I love this team. I love them not. I love them. I love them not. That's the range of emotions I went through watching last night's see saw 12 inning 9-7 Tribe win up in Toronto. And Buff is experiencing the same range of emotions with this team. In today's B-List, Buff tells several tales of Failure and Redemption in rehashing last night's victory. Only three things you can count on in life. Death, taxes, and the B-List being entertaining. And today's is very.

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W: Betancourt (1-1) L: Camp (0-1) S: J. Lewis (1)

Congratulations to LeBron James, the MVP of the NBA. The guy he exchanged jerseys with in Washington is pretty good, too.

1) Josh Barfield's Tale

This is a tale of Failure and Redemption.

When Josh Barfield was acquired to play second base for the Cleveland Indians, it was with the understanding that he was not a complete ballplayer. He hit well enough to be encouraging,

and his stats seemed considerably depressed by playing in cavernous Petco Park: his road hitting stats suggested that he might have more power and ability than his overall numbers had shown. Still, it became readily apparent that Josh Barfield was a fundamentally flawed player.

His defense was more a sprinkling of athletic plays amidst a morass of below-average ability.

He had less plate discipline than the Indians had hoped, and notable holes in his swing.

And there is simply no real positive spin to be attached to a full season of .243/.270/.324 in 2007.

He appeared in only 12 games with the Tribe in 2008, and this is no accident, no being held back, no personal vendetta, no horrific injury to overcome: although he was injured some in 2008, the reason he did not play was because he was not good.

The game can be simple, and the game can be unforgiving.

Two second baseman have been acquired since Barfield's arrival, each younger than he. Vene rable oldster Tony Graffanino spent much of April on the Tribe's roster, charting Barfield's eventual likely career path.

In the pre-season, Barfield took some repetitions at positions other than second base in order to increase his flexibility and make it more likely that he can continue to earn a paycheck in the major leagues, albeit probably not for Cleveland for the next ten years or anything so grandiose.

Josh Barfield is no longer the Second Baseman of the Future, but rather now a utility man.

In the top of the ninth, David Dellucci pinch-hit for the right-handed Matt LaPorta against ersatz closer Brandon League (the regular closer, B.J. Ryan, is injured, and his replacement, Scott Downs, had appeared in three straight games). This was a reasonable move in a 1-run game, and Dellucci rewarded the decision with a sharp single to right center.

Dellucci, a bit shadowy on the basepaths at this point in his career after injuries and age, was lifted for Barfield.

Barfield took second on a quailty sacrifice by Ben Francisco, then watched prudently from second as Grady Sizemore's fly ball to left accomplished little of value.

The next batter, Asdrubal Cabrera, laced a single to right, and Barfield, flashing the speed that

can make him a valuable player, raced home ahead of the throw, deftly avoiding the tag from the off-line throw. Dellucci would have had no hope of scoring on that ball. The Indians would go on to score twice more, but that run was the crucial tying run and allowed more baseball to be played.

Now, of course, Josh Barfield needed to play left field. On another day, I might exaggerate his antics out there with comparisons to cartoon characters, but not today.

Today I will point out that Josh Barfield has not played left field in many competetive games and admit that his play on Jose Bautista's game-tying single was arguably poor.

I have seen regular left fielders, including Dellucci and Francisco themselves, make the same play in the same manner.

Barfield make a bad break on the ball, and it fell in front of him to plate two runs: this is indisputible.

His other adventures in left bordered on the cringeworthy.

If the story ended there, it would smack of pathos.

It does not.

In the 10th inning, an audible groan rose from Indians fans as Barfield came to the plate after a one-out single by Ryan Garko. After all, Barfield may or may not be known for his poor defense, but he is certainly widely known for his inability to hit a baseball.

He is a poor hitter with large holes in his swing.

He took strike one.

He took strike two.

He topped a ball with no real authority.

But a funny thing happened on the way back to the dugout: Barfield beat out a hit. He put the go-ahead run in scoring position with one out.

Of course, this came to naught, and again, were the tale to end here, it would smack of sound and fury (or at least squeaking and ineffectual complaint) which signified very little indeed.

It does not.

In the 12th inning, the groans were quite loud indeed as Barfield strode to the plate with runners on 1st and 2nd with one out. He fouled off a pitch. He missed another. Then he lined a shot through this middle to plate the go-ahead run.

Later, his speed was directly responsible for the last run, as he scored from first on a double, forcing a poor throw by second baseman Aaron Hill.

