Taking two of three from Seattle is like a baby taking candy from another baby: both are toothless and end up crying, but the one with the candy at least has something to show for it. In the weekend B-List, Buff touches on how Cliff Lee without command is merely outstanding, while Aaron Laffey and Jeremy Sowers without either control or command are something short of outstanding. Homers, doubles, and ugly White Sox throwbacks are also part of the wrap, as the Indians prepare to head south to face the red-hot Something Angels of Something Else.

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (41-54)	0	0	1	0
Mariners (38-58)	0	5	0	3

W: F. Hernandez (7-6) L: Laffey (5-6)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (42-54)	3	0	6	0
Mariners (38-59)	0	1	1	0

W: Sowers (1-5) L: Batista (4-11)

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (43-54)	0	1	0	0
Mariners (38-60)	0	0	0	0

W: Lee (13-2) L: Silva (4-12)

There is no truth to the rumor that Mariners fans have contacted Oklahoma City

about whether they'd consider a baseball team instead of basketball. If the Mariners do move to OKC, though, I insist they remain the Mariners. That would give the Utah Jazz a run for their money in terms of inappropriateness.

1) Turning the corner, into another corner

Jeremy Sowers won his first game of the season with a scintillating 6-inning performance in which he pitched kinda like a major-leaguer. Fresh off his "victory" in the steel cage match with Brian Slocum (who was sent down, huzzah!), it might be worth looking for signs that Sowers has made some fundamental adjustment that will allow him to be a successful rotation member.

One of Sowers' biggest problems was finding the damned strike zone. He walked a ridiculous seven men in four innings last time out and has a poor 29:22 K:BB ratio in 50 innings pitched. In that start, he threw only 51 strikes in 93 pitches, which is just not very good. Well, in this start, he did a better job ... but not an actual good one: 62 strikes in 103 pitches is better, but still kinda lousy. 3 walks in 6 innings is better, but still kinda lousy. And Sowers managed to hit a batter and uncork a wild pitch, so you'd have to say that his control was not exactly "mid-notch." (Forget "top-notch," I have lowered my expectations.)

Well, Sowers' other big problem in the past has been the longball: he gave up 10 taters in 14 games in his good season in 2006, then followed that with 10 more bombs in 13 starts in his cretunkulous season in 2007. So far this season, he is averaging more than one homer a start, coming into the game with 10 allowed in 9 starts. In this start ... yeah, another homer. Or, in the parlance of Bugs Bunny, "Wham! Anothah homah!" This one was a solo shot to left-handed Raul Ibanez (kind of a theme for the weekend), so the damage was minimal, but we can't really consider that particular corner well-turned, either.

Well then, are there any encouraging signs from the start? Actually, there are:

Sowers certainly started out like a house on fire, which is to say that watching him made it hard to breathe and I wanted to run away screaming. He didn't allow any hits in the first, but after an error, walked Ibanez and allowed Willie the Q to steal third on his watch before being bailed out with a double play. And in the second, he started four of the five hitters off with a ball, three of the five with TWO balls, and gave up a single, double, and single to give up a run before being bailed out with ANOTHER double play.

This could actually be something encouraging: Sowers was a slight flyball pitcher last season, but he's been a bit more to the groundball side this season with a GO/FO of 1.20. I'm inclined to treat this as normal variation around neutral, but if he can induce more ground balls, he can get these bailouts more often and maybe even give up homers at a sub-Byrdian pace. He did give up the homer to Ibanez after having him 0-2, which turned into 3-2, which turned into Tater City, but that was the only hit of the inning.

And then there was actual encouragement: spotted a lead and encouraged by the soothing effects of starting each hitter off with a strike in the 3rd, Sowers sawed through the 4th with a walk and no hits, then had his first perfect inning in the 5th with three groundouts. So maybe there is something rhythmic going on here.

Of course, his other two runs were given up in quintessentially Sowery fashion: hit batsman, single, four-pitch walk, run-scoring grounder, swinging K, run-scoring wild pitch, swinging K. I mean, one guy hit the ball decently. He gave up two runs because he threw the ball as if the plate were protected by a force field. The swinging Ks make it all the more frustrating: he has some good stuff, but he also has some very, very BAD stuff. May I make a recommendation here?

2) Vocabulary lesson

One of the common distinctions in baseball is made between the terms "command" and "control." For an illustration of this, consider Cliff Lee's outing Sunday. The AP writeup includes the following opening sentence:

Cliff Lee left something behind in New York during a chaotic All-Star trip: command of his fastball.

Now, consider this: Lee threw 84 strikes in 109 pitches. In the first five innings, Lee had drilled through the Seattle Lineup in 48 pitches, EIGHT of which were balls. He got through the second inning with only one pitch out of the strike zone ... and the third inning with only one pitch out of the strike zone ... and the fourth inning with only one pitch out of the strike zone. When Miguel Cairo saw ball three in the 7th inning, it marked the first Seattle batter to do so. Also the last Seattle batter to do so.

