Two-hit by Kyle Davies. To lose a series to the Royals for the first time since 2003, and fall to 61-81 on the season. If there was ever a fitting capper for this weekend in the world of Cleveland sports, that was it. In the Monday edition of The B-List, Buff fawns over Zack Greinke, he hits on third base coach Joel "The Windmill" Skinner, handicaps the battle between the slew of catchers on the Indians roster, and talks about the strong outings from Justin Masterson and David Huff ... and the improved effort Sunday from Carlos Carrasco.

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W: Davies (8-9) L: Carrasco (0-2)

The Royals took a series from us for the first time since 2003. Think about that. Then think about this: we lead them by 4 ½ games.

1) Truth and Beauty Dept.

I fawned over Zack Greinke last time he pitched against the Tribe, so it's natural that I would do so again, given that he pitched *even better* this time. And the Royals, being the Royals, rewarded Greinke with the run support normally associated with the 1987 Houston Astros for Nolan Ryan (2.76 ERA, 8-16 record).

Consider the first inning: 8 strikes in 10 pitches, and a swinging K in a perfect inning. In the second, he gave up a single ... and promptly struck out the next two hitters swinging.

He didn't allow another baserunner until the fifth, and wiped him out on a double play.

The only mistake he made was a pitch that Shin-Soo Choo smashed off the wall in left for a "tripe," which means it really should have been a double had David DeJesus not badly misplayed the ball.

Choo scored when Travis Hafner's sinking liner bounced off a diving DeJesus' glove for an

"RBI single."

He then simply overpowered Luis Valbuena on three pitches (foul, foul, swing-n-miss).

Consider this:

Pitcher A: 31 starts, 223 1/3 IP, 214 H, 63 ER, 12 HR, 34 BB, 170 K, 2.54 ERA
Pitcher B: 29 starts, 205 1/3 IP, 177 H, 50 ER, 11 HR, 42 BB, 216 K, 2.19 ERA

Cliff Lee won the Cy Young last year: not only did he have the fine numbers above as "Pitcher A," but he sported a gaudy 22-3 record. Poor Zack is mired at 13-8 because his team is so mean to him, but his numbers are better in almost every way (Lee's control was exceptional, but Greinke's BB/9 isn't really that much higher, and his K/9 is higher enough to make Greinke's K:BB ratio of 5.14 better than Lee's 5-flat).

Now, of course, you don't compare this year's candidates to last year's winner. Other people have made the point well enough that Greinke is obviously having the best pitching season this year, which is what the Cy Young is supposed to be recognizing.

I just wanted to point out that as much as we were all collectively impressed by Lee last year, Greinke's 2009 performance is worthy of notice.

2) Perception, reality, and selection bias

It can be hard to properly evaluate left field defense. Generally speaking, the center fielder flashes all the range, and the right fielder flashes all the arm.

Left field is usually where you put the goofusi who aren't capable of playing defense, and you already have a cigar store Indian playing first.

There are plenty of exceptions: the Minnesota and Seattle outfields often sport superior defenders in left.

Barry Bonds was an exceptional defender in his twenties, and Rickey Henderson was a good fielder.

And David DeJesus is no Manny Ramirez, Adam Dunn, or Ryan Garko out in left field.

Still, the demands of the job make it hard for the lay fan to conclude that a player has special skill: the range demands and arm demands are simply lesser in left field than they are elsewhere, and there aren't a lot of opportunities to flash a lot of leather.

So it's noteworthy when a left fielder gets not one, but TWO opportunities to show some degree of skill, and David DeJesus was certainly the Man of the Match, non-Greinke Division on Friday night, gunning down not one but TWO game-winning runners trying to score from second base on singles to left. Both baserunners were fast guys, too: Asdrubal Cabrera lacks top-notch speed, but he's got some wheels, while Mike Brantley really IS fast. I mean, that's good stuff.

Except ...

You can correct me if I'm wrong, but when I watch the replay of Cabrera getting pegged out, I am thinking two things:

a) Cabrera hasn't even touched third base when DeJesus gets to the ball
b) DeJesus' throw isn't actually a good throw, but Cabrera is so far from the plate that it doesn't matter

The second throw was better and Brantley seemed to have a better shot, but ... it wasn't exactly a GOOD shot. He still had barely rounded the bag, and Miguel Olivo's block of the plate seemed like a bigger factor than the quality of DeJesus' throw.

Add to the fact that the run in the 7th scored almost precisely because DeJesus allowed the ball's carom off the wall to skip away from him on Choo's tripe and I am left with the impression that David DeJesus was, in essence, a neutral left fielder on Friday night.

