Well, it's official Tribe fans: Jeremy Sowers is a Schmoe. And in today's B-List, Buff lays out a detailed analysis of why Sowers is Not Very Good, and the reasoning for bestowing Schmoe Status on him. Buff also introduces a new feature called "Managerial Steve-Infuriators" and gives us his thoughts on Tony Sipp, Matt LaPorta, Matt Herges, and Grady Sizemore's sudden inability to steal bases without getting thrown out.

FINAL

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White Sox (15-17)

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Indians (12-22) (6.5 GB)

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1

W: Carrasco (1-0) L: Sowers (0-2) S: Jenks (8)

This is a game a bad team loses. I am not going all *post hoc ergo propter hoc* on y'all, but I'm saying it colors my impression of the team I'm watching.

1) Schmoenatomy

It's very tempting to simply dismiss Jeremy Sowers as a major-league pitcher. I understand this temptation, having already succumbed to it last season.

And, without a doubt, last night's performance was obviously poor.

His 5 runs in 4 innings LOWERED his ERA to TWELVE.

No one should be LOWERING their ERA to 12.00, unless they are Carl Pavano lowering his ERA from eighty-frickin-one.

But in going over the stats from last night's game, one thing leapt out at me: Jeremy Sowers recorded NO ground ball outs. Zero. Bukpes. Nothing. In fact, he got two balls to be hit on the ground TOTAL, and they were both singles.

At least they had the POTENTIAL to be outs.

Very few other things did.

Consider this: of the 7 hits Sowers allowed, two were the aforementioned ground ball singles. Okay, everyone gives up a ground ball single here and there.

Roy Halladay gives up a ground ball single now and again.

Shoot, one single only made it to the second baseman and was a function of Scott Podsednik being fast.

His other five hits, though:

Double to the left-center field wall
Double over Grady Sizemore's head
Homer to left
Homer BLASTED to center
Homer to right because Shin-Soo Choo isn't 6 feet tall

That's five extra-base hits in four innings: 5 extra-base hits out of 7 hits allowed. And this isn't a double down the line or a hustle play in the gap: these are *bombs* hit over the heads of outfielders.

His nine outs from balls in play were all in the air.

(He struck out three.)

Here's a quote from Sowers, which might qualify as The Understatement of the Epoch:

"I think I struggled a little bit with command and keeping the ball down."

No. Really? Are you sure you want to go out on that precarious limb there, Jer? Maybe a *little* bit?

(Sowers walked three: one scored on Jim Thome's first blast.)

Perhaps the ball was elevated?

Slightly?

Listen, please: that's just terrible pitching. I understand this, and I don't want to see any more of it. But here's the thing: I'm actually more encouraged by this kind of obvious crapitude than I am from a more-varied type, because there is a clear, identifiable problem, and just as clear an identifiable fix for it.

That is, you can look at this start and say, "Sowers must do this or he cannot be successful."

Let's make a distinction between addressing a shortcoming and producing a solution: I can't promise that getting Sowers to locate and keep the ball down will make him successful. I can guarantee that if he DOESN'T locate and DOESN'T keep the ball down, he will exhibit near-Elarton levels of taterosity and ERAs normally associated with SAT scores.

The funny thing is, I think a lot of fans misdiagnose Sowers' problem. Sowers is thought of as "another soft-tossing finesse lefty," and certainly Sowers is no Randy Johnson.

For one thing, he's too short.

A mullet might help.

He did go to school in Tennessee, after all.

But more to the point, I think a lot of fans have an unbreakable mental link between Sowers and Aaron Laffey (and to a lesser extent, Scott Lewis): they played together in the minors and came up at about the same time.

Laffey, of course, really IS kind of a finesse lefty: only kind of, in that he doesn't change speeds particularly well, depending more on a sinker that induces a lot of ground balls.

A true "finesse lefty" is more like Lewis, who offers an array of speed-changing deliveries.

Laffey doesn't.

Sowers once apparently did at Vanderbilt, but I can't say for sure. What I can say is that Sowers actually throws with pretty good pace, regularly reaching 93 or so on the gun and averaging out at just a hair under 90 mph.

That's not Jamie Moyer, that's a Regular Guy.

