With the Indians cruising with a 3-0 lead, the Squander Ball of the 6th inning did not seem too damaging until Jake Westbrook got puffy with a fatball and Torii Hunter tied the game, which ended on Howie Kendrick's walk-off … bunt.

Yes, bunt.

As Chris Perez watched the ball roll past him for the game-winning run, he thought to himself that this was a "stupid baseball play," and by golly, he was right.

Chris Perez' play was stupid.

Oh, yeah.

FINAL

1

2

3

4

5

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7

8

9

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Indians (9-12)

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2

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3

8

1

Angels (12-11)

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0

0

0

0

3

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0

1

4

6

0

W: Fuentes (1-1) L: J. Smiff (0-1)

Thank God @Dhuff11 got a double-double at In-N-Out Burger, or the entire trip might have been wasted. The **baseball** certainly sucked. (As a reminder, you can follow me on Twitter as @stevebuffum. I don't have a lot of updates, but I do announce when columns are up and respond snidely to other people's comments.)

1) Tempered enthusiasm

What do you want from a Jake Westbrook start? What things indicate a successful approach, and what things would be superlative?

Well, it's almost axiomatic that you want ground balls. That is Westbrook's calling card, and he

certainly got those: 10 ground ball outs to 1 in the air.

3 of his 4 hits allowed were singles, another hallmark of the wormburner.

What you'd LIKE to see is a low number of walks, meaning that Westbrook is either hitting his spots or getting batters to swing at balls that are dropping out of the strike zone. Indeed, Westbrook induced 11 swinging strikes, a high number for him, and walked only one batter.

What you can't reasonably expect but will gladly take is a goodly number of whiffs: Jake's 7 Ks ties a season high, and in fact hadn't been surpassed since Sept. 23, 2007. Jake had a lot of excellent movement on his pitches, both late and severe, and the Angels could do little with it.

What you have to take into account is what it means to play a game at 4 in the afternoon:

In a game that started at the unorthodox time of 4 p.m. PDT, hitters on both teams had trouble picking up the spin of the ball … "We couldn't see the ball today at all," [Torii] Hunter said. "When you're facing a guy like Westbrook, you really want to see the ball. But today it was so hard."

So while it's very nice to say that Westbrook struck out more than a guy an inning and gave up only 5 baserunners in 6 innings and induced 11 swinging strikes, we might want to take those numbers with some collective grains of salt. Jake threw well except for one pitch, which Hunter punished for a 3-run homer, and that's very encouraging, but … let's not draw a lot of half-baked conclusions from a game that may have been little more than a lighting outlier.

2) A stupid, bad, bush league play

With two outs and runners at the corners, Chris Perez was summoned to face Howie Kendrick. Kendrick bunted Perez' first pitch past him toward second base, where the deep-playing Luis Valbuena could only watch helplessly as Kendrick crossed first base to win the game.

After the game, Chris Perez expressed his opinion:

"It was a bad baseball play that happened to work out," Perez said afterward. "I don't want to say it was bush league. But you never see that. Ninety-nine percent of hitters in that situation would rather win the game with a hit, not a bunt."

Now, let me say, I totally agree with Perez. This was a *bad* baseball play. It was a *stupid* baseball play.

I would even go so far as to say it was a
bush league
baseball play.

By Chris Perez.

I understand that a guy falling off the mound like a log-roller on oiled shale isn't asked to do much more than throw really hard and test the wind patterns with the greased kite tails growing out of the back of your head, but there is a reason that the first baseman is called "3" and the right fielder is called "9". Because the pitcher is called "1". The pitcher is a fielder. He is a fielder that stands in the bloody middle of the field.

Do you know why most bunts go toward one of the baselines?

Because if they aren't angled away from the middle of the field, there's a guy standing RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF F*#^ING INFIELD.

With a glove.

What we call in colloquial terms a FIELDER.

Now, let us not take too much away from Kendrick here. It was a good bunt. Pitchers do not always field bunts because often, they are placed well.

Kendrick used logic and intelligence to diagnose the situation (all infielders back, he is reasonably fast) and execute it properly.

He could have popped it up.

He could have dropped it down for Marson to pounce on.

He could have angled it one way or the other, increasing the chance of a fielder nabbing it.

And maybe it was simply a better bunt than I'm giving him credit for. I *loved* this play from a raw baseball aesthetic sense.

But tell me if I'm off base here. This is what I saw on the replay:

*) Kendrick begins squaring early
*) Perez finishes his motion as normal
*) Kendrick follows through on threat
*) Perez watches ball go by

Did Perez make any sort of effort at all that I missed? Was the bunt really past him before he could finish recovering from his max-effort Mitch Williams delivery?

I could be wrong.

But what it looked like to me is that Perez couldn't believe it and stood there like so much carved liverwurst.

THAT would be a bad play.

What makes this even more heartbreaking is that if Perez had simply been his average, normal, ridiculous blunderbussian self, he would have thrown the first pitch out of the strike zone, Kendrick would have shown bunt, and the strategy would have essentially been eliminated, returning us to the normal fingernail-chewing exercise in C-Pez Action.

3) In case you missed it

Don’t bitch about getting beat and looking dumb in the process.

4) All sample sizes are significant if you want it bad enough

In his first 11 games, Lou Marson gathered 3 hits and 3 walks, scoring one run. All three hits were singles.

