Well, that wasn't exactly what we had in mind for the MLB debut of heralded young right hander Carlos Carrasco, one of the centerpieces of the Cliff Lee deal. However, in today's B-List, Buff takes some time to put Carrasco's debut in historical perspective. He also takes a look at the much more promising debut of another young Indian, fleet outfielder Michael Brantley ... and talks about just how good defensively an outfield of Brantley, Sizemore, and Choo could potentially be next season.

FINAL

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Indians (58-73)

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W: E. Jackson (11-6) L: Carrasco (0-1) S: Rodney (30)

Ah, September.

1) Historical Perspective

There have been many pitchers who had a poor major-league debut. Super Draft Ace Greg Swindell made a rather unfortunate first start in August 1986 in which he gave up 6 runs in 3 2/3 innings, walking three hitters and striking out exactly no one. (The team did not exactly pick Swindell up, as they went on to lose 24-5 to the Red Sox.)

Charles Nagy's debut featured two more outs, but he still yielded 4 runs on 7 hits, 4 walks, and only 1 K.

Two weeks after that, Nagy was still in the "feeling out" process, where he was trying to find his buttocks with both hands, giving up 6 runs in 1 1/3 innings to Seattle, which in 1990 was still a pretty bad team.

So it obviously is premature to declare the Carlos Carrasco Experiment to be a Compleat Failure and to declare him a Mook Extraordinaire after one unfortunate outing. Carrasco has talent and stuff, and seemed to be plagued by nerves as much as anything else.

In terms of meaningful baseball analysis, I will say that he seemed to elevate and/or overthrow a goodly number of pitches, at least partially evidenced by the fact that he got nary a single ground ball out: of the nine outs Carrasco recorded, 4 came in the air, two on the basepaths (one when Curtis Granderson tried to stretch a double into a triple, and a second on a lineout that doubled Granderson off first, making this one of the worst baserunning games of Mr. Granderson's young career), and three via the whiff.

The three Ks are encouraging, in that they suggest Carrasco has major-league stuff, but they don't entirely mitigate the rest of the outing.

What kind of mitigation is necessary? Consider this: the first six Tigers reached base. Six of the first eight hitters got base hits (one walked), and of those six hits,
four
were for extra bases.

Carrasco gave up three hits on
three consecutive pitches
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Of the 9 hits he allowed overall, 5 were for extra bases.

He gave up 3 home runs in 3 innings of work.

His WHIP stands at a round yet angular 4.00.

His ERA is 18.00.

And his team actually played good defense behind him, recording the two aforementioned baserunner outs on his behalf.

In this spirit, then, I am reminded of the debut of another Cleveland pitcher of yore, one Eddie Kolb, who finished his career with a 10.80 ERA that is lower than Carrasco's.

One finds oneself wondering idly if the rest of the 2009 Cleveland Indians enjoyed their cigars.

2) Welcome to the bigs!

The second Indian to make his major-league debut last night fared a bit better than Carrasco: Michael Brantley was called up from Columbus to play left field and rapped out a pair of singles in four trips to the plate. In the great equalizer that is baseball, one of his singles was feebly struck for a infield hit, but a ball he smoked to right was lined straight to the right fielder for an out.

Brantley's calling cards are speed and patience: he is one of the few minor-league players to have a career walk total (258) significantly greater than his career strikeout total (190). He has been an on-base machine at each stop in the minors, and could be considered a prototypical leadoff man if this trend carries into the majors.

His power is virtually absent, but his frame suggests that he could develop at least a semblance thereof, maybe a 10-15 HR 40-double sort of power that can play, at least in center.

Brantley played left field, and I can't pretend to give you great insight as to whether he was good, bad, or indifferent there last night. I will say that the speed he flashed in scoring from first on a Grady Sizemore double (and in beating out the infield hit) suggests that he can cover a lot of ground.

3) Looking ahead

In fact, this suggests an interesting jumping-off point: the Seattle Mariners have made some serious hay from playing exceptional defense, especially in the outfield where ex-Tribesman Franklin Gutierrez is an excellent fielder and is flanked by Ichiro Suzuki, who is good enough defensively to play a good center field but plays right because Gutierrez is even better. Tampa got some mileage from this approach last season, and in 2005, much was made of the "three center fielder" approach taken by the Chicago White Sox in their Champeenship season.

Now, while Shin-Soo Choo is capable of playing center field, I am not sure anyone is going to argue for him as an exceptional defensive outfielder. Without some way to separate out the chicken DNA that he apparently still harbors, or to pursue corrective lenses to give him a semblance of depth perception, he will always be a bit of an adventurous outfielder, albeit with an exceptional throwing arm. Brantley and Sizemore do not appear to have this asset: Brantley's is unremarkable and Sizemore's is actually below-average (not to mention injured).

