I'm not sure what's more comical. The fact that Joe Borowski's fastball is 82 MPH and straight, or The Atomic Wedgie continuing to send this bum out to the bump to close games for this team. Buff is downright angry in today's B-List, saying that Jo Blow absolutely destroyed what should have been a fun column to write today about a brilliant pitchers duel between two All-Star caliber left handed starting pitchers. But alas, it was not to be.

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (37-47)	(pointless)	0	0	0
White Sox (48-35)	0	1	0	0

W: A. Russell (1-0) L: Borowski (1-3)

First, an apology. Some readers are new, some are referred, and some have mild expectations that this column will be sprinkled with amusing barbs and clever quips. Perhaps after some game soon, I will channel the whimsical William Joyce and write of Rolie Polie Jhonnie, or blithely refer to nine-tenths of the team in myc ological terms. Sadly, if you came here for humor today, you have, at least temporarily, come to the wrong place.

Today, I'm going to yell.

1) The stark contrast between a rare gem and one ground to a fine paste

You see, here is my fundamental problem: last night SHOULD have been a joyous game to write about. Through eight innings, I was held spellbound by the efforts of two left-handers who should probably hand the ball off to one another between the 2nd and 3rd innings of the All-Star game, two pitchers who, at the beginning of the season, entered with huge question marks. Each entered the game with an ERA in the twos; each left the game having lowered his ERA still further. Neither got the decision, but this is more of a reason to tip one's cap than to curse one's fates. In a tight ballgame between fierce rivals, each stepped up but for one mistake each: one left the game without allowing an extra-base hit, the other left with a career-high in strikeouts. Conventional wisdom and arcane metrics both say that John Danks pitched "better" than Cliff Lee (fewer hits, more Ks), but this was the heavyweight fight where both combatants sincerely shake hands after the fight and actually mean it when they say, "Good fight."

That is what I SHOULD be writing about. Or how each team brought in the best of their relieving corps in the 9th and further throttled the opposition. Or the sneakily fine season Casey Blake is having, or Kelly Shoppach's stealth 10-game hitting streak, or A.J. Pierzynski's continued performance as personal Cleveland bugbear, or Danks having learned a pickoff move from the Andy Pettitte playbook, or the smoothness of the Cleveland 5-4-3 double play. Any of these things. Baseball things. *Magical* things. The things that I can use in my futile attempts to entice my children to share my passion for the game. Not stupid, obstinate, poorly-conceived, disastrous things that make a mockery of a game like this, things that make Cliff Lee retreat behind a wall of banality ("But we still have a long season to go.") as he struggles to cope with the realization that his effort ... his brilliance ... his ART was simply squandered by the most predictable kind of small-minded ignorance that destroys a fan's will to invest passion and risk emotional attachment to that which he or she has given a significant chunk of life to nurturing.

I understand that I write this column every year, and of course, in the end, it is proven false. Of course I will come back. Of course I will. In the words of the formerly-entertaining Bill Simmons, the lesson here, as always, is that I'm an idiot. And happily so. Joyously so, in fact. But the fact of the matter is that this "performance," where "performance" is more in the vein of "performance art" than "command performance," has obliterated my will to take this team seriously as a source of entertainment and emotional involvement. The sky is dark. The lights are dim. And I, rather than being able to be amused, find only simple disgust.

Here, in a nutshell, is the problem: in the same game in which many of the features of Great Baseball were displayed: the nail-biting pitcher's duel, the division rivalry, the unlikely hero ... in this same game, the spectres of Extreme Orthodoxy and Bad Decisions reared their unspeakably hideous heads and roared, "No, I will not allow this, this beauty, this sparkling gem to nourish you on the long road of the baseball season! I will smother this thing in its cradle, snuffing it with malice aforethought, and grin gleefully at your blank stares of recognition! Ha ha! Ho ho! Neener neener!"

