At least I don't have to read about Joba Chamberlain throwing a perfect game. Victor Martinez put the end to that, but the Yankees still beat the Indians when Greg Aquino couldn't wriggle out of a second bases-loaded jam, and the Tribe pitchers walked an unconscionable 11 hitters last night. Today, Buff takes a careful look at why Jeremy Sowers was good for 5 innings, why bunting into a double play is rarely a good move, and talks some more about how truly desirable Mark DeRosa is.

FINAL	1	2	3
Vogon Poets (30-21)	0	0	1	0
Indians (22-31)	0	0	0	1

W: Chamberlain (3-1) L: Aquino (1-1) S: Rivera (11)

0) Haiku Contest Reminder

Just a reminder that I will be taking entries for the WSCHC until the first pitch of Friday's game. Winners to be announced June 9 (the day after the Tribe's next off day). The topic remains David Dellucci.

For the record, "5-7-5" format means the number of syllables in each line, not the number of words. The 5-7-5 word entry I have is quite good, but currently is elligible for no more than an Honorable Mention.

1) Pulling out the microscope

Part of the reason Jeremy Sowers frustrates me is the burden of unreasonable expectations: because he was a first-round pick, I expected him to have superior talent. Because he

pitched at a successful major college program, I expected him to be helpful at the major-league level in a very short time. And because he did have some degree of immediate success, I expected his development curve to be steep and short.

Further, Jeremy Sowers has been pretty bad in pretty long stretches. His 6.42 ERA in 2007 was no accident, as he posted a poor 24:21 K:BB ratio in over 67 IP. Not only is the ratio bad, but the K-rate is simply dreadful. His 141 hits in 121 IP the next season included 18 HR, putting him on a 30-homer pace over 300 innings, a Byrdian rate. Although wins and losses aren't really a good way to measure pitching performance, his 1-6 and 4-9 records over those two season clearly contribute to a fan's frustration, in that his performances become associated with team losses.

Sowers' first two starts were simply horrific, yielding more runs than innings and a high number of walks. In fact, these are some of the indicators of poor performance to date:

Low K rates
High BB rates due to nibbling
A tendency toward fly balls
The fly ball tendency leads to homers
An inability to miss bats (contributes to low K rates)

Now, in Sowers' last outing, he came out of the pen and tossed 5 scoreless innings to get the win in a huge comeback game. He may have benefited from a coasting Tampa lineup (he entered the game at 10-2), but on the other hand, maybe he simply pitched better. So let's look at last night's start with these factors in mind and see if this is simply More Vintage Sowers or if in fact something appears to have changed.

An inability to miss bats: in the first inning, Sowers got 4 swinging strikes, including one each from Derek Jeter and Jorge Posada and a pair from Alex Rodriguez. Posada's was the third pitch of a three-pitch strikeout. Nick Swisher was able to foul off a pair of pitches. Now, this was a bit uncharacteristic: on the day, Sowers had only 1 more swing-and-miss in the game, while 8 more pitches were fouled off, but the first inning was an encouraging sign nonetheless. In fact ...

Low K rate: Sowers struck out 3 in 5 innings of work, and 2 of the 3 were swinging Ks. That's only a 5.4 K/9 rate, but he could play at that level.

High BB rates (interpreted as nibbling): through 5 innings, Sowers had thrown 46 of 72 pitches for

strikes and only walked one hitter. It should be noted that this hitter was the only one who scored (after a steal, bunt single, and double play), but a near 2-to-1 ratio of strikes to balls is just fine, and even Cliff Lee walks a batter now and again.

Fly ball tendencies and high OSLG: in his two disastrous starts, Sowers had allowed GB:FB ratios of 7:13 and 2:14, which is plainly unsustainable for a pitcher without Johan Santana's stuff. Even in his relief performance this ratio was 7:9, although that's pretty neutral. Yesterday, the ratio of 7:6, including a GO:FO of 7:5 on the strength of two induced double plays. I'm not ready to pronounce that Sowers has become a groundball pitcher, but I will point out that the three hits he allowed were all singles and he kept the ball in the park, something that has been a problem in the past.