But each of the three men has at least above-average speed, and the amount of ground they could cover, especially behind guys like David Huff, Jeremy Sowers, and Carlos Carrasco, would be a real boon for the pitching staff.

This assumes that Matt LaPorta will move back to first base in 2010: LaPorta is not a putrid outfielder, but he is not very mobile and would not be considered a "plus" defensive outfielder under any foreseeable circumstances. And, of course, it assumes that Brantley is actually ready to play in the majors, which is far from a given seeing that this is his debut in September, he's still very young, and has battled injury concerns this season.

The more interesting question becomes whether, in a clinical, sterile world without human emotions, it might be advantageous to put Brantley in center and move SIZEMORE to left. Size more's arm is subpar, and left-handers have played left field before (notably Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson).

I don't know if Brantley covers more ground than Sizemore, and it certainly wouldn't be a BAD thing to simply slot Brantley into left and leave the All-Star alone.

But it doesn't mean that the thought didn't occur to me.

Note that I do not consider Trevor Crowe in this conversation. This might be a mistake ... but I'm pretty confident that it's not.

Crowe would be a fine-enough 4th outfielder, especially given his switch-hitting and ability to play center.

But I've seen little to make me believe he can actually HIT on a regular basis.

4) Everybody hits!

Perhaps because the Tribe fell behind 8-1 and ended up losing by 3, the offense didn't FEEL like it did much last night. However, every Indians' starter got a hit, with only pinch-hitter Jamey Carroll going hitless in one trip to the plate. In addition, 6 different players had an extra-base hit, and Asdrubal Cabrera joined Brantley in getting a second hit.

The Indians drew a pair of walks, hit 3-for-11 with runners in scoring position (one hit by Brantley did not score Shoppach from second, but both scored on Sizemore's followup double, so no harm there), and only left 6 men on base. In a sense, these are thoroughly average numbers, and in fact, 5 is a thoroughly average number of runs to score.

In a very real way, if this lineup were shuttled to next year's team, with Travis Hafner slotted in for either Jhonny Peralta or Andy Marte (perhaps with Choo in right and LaPorta at first), this lineup would score some runs. The only real offensive sinkhole in the lineup is Shoppach and his .206 AVG, although he does get on base at a .336 clip, which isn't sad.

The only truly slow runner would be Shoppach, although none of Hafner, Peralta/Marte, nor LaPorta would be what you'd consider "fast."

Still, that's five above-average speed players and 8 legitimate major-league hitters, although neither Peralta nor Marte can be considered really adequate for a corner infielder at this point.

That's not bad.

5) Things you hope to see on a limited basis

Tomo Ohka threw four mediocre innings in relief of Carrasco.

Jen Lewis threw a perfect inning after the Tigers got bored.

Neither event is something I look forward to seeing in 2010.

6) Handy Andy

Andy Marte leapt ahead of Jhonny Peralta in the OPS race by smacking his 4th homer of the season off Zach Miner in the 6th inning.

Marte still has a lower AVG and a lower OBP, but his slugging percentage of .464 marks him as even with the departed Victor Martinez, and is in line with those of Matt LaPorta (.472), Shin-Soo Choo (.475), and is higher than that of Grady Sizemore or Asdrubal Cabrera.

In fact, his OPS of .794 ranks 4th amongst players who are still on the team and have more than 20 AB (sorry, Michael Bratley: I do not consider your 1.000 OPS to be the "team leader" yet).

Now, look: if your OBP is less than that of Jhonny Peralta, you cannot be considered a good hitter yet. And slugging .464 in 90-some plate appearances because you went on a one-week homer binge signifies very little indeed. But the man hit a homer, and good for him.

7) By the way

Jhonny Peralta has the second-most total bases on the team, behind Choo. Yes, he is tied with Cabrera and one ahead of Sizemore, but second-most is second-most.

8) Nice hose!

The first hitter of the game for the Tigers was the nominally-speedy Curtis Granderson, who smacked a double to right. Matt LaPorta's fine throw contributed to his being out at third.

Of all the skills Matt LaPorta needs to be a successful major-leaguer, a strong throwing arm is probably near dead last. I assume the plan is for him to play 1B, although some time in LF wouldn't be surprising. But it's better to have it than to lack it, so huzzah!

9) Dept. of Fair Play

Shoppach may be described above in negative terms, but the man was 1-for-2 with a walk and a run scored. He hit his 11th double of the season: with 10 HR, nearly half his 47 hits are for extra-bases. (Not surprisingly, Shoppach does not have a triple this season.)

In the Dept. of Irony, Jamey Carroll pinch-hit for Shoppach and struck out. I mean, that's just about perfect, right?