The return of the good Raffie Betancourt? Matt Ginter as a possibility for the 2009 rotation? Juan Rincon once again becoming a quality set up man? These are all things Buff talks about in today's B-List, which recaps the Indians 3-2 loss to the Halos last night in Anaheim. Jeff Mathis broke a 2-2 tie with a solo HR in the 5th inning, and the Angels bullpen came in and slammed the door shut. One more out west with the Angels, an off day, then three games here with the Twins this weekend.

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (44-55)	1	1	0	0
Angels (61-39)	0	2	0	0

W: Oliver (4-1) L: M. Ginter (1-1) S: F. Rodriguez (41)

I am reminded of my good friend Kilted Fool*, who coined the phrase "the malaise of the jejune."

** not really a good friend, insofar as I don't actually know him or his name, but seems pleasant enough in limited conversations ... and I love that phrase*

1) One of the pitchers ever to start for the Cleveland Indians

Matt Ginter is A Guy. He's never going to be great, and there's a nonzero chance for him to pitch putridly in any given start. He is the very definition of replacement player, a journeyman you stash in AAA because he prefers pitching to another line of work and you might need a few spot starts from someone more skilled than, say, the desiccated husk of Jeff Weaver. He isn't going to overpower major-league hitters and doesn't do anything else really so well that he could make 30 quality starts in the majors in a given year.

This having been said, Matt Ginter has now made two starts and has looked pretty good in each of them. He didn't give up any runs and was pulled after 5 low-pitch-count innings to get a win in his first start, and now has absorbed his first loss of the season with a 6-inning stint that qualifies as a Quality Start (3 runs allowed in 6 innings). The Angels hit surprisingly poorly for a team that leads the majors with 61 wins and is the only team in the bigs with a .600 winning percentage, but Ginter did the same basic things in this game that he did in his last: he gave up 7 hits, but 6 were singles, he didn't walk anyone, and threw 57 strikes in 85 pitches. He was efficient and largely in control of the game. He made one egregious error to allow a solo shot by light-hitting Jeff Mathis in the 5th, but other than that he gave up two runs on three singles. Even then, with a little more fortune he could have gotten out of the inning had the 1-out ground ball to third with runners on the corners been turned into a double play; had he had a catcher capable of throwing out his counterpart stealing second it would have prevented the second run.

Sure, Ginter induced two double plays to squirm out of two innings, but that's a *good* thing, right? It was one of the charms of Aaron Laffey, for example, back when he could pitch. And yes, Ginter only struck out one batter and in fact only induced four swings-and-misses in 6 complete innings, but this is not really Ginter's forte'. Ginter pitched essentially like we expected Paul Byrd to be able to pitch, and in many ways actually did it better than Byrd had the night before.

I think about next season's rotation, which has many question marks:

Westbrook will not likely return until after the All-Star break, and who knows when he'll really be effective? Laffey is terribly young and hardly a sure thing. Sowers is simply terrible and even less of a sure thing. Lee will probably regress, although ought to be at least a capable starter. Carmona is also very young. And anyone you'd identify in the minors is by definition an unknown quantity. So it looks very much like the Indians will have to acquire at least one starter, even if it's a "stopgap" type who simply hedges some of these bets.

Well, why isn't Ginter at least that hedgy? If you're going to go out and get a starter, get a GOOD starter, not a "just in case" starter. If you get someone better than Sowers and with more reliable track record than Laffey and Carmona, then by all means, this would improve the team, I'm all for it. But another Paul Byrd or Scott Elarton or (heaven forfend) Jeff Weaver? No, I say no. Because I don't see that Matt Ginter couldn't play that role as well as any of them.

2) Timing, the bane of the bad team

After Grady Sizemore's leadoff homer, Jamey Carroll reached base on an error my My Sir Izturis. After Ben Francisco struck out with great aplomb, Carroll waited for a 1-1 pitch to Casey Blake to try to steal second. Although this bit of smallball was actually welcome (Carroll is fast enough and Angels catchers haven't caught anyone stealing in over a month), Jeff Mathis was able to gun down Carroll at second. Three pitches later, Blake doubled to left, a hit that ostensibly might have scored Carroll from first.

