Cue "March of the Gladiators!" Zach Jackson's first inning was so unbelievably poor that it seemed the Tribe's chances after a two-hour rain delay were as soggy as the field, but Andy Sonnanstine was up to the task of blowing the game and the Tribe won going away, 12-7. In today's B-List, Buff addresses the ex-closers in the bullpen, the power of the bottom half of the order, and congratulates Sonnanstine for out-clowning Jackson on his way out the door.

				FINAL
Rays (23-26)	5	0	1	1
Indians (20-28)	0	5	3	0

W: Aquino (1-0) L: Sonnanstine (3-5) S: Vizcaino (1)

1) Showdown in C-Town!

The two-hour rain delay was not without some small benefit last night, as it gave Zach Jackson and Andy Sonnanstine the opportunity to flex their new-found skills as recent graduates from the RB/B&B School. Jackson specialized in Vehicular Stunts, while Sonnanstine was more steeped in the Classics, but both men were well-prepared to show their new repertoires last night, as delighted fans were treated to a bevy of balloon animals, cannon firings, and a thirty-minute Pie Marathon while the tarp covered the field. What began as a friendly competition to show their talents soon escalated into a pitched battle for who would reign supreme in the abilities that both will likely be using at this time next year after their careers as major-league pitchers are over, possibly as soon as today.

Jackson began the game with a flourish, brandishing a large, colorful blunderbuss, which exploded in a bouquet of flowers as B.J. Upton singled on his first pitch. Tripping over his comically oversized shoes, Jackson yielded a 1-2 single to Carl Crawford, and, showing his major, wedged himself into a car shaped like a roller skate before blooping a pitch that Evan Longoria looped into center for an RBI single.

Not satisfied with starting the game with three straight singles, and flabbergasted to have struck out Carlos Pena on a Shaving Cream Pie Ball, Jackson grabbed a hammer as if to start a construction project and hit the end of a long plank, which

wheeled up and smacked him in the face, much in the manner of Willy Aybar's single to left. Still reeling from the blow, he stepped on a poorly-placed rake, causing his delivery to Bentley Zobrist to be driven to the wall for an RBI double. After walking Joe Dillon on a Seltzer Bottle Blast, Jackson completed the chicanery with a two-run single to Gabe Kapler, who was a coach at this point last year. Getting into the spirit, Michael Hernandez and B.J. Upton then unwittingly got smashed in the face with more pies, grounding out the left side of the infield and ending Jackson's brilliant First Act.

Andy Sonnanstine, with the gracious nature of a True Professional, set the Indians down in order as to not steal the spotlight from Jackson, who returned the favor with a rather eventless second inning. Taking a quick bow in recognition, Sonnanstine got to work in earnest.

Attempting to throw a large pizza pie into the air, Sonnanstine became distracted and walked Jhonny Peralta after a 1-2 count. The pie then fell onto Sonnanstine's head, and his 0-2 pitch to Mark DeRosa was dribbled for an infield single that travelled roughly 40 feet in roughly three weeks. Sonnanstine jumped onto a pair of stilts, taking great strides around the infield, but slipped on the banana peel that Jackson had left in place of the rosin bag and gave up an RBI single to Ryan Garko. Then, pitching from a seated position with a "sit and spin" throwing motion, he served up a three-run homer to his old foil, Ben Francisco.

As anyone who graduates from RB/B&B knows, too much is never enough, and Sonnanstine was hardly finished: his brilliant "sit on the pizza oven and set one's own pants on fire" routine was the work of a seasoned pro, and allowed him to advance Jamey Carroll to second on a single and a well-placed Confetti Bucket wild pitch. One double to Grady Sizemore later, and Sonnanstine had given back the entirety of Jackson's lead, to which Jackson could only nod appreciatively.

Jackson then involved an unwitting member of the audience, Jhonny Peralta, when he picked up a long ladder and swished it over Peralta's head after a walk,

strikeout, and groundout. Peralta bent down to pick up the grounder, and the ladder missed his head; however, Jackson then showed masterful timing and turned the other way, smacking Peralta on the rear end as he threw the ball away with the kind of aplomb that shows a certain shillish quality, and an unearned run put the ball back into Sonnanstine's court.

