Stop me if you've heard this one before: Jeremy Sowers started the game with three perfect innings, retiring the side in order the first pass through, then gave up a hit in the 4th but faced the minimum thanks to a double play. Then, in the 5th, he turned into a newt ... Difference last night though? Jeremy was bailed out. A three run blast by the Artist Formerly Known as Pronk. A three run blast by the red hot Luis Valbuena to give the Indians the lead. And three insurance runs in the 9th. Buff tells about the win in today's B-List.

FINAL

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

R

H

E

Indians (55-69)

0

0

0

3

0

1

0

3

3

10

14

0

Royals (47-77)

0

0

0

0

4

0

1

1

0

6

9

0

W: Sowers (5-9) L: Soria (3-2)

We complain about the handling of certain players, but has any starting pitcher been handled more poorly than Gill Meche this season?

1) It's Sowerrific!

Stop me if you've heard this one before: Jeremy Sowers started the game with three perfect innings, retiring the side in order the first pass through, then gave up a hit in the 4th but faced the minimum thanks to a double play.

However, in the 5th, he turned into a newt, and, unable to get on top of his fastball thanks to his three-inch height, gave up 4 runs in the 5th and generally looked like ... well ... a newt.

Of course you TRIED to stop me, but the advantage of the Internet Columnist is that he doesn't actually have to heed to calls to stop and can plow right through such objections: this is simply Jeremy Sowers, and woe to all who believes he will undergo substantive change just because it would be handy for him to do so.

Except ...

What kind of manager would you be? Would you be a bullpen matchup *artiste* like Tony LaRussa, bringing in the groundball righty to face the slow right-hander, then replace him with the flyball lefty on prime-numbered days and the old finesse lefty on days with a "U" in them? Would you head-slap your closer like Tony Pena, or yank your pitcher because he refused to hit a batter like Ozzie Guillen?

Would you stick with Wile E. Taveras as leadoff?

Inspirationally dye your hair black?

Sell your lips on eBay?

Personally, I would be a terrible manager because I lean far too heavily on small-sample recent performance and would end up fielding a team of six shortstops, two catchers, and a guy from A ball.

My head is a lot smarter than my mouth, and I would cause irreparable damage to a team managing by whim, pants seats, and some of the worst statistical evidence in the Western World.

For quite a while, I maintained that Aaron Laffey fundamentally did not have the "stuff" to go three times through a lineup, and he has proven me wrong. I clearly stated that Luis Valbuena was completely overmatched by major-league pitching, and he is now arguably our best hitter.

And I have railed for years that Jeremy Sowers has a maddening propensity for falling apart and lacked some thing, mental, physical, or otherwise, to be able to regroup and plow through the game.

In four of his last six starts, Jeremy Sowers has pitched in the 7th inning; in three of those, he

completed it. And after the atrocious 5th inning, Sowers followed with a perfect 6th (three groundball outs) and a 7th that featured a manufactured run and a swinging K.

For better or for worse, one thing I give Eric Wedge credit for is to put certain players in a position in which they can develop. Sure, it is maddening that he makes decisions on other players that seem to exactly NOT do this, but I think it's only fair to recognize that there are players for whom Eric Wedge is BETTER than the Mythical Average Manager.

In a lost season, there is little reason NOT to send Jeremy Sowers out there every fifth day: the team will be better if Jeremy Sowers becomes a reliable mid-rotation starter (I truly believe his ceiling is limited, although I think I've established that my opinion is little more than a discussion starting point), and if he fails to do this, the impact will be virtually nil in 2009.

Whereas the 4-inning tag-team starter combo idea might have had conceptual aesthetic merit, it doesn't do much for the more-practical goal of building a solid 2010 rotation.

Developing Jeremy Sowers does.

Sure, the 5th inning was frustrating. How a pitcher can give up two RBI plate appearances to Yoon Betancourt almost defies belief. And the 7th inning was hardly *dominating*: he gave up a run on two hits (sandwiched around a bunt).

Jeremy Sowers is still fundamentally not even a league-average pitcher.

His 42:41 K:BB ratio is übercrummy, and 42 Ks in 96 2/3 innings is lousy.

His near-5.00 ERA is earned, not hit-unlucky.

And yet, four of his last six starts (since being recalled July 25th) have been Quality Starts, he's averaged 6.5 innings per start, is 3-2 in that span, and has lowered his ERA by nearly a run (3.69 ERA over that run, even after last night's 5 R in 7 IP).

