After squandering so many opportunities in the previous game, the Indians vowed to do better last night, and responded by … squandering even MORE opportunities and hitting into three double plays in the first four innings. Not to worry, though, as St. Austin came through with a big 5-RBI night, and the Indians pasted the Angels 9-2. In today's B-List, Buff talks about what we can reasonably expect from Mitch Talbot, praises Tofu Lou Marson (no, really!), and wonders if perhaps we have a surplus of one commodity on the team.

FINAL

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Indians (9-11)

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Angels (11-11)

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W: Talbot (3-1) L: J. Saunders (1-4)

OK, I did not expect that.

1) Mythic Mitch!

Okay, this may be entering "Ken Schrom, All-Star" territory in terms of sustainability, but Mitch Talbot shows up in the Top 20 list of qualifying ERAs, with similar WHIP, IP, and ERA numbers to pitchers like Matt Garza and Johan Santana.

Let's get this out of the way: Mitch Talbot is neither Matt Garza nor Johan Santana.

For one thing, Garza has struck out 25 hitters in 29 innings. Santana has struck out 28 in 30 1/3. Talbot has struck out … seven. Total. Aggregate. Seven. Talbot is the only pitcher in the top 40 with a "backwards" 7:10 K:BB ratio; the next closest is … Fausto Carmona (13:12). After that, Livan Hernandez (10:8), who somehow has a 0.87 WHIP and 0.87 ERA despite being Livan Hernandez. I think if you were looking for a cautionary tail about fast starts and sustainability, you couldn't conjure a more fearsome role model than Livan Hernandez. (Doug Fister might work, too, and Fister's formula for success isn't terribly different from Talbot's: low BABIP, high GB:FB ratio. This formula can't work to this DEGREE over the long haul, but it can WORK.)

Forget what will happen tomorrow, though: the fact is that Talbot has earned three wins by pitching exceptionally well in his three wins. His groundball stuff was actually a bit off last night, and he certainly got some good fortune in terms of hard-hit balls being hit straight to fielders, but look: the man gave up 1 run in 6 1/3 IP, and through 5 innings had given up 4 singles and a walk. As an indicator of Talbot's "formula," the Angels had to string together three singles to score their only run off Mitch. If it takes three hits to score a run, that makes for a pretty long night offensively.

Overall, Talbot's 1:3 K:BB ratio and 58% strike percentage are bad numbers. He generated exactly ONE swing and miss. Joe Smiff got more in 13 pitches. However, through those first 5 innings, he'd thrown only 66 pitches, suggesting a certain command that abandoned him in the 6th. (He said as much after the game.)

You got to see the best of Talbot in the first couple of innings, as he started the game retiring the first 8 in a row. My interpretation of what I see from hitters is that Talbot's ball moves *very* late, which is a fine skill to have. And then you saw the potential worst of Talbot as he walked

two hitters after a bunt single, then required inordinate luck to have both of the smoked liners that followed go straight to outfielders (Rivera to left, Kendrick to center).

I think if you temper your expectations properly, you can see Mitch Talbot as a real asset to this and future Indians teams. If you're expecting a 2 ERA from a guy striking out fewer than 3 guys a game, you're probably in for a rude shock.

2) Everybody hits!

It certainly looked like a Recipe for Fail through the first four innings, as the Tribe hit into three double plays, two with the bases loaded, and converted 9 baserunners into 2 runs.

This obscures the fact that we had 9 baserunners in the first 4 innings.

As the scoring drought levy began leaking in the 5th as Austin Kearns Found His Groove, you ended up with a lineup with no fewer than SIX players within eyeshot of the Mendoza Line producing, and producing BIG:

*) SEVEN players with multiple hits
*) EIGHT players reaching base at least twice
*) FIVE players who reached at least three times
*) EIGHT players with a hit

Most notable here are the four hits and a walk out of the leadoff slot from Asdrubal Cabrera, who was rewarded with two runs; a pair of hits and walks apiece from Jhonny Peralta; three hits, all for extra bases, for Austin Kearns; and 2 hits, 1 BB, and 3 R for Tofu Lou Marson, including his first XBH of the season.

The Indians hit 8-for-19 with runners in scoring position. SIX different players got a hit with a runner in scoring position. Oddly enough, only 4 players drove in a run, and one of them did it

without getting a hit, so three players got a hit with a runner in scoring position that *did not produce a run*
, but hey. We scored 9 runs. I'm a happy guy.

3) Wait, what was that?

They're not booing, they're saying "Tofu Lou!"

Well, actually, since the game was in Anaheim, they were probably booing. But not because Lou Marson made a huge number of outs. Marson actually made only two outs in five trips to the plate, and one of those was intentional (a sacrifice bunt with runners on 1st and 2nd).

Look, I get on Marson's case because his numbers are otherwordly bad. I know he's not really an .088 hitter, I get that, but part of the mission of this column is to try to capture a fan's real-time emotional impressions about the team, and I haven't encountered a fan yet who doesn't look at a Lou Marson plate appearane with an expectation of Epic Fail.

So it bears serious mention when I can say, with all genuine sincerity: Tofu Lou had a great night last night. Not only did he lead off the 8th with a single, not only did he get a rally started in the 6th with a one-out walk, but he led off the 9th with a real, legit, honest-to-goodness double to the right-center gap. Marson's never going to be a 20-homer guy (odds of him becoming a 5-homer guy are looking suspect as he Jason Kendalls his way through the league), but doubles would help immensely, and this is his first extra-base hit of the season, to which I give a hearty and non-ironic, "Huzzah!"

