Buff is back baby! Much like a prized young starting pitcher, it's often necessary to have Buff skip a couple starts in order to keep his arm fresh for the entire season. We did, and now he's back. So you can all stop e-mailing me. Appropriately, the Indians didn't give Buff too many positive things to pen about in his return to the front page. Led by former Indian Franklin Gutierrez, the Mariners carved through the Tribe like a hot knife through butter this weekend at the Prog. Buff tells us all about it in the Monday edition of The B-List.

FINAL

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Indians (36-55)

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W: F. Hernandez (10-3) L: Huff (4-4)

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W: Washburn (7-6) L: Ohka (0-4) S: Aardsma (21)

FINAL

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W: S. Kelley (2-1) L: Betancourt (1-2) S: Aardsma (22)

I think I'm developing a more-sympathetic view of the term "grinder."

1) One of these things is totally like the others

We could talk about the starting pitcher who went enough innings to be elligible for the win, but gave up too many extra-base hits, including both a double and a homer, didn't strike out enough hitters (2 or 3), walked someone, threw about a hundred pitches with a strike percentage in the 60s, gave up three runs, and ended up losing the game because he didn't have enough support (but didn't really pitch all that well in the first place).

Or we could talk about the starting pitcher who went enough innings to be elligible for the win, but gave up too many extra-base hits, including both a double and a homer, didn't strike out enough hitters (2 or 3), walked someone, threw about a hundred pitches with a strike percentage in the 60s, gave up three runs, and ended up losing the game because he didn't have enough support (but didn't really pitch all that well in the first place).

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And then we'd all be bored.

2) This having been said

Here is a statement I would like to reject out of hand:

"We should consider signing Tomo Ohka to an extension for 2010."

But I can't. And here's why:

Ohka has 5 outings of 5 or more innings. In those 5 outings, he's given up 15 runs in 30 innings for a 4.50 ERA. Now, he certainly has a couple of clunkers: his July 12 start against Detroit was awful, and two of those five outings were in relief. Tomo Ohka has never pitched for the Cleveland Indians in a game in which the Indians won.

He is the baseball equivalent of Schleprock, or maybe Myron the Living Voodoo Doll.

But look: David Huff has 12 outings, and in only 6 of them has he gone at least five innings in which he gave up at more 3 runs.

Jeremy Sowers has 6 such outings in 11 appearances.

Next season, we have half a year of Cliff Lee, some unforeseen contribution from Jake Westbrook, some number of bulk innings from Aaron Laffey, and High Noon at the (mo)OK Corral.

Carl Pavano is not walking through that door.

Anthony Reyes is not walking through that door.

There is no Adam Miller.

This virtually comes down to whether Fausto Carmona is a major-league pitcher or Sweatin' Bob Wolcott.

I do not want to hear about the bullpen, or the corner outfielders, or Jhonny Peralta, or Larry Dolan's checkbook, or Mark Shapiro's impending baldness, or Eric Wedge selling his lips on eBay. I want to see a credible starting rotation, or I'm staying home.

Now, you may say I'm being too harsh on the yoots. Amongst Laffey, Huff, and Sowers, it is entirely possible that there's a league-average pitcher hiding in there.

Hey, Laffey has a 4.27 ERA.

Huff is in his first year starting in the bigs.

Sowers is a smart guy and has lobbied extensively for the preservation of the coatimundi.

(Okay, I made that up, but it's hard to think of encouraging things to say about Jeremy Sowers.)

But be serious now: tell me something that you SEE that would CONVINCE me that there's a rotation next year that doesn't suck on ice.

3) Author's Note

Signing Tomo Ohka would not change this.

4) Postscript

The starters (especially Ohka) pitched well enough for a decent offensive team to win at least one of the three games. Draw your own conclusion.

5) Back on Top

Grady Sizemore has been slotted back into the leadoff role.

As a leadoff hitter, Sizemore has hit .224/.310/.408 this season. As a 2-slot hitter, he hit .257/.357/.523.

Now, the confound here is that he was hurt much of the time he led off, and batted in the 2-hole after he felt better. You could say he's hit a lot better as a #2 hitter than as a #1, or you could say he's hit a lot better in July (.296/.397/.593) after returning from time off, and that those numbers simply happened to take place in the 2 slot instead of the 1 slot. It's pretty clear that he's swinging the bat better now as opposed to earlier in the season, so the second explanation seems a lot more important than any sort of order-based thesis.

Still, here's the thing: Grady Sizemore slugged .523 in the 2 slot, and slugged .593 in July. It is great to have your leadoff hitter display as many offensive skills as possible, insofar as it's great for ANY hitter to display offensive skills, but really now, I think Grady's stint in the 2 hole showed two things:

a) Grady Sizemore may profess to be more COMFORTABLE in the leadoff slot, but alleged discomfort certainly doesn't seem to PREVENT him from HITTING
b) Grady Sizemore has 28 extra-base hits in 68 hits and has stolen 9 bases in 16 attempts.

