Well, we've got good news and bad news today. The bad news is that the Indians were badly beaten in their opener, 9-1 by the Rangers, and Cliff Lee looked more like Kane Davis than he did the defending AL Cy Young award winner. The good news? The B-List is back baby! Buff talks about Cliffie, talks about The Most Misleading Plate Appearance in the World, writes a poem about Jensen Lewis, and talks about the Opening Day woes of C.C. Sabathia and our division rivals.

FINAL

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Indians (0-1) (0.5 GB)

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Rangers (1-0)

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W: Millwood (1-0)□□□□□□□□□□L: C. Lee (0-1)

Imagine my dismay when the Rangers game was not televised in the Austin market, but still blacked out on MLB.tv because of its arcane rules.

Imagine my relief after the second inning when the Rangers game was not televised in the Austin market, but still blacked out on MLB.tv because of its arcane rules.

1) What a Bargain

Faust: Don't bare your greedy teeth at me like that! It sickens me! -- Great magnificent spirit that deigned to appear to me, that know my heart and soul -- why forge this monster who gorges himself on harm, and on corruption -- feasts.

Mephisto: Have you finished?

In 1997, Sandy Alomar Jr.'s career was clearly in decline. After winning the Rookie of the Year in 1990, Alomar struggled through some injuries and with consistency before finally breaking through with a .288/.347/.490 strike-shortened season in 1994 at age 28.

His next two years were successively worse, and he headed into 1997 on the tail of a season in which he posted a sad .299 OBP and looked to be the poster child for Why Tall Catchers Don't Last (role now being played by Joe Mauer).

What followed was one of the most remarkable single-season comebacks in modern baseball, certainly in terms of the Cleveland Indians: Alomar hit .324, slugged .545, set career highs for OPS and WARP, topped 20 HR for the first time, and hit a dramatic 7th-inning home run to break a 1-1 tie in the All-Star Game ... which was
played at Jacobs' Field
.

His contributions were instrumental in driving the Tribe to the cusp of a championship, only to find that his personal deal with Mephisto had been voided at the last minute because Wayne Huizenga offered the Devil a cut of the stadium parking and concessions profits for the next billion years.

(Huizenga, a businessman who thrives on small print, was able to void the deal with the approval of a new stadium in South Florida, although he is still going to Hell.)

Cliff Lee is 30 years old.

Now, I think it's a bit glib to claim that Lee was a one-season wonder borne of a deal with Beelzebub, but the parallel is uncomfortable nonetheless. Really, although Lee's final numbers are indisputably atrocious, you can look at pieces of the game and get a glimpse of the thin man hiding in the fat one, so to speak. In the first inning, Lee got two groundouts in a perfect 10-pitch inning, maintaining the gains of last year.

Remember, Lee's improved success last year came because he:

a) located his fastball exquisitely, throwing a lot of strikes
b) stopped being the most preposterous flyball pitcher since Scott Elarton

He wasn't ever going to be confused with Jake Westbrook, but he posted his highest GB:FB ratio in the majors, close to being neutral.

Things pretty much fell apart for Lee after he was struck with an "infield single" by Hank Blalock: he went 2-0 on Marlon Byrd (who kills the Tribe) before yielding a double, and after striking out Chris Davis, gave up run-scoring hits to Jarrod Saltalamacchia and Elvis Andrus, which is almost inconceivable.

The thing is, he seemed to have settled down after that: he got Josh Hamilton to fly out the other way on an 0-2 pitch, sawed through a 4-batter third with a bloop single, and struck out the side in the 4th. On the day, Lee struck out 5 and walked 1 in 5 innings of work, throwing more than 2/3rds of his pitches for strikes.

There was just that pesky "two hits an inning thing" standing between him and success.

Now, the home run to Blalock was arguably an Arlington Special, up in the jet stream, but look: you give up ten hits in five innings, and that's just poor. The real problem I had with Lee's

performance (other than the sucking, I mean) was his absurd 3:7 GO:FO ratio.

Hopefully this was just a case of wind and earliness conspiring to make for an off day rather than a harbinger of a return to pre-Mephisto form, because I've seen the Extreme Flyball Cliff Lee, and frankly, I enjoyed it very little indeed.

2) The Most Misleading Plate Appearance in the World

Fresh off a four-pitch walk to new acquisition Mark DeRosa, ex-Tribesman Kevin Millwood faced rejuvenated Victor Martinez with a man on first and something to prove. Millwood's five-year deal with the Rangers has looked just this side of awful, but his option vests with enough innings this season, and he is "finally healthy" in the way that North Korea is "finally ready to get serious in five-party talks."

Wearing him down early in the game would be pivotal: the back end of the Rangers' bullpen is actually pretty good, but its middle is soft and gooey like most Rangers' squads.

Martinez took a ball, took a strike ...

... and began swinging at pretty much every pitch that didn't bounce or hit him squarely in the face.

Admittedly, there are good ways to hack (spoiling pitches with two strikes) and bad ways to hack (giving Josh Barfield a bat), but Martinez fouled off an amazing six pitches to wear Millwood down.

And on Millwood's 19th pitch of the inning, and what looked like his first straight change ... Victor Martinez hit into a double play.

Millwood was so stressed out by this long at-bat, three of his next four innings were perfect. Th e one that was not ended with another double play.

Yeah, we made him work. Feh.

