Wow. WOW! What a finish last night! Down 10-0, the Indians rallied back, scoring seven runs in the ninth to shock the Tampa Bay Rays by a 11-10 final. It was the 15th straight home win for the Tribe over the Rays. In today's B-List, Buff recaps last night's game, hits on the three game weekend set with the Reds, calls for Rafael Perez to be made into a starting pitcher, and examines the newfangled Indians bullpen, which has produced some pretty solid results over the course of the last couple weeks.

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W: Arroyo (6-3) L: Laffey (3-1) S: F. Cordero (11)

FINAL

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W: Vizcaino (1-1) L: Weathers (0-1) S: K. Wood (7)

FINAL

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Reds (23-20)

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W: Fisher (1-0) L: Vizcaino (1-2)

FINAL

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Rays (14-23)

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Indians (18-28)

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W: Sowers (1-2) L: Isringhausen (0-1)

Well, I wasn't expecting THAT.

1) The Inning

Wow.

I mean ... just ... WOW.

You know, when this happened to Kerry Wood against Kansas City, it was certainly painful to watch: Wood couldn't throw strikes, and when he finally did, they got hammered. Still, it was a 5-2 game, not 10-4.

The lead was technically, at one point, 10-0, which is plenty demoralizing, especially given the

nature of several of the runs. Rich Rundles gave up a booming double to Bocephus Zobrist, then re-loaded the bases and gave up Jen Lewis' last run by hitting a batter.

I mean, that's just sad.

You aren't going to win that game at that point.

When Ryan Garko hit a two-run shot in the bottom of the frame, it just seemed like an empty statistic.

Still, the Tribe got a pair in the bottom of the eighth, and might have had more if not for Matt LaPorta's uncanny ability to ground into double plays with a runner in scoring position (he did it in Cincinnati, too). So I was watching, because it was encouraging that the Indians weren't simply phoning it in at the end there.

Now, it bears mentioning that big innings often require an element of luck, and this was no exception: by all rights, the inning should have been over when Mark DeRosa lined out to third.

The previous batter, Shin-Soo Choo, hit a rather routine ground ball to Reid Brignac at short, but Brignac threw the ball away and extended the inning.

By rather a lot.

DeRosa's AB was a microcosm of what can go wrong en route to a big inning: Grady Sizemore had already coaxed a walk, and DeRosa was at 2-0 when he missed the next pitch. With two strikes, he had to protect the plate, and the 3-2 pitch was probably a ball.

Still, he made good contact and smacked it down the third base line ... or rather, a few feet off the line, because Evan Longoria was able to spear it for the second out.

All in all, not a bad piece of hitting by DeRosa, but not a productive one, either.

Garko then took advantage of a truly horrific high ball from Grant Balfour and hammered it over the wall. I remember thinking, "You know, at 10-5, if he catches hold of one here, it's a two-run game," and sure enough, that's what happened. I also remember thinking that Wedge had better pinch-hit for LaPorta there with two outs, and by golly, Asdrubal

Cabrera drew the four-pitch walk in his stead.

And then Jason Isringhausen came in for the save opportunity. Now, we had seen this show with Kerry Wood in the starring role, but his first four pitches were balls, and now the tying run was on base.

And then Jamey Carroll spoiled a couple of pitches en route to his own walk to load the bases, with the tying run now in scoring position.

And then Grady Sizemore drew his second walk of the inning on a 3-2 pitch to drive in a run.

And then Victor Martinez ... mired in a 0-for-18 slump and 0-for-5 on the day, took a strike. He took a ball.

He took a second strike, a pitch that looked very hittable from the perspective of a guy 1000 miles away.

The next pitch was a ball.

The next pitch was also a ball, but Victor fouled it off. Hey, with two strikes, you'd better be sure it's a ball if you take it, so I don't mind that one bit.

The next pitch was ALSO a ball, but Victor lined it into center. I will accept Victor swinging at that pitch as well.

(Note: had he grounded out on that pitch, I would have been apoplectic. A game of inches, indeed.)

2) Degree of Difficulty

The Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim in Arte Moreno's Basement had a problem this spring: they were desperate for a starting pitcher. John Lackey and Kelvim Escobar were injured, and they needed some depth in case the worst-case scenario came up.

(In fact, the Angels were hit with the very worst of worst-case scenarioes, when Nick Adenhart was killed in an auto accident.)

When Dustin Moseley went down with an injury, it seemed like anyone they signed in the spring would have to pitch no matter what.

So it was fortunate for the Angels that they signed some extra guys, including Shane Loux, a career minor-leaguer in the Matt Ginter vein. Loux is considered nothing more than organizational fodder, a guy who doesn't really have the "stuff" to be a major-league starter. His K rates are low and he's pretty hittable. He made a couple appearances as a yoot for Detroit, sporting ERAs of 9.00 and 7.12 in limited work.

He was granted free agency in 2004 and signed with the Royals ... who granted him free agency in 2006, and ... well, you get the picture.

