

The Baseball Magazine For People Who Hate Baseball Magazines

*Fall
2005*

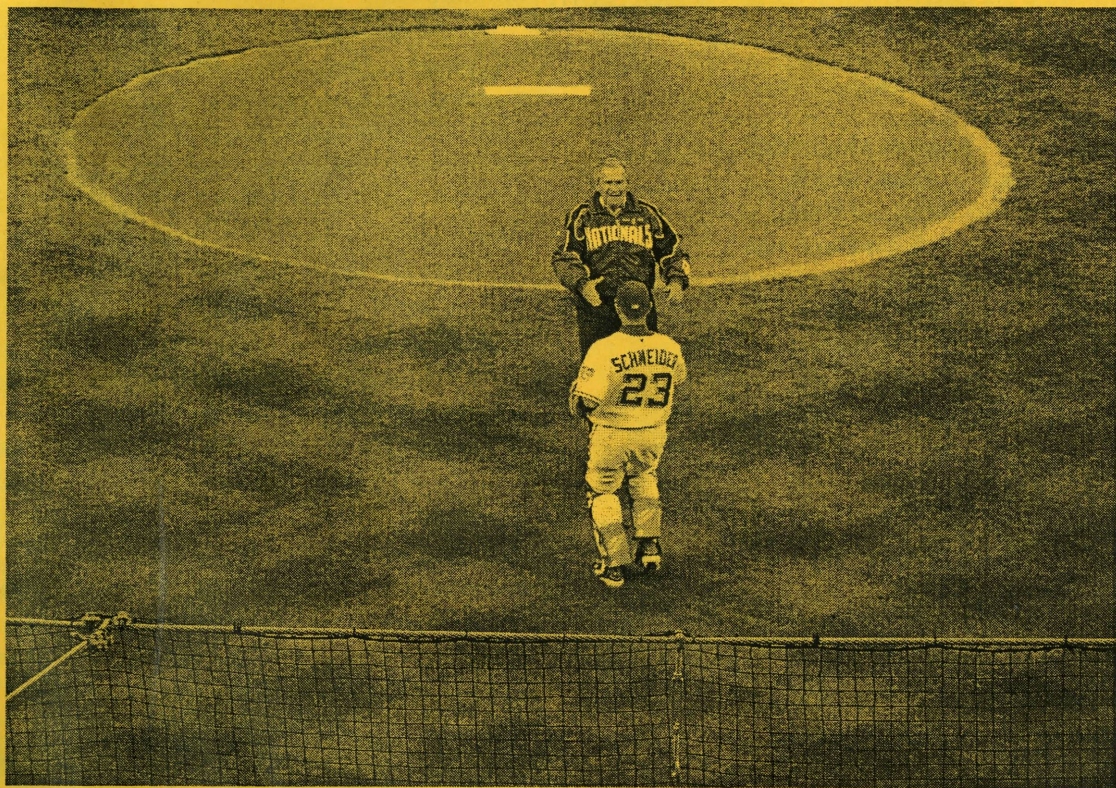
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Finally, Something Bush Can't Mess Up! A Look at Baseball's Return to D.C.

*Darryl Strawberry Goes Off Broadway
Do Latin Players "Hack at Slop Nightly?"
Who Should Be in Cooperstown?
...and more!*

Z I S K

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Publisher's Note:

My friend **Mike** was telling me about a movie he'd recently seen, a 3-D IMAX movie about the moon.

"It was meant for someone who's never heard of the moon before—there was nothing new. And it turns out there's not much to see on the moon, a whole lot of dull mixed with a bit of uninteresting."

That's a perfect description for the 2005 NL pennant race, a mundane landscape of runaway division winners. Personally, I'm pulling for the Padres to win the NL West and make the post-season with a sub-.500 record; we'll have plenty to talk about when a losing team wins the World Series—Mets fans in particular given that the Mets are likely to finish last in their division yet still have a better record than the playoff-bound Padres.

Speaking of the Mets, check out the *Zisk* website for a day-by-day account of the Metropolitan's 2005 season. We've had a great time covering the Mets every day, but plan to expand the site's focus during the off-season and into next year. **Steve** has gone grey trying to come up with different ways to say, "**Looper** blows another save" and "**Beltran** left four more runners on base last night" or "Why on earth is **Willie** sticking with **Ishii** and **Zambrano**?!? Please god, tell me why."

Meanwhile, all the action right now is in the AL, which is bubbling like the surface of a volcano. There are three races coming down to the last week; Los Angeles taking advantage of Oakland's many injuries; Chicago and Boston trying to avoid collapses that will have their faithful agonizing all winter. The AL can even boast of having baseball's biggest schmuck, with **Rafael Palmeiro** passing **Barry Bonds**.

Here's to an exciting playoff season. Let anyone but the Yankees win! (Hey, this issue is otherwise devoid of Yankee bashing, we're allowed a token dig.)

Hacking at Slop by Ken Derr

If you missed it, the San Francisco Giants not only imploded on the field, in the clubhouse, and in the front office this season; they even self-destructed on their flagship radio station. I won't get into the absurdities of the **Barry** watch, in which management desperately tried to keep up with the cryptic comments emanating from some Beverly Hills bunker announcing the latest return/no return news on the all-Barry website. I won't slobber on about the failure of veteran players to rise to a Bondsless Giants squad that has made the palace of PacBell a yawning morgue for cell phone ringtones and soggy, impotent garlic fries. I'll stay away from management decisions that have left the faithful groping for bottles of Wild Turkey snuggled deep in the back of the cabinet, untouched since the era of **Johnny LeMaster**. What I'm here to talk about is slop-hacking, PC rhetoric, the wrath of God and hardball capitalism. Let **Aguirre** be my eternal judge.

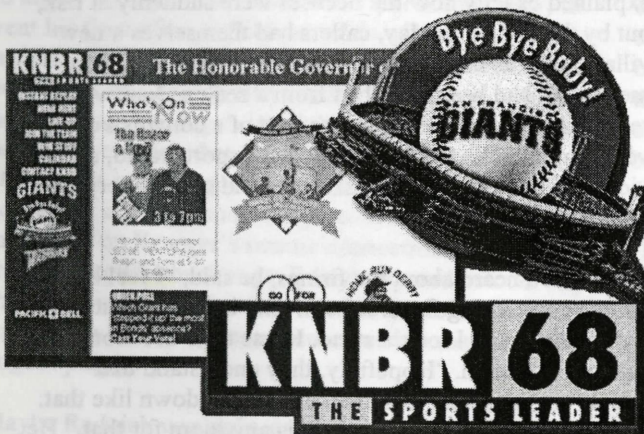
The story begins thusly: the Giants home on the radio is KNBR, a 50,000 watt station that reaches north to Oregon, east to the Sierras and south to the immoral confines of Isla Vista, home of the UCSB Gauchos. One night, after another aesthetically repulsive home loss to the Colorado Rockies, radio talk-show host **Larry Krueger**, an 8-year KNBR employee, went on the air and vented some pent-up frustration, denouncing "brain-dead Caribbean players hacking at slop nightly" and insisting that manager **Felipe Alou's** brain was made of Cream of Wheat.

comments, and he was not going to stand for it now that he was in a position to call the bastards out. KNBR suspended Krueger for a week, and the media in the Bay Area began sniffing race scandal blood. Meanwhile, Krueger offered to meet with Alou and apologize. Alou refused, insisting that while he did not want to see Krueger fired, people from the countries that comprise the Caribbean "were offended by that idiot. This guy offended hundreds of millions of Caribbeans." A few days later, things appeared to simmer down, but Alou was still boiling over. In an interview with ESPN's *Outside the Lines*, which aired right before Krueger was to be reinstated, he went Old Testament. He called Krueger "this messenger of Satan, as I call this guy now," and justified his reason for refusing to meet with Krueger this way: "I believe there is no forgiveness for Satan." And while reporters dug deep to explore Krueger's reputed youthful



obsession with **Black Sabbath**, a midnight raid to excavate his backyard revealed no bones of eaten children.

After Alou's "Satan" comments aired, the next morning's radio hosts, **Brian Murphy** and (ex-Giant) **F. P. Santangelo**, were exploring whether the manager's response was just a bit over the top. Yes Krueger had screwed up and deserved to be punished, but was he really an agent of Beelzebub? At that moment, their young producer, **Tony Rhein**, hoping to bring a little levity to what was an awkward time for the new morning hosts and trying to put a little mocking sting in Alou, interjected two "samples": a **Dana Carvey SNL** church lady cry of "Satan!" and a *South Park* sound bite from an episode that included a weigh-in before a fight between Jesus and



When told the next day of Krueger's remarks, Alou was livid, arguing that as a young player coming up in the south he had to put up with all kinds of nasty racist

Satan. It was over in seconds (the soundbite that is—no word on the length of the battle between the divinities). That night, KNBR Senior Vice President **Tony Salvatore** posted a short announcement on the radio's website announcing the immediate dismissal of Krueger, Rhein and 16-year veteran programming director **Bob Agnew**. "The segment, featuring inappropriate comedy sound bites," Salvatore wrote in the statement, "Demonstrated an utter lack of regard for the sensitivity of the issues involved and a premeditated intent to ridicule Felipe Alou's commentary...KNBR deeply regrets the comments and actions of these individuals, which do not reflect our beliefs or values as an organization. We would like to express our deepest apologies to Felipe Alou, his players and the Giants' organization for this offense to the Caribbean community." This missive was placed on the website at 10:15 p.m. What in the name of Jehovah were the talk show hosts going to say the next morning, less than eight hours later, with both their immediate boss and their producer out on the street?

Well, Murphy and Santangelo, who had been with KNBR less than a year, tried their darndest to do radio ballet. It was obvious that they were devastated by the firings, especially that of Rhein, whom they could not stop praising. They also knew that the man who had fired their friends was the man who had hired them and could have their own heads on a block if they went too far attacking management for the decisions. The majority of callers, however, swung verbal mallets. Most attacked the firings, and their two main theories for the cannings can be summarized as such: 1) KNBR laid down for the ultra-liberal Berkeley/SF PC Nazis because it did not want to deal with an assault on the station by the militant wing of the Rainbow Coalition, and 2) The Giants organization demanded the firings to support Alou and, and KNBR laid down. Callers had very few kind words for anyone, and most were seething with outrage. You could hear the spittle dripping from the corners of their blood-drenched mouths.

Esteemed and despised local media personality **Gary Radnich** was due to take over KNBR's 9:00 a.m. slot, and Murphy had been insisting all morning that Radnich's experience and insight would lead us out of the relativist wilderness and into the promised land of moral clarity. Radnich prefaced his remarks with about 14 different qualifications and then stated unequivocally that the Giants organization had nothing to do with the firings. Radnich tied Salvatore's decision to the fact that KNBR's

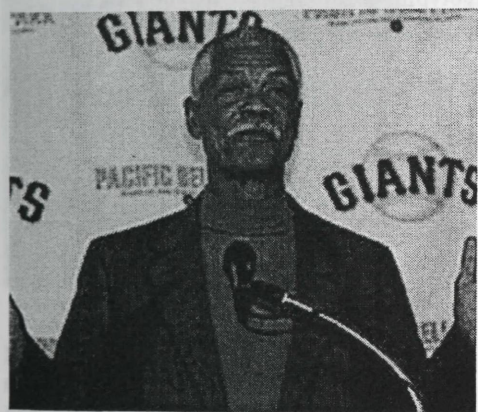
parent company, Susquehanna Radio Corp. of York, Pa., had been up for sale for several months. That made Tuesday morning's attempt at comedy, at least in the ears of the powers-that-be in York, more than a harmless mistake. "It's another log on the fire," Radnich told his



listeners, suggesting that if Alou thought KNBR was teasing him and rallied community support, an FCC investigation could hurt the sale of Susquehanna, which operates 33 stations in eight markets. "You're talking licensing, you're talking millions of dollars," Radnich said. "This is business. And in the end, business wins. That is why Larry Krueger is not with the station anymore." Radnich refused to blame the Giants, but he did say that Alou's "ranting and raving are the primary reason this thing reached the point that it did." He never explained exactly how the licenses were suddenly at risk, but by the end of the day, callers had themselves a new villain, and his name was Felipe Alou. Krueger, in the meantime, had been morphed from a zealous lout who had revealed his latent racism in the heat of a convulsive verbal moment to the **Mario Savio** of sports radio, a victim of intolerant PC thinskinners and callous corporate bigwigs.

When Alou heard about the firings, he said, "I feel bad about people being fired. It wasn't my intention, but I didn't start it and I took a stand. It was their decision," he said of the station. "Hopefully, they understand that people are not going to sit still and be put down like that. In the USA, I don't believe there is any room for that." He did not explain, however, how or why it was OK for his organization's radio station to keep hell's chief on board. Perhaps Krueger was the tempting snake in the Garden,

luring dormant racists up off their lazy boys to eat from the tree of hate. Even theological interpretations, however, weren't enough for the godless Bay Area, as a poll on the *San Francisco Chronicle's* website, taken the day after the firings, showed. Only 21% of the respondents said that Krueger should be fired, while 68% said that termination was an overreaction. KNBR callers continued to scald Alou in the days that followed, while the Giants and KNBR management went quiet,



desperately hoping that some SF supervisor would make his monthly egregious faux pas, and we could all go back to hating our secular targets of animosity.

