For our newer readers, the Monday edition of The B-List recaps the entire weekend slate of action, and Buff hits on a slew of different topics today. Included are his thoughts on the pitching performances of Scott Lewis and Anthony Reyes, The Return of Vinnie Chulk, and The Disappearance of Clifton Phifer Lee. Buff also likes what he has seen so far from Travis Hafner. The production from the top and bottom of the batting order? That's another story ...

FINAL

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H

E

Blue Jays (4-1)

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Indians (0-4)

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W: League (1-0) L: R. Perez (1-0)

FINAL

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Blue Jays (5-1)

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Indians (0-5)

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W: Halladay (2-0) L: C. Lee (0-2) S: Frasor (1)

FINAL

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Blue Jays (5-2)

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Indians (1-5) (2.5 GB)

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X

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W: Reyes (1-0) L: Purcey (0-1)

It's a brand-new season!

1) The Triumphant Return from ... wait, cancel that feel-good After School Special

Scott Lewis' career has been a story of fits and starts, mixing good results in with frequent stints on the injured list that have derailed his ability to jump onto a real fast track to the major-league rotation.

All this changed last fall when Lewis was called up to make some spot starts in place of the injured Aaron Laffey and other injured/ineffective/Matt Gintery pitchers: Lewis wasn't exactly

dominant, coughing up 4 homers in his 4 starts and posting a decent-enough 15:6 K:BB ratio in 24 innings, but he did win all 4 of his starts and posted a 2.63 ERA. Given an opportunity to compete for the fifth starter's job in the spring, he beat out fellow young left-handers Laffey and Jeremy Sowers (as well as a colllection of aged mooks) to make the Opening Day roster: in fact, he was actually slotted into the 4th starter role in order to give fellow brittle starter Anthony Reyes a little extra rest between starts.

Lewis' debut certainly started auspiciously enough: he struck out two of the three hitters he faced in a perfect 9-pitch first, missing the strike zone only once. In the second, he missed four times in a 14-pitch 1-2-3 inning, he worked around a leadoff double and a five-pitch walk to post a third straight scoreless inning.

The fact that the walk was to noted slugger Marco Scutaro might have been an indication of what was to come, however: no one walks Marco Scutaro on purpose, he of the lifetime .382 SLG.

Indeed, Lewis' 4th inning was a bad as his first three had been good: Vernon Wells was held to a single on a ball that could easily have been a double, Adam Lind pounded a homer, Scott Rolen doubled, and Kevin Millar was thrown out trying to turn a single into a double because he runs at the speed of Kevin Millar. Yes, Lewis got Jose Bautista to strike out swinging to end the inning, but really, who doesn't strike out Jose Bautista swinging at some point in his career?

Now, look, it's extreme second-guessing to say that Lewis was hurt there or should have been pulled: he had thrown 80 pitches to get through the 4 innings, and ought to be able to pull a fifth inning out of his posterior, but since the first two innings were SO efficient and the last one really nearly included four straight extra-base hits (and the leadoff hitter, Alex Rios, flew out on a ball that was pretty solidly struck), it isn't that big of a stretch to think that in a cold, rainy, cusp-of-evening outing, Scott Lewis may not have been ready to throw a fifth inning.

Sure enough, one Scutaro homer later, Lewis' night ended on a full-count single to Aaron Hill. Lewis' overall numbers have the gruesome overtones of Small Sample Theater, but really, this was almost two starts in one.

His first three innings (and, probably not coincidentally, his first full pass through the order) were just short of brilliant, while his last inning-plus was simple botchery.

Was he fighting his flexor tendon strain after three innings?

Only Lewis himself knows for sure.

But great googly moogly, that was an awful inning.

Lewis goes on the shelf with the aforementioned tendon strain: my immediate thought was "Chad Fox Commemorative Elbow Sproing," but we will see for sure later. In the meantime, Vinnie Chulk gets the immediate call, probably prepping the bullpen for a repeat of the Carl Pavano Experience far more than any imminent return to a four-man rotation.

The new fifth starter will either be Zach Jackson or a Laffey/Sowers/Mook type replacement plan.

As for Lewis, he is studiously studying the methods of St. Patrick in order to avoid being bitten by one more snake.

2) Welcome to the club!

