The Indians throttled the inert Boston offense for a 3-1 win last night, and the B-List talks about Josh Tomlin's unusual form, the new infielders' unusual production, and the unexpectedly good production from the leadoff spot. Buff also notes that some things remain constant: strong throws from right field, effective strikes from a lefty reliever, and the ghost of Bob Wickman. And then there are Jack Hannahan's production and Matt LaPorta stealing a base. Frankly, those doesn't even have categories.

FINAL	1	2	3
Red Sox (0-4)	0	1	0
Indians (2-2)	0	0	0

W: Tomlin (1-0) L: Beckett (0-1) S: C. Perez (1)

Joe Tait: It's a beautiful night for baseball!
Everyone else: You're totally lying, dude.
Joe Tait: So I am.

1) All he does is win

Last season, spent a good portion of my time trying to figure out exactly what it was that Josh Tomlin did WELL as a starting pitcher. His ERA was solid enough, but seemed a little lucky. He wasn't a complete puffball, but his 5.30 K/9 rate wasn't anything to write home about. (Not that I ever actually write home. Look, I'm 46: I *am* home. I guess I text home fairly frequently. I wouldn't text Josh Tomlin's strikeout rates home, either.) He had good enough control, sporting a K:BB ratio over 2, so that's good (especially compared to yoots like David Huff and Aaron Laffey). He just didn't seem like he had some singular, signature skill on which to hang his hat. Like a monocranial Zaphod Beeblebrox, he was just this guy, you know?

One thing he most certainly did NOT do well is keep the ball on the ground.

Consider this: Scott Elarton used to terrify me with his ungodly flyball rates. Elarton was horrifying at this. His career GB/FB ratio was 0.52. With the Indians in 2005, it was a hard-to-fathom 0.49. This led Elarton to allow SLG rates in the stratosphere, from .470 and .458 in Cleveland in 2004-5 to .510 in KC the next season. It is not in-and-of-itself a bad thing to be an extreme flyball pitcher, but it sure leads to some scary moments unless you have the stuff of a real power pitcher.

Elarton didn't, and he was kinda lame.

Josh Tomlin's GB/FB ratio last season was 0.47.

Now, again, the man was 6-4 for a lousy team and had a middle-of-the-road ERA. He wasn't getting bombed out there, and he'd performed well in the minors. I'm just pointing out that while some of his peripherals might have supported a lower ERA (like a 1.25 WHIP or a .315 OBP, his .458 SLG and high XBH percentage allowed) put a damper on what I thought was reasonable to expect.

I'm not going to draw a lot of conclusions from one game in miserable weather against a cold team (figuratively and literally: they came in hitting like .200, and it was about 40 degrees with a light rain to start). But I will point this out: last night, Tomlin recorded 12 ground ball outs to 5 in the air (3 Ks, 1 on the bases). In the first three innings, Tomlin didn't record a single air out, including 5 grounders and 3 punchouts. In fact, his only trouble came when he gave up a long drive to J.D. Drew that turned out to be a double. (His only run allowed came when the next batter singled, although Drew was thrown out at the plate to end the inning before further damage could occur.)

Tomlin wasn't entirely masterful after that: he did walk a batter in each of the 4th and 5th and gacked up an error in the 7th, but the walked batters were both erased on classical double plays, something he only induced 6 times in 12 starts last season. But the numbers don't lie: 3 hits and 1 run in 7 complete innings in an efficient 91 pitches is really a very good outing.

In watching the video and listening to Manny Acta, it would seem that Tomlin's best feature is using four pitches to keep hitters off balance, and it should be said that of all the swings the BoSox got last night, only Drew's double was hit with any real authority. I doubt that this signals any real State Change or Paradigm Shift or Very Large Occurrence with Tomlin's repertoire or approach: he didn't add a Super Drop Ball or take lessons from Jake Westbrook over the winter. His X-Treme Flyitude last season might have been a bit of a gork, and this might have been one the other way. He did say explicitly that he was trying to keep the ball down and away to left-handed hitters to prevent them from hurting him deep to right, suggesting a certain degree of self-awareness. I'm just noting that the ball stayed down and I liked it (and the results) significantly more. It's the "keeping hitters off-balance" thing that's sustainable, and he did it well last night.

Tomlin may not yet have That One Thing To Look For, unless that thing is a "W." Which would be okay, especially from your near-rookie #4 starter.

2) I would apologize to Charles Dickens, but he'd dead and doesn't know who I am

Jacob Buffley: You will be haunted by three ghosts ...
Chris Perez: I'm not afraid of ghosts.
Jacob Buffley: But they are really very terrifying ghosts.
Chris Perez: Dude. I'm not afraid of ghosts.
Jacob Buffley: But they are the ghosts of Really Big Bob Wickman.
Chris Perez: And ... ?
Jacob Buffley: Nope, that's it. Just Really Big Bob.
Chris Perez: I thought you said "three."
Jacob Buffley: Have you seen Bob Wickman? Do you really think he can be contained in one ghost?
Chris Perez: Wait a minute, Bob Wickman's not dead. He's your age, dude.
Jacob Buffley: Will you shut up?! You will be haunted by three ghosts. Heed them well, or you will never be a True Closer.