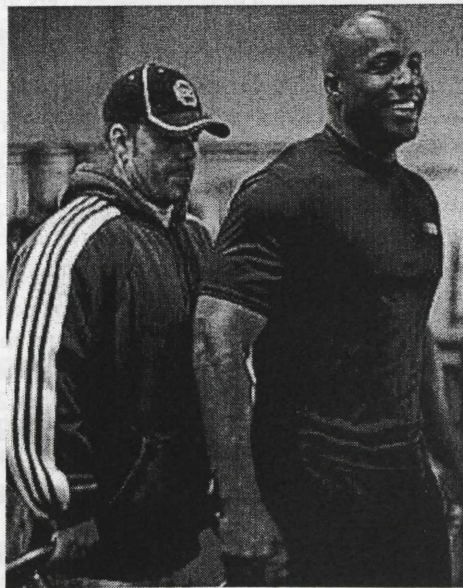
Some three weeks later, the game of black and white hats isn't so easy, so if you're looking for ultimate judgments, go watch the *700 Club*. Yes, Krueger's "Caribbean" comment was racist, and if he had been fired immediately (which he probably should have been), the uproar would have been far less intense than it ultimately was. He wasn't fired, however, but that did not stop Alou from seeking outlets (he went on the local Spanish TV station to attack Krueger in addition to his ESPN interview) to vent his frustration in Biblical terms, all the while insisting he did not want Krueger let go. Perhaps Alou's support of free speech also applies to denizens of hell, and he was simply trying to let truth win in the public forum, but he never made that clear. The vehemence of his attacks, his unwillingness to meet with Krueger and accept his apology (and perhaps educate the man) and his insistence on Krueger's satanic connections stole fuel from his legitimate outrage. Everybody understood why the man was pissed, but fewer and fewer felt comfortable supporting him as his mouth continued to roar from the dugout pulpit.

Maybe Radnich was right, and it was all about money. Three weeks after this whole sordid mess broke, however, I can't help wondering how it would have played if the Giants were above .500 and in first place (as I write, the

Padres are one game below .500 and 5 1/2 games up in the NL West), instead of stumbling along in 4th place in the weakest division in Major League history. Krueger's frustration with the wildly underachieving Giants pilfered his judgment, and he went public with something he might secretly believe but would never have aired had the team been winning. I suppose you could also argue that losing actually breeds such ugly sentiments, digging into the darkest recesses of the subconscious and planting such ugliest sentiments, but I've always tried to keep Freud out of my baseball. Winning, however, can be a pretty good band aid.

In some ways, the whole Krueger affair has been illustrative of the Giants season—one dumb move after the next, with good judgment and timely speaking decidedly missing in action. So, three guys are out of a job, Felipe Alou has lost the respect of many of his former fans, KNBR's reputation is stained, and I'm sitting here still trying to figure what the hell happened to the season.

You know, maybe I do have a solution to this whole mess—why don't we all just blame Barry? If he had been around, everyone could have been focusing their antipathy on his barcalounger, denouncing his cream and cleared accomplishments, and abominating his every breath. Hell, we'd all be too tired to stay up for late-night talk radio, and with Barry around, hey, maybe we just might be creeping up to that .500 mark. And let's face it—if ever there was a messenger of Satan...



Ken Derr is a San Francisco Giants fan and is really looking forward to hockey season. Go Sharks!

The Quick And the Brain Dead by John Shiffert

Esteban Enrique "Steve" Bellan died on August 8, 1932 in Havana at the age of 82. Now, that may not seem like much of a news flash, but Steve Bellan was a pioneer... the first Latin American to play baseball in the United States and one of the game's pioneers in Cuba and the Caribbean. As such, he was a trailblazer for the expansion of what was already the American National Game to an entire new population, and the starter of a trend that only gathers momentum to this day. However, it is apparently a trend with a skeleton in its closet, and a controversy.

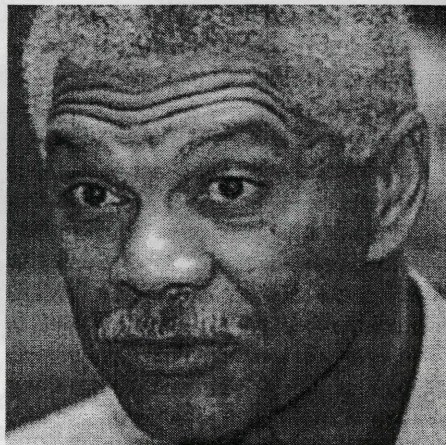
Steve Bellan was born into a Cuban (not Spanish) family in Havana in 1850, and was playing baseball at its highest level in the U.S. by the time he was 18, first with the Unions of Morrisiana, and then, for the next four years, with the Troy Haymakers. He finished his American career with eight games with the New York Mutuals in 1873. Thus, Bellan spanned the period between the National Association of Base Ball Players and the first professional league, the National Association. Basically a good-fielding third baseman, though with a scatter arm, he was only a fair hitter (.252 BA) with little power, although he did have a 5-for-5 day with five RBIs against **Al Spalding** on August 3, 1871. He was also eighth in the National Association in walks in 1871, drawing nine (the rules provided for very few walks in this era) in 29 games.

When he returned to Cuba, he was among the first to introduce baseball there, and he participated in the first organized baseball game in his native land in 1874. Apparently, he found some power back home, because he hit three home runs in a game on December 27, 1874. Bellan later went on to become the player-manager of the Havana team from 1878 to 1886 and lead his squad to championships in 1878-79, 1879-1880 and 1882-83.

The trend that Bellan helped start would make baseball as big a sport in Latin America, especially the Caribbean, as it is in the United States. By the start of the 21st Century, hundreds of thousands of Caribbean natives had taken up the game, and an increasing number were not surprisingly coming to America to get ahead and test their skills...just like Steve Bellan did almost 140 years ago.

The controversy is... how many of those thousands of Caribbean players are brain-dead? An absurd question, but the subject was brought up approximately 73 years after Steve Bellan's death by KNBR radio's now-fired

Larry Krueger. Now, KNBR is the flagship station for the San Francisco Giants, and it seems as if Krueger was getting frustrated with the G'int's lack of success at the plate (and in the standings) this year, generating a rant that included a statement about the Giants club and its "brain-dead Caribbean hitters hacking at slop nightly." This sort of cultural stereotyping is, of course, an anathema to most people, and it quite naturally provoked a firestorm of controversy, especially with Giants' manager **Felipe Alou**, who happens to be from the Dominican Republic (remember the old saying attributed to Dominican players, "you can't get off the Island by walking?") and who also happened to object to being characterized in the same rant as a "manager... whose mind has turned to Cream of Wheat."

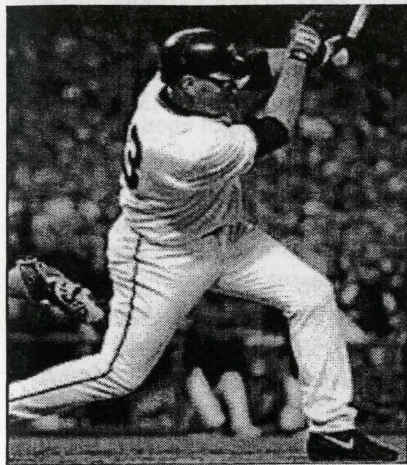


All well and good, or maybe bad. But, what about the actual statistics that may or may not support Krueger's assertion? (The walking comment, not the Cream of Wheat comment.) In the fallout over Krueger's manifestly politically incorrect statement, no one seems to have wanted to explore the facts. Possibly out of fear of also being characterized as politically incorrect. Well, *Zisk* has no fear, so we'll ask the question—do Caribbean players indeed lack plate discipline? That's something that can be studied dispassionately, through the baseball record. First, let's look at the 2005 San Francisco Giants, and their relevant stats, as of the time that Krueger made his ill-fated rant:

	AB	W	OBP	ID
Giants	3769	313	.326	.060
Opponents	3810	408	.345	.082

It seems pretty obvious that the Giants as a team were not drawing walks at a rate anywhere near their opponents—

almost 100 fewer walks, and on-base percentage almost 20 points lower, and a team Isolated Discipline (On-Base Percentage minus Batting Average) 22 points lower. Now,



how much of that can be laid at the feet (or heads) of their Latino players?

In early August 2005, there were five Giants who were born in Caribbean nations who had more than 100 plate appearances in 2005:

	AB	W	OBP	ID
Pedro Feliz	401	26	.309	.042
Omar Vizquel	390	36	.350	.060
Edgardo Alfonzo	258	21	.349	.054
Deivi Cruz	185	9	.299	.034
Yorvit Torrealba	93	9	.301	.075

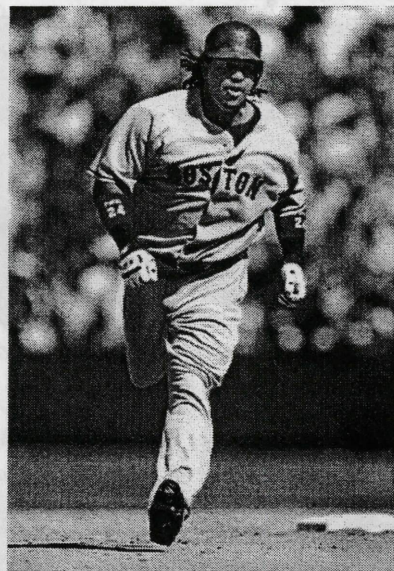
A mixed message at best. Vizquel and Alfonzo had on base-percentages significantly better than the team's. Torrealba was the only one to meet the Rule of 10 for Walks (having around 10% as many walks as at bats) and had a better Isolated Discipline (ID—a stat developed by your humble author and derived by subtracting batting average from on base percentage) than the team, while Vizquel was right at the team ID average and actually had more walks than strikeouts. Collectively, these five players had an on-base percentage of .328, just about the team average. So, you could say that, while they were not part of the solution, they also were not really part of the problem—they were just part of a team that didn't draw many walks.

It should be noted that this accounting does not include **Moises Alou**, son of Felipe, who was born in Atlanta and raised in the United States, and who happened, at the time, to be by far the team's best hitter, with a .925 OPS. Maybe it's a coincidence, but his figures at the time were as follows:

	AB	W	OBP	ID
Moises Alou	302	46	.418	.090

(An aside: I saw Moises Alou play in a New York/Pennsylvania League game at, of all places, Doubleday Field in Cooperstown, when he was about 18 years old. He spent the entire afternoon futilely chasing curve balls in the dirt.)

Obviously, this study says more about the 2005 Giants than it does about Caribbean players as a whole. It only covers six members of one team for a part of one season. What about the big picture, over a much larger slice of baseball history? The four Caribbean countries that have provided major league baseball with by far the most players in the last



century have been the Dominican Republic (385), Puerto Rico (214), Venezuela (169) and Cuba (148). Let's take a look at all the players from those countries who have had significant careers. In this case, 6000 plate appearances or more, or the rough equivalent of 10 full seasons, and ranked by ID.

Dominican Republic

	AB	W	OBP	ID
Manny Ramirez	5948	928	.409	.095
Jose Offerman	5652	766	.360	.087
Sammy Sosa	8362	895	.346	.071
Rico Carty	5606	642	.369	.070
Pedro Guerrero	5392	609	.370	.070
Julio Franco	8363	882	.366	.066
Cesar Cedeno	7310	664	.347	.062
Tony Fernandez	7911	690	.347	.059
Raul Mondesi	5814	475	.331	.058
Juan Samuel	6081	440	.315	.056
Tony Pena	6489	455	.309	.049
Felipe Alou	7339	423	.328	.042
Julian Javier	5722	314	.296	.039
George Bell	6123	331	.316	.038
Matty Alou	5789	311	.345	.038
Alfredo Griffin	6780	338	.285	.036

(Hmmm... maybe that's why Felipe Alou was so upset. By the way, Jesus Alou's career ID was an awful .025.)

