There are few things funner than watching the Indians ballbat Mark Buehrle. In todays edition of The B-List, Buff hits on Buehrle's struggles this year versus the Tribe, as well as Ryan Garko emerging as a guy that deserves 550 AB's next season. Buff also hits on Jason Michaels inadequacies as a #2 hitter, Marte's prowess hitting on the road, and Victor's splits.

Schadenfreude! It's not just for breakfast any more!

1) Hammer Time!

Moon Face Buehrle is one of the most annoying pitchers in the league because he is big, strong, good, dependable, and a White Sok. So it's always nice to get one of those outing where he throws little but beachballs up there: the Indians raked Buehrle for 10 hits in 4+ innings, including a pair of solo shots and a double. The tip-off that Buehrle was probably not going to be razor-sharp was hitting Sizemore with 2 strikes to lead off the game, although one questions how baggy Grady's skin has gotten for his shirt to be considered a body part. We could have made it a lot worse had Victor not grounded into a double play and Ryan F. Garko gotten picked off first on an 0-2 count. (Come on, where is Garko going to go? That's like picking off Greg Luzinski.)

Buehrle, known for being a fast worker and a strike-thrower, lost most of his cachet in the third when he started five of the seven batters off with a ball and yielded a homer, a double to the wall to finally-.400-slugging Jason Michaels, a two-run single to Garko, and walked Casey Blake on five pitches. It's to Buehrle's credit that even on a night when he had nothing whatsoever he only gave up 4 earned runs, but that's not the Mark Buehrle that's plagued us for the past N years.

Which is okay with me, by the way.

One wonders if maybe 5 straight seasons of 220+ IP (averaging almost 238 over the past four) before the age of 27, PLUS a post-season last year and the emotional drain of the World Series, might finally have caught up to Buehrle. (He's thrown 185 2/3 innings this season, probably on pace for about 210-215.) Given that I hate the White Sox so much, the more likely explanation is that this is just a down year, with an ERA a full run over his career average of 3.79.

2) Patience my ass

Jason Michaels had a good night at the plate, smacking a double to center and a pair of singles in 6 plate appearances.

That's five hits in the last two games for the hydrant-shaped Michaels. And as I alluded, I can no longer ridicule his sub-.400 SLG because he has a .400 SLG now. (I can still ridicule him for *that*: he's a left fielder, for Pete's sake.)

But wasn't the point of Jason Michaels that although he didn't hit all that great and his power

was mostly anecdotal, he produced high OBPs because he could draw walks? Wasn't that at least part of the thinking in putting him in the 2 slot? He started off okay, drawing 8 walks in April with 94 AB (which still isn't particularly good), but fast-forward to the All-Star break: in July, he drew 6 walks with 78 AB for an OBP-AVG of .049 (not good), and in August, he drew a Franceouresque 4 walks with 92 AB for an OBP-AVG of .036. He posted a .286 OBP in August, and played just about every day: if he played, his normal slot was still the 2 hole. Now, the Tribe played finely in August, but this is doubleplus ungood.

He's got a mini hot streak going, and good for him swinging the bat well, but I think it's time to stop thinking of Jason Michaels as a patient hitter.

By the way, Michaels had a rep as a platoon player with the Phils, hitting against left-handers. This season he is hitting .309/.369/.480 against left-handers. Looks like the Phillies were smarter than we are. (By the way, Shin-Soo Choo is hitting .286/.375/.495 against right-handers, meaning a platoon would currently be about an .863 OPS guy, assuming approximately a 2:1 ratio of RH pitchers to LH ...)

3) Ryan F Garko!

Elias points out that Garko's 3-for-3 with 2 walks night made him the first Cleveland rookie since Brian Giles in 1996 to have a 5-PA game in which he reached base all 5 times. He drove in two runs and scored once as well. No word as to whether this means he will be traded for a left-handed relief pitcher who immediately goes into the tank.

Garko is not the smoothest first baseman out there, and apparently his catching frightens women and children, but he hits well enough that I have to believe there's room for him to play regularly, splitting first with Victor, giving Hafner the occasional night off at DH, and maybe catching on nights when Eric Wedge is sedated. One thing it would seem to do is preclude trying to move Kevin Kouzmanoff to first, because there's no point. Kouz will either have to take the Casey Blake outfield route or he becomes bait, because ...

4) Rhymes with par-tay! Or party! Or kumquat!

Andy Marte is growing on me as a hitter. (ESPN's pronounciation guide tells me is MAR-the, which is the one thing I'm sure it's *not,* at least not with either English "th" sound.) It's sometimes hard to remember that a 22-year-old playing in the majors is quite rare: sure, we see guys like Davy Wright and Miggy Cabrera and think every yoot we call up should be able to produce like an established major-leaguer right away. 22 is young. It's rare.

