Well, the Indians lost another series, but all three games were tied after 8 innings. Last night, Fausto Carmona's excellent start was wasted by Raffy Betancourt, Jensen Lewis, and a cardboard cutout of Rich Rundles, who had been called up to replace ... Travis Hafner? Buff wonders who is making these roster decisions, as well as why the Indians can't get a hit with runners in scoring position and two outs, and why his newspaper would try to lie to him and try to convince him that Victor Martinez hit a triple.

			FINAL	1	2
Red Sox (14-7)	0	0	0	0	0
Indians (8-14) (3.5 GB)		1	0	2	

W: Okajima (2-0) L: J. Lewis (2-3) S: Papendejo (6)

It is sobering to realize that the Indians were one bad pitch and a routine defensive play away from a sweep ... and so were the Red Sox.

1) Cornering

Cliff Lee certainly looks as if he's put his early-season struggles behind him, so there is recent precedent for a scuffling Cleveland starter righting himself after a few bad April starts. There is even a precedent from last season, when C.C. Sabathia looked about as bad as humanly possible (which is actually Chien-Ming Wang, 2009) before righting himself into split-league Cy Young form. Of course, Lee has an outstanding 2008 campaign to fall back on, and Sabathia an entire career of goodness: Fausto Carmona's last season was poor and his 2007 was

looking increasingly pan-flashy.

Last night's start may or may not be the positive sign Cleveland fans have been looking for: it's only one start, albeit against a good opponent, but one missing two of its top bats (Kevin Youkilis, sore back, J.D. Drew, pleurisy or whatever it is that bothers J.D. Drew). The overall numbers are only pretty good: certainly it fit the definition of a Quality Start, and marked the first time that Carmona held the opposition to fewer than a hit an inning and the first time no one took him deep, but he also walked four guys in 6 2/3 innings and gave up a pair of runs on two solid doubles in the 6th.

Still, if you're looking for a reason to think that Carmona has morphed back into the version that was a front-of-the-rotation starter, look no further than the classic Carmonan measure, the ground ball. Carmona's first three starts were marred not only with bouts of control problems and taters, but also with a highly-unusual backwards GB:FB ratio. In each of those starts, Carmona allowed more batted balls to be lifted into the air than to be hit on the ground, and was rewarded with nearly a run an inning. Fausto's not really a strikeout pitcher, his 7 Ks against Minnesota in his last start notwithstanding, but he absolutely MUST have batters pound his sinker into the ground to be effective. There is no real middle ground for him.

In his last start, he encouraged observers with a tremendous 14:4 GB:FB ratio, including a sparkling 10:1 GO:FO ratio with a pair of double plays. Last night, he was able to continue this trend with 15 ground balls to 6 flies and a 12:5 GO:FO ratio with a DP mixed in. Sure, a 3:4 K:BB ratio is bad, and the extra-base hits still hurt, but the elements that make Carmona a successful starter were there for the second start in a row.

It's worth noting that after a bad 6th, Carmona came out in the 7th and recorded two quick outs. He then got two quick strikes on Jacboy Ellsbury before giving up an infield single, then walked Dustin Pedroia to end his evening at 114 pitches. But he was largely able to put his bad inning behind him and go deep into the game, something especially important after the previous night's bullpen-emptying affair.

2) Corner in the rearview

With runners on first and second, Raffy Perez was summoned to face lefty David Ortiz. He threw the first pitch for a strike, got Ortiz to foul off the next pitch, and swing through the third for a 3-pitch K that reminded fans of ... well ... Raffy Perez.

I have mixed feelings about Perez' current role. On the one hand, Perez was so dominant in 2007 that it made games shorter and provided a reason to be confident heading into the late innings. At the top of his game, there isn't a better left-handed back-end pitcher than Raffy Perez. On the other hand, you don't sport an 11.70 ERA by accident (or a 16.71 for that matter, his ERA before his three straight scoreless outings), and it's hard to argue that Perez has been good this season. In addition, Tony Sipp looks very formidable, and there's no compelling reason to switch the two lefties back into their expected roles right now.