Puerto Rico

	AB	W	OBP	ID
Carlos Delgado	5368	872	.392	.109



Bernie Williams	7278	1024	.385	.086
Roberto Alomar	9076	1032	.371	.071
Jose Cruz, Sr.	7917	878	.354	.070
Orlando Cepeda	7927	588	.350	.053
Willie Montanez	5843	465	.327	.052
Juan Gonzalez	6555	457	.343	.048
Benito Santiago	6951	430	.307	.044
Felix Milan	5791	318	.322	.043
Roberto Clemente	9454	621	.359	.042
Ivan Rodriguez	7076	406	.345	.039
Vic Power	6046	279	.315	.031

Cuba

	AB	W	OBP	ID
Minnie Minoso	6579	814	.389	.091
Jose Canseco	7057	906	.353	.087

Raffy Palmeiro	10446	1351	.371	.082
Tony Perez	9778	925	.341	.062
Tony Taylor	7680	613	.321	.060
Jose Cardenal	6964	608	.333	.058
Leo Cardenas	6707	522	.311	.054
Bert Campaneris	8684	618	.311	.052
Tony Oliva	6301	448	.353	.049
Cookie Rojas	6309	396	.306	.043

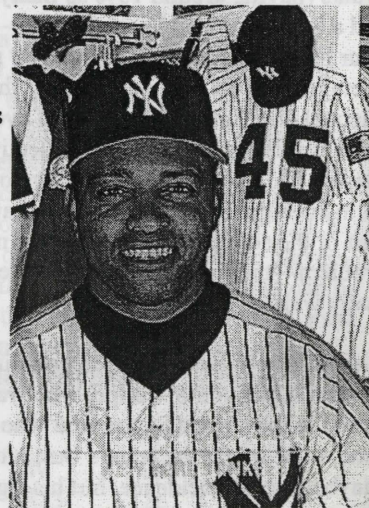
Venezuela

	AB	W	OBP	ID
Omar Vizquel	8213	822	.341	.066
Andres Gallarraga	8096	583	.347	.059
Dave Concepcion	8723	736	.322	.055
Manny Trillo	5950	452	.316	.053
Luis Aparicio	10230	736	.311	.049
Ozzie Guillen	6686	239	.287	.023

What, if anything, can we learn from these 44 players? First, that this is an arbitrary cut-off point. If we were to include all those players with 5000 plate appearances then, for instance, you could add Bobby Abreu, a master of controlling the strike zone, to the Venezuela list, and his numbers look like this:

	AB	W	OBP	ID
Bobby Abreu	4559	843	.411	.107

Cutting back to 5000 career PAs also brings in **Danny Tartabull** (Puerto Rico), with his .095 career ID, **Stan Javier**, who had a lot more plate discipline than his dad (.076), and another Venezuelan, **Alfonzo**, who's actually having a bad year in 2005, because his career ID is .073. On the other side of the coin, Caribbean players with between 5000 and 6000 PAs also include Cuba's **Tito Fuentes** (.039), Venezuela's **Tony Armas** (.035), Dominican **Rafael Ramirez** (.034) and Puerto Rico's **Carlos Baerga** (.040), so maybe it balances out.



Of more significance is a point made by the exceedingly astute **Bill Deane**, the former National Baseball Library researcher and a Hall of Fame thinker on the sport. Deane notes that while Latino players, “had been taught early on that the only way to attract the attention of major league scouts was by their hitting ability, not their patience; so, their only hope to leave their native islands for the promised land of the majors was to go up there hacking.” However, Deane makes another, more important point—this trend has changed in recent years, in that, prior to 1999, only one Latin-born player (Tartabull) had ever drawn 100 walks in a season. Since then, notes Deane, it’s become fairly common, thanks to the skills of—among others—Abreu, Williams, Delgado, Palmeiro and **Jorge Posada**.

The thought also occurs that some of these players, though born in Caribbean nations, weren’t raised there. Ramirez (who went to high school in New York), Canseco (Miami), Palmeiro and Alomar come quickly to mind. Still, overall we can say we’re looking at a pretty good-sized sample of players with long-time major league service starting about 50 years ago. Meaning, among other things, that they had to be considered at least pretty good hitters to have stayed around that long, with the possible exceptions of Javier, Griffin, Milan, Power, Rojas and Guillen, who were perhaps better known for their work in the field. Of course, the perceived value of a base on balls has never been higher than it is today. Back in the ’50s and ’60s, a walk wasn’t generally considered as good as a hit, so maybe you could last longer, even if you didn’t walk much.

Maybe the best thing is to look at the long-term historical perspective. Over the 50 seasons from 1955 to 2004, which basically encompasses the careers of all of these players, the average ID in the National League was .064, and, except for a couple of years in the “New DeadBall Era” of the 60s, it really hasn’t varied very much from that median. Over those same 50 seasons the average seasonal ID for the American League as a whole has been a bit higher, .067, although, once again, there hasn’t been much variance from that standard over the years, with the yearly marks rarely dropping below .060, and then not very far below .060. Thus, we can say that 14 of our 44-man sample had career ID’s above the National League standard and 12 had career ID’s above the American League standard. (The two that fell between the American and National League averages are current players Omar Vizquel and Julio Franco.) And, if we recall The Rule of

10 for Walks, we also see that just 14 of the 44 (Ramirez, Offerman, Sosa, Carty, Guerrero, Franco, Delgado, Williams, Alomar, Cruz, Minoso, Canseco, Palmeiro, Vizquel) meet that standard, that is, only 14 of these players had walk totals that were within 10% of their at bats. However, also note that, in conjunction to Deane’s point, that Ramirez, Offerman, Sosa, Franco, Delgado, Williams, Alomar, Canseco, Palmeiro and Vizquel are current or recent players.

Individually, only Carlos Delgado on this list (as well as Abreu, once he gets 6000 PA) qualify as ID Monsters, with career IDs over .100. Whereas, any pitcher who walked Ozzie Guillen should have been pulled from the game immediately. Ditto for Javier, Bell (even though he was a power hitter), Matty Alou, Griffin, Rodriguez and Power. Actually, power hitters (as opposed to Vic Power are scarce on these lists. That may be a significant point, since power hitters will typically get more walks from pitchers just pitching around them. Only Canseco, Palmeiro, Perez, Gallarraga, Bell, Ramirez, Sosa, Cepeda, Delgado and Gonzalez would unanimously make anyone’s list of power hitters, and only Bell and Juan Gone of that group really have seriously (more than 10 points below average) sub-par IDs. So, it could be postulated that Caribbean players seem like they draw fewer walks because there are relatively few power hitter in their grouping.

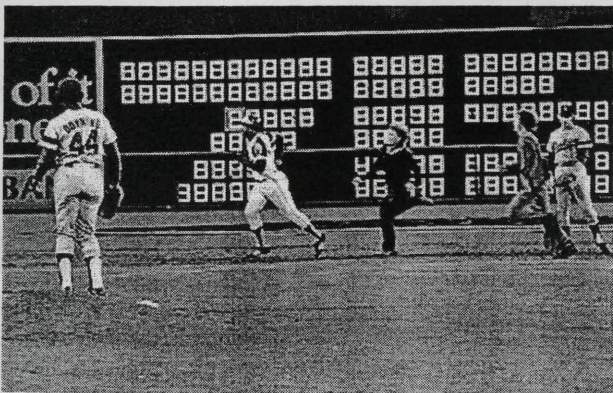
What does this all mean? What’s the conclusion? Well, another deep thinker on the game, **Matt Coyne**, has pointed to an interview Panamanian **Manny Sanguillen** (he of the .030 ID in 5300 PAs) gave years ago where the writer made a point of saying that Latin players would swing at anything because each time at bat was so valuable and that it was a macho thing to hit, meaning the only a nancy boy (Coyne’s term—an anachronism from his youth in the mid-19th Century) would accept a walk. So, maybe there’s something to the theory that Caribbean players don’t walk that much, at least up until 1999. Does that make them brain-dead hackers? Or, for that matter, does that make **Rocco Baldelli** a brain-dead Italian hacker? Hardly.

John Shiffert is the author of Baseball: 1862 to 2003 [PublishAmerica, 2004] and the forthcoming book, Baseball... Then and Now [PublishAmerica, 2005]. His third book, on Philadelphia baseball in the 19th Century will be published by McFarland in 2006. He can be reached through his website, www.baseball19to21.com.

The Loser in Right Field by Steve Reynolds

The summer of 1981 featured numerous big events—baseball was on strike for 49 days, leaving lots of fans wondering what to do; *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *For Your Eyes Only* and *Arthur* were raking in the bucks on the big screen; **Ronald Reagan** and **Pope John Paul II** were both recovering from assassination attempts; and “Bette Davis Eyes” blasted out of car stereos everywhere. But for 11-year-old Steven Raymond Reynolds, the summer of '81 meant humiliation, pain, taunting and disrespect from adults—all in the name of Little League.

Now I liked baseball as much as any 11-year-old kid did. I started collecting cards in 1977, spurred on by my grandfather Ray. **Ray Reynolds** was a hard working man throughout his whole life. He spent over 30 years working for the New York State Department of Transportation, sweating over blacktop in the summer and spending long hours plowing the voluminous amounts of snow that fell over the Berkshires each winter. Beyond that job, he worked weekends and evenings as a caretaker at the estate of city stockbroker, breaking his back pulling weeds, planting flowers and vacuuming the pool.



So when he actually had time off, he liked to watch other people work hard, hence his love of baseball. He was a Dodgers fan to the core, and when I started showing interest in baseball (my first TV memory is watching **Henry Aaron's** 715th home run), he tried to instill that same Dodgers passion in me. While I did root for them in the playoffs and World Series, I somehow became a fan of baseball's other lovable losers—the New York Mets and Boston Red Sox, just because we could actually see their games on broadcast TV once in a while. (Of course, picking those teams was just the first of a long line of misguided decisions, but that's a story for another time.)

In the end, my grandfather didn't care who I rooted for or against. He was just happy that he could share his passion for baseball with me. I was raised by my grandparents and my aunt, and since my grandfather was retired by the time I became passionate about baseball (and, more importantly, baseball cards) he would always drive me to Zayre's to get cards and some candy for both of us. (Gee, thanks for the lifelong gut, Gramps.) As I look back on that time, I also think my grandfather liked to come up with reasons to drive me around just to get away from his domineering bitch of a wife, my grandmother **Emma**. When people tell me I have a rather loud voice, I feel like telling them it's because yelling was the only way to talk to my grandmother. She yelled at my grandfather for ruining my diet, for buying those “useless pieces of paper,” for being late for dinner, for messing up the house and heck, she probably yelled at him for causing the Vietnam War for all I know. This woman loved yelling seven days a week, and as she got older she lost her hearing, so yelling became the trendiest thing we did in our house.

My grandfather died in late 1978, and I've always wondered if it really was his heart finally giving out, or that his ears just couldn't take that loud piercing voice anymore. So when the 1979 baseball season rolled around, my aunt **Joyce** picked up the sports slack, allowing me to spend my allowance on baseball cards each week. And my grandmother played her part as well, coming up with multiple versions of the word “stupid” to describe my card habit. And that little drama triangle was played to perfection for the next two years.

Then in May 1981 my aunt hit upon a great way for me to lose weight—why just watch baseball when you could be out there playing it with kids my own age? Why be immersed in stats on the back of the cards when I could make some of my own? At the age of 11, I was certain of a few things: *The Empire Strikes Back* was the greatest movie ever; Legos could only be taken apart with your teeth; **The Beatles' Red Album** was the best album ever... and I was horrible athlete. Every single gym class where teams had to be picked, I was always last picked. And with good reason—I couldn't kick, I couldn't hit, I couldn't shoot and I couldn't even block, even though I outweighed most of the kids in my class.

Yet my aunt saw me crush the wiffleball when I played

with my cousins in the backyard, so she thought I could be a great hitter. (Those great eye-hand coordination skills were better used once I got an Atari the next year.) So one night over dinner she announced that she was going to take me to the little league tryouts the next night. I barely had a chance to register my shock when my grandmother offered up some helpful advice: "He can't hit, he can't throw, he can't run. The best thing he could do is maybe eat the ball." (Wait, I think I meant to say she offered up some painful insults. Yeah, that's more like it.)

Undaunted by my grandmothers' criticism (which, in hindsight, I think was delivered at a volume that would drown out the planes flying over Shea), my aunt took me to the tryouts the next night. Hillsdale was a small town, with a population of just barely 800 people, with one traffic light, one supermarket, one liquor store and two thriving bars. (What else are you going to do in rural upstate New York?) So the "tryouts" were basically "show up and we'll get your kid on the team." And befitting such a poor town (even though there were plenty of city folks with big summer houses in the town), the Hillsdale little league field looked as though someone designed it to be a living cliché of a piss poor field. Home plate had cracks in it, and if any of us kids really learned how to slide we could have broken it in two. Centerfield was so brown and devoid of grass that I thought it was a reasonable facsimile of the desert planet in *Star Wars*. And the backstop must have been used in a Rustoleum ad to show what happens in the rain when you didn't use that all-powerful aerosol can to protect your metal.



But the field had nothing on the rough shape of our coach, who immediately made me think of that drunk guy from *The Tonight Show*, **Foster Brooks**, crossed with an overweight version of **Tom Selleck** on *Magnum P.I.* **Coach van Alston** (I never heard his first name the entire season) seemed to slur his words when he welcomed us to little league, and continuously rubbed his moustache as if he was going to find some leftover food (a leftover

meatball, perhaps?) buried in its immense bushiness. (And when I turned 17 I realized my Foster Brooks analogy was spot on, as when I got my first smell and swig of whiskey I immediately thought of Coach van Alston and the way he smelled during our Thursday night games.)

