Is it the All-Star break yet? Please? The Tribe lost their third straight last night, falling to 37-46 on the season, and a season high 10.5 games out of first place. In today's B-List, Buff introduces us to Jeremy Sowers and the Temple of Doom, talks about Jhonny Peralta's career night, and says that David Dellucci enhanced his trade value from "Ebola virus" to "warm spit." I need a drink.

FINAL SCORE

Indians (37-46)	(5th		10.5 GB CHW)	1
White Sox (47-35)	3	0	5	0

W: Floyd (9-4) L: Sowers (0-4) S: Thornton (1)

I find myself looking forward to the All-Star Break.

1) Jeremy Sowers and the Temple of Doom

Once upon a time, I reflected that Jeremy Sowers' success rate appeared to be closely tied to his ability to avoid the longball. (There are other 2006 pieces in this vein.) In his first four starts in the majors, Sowers gave up a total of seven home runs, then spun back-to-back

complete game shutouts (in which, sort of by definition, he did not allow any home runs): he lost three of those first four decisions, but had only two more starts (out of ten) in which he allowed a homer. He finished that season with a 3.57 ERA and a 7-4 record, including a 6-start August in which he went 3-0 with a 2.78 ERA. His K rate was lame, and his K:BB ratio was poor, but keeping the ball in the park was a real contributing factor to him staying effective. It helped that he was only giving up a hit an inning (actually 35 in 35 2/3 innings), of course.

Fast forward, past a disappointing 2007 to a ... well, disappointing 2008. Sowers has made seven starts. His K rate is still lame. His K:BB ratio is still poor. And he has given up 53 hits in 34 2/3 innings, including 41 in 24 1/3 innings in June, which is simply incredible. At least he's buttressed that with a brisk 9 walks, for a nearly incomprehensible WHIP of more than 2.00 in June. (He has walked 12 batters on the season, for a more plausible but still putrescent 1.87 WHIP.) But for those of us attuned to such things, one factor sticks out: after his first start, Sowers has allowed a homer in EVERY GAME HE'S PITCHED.

This includes a trio of games in which he didn't finish a FIFTH inning of work. He gave up a homer to the Padres, who cannot hit. He gave up a homer to the Giants, who cannot even PLAY. He gave up multiple homers the two times he was asked to pitch in a bandbox (Suckcinnati, Not Comiskey Park). If there were one skill I would ask Jeremy Sowers to develop ... well, that would be misleading, because it would suggest that I think Jeremy Sowers is one skill away from being a valuable pitcher ... but if I were given magic fairy dust and were told it is only effective on Jeremy Sowers, I would give him the ability to STOP GIVING UP SO MANY F*$^ING HOMERS.

What is it about a pitcher that makes him homer-prone? Well, pitching to Jim Thome will do that, I suppose: the man has 500 of them. Pitching in a small park, I suppose. Being a flyball pitcher in the Scott Elarton 2005 mold wouldn't help. Being named "Paul Byrd" in an even-numbered year. But I'm not really sure what it is with Sowers: he's not really a flyball pitcher (41:27 GO:FO ratio in June, 52:44 overall), Cleveland isn't a bandbox, and he isn't Paul Byrd. I'm kind of at a loss here.

Here's my best armchair analysis: Sowers doesn't throw that hard, although he doesn't throw appreciably slower than, say, Cliff Lee. (Reports had Sowers throwing over 90 late last and early this season.) He doesn't have that much movement. He theoretically changes speeds well, although that is something I will leave to scouts and optimists. But let's take a lesson from Cliff Lee, who morphed from a flyball pitcher with a curve to a man who locates his fastball with late movement: it would seem that Sowers' best chance for success would be to focus less on trickery and offspeed follies and more on command of the strike zone. And I'm not sure there's a whole lot to be done in this regard except to keep throwing lots and lots and lots of pitches, whether it be here or in Beefalo.

