On a rainy night in Cleveland, the Tribe finished the season series with the Angels on a high note to take the series for the first time since they were named something else, I think. It's a pretty safe bet, as the Angels are rarely named the same thing three years in a row. The defining feature of the game is that it was decided by an error by the third baseman … and it wasn't Cleveland's! Also, Fausto was really good.

FINAL	1	2	3
Angels (71-75)	0	0	0
Indians (60-86)	0	0	2

W: R. Perez (5-1) L: Cassevah (0-1)

I was asked last night if I thought the Indians would score more than 4 runs in a game over the remaining games. I think if you mean *earned* runs … then no. Agree or disagree?

1) Optimistic optimism

Fausto Carmona's six shutout innings last night actually extended a streak back to the 9/3 game in Seattle, a total of 22 innings in all. His last 4 starts have been Quality Starts, and this one was especially good through 6, as it featured 6 strikeouts against 1 walk and only 2 singles. Of course, Carmona got the no-decision not only because the Cleveland offense is so lame, but because he coughed up a pair of gophers in the 7th (although he also got two more swinging Ks in the bargain).

The first home run was more credit to Hideki Matsui than blame to Carmona: Matsui golfed a pretty good inside breaking pitch, and it didn't go out by a lot. Mike Napoli, on the other hand, hit an elevated meatball a Really Long Way. These things happen.

It's hard to argue that Carmona didn't have good command of his stuff, though; not only did he walk only one batter and throw 76 strikes in 103 pitches, he started 16 of 25 hitters with a first-pitch strike and got 13 swinging Ks. Not only was the ball in the strike zone, it was well-placed and moving. I hesitate to make any grand pronouncements on a "new pitch" after such a short time, especially since everyone seemingly has one in Spring Training, but Carmona's changeup really does appear to be giving hitters a different look, with more separation in velocity between it and the fastballs. Impressively, after walking Bobby Abreu in the first, Carmona did not go to 3 balls on any hitter until Torii Hunter led off the 7th … and Hunter eventually struck out. That's good stuff.

In a bit of a statistical quirk, this was Fausto's first no-decision since May 17th: he had gone 21 straight starts being the pitcher of record, going 8-13 in those matchups. Some of this is badness (a 2 2/3 IP affair against NY in which he yielded 7 runs on 10 hits), and some poor support (he lost each of the three Quality Starts he had before his shutout of Minnesota). This one was so close to being a win it seems kind of a shame that Matsui got him. On the other hand, if you throw the opponent's highest-SLG hitter a meatball, you probably shouldn't complain about poor fortune.

2) Meta-metrics

Trying to evaluate the performance of a relief pitcher is a little like trying to use golf balls as scattering media. Every time you get a hit, you know something is there, but the picture is so inexact as to tell you next to nothing about the object you've hit. (Think about shooting a stream of spherical pellets at a peach pit: the smaller the pellet, the better picture you get of how the peach pit is actually textured.)

I could talk about Raffy Perez' month-by-month ERAs, but he normally throws about 12 innings a month. That's two (shortish) starts. What conclusions are you going to draw from that? Is he the guy who put up a 0.00 in June, or the guy who put up 4.40 in August? The answer, of course, is, "Yes." He's both of those guys. One 2/3 IP 4-run outing in August skews the

numbers so horribly that if you move that ONE FRACTIONAL QUASI-INNING from August to June, his June becomes a 3.18 ERA and his August a 1.98. What have we learned from THAT?

There are some nice metrics out there for evaluating relievers like WXRL and ARP, but frankly, I kind of take these numbers on faith and don't use them to make a lot of decisions. I hope that the Cleveland front office does, and since Keith Woolner and Russell Carleton (formerly of Baseball Prospectus) work there, I assume they do. I want THEM to make decisions based on meaningful data, statistical savvy, and scouting acumen. Me, I'm left with a broader impression of "this guy is an asset" and "this guy is No Masa Kobayashi."