Admittedly, spectres rarely say, "Neener neener." These things can't be helped.

How can I think of this loss ... this well-played, one-run loss on the road, where just over a week ago I chose an enitrely different path to describe a pointless shellacking at the hands of an inferior team? What makes this loss worse than that one? Well, at leat partially, the answer lies in the fact that for nine-tenths ... nay, fully 95% ... of the game, the Indians showed why it is worth following the team with passion. No, they didn't hit well, but this was more Danks than any other single factor. They were not sparkling in the field, and were arguably atrocious on the basepaths. This is baseball. The perfectly-played game is rare indeed. But the WELL-played game ... that should not be a rare thing. That should be a COMMON thing. A DEFAULT thing. A thing independent of goodness or badness. Play well. Make prudent decisions. Let the chips fall where they may.

When Casey Blake hit his home run in the 10th inning, whatever joy this conjured (and it was considerable) was immediately snuffed by the realization that Joe Borowski was warming up in the pen. This could mean one thing and one thing only: that Joe Borowski would pitch in the bottom of the 10th. A brief respite from this gloom came in the form of two-out singles, but Franklin Gutierrez (himself a questionable decision) produced one of the five worst plate appearances by a Cleveland Indian this season (Marte's title is safe thus far), and the spectre's infuriating laughter could be heard throughout the land.

Was it surprising to see Alexei Ramirez, a man hardly distinguishable from Steve Urkel at this point in his career, a man without enough muscle fibers to support trichinosis, swat a home run to tie the game? It was surprising, I suppose, but not *shocking*. Was it a surprise that, despite being down 1-2 in the count, and being down 1-2 in the count because of a displayed willingness to swing at just about any pitch within sight, that pinch-hitter Dewayne Wise was able to rope a single to right? That was, sadly, not surprising in the least. Was it a surprise, then, that Wise stole second on a pitch that I would have passed on the freeway this morning in my car? Again, this was all but scripted. And when Borowski threw his patented, execrable, gravy-dripping, feeble, elementary-school, hanging slider to Orly Cabrera ... who was 0-for-4 ... on another tantalizing two-strike count ... was it surprising that Cabrera would lace the pitch into center for the winning run? Please be serious. You could not find a surprised person in the United States, much less in Not Comiskey Park.

The problem, then, is not that the White Sox were able to execute a two-out rally to win a tight game in extra innings. These things happen. Are White Sox fans up in arms that Matt Thornton would allow a go-ahead homer to Casey Blake? Perhaps, but not passionately or

justifiably: Blake is a pretty good hitter, and Thornton has a 2.51 ERA on the season. This is the fundamental difference, really: Thornton is a GOOD pitcher who got beaten by a GOOD hitter. (Yes, I said good hitter. Casey Blake is hitting .287 this season.) Borowski is a LUDICROUS pitcher who got beaten by a SUCCESSION of ORDINARY hitters. (Yes, I see that Ramirez is hitting .295: he is a rookie and is not a special talent yet.)

By calling on the titular "closer" in a tight ballgame, Eric Wedge demonstrated to me that this game is no more important to him than any other, an organizational philosophy that has its merits, I suppose. I am willing to engage in that discussion. And is there a functional difference between 37-47 and 38-46? Of course not. But I have watched Joe Borowski pitch, and I do not need to be a professional scout to tell you that he is no longer good. He is actually not even acceptible. He is, at best, an advertisement for how difficult it can be to hit a baseball.

I will not accept this thumb in my eye.

I am not doing a good job of this. I thought this would be easier to articulate. I'm not doing a proper execution of getting across how I'm feeling, or what I'm trying to say.

Let me try a different, more direct approach.

F*@# this sh^#. F*@# it.

F*@#.

2) Brilliance at the ballyard

In the first inning, John Danks faced three hitters and retired them in order, striking out one. Cliff Lee faced three hitters, allowing a single, but inducing an inning-ending double play to a powerful right-handed hitter.