There's not much to say about his performance last night: he most certainly did not pound the strike zone, with 37 strikes in 63 pitches (58.7%, which is poor). He didn't pitch well from the stretch: with men on base, the White Sox got 2 walks, 4 hits, and 4 outs. He allowed 8 runners to reach base, and every single one of them scored. The pitch Thome hit out for the first three runs wasn't a terrible pitch, but it wasn't very good, either (it was a nice hit by Thome, it should be pointed out). The pitch Swisher hit for a grand slam was execrable. But the fact is, Swisher didn't just hit a grand slam because he hit a lousy pitch, he hit

a grand slam because SOWERS HAD LOADED THE BASES. I don't want that to get lost in the lamentation over homers: the other pitches Sowers threw to other hitters weren't all that effective, either.

I want Sowers to stay in the rotation: not because I think he'll turn it around, but because I KNOW he WON'T turn it around UNLESS he gets more starts. This is not a playoff team, so the focus is on making next year's team better. I don't know if Sowers will help do that, but at least you have to try.

2) Career Night at the Cell

Every time Jhonny Peralta strode to the plate with a runner on base, he got an extra-base hit to drive the runner home.

Every time Jhonny Peralta strode to the plate with no runners on base, he also got a hit .

Jhonny Peralta had his first career five-hit game, and he did it in style: four of his five hits were for extra bases (three doubles and a solo homer), he drove in three runs (including two with two outs), and scored three times (twice on followup singles by Shin-Soo Choo). Peralta finished a June in which he hit .293/.322/.440, on the heels of a May that went .230/.306/.494: by trading a few home runs for doubles, Peralta lowered his slugging but kept his OPS in the same ballpark (.762 to .800).

Now, April was pretty bad. It's hard to spin a .225/.274/.427 month into something you'd want to write home about. And his overall numbers are still fundamentally lacking "oomph," insofar as a .305 OBP is Not Good. But Peralta's .758 OPS (.257/.305/.453) compares very favorably to the average AL shortstop (.261/.312/.365). Offensively, Peralta's VORP (Value Over Replacement Player) is second in the AL to Mike Young (.285/.338/.418), and just ahead of Derek Jeter, .280/.340/.388, and Orly Cabrera, .274/.326/.375. Peralta is a lot more like Derek Jeter in the field than Orly Cabrera, but hey.

Here's a sobering thought: for all the wailing and gnashing and hair-shirt-wearing, the Non-Prodigal Son Brandon Phillips ... who is OLDER than Jhonny Peralta ... is hitting .279/.325/.480. In a bandbox. In an inferior league. Peralta has one fewer homer and four more doubles (but four fewer triples).

Here's the thing about Jhonny Peralta: he can be a maddening player to watch. My father hates watching Jhonny Peralta, and he's a Mets fan, so he knows maddening baseball. He's just one of those guys that you LOOK at and say, "Great googly moogly, what a maddening baseball player!" He's not good defensively: Nate Silver, the inventor of defensive statistics that like Jhonny Peralta, finds him a maddening player. He seems to wander around a bit, both in the field and on the basepaths. He is Manny Ramirez without the charm or extraordinary ability. And, more than anything else, still sports a split in which he hits .278/.324/.512 with nobody on, and an uber-crummy .202/.257/.310 with runners on base (numbers do not include last night's game). So he's badly miscast as a cleanup hitter, but then, everyone on this team is.

But even that criticism might not be more than a small sample gork: in 2007, he hit .252/.310/.409 with the bases empty, and BETTER at .293/.375/.457 with runners on base. His three-year average from 2005-2007 is even more striking: .269/.333/.448 with the bases empty, and a very similar .275/.353/.435 with runners on base. To dump on Jhonny Peralta for "not being clutch" because of a(n admittedly utterly preposterous) big split in his numbers in 2008 would be pretty misguided, in my opinion. He is what he is. I wish he were better. But he's far from terrible.

I don't know if Jhonny Peralta will ultimately be the best player he can be in Cleveland, but I'm telling you: he's better than your knee-jerk first impression thinks he is.

