The Tribe got off the schnide last night with a much needed 9-4 win over the White Sox. Eight of the nine starters got base hits, and the icy cold Jhonny Peralta had three hits and three RBI's. In today's B-List, Buff looks back at the win, talking about Carl Pavano's maturation as a starter for this team, and how he feels Aaron Laffey is best utilized. Buff also hits on the unique nature of the Indians 13 hits last night, and tells us why the Tribe should have had even more base knocks than that.

FINAL

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Indians (12-21) (6.5 GB)

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W: Pavano (3-3) L: Floyd (2-3)

Dave Steckel!

1) A contrast in styles

In the first inning, Carl Pavano faced three hitters. Each hitter started the count at 0-1, as Pavano threw a first-pitch strike to each one.

In the first inning, Gavin Floyd faced seven hitters. Each hitter started the count at 1-0, as Floyd threw a first-pitch strike to absolutely no one.

In the second inning Carl Pavano faced four hitters. Each hitter started the count at 0-1, as Pavano threw a first-pitch strike to each one.

In the second inning, Gavin Floyd faced five hitters. The first four started the count at 1-0, as Floyd threw a first-pitch strike to the fifth hitter only.

In the third inning, Carl Pavano started the first three hitters with first-pitch strikes. The fourth hitter saw a ball, which Kelly Shoppach then fielded and threw to second to gun down the runner trying to steal second to end the inning.

In the fourth inning, the three hitters saw first-pitch strikes (although Carlos Quentin managed to hit his all the way to second base).

In the fifth, the first four hitters got first-pitch strikes.

In the sixth, two of three.

In all, Pavano threw a strike on the first pitch to 23 of the 27 hitters he faced, while Floyd ... well ... did not.

Where by "not," of course, I mean "couldn't find the plate with a map and a laser sight."

Actually, it was this hyper-accuracy that got Pavano in trouble in the 7th, to the point where he was knocked out of the game despite only throwing 87 pitches: after a single by Paul Konerko, both A.J. Pierzynski and Josh Fields stroked hits on the first pitch, and I have to believe that by

that point the White Sox hitters knew that Pavano was going to be in the zone with his first offering. In a way, this kind of outing (67 strikes in 87 pitches, 0 walks, 3 Ks, 10 H) is reminiscent of Good Paul Byrd, the kind where he'd never walk anyone and get deep into the mid-late innings but fall apart on a 4th trip through the lineup because, when all was said an done, he was still Paul Byrd.

Pavano's "stuff" is better than Byrd's, but his approach looked very similar: get ahead, move the ball, don't get too upset about a few hits. The real difference here is the overt taterosity: Byrd would routinely watch 20-plus balls fly over the fence, while Pavano has given up only 1 in his past five starts. Not coincidentally, three of those starts have been Quality, and had Pavano ceded the mound after the 6th, this would have been his fourth.

(I'm not saying he should have been pulled: he had a 7-run lead and had only thrown 76 pitches.

It would have been absurd not to send him out for the 7th.)

With the magic of Selective Sampling, you can make Carl Pavano look like whatever suits your predetermined opinion of him: if you look at his first four starts, you see one that was good and three that were poor and declare him abysmal. If you look at his last five starts, you can see a guy with 3 QS in 5 starts and a 4.11 ERA over that stretch, a perfectly adequate mid-rotation starter. You can see a guy who's given up double-digit hits in two of his last four starts, or a guy who leads the team in wins.

You can see a guy with a middling K rate of 6.2 per 9 IP, but a guy with a pretty good K:BB ratio of over 3 to 1.

Here's how I've chosen to interpret Carl Pavano: generally speaking, one inning of work doesn't matter much, but when you give up NINE RUNS in that ONE INNING, it's gonna poison the well for a long, long time. Pavano's April 9th start against Texas was truly an eye-hurter of Oedipal proportions. So I am going to pretend that, essentially, Pavano had such a poor Last Spring Training Start that it offended Major League Baseball and they fined us one loss. Because since then, Pavano has been pretty much Average Guy: he's posted 36 2/3 innings of 4.42 ERA ball,

giving up only 2 homers and walking only 5 batters over that six-start span, during which he's 3-2. Only once did he fail to go six innings, and twice gave up fewer than a baserunner an inning.

Look, Pavano is still very very very very hittable. But if he keeps his free passes low and keeps the ball in the park, he'll give the Tribe a good chance to win more often than not.

