On a night on which Brian Bannister outpitches Cliff Lee, Trevor Crowe strikes out on Ball Three, and the Indians post the Worst Inning in the World against Jamey Wright, there might not seem like a whole lot to say. Unless you're Buff, who can't really say anything in fewer than a thousand words. No one says nothing more verbosely than The B-List, and Buff wonders if maybe things could have been different, like putting runners on base for Victor Martinez, pulling Cliff Lee after 102 pitches, and building a roster that actually makes sense.

Royals (8-6)	1	0	0	0	**FINAL** 1
Indians (5-10) (3.5 GB)	0	0	0	0	

W: Bannister (1-0) L: C. Lee (1-3) S: Soria (5)

Short column today, because ... well, frankly, there isn't a whole lot to say.

1) Good news, bad news

The good news is that Cliff Lee continued his trend of being progressively better in each start, this time completing 8 full innings of work while allowing only 2 runs.

Technically 2 runs in 8 IP is not better than 1 run in 6 IP, but the way he accomplished it was: he gave up fewer hits per inning (9 in 8 vs. 7 in 6), walked fewer batters (1 vs. 3), struck out more hitters (5 vs. 4), and kept the ball in the park. On a cold, wet night, Lee held the Royals largely in check, giving up one run on a double and two sac flies and a second on an end-of-the-bat flair job by Willie the Q.

The bad news is that Cliff Lee has already lost as many games as he did all last season, now standing at 1-3 on the season. This loss was obviously of the tough-luck variety, but his other two are largely well-earned.

The good news is that Lee has regained some of the excellent command he had last season, throwing 85 strikes in 122 pitches. Not only is he showing control, putting the ball in the strike zone, but he is flashing swing-and-miss stuff that was absent earlier: Lee induced 14 swings and misses, and all five of his strikeouts were swinging. It's one thing to hit your spots with late movement that prevents solid contact, but to actually flat-out throw the ball by people is an added weapon that should serve Lee well.

The bad news is that not all his pitches were missed: 9 hits is kind of a lot of hits, and two of them were for extra bases. The first double was directly responsible for the first run, and if not for the Garkoesque speed of Bubba Billy Butler, the second double would have led to a third run as well. Oddly enough, three of Lee's innings were 1-2-3 affairs, and three of Lee's innings resulted in giving up more than one hit. Giving up a hit an inning is a lot more palatable when it is truly *one* hit per inning: allowing the opponent to string hits together is what leads to runs.

The good news is that Lee still had good stuff in the late innings: his fifth strikeout came on his 108th pitch, getting Mike Aviles to strike out swinging to lead off the 8th. Lee threw 14 strikes against 6 balls that inning, so he was still locating pretty well.

The bad news is that on a cold, wet night in April, Cliff Lee was summoned to the mound to start the 8th inning after having thrown 102 pitches through the first seven. Since we Scratched our collective Managerial Heads with respect to Joe Girardi's decision to do this with C.C. Sabathia earlier in the season, it would be inconsistent not to at least mention it. (I'll address this separately under another heading later.)

The good news is that although Lee put 10 men on base, only 1 was stranded in scoring position, meaning that a lot of those guys reached first base and didn't advance any further.

The bad news is that Lee posted a backwards 6:11 GO:FO ratio: part of the reason I thought his success last season was sustainable was that he had fundamentally changed his pitching style from being an extreme flyball pitcher to a moderate groundball one. I just don't think Lee can be an excellent starter without recreating this shift.

2) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

Brian Bannister is Joe Posnanski's favorite pitcher, and he does seem like a neat guy. But last season, he was a lot neater guy than he was an actually effective major-league starter. There isn't much in the way of positive spin for Brian

Bannister's 2008 performance. Let's put it this way: two of the Royals' starters in the Opening Day rotation were Sidney Ponson and Horacio Ramirez. One of the starters NOT in the rotation was Brian Bannister. If you have been beaten out in 2009 by Sidney Ponson and Horacio Ramirez, your stock is somewhere between "Livan Hernandez" and "AIG."

Bannister didn't really pitch that much better than Lee last night: he walked a pair of Indians and only struck out 1, but all 4 of the hits he allowed were singles (in 6 innings) and he generally shut down the lackluster Tribe. He didn't allow his first hit until the third inning, and only one of his six innings featured an actual scoring threat. (Two if you count Grady Sizemore stealing second with two outs, but on a pitch that resulted in an 0-2 count to Mark DeRosa. It didn't seem very threatening at the time. I don't think Bannister began trembling at that "threat.")

I don't think Bannister has the raw stuff or presence to be a front-of-the-rotation starter. The Royals don't need him to do that, of course: their front 3 are already excellent. But Bannister pitched a fine game on short notice, and, after all, he won. Not because he was lucky or his performance was out of character, either: he just *beat* us.

3) Welcome to the bigs!

Tony Sipp was called up and made his first appearance last night to pitch the 9th in place of Lee. His performance certainly started auspiciously enough, as he struck out his first batter en route to a 1-2-3 9th.

