The losing streak reaches three as the Tribe drop a pair in Minnesota, and today's B-List focuses on the feebleness of the offense, the timely nature of bad pitches, and the possibility that the team's best fastball belongs not to its Ace nor its Closer, but rather its Right Fielder. Buff also mentions a missing ingredient from the end of the Royals series, and touches on the fact that the season may hinge on the fragile nature of … well … hinges (of a sort).

FINAL

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Indians (13-7)

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W: Duensing (2-0) L: Carmona (1-3)

FINAL

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Twins (9-12)

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W: Pavano's Moustache (2-2) L: R. Perez (2-1) S: Capps (4)

In seraching for good things to say about the weekend series, I came up with "Grady hit a home run" and "Shin-Soo Choo throws more strikes than Chad Durbin."

0) Administrative Note

I travelled with the family Friday, so did not get a chance to write up the rainy 3-2 loss to the Royals. Josh Tomlin was very impressive in getting the no decision, so well done for him. But while Chris Perez certainly did fail, let me posit that Angel Hernandez is the only home plate umpire whose strike zone makes Joe West's look like the work of someone with stereoscopic vision.

1) Simple Fail

Someone must have pointed out to the Twins that Fausto Carmona was not having a particularly easy time locating his initial offerings within the confines of the strike zone. In the first inning, none of the four hitters swung at the first pitch, even though quite a few of the Twins are known to be less selective than others.

To Fausto's credit, three of those four hitters fell behind 0-1 in the count.

Although Carmona walked Jason Repko on five pitches, he also induced five groundouts in the first two (shutout) innings and appeared to be in reasonably good form.

The third inning looked more like a problem endemic to groundball pitchers, as three consecutive singles looked as much like "fortunate placement" hits as anything else. He was hurt by a poorly-located pitch to Jason Kubel for a 2-run double, but even at 3-0, the game

hardly seemed out of reach.

That had to wait until the bottom of the 5th, when Carmona loaded the bases on an infield single, solid opposite-field hit, and an intentional walk (to Kubel, a good move in my opinion) after a sacrifice. With one out and the force in play, the obvious intention was to get the slower-moving Justin Morneau to ground into the inning-ending double play that would keep the game within reach.

Instead, Carmona threw a changeup, about his fourth-best pitch, to Morneau, who had just returned to the lineup from a bout with the flu. Let's ask out erstwhile manager what he thought of such a choice:

"If I'm in bed for four days, I think I'd rather see an 86 mph changeup than 92 mph sinker," Acta said.

Well put. Of course, one has to ask at this point, "Who is making this decision?" Does Carmona call his own game?

Does Santana call the pitches?

Does Tim Belcher reserve the right to call certain pitches in certain spots?

Does anyone communicate with anyone else what the strategy or intention or batter strengths and weaknesses are or anything else to anyone at any time?

Lost in all of this is that a sixth run scored when Mike Cuddyer, no speed merchant himself from the right side, grounded into a fielder's choice to third that was not a double play. So it's not like a ground ball would definitely have gotten Carmona out of the inning.

No, Carmona simply pitched kinda crummily: not only did he allow 7 hits in 5 innings (6 singles, 2 infield), but he walked 4 guys (1 intentionally) while striking out 1.

It kind of split the difference between "eh" and "feh."

It wasn't egregiously awful: only one hit was for extra bases, and he did get 10 ground ball outs (to 4 in the air).

Sometimes ground balls go for hits.

There's not a good excuse for walking nearly a guy every inning, though, and 1 K in 5 IP is lame.

Hey, Roy Halladay got shelled once this year.

Over the course of a season, it's extremely likely for a starter to have a lousy start.

Doesn't mean the start wasn't lousy.

2) Tragic Fail

Carlos Carrasco did not appear to have his best stuff on Sunday. And this was largely because Carlos Carrasco did not have his best stuff on Sunday.

Sometimes, appearances are not deceiving in any way.

As naked emperors go, Carrasco was quite nude indeed.