3) Powerless

Of the Indians' five hits off Millwood, five of them were singles. One of them did not leave the infield. Travis Hafner's went the other way. None of them drove in a run.

4) Before you object

I'm not saying that Hafner hitting the ball the other way is a bad thing: in fact, it can be a very GOOD thing, especially if it is the kind of driven ball that keeps all three outfielders from standing in right field in an X-Treme Shift.

But one of the concerns about Hafner's shoulder is that he has been unable to generate the necessary bat speed to get around on a 90+ mph fastball. His two homers to end the spring seemed like they might be a positive sign toward this, but they may also have been fluky guesses. Until he shows me more positive data, I'm skeptical.

5) Back to the original point

The point of item (3) was that for all the rancid pitching done in Arizona, blamed on (at various times) the altitude, the dry ball, the slick surface, the working on specific pitches, the "It's Just Springness", the accidental confusion amongst clubhouse attendants between "agave" and "peyote" as a cactus-based sweetener, and errant Jack Cassel autograph requests, the offense seemed like it would be a stable and productive element of the game. And I can't really fault the approach of the hitters, at least at first: Victor Martinez was the first batter to swing at the first pitch with one out in the 4th, and in that plate appearance, he worked the count to 3-2 before singling.

Of course, he was erased by Hafner's subsequent double play, but I can't really pinpoint any single thing that rendered the offense so inert.

Shin-Soo Choo drove a single to right, but he also hit a ground ball to the left side, so he's not entirely pull-happy.

Grady Sizemore did the same thing.

Kelly Shoppach struck out twice, but c'mon, he's Kelly Shoppach.

This is what Kelly Shoppach does.

I guess more than anything, the Tribe seemed kind of ... absent.

6) Silver Lining Dept.

We only left three guys on base!

7) Bring out the carbon dioxide!

If there was one thing I would have bet money on in the game, it would have been that if Masa Kobayashi appeared in a windy game in Arlington, a home run would be involved. Kobayashi looked so, so very bad in the spring that people were clamoring for Vinnie Chulk to take his roster spot.

I will pause here for a moment for you to look up Vinnie Chulk's 2008 stats.

I will pause here for a moment to allow you to clean your keyboard.

This isn't necessarily to disparage Chulk, who I actually like from his Toronto days (I tend to fixate on the whole Toronto ‘pen, having tried to Virtually Acquire many of them over the past several seasons), but because I can no longer disparage Eddie Moo. No, wait, that's not the point either: the point is, Masa Kobayashi was awful after the All-Star break, and augmented this awful with a whole new, durian-scented flavor of awful in the spring.

Also, he was bad.

It's hard to argue that he should have been a lot more effective yesterday, though, throwing 7 strikes in 8 pitches and giving up a single in a scoreless inning of work.

Raffy Perez pretty much picked up where he left off and Raffy Perezed through a perfect seventh. He didn't strike anyone out because I think the Rangers pretty much wanted to go home at that point.

8) We've run out of carbon dioxide!

(to the tune of "Dennis Moore" from Monty Python)

Jensen Lew, Jensen Lew,
Riding through the land
Jensen Lew, Jensen Lew,
With his mighty hand
He gives up a bomb,
Then one extra run
Jensen Lew ... Jensen Lew ... Jensen Lew

He struck out two guys. I'm still not pleased.

9) Schadenfreude Dept.

C.C. Sabathia walked 5 batters, gave up 8 hits, and yielded 6 runs in 4 1/3 innings.

To BALTIMORE.

At HOME.

I have written about a Sabathia start on Opening Day for the past three seasons, and truthfully, I wish the guy the best. I honestly liked the fellow and hardly begrudge him the decision to go to New York to make nine figures. Class guy and all that.

But I do still hate the Yankees, so most of their failures give me joy.

10) Around the Division

Detroit lost to Toronto in a Smorgasbord of Bad, with former Favorite Player Justin Verlander (see below) getting pummeled for 8 runs in 3 2/3 innings, Nate Robertson being forced to the bullpen, and Juan Rincon ... yes, THAT Juan Rincon ... making his Tigers debut with the sparkling 1-inning 2-hit 2-walk 3-run extravaGANza we've come to expect from Mr. Rincon.

Minnesota scored one run because ... well, actually, because Felix Hernandez is damn good. But the Twins lost, anyway.

Chicago and KC did not play because it is April in Chicago. Why are the White Sox opening at home? Have we not learned this lesson yet?

11) Administrivia

If you are on Facebook, consider joining the group "Steve Buffum's B-List" at http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?gid=50887498738
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I don't know if there's a point to this, but I will post things there on occasion, including a sporadic "Mook of the Day" feature and other such frivolity.

For those unfamiliar with my record of Favorite Players, I will be putting the principle to the test this year: my Favorite Player was Cliff Lee, and I wrote an article about it. Shortly after this, Lee turned into a Gila monster and was sent to Beefalo.

I fired him and briefly chose Tom Mastny, who is now a Carp or Ham Fighter or Pokemon or something.

I then chose Justin Verlander for karmic purposes.

In 2008, Cliff Lee (no longer Favorite Player) won the Cy Young. Justin Verlander (my Favorite Player) was pretty bad.

So for this reason, I announce that my New Favorite Player is the whimsical bundle of misfiring lower bowel musculature that is the Red Sox' closer, Jonathan Papelbon. Join me in welcoming Papelbon to the B-List family of Favorite Players, and many happy returns!