The Indians pulled out the Whooping Sticks, did not recognize them, got confused, attempted to use them to stir a gigantic cup of coffee, lodged one in Lou Marson's ear, sold them on eBay to each other, bought them, unwrapped them, finally experimented with hitting baseballs with them, and actually conjured up the semblance of an offense to beat Minnesota in the get-away game. Let us say this about the offense: Andy Marte was the star. Oh, and Mitch Talbot is our Ace.

FINAL	1	2	3
Indians (7-8)	1	0	0
Twins (11-5)	0	0	0

W: Talbot (2-1) L: Baker (2-2)

What strange ballpark dimensions. I'm going to start wanting to see not just the outfield fence distances, but also how close the fans sit to the foul lines.

1) Neener Where Neener is Due

Scott Baker vs. Cleveland, 2009:

7 IP, 6 H, 3 R, 2 ER, 1 BB, 10 K
7 IP, 3 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 1 BB, 4 K
9 IP, 2 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 BB, 5 K
6 IP, 3 H, 1 R, 1 ER, 4 BB, 4 K
5 1/3 IP, 5 H, 3 R, 3 ER, 0 BB, 2 K

Total: 34 1/3 IP, 6 ER

Scott Baker vs. Cleveland, 2010:

5 2/3 IP, 10 H, 6 R, 6 ER, 1 BB, 3 K

Total: 5 2/3 IP, 6 ER

So, I don't want to say that we now have Baker's number, but I do want to say that he made us look awfully dumb last season, and now … well … I like this better.

2) Mighty Mitch!

The general consensus around the baseball world was that Cleveland had some interesting players, would probably score some runs and their Division was Sheldon Cooper Weak, but their rotation was much too absurd for them to really contend. In three complete trips through the rotation, we have:

Mitch Talbot: 20 IP, 2 QS, 1.10 WHIP, 2.25 ERA
Justin Masterson: 15 IP, 1 QS, 1.67 WHIP, 3.00 ERA
David Huff: 21 IP, 2 QS, 1.05 WHIP, 3.00 ERA
Fausto Carmona: 20 IP, 3 QS, 1.20 WHIP, 3.60 ERA
Jake Westbrook: 16 2/3 IP, 1 QS, 1.74 WHIP, 5.40 ERA

Note: Westbrook was a "question mark" coming into the season because of his surgery in 2008, but he was considered one of the "safer bets" because he had at least once been successful in the major leagues. And his ERA is badly inflated by his first Disaster Start: since then he's given up 3 R in 5 2/3 IP (barely short of a QS) and 2 runs in 7 IP. His (very) high WHIP (and, to some degree, Masterson's) is due to a horrible walk count, which may improve as he gets his elbow under him, so to speak. (Actually, the other three pitchers have higher-than-expected walk rates, too, meaning their excellent WHIPs are ***inflated***.)

Consider, though: in 15 starts, the "sad sack, fraudulent, joke of a" rotation has posted 9 Quality Starts. Starters as a group have a 1.32 WHIP and a 3.40 ERA. The staff as a whole has a 1.33 WHIP and a 3.53 ERA. Almost everyone needs to walk fewer hitters, but the Indians have pitched well.

Of the group, though, no one has surprised me more than Mitch Talbot. I'll be honest with you: I

had not heard of Mitch Talbot before we traded for him. He was one of the few arms in the Rays' system that didn't completely blow your socks off. The Rays have a significant number of young pitchers who are, objectively, significantly better than Mitch Talbot. You trade that guy. Of course.

And when all is said and done, it may be that Talbot is more of a rotation filler after all: he doesn't strike anyone out (6 in 20 IP) and depends on his defense. The opponents' .211 BABIP is probably unsustainable. On the other hand, his GB:FB ratio is 1.40; his GO:FO ratio is 2.06. People may not be getting as many hits as they "should," but they are tending to beat the ball into the ground, and if some more of those become hits, they're likely to be singles and not Big Inning Generators.

Against the Twins, Talbot benefitted from the decision to sit Joe Mauer, but otherwise throttled the non-Morneau portion of the lineup. In the 2nd, 3rd, and 5th innings, he erased two walks and a single with three GIDP, including a very odd-looking "4-5-1" double play because the Indians put "The Shift" on for Jim Thome. (First baseman Russ Branyan went to his right to try to snare the ball, so Talbot took the return throw, which is a pretty heads-up play.) Justin Morneau's double was one of four balls to get past the infield dirt (out of 20 hitters). (Yes, the run was unearned, but when you give up a shot hit that hard, you almost have to give back the unearnedness.)

