The Indians flipped the tables on the Twins last night 8-1 behind 8 strong innings from Aaron Laffey, and Buff chimes in with his normal musings. Is it time to take Aaron Laffey seriously as a rotation regular? Is it time to consider Jess Todd ready for Prime Time? Is Trevor Crowe a legitimate major-league outfielder? Do the fortunes of the Cleveland Indians hinge on the crucial presence of Chris Gimenez? Did last night's lineup resemble that of a major-league team? Could Jhonny Peralta have contributed less without actively tying his teammates' shoes together? The B-List asks all of these questions, and answers ... well, it's better at asking than answering, frankly.

FINAL	1	2	3
Twins (53-54)	0	0	0	0
Indians (45-62)	0	2	0	2

W: Laffey (5-3) L: Liriano (4-11)

Was the A.J. Pierzynski deal really historically awful in retrospect?

1) Serious Time

I've asked it before, and I'm still not sure, but ... is it time to take Aaron Laffey seriously?

It's one thing to look at the surface stats: with a 3.58 ERA, Laffey has the best raw ERA of anyone in our rotation. This number is no longer padded by some 12 1/3 innings of successful relief work: he has a 3.65 ERA as a reliever and a 3.57 ERA as a starter. He held batters to a lower average with a better K rate as a reliever, but the sample is much too small to conclude anything very significant from it.

Now, as a starter, he has two things that stick out: first, at least partially because he throws a sinker, he has allowed only 2 homers in 53 innings. I doubt that's strictly sustainable. I mean, I expect him to have a below-average HR/9 rate, but not 0.34. Still, he keeps the ball in the park, and that's good.

The other thing that sticks out is that he has walked 25 batters and struck out 28 in those 53 innings. That's plainly awful. And it brings to mind something I've seen: everyone who wants to produce a pocket analysis of Laffey seems to harp on the fact that he doesn't miss enough bats. Well, Laffey isn't exactly a strikeout pitcher, no, and isn't going to top 90 mph many times a game, if ever. He has a 4.75 K/9 rate as a starter, and 5.10 K/9 rate overall: these rates aren't very high, but they aren't completely useless.

In fact, with all the regular caveats about small sample size taken for granted, let's look at Laffey's performance just since he came back to the majors after a trip to the DL and some rehab starts. He has five starts total, with these stats:

31 IP
31 H
15 R
11 ER
1 HR
10 BB
18 K

This translates into a WHIP of 1.323: for reference, Cliff Lee's was 1.30. (On the other hand, Tomo Ohka's is 1.35, so WHIP is not the be-all and end-all of metrics. But it's more good than bad.) His ERA is 3.19, although his RA is 4.35. Still, this is good. And his K rate is a little higher, at 5.23 K/9. Again, Lee's was 6.34, so it's not like Laffey is far removed from a guy who misses enough bats. For reference, this is more than David Huff, Jeremy Sowers, Anthony Reyes, or Fausto Carmona.

See, I think Laffey's main shortcoming at this point is not that he doesn't miss enough BATS: it's that he misses too many PLATES.

10 BB in 31 IP is actually a significant improvement over his overall 25-in-53

performance as a starter: this is a 2.90 BB/9 rate instead of a horrific 4.25. And a 1.8 K/BB ratio kicks butt on a 1.12 ratio.

This marks Laffey's third Quality Start in five tries, and his first was just short with 4 runs in 6 IP. The problem is that this was the first start in which Laffey didn't walk at least two guys. Laffey faced 31 hitters, and threw a first-pitch strike to TWELVE of them. That seems really bad. I mean, maybe he's trying to get people to expand their strike zones, and that might be sound strategy. Getting people to fish just a little bit lower ... just a little bit lower ... just a little bit lower ... I mean, you won't be giving up many non-Vlad homers after that sequence. He ended up with 71 strikes in 112 pitches, which is a fine proportion, but maybe a couple more first-pitch strikes might be a better way to be more efficient and pitch ahead more often, getting hitters to fish at one of those pitches off the corner or one of those swooping curves.

(Is it just me, or does Laffey's breaking ball look better? It still wanders across instead of biting down, like Lee's, but that was a pretty neat-looking pitch.)

Anyway, Laffey's sole walk came in the 8th, against Joe Mauer, which is probably not an entirely terrible idea. With 6 hits and one unearned run in 8 complete innings, this was an excellent start by Laffey, and something that makes me think that he's got to be considered a front-runner for 2010's rotation, if perhaps more in the middle than at the front.

2) Welcome to the bigs!

Okay, I like Jess Todd.

Note: Jess Todd got 3 swinging strikes from 4 batters.

Aaron Laffey got 4 swinging strikes from 31 batters.

I understand that difference between starters and relievers, but I thought Todd looked very sharp, and could arguably have gotten at least one more strikeout had he gotten the proper low strike call. If you're going to miss, missing low is not a terrible way to do it. Even with getting squeezed, Todd still pumped 10 strikes through the zone in 15 tries. Relievers who throw strikes: what will they think of next?