I certainly can't look you in the virtual eye and tell you that Jeremy Sowers will be a good pitcher in 2010, or even that he will be one of the five best starters we have available, but I will tell you

that the way he's being handled appears to be optimizing his CHANCES that he will be one of these things and that he appears to be responding in such a way as to suggest that those chances are getting better than they were.

2) This having been said

Viscerally, I still don't actually ENJOY watching Jeremy Sowers PITCH.

3) Epiphany

Jess Todd is Ferd Carbrera.

4) Giantslayer

Joakim Soria is one of the very best closers in the majors, coming into the game with a 2.33 ERA and 20 saves. His WHIP hovers around 1.00, and he strikes out well over a batter an inning (48 in 39 1/3 innings to date). Joe Nathan might be the best closer in the A.L. Central, but Soria has to at least be considered.

(Kerry Wood does not.)

After much cajoling, Trey Hillman has finally recognized that the converted starter Soria is capable of more than a 3-out save, and has several two-inning saves this season. Thus it was no real surprise (and no real plasure) to see Soria called out to start the 8th inning, as KC had just put up the go-ahead run off Sowers to take a 5-4 lead.

It was impressive to see Jhonny Peralta line a one-out single to center, as Soria holds right-handed hitters to a .194 AVG.

It was impressive to see Travis Hafner beat out an infield single, as he is Travis Hafner.

But if you had told me before the season, or even as recently as June, that we would win a game largely because Luis Valbuena hit a three-run homer off Joakim Soria (who holds left-handed hitters to a .274 SLG and a .514 OPS), I would probably have treated the statement as absurd.

5) By the way

Jhonny Peralta is now hitting .280 on the season. Since the All-Star Break, he is hitting .329/.365/.493 with 15 XBH out of 46 and 29 RBI in 140 AB.

6) Blue Moon Special

Andy Marte got an extra-base hit!

7) Pronk smash!

It is hard to know exactly what to make of Travis Hafner this season: his overall numbers are quite good, at .282/.358/.500. This isn't exactly "PRONK!" territory, but it's at least credible for a DH to post these numbers.

Hafner started in April with a nice initial stretch, including 4 homers in 63 AB and a .270/.370/.540 line that lifted him over the .900 OPS line you'd like from a mid-order producer. And after some DL time, his June was spectacular, albeit brief, with a 1.082 OPS in only 44 AB.

Since then, it's been worth wondering whether Hafner was wearing down: his .275/.363/.435 June was almost like high-end Ben Fungusco, and his .278/.297/.431 August is more Vintage Yoon Betancourt (circa 2007). That's crumtacular.

So although you certainly don't want to draw a lot of big, pronouncement-laden conclusions from five games, it's nice to see Hafner on a bit of a hit streak that includes some longballs: with two in his past three games (and not cheap homers, either, but real blasts), Hafner has gone 9-for-22 over his past five games with a full 5 of these hits for extra bases and 7 RBI (also 6 R scored). It's not so much the fact that he's 9-for-22: it's the long hits that encourage me. I'm not sure how to approach Hafner's off-season, but I see enough to think that he'll be a starting-calibre player in 2010, if perhaps a 130-game version of one.

8) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Jamey Wright and His Astounding Ears came out to relieve Soria, and did an admirable job getting out of the 8th without further damage. However, after yielding a leadoff single to Andy Marte, and with left-hander John Bale warming up, Wright was left out to face Grady Sizemore.

Grady Sizemore hits .213/.306/.394 off left-handers, .260/.354/.462 off right-handers.

Wright faced Sizemore, who walked on four pitches.

THEN Bale was brought in to face the switch-hitting Asdrubal Cabrera, who has no real platoon split (he slugs better against righties, but his AVG and OBP are virtually identical). Cabrera punished Bale with a two-run double.

I mean ... why not have Bale face Sizemore?

I kind of liked the "bunt on the first pitch, swing away on the second" switcheroo Cabrera pulled on Bale, though.

9) Curmudgeon Corner

Kerry Wood threw 13 of his 26 pitches for strikes, walking one hitter and giving up a hit to Yoon Betancourt, which is really just about impossible. He finished the game.

My course is clear.

10) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Eric Wedge was late getting to Kansas City for the road trip because he made a quick stop in Williamsport, Pa. There, he used his computer hacking and electrical engineering skills to hack into the pitch counter display units at the Little League World Series, having them "miss" one pitch out of every five in a sinister effort to injure every starting pitcher by undercounting their pitch counts and giving the managers a false sense of security as to how deep into the games the starters could go. There is also a record of Wedge having invested heavily in the James Andews/Eric Wedge Youth Ligament Replacement Clinic.

None of this is even conceivably true.

Do not let Kerry Wood finish games to vest his third-year option.