4) The best NRI signing of the year, if not the 21st century

I've made the point before, but I'll say it again: I did not understand why we signed Austin Kearns and thought it was a wasteful gesture. I have the general philosophy that I don't mind signing ANYONE to a minor-league deal, because if the guy sucks, you simply leave him there: it's cheap, and no harm, no foul. I didn't have a PROBLEM with the signing; I just thought it was

a longshot to actually mean a damned thing.

It means a damned thing.

With the understanding that April numbers are hilarious, Kearns is now hitting .386/.426/.659 after banging out a pair of doubles (the scorer gives his last hit a double and "advancing on the throw," so it's not an official triple) and his second homer in as many games. The second double in particular was extremely aesthetic, where he took an outside pitch the other way and drove it past the right fielder for a bases-clearing 3-run double. Given the troubles this team has had scoring runs with the bases loaded (I believe we have more double plays than RBI in that situation), that was a very impressive hit.

One of my knocks on Kearns was that injuries appeared to have sapped his once-impressive power: Kearns slugged .411, .316, and .305 in his last three seasons in Washington, for ISOs of .145, .099, and .110. Those are middle infielder ISOs. We think Jhonny Peralta stinks because he posts ISOs higher than that. Those are simply atrocious power numbers for a corner outfielder.

However, Kearns appears to have recovered, at least temporarily, from injuries and surgeries and removal from Washington: 8 of his 17 hits are for extra bases, and he even has two stolen bases. Yeah, he's going to strike out. Power hitters strike out. The thing is, I can now say that with a straight face: Austin Kearns is … a power hitter.

The good news is that Kearns is cheap and doesn't HAVE to be moved. The better news is, you could envision a scenario in which his cheap production brings back a substantial reward if he IS moved in, say, July. And right now, it wouldn't be a bad thing if Kearns continues to produce and signs another contract. Obviously, long-range plans require a more lengthy length, but right now, it sure is nice to have Austin Kearns on the roster.

5) A less impressive NRI signing

Mark Grudzielanek, now. Oy. Grudzielanek got two singles and drove in a run, but … in the

words of Henny Youngman, “Take my Mark Grudzielanek … please.”

6) That’s not really fair

Who cares?

Look, I know it’s a small sample and we need a right-handed second baseman and Grudzielanek is a good guy and is very professional and probably better than a .233/.233/.233 triple-ack hitter. I get that. Who would I rather have? Probably no one plausible: the young guys aren’t really ready or good, and … I mean, Anderson Hernandez? Grudzielanek is a perfectly supportable, realistic option for the role we’ve created for him: sporadic ABs, solid defense, pointless goatee. He’s a guy.

Further, listing all Cleveland hitters in order of AVG regardless of sample size, Mark Grudzielanek is fifth. Fifth! His .233 is the FIFTH-BEST AVERAGE ON THE TEAM! Fourth-best if you raise the threshold to TWENTY PLATE APPEARANCES!

And … I don’t care. I’m not buying it. Sue me.

7) One of these things is … exactly like the other

Jhonny Peralta: .200/.347/.317 (Tyner Zone)
Andy Marte: .200/.360/.350 (Tyner Zone)

Jhonny Peralta: 13:14 K:BB ratio (more walks than Ks, great!)
Andy Marte: 3:5 K:BB ratio (more walks than Ks, great!

Jhonny Peralta: sort of a third baseman

Andy Marte: sort of a third baseman

Jhonny Peralta: 1 homer, 5 RBI, 4 R
Andy Marte: 1 homer, 4 RBI, 3 R

I'm not convinced we need TWO of these.

8) Upon further reflection

I'm not convinced we need ONE of these.

9) Shutdown corner

Aaron Laffey hasn't been Super Terrific this season, but it bears mentioning that he's done a pretty nice job in a role he doesn't actually want. (He wants Masterson's slot … which might not be a bad idea …)

Anyway, Laffey came in after Talbot gave up a one-out single, and calmly induced the inning-ending double play ball. Of course, they didn't actually get both outs, and Laffey was so rattled that he … struck out Bobby Abreu on three pitches. (Pretty nasty-looking ones, actually.)

After Jen Lewis got a couple quick outs, he also loaded the bases on a walk and two singles. Out comes Joe Smiff, out goes Mike Napoli on a swinging K, down goes Frazier. Smiff did give up a solo shot in the 9th, but … dude, it was 9-1. That made it 9-2. Nobody who isn't directly related to Brandon Wood gave a shit.

On the season, Indians relievers have inherited 38 baserunners. They have allowed THREE to score. Three! That's … well, that's unsustainable, frankly, but … three! That's awe-tastic!

10) Single-handed revival

Brandon Wood came into the series hitting a preposterous Marsonian .113/.145/.132. I mean, the guy is supposed to mash and strike out: to date, he's got the striking out thing down (in 17 games, he has THREE without a K), but the mashing … not so much.

However, Cleveland pitchers are hell-bent on returning Wood to Prospect Status, so they have let him go 3-for-4 in each of the past two games, including the homer last night. He is now hitting .197/.222/.262, which is still plainly terrible, but at least it's out of the Tyner Zone. If Wood sticks in the majors, he owes Cleveland a fruit basket or something.

11) Sotto voce

Wood's "plainly terrible" batting average is higher than Grady Sizemore's.