Too many unthinkable things happened last night: Cliff Lee lost, Squander Ball reared its ugly heads, and the Red Sox celebrated like they're almost as good as the Tampa Bay Rays. In the B-List, Buff outlines what he thinks about Lee's September, Andy Marte's future, Brendan Donnelly's surgence, and wonders if the guy in the Victor Martinez suit might eventually play like his namesake. Three more columns to go. Limp, limp, limp.

| **FINAL SCORE** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Indians (79-78)** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Red Sox (92-65)** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

W: Wakefield (10-11) L: C. Lee (22-3) S: J. Penis (41)

Did I not make myself clear in yesterday's introduction?

**1) Administrative announcement**

Justin Verlander is a fine pitcher, and I think he made a perfectly worthy Favorite Player this season. I enjoyed watching him pitch this season.

However, I would like to announce that, starting immediately, my new Favorite

Player is now Boston closer Jonathan Papelbon.

I look forward with great anticipation for Papelbon to live up to my distinctive standards for the foreseeable future.

**2) Deep depth**

Okay, Cliff Lee is gassed.

I mean, this isn't tremendously in-depth analysis, but sometimes, simple observations are as relevant as any arcane statistical analysis. The fact is, Lee matched his career-high in innings pitched three starts ago: at 223 1/3 innings, this is over 10% more than his previous high of 202, and an increase of over 50% from the 145 1/3 innings he spread across four levels last season. It's September 24th. He's had a terrific season.

He's out of gas.

Now, there's good news, rational news, and bad news here: the good news, of course, is that he's 22-3 with a 2.54 ERA and is likely to win the Cy Young. Roy Halladay certainly deserves consideration, with a lower WHIP and more strikeouts, but a quarter-run of ERA is significant, and voters like gaudy W-L stats (Halladay is 19-11). (Bother me not with Francisco Rodriguez, who arguably isn't even the best relief pitcher on his OWN STAFF; Jose Arredondo's season has flown almost completely under the radar.) The rational news is that Lee's late-season fade isn't a complete collapse into badness, but rather more a fade from "tremendous" to "okay." It's

perfectly understandable and to be expected.

But the bad news is, if we have hopes of winning in the playoffs, this is exactly the sort of thing that can't happen. We saw it last year in the guise of C.C. Sabathia (and to a lesser extent Fausto Carmona): tremendous season, late fade, inability to finish strong in the playoffs. If you want Cliff Lee to play a significant role in the playoffs, and I'd argue Cleveland can't win a championship without Lee doing exactly that, he can't fade this badly.

There are a couple of reasons why this might not happen. For one thing, he's extremely unlikely to increase his innings by over 50% next season, and pretty darned unlikely to exceed his career-high by 10%. He's thrown 220+ innings, and he's not completely waxed. He should have a restful off-season and then be able to pitch through next season with the confidence that he can complete a whole season. For another, though, it might be nice if the Indians got into a position where Lee could shave an inning here or there, either by virtue of an improved bullpen, or by more judicious use.

Anyway, Lee actually had a number of strong innings yesterday, and after his Homage to Sabathia 5th, he fired two more scoreless innings to finish well. I'm going to chalk up the 2-run shot by Kevin Youkilis in the 4th to giving up a hit to a fine hitter. But in the 5th, you can see where Lee's bowling-ball-sharpness spelled his doom: he had each of the first three hitters down with two strikes (1-2 to Cash, 0-2 to both Crisp and Ellsbury) and simply couldn't finish them off. He did get Crisp to ground into a force (he's still too fast to turn a 3-6-3 on him), but Ellsbury's double was not a good pitch. Then Pedroia hit an elevated pitch on 2-0,

and he couldn't get Bay with two outs. If Jhonny Peralta could even have knocked the ball down there (he wasn't far off), Pedroia would have had to hold at third and Lee gets the no-decision. But that's an inning Lee gets out of without 3 runs in most of the first 25 or so starts this season.

Were I in charge, Lee wouldn't start Sunday. Since I'm not, he will. But if he goes more than five innings or 80 pitches, I think it's needless.

**3) Fear Factor**

Brendan Donnelly was ... good.

He threw 12 strikes in 18 pitches, striking out two in a hitless inning of work. He did walk Alex Cora, but that was a 10-pitch monstrosity in which Cora fouled off 6 pitches. He induced 4 other swings-and-misses, so it's not like he was totally unable to miss bats. Admittedly, the two hitters who struck out aren't really any good (Jed Lowrie, Kevin Cash), but you play the hand you're dealt.