3) Principle Skinner

(Yes, I intentionally used that form of the homophone.)

Let's review these situations from the perspective of the erstwhile third-base coach. It is the bottom of the 9th, and Cabrera is reasonably fast.

There is only one out, but the next hitter is Travis Hafner, who is not very fast and is a threat to ground into a double play.

On the other hand, Hafner has only grounded into 7 double plays this season and has a career-low 0.57 GB:FB ratio.

He has a .356 OBP this season, and is twice as likely to lift the ball in the air (often translating into a run-scoring opportunity, as long as the ball reaches the outfield) as he is to lay it on the ground.

Yes, he has 61 Ks in 320-odd plate appearances (and, in fact and hindsight, did strike out after Cabrera was thrown out), but here are the facts: the single was in front of DeJesus, who was not playing exceptionally deep on the play, and ASDRUBAL CABRERA HAD NOT EVEN REACHED THIRD BASE WHEN DEJESUS GOT TO THE BALL.

I understand the need to take advantage of opportunities and Cabrera's speed and Hafner's shortcomings, but I think that was simply a very poor decision on Joel Skinner's part.

In the 11th ... well, y'know, DeJesus' throw in the 9th wasn't very good and Brantley really is fast.

In all likelihood, I would have sent him there, too, especially with two outs.

I have no problem with that decision.

That is, whether I totally agree with it with benefit of replay or not is largely irrelevant: in a bang-bang play, Skinner had probably reviewed the scenarioes in his head before the hit and had decided that unless something egregious happened (the ball was hit exceptionally hard, or Brantley fell down, or something else truly unexpected), he would send Brantley on a single to the outfield.

It was defensible with the information at his disposal, and DeJesus did make a nice-enough

play.

I just found it ironic that the third-base coach best-known for HOLDING a runner sent two to their dooms Friday night, largely on the principle that "in a tie game in the bottom of the 9th or later, you have to send the guy."

4) Relegated once again

Part of the reason that Greinke was denied his 14th win of the season was the ineptitude of the Kansas City offense, but at least part of THAT was because Justin Masterson pitched very, very well. Sure, the Royals aren't a good offensive team (four starters in the lineup sported OBPs under .315, and two of them were replaced by hitters with OBPs of .316 and .282), but Masterson's six innings of work featured 4 hits (3 singles), 4 walks, 4 Ks, and only 1 run.

Masterson did walk four hitters, but his command of the strike zone was improved, with 60 strikes in 103 pitches and 17 of 24 hitters seeing a first-pitch strike.

Masterson chipped in 10 swings-and-misses and a 9:4 GO:FO ratio: both of these factors will contribute to making him a valuable starter if he can replicate them. His platoon splits are still horrifying, and three of the four hits he allowed (including the double) were to left-handed hitters, so Masterson is hardly a finished product.

But he pitched a good game.

5) In other good pitching news

David Huff won his tenth game of the season Saturday, wresting the team lead from the departed Carl Pavano and setting him up as the prohibitive favorite to end the year in that position. (Aaron Laffey has 7 wins but was shelled last time out; Jeremy Sowers has 6 but remains Jeremy Sowers.)

In some ways, Huff pitched better than Masterson, striking out 6 and walking only 1 in his 6 complete frames. However, he gave up 3 runs on 7 hits, including a pair of doubles, one by Willie Bloomquist, who slugs .352.

Huff's September has been one to remember, including his lowest ERA (2.77), his first H/9 under 1.00, and his lowest opposing "slash stats" (.191/.269/.255). Of course, this is in two games.

You have to look at SOMETHING as a source of hope, right?

I still think Huff is Doug Davis. This has its uses. It also has its limitations. As long as Huff isn't asked to be more than a back-end starter for the foreseeable future, well ... last time I checked, teams still needed those guys, too.

6) Silver Lining Dept.

Carlos Carrasco had another outing that finished with terrible overall numbers, but I finally saw something that makes him look like a professional pitcher on Sunday. Of course, he got no help from his offense, but put aside his ending numbers for a moment and consider the process.

In the first three innings, Carrasco recorded six groundouts (including three in the third), picked a runner off base after a single, got a flyout, and struck out Billy Bubba (KC's OBP leader) swinging. Yes, he gave up a solo shot to John Buck, but somehow, EVERY Cleveland pitcher gives up a tater to John Buck for some reason. I have no idea how to explain it, but my impression is that John Buck hits .005 against every team but Cleveland and about .900/.950/3.450 against the Indians.

