*The Indians got their collective mojo back in a manner of speaking by beating Toronto despite making Brandon Morrow look like Danny Almonte. In today's B-List, Buff calmly assesses Mitch Talbot, is less calm on the subject of Vinnie Pestano, and welcomes back Grady Sizemore in a form more enjoyable than that of the weekend. He also wants some of Joe Smiff's good timing, Chris Perez' slider, and the glovework of … Matt LaPorta? Perhaps he has gone insane. (Wait, **gone**?)*

**FINAL**

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

**R**

**H**

**E**

**Indians (32-20)**

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1

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3

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**6**

**12**

**1**

**Blue Jays (28-27)**

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**3**

**10**

**0**

W: Talbot (2-1) L: Morrow (2-3)

Looking at the OBPs in both lineups, I'm not convinced this is the Year of the Pitcher as much as it might be the Year of the Hitter … Who Isn't Very Good at Hitting.

**1) Welcome Back!**

Okay, THIS guy, I welcome back.

Last time, I waxed schmoetic about how I considered Mitch Talbot's last start to be "simply bad."

That is, I didn't see anything in the start that suggested that he's still hurt or that he's broken for good, just that he had a single data point that happened to be egregiously awful.

I stopped short of writing it off entirely, because Mitch Talbot doesn't really have either the track

record or margin for error that allows for such things, but it did seem necessary to temper the initial aghastitude at the shellacking.

His ball didn't have the late movement it normally does, and I guess that happens sometimes: there was no compelling reason to think he'd suddenly lost it over(fort)night, and most "explanations" seemed no better than base speculation.

Also, I didn't want it to be true.

Anyway, I would be hard-pressed to argue that Talbot came shooting out of the gate with the command of Maddux combined with the fortitude of George Patton, seeing as he walked the first hitter on five pitches and threw nearly as many balls as strikes in the first inning (8 to 9). He wasn't sharp.

On the other hand, remember that his terrifying inning in his last start was in part caused by 4 singles by 5 hitters over a span of only 6 pitches, meaning that last time he was throwing meatballs, and this time he wasn't.

Sure enough, as the game wore on, Talbot didn't get much more hittable, and his command came back after the 3rd inning, so he ended up throwing 6 shutout innings before getting into trouble (in this case, giving the ball to Joe Smiff) in the 7th to give up his only run of the night.

For the game, all 6 of the hits he allowed were singles, and while a 3:3 BB:K ratio is pretty bad, Talbot is going to live and die by late movement on his pitches, and if a few wander out of the strike zone, that is better than having a few bore their ways through the strike zone on a string.

Talbot got 10 ground ball outs to 7 in the air, and a couple of those were weak popups, so generally speaking, he kept the hard contact in the low range.

(It should be noted that a couple of the balls that WERE hit really hard were snared by the defense on Talbot's behalf: put last season's infield behind Talbot, that that's probably more like 4 runs than 1.)

One thing I wanted to point out about Talbot's approach was the way he handled the majors' best hitter, Jose Bautista. I know that looks ridiculous in print, but this is no longer a small-sample fluke: Bautista made adjustments, and now he is simply the best hitter in the league. Will he hit .363/.505/.786 all year long? Well, those numbers are absurd.

And he very well might.

To day that Talbot faced him down and dominated him would be false: Bautista went 2-for-4 with a pair of singles. On the other hand, Talbot got ahead of him 0-2 in the first before one single and the other one was an infield single to 2B. When Talbot fell behind Bautista 3-0 with a man on base, he didn't simply give up and put him on to face the less-fearsome Juan Rivera, he threw a strike and got a double-play-quality grounder (there were two out). And one of Talbot's three Ks was of Bautista as well.

In any event, if you can attack the best hitter on the planet, I'm not worried about your composure on the mound.

Talbot's still probably no better than the 4th-best starter in the rotation, but he belongs in it.

**2) Vinnie. F&@^ing. Pestano!**

The VFP threw 9 of his 16 pitches for strikes. He struck out 3 batters.

I want you to think about this for a moment. If you strike out 3 batters, you need 9 strikes to do it. So for Pestano to strike out 3 in 9, he can't have any balls in play, he can't have any foul-offs with two strikes: he needs strike one, strike two, and strike three. That's it. Okay, and seven balls. Y ou know what?

With three Ks in three batters and nothing in between, you can have seven pitches that miss.

By the way, was this a product of getting a couple of gracious calls from the ump? Considering that he got ONE called strike, I'd have to say no.

Four fouls.

Four swings-and-misses, including all three strikes three.

So … yeah, that was good.

**3) Around the bullpen**

While Joe Smiff's ERA went down slightly, as the run he allowed was unearned, it's hard to argue that he actually pitched WELL. Uncorking a wild pitch and allowing singles to the first two hitters you face, both right-handed, which is supposed to be your entire POINT, is not very good, strikeout to end the inning or no.

