The Indians juggernaut was derailed by the mighty Oakland pitching combo of ... Gio Gonzalez and Vin Mazzaro? In any event, the formula for success against the A's has certainly been established: score a second run. The Indians' pitching has been outstanding over their winning streak, but the offense ... well ... let's just say that with the injury to Shin-Soo Choo, the Indians are fielding a lineup that consists of a certain kind of player, and that player is not exactly All-Star caliber ...

FINAL	1	2	3
Athletics (40-41)	1	0	0
Indians (31-48)	0	0	0

W: G. Gonzalez (7-5) L: Talbot (8-7) S: Bailey (16)

FINAL	1	2	3
Athletics (40-42)	0	0	3
Indians (32-48)	2	0	0

W: Sipp (1-2) L: Breslow (3-2)

FINAL	1	2	3

Athletics	**(41-42)**	1	0	0
Indians	**(32-49)**	0	0	1

W: Mazzaro (4-2) L: Carmona (7-7) S: Bailey (17)

Congratulations to the Cleveland All-Star, Fausto Carmona, who is distinguished by his All-Pro ability to not injure himself.

1) The Choo Wazoo

Diving awkwardly for a Jack Cust drive, Shin-Soo Choo managed to turn the ball into two negative events:

a) A double for Cust
b) Injured thumb ligaments

The first is bad enough, in that Cust runs in the manner of a hypnotized bowling ball, but the second requires at least a 15-day stay on the DL and at worst surgery. In Cleveland, this is no small manner: national pundits are talking about missing six to eight weeks, while Browns staffers are speaking of simply amputating the hand to prevent the inevitable staph infection from propagating up the arm.

Injuries, by definition, are painful and negative, but this was especially luckless for Choo, who deserved at least greater consideration for the All-Star Game. After making such an impassioned and thorough argument for why Choo deserved a spot on the team, even using the argument-clinching forensic device, “Neener neener,” I was more than a little disappointed that Choo wasn’t even mentioned. This seems like such a wasted opportunity for Joe Girardi: he could have gotten Choo on the team “for free,” in that Choo was injured BEFORE the rosters were due, so he could have named Choo, shook his head sadly, and immediately named an injury replacement (Jose Bautista, for example). That way you recognize Choo’s fine season and lose nothing from the actual roster. I suppose there was the danger that Choo wasn’t injured enough to miss the game, in which case you’d have the awful, intolerable situation of HAVING THE RIGHT GUY ON THE ROSTER IN THE FIRST PLACE. That would have been terrible, I understand.

(Am I bitter? Perhaps a little. It is so hard to convey such things in raw prose. Also, David DeJesus should be on the team instead of Bautista, a one-trick fluke.)

But the intent of this item isn't actually to lament injustice, but rather point out something about the current Cleveland lineup.

Right now, the outfield consists of Austin Kearns, Trevor Crowe, Mike Brantley, and Shelley Duncan. Kearns was an NRI, Duncan signed to a minor-league deal, and Crowe and Brantley are young players cusping their way up from AAA to the majors.

The infield consists of Peralta, Donald, Hernandez, Nix, Marte, and LaPorta. Donald and LaPorta are in the same boat as Crowe and Brantley (although LaPorta has higher pedigree than the other three), Hernandez was a minor-league signing, Nix was grabbed off waivers, Marte is a fungus, and Peralta is Peralta.

The catchers are Mike Oldmond and Carlos Santana: Santana is clearly excellent, while Oldmond is from the Brotherhood of Old Backup Catchers, signed in the off-season as many other recycled catchers are signed.

The DH is Travis Hafner.

Now, for those of you unfamiliar with the term "Replacement Player," it is a construct that acts as a baseline for talent measurement: these are the proverbial guys that you could call up from AAA or pick up off waivers or go find in Oaxaca, throwing spitballs between shots of tequila. The idea is that your starters should be better than these guys, because these guys are everywhere and available for the price of a bail bond.

Putting performance aside for a moment, though, let's take the definition of Replacement Player a bit more literally. What percentage of the Indians' position players are guys who you could pick up off waivers, sign to minor-league deals or NRIs, or call up from the minors? Let's be conservative here, saying that calling up a great young prospect from AAA is not necessarily an option for everyone: I mean, what kind of starting pitcher would we be calling up

from AAA? Someone horrible, right? So, here are the players who, in my opinion, do NOT fit the stricter definition of "Replacement Player:"

Jhonny Peralta (league average veteran)
Travis Hafner (once-excellent hitting talent)
Carlos Santana (premium prospect, not universally-available)

Three.

Kearns, Crowe, Brantley, Duncan, Marte, Donald, Hernandez, Nix, LaPorta, and Oldmond are, by the *literal definition*, Replacement Players.

Ten!

You may argue for LaPorta as "not replacement." I would argue that every team has a promising young power hitter capable of hitting .236/.307/.351 in the majors, since Trevor Freaking Crowe is hitting .255/.310/.340 in the majors.

I guess what I'm saying here is: it is moderately astonishing that this team can play .400 baseball.

2) Variety is the spice of life, and we are bland

Mitch Talbot pitched a pretty good game, giving up 3 runs (2 earned because of an error on Jason Donald) in 5 1/3 IP on 5 hits, but a lousy 5:4 K:BB ratio. Only one of the hits was for extra bases, and he posted a fine 9:2 GO:FO ratio.

