Well, we've gotten to the point where the term "stumbling to the finish line" is probably a little too rosy to describe how the Indians are playing as they wade through the final month of the season. With 19 games left, the Tribe need only win two of them to avoid a 100 loss season, but the prospects of a 90 loss season grow greater by the day. Last night, things looked great through seven innings as the Indians led 3-0 behind a gem of a start from Jeremy Sowers. What happened next? Find out in today's B-List ...

FINAL

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Indians (61-82)

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Twins (72-72)

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W: Mahay (2-1) L: C. Perez (0-1) S: Nathan (39)

I know how Rany feels.

**1) All aboard!**

Part of the motivation of this column is to express the emotional response of a fan: fans tend to overreact both ways, swinging wildly past the pendulum rest point because, well, that's how it feels to be a fan. I'm not saying this is the way we ought to behave, or that it's rationally-supportable: on the contrary, it's NOT rational. That's kind of the point. I try to leaven this propensity with more sound, thoughtful analysis, but on the other hand, you could argue that I also try to leaven the sound, thoughtful analysis with emotional responses as well.

I don't think any fan thinks in purely sound and rational ways, even if they intend to.

There are probably fans that react purely on the emotion of the last swing of the bat, but these fans probably gave up reading this column a long time ago.

Based on the barrage of email I do not receive, this likely describes a very, very large segment of the target population.

I have certainly written any number of knee-jerk blanket statements about Jeremy Sowers. I have also written a number of things that may seem knee-jerk but are actually quite rational.

In any event, I have certainly not been a huge supporter of Sowers in the past: after his terrific an unexpected first month debut, Sowers has been a pretty maddening and generally-below-average pitcher.

Consider this, then: Sowers right now sports a 4.49 ERA. He has given up barely more than a hit an inning (115 in 114 1/3 IP) and holds hitters to a .266 AVG.

This is very average stuff.

But let me repeat that: this is very average stuff. Meaning that in 2009, usually thought of as just another disappointing year for Sowers, Sowers has been basically a league-average pitcher.

We've talked about how underrated a term this is: "league-average" might be perjorative if you're talking about signing a free agent to an 8-figure deal, but a league-average starter is by definition better than roughly half of the starters out there. That's a valuable guy, especially if you're paying him under half a mill.

And this avergeness comes with remarkable consistency: after May, which was obviously wretched:

June: 4.45 ERA, 32 H in 32 1/3 IP, 2 HR
July: 4.42 ERA, 20 H in 18 1/3 IP, 2 HR
August: 4.42 ERA, 34 H in 36 2/3 IP, 1 HR

Now consider: in 2 September starts, Sowers has a 1.39 ERA, yielding 12 hits in 13 IP with 0 HR. Since the All-Star Break, Sowers has a 3.18 ERA with 50 H in 56 2/3 IP, holding opponents to 1 .242 batting average. A 3.18 ERA pitcher isn't just good, he's Cliff Lee. A nd his June, July, and August numbers are virtually indistinguishable: 0.03 of a run per 9 IP isn't even statistical noise, it's more like "rounding error."

Here's one nice thing about those numbers: the homers come down each month, and since taterosity was such a big part of Sowers' struggles in the past, this is very encouraging. I doubt this many innings is enough to draw a big, important conclusion like "Sowers has figured it out!" or anything, but good results are by definition preferable to bad results, and results are all we have to go on at this point.

The gigantic blue whales in the room are two numbers I've left off:

June: 32 1/3 IP, 15 BB, 19 K
July: 18 1/3 IP, 5 BB, 8 K
August: 36 2/3 IP, 16 BB, 11 K
Sept.: 13 IP, 2 BB, 3 K

Clearly these numbers are enormous red flags in terms of predicting future success. The walks

are too high (overall: July and Sept. are acceptible).

The strikeouts are too low.

And the ratio of the numbers is much, much too close to 1.00.

Those are all VERY negative factors.

In fact, this is the worst K:BB ratio of his young major-league career, and his GB:FB ratio is a career low as well.

Predicting great future success off THESE numbers is foolhardy, or at least misguided.

But here's the thing: let's say you want Sowers to work on one thing at a time, moving to the next thing when he's accomplished that one. His HR rate is less than HALF of what it was last season. Sure, his K rate was better last year, but if asked which season I prefer, this year's 4.49 ERA kicks major butt on last year's 5.58.

His BABIP is a bit lower at .277 to last year's .303, but this doesn't fully explain a whole run's worth of different.