Tony Sipp allowed a homer to Yoon Escobar, which, while bad, is not very good. He did strike out Jayson Nix.

He also breathed air and urinated a combination of urea and water.

I am not entirely certain which of the three was most noteworthy.

Chris Perez allowed a single to Jose Deitista, which is tantamount to winning. He also got Juan Rivera to ground out to end the game and threw 7 strikes in 9 pitches, so that's downright excellent. The most entertaining pitch C-Pez threw was a front-door slider to Bautista that made him flinch and hide … and was a *strike*.

If Chris Perez never threw another fastball again, I would understand, but I suppose you have to set up your best pitch with a fastball now and again to keep hitters honest.

Great Scott, that's a good pitch.

It still bears noting, though, that Perez' 2.61 ERA was by far the highest of any Cleveland reliever: Smiff stands at 1.84, Pestano at 1.35, and Sipp at 1.54. Oh, yeah.

**4) Welcome back for real this time!**

Grady Sizemore returned to the lineup after his DL stint in time to show up in Tampa and strike out 7 times in 12 plate appearances, generally looking inept enough to wonder if perhaps the doctors did not remove the IV oxycodone drip before sending him back on the field. He was not good. He got Monday off.

Last night, though, he lashed a pair or doubles in four trips to the plate, driving in a pair of runs, one with two outs. He also essentially stole third in the second inning, which was negated when Matt LaPorta fouled off the pitch. However, he didn't seem to have any hesitation or limping after hard slides, so he would appear to be back to "normal," although there are those who would snidely point out that the 7 Ks over the weekend also counts in this regard.

While I'm here, let me make explicit my view that unless Sizemore truly feels uncomfortable there, I would rather see his .300 OBP batting 6th or 7th instead of 1st while Mike Brantley is posting a .350+ OBP. If playing CF makes him more comfortable, he should do that, too: Brantley was so fazed by having to DH, he merely went 3-for-5 with a single, double, and triple.

**5) A game of inches**

A 6-3 win (and going to the bottom of the 9th as a 6-2 game) looks pretty comfortable, but it could be argued that this would have been a much closer game if not for a misplay by catcher J.P. Arencibia: with two outs in the 5th, Travis Buck walked and tried to score on a double down the line by Carlos Santana.

From what I could tell from the replay, Buck would have been out at the plate had Arencibia been able to cleanly handle the relay throw.

(On a scale from "one to very" out, I would have pegged Buck at "pretty darned.")

Since the Indians tacked on two more runs with two outs, you could easily see this being a 4-3 game if not 3-3, since Brandon Morrow was unlikely to come out for the 6th either way due to high pitch count.

**6) Correlation Implies Causation, Unless It Doesn't**

Carlos Santana sees one of the lowest strike percentages in the majors (I believe he's in the top ten, along with expected luminaries like Jose Bautista and Lance Berkman). The other guys in this category tend to be hitting .350 or so, so for Santana to be getting this treatment at .228 is somewhat surprising.

Sure, he has a great reputation as a hitter, but he is not actually HITTING.

His .358 OBP led last night's lineup, so he is not afraid to take a walk now and again.

So it was interesting that last night, Santana saw fewer pitches than anyone else in the lineup, including Orly Cabrera, who swings at pitches during the National Anthem. During this performance, Santana went 3-for-3 with a sac fly, scoring two runs and driving in two as well.

I am not encouraging Santana to change his approach at the plate, mostly because he is an established major-league hitter and I have trouble remembering where I parked my car, but I found it interesting nonetheless.

**7) Ducks on the pond!**

You might think that a comfortable 6-3 win in which the Indians drove in THREE runs with TWO OUTS would keep me from complaining about leaving runners on base. After all, 7 is not that many baserunners.

I would like to introduce myself.

The Indians went a brisk 4-for-16 with runners in scoring position, which, hey, is a .250 AVG, that's not too bad. It sure beats the last week or so, when the Tribe was something that felt like 1-for-437 with RISP. It's been pretty bad. Anyway, while it's all well and fun to see Orly Cabrera come through with an RBI single now and again, I don't think you want to be DEPENDING on the guy with the .614 OPS to pull your collective heinies out of the scoreless fire, okay? The 1, 3, and 4 hitters were each 0-for-2 with RISP: while Travis Buck is tragically miscast as a cleanup hitter, you really want the top-of-the-order guys to be more reliable.

**8) Flashing the leather**

In the third inning, Jayson Nix led off by TATTOOING a screaming liner into left … except that it didn't actually MAKE it to left because Jack Hannahan snared it with a nice grab. Hannahan has turned into … well, Jack Hannahan … at the plate, but he does play third base better than

anyone we've seen in Cleveland in a while.

Matt LaPorta is not necessarily a name you associate with "defense," but he is looking more and more natural at first base these days, and this includes a run-saving diving stop of a ground ball with runners on 1st and 2nd in the 4th inning.

Orly Cabrera does not belong in this paragraph.