Buff has the fever. And the only cure is less Scott Baker. Including last night's win, in five starts against the Indians this year, the Twins starter is now 4-0 with a 1.57 ERA ... and the Tribe has hit just .158 off him in 34 1/3 innings. We had the lead last night too, 3-2 through four innings, before The Artist Formerly Known as Fausto once again reared his ugly head. Buff tells us all about the Tribe's 12th loss in their last 15 games in today's edition of The B-List.

FINAL

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Twins (73-72)

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W: Rauch (3-1) L: Carmona (3-11) S: Nathan (40)

Y'know, not many teams can lose to Ron Mahay and Jon Rauch back-to-back.

1) The blind men and the Fausto

How big a sample do you need to draw a conclusion?

I'm not asking this to be snide, as in "How many times do I have to watch Fausto Carmona pitch excrementally?!" I'm not really asking this to be profound or thoughtful, as in "100 plate appearances or 50 innings pitched cannot be considered statistically significant." I'm more musing, free-form, about when it's okay to look at a chunk of a performance and use that chunk to say something interesting about the future.

I'm not 100% certain I have a point here, but I am 100% certain I have a deadline, so bear with me and we'll see if this goes anywhere, almost incidentally. Fausto Carmona started the game in about the worst possible fashion, starting two of the first three hitters with a ball and giving up a single to each hitter. The singles were solid and produced one run.

This was reminiscent of his last start, in which he gave up 5 runs on 6 hits, including two bombs, and recorded only two outs total.

In the game before that, he gave up a run in the bottom of the first against Detroit.

After five pretty good starts after being returned to the majors at the end of July (4 of them Quality Starts), Carmona has had three poor starts and one decent one (a Quality Start against Detroit, but 5 walks in 6 1/3 IP suggests he got kind of lucky to get that), and at least part of the problem is stumbling straight out of the gate.

So you could look at the first three hitters as part of a continuing trend, one that needs to be addressed post f*@&ing haste if Carmona is going to return the ranks of effective starters.

On the other hand, it's only three games in a row ... and three flipping hitters. Am I trying to impose a pattern on data that don't really have one?

After Joe Mauer's RBI single, Carmona then recorded three outs (including a swinging K) and a harmless walk, then got two groundouts and a swinging K in the second (around a Nick Punto double), then erased a third-inning walk on a double play grounder, getting a second swinging

K. Thus for those 11 hitters, Fausto gave up two walks, one poked double, got THREE swinging Ks, and got five outs on four ground balls. If Fausto had started the game with those 11 hitters, you would pretty much have to say that he was pitching very, very well: the two walks are too many walks (still an obvious problem for Carmona), but the GO:FO ratio was 5:1, and he got a swinging strikeout in each inning.

Not only that, but after starting Matt Tolbert out 3-0, he got him to look at two strikes (so no Tolbert bailing him out there) before getting him to ground out, so he didn't lose a hitter he fell behind on there.

If you're asking me what I need to see from Carmona to consider him a valuable rotation member, pretty much all the elements are right there in that three-inning stretch: ground balls, swings and misses, strikeouts, low hit count.

Cut the walks, and that's a terrific start.

Of course, you can find a good three-inning stretch by just about any pitcher in the majors. And the Twins don't hit well, especially with Justin Morneau on the shelf.

This is CLEARLY an insignificant data set in terms of drawing Big Important Conclusions.

But again, if you give me a three-inning stretch and ask, "What do you need to see from this stretch to believe that the pitcher you are watching is capable of excelling at the major-league level," then I would largely rattle off the list of things that Fausto Carmona ... well ... actually DID.

In the 4th inning, Carmona got Delmon Young to look at two strikes (which, given that Delmon Young has 10 walks in over 330 PA, is no small feat) before getting him to ground out.

And then he "Faustoed:" he walked Brian Buscher on four pitches.

Now, a minor digression: I can't STAND four-pitch walks. It is a pet peeve. It is irrational. But I cannot STAND them.

Brian Buscher is not a bad player: he's not really good enough to play every day, but he has excellent plate discipline and a .366 OBP.

But he is slugging .323.

His career slugging percentage is .358.

In nearly 500 career plate appearances, Brian Buscher has 22 extra-base hits of ANY kind.

If you fear Brian Buscher hurting you with one out and the bases empty, you are a Grade Z Moron.

Throw a f&#^ing strike, dammit!

Anyway, Buscher advanced on a groundout and scored on a Punto single, but generally speaking, Carmona got three groundouts and only gave up one hit. This is a perfect "razor's edge" moment, in which if Carmona could simply cut down on his walks, he'd have posted a scoreless frame, making one encouraged if one thought this was something Carmona could reasonably be expected to do.

On the other side of the razor, you say that BECAUSE Carmona WON'T ever be able to cut down on his walks, this is the type of run-scoring inning you have to live with if you are going to depend on Carmona in your rotation.

Carmona walks guys, hence, he gives up runs.

I was an extreme strike-thrower in Little League, so it's hard for me not to think of this as a "just bloody well do it" skill.