Of course, there's a simple, rational explanation for this: Carrasco was unable to get his elbow to respond in the customary fashion, and thus pitched at a 6 (or so) mph deficit for his three innings of work. Mind you, had he admitted to this earlier than the end of the second, at which point he still had a decent outing going (2 walks, 1 single, 0 runs), he may not have struggled through one of the more fortunate 2-run innings you'll see, and perhaps Jeanmar Gomez can get ready that much faster.

Let me be clear here: this is not a case of malfeasance by the Indians or foolish bravado by Carrasco or any sort of rail-worthy offense: Carrasco's elbow wouldn't loosen up, and he thought it would, and when it didn't, he said something and they pulled him after the next inning.

I think throwing any sort of blame around for him not being more forthright or the team not being more cautious is probably misguided and fraught with hindsight.

I might have been more aggressive about questioning him after his location was so atrocious in the first inning (3 ball counts to 3 of the first 4 hitters, including two walks, the second on four pitches).

Wasn't that Mitch Talbot's experience as well?

And Carrasco reports that he had this problem in Columbus last year, and it cost him only one start.

While I reserve the right to be skeptical, it is not my elbow.

Put aside blame or avoidability for a moment: let's say I had told you that the Indians would be competetive behind the rotation of Carmona, Carrasco, Masterson, Talbot, and Tomlin. While this seemed kind of unlikely, there is talent and potential in that group.

It would require something close to every one of the starters performing above his midline, with at least two pitching
significantly
better than
that
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And that's kind of how it's played out: Masterson is miles above what you could reasonably EXPECT, Tomlin's results are better than his median, and Talbot was looking really excellent until his injury.

The other two have had ups and downs, but aren't doing anything that couldn't be considered "reasonable" in either direction.

But if you completely REMOVE two of these guys, well, that's pretty much not going to be "above their respective midlines." The only hope at THAT point would be that you could drop someone into their respective places that could perform at THAT level (not the expected level of the replacement, but the optimistic above-expectation level of the guy he's replacing).

That, my friends, stretches credibility pretty damned far, and that's even BEFORE we mention that the two likely replacements are Gomez, who's just some guy, and David Huff, who
aspires
to be just some guy.

Forget acquiring anyone or graduating an Alex White or Drew Pomeranz.

So, yeah, I'll be explicit: if Talbot and Carrasco each miss more than a month, the Cleveland Indians cannot finish with a winning record. That simple.

3) Acute Fail

Facing light-hitting Alexi Casilla (.200/.245/.240), Jeanmar Gomez led off his 4th inning of relief by allowing a single on an 0-2 count.

Frankly, this blows, but hey, a tip of the hat to Casilla.

With three of the next four hitters posting good-sized platoon splits from the left side, Acta quite reasonably called on Raffy Perez, who has been excellent in the early going. He got Denard Span to foul off three pitches, then hit a routine ground ball to second.

While unlikely to be a double play due to Span's speed, at least the one sure …

… well, so much for the sure out: Orly Cabrera botched it and now there are two on for Jason Repko. Repko sacrificed the hitters over.

Now, not wanting to repeat Carmona's mistake, apparently walking Kubel was out of the question. This makes sense: Kubel's lefty/righty splits more severe than Morneau's, and listen, Perez should be able to retire Kubel. It's a good matchup for the Tribe.

Unless you throw a 1-0 meatball changeup. Here, again (sort of): is this Marson's responsibility? I doubt Raffy Perez gets to call his own stuff. I can't see throwing Kubel anything middle in or above the shin.

I'm throwing Kubel sliders 'til my fingers fall off, frankly.

Anyway, one middle-in changeup later, and Kubel's on second while the Twins lead 4-3.

For the record, Morneau flied out to left.

4) Grotesque Fail

Here is my challenge to Chad Durbin: if you walk a hitter on four pitches, you must leave the game.