I never understood why this man was our coach. None of his kids played on the team. As he was running the tryouts I'm pretty sure he actually dozed off—while standing straight up. I think I saw his brain attempt to crawl out of his ear whenever he was talking with a parent about their child. His assistant coach, **Mr. Albright**, wasn't much better of a role model. He looked like he never met a doughnut he didn't like (which I guess made him my role model) and couldn't hit ground balls to our infielders any better than I could.

With all this talent supporting me at the tryouts, you can draw only one conclusion—I was HORRIBLE. Any nuances of the game those two "teachers" passed along during that two hour initial tryout went in one ear and out the other. I could grasp any math problem in seconds, had an unhealthy interest in history for someone so young and could easily sing the lyrics to almost any Top 40 hit from 1973 to the present day, yet none of these skills helped as I swung at the first pitch from Mr. Albright...and forgot to hang onto the bat after I swung. That aluminum bat flew about 20 feet, hitting the backstop first and then clanging onto the ground. Every parent stopped in the tracks and immediately looked to make sure their child wasn't hit by that flying hunk of metal. I learned how to hang onto the bat quickly after that, not that I made any contact. With each miss I racked up, Mr. Albright threw slower, then slower and then delivered what could only be described as an "eephus" pitch. I swung so hard at that one I twisted like a corkscrew and fell right to the ground.

As I picked myself up off the ground I heard the chuckles of my soon-to-be teammates, Coach van Alston walked over to me and said—with a hint of disgust or bemused resignation, I'm not exactly sure which—"That's okay, kid. We'll use you as a defensive replacement." Unfortunately for both of us, coach had seen me attempt to catch fly balls. I never failed to lose sight of the ball when it was at its highest point and ended up using my glove to protect my face more than a place where the ball could safely land. Alas, we were a small town, so everyone made the team.

As the season got underway, I was rightfully buried at the

end of the bench, the sixth outfielder on team that probably only needed four. Even with the less-than-professional coaching, our team somehow started out well, going 6 and 2 in our first eight games. I contributed by, well, keeping splinters out of the asses of my more talented teammates. My aunt would always hope I would get into the game, yet she didn't seem that surprised when I rode the bench all the way through the 7th inning. She knew I stunk, yet would always put a positive spin on it. And she was popular with the other parents, and even ended up umpiring our eighth game when the other umpire couldn't make it. "Great," I thought. "My aunt has spent more time on the field than I have." (She was so successful that night that someone that ran the league asked her to umpire a couple of other games, and then she ended up working the All-Star game we had against one of the other leagues in our county. The ribbing I got for that was a perfect exclamation point on the entire summer.)

At the beginning of July, I caught my lucky break. Two of our backup outfielders were going on vacation over a two week span, so only one kid stood between me and my first appearance in the field. And during a game against Copake my chance came. We were up by four runs, so in the top of the seventh Coach van Alston came over to my usual spot on the bench and said, "Reynolds (buuuuurp), you're going in into right field." I grabbed my glove and sprinted out to my position. And then I realized I had NO IDEA how to play my position. I had stopped paying attention in practices at that point when I realized Coach van Alston was more interested in seeing how many Marlboros he could smoke around a bunch of kids in an hour. I started panicking. How do I catch the ball? If it rolls on the ground to me, who do I throw it to? Do I have to crash into that fence behind me? What if I have to go to the bathroom?

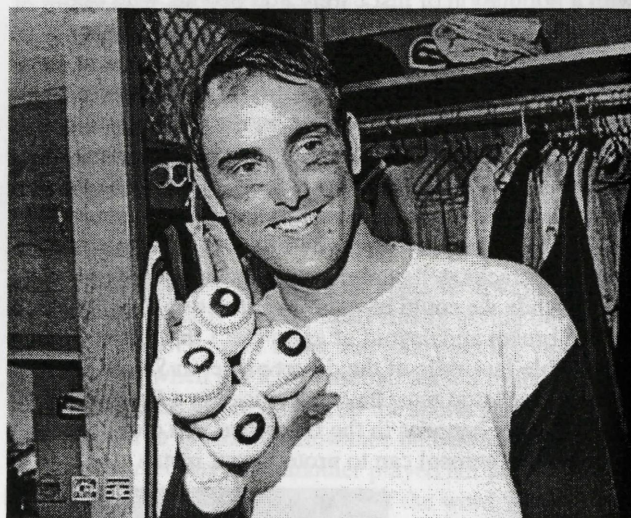
"Hey, get on in here!"

I snapped out of my panicky daydream to see that our pitcher had struck out the side and that the game was over. Whew, I dodged a bullet there.

The next game I didn't play, which left us with only one more game where we didn't have the full outfield. We were playing Ancram on our home field. Ancram was led by pitcher **Nicky Dolan**, who shared the same age as I did, but that was about it. Nicky seemed to be seven feet tall, had huge arms and legs, longish hair and generally

looked like the size of Chewbacca to me. Nicky not only had a wicked fastball, but he also had the pitch we had all heard about—the curveball. We were battling Nicky's team for the league lead, so I was convinced that I was never going to get into this game.

When we got to the field, Coach van Alston said to me, "Tom's not feeling well, so you're our fourth outfielder tonight." I never felt so nauseous so quickly. I definitely was going in if we changed pitchers, which meant I'd probably have to face Nicky. Uh-oh. This did not sound good at all. My usual summer sweating kicked up to a level that could have flooded our entire town. I spent each inning watching my teammates flail at Nicky's **Nolan Ryan**-esque fastball and his God-like curve for five



innings. In the top of the sixth Ancram broke the pitchers' duel, roughing up our ace **Garret** for three runs and making the score 4-1. So coach changed pitchers, sending in Richie, who was in right field, to pitch the rest of the game, and sending me out to my own field of nightmares.

Richie struck out the last Ancram batter, so we went into the bottom of the sixth down by three. As I sat on the bench, Mr. Albright said, "Steve, grab a helmet and a bat, you're leading off."

Gulp.

Defending my precious head from a towering fly ball with a glove was one thing; having a ball thrown directly at me was NOT what I signed up for. But my aunt was excited to see me up at the plate—she even had her camera out.

So I licked my lips (which strangely felt like sandpaper), put a helmet on and grabbed the lightweight red bat that none of my teammates liked to use. With each step to the plate Nicky grew six inches taller, until he finally was tall enough to block out the fading sunlight. I stepped into the batter's box hoping for one thing—that it would be a quick embarrassment for me. Most of my other teammates looked pretty bad swinging at this guy's pitches, so I figured my incompetence would blend right in.

I stared at Nicky, wiggling my bat from side to side because I thought it looked cool, waiting for that first pitch. When I saw it leave his hand I thought, "Wait, I can hit this." So I swung. HARD. And missed. HARD. So hard that the bat yet again flew out of my hands—and right past Nicky. My teammates laughed, as they had seen my batting prowess before during practice. But Nicky, well, he looked PISSED. He had a look of, "How dare you try to show me up?" I wanted to yell out, "I'm sorry—can I just go sit on the bench now?" Mr. Albright ran onto the field, picked up the bat and brought it back to me. He said just three words to me: "Hang onto this," and grumbled on his way back to the coach's box.

I stepped back into the batter box and thought, "Okay, I'm not going to swing. Just throw two strikes and I will be out of your way forever." Nicky looked in at me, and I knew he was going to throw a 100 mph fastball. What I didn't expect is that he'd want to throw it so hard that he gripped it so tightly that the ball slipped out of his hand at the last second—and headed directly for me. Now I didn't think he would throw at me on purpose; I mean, this kid had pinpoint control for a little league pitcher. His team was cruising. There was no need to settle a score. All these thoughts blinked across my brain, followed by, "Holy crap, I better move."

Too late.

The 128 mph fastball nailed me as I was trying to turn away, hitting me directly at the top of the spine. I felt like I'd been shot by a high-powered cannon. I was out for just a few seconds, and then rolled over to see my aunt with an extremely worried look on her face—and a look on Coach van Alston face's that said, "Crap, I hope I don't get sued for this." My aunt was a nurse, so she looked at where the ball had hit me and asked me if I could feel everything. And of course I could, especially the hundred eyes looking at me in the dirt surrounding home plate. After a couple of minutes I finally staggered to my feet to take

my base. Coach van Alston said, "Good job getting on base kid," and then—and I swear he did this—gave me a couple of pats on the back where I had just been hit.

When I reached first base I looked at Nicky, who was talking with Ancram's coach. And he looked as if he'd just left a showing of *Friday the 13th Part 2*. He was as white as **Jason Voorhees'** hockey mask (before all the blood got splattered on it), nervously shifting his feet and kicking the dirt mound. My teammate that followed me to the plate was this big kid



named **Ricky** who I rode the school bus with every day. Any coach with half a brain would have taken Nicky out, but Ancram's coach came from the old school—sports are not for crybabies. Nicky wasn't crying, but his mean mound demeanor was certainly gone. His first pitch to Ricky was in the dirt. The second Ricky crushed for a home run. I started running when I heard the "ping"—and immediately fell down, bringing laughter from both teams. I got back up and started running again, but then realized that I could jog home because that ball was never coming back.

Alas, we didn't win the game. The Ancram coach replaced Nicky with his younger brother, and he shut us down in order to close it out. I didn't play another inning the rest of the season. We finished second in our league to Ancram, with no help from me. (Even though I did have a perfect on base percentage.) When we lost our final game to Ancram, I distinctly remember overhearing Nicky saying, "Well, at last they didn't put in that loser in right field. He couldn't get out of the way of his own shadow." I was never happier to leave a ball field than that day. I knew, as did my aunt, that I did not belong anywhere within the confines of a baseball diamond. My love of the game was destined to lead me some place more comfortable than right field—the upper deck at Shea.

Steve Reynolds is the co-editor of Zisk, and admits that he probably couldn't hit a fastball thrown by any 11-year-old today.

Darryl, Off Broadway by Mike Faloon

Like most baseball fans, we at Zisk are men of refinement. We never wear white after Labor Day, we tip 20%, and, from time to time, we check out the latest in off-Broadway productions. This past spring, at the always reliable Upright Citizen's Brigade Theatre in NYC, we saw **Darryl Strawberry's** one-man show, *Darryl*, and it was brilliant—even with understudy **Chris Gethard** in the title role. Rather than rehash well-known events, *Darryl* tracks Strawberry's long, slow, painful fall from grace, showing us never-before-seen sides of the troubled ballplayer—how he was inspired by wheelchair basketball, how he patched things up with **Keith Hernandez**, how he found the cure for cancer (heroin, of course), and how, briefly, he reigned supreme over the pits of hell. It may sound like an April Fool's Day joke, but it's for real. It's also hysterical. As it turns out, Strawberry was unavailable for an interview but his understudy, the aforementioned Chris Gethard, was willing to chat with *Zisk*, offering a behind-the-scenes look at *Darryl: Darryl Strawberry's One-Man Show*. (Interview by Mike Faloon)

Zisk: We're talking with actor Chris Gethard, understudy for Darryl Strawberry. How many weeks have you been his understudy?

Chris Gethard: The first draft of the play was written four years ago and I was involved from the beginning, so I've known about this for four years and I've been doing the show for three months; I've been his understudy for three months and it's been a lot more work than I thought because he has not shown up a single time. As far as I know he has no idea that he has an understudy that's performing his show, which he may or may not know even exists, which probably explains why he hasn't shown up.

Zisk: Have you received any feedback from either the Mets or the Yankees?

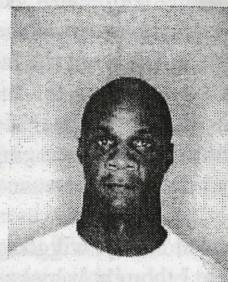
CG: I have not yet heard anything but I know at least that someone in the Mets organization knows about it only because someone who came to the show whose uncle worked in the Mets organization had told him about it. My great fear is that they're going to show up and sue me and/or the UCB Theatre for the existence of the show, but so far no luck on that. That would be the worst thing ever, but also the coolest thing ever.

Zisk: Were you there when Darryl wrote it, or did he feed you ideas and you wrote it? How did that work?

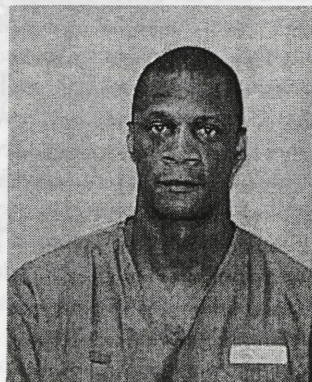
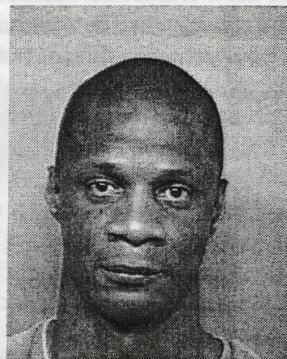
CG: He wrote the whole thing is what we pre-suppose, Darryl Strawberry sat down and wrote that whole thing. That's the in-character answer, that I didn't write a single word of the entire thing. Darryl Strawberry wrote the entire thing and just can't make the performances. In reality, I started writing it four years ago. But even in the premise of the show at the end of the show I like to thank him and say we're tinkering with this part or we're going to rewrite this bit so it'll be different next week. I do like to tell the world that Darryl Strawberry wrote this show.