In the best case scenario, Perez and Sipp represent an embarrassment of riches for the Tribe. Until then, I see Perez making more matchup and early-game appearances, leaving Sipp in the setup role until something changes significantly. I'll say this, though: I have seen the version of Raffy Perez that cannot throw a strike, and I have seen the version that throws nothing but, and I know which one I prefer.

3) Wait, I thought I turned you already

I think it's time to accept that 2007 was the career year for Raffy Betancourt, and look, there's no shame in that. Few relievers put up a season that good. Just because he is unlikely to ever be THAT good again doesn't mean he's washed up and incapable of being SOME good. He's been pretty good.

Last night, he wasn't very good.

Now, look, he should have pitched a scoreless inning last night. Mark DeRosa flat-out botched a double play ball. His three hits allowed were all singles, so he wasn't getting thoroughly bombed. But he did give up singles to three of the five batters he faced, and error or no, that's pretty poor.

Raffy is throwing strikes as well, including 13 of 17 pitches last night. He, too, is most effective when pounding the strike zone, which he has been. But left-handers are hitting .375 (1.045 OPS!) off Raffy, while righties struggle to a more-humiliating .208 (.583): it may be that Betancourt is no longer capable of being the "no matter who's batting" eighth-inning setup man of the past and is more of a matchup guy at age 34. Or it could be that I'm putting too much stock in small numbers. Anyway, a guy who splits the difference between 2007 (otherwordly) and 2008 (schmuck-level) is a useful reliever, and that might be the expectation at this point.

4) The Mighty Lew, Revisited

No Indians fan could be blamed for having the two enduring images of Jensen Lewis' outing be the game-tying single yielded to Jacoby Ellsbury on an 0-2 pitch and the game-winning mammoth dead-center shot to Jonathan Van Every on a 1-1 high changeup. Those were pretty bad pitches, especially the one to ex-Indians farmhand Van Every in his first game of the season. Lewis had a bit of misfortune in that the ground ball to second he induced with the bases loaded and only 1 out didn't turn into the inning-ending double play, but the fact is that he gave up a clean single to Ellsbury and can't worry about turning two there.

I think at least some of this misses a point here, though, that that is that I have just listed all of the hits Lewis gave up in 2 2/3 innings of work: those two hits contributed to losing the game, but the fact is that he pitched a perfect ninth, threw first-pitch strikes to nine of the ten batters he faced, struck out three, and walked nobody. He threw 29 strikes in 36 pitches, a Vintage Raffy type of ratio. He's a multi-inning guy for a bullpen that sorely needs such beasts.

Here's something I can't figure out, though: Lewis has been brought in several times this season to face left-handed hitters, normally in place of a guy with ROOGY tendencies like Betancourt or Joe Smiff. I know he was a successful closer last season, and sported virtually no platoon split last season (.267/.336/.444 vs. lefties, .264/.350/.405 vs. righties), but ... um ... guys ... has anyone actually looked at THIS season?

Jensen Lewis is okay against righties, yielding a .278/.316/.500 line hurt by a homer in 19 plate appearances. Hey, he's not walking many (just 1).

Jensen Lewis is almost preposterously, unFATHomably bad against lefties this season. Lefties are hitting .450/.538/1.050 against him.

Let me say that again: lefties are pounding Jensen Lewis to the tune of a ONE POINT FIVE EIGHT EIGHT (1.588!) OPS. Yes, it's only 26 PA. Did I mention the .450 average or the four-digit slugging percentage? That's really just immensely bad.

Too bad there was no left-handed pitcher available last night.

5) Wait, you've got to be kidding me, or at least trying to kill me

Travis Hafner was sent to the DL with shoulder soreness. This topic has been address in many places with many different conclusions summarily drawn. I have no insight to add.