It has become resonably clear how to tell if Durbin has adequate stuff on any given night: just count the strikes. He fell behind 2-0 to Drew Butera: after a couple of fouls, he gave up a double on a 3-2 pitch. He then walked Span on four pitches and fell behind Repko 2-0 before giving up an RBI single. He fell behind Jim Thome 2-1 the next inning before giving up a single, and 2-0 to Danny Valencia before yielding a 2-run homer.

That he struck out the next two hitters is simultaneously indicative of major-league stuff and completely beside the point.

Chad Durbin is effective exactly when he controls his stuff.

In all honesty, I'm rooting for Chad Durbin. Phillies fans miss him (granted, they are comparing his memory to Kyle Kendrick's present) and he seems genuine and has talent.

He sure can look crappy some days, though.

5) Low-Wattage Fail

The focus has been mostly on the pitching, but lost in the blown save Thursday and the bad outings by starters against Minnesota is the fact that the Tribe offense has been hitting on one or two cylinders over the past few games. The Indians did benefit from Luke Hochevar's temporary insanity Wednesday night, but they'd been no-hit up to that point; Josh Tomlin's fine start Thursday was ultimately wasted because the Indians could only score two runs, and Brian Duensing and Carl Pavano largely kept Cleveland's bats in check to the tunes of 1 and 3 runs respectively. The Indians scored in only three of the

18 innings against Minnesota this weekend, and didn't really squander that many opportunities: they just simply didn't *hit*.

While both Travis Hafner and Orly Cabrera got two hits Sunday, the only Indian two even reach base twice on Saturday was … Jack Hannahan.

6) Swing hard in case you hit it

Grady Sizemore collected two hits over the weekend, but they were good for six total bases, as Sizemore hit a double off closer Matt Capps Sunday and homered off reliever Dusty Hughes in the 8th on Saturday. I will repeat that I consider a leadoff hitter's One True Job to be to get on base, but it's nice to see some legitimate pop back in Grady's bat.

7) Walk this way

Although he went hitless in the two games, Carlos Santana drew three walks over the weekend

to raise his OBP to .329. Since he's hitting .200, this is actually pretty amazing. He is currently residing in the Tyner Zone with a SLG of .314.

8) One Wheatie Short

Sunday's game was delayed briefly after Mike Brantley's long drive to right was changed from a home run to a double as it was ruled to have hit some damned thing instead of somewhere else on some damned thing. Can someone explain to me why it's okay for a park feature boundary is allowed to be baseball-colored? Just wondering.

9) Nice hose!

The bottom of the third inning was not very pleasant for Carlos Carrasco, but it *was* notable. After getting a first out following back-to-back singles, Jason Kubel lined the first pitch he saw into right.

Alexi Casilla ran through a stop sign at third, deciding to test Shin-Soo Choo's arm, with is like daring plutonium to be radioactive.

Choo pegged out Casilla by such a distance I thought he was Lou Marson.

Not to be outdone, Justin Morneau tried to score from second on a weak single by Mike Cuddyer. Choo scooped up the ball, pulled out his cell phone, took a picture of how far Morneau was from the plate for his scrapbook, rifled the ball home, and recovered in time to snap a second picture of just how our Morneau was. The official measurement was "by a lot." Choo briefly posted the photos in Facebook before being asked to remove them by Manny Acta.

"We still have a lot of games to play," Acta did not say.

"I would rather other teams find out for themselves."

There is no moral to this story.

10) Stats Corner

Jack Hannahan has a higher AVG and OBP than Asdrubal Cabrera (and Shin-Soo Choo, but I have stronger feelings about Choo's ultimate destination, numbers-wise, than Cabrera).

Grady Sizemore has drawn two walks in 30 PA. Orly Cabrera has drawn two walks in over 80 PA. Carlos Santana drew two walks Sunday

in 4 PA.

Sizemore and Cabrera each have as many homers as walks.

Cleveland has hit 20 homers as a team, holding opponents to 12.

Opponents have stolen 12 bases without being caught. Even Mike Cuddyer and Billy Butler.