Can it get any worse? Are there any other ways to lose games? Because I don't know how much more of this I can take. Predictably, Buff is in rare form in today's B-List. After touching on the squandered performance of Cliff Lee and the superb season to date for Victor Martinez, Buff launches into an epic rant on the ninth inning, and delivers an inspired and passionate plea for the firing of Eric Wedge, who has that same look on his face that we started seeing from Romeo Crennel in about week eight. Calgon, take me away.

FINAL

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Indians (14-26)

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Royals (21-18)

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W: Farnsworth (1-3) L: K. Wood (1-2)

I used to be disgusted,
Now I'm even more disgusted
-- E. Costello, updated

1) Cursory Look I: Masterful-Lee Done

Cliff Lee threw 8 innings of 2-run ball. Ho hum. This marks the 4th time this season in 9 starts that he has gone 8 innings.
In his past six starts, he has pitched 46 innings, and no fewer than 7 in a start.

This performance, which was excellent, lowered his ERA by 0.10.

At this point in time, I think we have enough evidence to say, "This is Cliff Lee."

He will make $10M between 2008 and 2009 combined.

Tim Lincecum is a bigger bargain.

There aren't many other starting pitchers in this category.

Lee was not entirely dominant, giving up 8 hits and striking out only 3. His 65 strikes in 101 pitches did not suggest superior control, but his command was sufficient to induce a number of weak outs. The only troubling feature of the start was that he elevated a bit in the zone, resulting in a backwards GB:FB ratio and two booming doubles: each of the runs he gave up were the result of a single-double (or double-single) combination, so that's something to watch out for.

Lee's K:BB ratio now stands at 45:13 and is going in the right direction. His 101 pitches were the fewest he's thrown (in the most innings) since his poor Opening Day start.

2) Cursory Look II: Shop Smash!

Kelly Shoppach smashed a pair of hits, including a two-run homer off Brian Bannister. The homer came with two outs and should have been a key to winning the game, had it been key and had we won the game.

Shoppach is not hitting well this season, but he did not strike out in four trips to the plate, and the homer was not cheap, being to straightaway center and clearing the fence by a fair margin.

3) Cursory Look III: Blue Moon Special

Luis Valbuena got a hit!

4) Cursory Look IV: Hubbawhazzit?

Luis Valbuena got a bunt single!

And Asdrubal Cabrera followed with a bunt single!

And then Grady Sizemore followed with the standard 3-6-3-4-2-3-6-3-4-2 double play. ESPN's play-by-play writeup then tells me that Luis Valbuena was out at home, and Luis Valbuena was also out at third, so this appears to be some very bad baserunning by either Luis Valbuena or Luis Valbuena.

Perhaps they should platoon.

(In reality, Cabrera got caught in a rundown, and Valbuena tried to score. It was a pretty good play all around, actually: kudos to the Royals for executing pretty well, and I don't fault the Cleveland baserunners for being aggressive there.)

5) Cursory Look V: Nice hose!

Given a chance to play center field in place of a season-slumping Grady Sizemore, Ben Francisco made an excellent throw in the 2nd to peg Mark Teahen trying to advance from second to third on a fly ball. I'm not sure Grady makes that throw, but then, I would have said that Francisco was unlikely to make that throw, too, so I could be wrong.

In addition, Alberto Collapse-o tried to stretch a single to right into a double, and Shin-Soo Choo was able to place his rocket within a parsec of second base for a change, gunning down Collapse-o.

6) Cursory Look VI: Ho Hum Dept.

Victor Martinez singled and drew a walk. This lowered his batting average.

Martinez ranks 1st in AVG in the AL at .400: he also leads the AL in OBP (.478) and OPS (1.104). He is 5th in BB, 5th in SLG, and 4th in total bases. He leads the team in RBI, and has struck out fewer times than Travis Hafner, who has played in 17 games.

He has only 3 more strikeouts than David Dellucci, who has 38 AB.

He would like better teammates.

7) Incoherent Rant

I do not want to get too much on Eric Wedge's case for pulling Lee for Kerry Wood. I disagree with the move, and I would assume that in retrospect, Wedge feels largely the same way.

Here is the synopsis of the argument, though:

With all due respect to the workmanlike stylings of Aaron Laffey, we have exactly One Pitching Asset. One. We have exactly zero relief pitchers worth a handful of rhinocerous feces. We have a starting rotation that currently features these ERAs:

2.90
5.70
6.33*
6.88
17.18

** this pitcher leads the team with three wins*

I mean, that's actually hard to believe. Three of the five pitchers with ERAs under 4.00 are X-Treme Journeyman Clods, including one who has pitched in one game (Greg Aquino) and one that was designated for assignment (Vinnie Chulk).

One pitcher has an infinite ERA.

Cliff Lee has allowed no more home runs in 62 IP than any of the following relievers: Jen Lewis (6 in 20), Raffy Betancourt (3 in 20), Kerry Wood (4 in 13).

A pitcher with a WHIP of 1.50 is below-average (the AL average is 1.44, the NL average is 1.41).

Cleveland's TEAM WHIP is 1.57.

Not surprisingly, this is the worst in the AL (tied with Bal'mer).

Of the 20 pitchers Cleveland has used this season, 14 of 20 have a WHIP over 1.50.

Rafael Perez can actually set things on fire just by looking at them.

