The season draws to a merciful close, fittingly with a Justin Germano start with Trevor Crowe in RF and Jayson Nix in the two slot. The Tribe drops two of three to the White Sox, and the B-List chimes in on the seasons of Fausto Carmona, Carlos Carrasco, and Mike Brantley, while pointing out that the relative interest level of players like Germano and Vinnie Pestano falls somewhere between lunch distribution and the future writings of people who are unlikely to produce more literature of interest.

FINAL	1	2	3
Indians (69-91)	3	0	3
White Sox (86-74)	1	1	0

W: Carmona (13-14) L: T. Pena (5-3)

FINAL	1	2	3
Indians (69-92)	0	0	2
White Sox (87-74)	1	1	0

W: Buehrle (13-13) L: Carrasco (2-2)

FINAL	1	2	3

Indians (69-93)	0	1	0
White Sox (88-74)	2	3	0

W: E. Jackson (4-2) L: Germano (0-3) S: Sale (4)

Sunday's lineup featured one player who was in the same position as he was on Opening Day, and one player who was in a different position. It is unclear how many were actually sportwriters attempting to duplicate "Paper Lion."

0) Administrative Notes

Immediately after reading Friday's column , brilliant reader Robert Hunter emailed me:

Steve Buffum quote on 9/30/2010: " Screw avoiding 100 losses: let's go get 70 wins. "

You just guaranteed 69 wins...

The lesson, as always, is that Bill Simmons is an idiot. Wait, no, that doesn't follow logically*. The lesson is that I should not make positive pronouncements in a column, because I am Schleprock.

** It's still true, though.*

1) Lucky 13

Fausto Carmona ended his season with a nice 6-inning Quality Start, yielding two runs on 5 hits and a walk. One of the runs was a solo shot by Brett Morel, who apparently is a third baseman of some sort. (This distinguishes him from, say, Jayson Nix, who is a third baseman of no sort.) Carmona was reasonably efficient, using 93 pitches to get through the 6 innings, and part of the reason he even used THIS many pitches was that he got 7 strikeouts, including a total of 14 swinging strikes. A 7:1 K:BB ratio is pretty sharp, even against a free-swinging team playing out the string.

Carmona ends the season with some pretty sharp numbers overall: a 1.31 WHIP is better than his career number, and not too far off his "on-stage leap" year of 2007, when it was 1.21. Over the last two (largely unsuccessful) seasons, Carmona has struggled with K:BB ratios in the 1.00 range, while this year is was 1.72 (compared to 2.25 in 2007). He held opposing hitters to a .703 OPS (.661 2007), and posted a much more palatable 3.77 ERA.

Does this mean he's "all the way back?" Right now, you'd have to say, "No." After back-to-back extreme groundball seasons in 2007 and 2008 (1.84 GB:FB), he's now mired in the 1.30 range. This is still higher than normal, but it's no longer in the Webb/Lowe stratosphere that we all attributed to Carmona back in the day. "He might never strike out a lot of guys," we'd say, " But he'll always generate tons of grounders." Well, "tons" may be more like "stones," but Carmona's not exactly a one-trick poiny. The man still throws in the 90s and still has significant movement on his pitches: if he's truly added a changeup that's worth using as a weapon instead of a "show-me" pitch, he should be reasonably successful into the future.

Certainly his September should serve as some encouragement, with a 1.82 ERA and only 23 hits in 34 2/3 innings (and a WHIP under 1.00): his October start is in the same vein. I might make more of a big deal out of his last 6 starts featuring 2 runs or fewer had Carlos Carrasco and Jeanmar Gomez not put up similar streaks before ending with some Non-trivial Whimpering Action. As much as anything, Carmona's walk rate over his last 14 starts was 2.38 per 9 IP: basically, if he can pitch at that rate instead of the full-season 3.08 per 9 IP, I think he can be considered a legitimate *Good* pitcher.

2) The cow goes, "Moo," and the string goes, "Snap!"

Carlos Carrasco's streak of Quality Starts ended on a rainy night with a 6-inning "complete game" in which he gave up 6 runs on 5 hits and 3 walks. Sure, one run was unearned, but that still doesn't prop the start up into "decent" territory.

Of course, a couple of the runs were pretty weird: Carrasco gave up a run in the first on a walk, error, runner-advancing fly (apparently going from 2nd to 3rd is no longer a "sacrifice fly"), and double-steal on a strikeout. In other words, one run on no hits.