Perez had a dreadful May, but since then has largely been a net asset. Since June 1, he's struck out 22 and walked 11: this is more walks than I like, but it's better than it was. He's given up 3 homers and 11 runs (10 earned) in 42 innings. He has a pretty high ground ball percentage, a consequence of his low arm slot and heavy reliance on a slider and a fastball that appears to sit low in the zone.

One of the more remarkable things about Perez in September, though, is the number of truly short outings he's had. I don't necessarily mean that he's being used as a LOOGY to match up with one left-handed hitter, but consider: in 7 outings in September, he has FOUR outings in which he's thrown SIX PITCHES OR FEWER. And THREE of those outings are for more than one out! How does he do that? Consider:

Abreu: Ball, infield single
Hunter: Strike, double play
Matsui: Strike, groundout

All three men hit ground balls to infielders: it's just a matter of the location. Against Minnesota, he came in and got a double play in three pitches. In his previous outing, he needed four pitches to record two groundouts.

Last year was just wretched for Perez. After ERAs of 1.78 and 3.54, Raffy turned in a 7.31 ERA performance that had us all calling for his demotion, or possibly a round trip to Mars. This year, he's back down to 3.47. And much of this can be traced to these ground balls:

2007: 60.2 IP, 1.78 ERA, 62:15 K:BB, 1.21 GO:FO
2008: 76.1 IP, 3.54 ERA, 86:23 K:BB, 1.40 GO:FO
2009: 48 IP, 7.31 ERA, 32:25 K:BB, 1.04 GO:FO
2010: 57 IP, 3.47 ERA, 35:21 K:BB, 1.51 GO:FO

Obviously there's still some ground to make up with the strikeouts and walks. His K rates were much higher in the best years, and with fewer walks. This hasn't come all the way back. It could be that 73 appearances (in 2008) is simply a lot of appearances. But it looks like the 2010 version points to a pitcher who is effective rather than simply finished.

3) Just one of many

One night after hurling 6 perfect innings, the Cleveland bullpen put up 4 more scoreless innings, giving up 2 hits (both singles) and 2 walks while striking out 5 hitters. Chris Perez threw a perfect inning, and Jensen Lewis offset a walk with 3 punchouts (2 swinging, the last a three-pitch blasting of Reggie Willits with a man on base). The highest ERA by a Cleveland reliever in September is Justin Germano's 3.24; 4 relievers have pitched at least 4 innings without giving up a run (earned or not).

(The entire staff has a WHIP of 0.97 for September and a 2.39 ERA. We are 7-7.)

The bullpen on the year, as relief pitchers (but counting Justin Masterson's 7 innings of quasi-relief of Mitch Talbot) has a 3.92 ERA, and that includes 5 preposterous outings by Jess Todd, 20 innings worth of Kerry Wood's 1.60 WHIP and 6.30 ERA, and 21 1/3 innings of Jamey Wright's 1.59 WHIP and 5.48 ERA.

I am looking back, and I think the last lead *blown* by the bullpen was Germano's horror against the White Sox Sept. 1. Sure, Hector Ambriz lost the 16-inning game, but it was his third inning of work, and the bullpen threw like 8 shutout innings in that one. (Cleveland didn't have the LEAD when he gave up the run.) The offense is scoring 2.57 runs per game in September … and that INCLUDES 12 extra innings, so this is more like 2.4 runs per 9 innings. (There were 3 road losses with no 9th inning pitched.) To be

7-7 this month is a testament to the job the whole staff has done, and as much as I'm encouraged by the starters, the bullpen deserves its props as well.

Frankly, I think this bullpen as configured is probably overachieving. Chris Perez is a huge asset as closer, but looking at the rest of the pen:

R. Perez: solid
T. Sipp: good
J. Smiff: average, matchup guy
F. Herrmann: more lucky than good
J. Germano: leverage bothers me
J. Lewis: strikes = success, useful
H. Ambriz: ambergris

That's what, four guys I really WANT in my bullpen next year, instead of "being willing to accept?" Maybe five, probably not six?