Anyway, Marte's overall stats are still quite crummy: .225/.275/.392. The ISO of .167 is encouraging, but a .275 OBP is simply bad. However, keeping in mind the preposterous nature of the sample sizes, he's improved his AVG and SLG every month, and is hitting .308/.357/.554 on the road (65 AB). The fact that he is 3-for-37 with a .236 OPS (yes, OPS) at home is what makes his overall numbers so lousy. He's probably not a .911 OPS hitter at age 22, but he sure isn't a .236 OPS guy, either. My guess is that the .667 he's posting is low as well: given that Boone is at .685 for the season, giving Marte the everyday job in 2007 seems like *fait accompli*, unless Kouzmanoff shows me something I really, really, really, really never expected. (Hint: he won't)

5) And the Scott Proctor Pointless Inning Award goes to ...

... Rafael Betancourt! Congratulations, Raffy, you get an all-expense paid trip to the whirlpool and a year's supply of Rice-a-Roni, the *other* San Francisco treat! (Please, no more steroids.)

No, seriously, 50 innings in 44 appearances isn't a lot, but wasn't this guy on the DL early in the season? Did we have a 6-run lead? Did we call up twelve pitchers as September callups? Betancourt was terrific, throwing 2 scoreless innings of 1-hit ball (0 BB, 2 K, 20:6 ball-to-strike ratio), but was that really necessary?

By the way:

Betancourt pre-All-Star break: 4.78 ERA, 5 HR in 26 2/3 IP Betancourt post-All-Star break: 3.04 ERA, 1 HR in 23 2/3 IP

With arbitration looming, I have little idea as to whether he'll be an Indian in 2007, but money aside, I'd like him in the bullpen next season.

6) I have a pet stat, and I'm not afraid to use it!

Cliff Lee pitched very well last night, perfect through 3 1/3, hitless through 4, scoreless through 5. His night was over after the sixth and 109 pitches, giving up 1 run on 5 hits and 2 (harmeless) walks. He had his typically-absurd GB:FB ratio of 0.33.

What Cliff Lee does NOT do is miss bats. If Cliff Lee throws a pitch and you swing at it, you will hit it. In his six innings, Lee had 39 pitches fouled off (although several were caught for outs), and induced FIVE swinging strikes. In the fourth inning alone, the White Sox fouled off TWELVE pitches and missed ONE. (They never missed more than 1 in an inning.) This leads to the 109 pitches in 6 innings, but also to a sense that Lee has no "out" pitch, nothing he can throw that has a high probability of getting a guy out, even with two strikes. Jermaine Dye fouled off 10 pitches in two AB by himself! I don't know what this implies for Lee in the off-season, but learning a sinker or coming further over the top on the slow curve might be in order.

7) What do we have for our contestants, Johnny?

Aaron Boone has certainly taken his share of abuse, some of it even in columns other than this one. He is finished. Kaput. Marvin K. Mooney. Enough already.

This having been said, Boone was great last night, lacing three singles in 5 AB, scoring twice, and driving in two runs. That would be one heckuva farewell performance. This would be great for two reasons: he would leave on a high note, and he would leave.

But seriously, he did a good job and deserves to be recognized for that.

(But ... DH? We have no other right-handed hitters as accomplished as AARON BOONE?)

8) Splitsville

Victor Martinez is generally recognized as a stronger left-handed hitter than right: it's nice that he switch-hits, but he's hit feebly enough in the past from the right side (high enough average, power like a Cherrystone clam) to make one wonder if it's worth the effort.

Well, this season, Vic is hitting .286/.365/.429 with 6 HR. He actually has a higher HR/AB ratio right-handed than left-handed. Although he still hits better from the left side (.868 OPS to .793), he's improved quite a lot from the right side, enough to be a credible run-producing threat regardless of the pitcher.

9) Again, we're wearing the grey, right?

What is it with karma? Every time you have figured something out, the world thumbs its nose at you and does the opposite. This time, the White Sox gave up the ghost in the sixth when Jermaine Dye left second on a fly ball and was easily doubled off (bad baserunning), and Ozzie Guillen brought in lefty Neal Cotts to face Grady Sizemore (good move), then left him in to face Michaels, Martinez, and Garko to START THE INNING (presposterously bad move, bad bullpen management).

(In fact, Grady was the only lefty in the lineup since Buehrle started.) Predictably, Cotts retired exactly none of these hitters and David Riske was brought on the clean up the mess (which, to his credit, he did).

So the team with the obvious baserunning blunder and the pitcher left out there too long was ... Chicago? Did we adopt the Canadian Opposite Daya and no one told me?

10) Obligatory mention

Jason Davis is still on the roster. He pitched a scoreless ninth. I forgot he was on the roster.