In the third and fourth innings, both Danks and Lee retired all six batters they faced.

And in the eighth inning, with each man pushing the 100-pitch mark in a 1-1 tie in which any mistake would be costly, each man finished his night with another perfect inning.

This wasn't Lee's best performance of the year, nor was it Danks'. Lee issued a five-pitch walk to load the bases in the second, setting up a sacrifice fly that would produce Chicago's only run in regulation: I would argue that this was his worst plate appearance, worse than any of the six singles he allowed. And Danks allowed Kelly Shoppach to send his first pitch of the sixth inning over the left field wall for a solo homer that constituted Cleveland's run in the first nine. Danks also allowed a ground rule double to Casey Blake, but he did rack up an impressive 8 strikeouts: Lee managed only 3. Lee did induce a pair of double plays, while Danks used his ... um ... impressive-to-the-first-base-umpire pickoff move to catch both Shin-Soo Choo and Grady Sizemore trying to steal second base to end consecutive innings.

Due to my adherence to the Fundamental Attribution Error, I tend to speak more about the ineptitude of the Indians' hitters than give any great credit to the opposing starter. In my defense, I try to be fair about such things and recognize the tendency. When Barry Zito or Bronson Arroyo, at least in 2008, shut down the Cleveland offense, it really was a lot more a case of offensive weakness than any great pitching brilliance. But in this case, I saw a pitcher in Danks who is simply having an excellent season. (Full disclosure: Danks went to high school in Round Rock, TX, a suburb of Austin, where I live.) In many respects, he is a pitcher very similar to Cliff Lee, one with an above-average fastball that he commands with great skill. Why Texas would trade this man for Brandon McCarthy all but defies belief: McCarthy was jettisoned from Chicago because he is an extreme flyball pitcher in a small park. Also, he will NEVER pitch as well as John Danks, all of 23 years old, is pitching RIGHT NOW. While an extreme flyball pitcher might find it difficult to succeed in The Cell, he is likely to find it downright infuriating in Jet Stream Park in Arlington. That was just an asinine trade. Kudos to Kenny Williams.

Congratulations to John Danks, and to Cliff Lee as well. Well done, both of you.

3) Mighty Casey

At 34, Casey Blake is likely on the downslope of his career. However, Blake is hitting .287/.358/.453: although he has only 8 homers (low for him at the halfway point), he supports that with 20 doubles and an impressive 47 RBI (impressive in that Cleveland does not normally produce a lot of RBI opportunities, being inept, feeble, and inept).

Blake fought back from a 1-2 count against Matt Thornton in the 10th inning a drove a pitch well over the left field wall to give the Indians a Pyrrhic 2-1 lead. He also started a pair of 5-4-3 double plays and went 3-for-4 for the night, coming up a triple short of a cycle. I expect this to be Blake's last season in Cleveland, but the fact is, he one of three players with an .800+ OPS and leads the team in batting average (players with more than 10 AB). Without Casey Blake, this team would be horrific rather than simply pointless.

4) Did I read that right?

Kelly Shoppach has a 10-game hitting streak, including the blast off Danks that tied the game at 1.

Kelly Shoppach?

He'd be really valuable if he could catch. Maybe we can try to convert him in the off-season.

By the way, during the hit streak, he has 12 hits, a full EIGHT of which were for extra bases. Wow.

5) Dept. of Raffies

During the Truth and Beauty segment of the late innings, Raffy Betancourt was called in to preserve the 1-1 tie. He got Carlos Quentin to foul off a 1-2

pitch before getting him to fly out. Then he struck out Jermaine Dye looking at a 2-2 pitch.

With the left-handed Jim Thome coming to the plate, Wedge called in Raffy Perez, who prompty struck him out on a 3-2 slider.

Ah, good times. I mean, that reminds me of something long ago ... like ... last season. (Not this one.)

6) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

chirp