Of course, my ball didn't move like Carmona's and it certainly didn't go anywhere near the velocity, so it's an unfair comparison.

I spell well because I'm very pedantic, but to expect my dysgraphic son to spell as well would be pretty misguided.

Your impression of that inning is strongly-colored by whether you think Carmona is even CAPABLE of throwing strikes at a high clip.

I don't know.

Evidence suggests he cannot.

Evidence also suggests he is 25 and probably not a finished product.

I don't know.

The rest of the game ... well, to paraphrase "The Tao of Pooh," is just *is*.

Anyway, I started this with the idea that I would be able to wrap this up neatly, an idea about as well-executed as Fausto's outing. There's the germ of neatness there, and the telltale signs of rambling nonsense as well. Alas. I guess what I'm driving at is, I saw things from Carmona's outing that lead me to think that Carmona is neither "broken" nor "irreparable."

There was good pitching in there.

And I saw things that suggest that as much as Carmona may have worked on things this season, there is more work to be done: walk fewer guys, throw more first-pitch strikes, locate better, hold concentration better.

Those are hardly earthshattering concepts, as they apply to most pitchers, but they seem especially applicable to Carmona.

2) Idle musing without support

Would Fausto Carmona be pitching better this season if Jake Westbrook, a fellow sinkerballer and respected colleague, had been available to counsel him throughout the season? I'm not saying that he and Westbrook haven't talked this season, but there's something to be said for having a guy there on an everyday basis.

I mean, Aaron Laffey throws a sinker, but he's not big, he's not right-handed, and he's even younger than Carmona. Westbrook seems like a more natural mentor-slash-resource to the lay observer (me).

3) Port Smash!

Matt LaPorta hit his 5th home run of the season last night.

With two outs.

Off Joe Nathan.

To the opposite field (actually right-center).

After a slow start to his major-league career, LaPorta now sports at .425 SLG, which is nothing special, but a .179 ISO, which is trending in the right direction. In fact, since being called up in August, his SLG is .489 and his ISO is .217.

Of course, he has had a pretty miserable September, hitting only .184, but even there his power is evident.

12 of his 25 hits since the call-up have been for extra bases.

There's no way to guarantee super Manny-type numbers from LaPorta next season (heck, you can't guarantee even Choo-type numbers at this point), but I will say that LaPorta looks like the most legitimate right-handed power threat we've had for a while.

4) Game Log Follies

One of the blows that made the 6th inning unravel was Delmon Young's leadoff "double to left."

If you simply read this, you think that maybe he pounded the ball to the wall, or maybe slashed one down the line. Instead he hit a chopper to third that took a high hop: Jhonny Peralta leaped and touched the ball with his glove, but it skipped over the top and died in short left.

By the time either Peralta or left fielder Trevor Crowe could get to the ball, Young was nearly at second base already.

Now, this isn't low-quality butchery by Peralta: that's a tough play to read off the Baggydome turf, and Peralta isn't 6-foot-6. It got over him. Que sera and all that. But it sure wasn't anything like a booming double to left.

5) Terror on the Basepaths!

The Indians stole second three times last night: one put Jamey Carroll in scoring position where he scored on Peralta's single, another put Asdrubal Cabrera in position (but Peralta whiffed in the 1st), and the third put Crowe in scoring position to be the tying run for Mike Brantley. That Brantley flew out says more about Joe Nathan than Mike Brantley, but the aggressive baserunning gave the Indians a better chance to win the game.

For a team which has had numerous players thrown out on the basepaths in the past week, the Tribe could certainly have been excused for being gunshy, so I give them credit for pushing the Twins in an effort to win the game.

By the way, Carroll is 35 years old. How many 35-year-olds are legitimate steal threats?

6) Enough already!

Scott Baker had by far his worst outing against the Indians this season. He gave up a run.

Seriously, Baker ended up making 5 starts against Cleveland, and gave up 19 hits and 7 runs (6 earned) in 34 1/3 innings. He went 4-0, posted a 28:8 K:BB ratio, a 1.57 ERA, and the Tribe hit .158 off him. That's just brutal.

I have the fever, and the only cure is Less Scott Baker.

7) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Jose Veras faced six hitters last night. One grounded out. One bunted and sacrificed himself. One guy guy plunked.

The other three struck out swinging.

I certainly have my issues with Jose Veras, but that's an excellent outing.

Trev Crowe went 1-for-3 and drew a two-out walk off Nathan, then stole second to get into scoring position as the potential tying run. Since the All-Star Break, in very limited playing time, Crowe has hit .291/.339/.455 and has stolen 4 bases without being caught.

As a guy who could play multiple outfield positions, switch-hits (although he appears to be a better hitter from the right side thus far), has wheels, and is dirt cheap, I'm not sure there's a reason to look for a different 4th outfielder next season (pegging the starting OF as Brantley, Sizemore, Choo, with LaPorta at 1B).

I don't think he's good enough to play every day, but he's no schmuck.

Andy Marte only grounded into one double play.