After a pair of singles and one out in the second, Mathis hit a routine ground ball to third that scored the runner (running on contact) from third and got the forceout at second, but Mathis was safe at first. He then ran on the 2-1 pitch and was safe by 0.15 Garkoes. Reggie Willits, hitting .185 on the season, then singled Mathis home to tie the score 2-2: had Mathis been on first, he would have ended up stranded as Chone Figgins fouled out after Willits' single.

And there you turn the 3-2 Cleveland win into a 3-2 Caliheimgeles win, because the **fast** runner was thrown out by the **bad** catcher and the **slow** runner was able to steal off the **nominally-superior defensive** catcher.

3) The relative quality of strikes

On the surface, Raffy Betancourt looked much more like he had last season than he has thus far this one: 18 of his 23 pitches were for strikes, and he got through a scoreless inning with 1 K and 1 single by a man hitting .330 on the season. (This just in: Howie Kendrick can hit.)

Looking closer, though, a full NINE of those strikes were fouled off by Angels hitters, while only TWO induced swings and misses. Now, it was good to see Betancourt throw first-pitch strikes to each of the four hitters he faced, and he never threw a third ball to any hitter (Juan Rivera didn't see any, but it is hard to imagine what Juan Rivera considers a "ball"), but nine fouloffs ... well, I mean, they

didn't make solid contact, I guess, that's a good thing. On the other hand, they didn't seem to have a tremendous amount of difficulty determining the rough location to which any particular Betancourt offering was going, either. Reggie Willits saw eight pitches, and only the last was on the inner half of the plate (he hit a feeble fly ball to right).

Look, I'd rather Betancourt throw strikes than not throw strikes, but maybe Shoppach needs to work with Betancourt on varying the location a little more. Maybe a **lot** more.

4) Wishful thinking

After a couple of absurd outings filled with oafishness and blunderbussery, Juan Rincon has quietly put together a couple of outings in which he's thrown over 70% of his pitches for strikes and induced more groundouts than flyouts. After April and May saw Rincon put up more flies than grounders for Minnesota, and yield an atrocious 12 walks in 15 1/3 innings in May, it's nothing more than wishful thinking to think that the Cleveland staff has found some minor fundamental flaw in Rincon's delivery that might return him to some useful form: after all, it wasn't very long ago (July 12th, in fact) that Rincon was spraying the ball all over the strike zone and the field in a 2-hit, 2-walk, 2-out, 4-run outing. But ... I dunno, I'm not saying I'm
excited
, but I'm at least
intrigued
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(Rincon pitched a perfect 8th against the top of the Angels' order.)

5) Ducks on the pond!

Five of the Indians' nine offensive innings ended with a runner in scoring position; the Indians left 9 runners on base in all.

One instance was particularly galling, in which with a man on third, Asdrubal Cabrera struck out swinging after starting with a 3-0 count against a junkballer whose back tightened up and didn't have a fastball any more. (Grady Sizemore struck out swinging to end the inning, but at least he needed a HIT to score the run: Cabrera could have done virtually ANYTHING except STRIKE OUT.) Cabrera's a good bunter and the guy on third was fast: given that Cabrera's confidence in his hitter can't POSSIBLY be very high right now, it seems like that ought to at least have been *considered*.

6) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Cabrera did have a pair of singles in the game, the only Cleveland hitter to get more than one hit. And he was only picked off once (by Darren Oliver).

Jose Arrendondo pitches very well for an eleven-year-old.

7) Derision Where Derision Is Due Dept.

Three Cleveland Indians were asked to pinch-hit last night.

Jhonny Peralta struck out swinging.
David Dellucci struck out swinging.
Ryan Garko struck out swinging.

Now, of the three, Peralta had a decent at-bat, working the count full before swinging at an eyeball pitch that he couldn't resist, but at least he was hitting for Marte, an inexperienced .181 hitter. Dellucci was simply awful, but at least his average is higher than the player he replaced and had the handedness advantage (facing right-hander Francisco Rodriguez). But Garko ... I mean, what is the thought process here? With Sizemore on first, you need a double to tie the game, but since Sizemore stole second, and I have to think this was part of the thought process here, you only need a single. Now, who is more likely to get a base hit, Ryan Garko or Jamey Carroll? Heck, who was more likely to not make an out? It's Carroll, that's who.

In Garko's defense, he not only worked the count full, but fouled off two 3-2 pitches before finally succumbing, but ... that still hurt my eye.