I will say this, though: when your roster has 13 pitchers and 12 hitters ... and you send a hitter to the DL ... you f*#&ing damn well better call up a hitter.

Wait, maybe this is premature. Maybe if you have two exceptionally versatile and talented hitters on the bench, you can afford to do this for a night. I mean, do the math: 9 guys in the lineup means you have a two-man bench. You can get away with a two-man bench, I suppose, as long as no one gets

hurt or you don't need a hitter or something. But if those two guys can hit, I suppose that ...

... wait, the two guys are Trevor Crowe and Tony Graffanino?

Your bench is two guys, and the two guys are mind-bogglingly terrible?

You are telling me that you're going to send out a .900 OPS hitter and replace him with a pitcher because you have two guys on the bench who COMBINED have an OPS of .803? COMBINED OPS of .803. Crowe has a .462 OPS ... not OBP, not SLG, but OPS ... and is the FAR superior hitter this season? You have a two-man bench consisting entirely of MOLD?

Because you have to call up a left-handed reliever, just in case everyone else dies of scurvy ...

... who you do not use, stretching Jensen Lewis to a THIRD INNING facing a left-handed hitter in the 10th?

I mean, doesn't this kind of defy belief? That can't possibly have happened, could it?

6) Welcome to the ... wait, where'd he go?

The paper tells me Rich Rundles was called up before the game.

Then it tells me he was sent back down after the game.

My guess is that he just stayed home and ate Cheetos. Good on ya, Rich! Nice work if you can get it, I suppose. Let's hear it for Rich Rundles, ladies and germs!

7) Wait, that looks familiar

Our veteran third baseman, a guy who can play the outfield in a pinch as well as other positions, hammered

his 5th home run of the season last night. A guy with surprising pop, he hit 20+ homers last season and has surprising base-stealing ability, something you might not think about a guy in his mid-thirties.

On the other hand, on a potential inning-ending double play, he thoroughly bollixed a routine play: his error loaded the bases and heavily contributed to the loss.

If only he would grow a beard and wear #1, I would know exactly what was going on.

(Odd note on DeRosa vs. Blake, though: DeRosa is hitting .174/.283/.326 with the bases empty, .308/.341/.513 with runners on base, and .346/.370/.538 with runners in scoring position. These numbers would have surprised me if Blake had posted them.)

8) Ice, ice, baby

I've written about DeRosa's cold streak, but he did bang out a homer and drew a walk on a 1-for-4 night. And Jhonny Peralta has been mentioned as well: he looked like he might be snapping out of his slump, but pulled out a magnificent 0-for-5 night with a Tinfoil Hat.

However, consider a third player who has reached base in 5 times in his past 24 plate appearances for a brisk .208 OBP. A man who is hitting .136 over that span, ended innings with a total of three men in SCORING POSITION last night, and got picked off first the one time he did reach base (on a walk). Fortunately, he is hidden deep in the lineup as ... the leadoff hitter.

I'm not going to go out on the Limb of Foolishness and call for Grady Sizemore's benching or anything,

but goddam, this offense is better when he isn't awesomely bad.

By the way, the Indians hit .253/.358/.412 with nobody on. They hit .278/.358/.474 with runners on base! Yay! They hit .235/.340/.392 with runners in scoring position. Hm, that's not so good.

They hit .116/.263/.253 with runners in scoring position and 2 outs.

One. Six. Teen. Mark DeRosa has three of the 11 hits (in 95 AB). Trevor Crowe, who is a mook, is tied for second with 2.

One sixteen! Great Scott, that's terribibble.

9) Naïve question

Does Jon Lester get Five Free Balks each season? Is he on the Andy Pettitte Plan? Does he really need the help?

10) Blue Moon Special

There is a typo in my box score: it says, "3B: V. Martinez."

Ha ha! Very funny, Austin American-Statesboy! You can't fool me! Nice try, though.