May in which he posted a 3.51 ERA with a pair of 7+-inning shutout outings, he's gone 4 1/3, 7, 3, and 4 innings in his four June starts. And he's done so against some pretty poor offenses, including KC and Minnesota. There may be a GM out there who is willing to look at his good starts (including against Boston and Detroit) and his history (including being the only Cleveland starter to win all his post-season appearances last season) and conclude that he can help them ... but it's hard to color his June as anything but ... hm ... what's the word I'm searching for ... hm ... oh, yes, I believe that would be ... *bad*.

** Bert Blyleven is, in fact, not in the Hall of Fame, although he should be.*

2) Drip, drip, drip

I kept scouring the game log for insight as to when the game got away from the Indians, the inning in which Colorado had their Big Inning and pulled away for good. You could argue that Hawpe's homer to make it 4-0 was the blow given the Cleveland offense, but had the 6th gone differently, that may not have been the case. Certainly by the time the Rockies finished pushing across their 10th run in the 7th the game was more or less over.

But essentially, there WAS no Big Inning: Colorado simply kept stringing hits together and scoring runs here and there. In each inning in which the Rockies got multiple hits, they scored runs. Five innings featured at least two hits, and they scored 2, 2, 1, 2, and 3 runs in those innings. Only the second and eighth innings featured zero hits, and Byrd walked his one batter in the second. I mean, it's nothing earth-shattering, but

basically Colorado scored by getting hits with runners on base. No big rally. No crushing blows. Just a bunch of timely hits. And untimely hits. Really, just a lot of hits.

3) Epiphany

Oh, look, Scott Elarton and Rick Bauer pitched two innings each. I wonder if that had something to do with it?

4) This just in

Rick Bauer isn't any good.

5) An unsustainable formula for success

The Indians scored every time a batter tripled.

Under no other circumstances did the Indians score.

6) Almost like a real lineup

Because of several factors, including Jamey Carroll's recent hot streak and the installation of Shin-Soo Choo as a regular participant, the Cleveland lineup sported the following batting averages:

.265 (.375 OBP)
.288
.312
.260
.318
.235
.250
.235
(pitcher)

I mean, that's a legitimate top-5 of the lineup, a truly weak 6 hitter, and acceptible 7 and 8 slots. Well, maybe

not "acceptible." I mean, .235 is pretty bad, and .250 is below the league average by a good chunk. But they are the 7 and 8 hitters. The .260/.345/.380 guy hitting cleanup is obviously an eyesore, but that guy is hitting .345 in June with an .857 OPS: you could get by with that. Note that because of June, Garko's 37 RBI are now third on the team only 4 behind team leader Casey Blake (Grady Sizemore has 40).

Anyway, the offense scored two runs, which is obviously poor, but it's a real State Change from some of the lineups we were throwing out there in mid-to-late May where we hit .218 as a team.

7) Game Log Follies

Not since Einar Diaz hit a double to third base have I seen a less-descriptive description than the one ESPN lays on me in the bottom of the 4th:

G Reynolds hit a ground rule double to first, O Quintanilla to third

I mean, what the heck does that mean? Did the ball carom off the first base bag into the stands? Does Colorado have a ground rule demanding that every twentieth ball hit to first base be a double? Did the ball strike Ryan Garko in the head, potentially explaining the top of the 6th? Someone enlighten me here. That just doesn't even seem plausible.

8) A Game of Inches, or Squandering with Extreme Prejudice

The first three batters of the 6th inning reached base with the Indians down 5-1. After a double by Sizemore, Carroll was hit by a pitch and Ben Francisco singled to left. (It is a little surprising that the speedy Sizemore was held at third, but

I suppose in a 5-1 game it is better to be safe there than to be Joel Skinnery.)

Garko worked a hitters count, taking two balls and then watching the 2-0 offering go for a strike. He fouled off the next pitch. He missed the fifth entirely.

Now, with no outs and the bases loaded, just about anything you do will score a run. A weak ground ball. A moderate fly out (especially with Sizemore on third). An Actual Hit. About the worst thing you can do is ground the ball sharply to third and have the speed of, say, Ryan Garko. So at least he stayed out of the triple play, I suppose, but striking out is pretty bad, too.

Shin-Soo Choo then lined the next pitch sharply into left field for a two-run sing... oops, actually, no, that didn't happen. He lined the next pitch sharply into a diving Omar Quintanilla's glove, which caught Jamey Carroll both Off Guard and Off Second, and thus ended the inning.

Had the Indians scored there, it's possible that Eric Wedge would have brought in a Real Relief Pitcher and we might have scrambled to come back. On the other hand, one wonders aloud as to where Wedge would have found such a thing on such short notice, and it probably mattered very little indeed after all.

9) Managerial Back-Patters

I actually liked the fact that Wedge didn't waste a Real Roster Member in the game: Elarton was put on the team exactly to absorb this kind of short outing, and Bauer didn't do any more damage than setting a fire in Cedar Rapids would.

10) Bears mentioning

Paul Byrd picked Wile E. Taveras off first base.

Jhonny Peralta not only tripled, but was the only Indian with more than one hit, collecting three on the night.

David Dellucci heroically needed **five** pitches to strike out with only **two** runners on base.