But, of course, a Regular Guy needs more than just a 90-mph fastball: to paraphrase the immortal Underwear Jim Palmer, "Velocity, location, movement: you need at least two."

A lefty with a 90-mph fastball with exceptional command and late movement can look like the 2008 Cy Young winner, Cliff Lee.

A lefty with a 90-mph fastball that he elevates and doesn't command well can look like ... the 2007 Beefalo Bison rotation member, Cliff Lee.

Now, I'm not saying that Sowers will eventually win the Cy Young because all he has to do is

make the same transition Lee has. That transition is not within everyone. I would have scoffed at the concept of it being in Lee, frankly.

It would be very unusual: there are a lot more Shane Louxs in the world than Roy Halladays.

But I *am* saying: I cannot in good conscience tell you that we must cut bait on Jeremy Sowers because this was a horrendous start.

In My Perfect World, Sowers would be sent to the minors with an edict. No changeups. No sliders.

No eephus pitches.

Nine fastballs and one curve* per ten pitches.

I do not care what your ERA is.

I do not care what your WHIP is.

I do not care if the team wins or loses.

I will not pull you in the third inning.

You will throw 100 pitches, and 90 of them will be fastballs.

You will do nothing but locate your fastball and practice keeping it down.

You will watch film of Cliff Lee every day you do not pitch.

And at the end of two months, I will let you change speeds.

Look, I fixed the transmission in my car and the check engine light still comes on. That doesn't mean I didn't need to fix the transmission.

Sowers might or might not ever be a good, quality starter.

But he's broken right now.

Fix the obvious flaw.

Then
see if his check engine light comes back on.

** I don't know if Sowers throws a curve. If he doesn't, insert "slider" here.*

2) Observation bias in action

In watching the game, I got very frustrated by the end because I had the perception that we'd squandered a lot of early opportunities against Clay Richard and had blown the game because we'd choked away our opportunities and the White Sox took advantage of theirs. This was heavily-colored by Corky Miller's two-out two-run single in the 7th that essentially put the game out of reach.

Naturally, I was full of excrement.

We left 7 runners on base ... but the White Sox left 8.

We supplemented our 8 hits with 5 walks ... but the White Sox had 8 hits, 6 walks, and reached base on a preposterous error.

We stranded FOUR guys in SCORING POSITION ... but the White Sox stranded FIVE.

The White Sox had two run-scoring hits with two outs ... and so did Cleveland. (Note: each of the White Sox' hits drove in two runs; each of Cleveland's only plated one.)

It's really not that hard to figure out: the starters were equally terrible, but ours just slightly more (giving up homers instead of singles). Our hitters were equally squanderrific, but they got slightly better timing. I don't think either team is going to post video of this game to prospective season ticket buyers as an example of how well they play the game. They did more and won. Feh.

3) Managerial Steve-Infuriators

Let's review the first four innings: in 4 innings, Jeremy Sowers gave up three runs on 5 hits. He walked three guys.

Two balls were hit on the ground out of 14, and both were hits.

The next two hitters in the lineup were Jermaine Dye, who had walked and flew out to left, and Jim Thome, who had homered to dead center and walked.

Following Thome were a slew of right-handers.

Wedge looked at Thome and saw a guy with a sizable platoon split. Sure, I have no problem with that. It was pretty much established that Sowers was not a pitcher who could take advantage of this split, but hey, he is left-handed.

More importantly, though, he was getting POUNDED. Wedge had just watched Ozzie Guillen get proactive on Clay Richard, yanking him in the 4th to excellent effect, but concluded that HIS guy who was getting pounded was good for a few more hitters.

Except that he'd only gotten one of the next two hitters out ONCE, and that guy wasn't out by a lot.

After the horse had left the barn with Thome's second homer, Jen Lewis came in. He faced eight hitters.

Two flew out.

One reached base when Matt LaPorta decided to try to catch a throw on a routine grounder with a chicken salad sandwich.

The other five STRUCK OUT.

Meanwhile, in the lineup, against the left-handed Richard, Wedge needed to put a right-handed hitter in the 4 slot behind Victor Martinez instead of Shin-Soo Choo. This is prudent: Choo still has a pronounced platoon split.

