On the one hand, we have the historic 14-run outburst that set new records for the entire New York Yankees franchise. On the other, we have the Bullpen of Death. Buff recaps the final three games of the 4-game set while second-guessing his ability to second-guess, wondering where Anthony Reyes' curveball went, and wondering if Asdrubal Cabrera would like to face the Yankees in New Popup Stadium a few more times before he retires.

FINAL				1
Indians (3-8)	1	0	0	1
Yankees (6-5)	0	0	2	1

W: Bruney (2-0) L: J. Lewis (1-1) S: Rivera (3)

FINAL	1	2	3	4
Indians (4-8)	0	**14**	1	1
Yankees (6-6)	2	0	0	0

W: Carmona (1-2) L: Wang (0-3)

FINAL	1	2	3	4
Indians (4-9) (3.5 GB)	0	1	0	2
Yankees (7-6)	0	0	0	1

W: Albaladejo (1-0) L: J. Lewis (1-2)

I am not a huge fantasy wonk, but here is my recommendation: dump all New York Yankee pitchers, pick up all decent New York Yankee hitters. 81 games will be played in that stadium.

1) Sometimes the best anouncing is to let the crowd noise describe the action

Travis Hafner: single to 3B
Jhonny Peralta: single to LF

Shin-Soo Choo: home run to LF, **3 runs**
Ryan Garko: F-2
Ben Francisco: double to LF
Asdrubal Cabrera: single to CF, **1 run**
Grady Sizemore: double to RF

Mark DeRosa: double to RF, **2 runs**
(Anthony Claggett relieves Chien-Ming Wang)
Victor Martinez: single to RF, **1 run**
Travis Hafner: double to CF
Jhonny Peralta: double to CF, **2 runs**
Shin-Soo Choo: BB
Ryan Garko: single to CF
Ben Francisco: K
Asdrubal Cabrera: home run to RF, **4 runs**
Grady Sizemore: home run to RF, **1 run**
Mark DeRosa: K

Notes:

Which is more surprising, an infield single by Travis Hafner or a grand slam by Asdrubal Cabrera? You might say that Cabrera's home run was a glorified popup, and this is true, but Cody Ransom was playing

third base for the Yankees, so this is a similar handicap.

Every player got at least one hit. Four players got two hits. Grady Sizemore got two EXTRA-BASE hits. EIGHT of the hits were for extra bases. Asdrubal Cabrera drove in 5 runs in one inning. Victor Martinez was the only Cleveland batter to bat ONCE.

The most staggering thing about this game: if you took away this record-setting 14-run inning ... the Indians would still have won by FOUR RUNS.

2) Pre-second-guess Fail, or why Eric Wedge is the Manager and I am Not

Sunday's matchup looked like a horrific one for the Tribe: not only is A.J. Burnett arguably the Yankees' best starter at this early point in the season, but Carl Pavano is ... well, Carl Pavano. New Yankees Stadium to that point had yielded 3, 6, and 8 home runs (both teams combined), and right field was playing as if it were about 40 feet from home plate. Pavano is right-handed against a predominately left-handed Yankees lineup, and the right-handers like Derek Jeter have inside-out swings that drive the ball to right. Pavano had given up 2 homers in his first start and 1 in his second. He has allowed more fly balls than ground balls. And his stint with the Yankees has been written about at great length as to cause nausea. There was basically no rational way to look at Carl Pavano vs. A.J. Burnett in New Yankees Stadium and come up with a scenario that gave the Indians the proverbial "snowball's chance" of winning Sunday's game.

In thinking about the matchup Saturday, I came up with a Brilliant Idea: let Aaron Laffey start on three days' rest.

See, this would be a much better matchup: the left-handed Laffey coaxing balls away from the short porch in right. Laffey inducing ground balls where Pavano allows them to loft into the air. Laffey on short rest even could potentially work in his favor along the lines of the old bromide, "Sinkerball pitchers throw better sinkers when at less than full strength." (This bromide doesn't actually have enough sample size to be proven true, but Orel Hershiser used to say it, which has tended to be enough for Tribe fans.)

So clearly this was the kind of unorthodox, out-of-the-box thinking needed to take advantage of an unusual situation (the Yankees do not play in a major-league park), exactly the kind of thinking that the rigid, stuffy Eric Wedge would never even consider. How dare he be so rigid and stuffy! This is exactly the kind of locked-in, inflexible, rote thinking that causes fans great distress! I mean, he would never even THINK of skipping Pavano for Laffey there!