Today, Josh Barfield will, in all likelihood, return to his customary spot on the bench, waving his towel in best Jack Haley fashion and exchanging high fives with major-league regulars after they perform their regular major-league duties, but for one night, Josh Barfield was a primary reason the Cleveland Indians won a game.

2) Jensen Lewis' Tale

This is a tale of Failure and Redemption.

Last season, Jensen Lewis filled a huge void for the Indians as previously-reliable or otherwise attempted options for back-end bullpen duty failed for one reason (lost confidence, loss of control) or another (being Joe Borowski). Lewis, a pitcher of some talent but also a flawed player, stepped up admirably, registering a save in each of his opportunities despite being gifted with only one real above-average pitch and a deceptive delivery.

However, given the opportunity, the Indians signed expensive gilded free agent Kerry Wood to handle the closing duties.

This wasn't so much telling Lewis that he'd failed in his trial, but more like a physics department who grasped the opportunity to hire Steven Weinberg: the graduate student was doing an admirable job under the circumstances, but ... well ... look, he's Steven Weinberg, and you're not.

To his credit, Lewis did not launch into any sort of defiant "closer or bust" rant and has slotted back into a role in the back end of the bullpen as setup man.

Except, of course, he has set up little but abject failure to this point. Lewis not only sports an unsightly 5.40 ERA, but has been plagued with serious taterosity, yielding 6 homers in a mere 13 innings. Left-handers are clubbing him like an extra from "Gangs of New York."

Lewis has had some decent outings, but on the whole, his performance has been uninspiring at best and outright terrifying at worst.

Called on to snuff out the final Toronto rally, Lewis faced the very worst situation imaginable for the Tribe: the tying run on base, and the winning run at the plate. This seemed certain to spell the walkoff game-winning home run for the opposition that Lewis has already coughed up this season, seemingly every other outing.

Instead, he induced a harmless double play ground ball to third, which the Indians turned into ... one out.

There would be another chance for Toronto.

Aaron Hill is one of the best-hitting second baseman in the league. He is pasting American League pitching to the tune of .360, and hits second in the lineup because he has exceptional skill. He looked at Jensen Lewis' first pitch, and heard it called strike one.

He swung at Lewis' second pitch and missed it entirely.

He swung at Lewis' third pitch and missed it entirely.

Facing down a month's worth of poor performance and given two opportunities, for one night, at

least, Jensen Lewis gave the Indians the two outs that preserved the win and prevented a third lead from being snatched away.

3) Grady Sizemore's Tale

This is a tale of Failure and Redemption.

There is little of Failure in Grady Sizemore's tale, frankly. He is as close to Golden Boy as the 21st century Indians have had. He has gotten off to a slow start this season, his .243 AVG and .331 OBP both significantly below his career norms.

And like many Indians, he has developed an aversion for producing any of these paltry hits in run-scoring opportunities, hitting worse (.226 AVG, .286 OBP) with runners in scoring position and preposterously poorly (.091, .231) with runners in scoring position and two out.

Sizemore embellished this minor footnote of his tale in the 5th inning, when, with Brian Tallet still working on a no-hitter, he came to the plate with runners on first and third and two outs (thanks to a walk and an error). After a pitch bounced away from the catcher, runners stood at second and third.

And Grady Sizemore grounded out on the next pitch to end the inning.

His double in the 7th was instrumental to gaining Cleveland's first lead, but in the 9th, with a runner at second, Sizemore harmlessly flew out to left.

In the next inning, with two men on (on in scoring position), Sizemore faced brand-new reliever Some Guy Murphy.

On the first pitch ... the
first pitch
... Sizemore flew out to end the threat.

It was not a well-struck ball.

With two outs in the 12th, Cleveland had already scored the go-ahead run, although it was a run they would give back. There were runners on first and second. And Grady Sizemore slashed a ball down the right field line that scored both players.

4) Raffy Betancourt's Tale

This is a tale of Failure and Redemption.

Raffy Betancourt came into the season with a number of questions: his 2007 season had been one of the finest by a reliever in some time, and his 2008 was significantly below average. Was Betancourt finished as an elite setup man?

Heck, was he finished as a useful reliever entirely?

To date, the problem for Betancourt has been a lack of command: he has walked an uncharacteristic 7 men in only 14 innings, and although he has lacked Lewis' propensity for yielding the longball, he has been quite hittable, notably in streaks.

In fact, in two of his previous three outing, he had given up three runs (although he was "aided" by his teammates, both "defensively" and in "relief pitching" ... all quotation marks equally derisive).