We have ONE Pitching Asset, and he is Cliff Lee. Now I don't know about you, but when the Cleveland Cavaliers had a transcendent asset, they decided to commit to making sure that he was satisfied. They did not cater to his whims or anything, but they made sure he was involved in processes, made sure he understood the plans, made sure Drew Gooden and Larry Hughes and Jeff McInnis were sent away as soon as humanly possible, that sort of thing.

They made LeBron James happy.

And, as it turns out, a happy LeBron James is kind of a handy thing to have around.

Cliff Lee had thrown 101 pitches through 8 innings. This, as I said before, is the MOST efficient outing of the season for Lee. Not only does he regularly get up near 120 pitches (and is 30 years old: we are past the Injury Nexus here), but his number of high-stress 20-plus pitch innings were nonexistent.

The Kansas City lineup in the 9th

was Jose Guillen, Mike Jacobs, and Mark Teahen, the latter two of whom are left-handed hitters.

Let Cliff Lee finish that game. He deserves that win. Give him that win.

But since we're not going to do that, since we HAVE to give Kerry Wood his Precious Save Opportunity (which, really, a three-run lead, that's a cheap f*#&ing save), we send Wood out there to Borowski. Let's listen to Mr. Wood on the subject of pitching:

"I went with fastballs. The first guy [Jacobs] saw nine pitches. He's a low ball hitter, caught one down in the zone."

You know, I'm going to go out on a limb here and say, "If Mike Jacobs is a low ball hitter, why not try throwing something other than a low fastball? Maybe something other than NINE low fastballs?" You think Jacobs had timed Wood's fastball by that point?

Maybe something else there?

"I didn't have a second pitch today and scuffling to find an off-speed pitch."

Now, you cannot be serious. I mean, you've got to be shitting me, right? What was the problem with Borowski?

That he felt he had nothing, right?

Throwing through water or something?

He had nothing, and they sent him out there anyway.

Guess what happened?

He got bombed.

Big surprise!

Alert the media!

Larry King saw this coming.

So, if you warm up, and you realize, "Shit, I've got no offspeed pitch. I can't throw a curve. I can't throw a slider."

You know what goes through your mind at that point, if you actually give a shit about winning ballgames?

a) Man, I suck
b) Call skipper back and tell him to leave Lee in there

Now, I understand that Wood is never, ever, never going to do this. But do we have a pitching coach? A bullpen guy? A f*#&ing catcher out there?

Isn't SOMEONE supposed to notice that the guy doesn't have it?

What the f&*# are we doing out there?

Is this another one of these, "Gee, I wonder if Tony's going to throw a strike tonight, let's find out in a tight game," or "Gee, Raffy's set the rosin bag on fire by just looking at it, wonder if that's a bad sign?" things?

May I have something other than, "It's his job," as an explanation for things?

Kerry Wood may be a fine closer, but I have seen no evidence of this. And he has made me hate everything.

8) A plea for mercy

In 2003, neophyte manager Tony Pena shocked the baseball world by cajoling and lucking his way into the first winning record (83-79) in recent Royals' history. He was lauded as Manager of the Year, and high hopes returned to Kansas City.

Of course, this came crashing down in 2004 with a very poor 58-104 season, and when the 2005 Royals started 8-25, Pena resigned.

Now, this has had some pretty serious repercussions for Pena, who is currently not a major-league manager. The common consensus is that Pena quit on his team (which was, admittedly, pretty bad), and this colors all future perceptions of him as a managerial candidate.

Dusty Baker was forgiven for ruining arms; Davey Johnson was forgiven for being a jerk; Tony Pena is unlikely to ever be forgiven for quitting in the face of adversity.

In 2002, Charlie Manuel was fired at mid-season after guiding a Cleveland team that had won 90 and 91 games in the previous two season. Manuel didn't agree with the direction the new GM wanted to take, but the GM fired him, and a few years later, he got another opportunity in Philadelphia, where he eventually won the World Series in 2008.

In 2007, Eric Wedge helped guide a Cleveland team into the playoffs and all the way to a 3-1 lead in the ALCS before bowing out. This came crashing down in 2008 with a pretty poor 81-81 season that required a heckuva hot streak to get to .500.
The 2009 Cleveland Indians have started 14-26.

Many things have been said and written about the relationship between Mark Shapiro and Eric Wedge, but without going into two much detail, I think it's reasonably safe to say that the two men are friends. Mark Shapiro likes Eric Wedge. He would like for good things to happen to Eric Wedge. And that is why I am pleading with Mark Shapiro:

Fire Eric Wedge.

This is no longer the superstitious, amusing spewing of falsehoods from 2007. This is an honest, earnest plea to do the right thing for your friend.

This team is bad.

And it has to be killing Eric Wedge.

Hell, it's killing ME, and I'm just some guy.

The man is suffering.

But if he resigns, he becomes Tony Pena and will never manage in the major leagues again.

Don't make him run screaming into the night.

Do the honorable thing and fire him.

Then he can hem and haw and use all the powerful Wedgian rhetorical powers we've see over the years, such as the "Um" and the "Ah" and the "Mumble."

But he will be able to say, "Well, I gave it my best, and it didn't work out."

And then, some years later, a team will be willing to give him a chance to manage again.

Peter Gammons tells me that Wedge is widely-respected in baseball circles.

I don't agree with everything Wedge does, but then, I don't agree with everything ANYONE does.

Certainly not my children or my co-workers.

But Mark ... please ... if you want your friend to be capable of future success ... please ... pull the plug. It's excruciating to watch.

Please fire Eric Wedge.