And you know why not? Because it's borderline-asinine.

This is outsmarting oneself to spite one's nose, or something like that. Laffey just pitched on short rest on Wednesday, and it was arguably his first decent outing since 2008 (including spring training and AAA). Who's to say he would have responded favorably to that? Who's to say how Pavano would react, mentally and physically, to TWO extra days off (the Tribe doesn't play today)?

More to the point, who's to say Carl Pavano would fail on Sunday?

Certainly not Carl Pavano. Or the New York Yankees.

In fact, Pavano's start might have been the best he's put up in several years: he did have a 3-hit 6-inning start against Toronto on August 29th last year, but he only struck out 1 batter and had a cretunkulous 3:16 GB:FB ratio in that game, suggesting edge-living of the highest order. In this start, Pavano gave up 4 hits and a walk, even loading the bases once, but gave up only 1 run (I don't even need to cheapen the effort with the word "escaped" there) in 6 innings while striking out one batter and three Nick Swishers. Striking out Swisher with the bases juiced in the bottom of the 6th for the THIRD TIME in the game was nigh the stuff of legend.

Was it a flawless start? Of course not. Pavano was tagged for a run on a well-struck double by Derek Jeter and a 1-2 solid single to Mark Teixeira, and he did load the bases even AFTER getting a double play with runners on first and second in the 6th. But the start of the game could hardly have gone smoother for Pavano: in the first two (perfect) innings, Pavano induced three ground ball outs and struck out two hitters. This is exactly the recipe Pavano needs to follow to have some sustained measure of success. (He retired the side in order in the 3rd as well, but two of the outs were lineouts to the outfield and he looked significantly more hittable: in fact, Jeter's double in the 4

th

was the first hit he allowed.) Ultimately, the bullpen thoroughly squandered Pavano's fine effort, in which he outpitched Burnett, but for all the cyberabuse Pavano takes here, there, and everywhere, he pitched a quality game.

And Eric Wedge, while not necessarily saying, "I told you so," is currently posting outrageous lies about Rich Swerbinsky for the Google Search Engine until my column is taken away.

3) Out of control

Fausto Carmona gave up two quick runs in the first in "Here we go again" fashion, walking Johnny Damon on 5 pitches before allowing a bomb to Teixeira. He got two groundouts, but that's still a bad start.

And then he was staked to a 12-run lead over the next 38 minutes.

Now, listen: if there's a time to be jacking around with the strike zone, it is NOT in a game in which you lead by 12, 13, 14, or 18 runs (all of which Carmona did at various points). Derek Jeter may be beloved in New York and get some extra calls, but even Captain Derek cannot hit a 7-run homer. You still want to be effective, but please do not worry about hitting exact spots with a 12 (13, 14, 18) run lead.

In the 2nd, Carmona did this well: each hitter only saw 1 ball, and he retired the side in order.

In the 3rd, the first two hitters saw TWO balls, but he still retired the side in order (including ringing up Damon on his one strikeout on the day).

In the 4th, he walked two hitters, including Nick Swisher on 4 pitches.

Now, this is barely conceivable. The bases are empty. You lead 16-2. Throw a bloody strike! I'm aware that this makes it sound like I'm trivializing the ability to throw strikes: it's not trivial. And no, I'm not asking for big fat balloon balls tossed lightly into the strike zone just for the sake of raising your strike percentage. But damn, of the first 9 pitches Carmona threw in the 4th, TWO were in the strike zone, and his 10th pitch was laced for a single. Damn!

Anyway, three of Carmona's six hits were for extra bases, but I'm not sure I'm willing to get all up in someone's face about slugging percentage in New Yankees Stadium.

4) Aggressively Average

I really want to like Anthony Reyes more than I do. I think everyone has players that for one reason or another they are willing to give more slack than others, "wishcasting" better potential onto them than they actually have, and Reyes is one of mine. I see flashes of real goodness and want to think that's the default value rather than a two-sigma deviation from his norm. I don't think that's ever going to take a real hold. He's pretty good, a decent-enough starter: he's just not really Very Good.