Here's my fear: in his last five outings, Donnelly has given up 4

hits and 1 run, striking out 4. He's also walked 4, but I'm afraid this will be interpreted as UCL-recovery-induced command loss. I'm concerned that the front office will interpret this as Donnelly showing that he has good, hard-to-hit stuff and with an off-season of throwing and conditioning will arrive at Spring Training ready to be a valuable back-end reliever.

And who's to say this isn't true? I mean, Donnelly's had a pretty good career: he seemed to peak around 2003, but his four seasons after that feature ERAs in the 3s. He's kinda homer-prone and walk-happy for my taste, but hey. Relievers are volatile. He's got a track record. Tommy John graduates normally pitch better in the SECOND year, using the first to find their command. All this is plausible.

But I'm afraid Donnelly will be COUNTED on to provide good, high-leverage performance, and this is FOOLISH. You can't COUNT on Brendan Donnelly to do ANYTHING next season. He's 37 years old. Despite five good outings, his WHIP is 2.15 and his ERA is 7.62, and these aren't accidents: he was ATROCIOUS. How much you want to attribute to coming back from UCL replacement is up to you, but I'm telling you: in a rational world, this man has NRI writ large across his resume. And if Donnelly is considered either a Bullpen Upgrade or a Reason To Jettison a Guy Off The 40, that's pushing WAY more chips into the center of the table than I'm comfortable with.

Would I rather have Vintage Brendan Donnelly on my roster than Tom Mastny? Yeah, I probably would. Would I confidently bet on that guy being the one who shows up in February? No, I certainly wouldn't. Not confidently, at least.

## 4) Viewer Mail

From Mickey Ferguson, we note that while Donnelly might get be an NRI (Non-Roster Invitee), Mickey hopes that Juan Rincon will be an NRU (Non-Roster Uninvitee). Mickey also defines Rincon's performance as "sub-mook," which, through careful parsing of my previous umpteen columns, you might catch a glimpse of whether I agree with that assessment.

## 5) Hey, could you start hitting like Victor Martinez again?

‘cause it would really come in handy. ‘d be nifty.

## 6) Super Double Squander Ball!

Trying desperately to prevent Lee's third loss, the Indians

loaded the bases in the 7th inning on a single by Josh Barfield (!), a runner-advancing groundout, a K, a walk, and an infield single by Jhonny Peralta. Remember what I said about Bay's grounder making it through the infield? Had Peralta's done the same, Barfield would likely have scored the tying run.

Hideki Okajima then came in, went 3-2 on Victor Martinez, Martinez fouled off a pair of pitches, then fouled out to end the threat.

Not to be outdone, the Indians loaded the bases AGAIN in the 8th, with a K, a walk, another K, another single by Josh Barfield (!!), and a walk. Papelbon then came in and retired Jamey Carroll on a groundout to second on the FIRST PITCH.

So, when all was said and done, the Indians got two hits by the one player I would have bet would have zero, and no hits that left the infield by anyone else.

## 7) Wait, what did you say?

Josh Barfield TRIPLED his hit total on the season by going 2-for-3. Two hits!

I'm in awe.

## 8) Ouch!

Andy Marte pulled up lame, straining a calf muscle running out a groundout to short. I'd be shocked if Marte's season isn't over, since the season now consists of five games.

To say that Marte's season has been a disappointment is to have held very low expectations indeed for Marte. It's been colossally

terrible, a .222/.269/.316 season in which he played only adequate defense. Yes, he hit .297 in September, but that was in 37 AB, and even hitting .297 he slugged a feeble .324.

Now, he did post mid-high-600s OPSs in each of the last three months: .224/.278/.403 in July, suggesting power without discipline, .250/.288/.355, suggesting contact without goodness, and .297/.350/.324, suggesting Jason Tyner. None of these hitters is actually worth a damn, but it beats his pre-All Star numbers of .177/.217/.253 (about 85 PA).

I still think Andy Marte is a schmoe. I can understand the argument for Marte starting the season on the roster and even playing some third base, but ... he looks like a schmoe. Is 250 PA enough to truly evaluate a young hitter? I'd have to say no. Would he make it through waivers if we wanted to send him back to Beefalumbus? I'd have

to say no. Am I looking forward to 500 more PA from Andy Marte?

I'd have to say no to that, too.

## 9) The wisdom of Paul Brown as it applies to the Boston Red Sox

*"Act like you have been there before."*

The defending World Series champs, and now a Wild Card berth. Absolutely worth that level of celebration. Yeah. Don't hurt yourselves.

*Note: the one player immune from this scorn is Jason Bay, a fine player heretofore sentenced to baseball Purgatory in Pittsburgh making his first*

*post-season appearance.  He could run a victory lap around Fenway like Cal Ripken after his Streak-breaking game and I would have found it charming.  Everyone who was on the 2007 squad, you're a jerk.*