How sweep it is! The Indians bombed the Royals 10-3 to complete the three-game washout of Kansas City, and Buff attributes this to the Indians' two best players: Cliff Lee and Grady Sizemore. Lee was merely quite good, while Sizemore had a ridiculous 7-RBI game, hopefully spelling the official end of his August slump at the plate. You also find out that Shin-Soo Choo is one of the corner outfielders Buff has ever seen, that Kelly Shoppach can miss the ball, and that Robinson Tejeda avoids the strike zone whenever he can. Time to hit the road!

FINAL SCORE				
Royals (55-72)	0	0	0	0
Indians (59-67)	0	3	2	0

W: C. Lee (18-2) L: Greinke (9-9)

I'm gonna go out on a limb here and call Kansas City "bad."

1) Ball on a string

One of the things I meant to write about the weekend series against the Angels (when the Indians became the first A.L. team to take a series from Caliheimgeles since MAY) was the performance of Cliff Lee. Lee wasn't spectacular, yielding 8 hits, including a homer, and 2 runs, but was able to create four double plays. The one double play that caught my attention was the one in the fifth: after giving up a solo shot to Juan Rivera and walking Jeff Mathis, Chone Figgins tried to sacrifice Mathis to second to try to extend the lead. He fouled off the first pitch and took the second for a ball, and on the third pitch, he popped up the bunt, which Lee caught and fired to first to complete the double play.

This is sort of in the same vein as yesterday's discussion about Zach Jackson hitting Mitch Maier on a bunt attempt: it turns out I over-analyzed this and Jackson simply threw a very, very, very bad pitch (it was meant to be low and away, meaning he missed by roughly four FEET), but the idea still holds. It is tougher to bunt a high pitch well than a low pitch, and a four-seamer has a better chance of being popped up (what you as a pitcher would like to have happen). I'm not clever enough to identify pitches from MLB.tv replays, but it looked like Lee played a role in getting Figgins to pop the ball in the air rather than drop it on the ground.

The other three double plays were the garden-variety ground balls to infielders (a pair of 6-4-3s and a 4-6-3). Still, this smacked of being able to control the strike zone to Lee's advantage: a man on first? No problem, I'll just get the next guy to put it on the ground. Lee's become more of a groundball pitcher this season than in years past, and I'm likely reading too much into a small set of positive results, but the idea that Lee was controlling the outcomes to a larger degree than the average pitcher stuck in my head.

Against the Royals yesterday, Lee gave up 6 hits and 2 walks (and had an error made behind him) in 7 full innings, and left a total of 2 men on base. How? Well, he let three score, that's not exactly what anyone had in mind. But he erased FOUR of the baserunners with double plays: a 4-3, a 5-3, a 6-4-3, and a 5-4-3. Against the Angels, Lee threw 80 strikes in 117 pitches, a strike percentage of 68.38%; against the Royals, it was 70 in 102, or 68.63% strikes. He struck out 6 Angels in a complete game, but 7 Royals in 7 innings.

Lee has a Sabathian 5.42 K:BB ratio and is striking out over 7 per 9 innings: combined with a paltry 0.41 HR/9 rate, it's easy to see how this translates into success. But the double plays suggest something even more: that Lee's command of his stuff has become truly exceptional to the degree that he can influence batters beyond simple hit-and-miss.

Consider these stats:

2004: 179 IP, 43 2B, 4 3B, 30 HR
2005: 202 IP, 46 2B, 3 3B, 22 HR
2006: 200.2 IP, 47 2B, 1 3B, 29 HR
2007: 97.1 IP, 28 2B, 1 3B, 17 HR
2008: 177.2 IP, 24 2B, 6 3B, 8 HR

Now, 2007 was atrocious and we can arguably throw that baby out with the entire bathtub, but even in Lee's "good" years before, he was allowing a goodly number of extra-base hits: not just homers, but a bushel of doubles as well. This season, not only has he cut down on his home run rate (which may be artificially low, actually), but he's also cut his DOUBLES rate almost in half. While halving his homer rate would be more like 13 homers or so, the fact that he's cut the doubles down significantly AT THE SAME TIME suggests that even if a hitter is able to make solid contact off Lee, he isn't able to really **drive** the ball on a consistent basis. (For the purposes of this, I consider the triples to be fluky: turn two into doubles and two into homers and the analysis wouldn't change much.)

Anyway, I was glad to see Lee pulled after 7 with a 7-3 lead: I *understand* why Wedge sent him out for the 9th against the Angels, but I sure didn't *like* it a lot. With two righties leading off that inning, it seemed like a good chance to test Jensen Lewis: on the other hand, Lee's Cy Young candidacy is one of the few bright spots for the Tribe this season, and I can't blame Wedge for not putting Lee's push for 20 wins in the hands of Jensen Lewis, capable or not.

By the way, Lee posted an unearthly 12:2 GO:FO ratio for the game.

2) One-man gang

The Kansas City Royals as a team collected 8 hits and drove in 3 runs.

The Cleveland Indians without Grady Sizemore collected 6 hits and drove in 3 runs.

The Grady Sizemore collected 4 hits and drove in SEVEN runs.

An argument could be made that the Indians were the second-best team on the field yesterday, while the Royals were merely third-best.