Here's the problem I have with Reyes: put aside the back-to-back homers that coughed up a 1-0 lead in the bottom of the 3rd. Damon's was a long popup (although, admittedly, Teixeira's was *crushed*
). Ignore that he gave up two lineouts before a third homer in the 4th
. The problem I had with Reyes on Friday was that he simply gave up on throwing one of his best pitches.

Reyes' fastball is better than I thought, touching 92 at times. It can be elevated, so that can get kind of scary, but he generally spots it well.

He has a quality straight change that fades on a left-hander and runs in on a righty. He changes speeds well enough, hitting about every value from 80 to 92 at one point or another. He doesn't have to blow people away (although I would certainly have liked more than 1 strikeout).

But the best pitch I saw Reyes throw on Friday was a blooping overhand curve, the kind of curve that used to drive me crazy when Cliff Lee would steadfastly refuse to throw it. And after about the third inning, Reyes simply never threw that pitch again.

Well, there may have been one exception: he kept throwing what the announcers told me were "straight changes" away to left-handed hitters, and I could have sworn that at least two of them were trying their damndest to dive back down. They just simply wouldn't. I mean, NO ONE throws an eye-high straight change a foot off the plate on purpose. That's where the ball goes when you TRY to throw a curveball and spin it instead of getting it to really bite.

Is this a health problem? It certainly

wouldn't be Reyes' first brush with such things. His elbow-raised reachback in his delivery is all but designed to get hurt eventually. Is this a badness problem? Maybe Reyes doesn't throw his curveball because he CAN'T. Is this a communication problem with Victor Martinez? I don't know how to read Martinez' signs on a tiny screen, and won't feign insight here. But I'm telling you this: Reyes threw some good curveballs early in the game, and he didn't throw any curveballs later in the game, and I am not encouraged by this development.

Reyes did a decent job battling with runners on base: the three homers were all to right and all with the bases empty. He walked three in 5 innings, which is clearly too many, and he wasn't very efficient (47 strikes in 91 pitches in 5 IP, nearly a 1-to-1 ratio, which is putrid). But I still think a Reyes with that curveball can be an effective starter, while the Reyes with no curveball is probably Keith Ginter.

5) The Bullpen of Death!

Congratulations are in order to Joe

Smiff, who faced Derek Jeter with a man on second in a 1-run game and struck him out with nasty low-slot stuff, including two back-up pitches and an unhittable slider (literally: that pitch ended up a foot outside, but you can see why Jeter committed to it).

Because Zach Jackson was terrible.

And Vinne Chulk was terrible ... twice.

And Jensen Lewis was terrible ... twice.

And Raffy Perez was terrible.

And Raffy Betancourt was terrible.

Actually, Masa Kobayashi tossed two perfect innings and Kerry Wood struck out the batter he faced, but Kobayashi's innings were with a 16 and 17-run lead and Wood's was way after the horse had left the barn,

trotted down the road, and eaten a oat-and-millet omelet down at the pub.

6) Special Mention

Here's the truly infuriating thing about Betancourt's 1 1/3 innings: he came in and was dominant. Two quick strikeouts, both swinging on 1-2 counts, to keep the game to a 1-run deficit. That was awesome. Vintage Raffy. Then after two quick outs (on six pitches), he gave up a double and intentionally walked Robinson Cano.

Okay, no problem, rather face the legless Hideki Matsui with two outs, no problem. But after going 0-2 on Matsui, Betancourt threw FOUR STRAIGHT BALLS to load the bases. That's just awful. Again, though, no problem, Cody Ransom is so so so so very very bad, facing him is what you want at that point.

Two more balls. That's atrocious.

Two quick strikes. That's more like it.

Ball three. Bases-clearing double. To Cody Ransom! That's inconceivable! Great Hera's earlobes, that's just excruiciating. Cody Ransom! Sickening.

7) Items of note

Grady Sizemore reached base at least twice in each of the three games.

Every hitter reached base in Friday's

game. (Every hitter reached base in the SECOND INNING of Saturday's game.)

Asdrubal Cabrera walked four times, twice each in every game in which he did not hit a grand slam.

In all, the Indians walked 18 times in the three games, never fewer than 5 in a game.

No one in major-league baseball will

make a worse throw than Vinnie Chulk did on Friday.

Ryan Garko did not look ridiculous in right field.

Tony Graffanino is still on the roster.

8) Obligatory Mention

Of course it was fan interference.