After two quick outs, it looked like Sonnanstine might be ceding the battle to Jackson right there, but with a brisk five-pitch walk on a Squirted Motor Oil Ball to Mark DeRosa, Sonnanstine juggled three flaming cats while kicking the ball to Ryan Garko, who singled to left. The cats landed on Sonnanstine's head, causing temporary insanity, and Sonnanstine threw a strike to Ben Francisco, who smacked an RBI single to center. Jackson made a guest appearance, throwing a bucket of water into Sonanstine's head, which doused the flames but also caused his vision to blur, forcing him to throw a Pitch of Great Fatness to Jamey Carroll, who dribbled a single past a diving Willy Aybar, who proved to be a substandard foil in comparison to Jhonny Peralta. Finally, soaking wet, burned, and blinded, Sonnanstine leapt onto a seesaw, walked precariously to the end, tripped over a six-ton weight, buried himself in feathers, and allowed a final RBI single to Asdrubal Cabrera.

Jackson's coda, a five-thousand-foot homer by Evan Longoria, was not so much an exclamation point as it was a signal that the night's festivities would be coming to an end. In the final tally, Sonnanstine was able to match Jackson pitch-for-pitch, but in the end, it was Sonnanstine that received the coveted Clown of the Night, and Jackson was sent back to Columbus after the game to brush up on his pratfall and tumbling skills.

2) Too much too late

Really, I think the 4-hit 2-walk 1-homer performance by Joe Nelson, dressed as Carmen Miranda while riding a unicycle, smacked of the kind of attention-seeking behavior that we shouldn't be encouraging. His use of Dual Armpit Horns was clever at first, but he went to the proverbial well too often for my tastes, the the

Tribe's 4-run outburst in the 5th, while welcome, showed that Nelson has a long way to go before being considered in the class of real pros like Sonnanstine and Jackson.

Also, using "Yakkity Sax" is hackneyed and trite. Try "Flight of the Bumblebee," or possibly Green Day's "King for a Day." You've got to bring something new to the table, Joe. I did like the bloomers, though.

3) And now for something completely different

Greg Aquino chipped in with two scoreless innings: they were not especially efficient or dominant innings, but after Jackson, Sonnanstine, and Nelson, they stuck out like a Thumb of Great Soreness.

More seriously, Aquino does not seem to have the best control: he wasn't exactly wild or all over the place, but he still missed as often as he hit (24 strikes, 24 balls). A lot of this looked like he was trying the Raffy Betancourt approach of hitting the Exact Knee-High Ouside Corner with a lot of pitches. To his credit, he started his first hitter 3-0 and got him to foul out 3-2, and struck out Evan Longoria with men on 2nd and 3rd to end the 5th.

Still, Aquino started each of his first 5 hitters with a ball, 3 of them with 2-0 counts, and 2 with 3-0 counts. He recovered to throw first-pitch strikes to the first two hitters in the 6th, but he certainly should with a 5-run lead instead of the 1-run lead he was protecting earlier.

Aquino is an interesting signing: he was actually the closer for much of his rookie year in Arizona. Two other "veteran retread" signings, Matt Herges (SF) and Luis Vizcaino (MIL) had also been closers at one point in their career. Vinnie Chulk was more of a Primary Set-Up Man in Toronto early in his career, but I'm wondering if maybe Mark Shapiro identified "ex-closers" as an undervalued resource in the "Moneyball" sense.

Anyway, although Aquino now has 7 scoreless innings, he's also walked 5 guys to 4 strikeouts, so he is more valuable as a multi-inning early reliever than any sort of shutdown late-inning guy. I'll take 7 scoreless innings from a reliever this season, though.

4) Mea culpas all around, on the house

I was wrong about Luis Vizcaino.

Now look, I'm not going to tell you he's something he's not: he's not tremendous, he's not the new Closer, he's not supplanting Raffy Betancourt, he's not Super Special. He's not.

But he's pretty good.