Still, the fact is, they've been pitching well, so kudos.

4) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

I have heaped my fair share of derision on Trevor Crowe. Then I have heaped my father's share of derision on Trevor Crowe. I followed this with my eldest son's share, my daughter's second-grade teacher's share, and Michael Bloomberg's share. I am now reduced to stopping random people on the street so that I may heap THEIR shares of derision on Trevor Crowe. I do not like Trevor Crowe playing a significant role on the Cleveland Indians, because I do not think he is a valid hitter and because his defense is subpar. I am not being *entirely* fair, but I am not entirely
unjustified
, either.

This having been said, Crowe took what was a pretty good pitch from Bobby "The Melon"

Cassevah, one that was right on the lower-outside corner of the strike zone, and served it up down the left field line (he was batting lefty against the right-handed Melon) for a double. Earlier in the game he had singled and stolen second base, his 16th (!) of the season.

(As an aside, it is impressive that Trevor Crowe has stolen 16 bases this season against only 5 times caught. He also has 19 doubles, more than you might expect. It is also disheartening, because it means that Trevor Crowe has played really, really more than he should have.)

The hit off The Melon proved to lead to the winning run, as Crowe scored on Shelley Duncan's preposterous blorp.

(Under this heading, Mike Brantley now has a 16-game hitting streak.)

5) The shot heard 'round the left side of the infield

I would write about the mighty swing and the sound of the bat and all that other poetic junk, but I'm pressed for time, so let's just say, "Shelley Duncan hit the ball in a manner that would charitably be called 'feeble' and because it was wet, we won the game."

6) Managerial Second-Guessing

Tofu Lou couldn't have done that? He had a double and a walk and would have made The Melon throw strikes, at least. Oh, well, any time you can replace the .197 hitter with the .235 hitter, I suppose you have to do that. Okay, well, I mean, against righties, it's replacing the .161 hitter with the .202 hitter.

Man, I just cannot figure out why this team only scores 2 ½ runs a game.

7) Managerial Second-Guessing II

Mike Brantley led off the 10th inning with a single that he actually *pulled*. After the balloons and confetti were cleared from the field, he stole second base.

At this point, Asdrubal Cabrera is at the plate with a man on second and nobody out. Following him would be Shin-Soo Choo and Travis Hafner. Cabrera sacrificed Brantley to third, and the Angels elected to walk BOTH Choo AND Hafner to set up the double play for Jord Brown, who obliged on second pitch against a five-man infield.

Now, I generally dislike when Cabrera sacrifices Brantley to second late in the game, because the automatic move is to take the bat out of Choo's hands as he is intentionally walked. I understand the principle and the run expectancy matrix and all that, but I hate the idea of giving up BOTH and out AND our best hitter.

With a man on second, of course, they'll walk Choo anyway, so this much is academic. But now by sacrificing, Cabrera is taking the bat out of BOTH players' hands and giving it to JORD BROWN. Really now, I'm all for developing the yoots and all that, but I like winning baseball games, too. Isn't Hafner more likely to do something than Brown? Sure, 1st and 2nd would still be a double-play situation for Hafner as it was for Brown, but with one out (let's say Cabrera just whiffed), they're probably not playing a five-man infield, right?

I dunno, I understand that having a runner on third with one out means you don't need a hit to score, but having Jord Brown at the plate means you're not likely to get a well-hit ball, either. (Brown has an ISO of .064 thus far against righties, lower than, say, Luis Valbuena or Tofu Lou).

8) Welcome to the club some more!

Not only did Drew Sutton get his first hit and draw his first walk, but with Crowe on second in the 11th, he pulled the ball to the right side to allow Crowe to get to third. He was also part of two double plays and has not made an error.

Can he play third?