The more things change, the more they stay the same: the Indians still own the White Sox, Kerry Wood extends his streak of "appearance = victory," and both teams are still pretty crummy. At least Ozzie Guillen knows how to pump up his team: "Bad pitching, bad hitting, bad game." And that was in the game they lost by two runs. Justin Masterson proved that SOME things changed, as he won for the first time as a non-zygote pitcher. Did he pitch well to accomplish this? He did not. Perhaps fewer things change after all.

FINAL

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4

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7

8

9

R

H

E

Indians (20-33)

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10

15

1

White Schmux (23-31)

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6

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W: Masterson (1-5) L: Danks (4-5)

FINAL

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R

H

E

Indians (21-33)

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2

0

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3

9

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White Schmux (23-32)

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W: Talbot (7-4) L: Peavy (4-5) S: K. Wood (4)

FINAL

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Indians (21-34)

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7

13

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White Schmux (24-32)

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2

0

X

8

11

0

W: Putz(1-2) L: Sipp (0-2) S: Jenks (9)

Can you believe they actually TELEVISED one of these games?

1) Process v. Result

Justin Masterson ended his personal 11-game losing streak by giving up one run in 5 2/3 innings, giving up only 5 hits and allowing the single run on a solo shot by Waif Ramirez. This seems like a pretty good game.

Well, except for the 6 walks.

And the two HBP.

And the fact that he was facing a dreadful offensive team.

Other than that, it was terrific.

Now, more seriously, Masterson DID do a good job in some regards. 5 hits in 5 2/3 innings is good enough, especially since 4 of them were mere singles. He posted a very nice 10:4 GO:FO ratio, returning to his roots, and induced a double play in the sixth when it looked like things were starting to get out of hand. He picked off Andruw Jones trying to steal. And one run is one run: sure, 13 baserunners are bad, but part of pitching is being able to record outs with men on base. The name of the game … well, the NAME of the game is “baseball,” but the POINT of the game is to score more runs than your opponent, and limiting the number of runs your opponent scores is a good way to accomplish this.

On the other hand, more than a walk an inning is just atrocious. There are a couple of mitigating factors here: two of the hitters walked on four pitches in the 6th, when Masterson was approaching 100 pitches. He threw 20+ pitches in EACH of the first three innings, so although the total pitch count wasn’t onerous, I have no trouble believing Masterson was less than fresh as a daisy in the 6th.

But here's the thing that was most infuriating about Masterson's performance: he faced 26 hitters, and got to 2 strikes on 15 of them. That's pretty good. Except that he gave up the solo shot and a single with two strikes on the hitter, threw a total of 36 pitches after getting two strikes (granted, 15 is the minimum, but … 36!), and WALKED THREE GUYS AFTER HAVING THEM DOWN 0-2! Down 0-2! Two of them walked on the NEXT FOUR PITCHES!!! And one of the guys he hit was on a 2-2 count! In all, 6 of 15 guys reached base AFTER Masterson already had them in the hole with two strikes. No WONDER he only struck out one guy.

Hey, I don't mind needing some extra pitches to put guys away. With two strikes, sometimes you try to get the guy to fish for something. Sometimes they foul off a pitch. They're professionals too, after all.

But there is simply NO EXCUSE for WALKING THREE GUYS ON FOUR STRAIGHT BALLS AFTER GETTING AHEAD 0-2. That's horrific. In Masterson's last nine starts, he has walked at least FOUR guys FIVE TIMES. I am happy that Masterson is getting a chance to work through things and everything, and there are signs of life, but not being able to polish off hitters with two strikes on them … well … part of the selling point of Masterson is his high K rate. If he's just going to convert Ks into walks … I mean … is there any upside to that? What the hell?

2) Results v. STFU

You know, at this point, I don't CARE why Mitch Talbot is 7-4 with a 3.54 ERA. I just love that he is. (It helps that he has a 1.57 ERA and an 11:3 K:BB ratio in 23 IP against the White Schmux.)

Stat of the day!

vs. Chicago: 11:3 K:BB (3.67 K/BB, 0.818 BB/9)
vs. Not Chicago: 21:24 K:BB (0.875 K/BB, 4.26 BB/9)

So … the strike zone … yeah … more of that … yeah …

3) Contractural Obligation

Jake Westbrook pitched.

4) The Herrmannator!

