O, the humanity! Inept baseball from beginning to end results in a three hour thirty-nine minute game in which there were perhaps six postively-aesthetic plays total. Innumerable foul balls. Thirteen walks. Throwing errors by each team's pitcher. Zero of five basestealers caught. Twenty-three men left on base. Combined 7-for-34 hitting with RISP. A wild pitch. Two hit batsmen. Bryan Bullington in the major leagues. Austin Kearns and Jose Guillen combining for 0-for-9 with 5 Ks. Kerry Wood as Joe Borowski. The horror. The horror.

FINAL

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Royals (16-25)

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13

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Indians (15-23)

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7

1

W: Chen (1-0) *L: K. Wood (0-2)*

I dunno, what do you want to talk about today? Walnuts? Echidnas? Liposuction? I'm up for anything. Anything but *this*, I mean.

1) Progress, real or imagined

I wasn't much looking forward to the matchup of Lilliputians that was Justin Masterson v. Gil Meche, and all things considered, I was probably right. However, Masterson did have his moments.

For example, each of the four hitters in the first inning saw strike one. Masterson got a swinging K to start the game, and after a double and a walk, induced a double play grounder from KC's best hitter, Billy Butler. (Note I said "best hitter" and not "fastest runner.") Although he coughed up another walk in the second, he also got another swinging K and a groundout in a four-batter inning.

One nice thing about these stats is that each of the hitters who struck out was a left-handed hitter. Neither was a particularly GOOD left-handed hitter, but since lefties posed a long-term and significant problem to Masterson in the past, a sign of improvement (especially the development of an "out pitch") is encouraging. (I do not know what pitches the batters struck out on and am not interested enough to go to pitch f/X to find out.)

Three straight singles and a groundout produced two runs in the third, and Masterson ended his night after a strong 1-2-3 5th having allowed only those two runs, so all things considered, that's a pretty nice outing. It's not good to string three hits together, but it's good that it took stringing three hits together to score a run, unlike, say, Aaron Laffey, who needed only two, or Kerry Wood, who used a flamethrower and a bucket of naphtha.

Masterson only allowed 1 out in the air to 11 on the ground and 4 of his 5 hits allowed were singles. If he can continue to pitch in a way that holds left-handed hitters to be only a bit more effective than righties (you can't TOTALLY eliminate a platoon split with that delivery, but it hopefully can be cut back significantly), the next development point would be to decrease the walks. Fully half of Masterson's 8 starts have featured 4 or more walks, which blunts the effectiveness of his high K-rate (46 in 43 IP). A 2:1 K:BB ratio is good in a vacuum, but walking 4 guys in a game simply is not.

2) Guest columnist: Leonard Pinth-Garnell presents, "Bad Relief Pitching"

Thank you.

Today we feature Mr. Aaron Laffey, who entered the game with a 3-2 lead to face switch-hitter Alberto Callaspo. Callaspo is a much better hitter from the left side, hitting .317 with a .211 ISO, while only hitting .257/.297/.371 from the right side. Turning him there was a smart procedural move, and would have been excellent if not for the astounding badness of Aaron Laffey. After going to a 2-1 count, Laffey allowed Callaspo to pound a ball into the left-center gap for a double.

Mitch Maier is no such animal, being purely left-handed and also pleasingly wretched. I applaud Mitch Maier's thorough inability to hit any sort of pitching, althouh it should be pointed out that he actually has a higher AVG and SLG against lefties, in a small sample borne of supreme lack of skill. His first-pitch double tied the game.

I found Aaron Laffey's performance to be exquisitely awful!

3) What he left out

The next two hitters lined out, and Scott Podsednik flew out to left, suggesting that Laffey actually got lucky to get out of the inning scathed for only one run.

4) Welcome to the club!

Shelley Duncan!

Or, at least, I assume so. He did not play.

From my perspective, for those calling for Mike Brantley instead, I want Brantley to play often, if not every day. You can either call up Brantley and sit Trevor Crowe, or call up Shelley Duncan and sit Shelley Duncan. I think that's what happened there. As for a guy like Jose Costanza, first off, his performance screams of "fluke," as his pre-2010 numbers don't suggest anything like this (especially in the power dept.), so it would be nice if he could show he could sustain it for more than a month and a half. But more importantly, Duncan had to be added to the 40-man by putting Cabrera on the 60-day DL. When Cabrera comes off, Duncan will likely be DFA'd and the long-term loss is virtually nil. If you add Costanza, you actually have to make a 40-man move when Cabrera returns, and although I have several suggestions for this, Costanza is not really the kind of player you force your hand for.