3) Three at-bats, or Baseball Illustrated

After giving up two runs in the sixth to turn an 8-2 laugher into an 8-4 baseball game, Ozzie Guillen brought in his nominal setup man Octavio Dotel in the 7th (after Swisher's second homer made it 9-4) to stem any Cleveland rally: the Indians managed an infield single, but no runs, and a 9-4 lead in the 8th was safe enough to bring in Nick Masset instead. There is no argument you can construct to convince me that Nick Masset is a better pitcher at this point in their respective careers than Octavio Dotel: this is one of the skills I really like about Ozzie Guillen, his almost intuitive ability to get the most from his bullpen. (This can have comic effects as well, like five pitchers in one inning, but generally speaking, Guillen's one of the best.)

Masset gave up a leadoff single to Jhonny Peralta, with Shin-Soo Choo to follow.

Now, Choo had a nice night at the plate: he went 2-for-4, drew a walk, and drove Peralta in twice. He also scored a run when David Dellucci skipped an infield single off the top of Alexei Ramirez' glove. But in **this at-bat**, Choo took the first pitch he saw from Masset and tried to drive it through the middle, where Masset was able to stab it, fire to second, and start a 1-6-3 double play that erased Peralta. This would prove doubly troublesome, as the next two hitters got hits off Masset: a single by Blake, and an opposite-field double by Dellucci. Just about anything else there by Choo, and a run would have scored.

With two outs and runners on second and third, Ryan Garko took two quick balls from Masset. Garko was 1-for-3 to that point, potentially raising himself from the morass-like slump he's been in. In **this at-bat**, Garko swung hard at the 2-0 pitch, but grounded it directly to third baseman Joe Crede, and the inning ended with zero runs scored.

The Indians wouldn't just roll over, though: Kelly Shoppach led off the next inning with a double, and after a "sac fly" by Grady Sizemore, Jamey Carroll was safe on an error by Crede and Shoppach scored. After an out, Peralta hit his third double of the game to drive home Carroll, and scored after lefty

reliever Matt Thornton allowed a 1-0 single to center by Choo.

With the score 9-7, two outs, and Choo on first, Casey Blake represented the tying run at the plate, something most would have found implausible in, say, the fourth inning. In **this at-bat**, he took a strike from Thornton, then lined a shot to right that Jermaine Dye was able to catch for the third out to end the game.

In an 8-2 ballgame in the middle innings, or a 9-4 game in the last two, it doesn't seem like a few balls, if struck just a little differently, would make much difference. But in a sense, it is that very thing that makes baseball what it is.

4) Eddie Moo sighting!

A perfect inning with one strikeout, including 11 strikes in 14 pitches ... who was that guy?

5) Welcome back!

Tom Mastny was called up before the game to allow Scott Elarton to take "personal leave." This usually means some family-related incident, and for whatever vitriol I spit in Elarton's direction because of his pitching, I wish him the best.

Mastny relieved Mujica and sawed through the inning in order, including a swinging K of Jermaine Dye. He did allow Swisher's solo shot to take some wind out of the Comeback Sails in the 6th, but got a third inning of work which featured a second swinging strikeout of Dye.

In all, Mastny gave up three hits in three innings, the one run, and the two whiffs of Dye. More encouraging to me, he appeared to be back in his 2006 mode of pounding the strike zone, with 29 strikes and only 11 balls. Mastny's implosion early in the year contributed greatly to the bullpen woes this season, and if he can regain the form that made him a valuable reliever, it would help a great deal.

6) Ho Hum Dept.

Joe Borowski's three outs travelled about 900 feet. But it was a hitless, scoreless inning nonetheless.

7) St. Grady

Here we invoke the Thumper Rule.

8) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

Shin-Soo Choo stole a base.

Eric Wedge managed his bullpen proactively instead of reactively, which worked brilliantly.

David Dellucci got two hits to enhance his trade value from "Ebola virus" to "warm spit."