Although Sipp was called up and Zach Jackson was sent down, Sipp wasn't really called up to replace Jackson. After all, Jackson was a schmoe with no actual role. No, he was called up to replace Raffy Perez, as a left-handed reliever who could retire hitters and not walk the bejeezus out of them. Perez has been such an excellent pitcher that I certainly don't want to write him off, but by the same token, the Indians need someone who can fill that role Right Now, and Perez is Not That Guy.

Whether Sipp is or not is an open question: he's coming off a gruesome injury and wasn't pitching particularly well in the minors before being called up. But he certainly looked legit last night, and I give the club credit for being willing to try something plausible here.

4) The Worst Inning in the World

Jamey Wright is a Guy. He's better than a mook, but he's pretty ordinary. I've gotten to see a bunch of him in Texas the past two seasons and can't remember ever thinking, "Man, this is a guy the Tribe should target." His ERA was goodish (3.62) in 2007, but he walked more guys than he struck out. His K:BB ratio was better in 2008, but he posted a 5.12 ERA. He's a Guy. Also, his ears prevent him from being truly aerodynamic.

Jamey Wright's first pitch hit Kelly Shoppach. His next three pitches were balls. His next three pitches ... well, Trevor Crowe watched them strike him out. I have no ready explanation for this. He also went two balls to Asdrubal Cabrera, who bounced into a double play. Hey, Wright's got groundball stuff, this sort of thing happens.

But at this point, I think we've established that Jamey Wright is not having his most accurate day. The guy who doesn't have strikeout stuff (career K/9: under 5.00) who

is prone to walking people (K:BB ratio past 5 years: 0.91, 1.25, 1.23, 0.95, 1.71). The guy who just threw 6 of his 12 pitches out of the strike zone.

In the 8th, Grady Sizemore bunt grounded out **on the first pitch** .

Mark DeRosa grounded out **on the first pitch**.

Victor Martinez took a ball and grounded out **on the *second* pitch** .

I'm gonna go out on a limb here and tell you that this is not a good offensive inning.

5) Nobody listens to my advice

The Indians had five hits last night, but two were by none other than Victor Martinez.

His two singles came leading off innings.

Victor Martinez batted four times with an aggregate ZERO runners on base.

Get on base in front of Victor Martinez!

6) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Look, I understand that the bullpen has been truly

execrable. Just painfully bad. They gave up 6 runs in 2 innings the night before. A 2-0 game is eminently winnable, and Cliff Lee still had gas in the tank.

And if you were looking for the difference between Lee's outing and the aforementioned Sabathia one, it was the stress level: Lee had 102 pitches in 7 innings, while Sabathia had more than that in FIVE. Lee's 30, he's no longer a kid. It's not that big a deal.

But ... geez, really? I mean, you know the guy better than I do, but ... really?

7) General Managerial Head-Scratchers

Some people questioned the decision to let Trevor

Crowe bat with two outs and two men on base against uber-closer Joakim Soria last night.

Let me get this out of the way: Crowe was called out on Ball Three. That pitch was a ball earlier in the SAME AT-BAT. That was not a strike. It started on the inside corner and curved toward Crowe from there. There is no way I'm getting on Crowe for that one. The one before, yes: how can you watch THREE CONSECUTIVE STRIKES from JAMEY FRIGGIN' WRIGHT? That's just terrible. But that K against Soria ... he got ripped off. Tough break.

But here is the Cleveland bench at this point in the game:

Ryan Garko, a right-handed hitter who was 1-for-9 with 5 Ks against Soria in his career.
Tony Graffanino, a right-handed hitter who is No Good

Ben Francisco, a right-handed hitter who was 0-for-4 against Soria in his career and is a Guy

That's it. That's the whole bench. The bonus of going to a 13-man staff is that your bench is three guys, one of whom can see Fungus Land from where he's sitting. If you want to bring in a lefty to face the right-handed Soria with wicked breaking stuff, you call on ... who? Trevor Crowe, that's who. That's it. That's what you've got.

Would I have called in Garko or Francisco? You know what, I probably wouldn't. And even if I would, it would be second-guessing on my part, and if it wasn't second-guessing on your part, then it sure wasn't a no-brainer "he'd obviously do better" sort of call. It would only be a call you make because you think Trevor Crowe is borderline-fungal himself.

So let's recap: you're worried about Crowe hitting: who put him on the roster? You want a pinch-hitter, but the team has a three-man bench, NONE of whom can hit left-handed. Who set the roster up that way? You have to have a 13-man staff with an 8-man pen because you don't know exactly which pitchers can accomplish what on the mound. Are you serious?

I don't like this roster makeup. I know injuries and performance meltdowns have caused some of this, but I really don't like the top-to-bottom nature of this roster.

8) Flashing the leather

Victor Martinez made a nice stab to catch a liner with runners on the corners and double off Bubba Bubba. Huzzah.