Called on to clean up after Kerry Wood's despicable mess, Betancourt did allow a double to Kevin Millar in the 10th, but otherwise dispatched the Blue Jays in more or less perfunctory fashion. In the 11th, though, Betancourt flashed a bit of his old, dominant form, striking out the side with all three strikeouts swinging.

He did allow Vernon Wells to single, but it was on an 0-2 pitch: of the 18 pitches he threw that inning, 4 were balls.

Six were swung at and missed.

On a night when only lesser options remained, for one game, Raffy Betancourt unsheathed his old buzzsaw and pitched as if, at least this night, Cleveland had a dependable shutdown reliever.

5) Mark DeRosa's Tale

This is a tale of Failure and Redemption and more Failure and Redemption at someone else's hands.

Mark DeRosa's April was one to forget: after being signed as the de facto replacement for Casey Blake's blend of adequacy and versatility, DeRosa performed quite poorly in April, ultimately being dropped from 2nd in the order to the nether reaches of the Cleveland lineup. Coming into the 12th inning, DeRosa had gone 1-for-5, being erased on a double play on his single trip to first base.

In the 12th, however, he was able to start the inning with a well-struck double that led to the go-ahead run, a fine piece of clutch hitting that started the avalanche off Shawn Camp.

His inability to cleanly turn a double play on Lewis' first batter did not seriously impact the game, except insofar as it allowed Lewis' three-pitch strikeout to serve as the heroic ending of the game.

6) The Tales of Ryan Garko and Ben Francisco

These are tales of Failure and Redemption.

The writing is on the wall for these likable but limited players. Garko sports an excellent .400+ OBP, but without the requisite power needed to be a legitimate first baseman, especially without auxiliary skills like Mark Grace's defense or a sentient biped's speed.

Francisco does nothing exceptionally well, fielding his position in a wicket-like fashion and hitting a very substandard .243/.317/.378, numbers that would be poor for a middle infielder.

At the very apex of their capabilities, they could be useful parts on a contending club: without attaining their apexes, neither player should even be counted on to provide meaningful appearances.

The future for these players has arrived in the form of Mighty Matt LaPorta, a hulking 1B/OF who could ostensibly do either of their roles better than either one of them can do one. When LaPorta connected on his first major-league home run in the 7th, you could hear the audible ticking of these mens' futures yawing toward the inevitable ringing alarm, without much in the way of a snooze button available.

Still, for one night, at least, each made crucial contributions: Francisco was able to lay down a fine sacrifice to set up the game-tying run in the 9th, and had scored the go-ahead run in the 7th because he was able to coax a bunt single off Tallet immediately following LaPorta's blast.

Garko had scored on the homer, as he delivered Cleveland's first hit to break up Tallet's improbable no-hit bid: he later singled in the ill-fated 10th as well.

Neither player bears much resemblance to a man who is likely to be a major contributor to a great team, but at least for one night, each delivered their own contributions via their own capabilities, and without them the game would have been lost.

7) Matt LaPorta's Tale

It's a bit premature to talk of Failure and Redemption for a player with 10 plate appearances, but Matt LaPorta's debut on Sunday was not the thing of legend. It was, in fact, complete crap. An d LaPorta's early-game appearances were no better, although, in his defense, he was ableto make contact with the ball, something that escaped him when given the opportunity against Justin Verlander.

However, if his shot in the 7th wasn't of the "Jim Thome hits the restaurant" variety, it was at least of the "Yep, that's gone off the bat" variety, providing the kind of no-doubt power that left field (or first base, for that matter) has lacked in recent games.

Welcome to Cleveland, sir. Hope you stay a long, long time.

8) The Tales of Jhonny Peralta and Raffy Perez

These are tales of Failure, abject and pure.

9) The Humble Writer's Tale

This is not always a fun thing to do. After being cretunkulously no-hit by Brian Freaking Tallet for six-plus innings, this team was looking more and more like the team I alluded to over the weekend: a team that was impossible to like, a team that made me feel foolish and stupid for investing in it emotionally. After blowing the lead in the 7th inning, I honestly questioned whether it made sense to make the commitment necessary to continue pouring effort and self into.

And yet, somehow, at least for one night, the team gave me any number of reasons to do exactly that. It's not a team without flaws. I can appreciate that. It's also not a team without good stories and appeal and reasons to follow, though, either.

For one night, I did not actively hate this team.

We shall see if this blossoms back into a team I actually
like
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