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You know things are bad when Swerbs Blurbs columnist Steve Buffum considers changing the station from the Indians to the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Steve also pontificates on the ability of Grady Sizemore against left-handed pitching and wonders where this Rafael Perez guy has been all year. Plus, Steve points out some evidence of steroid abuse by the hometown boys.

My thought process last night:

0-0: Hey, Jason has good stuff tonight!

2-0: Okay, still a pitcher's duel!

2-1: See, we're still in it!

3-1: Hm, maybe Johnson should come out now ...

6-1: Oh, look, the Stanley Cup is on NBC! (Note: I can name more Toledo Mud Hens than Edmonton Oilers: this indicates my level of Hockey Fan.)

1) That slope drops off surprisingly fast

It is hard to argue with Jason Johnson's first inning: he threw 13 pitches, and only the first was a ball. The Yankees fouled off 6 pitches, suggesting that Johnson had nice movement on his pitches. More importantly, not one ball left the infield, two of the outs were on ground balls, and there were no baserunners. That's pretty much The Prescription for a successful Jason Johnson start.

In the second inning, he gave up two singles, but they were simply balls hit up the middle instead of at someone, he struck out K-Rod, and only Jason Giambi watched a second ball. In the third, more of the same: no hits, two groundouts, right around the plate.

Then the wheels loosened.

Three balls to Giambi, an extra-base hit, and only the ability to induce a double play kept the damage to two runs (although, arguably, it should have been one if Broussard had not oiled up his glove before the game). This bodes ill: this violates the prescription, and should be considered enough reason to shorten the leash (anything Johnson lets get in the air that isn't a popup should be considered a Harbinger of Home Runs To Come).

The fifth wasn't terrible, but it certainly indicated a loss of a lug nut or two: a home run (to noted slugger Johnny Damon) and a walk (never good for Johnson) and that's probably enough of that. I know he hadn't even thrown 80 pitches, but I'm not concerned about Johnson's arm, I'm concerned about Johnson's *effectiveness*. It was waning.

Then the wheels fell off, and the only two people in the stadium surprised by this were Eric Wedge and Jason

Johnson. At least Johnson has an excuse: self-delusion. That, and "being under a microscope." Dork.

2) Hey, I remember that guy!

On the flip side, you have Randy Johnson, whose power apparently is not Samsonesque in that he can pitch well without a mullet. (Frankly, I preferred the mullet.) Four hits, six Ks, and no walks in 6 1/3 (on only 78 pitches: without the ejection, that could well have been a complete game). Almost 70% strikes, and the run came on a double play (hence no RBI for the Tribe last night). As the kicker, he looked like he was stifling laughter when Perez jawed at him for throwing inside. Perez is a beefy young

man (okay, he's only young to *me ...*
and to Randy Johnson), but RJ appeared distinctly unfazed by the prospect of facing Mr. Perez on the mound. (Yes, he buzzed him: no, I'm not outraged. That's baseball.)

3) That guy Snell is an idiot

No, not the Pittsburgh pitcher, the physicist who described how light is refracted through different media (the angle of incidence and all that). Snell's Law may be valuable in the lab, but it means nothing to Grady Sizemore: in four plate appearances against left-handed pitching, he never struck out (including a three-foul appearance against Johnson), and doubled off Ron Villone, who once played

with Sizemore's father in high school. (No, that's not true, but he's old.) Although it's only a 1-for-4 night, Sizemore never looked overmatched, and combined with other recent performances, gives Tribe fans hope that he has turned the corner on the subject of hitting left-handed pitching (which would make him an exponentially more valuable everyday player).

4) Managerial Head-scratchers

The decision to play Eduardo Perez in right field was an innovative one: he hadn't played the outfield

this season, and has a history of success against Randy Johnson, hitting over .300 and smacking four homers off him (in a limited sample). Getting Perez into the lineup was a good move, and if he has to play right field to do it, that shows a certain flexibility of thought that has been largely absent this season.

Except that the reason he had to play right was that the left-handed Ben Broussard was playing first. And it took the right-handed Casey Blake out of the lineup.

Now, I could be missing something (like Blake is 0-for-4000 against Johnson with 3999 strikeouts, or Broussard hits .500 off him, or Blake is battling liver flukes, or something else) ... but wouldn't the more conventional approach of having Perez at 1B and Blake in

RF have gotten Perez in the lineup without having to watch Broussard strike out twice against one of the toughest left-handers of my generation? (Oh, he did hit into a run-producing double play, though, so I guess it was worth it. Phbt!)

5) Now that the horses are all safely out, should I close the barn door?

Rafael Perez: 1 IP, 12 strikes to 4 balls, 1 H, 3 K, 0 R.

Scott Sauerbeck: still fungal

What the **FUCK** took you so long, you **FUCKING FUCKS** ?!

6) A Gil Mota sighting!

Hey, he threw

strikes! He was efficient! He threw a shutout inning! He may have turned the ...

No. Apply the Blind Squirrel Theory and release him anyway.

7) Silver Lining Dept.

We turned three double plays.

We only left 3 runners on base.

Ferd Cabrera was able to nurture a 1-to-1 out-to-hit ratio.

(I'm grasping a straws here,

people.)

8) Evidence of

steroids

I think the entire Indians team has been doing massive doses of steroids. It is the only thing I can use that would plausibly

explain why the entire team's testicles appear to have atrophied. (Way to bounce back from the near-beaning,

guys! I'm so proud!)