Zisk: What sparked the idea?

CG: The show actually started with my brother. He went to LaSalle, a tiny liberal arts school where everybody knew everybody and he hung out with the punk rock kids and there was a large hippie contingent and in a very clichéd way they hated each other. These hippie kids would hold open mic poetry nights and my brother and all his friends would go and disrupt them and try to ruin their

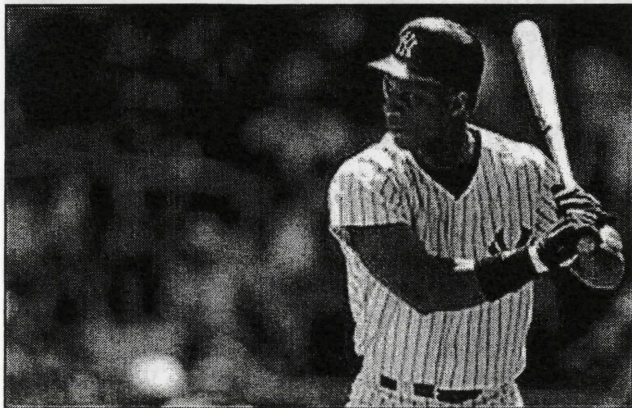


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poetry nights. Then my brother started signing up and giving monologues as Darryl Strawberry. I asked him if I could steal the premise and I came up with the idea of being the understudy and added a lot more layers to it. I think there's one joke of my brother's, the one about Darryl Strawberry's great-great-grandfather inventing the strawberry.

Zisk: I love it when Darryl takes a bite of a strawberry and then reminds the audience, "Royalties, bitches!" My wife hasn't been able to see the show yet, but she loves that joke.



CG: We started getting written up and a rumor went around that Darryl Strawberry's actually doing a show and the first three times I did the show [the audience was] friends of mine, it was comedians, it was people who knew me. And then about a month in there were lots of people showing up fully decked out in Mets gear and showing up with things they wanted autographed. At first it was funny, but then to get on stage in front of those people was terrifying. There have been times when they announce that Darryl can't make it and there are resounding boos and I have to win them over, and that strawberry bit tends to get them, that is where I can feel people being like, Okay, we get it.

Zisk: When I saw the show, I found it interesting to scan the crowd to see which people were there because it was a comedy show and which people were there because they heard that Darryl Strawberry was appearing off-Broadway.

CG: Instead of house music I play a copy of the "Let's Go Mets" video that they put out in '86, and these guys, all across the room you could feel these Mets fans uniting, it was really kind of amazing. Backstage I couldn't see

them but I could hear them. One guy would yell out something about **Gary Carter** and then another guy on the opposite side of the audience would yell out a stat or another player's name, or **Mookie Wilson** would come up and everyone was like, "Mookie!" or they mentioned **Rusty Staub** and it got a big cheer. That was one of the weeks where there was an "ugghh" when they announced, "His understudy Chris Gethard will be doing the show tonight," but then two minutes into it those guys were laughing more than anybody. From the start I was hoping this show would go beyond just the comedian scene. I got a big rush out of having the Mets fans show up and actually enjoy it because that's going to a totally different audience.

Zisk: Most of the show is comprised of fabrications. Are there any events in the show that are actually from his life?

CG: The first time we did the show it was probably five minutes longer and that entire five minutes was true facts, things that actually happened, exposition about Darryl Strawberry's real life, his career, coming up in Crenshaw and being on the best high school team ever, a lot of stuff like that. And what we found was that the people who thought it was Darryl just wanted a comedy show after a certain point, once they got the premise they didn't care and it was amazing to me. The thing that shocked me the most was how little convincing I have to do. The very first video that plays in the show is **Mike Wallace** doing the intro to a *60 Minutes* piece and it's the exposition they did—he had an amazing career, then he got into drugs, cancer, beset by demons, and this and that. Once the audience saw that they didn't give a shit about anything else I had to say about Darryl Strawberry, so we trimmed stuff out, to the point where the entire show is a lie. Every week people come up to me, even good friends of mine, and ask, How much of that is true? Did Darryl Strawberry really beat up a cop and knock out his horse? People think the most ludicrous things are true. I was a huge **Andy Kaufman** fan as a kid—and I would never compare myself to Andy Kaufman—but, wow, it's so much easier to trick people than I thought.

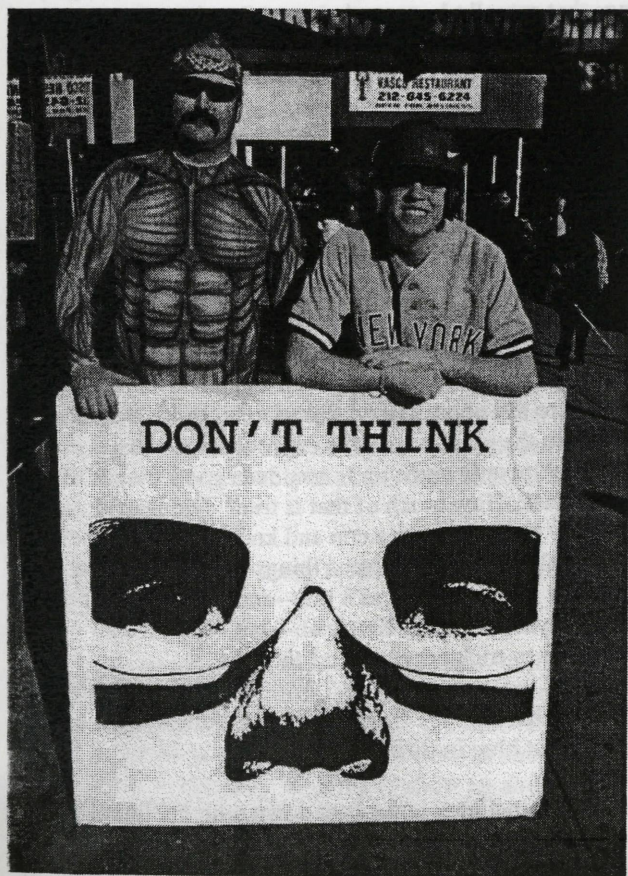
Zisk: Was that the idea from early on, to follow the arc of his career but plug in different events?

CG: My original idea when I sat down with my director, I was like, I have this idea I'm going to pretend to be Darryl Strawberry and I'll say that I'm his understudy and

basically what I'm going to do is tell a story that everybody knows about him—like everybody knows that he and Doc Gooden were drug buddies—so I'll get up and reference something like that, something that actually happened, and then I'll follow it up by saying here's the stuff that didn't make the papers, the stuff that the Mets covered up. I started doing monologues at open mics around town and even then people didn't respond at all to the true stuff and the fake stuff they flipped out for. Everybody knows enough about him already, he's a character, especially in New York City. He's almost mythological at this point. I can say anything—anything's feasible—and if anything could be true, nothing has to be.

Zisk: Now that I think about it he was part of the '80s Mets and the '90s Yankees, the city's two biggest teams of the past 20-25 years.

CG: Yeah, I grew up in northern New Jersey which is 100% under the wing of the New York media and I



remember the '86 Mets. That team had hero status and he was one of the chosen few and every time he got arrested and every time he got kicked out of baseball you could feel it, the entire city would get back on his side. I remember so well when he came back in the minor leagues in the early 90s, Minnesota, I think.

Zisk: Right, he came back with one of the independent leagues.

CG: In New York, when that was on the news, that wasn't sports, that was anchor desk material. In this town there's very little need for exposition. Anyone who's been here, even for five years, knows who he is really is. It's almost like **Mike Tyson**, with very few alterations this could be the Mike Tyson story but I would never do that because I would have to impersonate his voice.

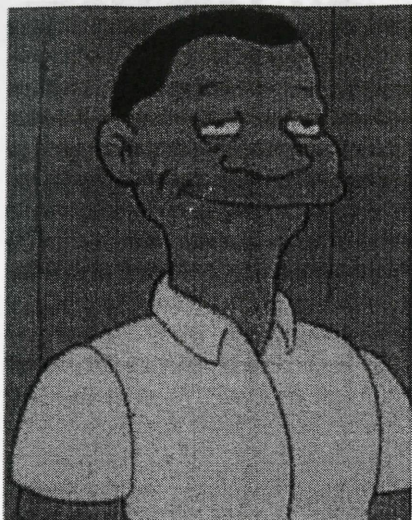
Zisk: And you'd have to commit to the face tattoo later in the show.

CG: That would be funny if I did his understudy and I came out with the fake face tattoo. There's your sequel. Yeah, those videos—the '86 Mets video and the *60 Minutes* piece—are priceless. You have Mike Wallace calling Strawberry a loser. My show kind of begins and ends with Darryl Strawberry saying, Leave me alone, every time I do anything it's on the news and that's not fair. Watching that video that was a point where I was like, this guy has had a rough life and we forget that. He's a freak show and we tune in or read about him hoping he has another downfall so he can come back, but it is not an easy life. I'm sure all the scrutiny doesn't help.

Zisk: But that doesn't mean you don't want to exploit it.

CG: No, not at all, I'll exploit it for laughs, but that Mike Wallace video... The only two guys in that video who stick by him are like these equipment managers from the Mets who never gave up on him. I feel bad for the guy in the sense that people make mistakes and people never ever let him live down his. I'm sure a large percentage of people have done things as bad or worse than Darryl Strawberry has but he will never be allowed to move on with his life.

Zisk: It would be funny if one of the anecdotes you made up came back to him, a person walking up to him and asking if he really punched out a horse.



CG: A girl came up to me and said her parents live next to him in Florida and she said she'd be sure to tell them about the show, and I was like, Please don't! I don't want to get sued. But my ultimate dream is for him to come see it and see what he thinks.

Zisk: It's like you fear the cliff as much as you want to go over it.

CG: The first time I did the show someone made a reservation under the name **Sid Fernandez** to mess with me. I saw that on the list and I freaked out. I would love for someone from that team to see it. It would be a complete disaster but it would be completely fascinating.

Zisk: Have you done anything to directly to draw the attention of the Mets?

CG: For the first two months it was easy to get a crowd—the premise is good enough, people heard it was a pretty decent show, and it had a celebrity's name attached to it. As long as that was happening I was happy to get some press, but I didn't go to them [the Mets] directly. I do think that if they know about it it will get shut down. I've been doing it for two and a half months and the crowds are starting to wane, so I'm starting to look for ways to get more attention for the show, to keep it alive. Part of that is seeing if I can get into some kind of trouble and parlaying that into crowds again. That will kill it faster but at least it will go out with a bang.

Zisk: At one point in the show you wear a Yankees jacket. Is that autographed?

CG: Yeah, that's why I wear a Yankees jacket and not a Mets jacket. I like that idea that he signed it and I'm wearing it in the show. In a sense there is a little bit of him there, I'm bringing as much of him as I can to the stage. If I'm going to make fun of the guy, this is my attempt to honor him. Maybe that's too much of a stretch,

too cheesy.

Zisk: You've got 50 tally marks in the "mock him" column and one tally mark in the "honor him" column, but it's there.

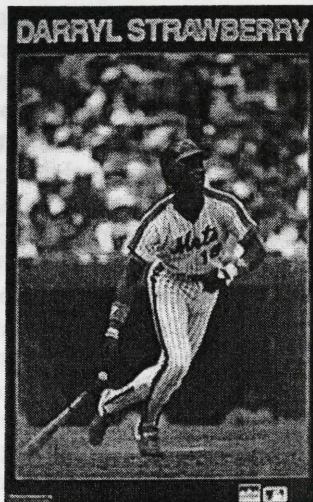
CG: Yeah, I don't think it balances it out at all.

Zisk: I also like the Dodgers jacket that you wear at the end.

CG: I found that on eBay. I would type in "Darryl Strawberry" and I found that about a month before the show went up. When I opened the box that came in I was laughing with tears in my eyes. The other thing I did was order thousands and thousands of Darryl Strawberry baseball cards and used those as flyers. I also got a copy of "Chocolate Strawberry," the rap song he put out, I got it on vinyl. I'm still looking for a copy of "Let's Get Mets-

merized," which is a rap album that the entire '86 Mets put out. The best line is "You all know me/I'm the baddest terror/They call me **Rick Aguilera**," it's all lines like that. Those guys were amazing. I'm sure readers of *Zisk* are going to hate this, but I grew up a Yankees fan, but doing this show has made me obsessed with those Mets teams of the past. Did you read the *Bad Guys* book? It came out a year or two ago and it was about how the 1986 Mets were collectively the worst group of human beings to spend any amount of time together. It's all the stories of all the things they did, the fights, coke parties, everything, all the arrests. They said in that book that, I guess, **Mel Stottlemyre** ruined Dwight Gooden by forcing him to learn a curveball that subsequently tinkered with his fastball mechanics. I did obsessive research, I became 100% obsessed with the Mets, the hardness with which they attacked being rock stars.