Chris Perez: Whatever. Bring him on.
Wickman: First, you must allow a hit to a punk.
Chris Perez: Okay, I can do that. Now what?
Wickman: Now, wait until there are two outs ...
Chris Perez: Yeah? Yeah?
Wickman: Then walk the most irritating man alive!
Chris Perez: Okay, I can do that too. Have you seen my Blunderbuss Pitch?
Wickman: I have. It is most impressive.
Chris Perez: That means a lot, dude.
Wickman: Then fall behind to the hitter at the plate, who represents the go-ahead run!
Chris Perez: Wait, I don't like this plan so much ...
Wickman: Silence! Then ... and only then ... can you retire him on a line drive out that, if hit just a little better, would have tied the game!
Chris Perez: Wait, old man. This plan sucks. I hate this plan.
Steve Buffum (ripping off cheap mask): Well then bloody well stop doing it, you long-haired git! Throw strikes, dammit!
Ferd Cabrera: Hey, why didn't you tell ME that super secret strategy?
(Buffum beats Cabrera to death with his laptop. Exeunt.)

3) A new Deputy in town

It would be pretty cold-blooded to suggest that there won't be any place for Grady Sizemore in the lineup when he returns from his rehab. Sure, he was awful last night in an exhibition game, taking a Size Four Collar, but it's cold and early and it's an exhibition game. The fact is, Sizemore has the highest immediately-attainable ceiling of any outfielder in the system not named Shin-Soo Choo. If Sizemore is back to being some sizable percentage of what he's demonstrated he can do, he belongs in the lineup. (If he's not, he'll probably play anyway. What part of "nine thousand fans" confuses you here?)

This having been said, for all the questions I've raised about Mike Brantley's suitability in leading off a major-league lineup, the fact is, Brantley has done what a leadoff hitter must, must, must do: get on base. In each game, Brantley has at least one hit, and in three of the four games, has reached base twice. The sample size of 15 AB is obviously negligible, but all a player can do is perform in the situations he's put in, and Brantley has done that, drawing two walks to go with his 5 hits for a .389 OBP. To put this into perspective, Sizemore's career-high OBP was his .390 in 2007. Of course, that's over 750 plate appearances: Brantley has 17. I would bet a rather large sum that Brantley will not finish with a .389 OBP, but that's only because a .389 OBP is really quite excellent. I'm not saying Brantley isn't excellent, even though I do believe he is not, but … look, .389 is great. Mike Brantley is 23. I'd be surprised, that's all.

One nice thing about Brantley's approach thus far is that it has produced a pair of doubles, including one last night, when he turned on a ball and pulled it to right. And he also can go the other way, flying out to left: he's been using the whole field, which is important for a guy like him without serious power. Finally, he stole his first base of the season, something that might look more impressive had Matt LaPorta not managed the same trick later in the game.

I'm going to refrain from writing Brantley in on any All-Star ballots for the time being, but the fact is that he looks both like a legitimate major-leaguer and a legitimate leadoff man, and we've been kinda short on the latter since St. Grady left the building.

4) Meet the new guys, virtually nothing like the old guys

Do you remember Josh Barfield and Luis Valbuena? I sure hope you get therapy for that. Because Orly Cabrera and Jack Hannahan do not remind me of Josh Barfield and Luis Valbuena.

I think it would be unwise to think that Orly Cabrera at age 36 is having a Career Renaissance and will slug .188 on the season. The last time he posted a SLG over .400 was his .404 in 2006, and that was the result of a .122 ISO. Small samples are hilarious. But with another hit last night, Cabrera now leads the team with 5 RBI and is playing fine defense for a team that has produced 28 ground ball outs in 14 starter innings over the past two games. Is there a reason to be playing Orly instead of breaking in Jason Kipnis in 2011? Several, I suppose, but harkening back to the idea of Opportunity and Performance, Cabrera's done a fine job.

Hannahan, on the other hand, collected his 4th RBI with a go-ahead two-out single up the middle off Josh Beckett, and is overperforming expectations by a factor of about three zontillion. Hannahan, simply put, is a mook. He's a placeholder for developing yoots (ostensibly Lonnie Chisenhall), and that's fine. Still, his hot start has really lifted the Tribe and prevented things like the Jayson Nix Strikeout Experience and the Wes Hodges Frine Pan Experience and the Jared Goedert Misspelled Name Experience. He leads the team with 12 assists on defense as well. And just because he's a schmoe doesn't mean he's not doing a good job or playing well. He's doing both. Huzzah to you, sir!

5) Terror on the Basepaths!

With three steals off Jarrod Meckeleckahighmeckahighdyho last night, the Indians now have three steals on the season. This is known as “picking your spots,” or “paying homage to Victor Martinez.”

6) Ho Hum Dept.

Tony Sipp threw 5 strikes in 7 pitches and retired all three batters he faced.

7) Nice Hose / Dept. of Not Surprise

If I tell you a crucial run was cut down at the plate by an outfield assist, do I even need to tell you which player uncorked the throw?

8) Pronk Quasi-smash!

Although it was only a double, Travis Hafner did unleash a rocket off Beckett that went for extra bases. He has wrested the team lead in slugging from Mr. Hannahan for those players with more than 4 plate appearances.

Look, Hafner hitting for extra bases is awesome. It would be so, so very valuable for this offense. Let’s enjoy it while it’s going on. Am I slightly concerned that his only extra-base hits have been dead pull jobs? Slightly, I guess. It’s a sample of 6 hits in 16 AB. Let’s take the half-full glass of the .250 ISO over the half-empty glass of “maybe the power only comes from hitting correct guesses.”

9) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

Matt “Matt” Albers, Fat Bobby Jenks, and Danny Boy Bard faced a total of 11 hitters. One flew out. Two walked. The other eight ALL STRUCK OUT.

To date, the Cleveland bullpen has performed admirably and has flashed some power stuff. But that’s just mean-spiritied.

(Note: the K-rate is the same as was posted by Frank Herrmann and Vinnie Pestano on Friday, but Herrmann gave up a run, and each allowed at least one hit.)