Frank Herrmann was called up after posting a microscopic 0.31 ERA in Clumbus thus far. He faced a total of 8 batters. He recorded a total of 8 outs. One player got a single off Hermann, but he was caught foolishly attempting to steal. I do understand the inclination to try to "make something happen" against Herrmann, insofar as he is an unstoppable machine and all that, but "out is as out does," or something like that.

Seriously, Herrmann came on in his debut with runners on the corners and retired Gord Beckham on one pitch. Nice way to make a debut with two guys on in a 4-1 game. Nice way to execute: one pitch, end of inning.

Herrmann struck out 2 in his 2 2/3 innings of work (1 1/3 in each of Friday's and Sunday's games), giving up the one hit and no walks. That pretty much makes him our Relief Ace at this point.

Trivia: in German, "Herrmann" literally means "Mister man", while "Frank" means "comestible meat by-products."

5) Anatomy of a Loss, or Blaming the … um … Everyone

Tony Sipp was saddled with his second loss: if you knew nothing else, how many taters would

you have attributed to him? Two? Three? Probably at least a three-run jack by Paul Konerko? Well, in this case, Sipp recorded one out before giving up a single. So really, now: that's not exactly doing a great job, but it's a far sight better than Sipp's recent performances. At least the ball was retrievable, fer crine out loud.

Jensen Lewis entered the game and began … how can I describe this? Here, take a styrofoam cup: you know, the kind they have around the office to hold bad coffee in. Hold it closed-end forward, kind of like a football. Now step outside, preferably where a decent-strength wind is blowing. Now drink eight shots of whisky, turn around thirty-five times, sniff some airplane glue, stand on your head, have someone turn on a wind machine, and throw the cup as hard as you can in any direction whatsoever. This will simulate Jensen Lewis' two-walk no-out bloody pointless outing.

And, with the bases loaded and one out, Raffy Perez came in and retired the left-handed hitting Mark Kotsay, then gave up the two-run single to Carlos Quentin, and we lost by one run.

So, if I were to assign blame for this loss, I would give 10% of the loss to Sipp, who let a guy get on base after getting a guy out, 20% to Perez, who let a guy get on base after getting a guy out, and 358% of the loss to Jensen Lewis, for retiring no one at all and not being Frank Herrmann.

Actually, it was Westbrook who coughed up a 6-1 lead to give up 6 runs in 4 2/3 innings, but hey.

I hate everyone.

6) Tofu smash!

Lou Marson LEAPS out of the Tyner Zone with his first home run since Manny Acta had hair, a three-run jack off Mark Buehrle! Let's hear it for the curd!

Okay, so it was his only hit all weekend. He did draw three walks on Friday.

7) Open question

Why are you walking Tofu Lou Marson?

8) Signs of life, Infield Dept.

Luis Valbuena, who came into the series hitting .148, made 14 plate appearances and reached base 7 times. This includes 5 hits (including his 5th double on the season) and a sacrifice to go with a pair of walks. He reached base at least twice in each of the three games. He scored one run.

Jhonny Peralta took a Size Four collar in the middle game, but in the opener he went 4-for-5 with 4 RBI. Two of the hits were doubles, and he went 3-for-3 with runners in scoring position. In the closer, Peralta went 2 for 5 with 3 RBI and went 2-for-3 with RISP; the rest of the team went 1-for-10, which helps explain to the 10 men left on base. Peralta now leads the team with 29 RBI, 16 doubles, and 22 extra-base hits despite slugging a relatively feeble .413.

9) Signs of life, Outfield Dept.

Each position in the outfield got a hit in each of the three games, including:

Austin Kearns: 8-for-13, 3 doubles, 1 HR, 6 R
Shin-Soo Choo: 5-for-13, 1 double, 4 R
Trevor Crowe: 4-for-8 with 2 BB and a two-run triple

Shelley Duncan also had a hit in each game in which he appeared, although that's only 2-for-8 with a double.

10) Open Question II

If Matt LaPorta can't start against John Danks, when CAN he start?

11) Valuable Commodity

In the last five games in which Kerry Wood has pitched, the Indians have won. In a perfect ninth inning, Wood earned his 4th save in his last 4 opportunities and has a perfect 0.00 ERA in June. The last two games Wood has closed out have been nail-biters that become relief-sighers when Wood appears, finishing 3-2 and 3-1, bailing out a poor offense with shutdown work the likes of which is seen very infrequently in the major leagues. Although the trade deadline is technically July 31, it is the aggressive team that makes their mark by trading for that Missing Piece player well BEFORE the deadline, to get the jump on other teams. Will a GM show that kind of foresight this season? It remains to be seen …