ERA isn't a great stat for relievers because of sample sizes and inherited run biases, but his ERA of 1.80 is fine. His WHIP, more telling for relievers, is 0.90. He has 9 Ks in 10 IP, and a brisk 9:3 K:BB ratio. With the Indians alone, his ERA is 2.84, his WHIP is 1.11, and he has a 6:3 K:BB in 6 1/3 innings (still almost a K an inning). Sure, he gave up the Instant Game-Losing Tater in his Indians debut and it drove me crazy, but since then he's had three excellent outings and one poor one, which isn't great, but is still pretty good.

Last night, Vizcaino ate the last three innings in 40

pitches, striking out 4 and giving up a single hit. And that points out another thing about the bullpen construction: rather than having a series of one-inning matchup role guys (Perez here, Betancourt there, Wood closes, Smiff pitches to Longoria, etc.), we've sort of lucked/settled into a bullpen of multi-inning guys. Herges has gone multiple innings more often than not, and so have Aquino and Vizcaino. The Long Lefty du Jour (Laffey, then Sowers) is usually used for long stretches, often at least 3 innings.

Obviously, at least part of this is due to the fact that our starters often bring their own rocks with them to the mound in order to suck on them at the drop of a ground rule double, but the bullpen really has stabilized into a useful collection.

5) Bottom's Up!

In the first inning, the 1-5 hitters made 3 outs and garnered no hits, walks, runs, or RBI.

In the second inning, the 1-5 hitters made all three outs, but did manage 1 hit, 1 BB, 1 R, and 1 RBI. The 6-9 hitters made ZERO outs, got FOUR hits, scored FOUR runs, and collected FOUR RBI.

In the third inning, the 1-5 hitters made all three outs, getting 1 hit and an RBI. The 6-9 hitters got THREE hits, one walk, THREE runs, and two RBI.

So, through three innings, the 1-5 hitters contributed a grand total of 2 hits and a walk, scoring once and driving in two runs. The 6-9 hitters NEVER MADE AN OUT and SCORED SEVEN RUNS ON SEVEN HITS (and a walk).

Now, mind you, that's sort of how they finished as well, but in all, Mark DeRosa, Ryan Garko, Ben Francisco, and Jamey Carroll each scored two runs and reached base at least twice. Only DeRosa didn't reach base a third time (Francisco had three hits, Garko two hits and an HBP, Carroll two hits and a walk).

The top five did eventually chip in: each player got a hit, and three drew walks as well. Asdrubal Cabrera was the only Indian not to score.

6) Today's Plaintive Plea

In the third inning, after drawing a walk, Mark DeRosa advanced on a single and scored on a second one. After crossing the plate, he saw a small girl, about 7 years old, wearing a LeBron James jersey and a New York Yankees hat. Tears were streaming down her face.

"What's wrong, little girl?" he asked politely.

"Oh, Mr. DeRosa, if only the Yankees had a player as versatile and talented as you, I'm sure we could defeat those evil Red Sox," she choked between wracking sobs.

"There, there," DeRosa said, patting her kindly on the shoulder. "You never know what will happen in this great game of baseball. You just never know."

Please, Brian Cashman. Your course is clear. Think of the children!

7) Pwned!

When Ben Francisco drove an RBI single up the middle off Andy Sonnanstine, it marked a truly unusual experience for Francisco against Sonnanstine:

It was not a home run.

For his career, Ben Francisco is 8-for-9 with FIVE home runs off Sonnanstine. One of his hits is a double. He has also drawn a walk (which seems wise, given these

numbers), and has driven in TWELVE runs.

In a batter-vs,-pitcher matchup, Francisco is hitting .889/.900/.2.667 against Sonnanstine for an OPS of 3.567.

Three point five six seven. I mean, that's just absurd.

8) Blue Moon Special

Ryan Garko scored from second on a single.

9) A word about ducks and their nature

At first, you might notice that the Indians left 8 men on base, a whopping 7 in scoring position. "Seven in scoring position!" you might cry. "What a lot of wasted opportunities!"

Well, consider this: the Indians went 4-for-9 with two outs and runners in scoring position, a .444 AVG. I mean, really now. Be careful with that axe, Eugene.