A number of fans were calling for Chulk to make the Opening Day roster, especially at the expense of Masa Kobayashi: natually, Kobayashi has been the Indians' Very Best Pitcher with 3 decent appearances (two excellent) and an ERA of 2.70. Of course, he's also walked more than a guy an inning, struck out NOBODY, and sports a regurgitory 2.10 WHIP, so perhaps this ERA is a bit misleading.

In fact, of the three pitchers on the staff with an ERA under 4.50, Chulk is the only one not to walk a batter: Joe Smiff has been effective in spots, but lousy with aim, as he too walks a guy an inning. All Chulk did was come in for Zippy Lee and hold the line for 2 1/3 innings, giving up 4 hits and a run when Smiff couldn't keep Sluggin' Scutaro from lifting a sac fly for what ended up being the game-winning run.

As long as Pavano remains on the club, Jackson (or someone like him) will have to be on the roster to "shadow" him: Chulk can clearly go multiple innings, but probably not the four or five required to pick up Pavano until his merciful immolation, so long-term, I don't know where that leaves Chulk. But he was pretty good Saturday.

3) The horror, the horror

Raffy Perez has now thrown 3 2/3 innings: he has posted the following gemlike qualities:

Zero strikeouts
Three walks
Five hits (2 XBH)
One homer
A GB:FB ratio of 0.45 (last three seasons: 1.40, 1.21, 1.50)
WHIP of 2.18 (still lower than Kobayashi!)
ERA of 14.73

Perez was the One Sure Thing I had in my Virtual Prospective Bullpen: I was worried about Jen Lewis being a One-Trick Pony, about Betancourt being worn down, about Smiff being a ROOGY, about Kobayashi being Kobayashi, about Wood going *florp*, and about Zach Jackson being on the roster. The only thing I could COUNT on was that Raffy Perez was a nasty, evil pitcher.

Well, the results have certainly been nasty. I don't care for them.

4) Analytical Analysis

Sometimes analysis just isn't that involved: last season, Cliff Lee was extraordinarily effective because of his exceptional command. He threw a high percentage of strikes, and he was able to spot both his fastballs in terrific, hard-to-hit-solidly locations.

Lee posted an astounding 170:34 K:BB ratio and a 2.54 ERA en route to a Cy Young award and a sparkling 22-3 W-L record.

This season, Cliff Lee has been replaced by his doppleganger, Zippy Lee, a man who walked Marco Scutaro on five pitches to open the game and started 2 of 7 hitters in the second inning with a strike. He threw 57 strikes in 102 pitches, walking 4 men in 5 innings, and coughed up a

preposterous 3:7 GO:FO ratio.

Sometimes it really is that simple: Lee is throwing the ball badly, and the results, not unpredictably, are bad. Stop being bad!

5) Advice taken!

Mark DeRosa, at least temporarily, has stopped being bad. He hasn't entirely starting being good, but, as it turns out, the opposite of "bad" is not "good," but rather, "no longer an open, sucking wound."

DeRosa now sports a three-game hitting streak and drove in five runs this weekend with a double and a two-run homer. He still has a bit of a row to hoe to get up to his weight, but hitting his age is no longer an issue, unless his birth certificate was forged and he was actually born in 1894.

6) Is it too early? It seems too early. I'd better not say anyth...

It's not too early! Travis Hafner is a manly man! Ahoogah! Ahoogah!

Okay, well, of course it's too early, but look: Hafner has played in five games and had a hit in each one. He has homered in each of his last three games, and now sports a .300/.417/.800 line that, while obviously deeply colored in shades of Small Sample, is eons removed from his performance in any random five-game stretch of 2008. Will Hafner slug .800 on the season? Of course not. But is a 1.217 OPS more encouraging than the .437 he posted in September, or the .628 he posted last season?

You bet your sweet bippy.

Cautionary tale: after five games last season, Hafner had hits in 4 of the five games and had an .859 OPS. But ... dude ... really, now ... watch the damned games. He's still not "Pronk" (that guy was significantly larger), but he sure isn't 2008 Travis Hafner.

7) Small Sample Illustrated

Marco Scutaro is hitting .385/.485/.731. Let's not get all carried away by Hafner's numbers here.