Jake Westbrook pitched a pretty good game, giving up 3 runs (2 earned because of an error on

Jason Donald) in 6 IP on 4 hits, but a lousy 1:3 K:BB ratio. Only two of the hits were for extra bases, and he posted a fine 11:5 GO:FO ratio.

Fausto Carmona pitched a pretty good game, giving up 3 runs (3 earned because Jason Donald did not play) in 7 IP on 7 hits, but a loust 3:3 K:BB ratio. Only 2 of the hits were for extra bases, and he posted a fine 11:6 GO:FO ratio.

The good news is that this is why the Indians are able to post a .400+ winning percentage: you could argue that Talbot and Laffey/Huff are by definition Replacement Players, but Talbot has shown that even a Replacement Player can come through with above-average performance, and Carmona is clearly nothing like Replacement this season (although he kind of was the past two seasons). Also, the bullpen gave up only 1 run in their 9 2/3 IP, another reason the Indians have won 6 of 8 over the past week or so.

The bad news is, this is really boring stuff to write about. So ... that's all I got. Three tall right-handed groundball specialists without strikeout stuff who walk too many guys and have Jason Donald as their shortstop. One of whom is an All-Star. Because of the Neener Neener Principle.

Feel the excitement!

3) Explicit heading required

Read that "Also" clause up there again.

Not only did the Indians' bullpen give up 1 run in 9 2/3 IP against the A's, they've only give up 3 runs (earned or no) in their last 21 IP during the 6-of-8 string.

Special mention goes to Heck Ambriz, who gave up 1 hit and no runs or walks in 3 innings, during which he struck out 3 guys. Although Ambriz has not been truly valuable in a global

sense (5.25 ERA), that's kind of Raffy Betancourt level of performance for the weekend, and maybe he's valuable enough to consider a real, live pre-setup man in 2011.

Right now, Ambriz has been used in pretty low-leverage situations, and I'm not sure he could really be considered a candidate for right-handed setup man. Despite having a lower ERA than Joe Smiff, I get the impression that Manny Acta considers Smiff a more palatable choice to get right-handers out in a tight game. That may even be true after Smiff returned from Clumbus with a couple extra mph on his fastball. But bullpens need arms, and Ambriz apparently has one.

On the other hand, he was passed up by Frank Herrmann, a man with lesser stuff and far less experience, so maybe he's Just Some Guy.

While I'm here, Chris Perez was excellent as usual, and Kerry Wood pitched a scoreless ninth in a tie game, which is good from two standpoints: first, he pitched a scoreless ninth, showing few ill effects of the three straight saves, and second, Acta was willing to use him in a non-save situation in order to get Wood work AND give us a better chance to win the game. I'm in favor of that.

4) Welcome back, but please suck less

With Choo on the DL, Mike Brantley was called up to lead off, play center and left, and hit the ball out of the infield.

Two out of three is still bad.

5) Stone or steel?

I appreciate Jason Donald's enthusiastic charm. He displays surprising power I did not know he had. His versatility will come in handy in the future, as he can play both middle infield

positions. He has some speed and currently has a higher AVG and SLG than Jhonny Peralta, a credible everyday infielder.

But he should not be allowed to play shortstop again until someone buys him a glove made of leather instead of tyrillium alloy. Buzz Lightyear would be a better fielder at shortstop, and he is nine inches tall.

Asdrubal Cabrera is taking grounders and will likely be ready to come back after the All-Star Break. It will be too late for me.

6) Captain Clutch!

Matt LaPorta dribbled a game-winning single up the middle to win Saturday's game. Ironically, it was the least of his three hits on the night, producing 2 RBI of the Indians' 4 on the night. The Indians went 2-for-7 with runners in scoring position Saturday, and LaPorta was 2-for-2.

Look, LaPorta is not necessarily the guy who homered in three consecutive games, because no one is, but he does have a certain calm and composure at the plate that I think will serve him well in this incarnation. If he gets a day off between now and October, I want it to be because he is receiving intravenous fluids or recovering from saving a child from a tar pit.

7) Boom goes the soggy dynamite!

Jayson Nix hit his second homer of the season to stake Cleveland to an early 2-0 lead on Saturday.

I don't really have anything else to say about this, except that between me and Some Guy Mortensen, I'm pretty sure that we were equally surprised.

8) Get that man a jet pack!

With the bases loaded in the 6th inning Friday, Mike Redmond came to the plate and stroked a ball into right field, which he does roughly 100% of the time he does not strike out.

Right fielder Ryan Sweeney, playing in against the low-wattage Redmond, scooped up the ball and fired to first, where Redmond was out on what was officially “a groundout to right field.”

I appreciated Redmond’s response after the game:

"I hit it right to him," Redmond said. "I knew I was in trouble. The only thing that bothers me is the fact there are probably people out there who think I didn't hustle. I was running hard out of the box. I'm slow."

I will say this: I did not think that Mike Redmond was not hustling. I appreciate Mike Redmond’s contribution to the team, to Fausto Carmona’s resurgence, and as a calming veteran leader on a team lacking in such things.

But I like the fact that Redmond thinks that I will ridicule him less because he’s simply slow. That’s a whole lot funnier to me, frankly. You got thrown out on a ground ball to right, dude! Every Little Leaguer knows they put the worst fielder in right!

(It is not clear from the replay if Sweeney was picking his nose, looking at a grasshopper, or breathing through his mouth before the ball was hit. These are the most common actions my right fielders would be practicing during my Little League career.)