In fact, let me leave you with a few pitch sequences to tell you why I started on this path in the first place.

In **Angel Berroa's first at-bat**, Sowers began by working Berroa away. This is a fine way to start a hitter, but there are two things you should know about Angel Berroa: he cannot hit, and he will not walk. After his big debut in Kansas City, he has become a real liability at the plate. Since 2004, his highest OBP has been .308. in Los Angeles last season, he hit .230/.304/.310. He has 114 walks in over 2700 plate appearances. Also, he can't hit.

So I was snarling at my computer screen for

Sowers to come inside and challenge Berroa. Outside corner, foul. Outside corner, ball. Outside corner, foul. Outside corner, foul. I was nearly apoplectic. And then Sowers threw a pitch more in the middle of the plate at the knees, and Berroa flew out. Seemed like a lot of trouble for Angel Berroa.

In **Berroa's second PA**, Sowers started him on the inner half. He looked at a strike. A pitch down was fouled off. Then Sowers began climbing the ladder: a pitch in and up was fouled off, and a pitch in and up and over the strike zone was missed for strike three.

In these two appearances, Berroa got two entirely-different sequences of pitches. The first time, he saw nothing in, and in the second, 3 of the 4 pitches were on the inner half.

Finally, consider **Alex Rodriguez' second plate appearance** . Rodriguez is coming off hip surgery and has always had more trouble with pitches in than pitches away that he can extend and drive on. Although he's only hitting .259, this comes with a .412 OBP and a .568 SLG. Sowers started him inside for a ball. He then hit the inside corner for strike one. Inside, ball. Inside, foul. Inside, ball. And finally, Sowers threw a breaking pitch down that missed low and Rodriguez walked. But the *appr*

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here was well-reasoned and competently executed: in a 1-0 game with Rodriguez leading off the inning, there seems little point in getting very cute. Sowers missed the strike zone on a couple pitches, but not by much, and in the "right" places. (If you're going to miss on an inside fastball to an opposite-handed hitter, better miss in: Sowers did.)

I might be taking too much from these three pitch sequences, but I was struck by how much they LOOKED like the execution of a well-reasoned PLAN. I don't know how much to attribute to Sowers, Kelly Shoppach, Carl Willis, or anyone else, but I will say this: it SEEMS like the way for Sowers to maximize his chances at success

is to have a distinct action plan for each hitter, and at least last night, it SEEMED like his plans were well-conceived and pretty well-executed.

2) This having been said

The sixth inning was plainly disastrous and 1 strike in 13 pitches is very very very very poor. Don't do that.

3) From the ridiculous to the sublime

I find most of the second-guessing of Eric Wedge not pulling Sowers fast enough in the 6th to be largely misguided: although Sowers does have a history of having trouble a third time through a lineup, he showed that he had multiple approaches to each hitter and had thrown 5 innings of 3-hit ball with 1 walk and only 72 pitches. That's a very effective start. Maybe you get someone up to start tossing, but that's about it. The fact is, Sowers went from zero to completely insane in the space of 9 pitches, and Greg Aquino was called in four pitches after that.

Consider Aquino's task: the bases are loaded. There is no one out, and the score is tied 1-1. Oh, and by the way, the hitter is Alex Rodriguez. After him, Jorge Posada. If Alex Rodriguez does about the worst thing possible, ground into a double play, the Yankees likely score a run. If he lifts the ball out of the infield, they score.

Strike one
Strike two
Foul ball

Strike three

On the next pitch, Posada grounded a ball back to Aquino that resulted in a force out at home.

On the next pitch, Robinson Cano lined out to center to end the inning.

Six pitches. Six strikes. No runs. That's pretty awesome.

