In his latest offering, Buff takes a deeper look at Jake Westbrook and how he is a different pitcher at home vs. on the road. And, as always, Buff takes you on a trip through the box score and provides some musings on the happenings in other AL Central games.

It's nice to cruise every now and then, although with Jake on the hill, one keeps looking for other shoes to drop.

1) Hey, I remember that guy!

Sure you do, the guy who spun the complete-game six-hit shutout of the Royals a couple weeks ago. No, wait, that was the guy who got bombed for 8 runs in under 6 innings against the Royals the week before. No, wait, that was the guy who gave up only 2 hits in 7 1/3 to shut down Minnesota right that first weekend, wasn't it? Or was that the guy who got shelled in Detroit, walking two guys for every one he struck out and gave up seven runs not lasting six innings?

The answer, of course, is simply "Yes." I went looking for some sort of fancy statistical analysis for Jake Westbrook's up-and-down season: maybe it's the walks, or lack of Ks, or hittability, or ground balls, or Venus rising ... and it turns out to be this simple, really:

ERA; AVG/OBP/SLG/OPS against A: 1.83; .211/.276/.228/.504
ERA; AVG/OBP/SLG/OPS against B: 8.31; .333/.367/.503/.870

A is Jake at home, B is Jake away. The second set of numbers help explain the first: hard to give up few runs when people are basically beating the caca out of you. Westbrook has had two good starts on the road (Chicago, Apr 4, Seattle May 5) and one moderately-bad start at home (Texas, Apr 30). In the other four home starts, he has given up 1, 2, 0, and 0 runs; in the other four road starts he has given up 5, 9 (8), 8 (7), and 7 runs (earned when different).

There's nothing particularly odd about Jacobs Field: it's a pitcher's park but not the Polo Grounds. There's nothing particularly weird about Jake's pitching: his numbers this season to date look eerily like pro-rated career numbers (he doesn't walk too many, he strikes out very few (fewer than 5 a game), he doesn't give up home runs, he has a ludicrous GB:FB ratio). Basically, being a high-contact low-strikeout pitcher is a tough way to make a living, especially when your defense is crummy at turning balls in play into outs (see Baseball Prospectus' "Defensive Efficiency" stat).

Maybe he likes that the field's named after him. Can we make him stay here?

2) Wheels!

Not only did Grady Sizemore leg out a triple off Freddy Garcia, he added insult by stealing second on him as well. Jason Michaels thought that looked like a good idea and did the same against Cliff Politte. None of these occurences is particularly meaningful in and of itself (although Sizemore has hit 5 triples already this season, which is pretty Omar Moreno-y), but it suggests an increase in both the ability and the inclination to practice the skills necessary to "manufacture" runs. (Lou Merloni's sacrifice did this as well, directly leading to a run, albeit in a horrifyingly wasteful manner.) For a team that got slagged for lacking this last year, it's nice to see at least enough to make Joe

Morgan shut the fuck up.

3) Wheels! Falling off!

Cliff Politte was evil last season: he had a 2.01 ERA with a sub-unit WHIP (42 hits in 67 1/3 innings, 57 Ks!). It was a bit out of character for the White Sox' primary right-handed setup man, although he'd had fine seasons in 2000 and 2001, but relief pitchers are notoriously volatile.

Well, Politte entered the game with a 7.00 ERA: he left with a 6.41, but he gave up 2 hits and 3 walks in 1 2/3 innings, throwing 25 strikes and 20 balls (note: he walked Hafner intentionally; probably a wise move). He's already given up 4 bombs (6 in 2004, 7 in 2005) and has a K/BB ratio of *1.0 *, striking out only 10 in over 20 innings. It's not like Guillen doesn't have any options in the 'pen, but Politte played such a HUGE role last season, this HAS to be bothering the Sox.

As opposed to, say, me. Hee hee! Schadenfreude, here I come!

4) I see a pattern emerging

The bullpen tossed another two scoreless innings: if not for the meaningless double to Pierzynski, they would have been perfect. Rafael Betancourt struggled, needing double-digit pitches to get through his perfect inning, largely because he threw only twice as many strikes as balls instead of his customary 8:1 ratio. Fausto Carmona was a bit less accurate (who isn't?), but he did strike out two batters: since the rap on Carmona was that he didn't miss enough bats, this is mildly encouraging. Question: does Carmona use his "stuff" more effectively in short bursts than aired out as a starter? I'm very partial to the starter side of the starter v. reliever debate, but it's worth considering as a topic of discussion.

5) Blue light specials

Ben Broussard snapped out of a hitless streak by hammering a home run on a 3-0 pitch. This is one of those times I have to tip my hat to the coaches, because I'd be inclined to have the struggling guy take one there. In retrospect, Garcia didn't walk anyone and was around the strike zone all night: it probably made sense to look for a pitch/zone combination and swing if you got it. It seemed to boost Broussard's confidence in post-game comments, although it should be noted that he began a new 3-AB hitless streak immediately thereafter.

In addition, Jason Michaels hit a double that missed being a homer by one Jim Thome "nutritional supplement." As I said before, now that Michaels is hitting, every extra-base hit is gravy, and a sign that his stroke is more valuable than just a guy who gets on base.

6) Blue moon special

Lou Merloni got another hit!

7) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Down 2-0 to the Yankees, Detroit's Nate Robertson was sent back out to face New York in the top of the 8th. He'd only thrown 83 pitches, so this was defensible, but not particularly effective: the first two batters hit a ground rule double and a triple. He might be running out of gas there, Jim. Nah, he's fine: he made it through the 8th, 100 pitches, down 4-0. Not a bad night, kid, go ahead and hit the ...

... no, wait. He's going back out for the ninth.

What the heck is the thinking there? 20 pitches and three singles later, Robertson finally leaves, giving up two more runs (one inherited runner), and takes the loss as Detroit goes down 6-1. Now, I'm not in any position to question Jim Leyland, who knows a heckuva lot more about baseball than I do and has done a truly superb job with the Tigs this season, but Leyland also knows a fair amount more about grinding pitchers' arms to dust than I do, and I don't see where the gain is here. Is he testing Robertson? Punishing him? Sparing his bullpen? I can understand (although not condone) leaving a guy out there to battle in a close game or approach a shutout or some such rot, but down 4-0 to the Yankees in the ninth? Is there thinking involved here?

8) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Sizemore not only tripled and stole a base, he went 3-for-4 with a walk, two runs scored, and two RBI. That's a nice night from your 3, 4, or 5 man; since Sizemore bats leadoff, that's very nice indeed.

Aaron Boone showed his cobwebs are either gone or more tolerable than the average guy would consider, getting a hit a scoring after being bunted to second and coming home on a single. The second day after my first concussion, I had graduated from the dark room to watching Speed Racer on the couch. Running + concussion = not a fun experience, ladies and germs.

Casey Blake did not swallow his tongue. That's about it.