I don't know about you, but when I add two and two, I get four. And when I add two, two, two, two, and two, I still get ten. When I add up the datapoints for Grady Sizemore, they scream, "Grady Sizemore should not lead off."

I mean, I only have a Master's Degree in Math, so maybe my addition skills have atrophied.

Anyway, Sizemore went 2-for-4 against King Felix Hernandez (the rest of the team: 3-for-26), then drew three walks and scored a run on Sunday as well (against a left-handed starter, Glass Eric Bedard). He was 0-for-4 Saturday, but that's a credible body of work out of the leadoff slot.

Which is the wrong place for Grady Sizemore.

Huzzah!

6) A model of consistency

Asdrubal Cabrera spelled Sizemore in the 1 slot, and has now become the de facto #2 hitter. A s a leadoff guy, he hit .282/.325/.400 in 110 AB.

As a 2-hitter, Cabrera has hit .300/.330/.390 in 105 AB.

That's remarkably consistent.

Also remarkably crummy for a 1 or 2 hitter.

Really, now. Cabrera hit .321/.438/.453 out of the 9 hole to give us all hope that he'd be a great top-of-the-order producer, but the fact is, he isn't. He plays a good shortstop, and hits like a shortstop. Big deal. Oddly enough, he hits .314/.392/.400 in 70 AB leading off an inning, suggesting that leading off isn't THAT much of a stretch.

The thing that is killing Cabrera this season is his platoon split: in past years, he's been superior from the right side of the plate: in his career before this season, he hit .346/.403/.554 against lefties, and .239/.331/.325 against righties. This season, he is completely helpless against lefties, hitting .256/.293/.308 against them. I mean, that's absurdly bad.

Your leadoff hitter can't produce this weakly against 1/3rd of the pitchers in the majors.

Well, I mean, unless he's Grady Sizemore.

But really, now, what happened here?

I'm glad he's turned it around against righties (.316/.377/.447): there are a lot more of them.

But geez, did he take a pass through the Opposite Hand Reflectioninator?

7) Cause celebre

Ben Francisco is having a hot July, hitting .293/.408/.537!

So trade him to someone who falls for that crap!

Because he hit .141/.211/.176 in June and Matt LaPorta is in Columbus!

Seriously, now. Which player is more likely to play a significant role in the next Cleveland Indians playoff team? Come on. Francisco went 2-for-4 with a two-run jack on Sunday, but in the first two games, he posted a pair of 3-PA collars that you expect from your nine-hole hitter who is slugging .384 on the season.

Here's a tip: if your nine-hole hitter is hitting .237/.321/.384, this is bad for your team. If your nine-hole hitter is your LEFT FIELDER, a position at the far end of the defensive spectrum, and he doesn't play very good defense anyway, YOU ARE A PUTZ.

Mark Shapiro, please ... do not be a putz.

8) Please come to Austin, we could use your coldness

3 slot (Choo, Choo, Choo): 1-for-12, 1 BB, 6 K
4 slot (Martinez, Martinez, Martinez): 2-for-13, 0 BB, 1 K
5 slot (Hafner, Peralta, Hafner): 4-for-11, 1 BB, 2 K
6 slot (Peralta, Garko, Peralta): 1-for-11, 0 BB, 4 K

Gee, I wonder why we scored 6 runs in 3 games this weekend.

9) Nice Hose!

Ryan Garko gunned down Ronny Cedeno trying to score from first on a double to the left field wall. Well, I mean, he had help, but it was a nice play. Too bad he struck out three times.

10) Sotto voce

Travis Hafner is hitting .297/.396/.545 on the season. He had a .945 OPS before the All-Star Break and has a .900 OPS after. He has almost as many walks as strikeouts (22 to 26) and has 9 HR in 145 AB.

He is hitting .314/.400/.629 against left-handed pitching.

He posts nearly-identical OPSs with men on base (.931) and the bases empty (.949).

No one is taking his contract, but Travis Hafner is not a big source of problems on the 2009 Cleveland Indians.

11) Forte voce

Don't pitch Raffy Betancourt in back-to-back games the instant he comes off the DL. It would be nice to believe we have learned something, wouldn't it?

Something about Betancourt, but more importantly, something about MARKETING.

Because you have to trade Raffy Betancourt at this point, right?

Geez.

12) Around the bullpen

Tony Sipp and Joe Smiff were great Friday. Sipp in particular got three swinging strikes in 5 pitches and recorded a K. Smiff got three swinging strikes in 8 pitches and recorded a K.

That was great!

This represents a marked contrast with Saturday, which was Not Great, insofar as it was Putrid.

Kerry Wood was great on Saturday, with 3 Ks in a scoreless 1-hit inning. This contrasts with Sunday, insofar as it Didn't Suck, as opposed to Wood on Sunday, who Did.

Jose Veras makes me pine for the halcyon days of ... anyone else.