.277 isn't EXTRAORDINARILY lucky, and hitters are slugging a weak .390 against Sowers this season.

So consider the other most-notable feature of Sowers' pitching, the mid-late-inning collapse. I went so far as to suggest that Sowers' early-inning pitching is not just acceptible, but actually very good, and should be leveraged as an asset.

Sure enough, Sowers held the Twins scoreless through 5 innings, and even squeezed a sixth scoreless inning out by inducing a double play with one out and one on.

And then he went to the well one inning too many, giving up a single and a five-pitch walk, signalling the inevitable beginning of the ....

... seventh scoreless inning.

He struck out Carlos Gomez, induced a weak ground ball to Nick Punto, and got Denard Span to fly out the other way to end the inning. Now, this is admittedly no Murderer's Row: Gomez

and Punto make up more Jaywalker's Corner. But it was Jeremy Sowers.

And it was the 7th inning.

And with none out and runners on base, Sowers retired three straight hitters and ended his night with 7 scoreless innings.

Minnesota hitters batted 0-for-5 off Sowers with runners in scoring position.

Ultimately, there are a lot of "ifs" when it comes to Jeremy Sowers being an effective major-league starter. The low K rate makes him susceptible to higher ERAs if his BABIP fluctuates upward or if his suppression of homers is a small-sample mirage instead of real improvement. He still walks about twice as many hitters as is sustainable for success. He probably needs a better outfield defense behind him, but he might actually have that next year: replace Fungusco/Garko/LaPorta with Brantley and use Crowe as a legitimate 4th OF instead of Adorable J. Carroll and this could be the first Actually Above-Average Outfield Defense we've seen in Cleveland since ... um ... let me get back to you on that.

But Sowers has been exceptionally consistent this summer, and with either a quick hook or actual development in a third pass through the order, Sowers becomes a net asset in the rotation next season.

**2) On milk, spilled and otherwise**

Chris Perez has been very good, so I'm inclined to chalk this up as The Worst Performance Ever Since His Very First Cleveland Performance, But Probably Ever Anyway and move on.

Note that I thought that at least one, if not two, of the pitches that Tony Sipp threw to Joe Mauer were strikes, and this bled into Perez' pitching. Perez simply doesn't have the command to overcome getting squeezed: shoot, he has 23 walks in 49 2/3 innings, so he isn't exactly Super Accuracy Johnson in the first place.

This is not to excuse a two-bomb, 4-run, game-losing outing. That was obviously terrible. I just think that this is a lot more "everyone has a bad game now and again" than

"Chris Perez sucks."

Chris Perez doesn't suck.

Let's separate out the single performance from the overall skill level here.

(And by that, I mean, "Please, Chris Perez, leave that single performance far removed from your skill level, because I am in no hurry for a repeat of THAT.")

**3) Bombs Away!**

Kudos to Trevor Crowe, who gave Cleveland a quick 2-0 lead in the third inning with his first career major-league home run. Well done, sir.

**4) In French, "Chat chapeau"**

Special mention goes to Luis Valbuena for the Tinfoil Hat: striking out against Joe Nathan is one thing, but striking out TWICE to CARL PAVANO ... well, that's just humiliating.

**5) I thought you guys were fast**

Because of the handy Fundamental Attribution Error , I can express supreme discouragement that Trevor Crowe was gunned down going from first to third on a single to right and that Mike Brantley was caught stealing ... AGAIN ... without having to give any real credit to Denard Span or Joe Mauer.

Run better!

**6) Sweet ‘n' Sour Lou**

Going 1-for-2 is sweet.

Drawing a pair of walks, including one right before Crowe's blast, is extra sweet. Lou Marson now sports a low-sample OBP of .385, despite an average of only .200.

Getting on base is the most important single skill for a hitter, and Marson is thus far holding his own at the major-league level.

Yielding a passed ball with a runner on third base ... well ... that's pretty much the opposite of "sweet." Catch better!

**7) Smash-Soo Choo!**

Shin-Soo Choo hit his 16th homer of the season. Although his slugging is down from last season's .549, Choo's SLG of .479 is still acceptible for a corner OF and is at least partially due to the fact that he is facing more left-handed pitching this season.

Choo's SLG of .447 against lefties is kind of Fungusco-esque, but it's roughly what Grady Sizemore posted as a three-year average from 2006-2008 (i.e., pre-elbow, .449) against lefties, so it's not like he's a schmoe.

And Choo gets on base at a .369 clip against lefties, so he's still an .800-plus OPS player against them, nothing like a platoon player.

It's a nice followup to last year's breakout for Choo.