3) Lineup Follies and the Residue of Design

A number of fans were flabbered when they saw that Chris Gimenez was batting 5th last night. This actually misses the point of what was truly flabbering about last night's lineup: that is, that is was one of a bona fide major-league baseball team. That WON.

5 Chris Gimenez (.192/.294 AVG/OBP)
6 Jamey Carroll (.287/.384)
7 Kelly Shoppach (.209/.338)
8 Andy Marte (DH!) (.235/.381)
9 Trevor Crowe (.221/.287)

Now, I admit that at some point a couple years ago, I might have been more excited about this lineup (although at that point I don't believe I knew who the heck Jamey Carroll was), but

although it does stick out that the poorest hitter seems to be sitting in the highest slot, the real question is, "Of these five men, how many belong in a starting lineup in 2009?" I don't mean to intimate that none of these guys belong on the team or that they're all schmucks or anything, and it certainly makes sense for a team out of contention in August give some playing time to inexperienced players, but ... in the abstract, is the answer to this question even ONE? In this theoretical space, Crowe is a 4th OF, Carroll is a UIF, Shoppach is a backup C, and Chris Gimenez appears to be some sort of ersatz Ryan Garko who apparently believes he is capable of stealing a base. (Empirically, this is untrue.) This leaves you with the question as to whether Andy Marte (Andy Marte!) has finally shaken off the three-year doldums he has found himself in, lounging with Lethagarians in early-late-mid-morning naps to this point, blending in with Milo's trousers and refusing to think.

As far as putting Gimenez fifth, well, why not? Would you put Carroll there, with his .075 ISO and more-or-less permanent residence in the Tyner Zone (OBP > SLG)? The Kelly Shoppach Windmill Experience? I would probably have said Marte, but Marte's SLG thus far is .294, good for a sub-Carroll ISO of .059, and he could use some easing-in in any event. And then there's Crowe, who is acting as the de facto "second leadoff man" role that propelled Asdrubal Cabrera into the limelight.

In this sense, the lineup was a rousing success: the "wraparound" 9-through-3 hitters collected 10 of the team's 11 hits, scoring 6 runs. Crowe had another nice game, getting on base three times with a pair of singles and a walk, and was rewarded with two runs. And one of the hits came in his only shot at batting with a runner in scoring position, giving him his 7th RBI on the season as well.

If we are to look at what Laffey has done since being recalled as evidence of development, consider Crowe's 5-game stint after his most recent callup: two multi-hit games, 8-for-21 hitting, 3 extra-base hits, 6 runs, and 3 RBI. That's a .381 AVG (albeit in a preposterously tiny sample), and a .524 SLG, which is almost left-field-like. I still think of Crowe as a 4th outfielder, but a useful one, certainly more than Ben Fungusco.

Weird stat from the land of small samples: although Crowe is a switch-hitter, I tend to think

of him as a lefty for some reason. (He has a lot more PA against righties than lefties). Except he hits .368/.455/.474 against lefties and .179/.236/.254 against righties. A lot of those PA are from earlier stints, though. Anyway, Crowe at 9 works for me. Gimenez at 5 ... um ... not so much.

4) I demand to see the memo

... that declares that the fortunes of the Cleveland Indians rest primarily and crucially on the development of Chris Gimenez.

Chris Gimenez? I actually like Chris Gimenez, but ... Chris Gimenez?

5) While I'm here

Can Chris Gimenez catch or not?

If he can catch, why is Wyatt Toregas here?

If he can't, why is HE here?

Can someone explain the roster that requires that ALL of Gimenez, Toregas, and Shoppach to be on it? With Andy Marte and Trevor Crowe? And 8 relievers? I'm not even necessarily OBJECTING, I just can't grok the POINT.

6) Manufacturing Jobs

In the second inning, the Tribe scored two runs on two singles, two walks, and a sac fly.

Iin the 4th, Crowe singled, hustled to second on a bobble by center fielder Carlos Gomez, took third on a passed ball, and scored on an infield single.

That's good fourth-outfieldering right there, boy howdy. I still like extra-base hits, though.

7) That's okay, the hole is only right in

the middle

The "9-through-3" hitters each had at least two hits, with 1 & 2 hole hitters Grady Sizemore and Asdrubal Cabrera actually collecting three apiece.

Gimenez didn't have a hit, but he did draw a pair of walks, as did Adorable J. Kelly Shoppach and Andy Marte each reached base on a hit and a walk respectively.

Jhonny Peralta, in the cleanup slot, with five plate appearances, produced three whiffs and no positive offensive contribution. The team minus Peralta was 5-for-10 with

runners in scoring position; Peralta was 0-for-3.

8) Speaking of RISP

Justin Morneau drove in his 89th run of the season last night, which is excellent.

He came to the plate 4 times. In 3 of those times, there was a runner in scoring position.

The 4-slot in Minnesota is a pretty sweet

gig.

9) Gotta get to bed before the day game tomorrow

Six of the last six Cleveland batters struck out. The one who didn't was hit by a pitch.

Hey, if Asdrubal Cabrera can get from first to second on a passed ball swinging strike three, is it too much to ask that Jhonny Peralta make it from home to first on the same play? Did they change

the relative distances between bases without telling anyone?