Mike Faloon lives on top of a hill and roots for Dontrelle Willis even when he's pitching against the Mets.



Who Belongs in Cooperstown? by Jeff Herz

Too often, I think, baseball commentators refer to a baseball player as a certain Hall of Famer. This term is being thrown around too easily and at far too many players. I want to look at those players who are either eligible or still playing to determine—based upon my own criteria which include (but are not limited to) individual career statistics and team performance—who I believe are Hall of Fame worthy.

Let me start with some broad categories of players who do not belong in the Hall: 1) Mediocre or above average players, who might have had a few good years, but have not performed over the long term, do not belong; 2) Compilers, players who played beyond their years even though their statistics continued to fall, hanging on to reach some individual goal that baseball anointed as being a H-O-F credential, don't belong. Quite simply, was the player among the elite players of his day. If yes, then you can argue he should be in the Hall. If you can name two or more players better than that player at the same position, then I would argue that the player in question should not be in the Cooperstown.

The Hall-of-Fame should be reserved for the best of the best at the time they played the game; those individuals who performed almost every year of their career significantly above the league average. In the Rocketball Era averaging 30 home runs a year does not make you a Hall of Famer since so many players have routinely hit 50+ in that same time frame. The bar we use to measure players' performances needs to be moved up or down over time based upon the level of competition, the ball parks, expansion, and many other factors.

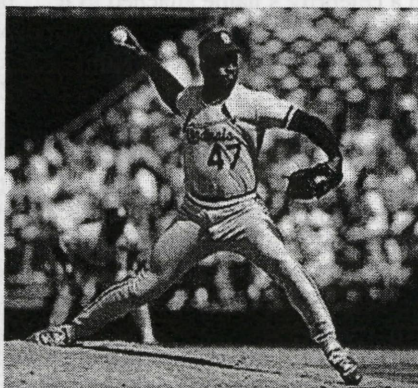
I am not even going to discuss players in the "No Brainer" category. They're locks for the Hall. (But with future fallout regarding steroids use, possible exceptions to this category are noted with **.) The position players are **Barry Bonds****, **Tony Gwynn**, **Cal Ripken**, **Alex Rodriguez**, **Rickey Henderson**, **Sammy Sosa****, **Mark McGwire****, **Ivan Rodriguez** and **Mike Piazza**. The pitchers are: **Roger Clemens**, **Randy Johnson**, **Greg Maddux**, **Mariano Rivera** and **Pedro Martinez**. That's 10 position players and five pitchers, which tells me we are currently living in a hitters' world, and with the common routine being starter for five or six innings, middle reliever, closer, I am not sure we have enough perspective to truly evaluate pitchers during this time

period beyond the five mentioned above. It's a topic that merits its own discussion.

When I review the list of top eligible pitchers not listed above I come up with the following **Lee Smith**, **Jim Kaat**, **Rich "Goose" Gossage**, **Jack Morris** and **Bert Blyleven**. The active pitchers are **Tom Glavine**, **Curt Schilling**, **John Franco**, **Trevor Hoffman** and **John Smoltz**. The hitters included the following retired players **Jim Rice**, **Don Mattingly**, **Steve Garvey**, **Dave Parker**, **Ted Simmons**, **Joe Jackson** (ineligible), **Alan Trammell**, **Andre Dawson** and **Dale Murphy**. It is interesting that **Ron Santo**, who is the latest HOF media darling not enshrined, is a whole 20 Jamesian points behind **Andre Dawson**, so not worthy of considerations. Along with the following active players **Ken Griffey Jr**, **Roberto Alomar**, **Frank Thomas**, **Rafael Palmeiro****, **Manny Ramirez**, **Todd Helton**, **Larry Walker**, **Jeff Bagwell**, **Bernie Williams** and **Vlad Guerrero**.

They are all good, but are they great, are they good enough to be immortalized in Cooperstown?

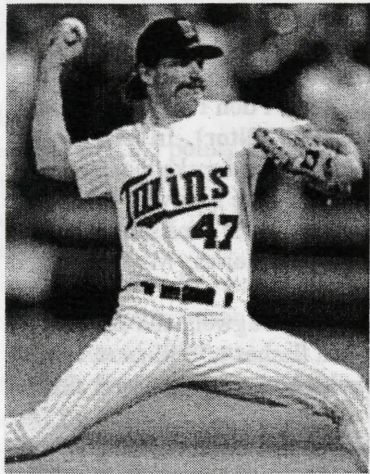
Let's briefly look at each person and see why they do or do not belong. (Author's note: I am using baseball-reference.com as the basis for my comparison and providing the players statistics. All stats are through the 2004 season)



Lee Smith – 136 HOF points*, 478 saves, 1289 IP;
Rich "Goose" Gossage – 126 HOF points, 310 saves, 1809 IP -
With closers **Rollie Fingers** and **Dennis Eckersley** now in the Hall of Fame, and **Mariano a**

foregone conclusion, I think it is time that **Smith** and **Goose** get their due. In order to save a game during this era, closers were often asked to work two or three innings. Today a closer is working one inning or less most of the time outside of the playoffs, and therefore are less valuable than **Smith** and **Gossage** were. My vote: IN

Jim Kaat – 129 HOF points*, 283 wins, 2461 K's, 4 WS Appearances, 3 20+ win seasons - Kaat was solid for 25 years, never a team ace, never a standout season that brought him high votes in the CY Young or MVP voting, Conclusion: Compiler, My vote: OUT



Jack Morris – 122 HOF points*, 254 wins, 2478 K's, 3 WS Appearances -3 wins, 3 20+ win seasons - Morris was the ace of the Tigers for years, leading the AL in wins for the entire decade of the 1980's. He played for and was the ace of three World Series winning teams with the '84 Tigers, the '91 Twins, and the '92 Blue Jays. He was a

gritty and determined, and pitched 10 innings of perhaps the greatest individual World Series game in history, Game 7 in 1991 against John Smoltz and the Braves. Morris is HOF caliber and should be voted in. My Vote: IN

Bert Blyleven – 120 HOF points*, 287 wins, 3701 K's, 2 World Series Appearances; one word describes this Dutchman, Compiler. My vote: OUT

Tom Glavine – 154 HOF points* 262 wins, 2245 k's, 5 20 wins Seasons, 4 WS Appearances – 1 win, Curt Schilling 151 HOF points*, 184 wins, 2745 K's, 2 20 win seasons- I am going to group Glavine and Schilling together, because I think they are both gritty competitors and both the Braves in Glavine's prime and, for Schilling, the D'back's in 2001 and the Red Sox in 2004, were better because of them. But would Glavine have been as good on a different team? Also, I think the fact that Schilling was traded so many times devalues his statistics. In order to be in the HOF, you need to have a great career, not just a few good years, and few great years, and both of these fit this category: My vote: OUT

John Franco – 126 HOF points*, 424 saves, 1230 IP,

Trevor Hoffman – 100 HOF points*, 393 saves 764 IP- In spite of my previous efforts to bring in Smith and Gossage, I don't think Franco or Hoffman are good

enough to make the cut. They have both totaled many saves, but not many innings, and not with much dominance. I view Franco as a compiler, and Hoffman as simply not having what it takes to make the Hall. My vote: OUT

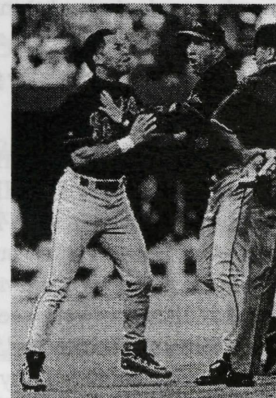
John Smoltz – 128 HOF points*, 163 wins, 154 saves. – I am going to withhold judgment on Smoltz until his career is completely over, since he went from starter to closer back to starter, which is quite impressive. If he is able to pitch dominantly as a starter for a few more years as he has so far this year, then I would say he could be considered great and should be in. We'll see.

Jim Rice, Don Mattingly, Steve Garvey, Dave Parker, Ted Simmons, Alan Trammell, Andre Dawson, and Dale Murphy are quite simply all good or very good players who might have excelled in their positions for a few years, but were never great for an extended period of time. Quite simply the BBWA got these right, as amazing as that seems. My vote: OUT

Joe Jackson (ineligible) – this is a whole different story. See previous *Zisk* article on the concept of a lifetime ban, and the fact that Jackson lifetime ended in 1951, and therefore should be eligible for consideration. My vote: IN

Ken Griffey Jr – 204 HOF points*, 501 HR's, 2156 hits – Once considered a sure thing, but injuries have derailed his career for the past few years and have brought his credentials into question. I think he was sufficiently great enough for a long enough period of time, and the injuries, which I attribute to lack of conditioning should encourage voters to believe he was not on the juice, just lazy in the off-season and relied on natural talent, which faded in his thirties. Even still, I think he is still a good bet. My Vote: IN

Roberto Alomar – 193 HOF points*, 2724 hits – perhaps the premier 2B of the post Ryne Sandberg generation, which includes **Craig Biggio** and others. However, I will forever remember him for spitting on an umpire and tarnishing the game. He has also been traded multiple times and played for a total of seven teams in 17 seasons. I



know I never mentioned team loyalty as a criteria for HOF eligibility, and in today's game it is impossible to assume a player will be with one team for his entire career, but this type of activity is a bit concerning. Still, my vote: IN



Frank Thomas – 179 HOF points*, 436 HR's, 2 MVP's, 15 seasons, 2113 hits .308 BA – Thomas creates the most difficult player in this article. Mostly I remember him as being a run down, injury prone, cranky White Sox DH. However, he was probably the premier player in MLB during the 90s. Better than McGwire, better than Boggs, better than Gwynn. He is going to be perceived a lot like Don Mattingly, great early on and injured later on that hurt his credentials. I think that Thomas is vastly superior to Donnie Baseball, but I am concerned writers will only remember his recent past, and not the monster he was in his prime. My vote: IN

Rafael Palmeiro** - 156 HOF points* - Just because a player accumulates 500 HR and 3000 hits in this era, does not make them great, and Raffy is a perfect example, even before his recent steroid suspension (which has even further clouded his ability to compile statistics since steroids allegedly help keep players healthy and he has never been on the DL in 19 seasons). I have to group him with **Fred McGriff**, a guy who played a long time and

compiled some good looking stats, but was never the premier player at his position during his career. My vote: OUT

Manny Ramirez – 155 HOF points*, 12 seasons, 390 HR's – Manny is Manny as they say. I think he is special. I hate him because he has played for the Indians and the Red Sox, the Yankees' largest rivals the past 10 years. Manny is a questionable fielder and a defensive liability. He is best suited to be a DH, and I don't think DH's should be in the Hall (see **Paul Molitor**). In spite of this, he still plays left field in Fenway, and make the occasionally gaffe. All of this can be forgiven, because he is an incredible offensive force. He is consistently among the leaders in all major hitting categories. My vote: IN

Todd Helton, Larry Walker, Jeff Bagwell, and Bernie Williams – They all have had flashes of brilliance, but not one of these players is consistently great. My vote: OUT

Vlad Guerrero – 134 HOF Points*, Let's wait and see how he finishes his career before giving him the benefit of the doubt, though he is well on his way, hopefully he follows the A-Rod route (in spite of no significant post season results) and not Griffey's.

In conclusion, and as much as I hate to admit it, the BBWA has been right in their voting up until now. I would like to see Morris, Smith and Gossage in Cooperstown. I don't see any glaring mistakes when it comes to batters that are eligible that are not in yet. I think many current players are playing in small stadiums, in an era where steroids and diluted pitching has inflated the numbers making average players look above average, and making historical comparison difficult if not impossible for the non-mathematicians.

Among current players, only a handful are truly great, and should be referred to as certain Hall of Famers. The rest are good, but not great and have made very good money playing a kids game and should be happy with their successful careers, and should not hold their collective breath awaiting a call from the Hall.

Jeff Herz is an Information Technology manager who lives in CT works in NYC and loves baseball and baseball history. He has began writing a blog, which can be found at herzy69.blogspot.com. He is also a collector of baseball and football cards, so if you got any to trade, let him know.

A Hall of Fame Points Guide

*HOF Points are another Bill James creation. It attempts to assess how likely (not how deserving) an active player is to make the Hall of Fame. Its rough scale is that 100 means a good possibility and 130 is a virtual cinch. It isn't hard and fast, but it does a pretty good job. Here are the rules:

Hitng Rules

For average, 2.5 points for each season over .300, 5.0 for over .350, 15 for over .400. Seasons are not double-counted. I require 100 games in a season to qualify for this bonus.