However, the choice of Mark DeRosa here is not one I would have made: not only is DeRosa hitting poorly, but the only reason he doesn't lead the team with 22 whiffs is that Grady Sizemore gets more plate appearances.

Meanwhile, Jhonny Peralta seems to have turned the corner on his horrific start, gathering 10 hits in his previous 5 games (23 ABs).

Sure, 9 of those were singles and DeRosa has 6 HR, but for whatever reason, over the past three years (2006-2008, 370+ PA), Peralta hits better out of the 4 slot than anywhere else he's gotten at least 50 PA in, hitting a brisk .300/.360/.506.

Is this tremendously meaningful?

No, not tremendously.

But it seemed like a perfect chance to take advantage of the confluence of Peralta's minor hot streak with Peralta's historically-support potential psychological boost of hitting cleanup, and instead we get Mark DeRosa.

By the way, with the bases loaded and one out, after walking Victor Martinez intentionally to get to him, DeRosa struck out swinging on four pitches in the 4th. He went 0-for-4.

(Note: Peralta struck out in his next plate appearance against Carrasco. However, he was 1-for-4 with a two-out RBI.

I tend to resent post hoc second-guessing, but I was infuriated by this
before
the game.

There's no
guarantee
that Peralta would have been better ... but really now ... Mark DeRosa?)

4) Putting the "blunder" in "blunderbuss"

I like Tony Sipp. I really do. I certainly want to like him more than I actually do, but I like his stuff and his fearless nature. I think he has the potential to be what Raffy Perez was in 2007, or even a Closer of the Future.

Right now, I would like Tony Sipp to throw a strike.

Sipp didn't just have poor command, he had NO command. He threw 8 strikes and 15 balls. He walked 3 of the 5 hitters he faced.

He threw a wild pitch so egregious the runner advanced from first to THIRD.

And largely because of this, he was forced to throw a substandard fastball to Corky Miller, a graduate of the Gregg Zaun School of Backup Catchers, on a 2-0 count that resulted in Chicago's final two runs.

Sipp came on like gangbusters when he first arrived, but that performance was utterly dismal.

5) Passing 50% of the audition

I assume that Matt LaPorta's audition to get more playing time is 2 games, since the White Sox are starting two consecutive left-handed pitchers. This is not so much a function of LaPorta having a platoon split as it is David Dellucci having an absolute platoon deathsplit.

Really, now, is there a cogent argument for playing Dellucci over LaPorta at this point? There isn't, right?

LaPorta didn't have the greatest game: his error in the 7th led to the two unearned runs, he struck out once, and grounded into a double play.

On the other hand, he also had a single and drew a walk for a brisk .500 game-OBP, so ... well, please, can we see more Matt LaPorta?

Please?

6) Yo, yo, yeoman

A sincere columnist should point out the good along with the bad, so here's a shout out to Matt Herges, whom I thought was simply washed up at this point in his career (and wasn't really very good at ANY point in his career). Herges struck out 2 in 2 1/3 perfect innings of work, lowering his small-sample ERA to 1.69 and looking at this point like a real right-handed option out of the pen. I greatly prefer Herges to Vinnie Chulk, mostly because of the absence of blunderbussery: Herges has now tossed 5 1/3 innings and hasn't walked anyone. The facts that he's striking out more than a guy an inning (6) and has given up only 2 hits don't seem sustainable: maybe the K rate, but certainly not the WHIP. I mean, that's spectacular: Matt Herges is not spectacular.

But I think the low walk rate (well, NO walk rate right now: I expect eventually he'll walk someone) IS sustainable, and crucial to this bullpen.

He's been a real find: he isn't THIS good because no one is (seriously, a 0.38 WHIP?), but he's significantly better than Chulk et al and I'm glad he's here.

7) Stop the madness!

Stop sending Grady Sizemore! Seriously, 5 SB and 6 CS? Can we put this strategy on hold for a while? He only gets on base 31.3% of the time in the first place: don't let him squander even THAT pathetic gift.

8) Philosophical note

There is really only one skill I ask for in a left-handed pitcher: do not give up a home run to Jim Thome. (Also applies to David Ortiz.) Get me one of those.