For the first time in quite a while, the best performer in a Cliff Lee start wasn't Cliff Lee. The Tribe rallied with two runs to defeat the Twins, but Lee left with the score tied at 4 and couldn't get his 23rd win. In today's B-List, Buff wonders what Lee was doing out there in the seventh, muses on how many more times Raffy Perez needs to go out there at all, discusses the merits of Jensen Lewis as closer, and forsakes Eddie Moo.

FINAL SCORE				
Twins (82-70)	1	0	0	1
Indians (75-77)	0	0	0	2

W: Mujica (3-2) L: Mijares (0-1) S: J. Lewis (10)

We won this game because Cliff Lee had poor command, but the bullpen was excellent. Also, the sun is blue and my children prefer broccoli to chocolate.

1) Nerf spikes

I don't think it's fair to say that a guy who gave up 2 runs in 6 innings was a sharp as a balloon, but I got the impression that Cliff Lee's command was not at its finest

last night. How did I get this impression? Consider:

He walked the leadoff man
He hit a guy in the 2nd on a 1-2 pitch (I thought only Aaron Laffey was capable of this)
He uncorked a wild pitch on the first pitch of a four-pitch walk in the 3rd
He walked a guy after starting 0-2 in the 4th
He uncorked a SECOND wild pitch in the 6th, allowing Carlos Gomez to reach on a strikeout

So for a guy who's been making his living off exceptional control and command this season, Cliff Lee pretty much had little of either. Sure, he threw 71 strikes in 113 pitches, which is a testament to how natural and ingrained his delivery has become, but it's hard to argue that a guy who walks 3, racks up a pair of wild pitches, and hits a guy is really "working the strike zone." (Admittedly, one of the wild pitches was a strike ... but only ‘cause Gomez swung at it.)

Here's the thing: through six innings, Lee had thrown 98 pitches. He gave up 8 singles, walked three guys, and hit a batter. Through good fortune and a pair of double plays, he was only touched up for two runs, one on a true mistake (a two-out 1-2 solo shot to Gomez, right after a double play). He'd struck out 5 and had an excellent 10:3 GO:FO ratio, but ... geez Louise, this was not a gem of a game he had going here. After the near-debacle last Friday in which he took a huge lead into the ninth and proceeded to give up four runs (we, and he, still won, but that was bad), it would seem that erring on the side of caution might have been advised.

Now, of all the themes from 2006 I'd rather not reprise, I'd have to say the Danny Graves Experience would probably be number one. But I didn't think I'd have to rehash the "just one more inning" tendency of Eric Wedge after it failed so spectacularly that year. Sure, the common thread between 2006 and 2008 is an execrable bullpen, but this bullpen is not necessarily the one that's been stumbling around all season. And, more to the point, it didn't take that much hindsight to see that Lee was not running on Grade A Jet Fuel after the sixth.

Anyway, after an error by Jamey Carroll, Lee gave up two runs on a booming double, a groundout, and a single: the single was good hitting by Delmon Young, having fallen behind 1-2 and then fouling off a pair of two-strike pitches before lining a single to the opposite field. Having yielded the tying run, Lee stalked off the mound with no chance to win his 23rd game of the year. I appreciate that Wedge has his proverbial finger on Cliff Lee's pulse a lot more than I do, and pulling Lee after six might have been more negative than anything Lee could do to himself firing bullets at his feet, but ... well, without such insight, I disliked the move.

By the way, now poised at 218 1/3 innings on the season, I'm not sure there's a good argument for Cliff Lee making two more starts. He probably will, though.

2) Thank you sir, may I have another?

I have to say, I admire the attitude Jensen Lewis has taken in trying to procure the closer's role. Pitch four days in a row? No problem. Express a desire to go all-out to get the starter his win? By default. Even throw strikes? That can be arranged.

Look, Lewis is never going to look like vintage Eric Gagne or Mariano Rivera: he does not have that level of dominant "stuff." He doesn't have the one devastating pitch that can't be hit (Rivera) or the velocity to scare small children (Billy Wagner) or a frightening moustache (Al Hrbosky). He's a guy. A better-than-average guy, but ... he's a guy. Has he been flawless since being named nominal closer? Nah, not really. I mean, yes, he has 10 saves in 10 chances, and he's only given up a run in two of those (single runs each time), so in a sense he's done a tremendous job AS CLOSER. Of course, sprinkled in between those opportunities are a pair of two-run outbursts in late August that cost him his 4th loss and jolted his August ERA from 0.79 to 3.38. Relief pitching is like that. His September ERA of 1.29 is sparkling, but ... c'mon, it's seven innings.