In his next 2 games, Lou Marson posted 4 hits and 1 walk, scoring FOUR runs. Fully half of his hits were for extra bases.

Clearly, this means that Lou Marson has “figured out” major-league pitching and is well on his way to being a successful major leaguer! All right!

(Just as encouraging: the Angels’ hitters may have had trouble picking up Westbrook’s pitches, but Tofu Lou did not. 0 PB and 0 WP were partially due to the small number of baserunners, but he certainly looked less scoobied by Westbrook’s stuff than he did in the opener.)

Now that he’s hot, let’s move him up in the order to the 2-slot.

5) Wait, what?

Okay, maybe that was facetious. Heck, a lot of the last item was intentionally overblown. I'm happy for Lou, and the man hit .571/.556/.857 against the Angels.

After such a tough start, it's worth celebrating a nice series.

But here's the more serious problem: afer the April 21st game in which he took the second of two consecutive Size Four collars, Grady Sizemore was hitting .191/.269/.340.

Awful.

In his next 6 games (and a pinch-running assignment that ended up wrapping around for a walk in his only PA), Sizemore hit 5-for-26 with a double and a walk.

This raised his numbers to … .192/.268/.301.

In other words, an almost perfect sustain.

It's April and it's early and the sample is pitiful and track record and fan club and bananas don't grow from seeds, I get it. I just don't CARE about it. Grady Sizemore is Death in the Two Hole.

Here's where I've arrived: in the 9th inning, Valbuena bunted his way on …

… wait a minute.

Two nights ago, Marson beat out a bunt single. Then in the NINTH INNING, Valbuena saw an opening and used his speed to leg out a bunt hit.

Admittedly, Chris Perez was in the bullpen and may not have seen this, but … Kendrick's tactic was not only not stupid, it was PROVEN EFFECTIVE IN THE TOP OF THE INNING!

Okay, I'm better now.

Anyway, Valbuena got on and Marson calmly took two strikes before lining a single to left. See ? He's so confident, so relaxed at the plate, he's locked in, I tell you …

… okay, I'm back now.

Anyway, Asdrubal Cabrera was unable to get his ball to left to sit down (or get up more seriously, I suppose), and he flew out to left. So, up against the left-handed closed Brian Fuentes, the chance for scoring comes down to Grady Sizemore.

And I wanted a pinch-hitter.

Look, it's not just that Sizemore is off to a "slow start," where "start" is defined as "since 2008." It's that Grady Sizemore can't hit left-handed pitching.

This season, he actually hits a respectable .256/.333/.462 against righties.

I mean, those aren't All-Star Numbers, but you can put that guy in your lineup.

Heck, THAT guy is our third-best hitter.

But against lefties, Sizemore is hitting .103/.188/.103.

Let me write that again: .103/.188/.103.

In addition, Fuentes is the most left-handed of left-handed pitchers, coming from a low sidearmy angle that must make it even tougher, especially given that his slider is probably his best pitch. As a team, we don't hit left-handed pitchers well at all, but this is because they are PITCHERS.

We don't hit ANYONE well.

Our top two guys are … well, the guys who can HIT: Choo (.351/.400/.514) and Kearns (.350/.409/.600).

The highest OPS, oddly enough, is Valbuena.

Anyway, there's not a good candidate to pinch-hit there: LaPorta SHOULD be a good choice, but he only just got his first two hits off a lefty after starting 0-for-18.

Andy Marte is hitting .250/.400/.250, which is not exactly setting the world alight.

But you know who's REALLY bad against left-handed pitching? That would be Grady Sizemore.

Anyway, he grounded out on an 0-2 pitch.

6) Dept. of Not Surprise

There's a meme in statistical circles called the Three True Outcomes. These are those plate appearances that involve no one but the pitcher and the hitter (well, the catcher, too, but hey): no nasty fielders or baserunning or throwing involved, just
mano y mano
.

Quien es mas macho?

They are: homer, strikeout, walk.

Russ Branyan is a TTO All-Star, along with players like Jim Thome and Adam Dunn.

So, Russ … anyway … I don't know if anyone really explained this to you … y'know … but … that first "T" stands for "Three." Not "Two." There is a third outcome.

Oh, yes, Branyan drew a walk. And oh, yes, Branyan struck out. Majestically. Heroically. Wit h great aplomb.

Also three times.

Hit the damn ball, Russ!

7) Travis Hafner, RBI Machine!

Yes, indeedy do!

An HBP? Are you shitting me? This is the run-producing we were talking about? Forget I brought it up.

8) Box Score Follies!

FIVE players started and ended last night under the Mendoza Line:

Sizemore: .192
Hafner: .190
Peralta: .190
Valbuena: .196
Marson: .171

In these guys' collective defense, only Sizemore and Marson have an OBP under .310. With the average AL player posting a .331 OBP, Peralta (.329) and Valbuena (.328) are actually nearly average players at getting on base.

It still looks bad.

9) Shutdown corner

Jamey Wright faced three hitters. He retired them all, throwing 8 strikes in 13 pitches.

Tony Sipp faced three hitters. He retired them all, throwing 8 strikes in 12 pitches.

Called in with runners at first and second and nobody out, Raffy Perez induced a double play on his 6th pitch.

10) Thumper Rule

Joe Smiff.

11) Because I should

Luis Valbuena and Shin-Soo Choo each had a pair of hits.