The Indians looked helpless against Tommy Hunter and his Magic Curve Ball last night as they dropped the second game of the series, 5-0. In today's B-List, Buff points out that Fausto Carmona's numbers are good without his pitching actually matching, wonders if the bottom third of the lineup qualifies for Superfund money, and wonders if the pod person that replaced Raffy Perez will give the real guy back any time soon.

FINAL	1	2
Rangers (63-49)	0	0	2	0
Indians (49-64)	0	0	0	0

W: T. Hunter (5-2) L: Carmona (2-7)

So help me, I like Texas' pitching. But not the Time Warner guy who replaced my wireless router with a plain cable modem.

1) Glass half boring

Fausto Carmona's glass was half full last night, in that he gave up 2 runs on 5 hits in 6 complete innings. Camona got 11 ground ball outs for an 11:4 GO:FO ratio, and not only struck out three hitters but got 9 swings and misses to 15 foul balls: that's an excellent ratio, especially given that 7 of the foul balls came in a single at-bat to consumate professional Omar Vizquel, who ended up grounding out in the plate appearance. All three of the strikeouts were swinging, and two were by left-handed hitters. Carmona has been having enormous trouble with left-handers this season, with an unconscionable platoon split of .314/.437/.520 against lefties and .218/.299/.308 against righties, so this is a positive sign. True, all three of the extra-base hits Carmona allowed were to lefties, but two of them were Josh Hamilton: Hamilton has bad stats on the season, but has 6 multi-hit games in his last 10 and is hitting .314 in August, so he might be returning to form. His last three innings were very strong, featuring one hit and one walk, but neither runner reaching second base, and all three of his strikeouts came in these three strong innings.

His glass was also half empty last night, as he walked three more hitters in 6 innings and needed 101 pitches to get through them, only 57 of which were strikes. He started fewer than half of his hitters with first-pitch strikes (12 of 26)

and more than half his hits were for extra bases. He walked the first batter of the game, a man with 10 career ABs entering the game, to whom he also yielded a double. He put two men on in the first, hit a batter on an 0-2 count, gave up the double to Borbon on a two-strike pitch, and walked David Murphy on 4 pitches in his two-run third inning.

But more than anything, Fausto Carmona's glass was pretty boring last night. The Rangers aren't a very good hitting team, and didn't hit very well. Fausto doesn't have very good command, and didn't command the ball very well. I mean, it's a Quality Start without actually having a lot of Quality. I suppose in one sense, if I get a lot of these starts, I will be reasonably pleased. He kept the ball into the park and had only one inning that truly wasn't good. Is it greedy to clamor for more? Baby steps and gradual progress and all that? I mean, his three starts since returning from the DL or Time Out or however you want to phrase it:

5 IP, 4 H, 2 R
6 IP, 6 H, 1 R
6 IP, 5 H, 2 R

That's pretty darned good, right?

Except:

5 IP, 4 BB
6 IP, 3 BB
6 IP, 3 BB

Sure, the strikeouts went from 1 to 2 to 3, and that's a positive trend, but ... yeah, I suppose I am being greedy. But not excessively so. Let's hold off with any standing ovations until he cuts the walks down and finishes a seventh inning. The two things are related, of course ...

2) One and done

Jess Todd's first inning of relief was quite good: he did walk the leadoff hitter, but did so on a full count. He threw four strikes (one two-strike offering fouled off) in striking out Mike Young swinging on five pitches. No one hit a ball out of the infield: the only fair ball was a bunt.

Of course, he got charged with a run because he faced one right-handed hitter in the 8th, and Marlon Byrd hit a single and subsequently scored when lesser relievers came in. I'm not arguing that it was foolish for Todd to go back out: heck, I WANTED him to go back out. I'm just saying that if you want to evaluate Todd in terms of what he's likely to give you in the future, you'd be better off looking at the job he did in the 7th rather than looking at the box score line.

3) Mercy out

Raffy Perez retired a batter because the batter begged to be out.

I don't think there's another reason for it.

4) Mirror image

Jess Todd's box score line makes him look ineffective because it shows his inherited run (that is, another pitcher let his baserunner score) and tends to focus your eye on the short end instead of the longer (and much more effective) beginning.

Jensen Lewis' box score line makes him look effective because it doesn't show the runs he allowed to score and tends to focus your eye on the three batters he struck out toward the end of his appearance well after the game was effectively over.

Look: it's great that Lewis has strikeout stuff. That's a good skill for a reliever to have, and the fact is that he faced six hitters and struck out 3 of them, two of them swinging. And he threw strikes: 17 in 23 pitches. That's great.

But unless Jensen Lewis is purely an inning-starting reliever, that's not a hugely successful outing.

5) Batting Order Musings

Forget what you know about the individual Cleveland players for a moment. Ignore the fact that this player is fast or that player is hot. For example, from a logical standpoint, it's probably not the most accurate way to evaluate Luis Valbuena's likely August batting skill by looking at his yearlong numbers lf .236 AVG and .297 OBP: we've talked about how he's been a much better hitter recently, and for a young inexperienced player it isn't unreasonable to attribute at least some better performance to simple development and improvement.

For this exercise, forget all that. Just look at the numbers for a minute. Consider this lineup, in terms of AVG/OBP:

Sizemore .238/.330
Cabrera .310/.361
Choo .295/.404
Peralta .271/.337
Hafner .278/.364
Valbuena .236/.297
Crowe .216/.281
Toregas .214/.200
Marte .200/.314

So here's what I thought when I saw this:

a) My God, Luis Valbuena is hitting .236 with a sub-.300 OBP and bats SIXTH!
b) My God, Luis Valbuena is hitting .236 with a sub-.300 OBP and SHOULD be batting sixth!

I mean, think about it. You kind of want Marte's slight OBP advantage in the 9 hole not simply because he's hitting .200 and that's plainly putrid, but because he might actually have a better chance to get on base for the top of the order to drive him in. Crowe and Toregas are fetid. And that means that Luis Valbuena, bless his heart, is your #6 hitter.

c) In a vacuum, you'd flip Cabrera and Sizemore and have Sizemore bunt a lot.

6) On the other hand

Grady Sizemore went 3-for-4, collecting half the Tribe's hits and has four multi-hit games in August, hitting .302 over that span, so I kind of don't know what I'm talking about. (But only kinda.)

7) There is no other other hand

Travis Hafner collected a pair of hits, including a double down the line that was hit so hard that it got past first baseman Hank Blalock, who was playing NINE INCHES OFF THE LINE. Seriously. There was no way to sneak that ball past Blalock, and yet, there it went.

The entire rest of the team collected one hit.

8) Schadenfreude in reverse

As the Tigers continued to lose, I was anticipating the White Sox blowing a winnable game by getting shut out by some thing named Doug Fister, which is a very unfortunate name, and this is coming from someone named "Buffum." Still, with Fister shutting down the Sox on 1 hit over 6 innings, their Super Gork Closer (closer, having a super year, which makes no actual sense) David Aardsma. Who promptly gave up a three-run jack to Alexei Ramirez to lose the game. Doh!

Today the Mariners got their revenge by beating the White Sox 1-0 in FOURTEEN INNINGS, meaning that over the past 23 innings in Safeco, Seattle scored a total of 2 runs ... and split the two games. (Chicago managed 50% more runs with THREE.) Safeco Fever! Catch it! And some Zs!