8) Saving the Season

Why does 1-5 feel so much more hopeful than 0-6? Because Anthony Reyes is the key to the season! There is no player more instrumental to the success of the Cleveland Indians than Anthony Reyes!

Without Anthony Reyes, all is lost!

Name your children after him!

Iron your hat brims to better emulate him!

Raise your voices and cry to the heavens!

Anthony Reyes will deliver us to ...

... mediocrity. I mean, let's not get TOO carried away.

The fact is, Anthony Reyes is NOT the key to the Indians' season. He might end up making the difference between Decent and Playoffs if we get the other pitchers on the team to perform like Pitchers rather than Untrained Monkeys.

I like Reyes irrationally and think he can be pretty good, but he's the fifth starter for a reason: he's got wonky arm parts and he's only Pretty Good in the first place.

But the other fact is, Anthony Reyes pitched pretty darned well for 5 innings, and went a sixth inning, something no other Cleveland starter has done this year. Sure, his sixth inning was a case of Excess Well-Going, giving up a two-run shot to Vern Wells (on a pitch that looked to have more elevation than you'd strictly like in a pitch to Vern Wells), but through five innings, Reyes posted 5 ONE-hit innings with a pair of walks: his only run to that point came on a double, runner-advancing groundout, and truly execrable wild pitch.

Look, if I'm going to get on Zippy's case for throwing 57 strikes in 102 pitches, I can't very well tell you that Reyes' 53 in 96 are a Quantum Leap Forward. Shoot, that's actually a lower strike percentage than Lee had. And Lee actually struck out a guy an inning: Reyes only blew past two.

Lee and Reyes gave up the same number of runs, fer crine out loud.

But Reyes showed a flash of brilliance heretofore missing from Mr. Lee's repertoire, and given the twin facts of Lower Expectations and We Won The Damned Game, I'm ready to anoint Reyes as Season Savior, because otherwise, my job here is X-Tremely Stoopid.

9) Feast, Famine, and Hunger Pangs

Last week I mentioned that the 3-4-5 hitters for the Indians were actually doing a pretty good job getting on base: perhaps a bit sporadically, but at a decent-enough clip. Consider the lineup used in Monday's win:

3. Martinez, 1-for-3, 2 BB, .320 AVG, .414 OBP
4. Hafner, 1-for-4, 1 BB, .300 AVG, .417 OBP
5. Peralta, 3-for-5, 0 BB, .333 AVG, .407 OBP
6. Choo, 2-for-3, 2 BB, .353 AVG, .500 OBP
7. Garko, 0-for-3, 2BB, .300 AVG, .588 OBP

Regardless of how you feel about AVG or OBP as the better measuring stick, or the fact that six games is not a lot of games (Garko, for example, has 10 AB, although 16 PA), that's a very, very solid middle of the lineup, all the way from 3 to 7. The lowest OBP is still over .400, and the lowest average is .300. That's awesome!

Except that when these guys hit, they're the only guys on base for themselves:

1. Sizemore: .200 AVG, .310 OBP
2. DeRosa: .115 AVG, .207 OBP
8. Crowe: .111 AVG, .111 OBP
9. Cabrera: .158 AVG, .304 OBP

That's very poor. I have confidence that DeRosa will not hit .115, Sizemore will not hit .200, and Crowe will not play a lot, but that's still bad. Of course, without the Untrained Monkey Brigade pulling their collective HEADS out of the RUMPS, it hardly matters how many runs we SCORE.

10) You thought I missed that!

Trevor Crowe stroked a two-run double with the bases loaded to drive in two runs: Ryan Garko was on first, so there was no chance of a third run scoring on a ball that stayed in the ballpark. Congratulations to Crowe for his first major-league hit: Crowe now has a perfect 1-to-1 correlation between him getting a hit and the Indians winning, a correlation that spells certain doom for the Tribe if it continues throughout the season.

11) Holy Crap, what was THAT?

We had this guy who came out for the ninth inning, and he struck out the side without giving up a baserunner. I have no idea what that's called. I don't believe I've seen that this century. I'm pretty sure I imagined it, since I also thought I saw Jen Lewis get out of a 2-on jam to pitch 1 2/3 scoreless innings, so I'll let you know if I have that dream again, but it was pretty exhilirating.