Shane Loux is the mookiest mook in the world, and there are many guys like him available for a bag of peanuts and a new hat.

Shane Loux has made 6 starts this season, including 3 Quality Starts, having a 4.64 ERA in 33 innings as a starter.

He gave up 43 hits, which isn't good, and sported a 13:10 K:BB ratio, which was plainly awful.

(He has since been sent to the bullpen, got hurt, and is now on the DL.)

But this is kind of what you get with a Man Off The Street signing.

The Kansas City Royals had a problem this spring: they did not trust the starting pitchers they had. Luke Hochevar is a groundball specialist who had a lousy 2008 with a 5.51 ERA and a crummy set of K:BB and K/9 ratios. And Brian Bannister was even worse: after a promising 2007, he changed his approach in 2008 and was hammered like a construction project. The Royals needed someone ... ANYONE ... to fill out the rotation with bulk innings, and they signed Sir Sidney Ponson to a "prove

it" deal after he wasn't putrid in the WBC.

Ponson didn't last long in the rotation, sporting a 5.91 ERA in 6 starts. Still, 3 of those starts were Quality Starts even though his peripherals look a lot like Loux': 19:12 K:BB in 35 IP with 43 hits allowed. But this is kind of what you get with a Man Off The Street signing.

The New York Mets had a problem this spring and somehow decided that the solution was Livan Hernandez. I mean, really. Did you realize that Livan Hernandez was 34? I still think of him as a young guy for some reason, but of course, he pitched in the 1997 World Series, so he's gotta be at least that old.

Heck, he's from Cuba, he might be 60 at this point.

Anyway, Hernandez was so so so so so very bad for Minnesota last season that they gave him the wazoo, and now he pitches for the Mets, the only one of this trio to keep a starting gig.

His 4.93 ERA would probably be higher in the AL, as he has a 25:13 K:BB in 45 2/3 innings with 54 hits.

Still, he has 4 Quality Starts in 8 overall and isn't bad for a Man Off The Street signing.

So this is the bar I'm trying to meet here: I want a guy starting for the Cleveland Indians to be at least Sidney Ponson, if not Shane Loux.

Here I will pause for effect as it sinks in that I am asking my starting rotation to consist of pitchers who can meet the lofty standards set by SHANE LOUX, but will accept those sub-lofty standards of SIDNEY PONSON.

Carl Pavano does not meet this standard.
Fausto Carmona does not meet this standard.
Anthony Reyes does not meet this standard.
Jeremy Sowers does not meet this standard.
Scott Lewis does not meet this standard.
David Huff does not meet this standard.

(The two pitchers who meet the standard: Cliff Lee, who is excellent, and Aaron Laffey, who took the Shane Loux Route by going to the bullpen and then injuring himself. Huzzah! Well done, Aaron!)

Now, Pavano has an excuse: if you remove his first aborted outing, he actually DOES meet this standard. We've addressed this, and I'm fine with Carl Pavano in the rotation.

Anthony Reyes sort of has an excuse: he has been put on the DL with an elbow injury. This has always been a concern with Reyes, who was a known risk, and it's hard to say how much of his performance to date is colored by this injury.

His outing against Cincinnati was plainly atrocious, in which he couldn't find the plate with both hands, but again, the elbow is a mitigating factor here.

Scott Lewis sort of has an excuse: he has been put on the DL, too. Who knows? He looked pretty good, and then completely lost it, and who's to say what the badness-to-injury ratio here should be?

Fausto Carmona has no excuse, he is simply infuriating.

David Huff has an excuse: he is a bad pitcher. He was awful against Cincinnati. Please don't subject to me more of that.

I hate David Huff's pitching.

Jeremy Sowers ... am I reduced to clinging to the hope of a 5-inning relief stint against a coasting Tampa Bay squad? Is that what it's come to?

Did anyone keep Paul Byrd's phone number?

3) A modest and/or insanely ill-advised proposal

Bring up Raffy Perez and let him start.

You may say that he is a two-pitch pitcher, and I do not disagree. But so what? Fausto Carmona is a ONE-pitch pitcher: he has a sinker and gunk.

David Huff is a NO-pitch pitcher.

And if you don't think Perez could go more than 5 innings, again, I ask, how would I notice this?

Our starting pitchers went 3, 3, 6, and 1 1/3 innings in these four games.

I would take 5 innings at this point.

When he gets exposed, he gets slotted back into the pen like Laffey and Sowers have already.

Perez was a starter at one point: give him two trips through the lineup and pair him up with Sowers if you have to.

Or Greg Aquino.

Or Teddy the Wonder Lizard.

Also, I think we should devour David Huff.

4) A quick note on the only decent start

Johnny Cueto is a pretty darned good pitcher, so falling behind to him is no big shame. Cliff Lee didn't appear to have his Very Best Stuff Sunday, though, as he gave up 8 hits in 6 innings, including a pair of extra-base hits that cost him dearly.