Yes, Talbot could throw more strikes: 57 in 99 pitches isn't great, and 3 BB is too many for a "command and control" guy. He threw a first-pitch strike to only 35% of his hitters. He could take a lesson from Raffy Perez, who … wait, that was 33%. Okay, then, Chris Perez, who …wait, that was ZERO percent. You know, I kind of like Strike One. Maybe I'm in the minority.

Anyway, colleague Tony Lastoria emailed me and said he got a Dave Burba vibe from Talbot: a guy who could effectively eat innings through his prime and might be underappreciated but was still valuable. I'm not crazy about this comparison: Burba struck out a lot (a LOT) more guys, and was a flyball pitcher.

The guy I'm seeing out there is the '90s version of Scott Erickson. He just seems to have more on his delivery than Westbrook does. Erickson had some fine seasons in his 20s and objectively had tougher "stuff" than Talbot does, but … hey, it's been three games. I've made some pretty bad attributions after three games. Thus far, though, Mitch Talbot is doing a great job. Huzzah!

3) Dept. of Perezes

Raffy Perez threw two one-hit scoreless innings, with 11 strikes in 17 pitches, one K, and a 4:1 GO:FO ratio. This includes a double play induced on the pitch immediately following his lone hit, a single by Justin Morneau, who is genetically incapable of making an out.

Look, it's hard for me to be completely objective about Raffy. I like him more than most players. His 2007 remains a magical season, and that's what I'll always see when he goes to the mound: the capability to turn hitters into those kinds of knee-buckling wasted-flailing hopeless schmoes. Obviously, this isn't 2007, nor was last year, nor was the year before that. I'm behind the times.

But consider: Raffy's WHIP is 1.80 because of a ridiculous Seeing Eye Night promotion in The Debacle in Detroit, where he gave up 4 hits that looked no fundamentally different from his ground ball outs. His outing on the 18th had no value (2 PA, 1 H, 1 BB), but these things happen to spot-up relievers. As his BABIP comes down from its absurd level, Raffy looks more like a groundball-inducing reliever who can pitch multiple innings if required. After his 7-pitch swinging K of Kubel, he only required 10 more pitches to retire five more hitters. I'll take that.

What will continue to INFURIATE me is a guy who comes in to the 9th inning with a SEVEN RUN LEAD and WON'T THROW STRIKES. You know what? In that circumstance, I'm starting believe that it's not an UNWILLINGNESS, but an INCAPABILITY. If Chris Perez CANNOT throw strikes (as in, he literally CAN'T), his value PLUMMETS.

Yes, he pitched a scoreless inning, and for all my wailing, heck, he didn't walk anyone. He gave up a harmless single and three outs in the air.

But look: the man threw first-pitch balls to EACH of the four men he faced, and fell behind 3-0 to Denard Span, who slugs .328, before giving up a single. What are you worried about, man? He might get a Really Solid single instead of merely an Adequate one? He's Denard Span! The man has 11 singles, 13 walks, and 4 doubles. He's fast and pesky and all those things, but … you lead EIGHT TO ONE! In the 9th! It's Denard Span! Throw a f*#&ing strike!

Okay, I'm not being entirely objective here. I bend over backwards to find good in Raffy's game and bend over forwards to find fault in Chris'. I know this isn't being totally objective, and I really do try to be a fair as I can. But there are really only two things you can do as a reliever to make me go insane: give up homers and walk guys. Neither Perez is taterrific, although Raffy is more likely to stay that way because he's morphed into a groundball machine, while Chris is an extreme flyball power guy. But geez, 5 walks in 5 2/3 innings and a strike percentage near 50% is just infuriating. Come on!

4) Scientific Progress goes "Boink!"

When I read "ground rule double" in the game log, I am impressed. Here is a ball that was well-struck, blasted over the outfielders to somewhere near the track, where it took a mighty hop and vaulted over the wall. A ground rule double is a thing of power and majesty and, while not quite a home run, is still a sign of great strength.

Unless it happens in Minnesota.

Leadoff hitter Asdrubal Cabrera hit a ball down the line that landed fair past the first base bag but well short of the wall. Spinning, it took a hop into the SIDE stands, and Cabrera had a ground rule "double."

