Guy walks into a crowded bar. The bartender gives a patron a beer, which the guy snatches out of his hands and pours it on the patron's head. He strides over to a guy nursing a bourbon, grabs the drink, pulls back the guy's collar, and pours it down the back of his neck. "Hey," says one patron. "What's the deal?" "That's Dan Haren," the bartender sighs. "He can do whatever he wants." "Can't someone stop him?" the patron agonizes. "You wanna try?" the bartender sneers.

FINAL	1	2	3
Indians (8-3)	0	0	0
Angels (6-5)	0	0	1

W: Haren (3-0) L: Carmona (0-2)

Sometimes, the other guy is just better than you are.

1) Righted Ship

Is it fair to say that the memory of Fausto Carmona giving up 10 runs in 3-plus (the plus stands for Extra Fail!) innings on Opening Day is simply a Data Point of Badness and we can all move on with our lives now?

This game wasn't quite as good as his previous start against the Red Sox, but it was still damned good. Instead of 2 hits, he allowed 4, and of course, instead of 0 runs, he allowed 2. On the other hand, he actually threw more strikes and struck out more batters (6 to 4) while getting more swings-and-misses (14 to 9). It's going to be hard to top a scoreless outing when giving up a home run to Peter Bourjos, and of course he lost the game, so there is no argument for this start being "better." Still, it's equally hard to argue that it wasn't high-quality.

One of the interesting things about Carmona's pitch location was that he started only 9 of the 30 hitters he faced with a first-pitch strike. Usually, I would complain about this: it seems like one of the easier things to control about an outing. However, given his overall numbers, I wonder if maybe there wasn't some Method to the Madness involved. The Angels of the 21st century have been an aggressive team at the plate, taking the character of their manager and hitting coach. While statheads tend to deride such things, the fact is that it has generally worked for them, and they went through a stretch where they routinely "out-performed" their "Pythagorean Projection" of how many games they "ought" to have won based on a simplistic calculation based on run differential.

And the fact is, Carmona *did* throw strikes. While he did walk three batters, each was Bobby Abreu, who apparently gives off some sort of hypnotic force field from the batter's box that influences both pitchers and umpires. I introduced the idea of the "Tyner Zone" to describe hitters with a higher OBP than SLG, which generally means the guy will draw a walk while being utterly powerless. Bobby Abreu is technically in the Tyner Zone with an OBP that is 29 points higher than his SLG. Except that his SLG is .500, and his ISO is .132. His OBP is .529. FIVE twenty-nine. No, he won't finish the year like this. Yes, Bobby Abreu knows a thing or two about talking a pitch. (Two of his walks came on full counts.)

Overall, Carmona tossed 70 strikes in 118 pitches, which isn't bad. Against all hitters who were not Bobby Abreu, Carmona threw 64 strikes in 98 pitches, which is actually pretty good. Anyway, since he wasn't walking anyone else and wasn't throwing a lot of 2-0 or 3-1 meatballs, it would appear that Carmona's falling behind in the count was more in the Abreu-Thome mold in which he didn't mind trying to get the Angels to reach for a pitch before getting down to business later in the count.

Through the first five innings, exactly two Angels managed to hit the ball OUT OF THE INFIELD. Sadly, one of those was the home run to Bourjos, who hit a pretty bad (elevated and flat) pitch on a line over the left field wall. Later, Mark Trumbo hit a pretty GOOD pitch inside the pole for the other offense. Besides that, Carmona used excellent movement to generate a bunch of garbage off the Angels' bats: 13 groundouts, a few foulouts and not much else. I'm not certain it was truly valuable to send him out for the 8th inning, but the same discussion about Talbot yesterday applies here as well (and he'll get an extra day's rest due to the travel day tomorrow).

2) The early front-runner

If someone other than Dan Haren wins the Cy Young this season, I hope the Indians make it through the regular season without facing him.

Obviously it's premature to anoint someone the Cy Young after three starts, but it's literally not possible to pitch a lot better than Haren did. Well done, sir.

Now get a haircut.

3) A game of inches

Consider the game of baseball for a moment.