So, this is the difference between "command" and "control:" *control* is being able to through strikes. *C ommand*
is being able to throw the pitches to more-specific locations. To quote Mr. Lee:

I was missing with my fastball quite a bit over the plate today.

How much so? Well, Lee did allow 11 hits in his second complete game of the season, which is obviously not very good, especially seeing that Seattle collectively hits like great big ninnies. Indeed, Seattle boasts three hitting hitting over .275: they went an aggregate 2-for-12. They also boast three hitters hitting below .235: they went an aggregate 6-for-12. The key for Lee was that nine of those hits were singles, and in fact, four of them didn't even leave the infield. So even on an off day, Lee was able to challenge hitters and walk off the field by lowering his ERA.

Whatever. I'll take that outing every time.

The wisdom of Cliff Lee. Also the walkless, tater-freeness of Cliff Lee. We could use more of all of them.

3) Simple nostalgia or mantle-passing

I admit, I've been rooting for C.C. Sabathia (again, lawsuits by the Sabathia estate about refusing to butcher his name are welcomed: I also will continue to refuse to use the nickname for

Covelli Crisp, or refer to Rick Bauer as "a major-league pitcher") in Milwaukee. I feel a personal fan attachment to the guy who grew up in the Indians' organization, and I'd like to see the Brewers be successful in a Fellow Midwestern Smallish Market Longtime Suffering kinda way. Heck, they hosted three of our home games last season. How could you not love those guys? Anyway, Sabathia has treated the Brewers to three wins, each better than the last, including two complete games and a solo homer. Sabathia now has the second-most complete games in the National League. In three starts! You'd have to say that thus far the trade is working out for them.

One of the things Milwaukee fans haven't gotten to see, though, is the trademark C.C. Sabathia **Inning of Crap™**. This is a little bit of a shame, as it's such a personal thing, like Marichal's leg kick, Paul Byrd's double pump, or David Dellucci's bases-loaded whiff, but it may be that Sabathia was asked to leave this behind before making the trip.

Anyway, Aaron Laffey seems to be a worthy successor.

You can play lots of "what if" games with Laffey's start, but trying to argue that it was a good one seems pretty counter-productive to me: he allowed

singles to the first two hitters, got a double play, and walked a guy. In the second, after two quick outs, he produced this sequence:

Jamie Burke: 1-2 count, single
Yoon Betancourt: 0-2 count, HBP

Let's stop here for a moment. First off, I wouldn't know Jamie Burke from a pot roast wearing a wig, but surely he isn't as bad as Ken Johjima. Johjima is at least six times more pointless at the plate than Travis Hafner or Victor Martinez were, and they've been on the DL because they were so pointless. Can't someone invent a face-saving injury for this poor sap already? Great Scott. He's awful. Anyway, Betancourt has a line of .261/.274/.365 on the season and has drawn 6 walks in 337 AB. Six! You can't walk Yoon Betancourt. He already swing at ball one, which was roughly a foot outside and low. Throw him that pitch again, what's he going to do, bleed on it? Hitting him there is just awful. Anyway:

Ichiro Suzuki: 2-2 count, error Peralta

That's a bad play. I mean, just a routine grounder. In a sense, Laffey has done his job. In another sense, though, Laffey still has a job to do.

Willie Bloomquist: four-pitch walk

Now, that's just infuriating. Willie the Q can actually do some damage against a lefty, hitting .348/.455/.370 against them. But ... come on, look, the man has ONE EXTRA-BASE HIT. In almost 150 PA! The man has the power of the Whig Party. He is a schmoe. Throw him a strike!

Raul Ibanez: 1-1 count, grand f^#%ing slam

Hey, Ibanez can hit. Good on him. Tip your hat. But damn, that's **Crap™**.

Not content with **Simple Crap™**, Laffey produced **Complex Crap™**

two innings later with an infield single, fielder's choice, single, fly out, homer-to-Jose-Lopez.

Laffey has reported to feeling "out of whack" for several weeks now. I can't speak to this, other than to note that after four straight seven-inning outings in May, he doesn't have one since. He's walking more guys than he was and has hit a few as well. I'm not sure Laffey pitches in September with callups and such.

4) Welcome back!

Asdrubal Cabrera celebrated his return to the

majors with a single and a walk on Friday, then a double against Carlos Silva on Sunday before Silva injured himself. He scored in each game and helped turn a pair of double plays in each of the tilts.

A valuable Asdrubal Cabrera would solve myriad problems for the Indians: he is still a superior defender, could spell Peralta at short, would avoid over-exposing Jamey Carroll (who has provided yeoman's work at second, but ultimately is a UIF at heart and body), would provide some speed (although Carroll isn't exactly slow), and could potentially move up to the 2 slot as a switch-hitter once he gets his sea legs. This would contrast with the non-valuable Asdrubal Cabrera he portrayed for the first two months, which offered all the benefits of Tony Pena Jr. without the famous father or headslapping pedigree.

