We're number five! The Indians wrest sole control of last place in the A.L. Central from the Royals with an inspirational 2-1 loss in which the two teams combined to got 1-for-17 with runners in scoring position and leave an aggregate 20 men on base. This included three consecutive walks by Jesse Chavez … on 14 pitches … to load the bases … and resulted in zero runs. So I guess what I'm saying is, "Indians-Royals fever! Catch it!" Or maybe, "Ow! My spleen!"

FINAL	1	2	3
Indians (49-70)	0	1	0
Royals (50-69)	0	0	0

W: Greinke (8-11) L: Gomez (3-1) S: Soria (34)

Well, that's what you ask for: your two best hitters up with a runner in scoring position in a 1-run game.

1) Bait & Switch

With Michael Brantley at second base and one out, Shin-Soo Choo and Travis Hafner each went down watching strike three sail through the right-handed batter's box.

Here's what bothered me most about those calls, which I thought were not good: incentive and reward.

See, the Indians had drawn seven walks on the night. One of these walks was to Shin-Soo Choo, another two of them to Travis Hafner. To that point, Hafner had reached base all four times on a single, double, and two walks. Choo has an OBP that is 97 points higher than his AVG; Hafner's OBP is 102 points higher than his AVG. And although Choo's walk was against Jesse Chavez, who went through a stretch where he could not have hit a beer at a Cleveland Browns tailgate, and one of Hafner's walks ended up being intentional (after Chavez advanced runners from 1st and 2nd to 2nd and 3rd with a pitch that hit a beer at a Cleveland Browns tailgate), starter Zack Greinke walked 3 hitters in 6 innings and Blake Wood walked one in his single inning of work. The Royals had established themselves a masters of the Not Strike Zone, the Indians hitters had established that they were willing to wait for strikes, and they had been REWARDED for this patience by the UMPIRE behind the plate SEVEN TIMES.

Now, Joakim Soria is not Jess Chavez nor Blake Wood. Joakim Soria is a much muchity much better pitcher than those two mooks. He has 55 Ks and only 13 BB in 50 IP this season, a K:BB ratio over 4, and a walk rate barely one every four innings. It's perfectly true that Soria has good control and has established this.

But you know, the hitters have established they have pretty good eyes, too. And you've just INCENTIVIZED them over the course of the first eight innings to WAIT for a pitch in the STRIKE ZONE.

So while it's one thing for an umpire to miss a couple of calls, possibly because he is subconsciously giving the excellent pitcher on the mound a little extra credit for being awesome, it is another to call a game one way for 8 innings and suddenly decide that the 9th inning would be a perfect time to change tack.

Anyway, they were bad calls and we lost.

2) And this is functionally different … how?

Well, I mean, the obvious answer would be the two home runs: after giving up 1 home run in 23 1/3 IP over his first four starts, Jeanmar Gomez gave up a pair of solo shots and lost the game

2-1 when his offense became pitiful and bad.

Otherwise, the fact that he lost the game shouldn't overshadow the fact that this start looked very much like each of his other starts: 6 innings, about a hit an inning, 2 runs, 3 strikeouts, and a pair of walks. Really, other than the fact that this is Gomez' first major-league start in which he allowed more hits than innings pitched (7), the runs, walks, and Ks all hit their modal values, and the IP was right at the mean. Five of his first six outs were via the groundout, and he got Mitch Maier to strike out swinging twice.

Really, although the velocity isn't quite as high and the movement isn't as severe, this could be younger Fausto Carmona. Note that Gomez is currently much better against left-handers than Carmona was back in the day … or is now.

3) Ho Hum Dept.

Justin Germano came in, threw strikes (7 of 9), and didn't give up a run.

Joe Smiff came in, threw strikes (3 of 4), and didn't give up a run.

Raffy Perez came in, threw strikes (8 of 12 with a walk, meaning every hitter who didn't walk saw nothing but strikes), induced nothing but ground balls, got an inning-ending double play, and didn't give up a run.

4) Welcome back!

You know, I'm not sure I really gave it enough play up top there, so let me say this again: through four plate appearances, Travis Hafner had one single, one double, and two walks. The double was directly responsible for 100% of Cleveland's runs, as he scored on a groundout after a single by Jay Nix.

Sure, his first three plate appearances were bad, but since then, he has a homer (GS), single, double, two walks, and a bogus strikeout.

Primarily against Feliz Hernandez and Zack Greinke.

I wonder if Hafner could ever accept being a six-week-on, two-week off player. You know, just slap him on the DL after every six weeks. I wonder if that would make him more productive and less prone to wearing down. Probably not. I like *this* guy, though.

5) Hustle from the fat guy

Sure, Ozzie Guillen thinks he's fat, but Matt LaPorta played a role in the first run as well in that his ground ball to second was not a double play. He also drew a pair of walks, which is not so much "hustle" as it is "depth perception."

6) I know it's Zack Greinke, but …

Any lineup that goes:

Nix
Crowe
LaPorta

Better be up against a ten-foot guy who throws directly sidearm. And then, what is Nix doing in the five slot?

7) Ducks on the pond!

Hitting 1-for-9 with runners in scoring position is a good step toward leaving 12 guys on base.

It's not a good step in the abstract, but it does serve the lower purpose.

8) The warm streak continues

Asdrubal Cabrera singled and drew a pair of walks in five trips to the plate. Lookin' more comfortable there finally.

9) Hey, Shelley!

I know you're in a slump, but the first pitch? C'mon, man.