Grady Sizemore followed by looking at two strikes, then slicing an 0-2 down the third base line, where it hit beyong the bag (near where a ball girl would sit, to help you visualize), spun off into the crowd, and Sizemore had an RBI ground rule "double."

Later in the game, Luis Valbuena hit a double of the Cabreran variety.

Now, the Indians put together plenty of Honest To Goodness extra base hits: you can't fake a homer, and each of Cabrera, Valbuena, and Russ Branyan had Serious Doubles in the game. Branyan's in particular might have been a homer in some other parks. But these doubles …

these are not “ground rule doubles.” We need a new term for these. I suggest “boink doubles.”

5) We knew you could do it!

Andy Marte is never going to be the player we wanted (or, arguably, HE wanted) to become. He’s not. He’s a guy. Maybe he has a Joe Randa type renaissance in his 30s, but … look, he’s Andy Marte.

This having been said, if you throw Andy Marte a fastball out over the plate in his Happy Zone and he’s looking for it, he can hit the ball over the wall, and he certainly did yesterday for a 2-run shot with two outs. He later added an RBI single and is now hitting .250/.357/.500, proving that small numbers are small.

He was also pointlessly caught stealing and dropped a foul pop that led to the Twins’ only run. As I said, he remains Andy Marte. But he hit a homer.

Consider this: in 14 PA, Andy Marte has 6 total bases. In 53 PA, Jhonny Peralta has 11 total bases.

6) Fun with Numbers!

Asdrubal Cabrera is Cleveland’s leadoff hitter. He has a rather pedestrian .724 OPS.

Denard Span is Minnesota’s leadoff hitter. He has a rather pedestrian .725 OPS.

You might glance at this and say that the two are roughly equivalent, and given that Cabrera is hitting a crisp .297, he’d be the more-valuable player.

He is not.

You see, Denard Span may be hitting .259 and have 4 extra-base hits (all doubles) for a feeble SLG of .328, but his OBP is .397. Because I have evolved from five-fingered creatures, I will round this up to .400. Cabrera, on the other hand, sports a .318 OBP, which I will call .320 because of my Base Ten Bias.

What does this mean? Well, let's put this in practical terms: in 100 PA, Span will make 60 outs. He will get on base 40 times. Cabrera, in contrast, will make 68 outs and get on base 32 times. These numbers are nicely divisible by 4, so lets say that in 25 PA, Span gets on base 10 times and Cabrera 8.

Now, what is 25 PA? That's about a week's worth, right? 6 games of 4 PA or 5 of 5 … you know, a good game here, a day off there, and a bad game somewhere else … yesterday, Cabrera got 5 and Span got 4. Let's say it's a week.

Every week, Denard Span gets on base two more times than Asdrubal Cabrera.

Every week, Denard Span makes two fewer outs than Asdrubal Cabrera.

Every week, the Twins' #3 hitter, Joe Mauer, has a lot better chance of getting two more trips to the plate than the Indians' #3 hitter, Shin-Soo Choo.

Every month has at least four weeks.

Every season has six months.

Things will change and other things will change, but one thing that must change: Asdrubal Cabrera needs to get on base more often if he is to be as effective a leadoff hitter as Denard Span.

I will settle for splitting the difference. But don't be fooled by .297: a .318 OBP is piss-poor from your leadoff guy.

7) Everybody hits!

Actually Choo took a collar, but he did walk. Every other Cleveland hitter who got a plate appearance got a hit.

Yes, even Matt LaPorta.

Yes, even Tofu Lou Marson.

Yes, even Grady Sizemore.

(Ouch that mentioning Sizemore is necessary … but the man is hitting .196.)

8) Managerial Head-Scratchers

Today's Head-Scratcher comes from Ron Gardenhire: it is one thing to bring in Alex Burnett to relieve Scott Baker, but to leave him in in the 7th inning with Cabrera-Sizemore-Choo-Hafner due up is tantamount to conceding the game. Burnett gave up a double and walked the next two, and that was enough of that. Gardenhire bought himself … exactly nothing.

I dunno. Maybe it was an effort to give the kid some reps and save the Real Guys for the next series. It sure didn't work, and all of Mahay, Guerrier, and Rauch ended up tossing a frame.

Note: Cleveland scored 2 runs on one hit: both of the runs in the 7th were driven in by OUTS.