4) From the sublime back to the ridiculous

Unfortunately, that was pretty much the end of Aquino's sanity as well, as after a leadoff groundout, he walked pinch-hitter Hideki Matsui on four pitches. This is pretty bad, and kind of an historical bugbear for Aquino, missing the strike zone. Get someone up.

After going 1-2 to Brett Gardner (who is not particularly good), Aquino missed three more times and walked a second hitter. Get someone up.

And after a 1-1 count to Derek Jeter, three balls followed and the bases are loaded much in the same manner as the previous inning. Someone up? Yes, get.

Nick Swisher's double essentially ended the game. Alex Rodriguez' two-run single off Luis Vizcaino was simply wound salt.

Bad, bad, bad, bad inning.

5) The Worst Inning in the World

After a leadoff walk in the 5th, Jamey Carroll fought off a 1-2 pitch and singled to right. Since it was Ryan Garko who had walked, there were runners on first and second and no one out.

The Indians proceded to make three outs without ANYONE TRYING TO HIT THE BALL.

To second-guess the decision to have Kelly Shoppach bunt seems disingenuous: he had three sacrifices last season and three the season before that (in only 161 AB). And his bunt really wasn't that terrible: Joba Chamberlain made a terrific play to snare his bunt near the third base line. Garko did not show the best baserunning instincts there, but had he hovered near second base and had the ball

dropped, he would have been extraordinarily out (and Carroll may have been forced at second as well). It was more a good play by Chamberlain than anything else, but a double play there is very demoralizing indeed.

And then Jamey Carroll was caught stealing by Jorge Posada, who is 50 years old

and has a shoulder constructed entirely of Silly Putty and Mentos.

Huzzah!

6) The two-man offense

Chamberlain had retired the first 11 hitters in a row before Victor Martinez laced a homer to right. The only other player to score was Shin-Soo Choo, who singled, went to second on a groundout, stole third (!), and scored on a second groundout. In his previous AB immediately after Martinez' homer, Choo reached on a bunt single,

then stole second immediately after Steve Phillips' Hair declared that Choo was not a threat to steal second.

On the season, Shin-Soo Choo has 8 stolen bases and 0 times being caught.

(After Jhonny Peralta walked, Mark DeRosa struck out on three pitches, watching each fly by as if he had been encased in wax. Huzzah!)

The only players to reach base besides Choo and Martinez were Peralta above, Garko (who was doubled off), and Carroll

(who was caught stealing).

7) Nice Hose!

Mark Teixeira decided to test Mark DeRosa's arm in left field, forgetting that DeRosa is also a third baseman and, as such,

has a wonderful arm. Teixeira was gunned down trying to go from first to third on a single to left, and lamented his choice after the game, saying, "If only we had someone with the versatility and superior throwing arm of Mark DeRosa!"

However, I would caution Teixeira from getting his hopes up: Troy Glaus looks likely to miss more time as St. Louis' regular third baseman. The tricky thing is that it may also be the case that Glaus may return and play acceptibly at the hot corner. So the ideal replacement would be someone who could provide some pop at third

(someone slugging at least .430, preferably with no fewer than 8 home runs: it is third base, after all) while being a player who could also move off third base when Glaus comes back. The other spots St. Louis might use such a player would be second base and left field, with the occasional shot at right. And, of course, it would be

a huge bonus if that player was familiar with the NL, especially the NL Central where the Cardinals are fighting for divisional supremacy.

I wonder if any player like that still exists.

8) Steel-plated testicles

After giving up a leadoff double and going 3-0 to Mark Teixeira, Jensen Lewis, a man of questionable stuff but unassailable guts, threw two strikes past Teixeira and struck him out

swinging. He then struck out Alex Rodriguez swinging, inducing two swings-and-misses in the sequence.

I may not enjoy watching Jensen Lewis pitch, but I will never claim that it's because he's a nibbling

WUSS.