One was a solo shot to Jerry Hairston Jr., although the Reds' stadium is known as kind of a bandbox.

The other was a double to Adam Rosales, a man I've literally never heard of.

But the most infuriating run was his last, when, after a leadoff single to Mohawk Gomes, Lee struck out the next two hitters swinging. He then uncorked a wild pitch, and the subsequent single by one of the Alex Gonzali scored the third run.
The next batter flied out, so without the wild pitch, that run doesn't score and we win in regulation.

Sigh.

By the way, Lee threw 72 strikes in 98 pitches, which is excellent.

5) Get off my back!

I don't want to hear about how this bullpen is so bad and how it is the reason we're losing games now. Yes, it WAS bad and yes, it WAS the reason for losing games. Its overall statistics continue to be terrible, and we've churned through some very bad relief performances to date.

But consider this:

Friday: 5 IP, 4 H, 2 R, 1 BB, 4 K
Saturday: 6 IP, 4 H, 0 R, 4 BB (2 IBB), 1 K
Sunday: 4 1/3 IP, 2 H, 1 R, 1 BB, 4 K
Monday: 7 2/3 IP, 7 H, 5 R, 4 BB, 4 K

Now, giving up 5 runs isn't good: that was a bad outing. Lewis wasn't "on" and Rundles was absolutely no help until he'd given up all the inherited runners he could.

But really now: 6 innings of shutout relief on Saturday?

4 1/3 innings of 2-hit ball on Sunday?

That was the SHORTEST outing.

Yeah, a relief pitcher lost that game ... but hey, no bullpen stays clean forever.

Sometimes you get beat.

He gave up one run.

It happens.

And Lewis may have been horrible on Monday, but on Friday he was truly awesome, giving up a hit and a walk in three complete scoreless innings (2 Ks). He threw 48 pitches, almost as many as the starter; he DID throw more STRIKES than the starter (29 to 23).

Laffey looked good for an inning, but gave up a couple hits and hurt himself, which is clearly bad.

Jeremy Sowers' 5-inning relief stint was quite excellent in every way: 3 hits, 1 walk, and 40 strikes in 57 pitches.

Oh, and no runs.

That helps, too.

Greg Aquino may be another find out of the retread bin, going 2/3 scoreless on Friday (1 H, 1 K, 6 pitches) and 2 scoreless on Saturday (2 H, 1 BB). Raffy Betancourt has found some of the old mojo, going a scoreless inning Saturday and 2 more on Sunday, including striking out the side in his second inning of work. Matt Herges calmly laid down 2 more scoreless innings (make that PERFECT innings), and although Luis Vizcaino gave up the game-winner in the 11th Sunday, he had 2 scoreless innings on Saturday in which he gave up zero hits, and the three walks are misleading because 2 of them were intentional.

Finally, Kerry Wood got the save by facing the minimum thanks to a double play.

I mean, really now: how many bullpens emerge unscathed from a 4-game stretch in which the starters combine for 13 1/3 innings TOTAL? In that whole stretch, 13 relief pitchers made an appearance, and only 3 were ineffective (Lewis horrific, Laffey with the botch, Vizcaino Sunday).

And one of those gave up a run on two hits: it just happened to be the bottom of the 11th.

I don't know if I'm ready to call the bullpen a "team strength" or anything, but it's no longer an obvious "duck and cover" situation. Although, really now, we could use come bulk innings from starters this week.

Really.

6) The Return of the King

In three of the four games this weekend, Grady Sizemore cranked out two hits, one of which was for extra bases in each game. This includes a triple on which he scored because of an errant throw, a double, and a solo shot off Bronson Arroyo that represented the sum total of useful offensive output off Arroyo.

(By the way, when did Bronson Arroyo morph into some sort of ground ball machine? Three double plays and a 15:7 GO:FO ratio?

From a guy with a historical 0.70 G/F ratio?

What the heck happened there?

Was the wind blowing straight down from the sky?

Did everyone suddenly channel lumberjacks?

What the what?)

Sizemore has been bothered by an elbow injury, and although I obviously conjure up images of Shin-Soo Choo's UCL replacement, it doesn't seem to be as serious as all that. (Sizemore never had a throwing arm anyway.)

Giving him a few games at DH and then easing him back into center seems to have given Sizemore some of his old stroke back, and the offense certainly functions better when Sizemore is on base.

7) I am ready

For Matt LaPorta to stop sucking now.

8) Adorability Index off the charts

Jamey Carroll batted leadoff on Monday, and proceeded to draw three walks in 6 plate appearances. Also, you will never find his pot of gold.

9) Trade Asset update

Mark DeRosa has three multi-hit games in his past 6, hitting .375/.423/.542 in that span with a double and a homer. He now has 7 home runs on the season. Remember: you have to acquire someone who can perform at least at Shane Loux Level.

You can do it.

I believe in you.

(Well, actually, no I don't. But some encouragement might help, right? Right?)