For hits, 5 points for each season of 200 or more hits. 3 points for each season of 100 RBI's and 3 points for each season of 100 runs.

10 points for 50 home runs, 4 points for 40 HR, and 2 points for 30 HR.

2 points for 45 doubles and 1 point for 35 doubles.

8 points for each MVP award and 3 for each All Star Game, and 1 point for a Rookie of the Year award.

2 points for a Gold Glove at C, SS, or 2B, and 1 point for any other gold glove.

6 points if they were the regular SS or C on a WS team, 5 points for 2B or CF, 3 for 3B, 2 for LF or RF, and 1 for 1B. I don't have the OF distribution, so I give 3 points for OF.

5 points if they were the regular SS or C on a League Championship (but not WS) team, 3 points for 2B or CF, 1 for 3B. I don't have the OF distribution, so I give 1 points for OF.

2 points if they were the regular SS or C on a Division Championship team (but not WS or LCS), 1 points for 2B, CF, or 3B. I don't have the OF distribution, so I give 1 points for OF.

6 points for leading the league in BA, 4 for HR or RBI, 3 for runs scored, 2 for hits or SB, and 1 for doubles and triples.

50 points for 3,500 career hits, 40 for 3,000, 15 for 2,500, and 4 for 2,000.

30 points for 600 career home runs, 20 for 500, 10 for 400, and 3 for 300.

24 points for a lifetime BA over .330, 16 if over .315, and 8 if over .300.

For tough defensive positions, 60 for 1800 games as a

catcher, 45 for 1,600 games, 30 for 1,400, and 15 for 1,200 games caught.

30 points for 2100 games at 2B or SS, or 15 for 1,800 games.

15 points for 2,000 games at 3B.

An additional 15 points in the player has more than 2,500 games played at 2B, SS, or 3B.

Award 15 points if the player's batting average is over .275 and they have 1,500 or more games as a 2B, SS or C.

Pitching Rules

15 points for each season of 30 or more wins, 10 for 25 wins, 8 for 23 wins, 6 for 20 wins, 4 for 18 wins, and 2 for 15 wins.

6 points for 300 strikeouts, 3 points for 250 SO, or 2 points for 200 or more strikeouts.

2 points for each season with 14 or more wins and a .700 winning percentage.

4 points for a sub-2.00 ERA, 1 point if under 3.00.

7 points for 40 or more saves, 4 points for 30 or more, and 1 point for 20 or more.

8 points for each MVP award, 5 for a Cy Young award, 3 for each All Star Game, and 1 point for a Rookie of the Year award.

1 point for a gold glove.

1 point for each no-hitter. This is not currently included.

2 points for leading the league in ERA, 1 for leading in games, wins, innings, W-L%, SO, SV or SHO. Half point for leading in CG.

35 points for 300 or more wins, 25 for 275, 20 for 250, 15 for 225, 10 for 200, 8 for 174 and 5 for 150 wins.

8 points for a career W-L% over .625, 5 points for over .600, 3 points for over .575, and 1 point for over .525, min. 190 decisions.

10 points for a career ERA under 3.00, min 190 decisions.

20 points for 300 career saves and 10 points for 200 career saves.

30 points for 1000 career games, 20 for 850 games and 10 for 700 games.

20 points for more than 4,000 strikeouts, and 10 for 3,000 SO.

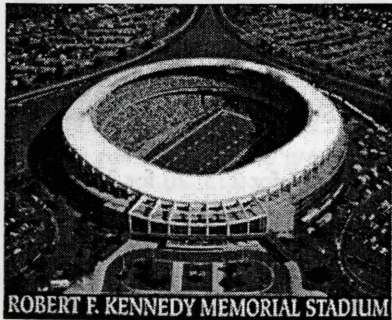
2 points for each WS start, 1 point for each relief appearance, and 2 for a win.

1 point for each league playoff win.

Baseball Returns to Our Nation's Capitol by Nancy Golden

Even though I've lived in DC for eight years now, I've never stopped considering myself a New Yorker. I grew up on Long Island, where my older siblings raised me to be a Yankees fan, a moniker that I have worn on my sleeve wherever I've moved. But when I woke up on April 14th of this year, the day of the Washington Nationals Home Opener, something changed. Giddy with excitement and anxious to get through the day (and this from a person who generally equates waking up for work with waking up out of a coma), I knew right then that a small part of me had finally become a Washingtonian.

I think I lasted until nearly 4:00 at work that day, though my spotty long-term memory may be rewriting history in my favor. The platform of the Metro that I usually took home this afternoon seemed more crowded than usual, and when the doors slid open on the inbound train to DC I got my first taste of a sub-culture that had literally been born that day. What was normally a sparsely populated train of weary commuters returning home from their Northern Virginia jobs today was a buzzing sea of red hats and shirts that were all having the same conversation. I felt like I was riding the D train to Yankee Stadium during the postseason, and aside from those first few days of the NHL playoffs when we pretend that the Capitols might actually advance to Round 2, I had not experienced



anything like it before in DC. It occurred to me how awful it would have felt at that moment had I simply been taking the train home instead of making my way to RFK Stadium.

For the past month, the Nationals home opener had been the hottest ticket in town. Seats had been held back when the rest of the individual games went on sale in hopes of retaining some bait to lure in additional season ticket purchases. By the time they were finally available to the general public, the supply had been depleted not only by season ticket holders, but lottery winners, promotional giveaways, Congresswomen's husband's drinking pals, and the usual crowd of the entitled that haunt the city. In fact, only single tickets were left for us mere baseball fans.

And yet I was never quite alone that night. In a packed Metro train, I managed to carve out a bit of space next to Stan, an older gentleman who claimed to be playing hooky from his post at the National Zoo. Stan held season tickets for the Washington Senators and had attended their last game in DC before that incarnation of the franchise moved to Texas in 1971. Tonight he would catch the very next home game, a moment for which he had waited 34 years. During our conversation, I never mentioned to Stan that I had waited merely a year and a half, basically the time since leaving my Camden Yards-friendly job in Maryland for one in Arlington, Virginia that separated me from weeknight Orioles games by an extra city's worth of traffic. I didn't feel as if my joy that the next homestand had finally arrived was any less than Stan's at that point. We were both going to a baseball game. Tonight. In DC.

Amid the carnival atmosphere outside the stadium I met my friend Mike, whose 9-year old son Dana was playing in the makeshift amusement park of inflatable slides and slow-pitch target practice. Forced to pay Ebay prices for tickets, Mike, a native of the area could only bring one of his children to the game. Though I likened this to a *Sophie's Choice*, Mike explained that 4-year old Alex might be too young to appreciate the event anyway. Knowing Mike was a big baseball fan, I asked Dana if his dad had taken him to a lot of Orioles games.

"No."

Had he been to *any* baseball games?

"No."

This is your first baseball game???

Dana was getting in from Day 1. He would be the first of his generation to be raised a Nationals fan.

After passing through the metal detector (a precaution for the President that would be dropped after tonight's game), I watched the opening ceremonies from my infield upper reserve seat behind home plate. Brand new season ticket holders (aren't they all?) Ken and Rick, who sat to my left, revealed to me how pleased they were with their seat selections, and we all agreed that RFK cleaned up surprisingly well for an infrequently used soccer venue. The packed house of diehard locals exploded as the

festivities began and I—a transplant New Yorker steadfast Yankees fan—I could feel myself morphing into one of them with every cheer.

The pomp and pageantry, which so easily could have been overdone, was just right. On loan from the Kennedy Center, **Renee Fleming** sang the National Anthem as the obligatory patriotic mega-flag was unfurled in the outfield and the flyover tribute was quick and tasteful. Even **President Bush** kept his fanfare to a simple wave and trot as he threw out his first pitch, and I, riding the wave of good cheer, relegated my disgust for the war-mongering asshole to a charitable silent protest. And then the game began with what was by far the classiest moment of the evening. One by one, members of the Washington Senators were introduced and took their old positions on the diamond. When the full team was fielded and it was time for play to begin, the Nationals starters trotted out to their positions and shook the hand of the man he was to replace. Each Senator then took off his glove and presented it to his counterpart, as if finally, after three decades on call, he would no longer need it. I wondered how those transplanted Expos felt at that moment, without the luxury of my eight years to warm up to the city. It couldn't possibly have meant us much to them as it did to the fans, and yet watching the Senators leave the field one final time to the roar of the crowd, it had to have instilled some sense of responsibility.

The Nats went on to the beat the Diamondbacks 5-3 that night behind the first of many solid outings from the moody-but-worth-it **Livan Hernandez**, and a 3-hit, 4-RBI night from **Vinny Castilla**. And we got our first peek at some of RFK's peculiarities, like the way the entire third base field level section bounces when enough people jump up and down, or how somebody someday must have thought it was a good idea to paint the 400-level seats mauve. Other quirks would wait for future games to show themselves, like the way the deep outfield turned out to be not quite as deep as it was labeled, or that odd eagle-like mascot that looks like it's suffering from bloating and edema. (I know, I know, Screech was designed to appeal to kids, not anal wildlife biologists.)

And we've had plenty of opportunity to experience them all. From blind dates that I might not otherwise have agreed to, to premier seats with out of town visitors (including Zisk editor **Steve Reynolds**, down for the very first series against the Mets), to last minute excursions after a taxing day at work, baseball in DC has become the

norm. The average game draws over 30,000 people, compared to those 16 or 17 fans that used to show up in Montreal. And when **John Patterson** claims to be pitching better due to DC's amazing fan support, I choose to believe him, even if he is clearly just sucking up. Men, women, and kids sport Nationals caps everywhere you turn, and newspapers run stories on whether your choice of a red "W" cap or blue "DC" cap is some kind of a political statement. (I say let's reclaim the "W." And the color red while we're at it.) And like New York, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and yes, even the evil Boston, we talk baseball again. We weather the highs and lows together every morning at work, and suffer the occasional indignities, like when **Joe**, the resident Braves fan, brought his tiny little broom to my office after Washington was swept by Atlanta. Mike's sons even request play-by-play at night now in lieu of bedtime stories. And I'm finally accepting that despite being spoiled by the Nats unexpected success in the first half, being "only" in Wildcard contention (*reminder to self—these were the Expos*) is pretty damn sweet.

Some of my New York friends have branded me a traitor for this show of enthusiasm for my new hometown team, even though the Yankees don't play the Nationals this year, and I argue that I can safely root for both clubs. Though many just ask where my loyalties would lie if forced to make a choice, as if there's even a question. Let me go on the record to say that in the unlikely event that the Nats meet the Yanks in a World Series, I, like most transplants and transients in this city, will revert back to my roots. But in the meantime, I will continue to enjoy the new experience of rooting for a bunch of guys—ballplayers—a team—who are not defined by their salaries, steroid use, haircuts, or egomaniacal owner (the Nats don't even *have* an owner), but by last night's play at second or the ability to make a key 2-out hit in the 8th. I often think back a few years to a screening I attended of *The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg* in which filmmaker **Aviva Kempner** stood before the audience and appealed to us and to the league to bring baseball back to DC. We don't need baseball in DC, I thought on the first of many occasions, we have the Orioles. I know now that I was wrong. We *do* need baseball. I've changed. I believe.

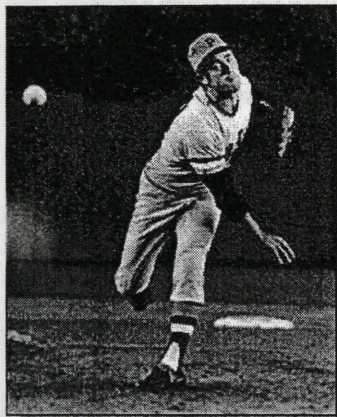
Dr. Nancy Golden has been a Yankees fan all her life, yet she and Zisk co-editor Steve Reynolds still remain friends. (She has a doctorate, so we can call her 'Doc.')

Hey Nineteen

by Art Webster

Even in the days when guys like **Hoss Radbourne** and **Jack Chesbro** were winning 59 games (in 1884) and 41 games (in 1904) respectively, it was still a pretty big deal for a pitcher to win 20 games. This convention held true through baseball history, even lending credence to a seasonal performance despite the 20-game winning pitcher's inherent crappiness (**Wayne Garland**, **Bill Gullickson**, **Jon Lieber**).

But what of the fellows who fell one game short of infamy? The guys who can never use "I'm a 20-game winner" as a pickup line on a fledgling baseball **Annie**? The doorstep guys ostracized because of a lucky bounce or lack of run support?



Let's call our 19-game winners/20-game-nonwinners The Blasskickers, after patron saint **Steve Blass**. Blass, of course, won 19 games in 1972 and, having fallen one victory short, apparently snapped. After having averaged slightly under three walks per nine innings throughout his career, Blass suddenly couldn't throw strikes in

1973. In 87 innings, he walked 84 and hit 12 bewildered batsmen.

Steve's not the only Blasskicker with an interesting back story.