Consider this: Fausto Carmona's first start was pretty bad, too: take it away, and Carmona's ERA is 4.86.

In other words, worse than Pavano's.

There is no amount of data surgery you can perform to make Anthony Reyes look better than Carl Pavano.

Scott Lewis got hurt and was bad before he did (or during it: this is still an open question for me).

Jeremy Sowers is a schmoe.

You have Cliff Lee, who is clearly better, and Aaron Laffey, who is in the bullpen, and then you can argue that Carl Pavano is our next-best starter.

Should he be replaced by the All-Star Break? Well, that'd be okay. Just make sure you prioritize the replacement schedule.

2) Resource Management 201

For those who haven't attended or don't remember college, the courses are often numbered in the hundreds, where a lower number means a more introductory course. In this scheme, "101" denotes the very first class in a subject and why people talk about "Lane Changing 101" when they want to make a sarcastic comment about a driver that vexed them on the way to work.

(A quick story: one of my colleagues in grad school was doing work at LSU. He needed money and asked about being a Teaching Assistant or being an Instructor in the Math Dept.

A course was described to him: MATH 007, which was taught to those freshman who came into college without a lot of experience.

"You mean like pre-calculus?" he asked.

"Well, they work up to that. There are some basics you have to cover first."

"You mean like algebra?" he asked, a bit apprehensively. (He was kind of a snob.)

"Well, they work up to that."

"My God, man, what are we talking about here?!" he recoiled. "Fractions?!"

"Eventually, yes."

"Well, listen, I've got to be frank with you, Dr. Zarznick (*), I just don't see how I'd fail anyone in that course."

"Boy," the department head said with a hand on his shoulder. "If you don't fail at least 90% of them, you're not doin' yer job.

I have some bad news, though.

I just checked, and we're all outa slots of 007."

"That's a relief," my colleague muttered.

"No, you'll be teaching MATH oh oh FOUR."

(*) not his real name)

Anyway, this isn't the most basic concept, but not one of great complexity, either: how is Aaron Laffey best utilized?

Laffey started the season with three very good starts with somewhat unsustainable peripherals.

He sported a 2.41 ERA and won two games, giving up no more than 2 runs in any start.

On the other hand, he never walked fewer than three guys, walked more than he struck out, and needed an infinite number of double plays to post that ERA.

Now, Laffey's groundball stuff is well-established (he has the minor-league track record as well as major-league), but guys poke those ground balls a few feet over and we're talking about run-scoring singles instead of inning-ending double plays: some of this is reasonable to expect, and some of this is hopeful tightroping.

Laffey's disastrous loss to Detroit on May 2nd wasn't nearly as bad as Pavano's first try, but it marked a pitcher who is trending in the wrong direction: he went from 3 walks to 3 to 4 to FIVE, striking out 5 to 3 to ONE to ONE, and this is just not looking like something you've got to bend over backwards to continue to employ in that role.

Except ...

Well, for one thing, it's a heckuva lot better than most anyone else. Reyes has the same problem. Sowers is a mook. Lewis is dead. David Huff has scurvy.

Keeping Laffey in the rotation would seem to be an obvious plus.

Except ...

Laffey was moved to the bullpen, not as a punishment for bad pitching, but rather as a desperate move by a desperate team with a desperately bad bullpen. And it's hard to argue that the bullpen is less desperately bad, not when Laffey's first appearance (which was excellent) corresponded with the only win in the last week and came sandwiched between the two most absurd blowups ever conceived by man or beast.

Except ...

Well, it's not like the bullpen was bad this weekend. In fact, it was excellent in relief of Reyes, and Betancourt had a scoreless inning in relief of Lee.

Yeah, Betancourt gave up two runs in relief of Carmona, but it wasn't a big problem.

Now, Laffey has been very good out of the pen. He threw three scoreless innings last week to get the Wes Littleton Save, and threw 1 2/3 last night.

He's given up a pair of hits in each outing, but more importantly, HASN'T WALKED ANYONE.

So maybe he's turned the corner on his control?

Maybe he thrives in this short-stint setting?

See, this is where it's hard to separate factors here: if Laffey pitches better out of the bullpen, then having him pitch out of the bullpen is by definition a good thing. Except he has to do it more often or he's being wasted.

Except it isn't clear that he could put up these outings from the rotation, because he certainly didn't.

In addition, lefties are hitting a poor .185 (.452 OPS!) off him, so maybe he'd be an even-better left-handed reliever than we've had previously.