Now, there's an element of "game of inches" going on here: David DeJesus did not appear to play Sizemore's second-inning triple very well and still came close-ish to catching it (which would have ended the inning). And Sizemore's homer in the 8th wasn't exactly a moon shot, although it wasn't really close to being caught, either. Still, a couple protractor notches up and it would have been a long fly.

But the fact is, DeJesus DIDN'T catch the ball, which was very well-hit to the opposite field off a pretty darned good (if unlucky) pitch in Zack Greinke. With the bases loaded. With two outs. After Sizemore had already singled to the opposite field (albeit with another "game of inches" seeing-eye Texas Leaguer) to lead off the game. And Sizemore's homer was hit off left-handed Josh Newman, who ... well, actually, Josh Newman is terrible, but he's still left-handed. Sizemore is now

hitting .256/.389/.457 against left-handed pitching this season, which is only some slugging off his overall numbers, and at least part of that can be attributed to sample size (his home run off Newman raised his slugging by .026 all by itself, for example). Sure, a higher batting average would be better, maybe a few fewer strikeouts, but hitting lefties was pretty much the last hole in Sizemore's game. From 2005-2007, Sizemore hit .247/.325/.408 against lefties. For those of you wondering, yes, I consider SIXTY-FOUR POINTS of OBP to be significant, yeah.

Oh, by the way, Sizemore stole his 31st base of the season in the 6th. He has been caught 3 times. He has 29 homers and 79 RBI. The percentage of males in the U.S. who would like to be Grady Sizemore is at 96.8% because I'm counting infants.

3) Still the most-effective weapon

Shin-Soo Choo blasted a Zack Greinke offering about 420 feet to straightaway center for his 6th home run of the season: combined with his blast earlier in the series, it appears than any lingering power-sapping effects of elbow surgery are gone and forgotten.

Choo's a bit of an odd guy to figure out: he'll go through some stretches where it seems like everything he hits is for extra bases, and other stretches where it seems like he couldn't reach the wall from the pitcher's mound. He's slugging .461 for the season, sorta acceptible for a corner outfielder (Ben Francisco slugs .458, equally sorta sorta), although he's managed this with a .486 June (pretty good), and .403 July (quite lousy), and a .491 August (pretty good). I mean, I understand that monthly splits are almost guaranteed to have some fluctuation like this (Grady Sizemore slugged .423 in April and was slugging a preposterous .292 in August before yesterday due to a cold streak), but I can't look you in the eye and conclude anything about Choo's power with any great certainty. He has some. It's prone to disappearance. He walks a lot to maintain a pretty good OBP, usually around 100 points higher than his AVG. He still looks terrible against lefties, but he also doesn't get many reps: he's kind of a platoon player by fiat rather than any grand skill evaluation. You could do worse than to trot Shin-Soo Choo out there against right-handed starters (and, by golly, we have!), but you could

probably do better, too. Until that better player is identified and signed, I have to consider Choo a valuable roster member.

Jhonny Peralta blasted his 21st home run of the season. Peralta is the first Indians' shortstop to post three 20-plus homer seasons since Woody Held from 1959-1961, which is more a function of the Indians employing glove men like Omar Vizquel and Frank Duffy as shortstops than anything else. Peralta is now hitting .276 on the season: his OBP of .319 is still low, but he's slugging .499 and is a significant offensive plus for the Indians.

4) Box Score Follies

Peralta's home run was hit off Kansas City reliever Joel Peralta, meaning you get this in the box score:

J. Peralta (21, 7th inning off J. Peralta)

That makes it sound like Jhonny was tossing the ball up himself like hitting fungoes or something. It could be argued that Joel's hanging breaking ball was actually significantly easier to hit than a fungo, however.

5) I am ready

For Kelly Shoppach to post 2 games in a four-game stretch in which he does not strike out.

Shoppach struck out twice yesterday, his 8th consecutive game and 15th in 17 games with at least one Bad Russ Branyan. He has struck out 8 times in his last 4 games and 22 in his last 12 games. He is still having a fine season, but great googly moogly, that boy can miss the ball.

6) Bullpen Roundup

Just as I said that Raffy Betancourt was looking better, he looked terrible, giving up singles to the first two hitters he faced and then yielding a screaming liner to David DeJesus that happened to burrow

itself into Ryan Garko's surprised glove for a double play (as Garko beat Esteban German back to the bag). He did get Jose Guillen to pop out to escape with a scoreless inning, but that wasn't very good.

Just as I said that Brendan Donnelly had no redeeming features, he pitched a perfect inning, throwing 9 strikes in 13 pitches and recording a swinging K to end the game. Actually, I'm gonna hold my ground on this one. I'm still not excited by the Brendan Donnelly Experience.

7) More box score follies

Jamey Carroll reached base three times on a single and a pair of walks. He scored three runs.

Asdrubal Cabrera reached base twice on a single and a walk. He scored two runs.

Officially, these two scored 5 runs in 5 AB, Carroll with the ever-popular 3 runs in 2 AB (because of the walks).

Not coincidentally, these two players bat immediately before Grady Sizemore in the lineup.

8) Department of Not Surprise

Robinson Tejeda walked two men in his one inning of work. I got to see Mr. Tejeda's unorthodox repertoire (most major-league pitchers pitch with their eyes OPEN to better locate the strike zone) when he pitched for Texas, and trust me, this is absolutely no surprise to anyone who has seen his *ouvre*.