In the second, after a 4-pitch leadoff walk, Tyler Flowers went to second on a groundout, went

to third on a groundout, and scored on a wild pitch (to a guy who ended up whiffing). So again, one run on no hits.

But the next three runs were pretty legit: double, walk, double, single. What Carlos Carrasco is doing walking Tyler F&#*ing Flowers twice on four pitches each is beyond my ken. Tyler Flowers is batting .000 this season. Zero! Zero! Zero! Throw him a strike, fer crine out loud.

Note: Tyler Flowers has zero hits. He has a higher OBP than six of the players in the Indians' lineup on Saturday. His OBP is .308. That is really tripe and makes me want to pelt the Indians' front office with charcoal briquets.

Last run's a solo shot, that's pretty damned legit.

This isn't to say that Carrasco was a thorough schmuck: he did strike out 9 hitters in 6 innings and got a massive 21 swings-and-misses in 106 offerings. Had he but thrown some strikes to Tyler Flowers, he might have given up as few 2 runs. I can't complain about Carrasco's control overall, really: with a 38:14 K:BB ratio in 44 2/3 IP, that's significant major-league stuff. If there's a red flag in Carrasco's future, it's that right-handers slugged .640 off him for a ridiculous .280 ISO. Obviously, when you're talking about 75 AB, anything can happen, but that's clearly something to work on this winter.

I'll say this: they guy I watched in September 2010 looks almost NOTHING like the guy I watched in September 2009. It's worth remembering that a guy in his early-mid 20s can change a LOT.

3) Thumper Rule

Justin Germano.

4) Elaboration

Look, Justin Germano finished the season with a 3.31 ERA and a 0.99 WHIP. He struck out 29 hitters in 35 1/3 innings and held hitters to a .206 average with no appreciable platoon split (.213 vs LHB, .200 vs. RHB). Righties hit 5 homers off him for a .243 ISO in a sample even smaller than Carrasco's. He had some games that were really good, and some games that were flat-out putrid.

You know what I learned from all this? That small numbers are small.

I learned jack shit about Justin Germano, and I find the topic of whether he's on the roster next season to be thoroughly uninteresting. I would rather talk about how many of my next 50 meals will include mayonnaise, or whether John Updike's next novel will contain more "u's" than "w's". (It won't: he's dead.)

5) Hedged Bets Dept.

Mike Brantley had a good series, getting on base twice in EACH of the three games, and includes the 6-inning affair. Overall, he was 4-for-11 with a pair of walks and scored three runs, which is pretty good stuff from your leadoff man.

And listen: there is no question that Brantley looks like a more comfortable hitter over the last two months than he did earlier in the season. Again, 23-year-old guy, split time, 300+ plate appearances against big-league pitching: this is a highly mutable situation. Witness the difference between his .417 OPS (yes, OPS) April or his .445 OPS July and his August and September, in which he hit .291 and .286 respectively. Those are very respectable batting averages.

But that's ALL they are: respectable BATTING AVERAGES.

Because during these two "productive" months, Mike Brantley has posted OBPs of .337 (barely adequate) and .312 (actively *bad*).

I understand that Brantley is not going to put up big slugging numbers, so I'm hardly disappointed by SLGs of .418 and .352. Would I like higher SLG? Of course. 5 extra-base hits out of 30 in September isn't very good, even for the "prototypical waterbug" leadoff guy, and even if it includes a pair of triples. But I'm not worried about that.

I am worried about the OBP.

Look, since August 1, Brantley's OBP is .332, and that's buoyed significantly by this weekend's outings (would be .323 without them). Of course, the fact that this is so volatile that 13 PAs can affect his OBP that much speaks to the size of the sample, but look: a leadoff man has to get on base at least 35% of the time. He just does. Was Grady Sizemore the perfect leadoff guy? Probably not. From 2005-2008, his healthy years, was his OBP over .370 on average? Yes, it was.

I want to make this perfectly clear: in comparison with OBP, the following factors are not within a power of ten of being the same level of importance: steals, speed, slugging, homers, handedness, bunting skill, infield hits, drawing throws, number of pictures on the internet with genitals concealed in drinking vessel. Nothing. Get on base. All things being equal, it's *better* if you can steal (and Brantley can) … it's
better
if you can take an extra base … it's
better
if you can beat out a few infield hits or bunt your way on … but that's because you GET ON BASE. Give me a .370 guy who doesn't steal and a .330 guy who does and I'll take the .370 guy every time. Give me a .360 guy who can't steal and a .350 guy who can, and I'll strongly consider the .350 guy. I do not want the .330 guy leading off, because … HE MAKES TOO MANY OUTS. He's going to get the highest number of plate appearanaces on my WHOLE DAMNED TEAM! I want him to NOT BE OUT.