Keep your fingers crossed.

5) The prototypical leadoff hitter

With all the wailing and gnashing about Grady Sizemore being woefully miscast as a leadoff hitter because of his power, sometimes it gets lost in translation that Sizemore still leads the team by a healthy margin in the single skill that defines a good leadoff hitter: getting on base. Sizemore's OBP of .380 leads second-best Casey Blake by 18 points, and third-placers Shin-Soo Choo and Jamey Carroll languish a full 30 points behind. You could pretend that one of these men would be better-suited for the leadoff role, and it sure would be nice to see someone like Trevor Crowe or Player To Be Named Later step up from the minors into the leadoff slot, but until then, I like the fact that the

guy who gets on base is the guy on base.

Sizemore flashed a little of this on Saturday as, given a day off from the field, the DH Grady Sizemore drew four walks in six plate appearances, including a pair off the left-handed Ryan Rowland-Smith. Sizemore is still a significantly better hitter against right-handers (.283/.380/.580, which is ludicrous) than left-handers (.242/.370/.414), but a .370 OBP against left-handers would still be quite good for your leadoff guy (of non-injured Indians, only Blake's .416 and Garko's .373 are higher). In fact, Sizemore leads the team in total bases off left-handers, although at least part of this is a function of him leading off and playing every day (his 100 AB is at least 21 more than any other player).

Yeah, I'd like to see him in the 3 slot against righties. But ... and I'm surprised I can say this with a straight face ... he might be our best choice against lefties. (Blake might be better, but he slugs .500 against lefties, and that's a corollary of the argument that Sizemore should be moved down in the first place.)

(By the way, Sizemore stole his 23rd base.)

6) Super Smash Brothers

The Indians got a home run in each game. Part of this was a function of facing Miguel Batista (4-11, 6.98 ERA) and Carlos Silva (4-12, 5.68 ERA). Wowzers, that's awful. Isn't Seattle supposed to be a pitcher's

park? 6.98? 5.68 and injured? Nice spending there. Can't believe that guy wa fired.

Anyway, Shin-Soo Choo's three-run blast provided Sowers with the early lead that encouraged him to throw over SIXTY percent of his pitches for strikes Saturday, while Kelly Shoppach's three-run job Sunday provided Lee with a comfort cushion that he probably ignored anyway. Casey Blake's solo shot proved that Felix Hernandez is not infallible.

7) Multi-hit wonders

Choo's homer came as part of a three-hit barrage for him in which all three hits were for extra bases. In fact, the Indians pounded out five doubles in ONE INNING against Batista and Rowland-Smith, and five players collected multiple hits: Carroll, Peralta, Choo, Blake, and ... Franklin Gutierrez! Franklin bloody Gutierrez! And both hits were doubles! Great Hera's lip balm, that's fantastic! Okay, both were off a lefty, but look: the man had two doubles. You can't take that away from him.

On Sunday, Sizemore and Shoppach had a pair of hits apiece ... and Gutierrez hit another double! Off a righty! Huzzah!

Friday was full of swinging and missing and fungus. Feh.

8) Bullpen Roundup

Laffey only lasted 3 2/3 innings, so Jen Lewis was called in to stem the bleeding. He did an admirable-enough job, pitching 2 1/3 scoreless innings, but he gave up two singles and walked two guys and threw only 23 strikes in 41 pitches. That's not exactly terrific.

Juan Rincon, in contrast, threw 20 strikes in 28 pitches in two scoreless innings. Yeah, one of the two hits was a double, but ... he

threw 20 strikes in 28 pitches! I can scarcely believe that after watching his other Cleveland outings.

Eddie Moo threw two scoreless innings, allowing a single. He threw 18 strikes in 24 pitches. With some confidence, I'm hoping he really HAS turned some sort of proverbial corner. At least I like his stuff.

Masa Kobayashi invokes the Thumper Rule.

9) Around the Division

Scott "Home Run" Baker retired the first 17 Texas Rangers in a row, but former University of Texas catcher Taylor Teagarden was able to lift a Baker offering just over the center field Baggie™ in the Metrodome for a home run. Baker lost the perfect game with that swing, and the Twins mistook Vicente Padilla for a sane man, meaning that Baker went through a quick progression from perfect game to no-hitter to shutout to win to loss because Teagarden got in one good swing. (Teagarden struck out in his other two plate appearances and will be sent back to the minors this week. It's a funny game.)

The White Sox lost two of three to Kansas City, giving up a total of 22 runs in the process. Their throwback

uniforms are all tremendously ugly, independent of era. Just horrific.

Detroit took 2 of 4 from Baltimore in a matchup that proved Detroit to be the more mediocre team (49-49 to Bal'mer's 47-50).