But here's the thing: I remain convinced that two skills are required to close effectively:

a) good pitching

b) mental toughness

That seems unenlightening, but what I'm driving at is that it doesn't necessarily take lights-out death-from-the-skies stuff to close: you just have to be a pretty good pitcher. A lot of talent can overcome a bit of shortness in the toughness department. But a lot of toughness can overcome quite a bit of ordinary talent. There are guys with great stuff who can't close ... and there are guys with ordinary stuff who can.

I'm not so far on the automaton side that I think any good pitcher can close: I've seen my share of David Riskes et al. I do happen to think that if you have a good pitcher out there, he ought to be able to get through one inning with a lead fairly often. Lewis seems to have that plus the "oomph" to do this in the ninth. It works for me.

Note: Lewis has yet to blow a save since taking the role (his blown save was in April), so there's the whole "how will he react to blowing one" thing that's

crucial for a closer. But ... gee, I dunno, I haven't seen anything from Lewis to suggest that he's lacking this quality. Let me say this: it has been reported that Mark Shapiro sees signing/acquiring a clear closer is his top priority this off-season. I have no problem with this, given the way Eric Wedge manages a bullpen and has talked about how he slots roles. You play the hand you've dealt yourself, in a sense. But ... just as I've said in the past that I would rather get one $10M player than three $3M players for certain incarnations of the Indians, I will say something similar here. If you can sign or acquire a Very Good Closer to supplant Lewis, I'm all for it. But if the best you can do is to sign or acquire a Pretty Good Closer, don't bother. I think we have at least that *right now* .

3) Perfect Jhonny

(bonus points for getting that reference)

The Indians' first run came off the bat of Jhonny Peralta, who launched a solo shot off Scott "Home

Run" Baker in the 4th inning. He would proceed to walk twice, then with the score tied 4-4, Peralta doubled to deep left center to plate Jamey Carroll with the go-ahead run. (He would then score on Victor Martinez' followup double.)

I suppose it's not technically "perfect," in that his game OPS was a mere 4.000 instead of 5.000, but it was flawless, at least (4 plate appearances, 4 times on base).

4) Pronk smash!

Hey, at this point, every ball Travis Hafner can lift out of the infield is a bonus. But he did club that homer in the second (with two outs, no less) pretty good.

5) Nice hose!

Shin-Soo Choo came up firing on a single to right to catch Brendan Harris trying to stretch the hit into a double. For a guy recovering from UCL replacement, Choo still has an impressive arm.

Interestingly enough, Choo was credited with a "double" to left center in the 5th inning, and I swear in the replay that it looks like left fielder Delmon Young cuts that ball off. I would have scored it "single, advanced to second on the throw," although it's not entirely clear what Young's intent with his throw was (catching Sizemore at home, hitting a cutoff man, fighting off midges).

6) Oh, no you don't

Astonishingly, Eddie Moo was able to recover from the strain of throwing two pitches last night

to make another appearance. This time, he threw 10 strikes in 13 pitches, giving up a single but getting out of the 7th (inheriting one runner and stranding him) without any damage. For this, he was rewarded with his third win of the season and a spot in the Jhonny Peralta Spherical Head Challenge Invitational.

You know, I think that ... no! You can't entice me with two good outings! Fie on you, Eddie Moo! My heart is broken! Stay away, foul tempter! I embrace you not!

7) Dept. of Raffies

It's only one Raffy, and it looked like it would

be a Ho Hum Dept. after he whiffed the first two hitters, but Alexi Casilla fouled off FIVE two-strike pitches before finally singling, and Joe Mauer simply singled to make Raffy Perez look very vulnerable indeed. Then he got Justin Morneau to ground out on an 0-2 pitch and everything was back to normal.

At 67 appearances and 74 innings ... man, I'm not sure I wanna see a lot more Raffy Perez. A couple more times, maybe? I know he's 26, but ... we know he's good, right? His next Truly Important Pitch will come in 2009 ... maybe that's when his next one should be thrown.

8) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Five of Cleveland's six runs came with two outs.

Grady Sizemore singled twice and walked once in five trips to the plate.

No one reached base on catcher's interference.