I'm not really sure how to manage Laffey IMMEDIATELY, but I'll say this: using him for 2 innings every five games IS Severe Resource Squandering. It would seem that Laffey either needs to pitch more often out of the pen or needs to get back in the rotation: having him "shadow" Carl Pavano is not taking enough advantage of the resource.

(It should be noted for completeness that Laffey was superb, inheriting two runners and letting neither score, then adding a scoreless inning after that.)

3) Trend analysis

Raffy Betancourt has been called out in the past for having a severe reticence for pitching inside. When Betancourt is on and is locating his fastball, few pitchers paint the outside corner with higher frequency. On the other hand, Mariano Rivera is arguably the only pitcher in baseball who can throw the same pitch over and over and over and make a living doing it.

So it was a little disturbing to look at the pitch locations to Betancourt's final two hitters on the night, Chris Getz and Wilson Betemit: in all, the two hitters saw 13 pitches, and 12 of them were on or off the outside corner. True, each hitter made a simple out, and Betancourt's 9th was a fine scoreless, hitless inning.

On the other hand, he had a full count to three of the four hitters he faced (walking the leadoff hitter after three 3-2 pitches were fouled off), and better hitters might be able to take better advantage.

4) Everybody hits!

Eight of the nine starters got at least one hit: in fact, the Indians' 13-hit onslaught was highlighted by four players getting multiple hits, including Asdrubal Cabrera, Shin-Soo Choo, and Mark DeRosa.

Special mention goes to Jhonny Peralta, whose THREE hits also produced 3 RBI.

5) Wait, what?

Okay, 8 of 9 is not "everybody." David Dellucci had zero hits. Also zero walks. Als o three hitters left in scoring position while making the third out of innings.

Also five men on base total when he was up, advancing nary a one.

On a nutritional scale, Dellucci's night could be described as "salt-encrusted trans-fat."

6) Managerial Back-Patters, or Post Hoc Analysis Follies

With two outs and the bases loaded in a 9-4 game, the White Sox had just "gotten back into the game," if whittling a deficit to a mere 5 runs counts as getting back into it. Still, given the 7-run outburst the Cleveland bullpen allowed to Toronto or the 12-run deluge the Red Sox were gifted, a 5-run lead was hardly insurmountable.

The bases were loaded because Aaron Laffey gave up a single, so he was proven not to be untouchable, and the right-handed Carlos Quentin came to the plate. Behind him, right-hander Jermaine Dye loomed. T he "book" reaction here would have been to bring in a right-hander to face these two, especially with runners in scoring position: had we an Actual Reliable Right-Handed Reliever, this decision may have been more difficult to shrug off.

However, Laffey was left in: as a starter, Laffey obviously has faced plenty of right-handed hitters, and sure enough, his first pitch was grounded harmelessly to third and the White Sox went away pretty meekly after that.

Now, is this something to give Eric Wedge a lot of credit for? It depends on a lot of factors, not the least of which is a true lack of viable options, but yeah, I'll give him credit for that.

7) Gut check

Of the 13 hits the Indians collected last night, a majority 8 were what I'd consider "up the middle," and that doesn't include an opposite-field double by Mark DeRosa. Ben Francisco took a pitch away and blasted it to right-center, and most notably, Jhonny Peralta took a pair of pitches back through the box for singles: this is notable because Peralta is a much more valuable and consistent hitter when he practices this approach, and it signals a possible appearance of the net-plus bat that Peralta can be rather than the sub-.300 OBP out machine he was in April.

It is that much more encouraging that two of Peralta's RBI came on a two-out single: the Tribe drove in 4 runs total with two outs, a welcome change from recent performances.

Truthfully, those numbers could have been more like 16 hits and 11 up the middle if it weren't for the superior range of second baseman Chris Getz: he made three different highlight-reel plays on balls hit up the middle to rob the Tribe of more hits. The Sox still have no center fielder, and Alexei Ramirez and Jim Thome are off to truly dreadful starts, but Getz looks like a real find at 2B.

8) Quote of the Day

"The last few games, I was looking for walks. Tonight, I tried to make it simple -- see the ball, hit the ball."
-- Shin-Soo Choo

You gotta be kidding me.

9) Nice hose!

Kelly Shoppach threw out Getz trying to steal: on the season, Shoppach has caught 5 of 11 would-be stealers for a brisk 45.5% catch rate.