Now, why am I going on this spiel, which I go on at least once a season, and probably more than that, when I just admitted that:

a) Mike Brantley is 23
b) In the Carrasco section I told you that guys this age are capable of dramatic improvement

c) Brantley's sample sizes aren't very big

Because I'm not entirely sure where this "improvement" is supposed to come from.

Do you see Mike Brantley as a .320 hitter? I sure don't. Sure, he might have a career year in which all the balls fall in and he legs out a couple hits, but generally speaking, I can see Brantley as a .300 hitter as his most plausible high end. Now, look: this is not saying Mike Brantley sucks: only one guy with more than 14 AB hit .300 for the Indians this season. Hitting .300 is good. Mike Brantley can hit. But he's not Ichiro Suzuki.

Right now, he is Juan Pierre.

Pierre has a pair of .320 seasons under his belt, for example. Brantley might could do that, as we say in the South. And his career average is .298, very respectable indeed.

But while Juan Pierre has drawn 50 walks exactly ONCE in 10 seasons (while racking up close to 700 PA in 7 of them), he STILL has a career OBP of .347.

And Juan Pierre is not actually a valuable baseball player. His WARP over his last six years: -0.1, 3.3, 0.6, 0.4, 2.3, 1.1. That's four seasons out of six in which he was worth a game or so over a replacement player, who is defined as "Trevor Crowe." And a bunch of his WARP is tied up in stealing bases: over those 6 seasons, he's stolen an average of 53 bags a year. Brantley has 10 in roughly half a season's worth of playing time.

People tell me that Brantley walked a lot in the minors and posted high OBP there. He is still quite young, and this was his first real extended stay in the majors. This is fine. I just want to be clear here: he has to improve his OBP to be a valuable player, .290 hitter or no. If you're writing Brantley in as a sure-thing-done-deal at leadoff for the 2011 Cleveland Indians, I'm not saying you'll be proven wrong.

I'm saying you're jumping the gun.

6) Smash-Soo Choo

Shin-Soo Choo ends the season with a .300/.401/.484 batting line as Manny Acta chose to sit him in Sunday's closer to allow him to preserve those ten-finger-biased numbers. Choo appreciated it, and I have no problem with it. On Friday, Choo hit his 22nd homer of the season, giving him another "20/20" season of homers and steals (actually 22 of each).

Sobering reflection: Choo's 266 total bases led the team by EIGHTY-EIGHT. Had Travis Hafner homered in his next 20 plate appearances … he would still trail Choo by eight total bases.

Of course, total bases are highly count-dependent, and Choo was the only offense regular to play as many as 125 games for the Indians (actually 144). It is illustrative, for example, to note that third place is taken by Trevor Crowe out of sheer volume. Crowe posted a .634 OPS.

Anyway, Choo had a good season.

7) Mayonnaise Frequency Report

Vinnie Pestano does have some swing-and-miss stuff. In two appearances, Pestano struck out five guys in two innings, for a brisk 22.50 K/9. That's awesome!

He also allowed three baserunners and a run in each outing for a WHIP of 3.00 and an ERA of 9.00. That's no good at all.

Anyway, I no longer pretend to know what the heck a minor-league reliever is likely to do in the

majors (I was a huge booster of both Ferd Cabrera and The Second Roy Smith, so my track record is … "spotty"*), but Pestano is not going to unseat Chris Perez any time soon and his pitching leads me to start counting how many turkey or ham sandwiches I'm likely to pack for lunch, and whether perhaps tuna salad will be involved.

** It's not "spotty," it's "excremental."*

8) Coming up with something else interesting to say about the weekend's games

Nope.

9) Signoff

Thanks for sticking with both of us (the Tribe and the B-List) for the whole season. You can continue to reach me at steve.buffum@gmail.com or follow me on Twitter at @stevebuffum . If enough people are interested in me binding up this season's columns in book form, I will consider it. Also, if anyone has suggestions for who I should tansfer the Patented Steve Buffum Favorite Player Negative Karma™ to for 2011, let me know.