As much as anything, this may be "defecate or get off the pot" time for Trevor Crowe. Yeah, he might be a 4th-OF in the long run. When exactly would we be finding this out, if not now? We have a lot more time left to evaluate and develop Brantley than we do with Crowe. And if Crowe fails, then at least he failed with data instead of on theory or general principle.

5) Smallball with Lou: with the steal, with the wheels

Down 2-1 to a laboring Shreddy Meche, Lou Marson banged out a single, then stole second base. Catchers who steal are pretty rare, so that's nice. And he scored on Trevor Crowe's subsequent single to shallow center, showing good wheels to score from second on such a meh hit.

Indeed, I forgot to mention in the Tampa series that one of the runs the Indians scored was the result of Marson running through an ill-conceived stop sign from third base coach Mumble Mumble, scoring, in fact, without a close play at the plate.

Marson is a better baserunner than I gave him credit for. Still can't hit, but once on base, he's an asset.

6) Guest columnist: Leonard Pinth-Garnell presents, "Bad Clutch Hitting"

In the second inning, the first two runners reached base. Russell Branyan then took five mighty cuts at the ball, striking four of them into foul territory, then unleashing a perfectly awful swing that missed the ball entirely. This resulted in no runners advancing whatsoever.

Jhonny Peralta then swung at a 2-0 pitch and grounded into an out, but because of stunningly bad defense by Kansas City, a run was able to score. This was one of the offensive highlights for the Indians.

With a runner on second in the 5th, the following sequence was executed:

Grudzielanek: groundout
Choo: K swinging
Hafner: walk
Kearns: K swinging

Note the astonishing lack of quality in those at-bats: not one advanced a runner even an inch. Unrelentingly bad!

In the 6th with runners on second and third and no outs, three consecutive groundouts scored the tying run but nothing else. Only very bad, a disappointment for those who truly treasure the extraordinarily bad.

Have no fear! After a single and a runner-advancing groundout, Mr. Branyan was able to coax a walk, and then Mr. Peralta struck out swinging. Couldn't be worse!

But the ne plus ultra, the je ne sais quoi, the tete du fromage, was the 8th inning, in which the Indians parlayed a two-out single, a walk, and a second walk into a bases-loaded situation, which accomplished preceisely nothing as Mr. hafner watched strike three cross the plate. Monumentally ill-advised!

The Indians went 2-for-14 with runners in scoring position, leaving 12 on base and thoroughly squandering 4 stolen bases, a wild pitch, two hit batsmen, two errors, seven hits, and seven walks, and scored a fourth run only because of Kansas City's inept defense. There … that wasn't so good now, was it?

7) A radical proposal

Travis Hafner should lead off.

Oh, I don't mind Crowe doing it for now, I suppose. He's doing fine in his small-sample stint, hitting .350/.409/.500.

But Hafner has two things going for him:

a) a .399 OBP in a larger sample
b) 1 homer and 5 RBI in nearly 60 PA in May

If Hafner isn't going to hit for power, why not take advantage of the one thing he IS doing well: getting on base? Did you realize he has a .500 OBP in May, courtesy of 17 hits, 10 walks, and 4 HBP? Just in May! He's been hit 7 times already, a veritable Ryan Garko. That's a lot of walks.

Look, it's not going to happen: Crowe is going to be considered a "speedy athletic type" as long as he's here, and Hafner is not a fast man. But the man gets on base a LOT, and his power is mostly theoretical at this point, so why not treat him as such?

8) Jobs well done

Tony Sipp faced four hitters, striking out one and giving up a single in a scoreless inning of work. He threw 9 strikes in 14 pitches: after posting a bad 8:6 K:BB ratio in 8 1/3 IP in April, he has an 11:3 K:BB ratio in May. Hitters bat .158 off Sipp.

Chris Perez faced four hitters, striking out one and giving up a single in a scoreless inning of work. He threw 11 strikes in 15 pitches: after posting a horrific 3:6 K:BB ratio in 6 2/3 IP in April, he has a lovely 9:2 K:BB ratio in May. Right-handers bat .158 off Perez, and all 12 of his strikeouts are against right-handers.

Jamey Wright got two groundouts in four pitches.

9) Guest columnist: Joe Borowski

Feh. Let's see him do it more than once, THEN rack up 45 saves. THAT'S hard.