I hate when John Buck plays the Tribe.

And even in the two-run 4th inning, much of which was Carrasco's own fault, one run scored on a groundout and another came via an error, advancing groundout, and single.

Now, Carrasco's last three innings were not nearly as good as his first three, and he did give up four extra-base hits out of seven. There isn't a measure that can be constructed to make Carlos Carrasco look like a good major-league pitcher, and I would be surprised if he is in the Opening Day rotation in 2010. But the man is 22 and has shown me that he is capable of getting major-league hitters out.

Just not consistently, and not often enough.

But there is talent there.

This having been said, opponents are hitting .403/.464/.823 against Carrasco. I mean, that really, really sucks rocks.

14 of the 25 hits he's allowed are for extra bases.

That's really fecal.

Booooo.

7) Hammerin' 'Honny

After being robbed of two RBI singles Friday (the Indians went 3-for-5 with runners in scoring position: Hafner's RBI single, and Peralta's TWO non-RBI singles), Jhonny Peralta rebounded with a nice game on Saturday in which he banged out a two-run double in the 4th and a bases-loaded two-run single in the 6th.

Despite having only 11 homers this season (after 21 and 23 in the past two seasons), his 77 RBI already surpass his 2007 total and are within sight of his career-high of 89 set last year.

In a lost season like this, I might be inclined to give Peralta some games off down the stretch, but in reality, he needs the reps at 3B if he is going to go into next season as the starter there. Given the epic fail collapse of Andy Marte (.132/.195/.316 in Sept.), I have to think that's the default plan.

Since being moved to third on a regular basis, Peralta has hit .289/.349/.438 as a third baseman, nearly an .800 OPS.

Although you'd like a bit more power there, those numbers would be acceptible, and comparable to what Mark DeRosa did in Cleveland (.270/.342/.457) and what Casey Blake is doing in L.A. (.278/.360/.466).

Anyway, I plan on seeing a lot more Peralta at third down the stretch, and enjoying it a fair amount.

8) Completely unsubstantiated opinion piece

Lou Marson can hit: just because he cannot hit Zack Greinke et al does not convince me he couldn't play as a high-OBP low-SLG catcher on a regular basis.

Wyatt Toregas could probably be as decent a backup catcher as 5-10 teams have in the majors right now. I don't see that he will ever be a worthy starter, though.

Kelly Shoppach would be awarded more money in arbitration than he'd really be worth. I like Shoppach, and he's got quality power, but he isn't head-and-shoulders above a guy like Marson and will likely not be a Cleveland Indian next season.

Chris Gimenez hurts my eye.

9) Twelve-chambered gun

After six excellent innings by Masterson, Tony Sipp followed with two innings of scoreless ball, yielding two hits but striking out two. He threw 21 strikes in 29 pitches and didn't walk anyone.

Chris Perez followed this with a dominant pair of innings, striking out 3 and walking 1 in two hitless, scoreless innings.

Juan Veras followed with a dominant inning, going swinging K, fly out, fly out to end a perfect 11th.

And then he got to go to the well one more time and lost the game. If Juan Veras is on this team next year, I will weep uncontrollably.

10) Note to Jess Todd

When you are bailed out by 2009 Raffy Perez, you are bad.

11) Speaking of unlikely

Raffy Perez: 2 G, 1 1/3 IP, 0 R, 0 H, 0 BB, 10 strikes in 11 pitches
Jensen Lewis: 1 G, 1 IP, 0 R, 1 H, 2 K, 12 strikes in 16 pitches

12) Speaking of Mike Gosling

Just kidding! No one was speaking of Mike Gosling.

13) Of Note

Mike Brantley collected his first 4-hit game. Sadly, it took all the way to his TENTH major-league game to get it. What a piker. (He also collected his first career oh-fer.

It took until his ninth major-league game ... pitched by Zack Greinke ... which is actually pretty awesome.)

Travis Hafner and Jamey Carroll each had a three-hit game. Cabrera, Choo, and ... TREVOR FREAKING CROWE!!! Wait a minute, that has to be a misprint.

I'm not falling for that.

Nope, it's true. Cabrera, Choo, and Crowe each had two hits Saturday.

Niuman Romero got his first major-league hit. It does not improve the spelling of his first name.

14) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Eric Wedge is a vampire and has drained all life from Chris Gimenez. I have watched "True Blood," and Eric Wedge is nothing like any of those characters, which is not surprising, as the statement has no veracity.

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