Fausto Carmona threw an execrable pitch to Peter Bourjos. This is indisputible. Bourjos is not normally much of a power hitter, but there are literally hundreds of guys in the pros who will hit that ball out. Of course, you still have to DO it (and not miss by a fraction of an inch, producing a hard smash to third or a popup to left), and he did, so good job.

Mark Trumbo did a good job to jerk a low pitch down the line for a homer. This is quality hitting, and sometimes, as I've said, the other guy just does a good job.

Two pitches. One was a mistake by Carmona, one was an abnormally-good job by the hitter.

This is the difference between Dan Haren and Fausto Carmona last night. Two pitches.

And going further, Mitch Talbot gave up MORE hits with FEWER strikeouts, and because Bobby Abreu got slightly under a pitch with a runner on first, it was the final out of the 3rd inning on a fly ball to medium-deep center rather than a two-run homer.

Which would have been the game-winning blow for the Angels had Matt LaPorta not been able to muscle an outer-half fastball 380-plus feet over the right field wall off rookie Tyler Chatwood. In other words, two pitches.

So the difference between Haren and Carmona was close to negligible, while the difference between Carmona and Talbot was virtually negligible, and the difference between Talbot and Chatwood wasn't really VERY large. Because after the homer by LaPorta, Chatwood didn't give the Indians much in the way of offense at all.

Now, I'm not going to try to apply some warped version of transitivity to claim that Dan Haren wasn't really all that much better than Tyler Chatwood. Really, he was that much better than Tyler Chatwood. There were any number of times that I thought the Indians would string a couple hits off Chatwood and chase him screaming from the mound like Justin Bieber at an assembly at an all-girls middle school. There was literally NO point last night at which I thought the Indians would GET A HIT. The fact that Shin-Soo Choo was able to single was quite amazing to me. Haren was That Good.

I guess the point is, though, you can look at one performance and declare it amazing, and another performance and declare it pretty good, and another one and declare it a struggle, and at the very top level of the game, you're not really talking about things that are on different planets. They might barely be on different slices of bread in the same loaf.

Yeah, I'm gonna stop thinking about that now, too.

4) Terror on the Basepaths!

There are some basic rules for stealing a base. You should get a good jump. You should study the guy's motion. You should not get picked off when Andy Pettitte balks. You know, basic

stuff.

Here's one thing you should not do: begin running BEFORE THE PITCHER EVEN GOES INTO HIS MOTION.

Had Orly Cabrera not been picked off, we would still have lost. But don't do that again.

5) Resignation

I like that Frank Herrmann throws strikes and is aggressive. But I swear, the man has no "out" pitch. None whatsoever. I'm not motivated enough to look up what his foul ball percentage is with two strikes, but it seems like about 1000%. This is pretty weird, given that he struck out 5 in 2 innings on Opening Day against the ChiSox, but that's looking more and more like the outlier. His scouting report says he "doesn't really have a pitch that could get left-handed hitters out," and that might be the case. I'm not much of a scout. But Torii Hunter is right handed, and he didn't have a pitch that could finish him off, either.

In fact, Herrmann gave up runs in each of his two previous outings precisely because he gave extra swings to guys with two strikes. His epic battle with Adrian Gonzalez comes to mind.

I don't know whether this means he needs to learn a new pitch like a cutter or a splitter, or if he simply needs a bit more polish on his command, but right now, Frank Herrmann looks very much like Just Some Guy.

6) End of an Era

Mike Brantley's on-base and hitting streaks came to an end last night.

Since Haren made EVERYONE look feeble, I'm not gonna get real worked up about that.

7) Flashing the leather

Look, Jack Hannahan remains Jack Hannahan. He had a hot week, and now he's back to being the Jack Hannahanniest Jack Hannahan that ever Jack Hannahanned.

But I will tell you this: I GREATLY prefer to watch him play third base than ANYONE I saw man the hot corner for Cleveland last season. It's not that either of the nice plays he made in the second were show-stopper highlight materials, but they were good plays, above-average plays, and plays that would have had a decent chance of being Bollixed But Good And How last season.

Someday, I will demand more than "above-average defense, and nothing else" from my third baseman. April 2011 does not contain that day.