There's his teammate **Dock Ellis**, who, before winning 19 in 1971, dropped a hit of acid before a 1970 game. He naturally pitched a no-hitter. If you're reading this, you almost certainly know the story (see: **Barbara Manning** songs; LSD, users of; Baseball Babylon, etc.). If anyone has television or film footage of this remarkable achievement, please send it to **Mike** or **Steve**, at the address listed in the front of this magazine. They'll reward you handsomely. (*We have no cash to offer—SR.*)

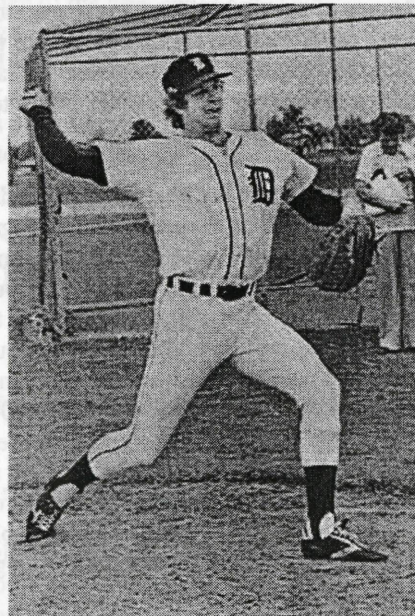
Whereas the Big Red Machine was never known for its starting pitching, **Jack Billingham** won 19 games for the

team in both 1973 and 1974. In a rarity for the early 1970s Reds, the team didn't win pennants either year. I blame Billingham. Loser.

Also in 1974 came the first quality, relatively speaking, season by **Jim Bibby**. We could call him a Blasskicker Extraordinaire, but it'd make more sense to call him Mr. 19. In '74, he won 19. He also won 19 for the 1980 Pittsburgh Pirates, making him one of two cats on this list to win 19 for two different teams. The reason I really like Bibby, though, is that he also lost 19 for Texas in 1974. Man, talk about cutting it close. He could have been 18-20. Or 20-18. You'll never be Mr. 19 by going 20-18.

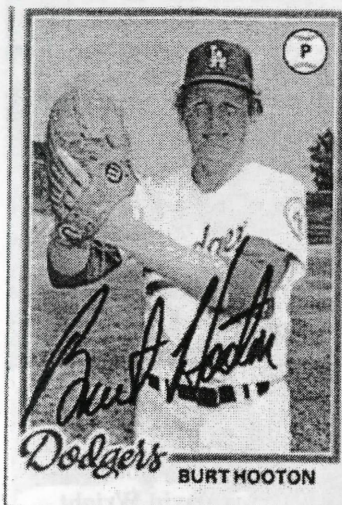
He's also kind of a 19-game winner in overall life. His brother is **Henry Bibby**, a UCLA Bruin great on those **Bill Walton** teams in the early 1970s. His nephew is **Mike Bibby**, a damn good NBA player in his own right. Mike Bibby could probably buy and sell Mr. 19 several times over.

The coolest 19-game winner, nudging Dock Ellis, was Detroit's **Mark Fidrych**, who would have won 20 except that he wasn't called up to the team until the season was a few weeks old. Poor guy. Good pitcher. Good fastball and curve. Great control, except in the crotch area. The rumor about him was that a jealous husband twisted his arm.



A future Tiger, **Frank Tanana**, also won 19 games in 1976 for the Angels (he played a key role when the Tigers stole the 1987 division title from the Blue Jays; that's a completely different story). The thing about Tanana was that he threw, like, almost as fast as **Nolan Ryan** and was

a bit arrogant as well. Then he found God and, well, I don't know if it was the natural aging process or an arm injury or the whole God thing or what but all of a sudden, he became a really lame-looking finesse pitcher. A finesse pitcher who lasted forever, but, nonetheless, a finesse pitcher really into God, which made him, let's face it, not cool. He was no Fidrych, anyway.



Former Cub **Burt Hooton** came up one short in 1978, when hurling for the Dodgers. Hooton was an early knuckle-curve auteur, pitching a no-hitter in his fourth major league start, in 1972. I think his nickname was "Happy," and supposedly, it was one of those ironic nicknames often given to a sourpuss guy. Probably wasn't too happy that he never won 20.

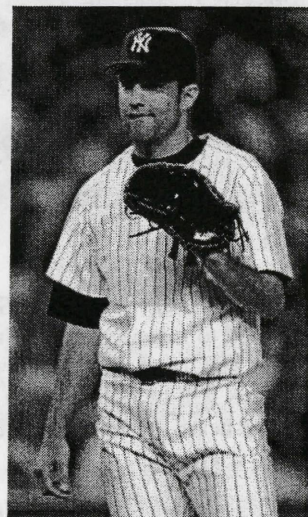
Steve Rogers of the Expos was always considered one of the game's best pitchers during the latter 1970s. Yet, like his really good bridesmaid team, he never quite finished the job, falling short of the 20-game mark in 1982. Can't believe that's the most he ever won; I'm gonna check it. Yup, he won 17 twice, and had a career ERA of 3.17. If he were pitching today, he'd be on the Yankees. And probably winning 20.

Then there's crusty **John Denny**, who won the Cy Young Award with his 19-win season in 1983. Can't remember where I read this, but wasn't Denny supposed to be a jerk? Or was that **John Smiley**? I always get those guys mixed up. (If John Smiley's a prick, would they, as they did with Happy Hooton, call him Smiley Smiley? Do you think John Smiley is a **Brian Wilson** fan?)

Dan Petry won 19 for the Tigers in 1983, then won 18 for them the next year as the team out-and-out dominated baseball. **Mark Langston** won 19 for the 1987 Mariners and 19 for the 1991 Angels. **Storm Davis** and **Mike Moore** both won 19 for the 1989 A's. Man, baseball was boring back then. Hmmm. Who won the 1989 Cy Youngs? **Bret Saberhagen**, for Kansas City. Boring.

Mark Davis for San Diego. Are you kidding me?

Mike Mussina won 19 games for both the 1995 and 1996 Orioles. I remember this well. In the game after **Roberto Alomar** spit on **John Hirschbeck** (the Orioles clinched the wild card that game), Mussina gave up a home run to someone to tie the game in the ninth. Maybe I don't remember it. Maybe he lost his bid in the same Roberto Alomar game. Bet'cha Mussina remembers it. Dude's got his economics degree, in just three years, from Stanford. Man, with his stuff, he should have won 20 four different times and pitched two no-hitters. And with his brain, he should be a special assistant to **Alan Greenspan**.



During the late 1990s, a bunch of yawners won 19. **Shawn Estes** did it in 1997 for the Giants. **Aaron Sele** did it in 1998 for the Rangers. **Shane Reynolds** did it in 1998 for the Astros. **Kevin Tapani** did it in 1998 for the Cubs. Tapani won his 19 despite his 4.85 ERA. God, what's this game become? Oh yeah, that's right, 1998, the 'Roid Year. Never mind.

Which leads us to **Mark Buehrle**, who won 19 games for the 2002 White Sox. Remember *The Simpsons* episode where **Homer** and **Bart** tricked **Marge** into thinking the lumberjack who branded her favorite paper towel brand was coming over to the Simpson household. "Mmmm, Burly," she cooed, referring to the paper towel's brand name? They should play that sound bite at Comiskey Park (or whatever it's called now, Somefuckingcellphone Park?) whenever Buehrle (pronounced like Marge's paper towel brand) takes the mound. Or at least until Buehrle, who's off to a great start this year, wins 20. Then they can play, I don't know, how about "Yellow Pills?"

You know, by the band **20/20**?

Art Webster is a Portland, Oregon writer, a hopeless Cub fan and a songwriter who plays in a series of obscure projects. He contributes regularly to Portland's Barfly Magazine and Narc.

Alex Wolf, Meet the Mets by Greg Prince

(Editor's note: In starting the Zisk website this year, I discovered a whole bunch of Mets blogs out there on the world wide web of baseball. One of the best is Faith and Fear in Flushing, which the intro to their site says, is "written by Greg and Jason, a pair of longtime friends and lifelong Mets fans, get together to contemplate, complain about and once in a great while compliment their favorite team." This piece originally ran on their blog [http://mets2005.myblogsite.com/blog] on July 19th, and I thought it was so good that it was worth reprinting in these pages. —SR)

Hi Alex,

My name is Greg. My wife **Stephanie** and I are looking forward to meeting you on Sunday. We've heard a lot about you. It's hard to believe you're about to turn eight and this will be the first time we'll be seeing you. Perhaps you've heard grown-ups use the expression "time flies." Well, it's true.

Your dad and I worked together a long time ago before you were born. When you came along, we sent your parents a Mets uniform for you to wear, one you've long since outgrown. At that time, I told your dad that one of these days we hoped to go to a Mets game with you.

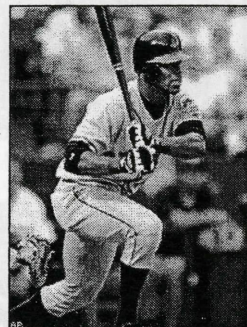
That day will be Sunday. It won't be just any game. It will be your first baseball game. First for you, first for your brother **Zack**. We are honored to be a part of such a big event.

Your dad is a great guy. He hired me for my first full-time job and we became friends and have stayed friends ever since. The only thing your father and I didn't share was a love of baseball. He's not a baseball fan, but I'm sure you don't hold that against him. I know I didn't. Everybody has different interests. Guys like you and me really like baseball. Your dad says you're quite the shortstop. I'm impressed! That's a very important position. I was never much of a player myself, but I'm a pretty big fan, especially of the Mets. Your dad knows that and asked me if I wouldn't mind sending you some information about my favorite team before you go to your first game. I said I'd be happy to do so.

I'm not sure how much you already know about the Mets. Your dad says you know **Mike Piazza**. That's a good

place to start. Mike Piazza is the best-hitting catcher there's ever been in baseball. He's getting older now and isn't as good as he used to be but he's still able to win a game with a big home run every now and then. He did that last week against Atlanta. I was at that game and it was very exciting.

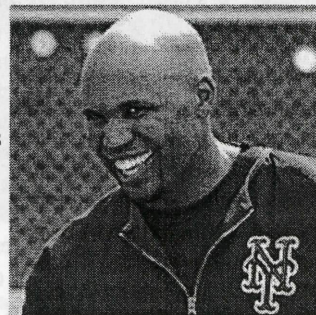
The Mets' shortstop, the guy who plays your position, is **Jose Reyes**. He's very young for a Major League ballplayer. He just turned 22. He had some problems early in his career avoiding injuries but this year so far, he's stayed healthy. He's shown great ability to get to balls that are hit to his right and he steals a lot of bases. I think you'll like watching him play. He's my favorite Met on the team right now.

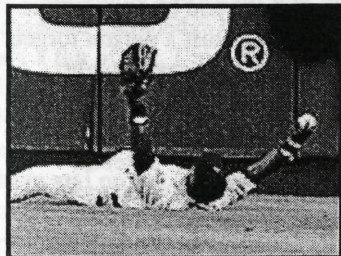
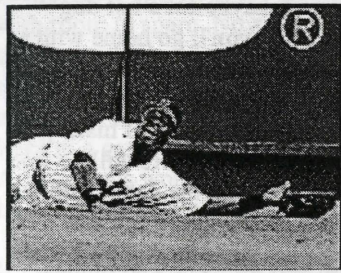
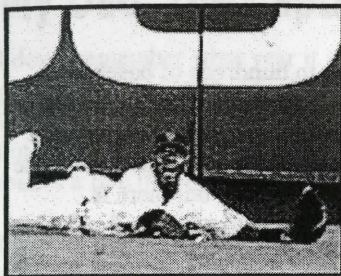


Another really good young player is **David Wright**. He's the third baseman. He's also 22. David is going through what almost all young players go through, something called growing pains. He has good games and he has bad games. Sometimes he has them at the same time. He's also

worth watching.

The Mets have three very talented outfielders. The left fielder is a veteran named **Cliff Floyd**. He's the Mets' biggest home run hitter. He's hit more than 20 this year which is a high total. As a fielder, he's made some terrific catches. You can say the same for **Carlos Beltran**, a very good centerfielder. He came to the Mets before this season and got the fans very excited because he had been a very good player for Kansas City and Houston. So far, he hasn't



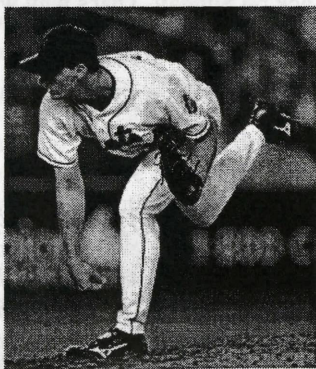


been that great for the Mets but even when he's not at his best, he helps them win. He can hit for power and run very fast. I think he'll be better in the second half of the season than in the first. The rightfielder is **Mike Cameron**. He's what you might call a team player because he used to play center but moved to right to make room for Beltran. He's had his slumps this year, but he hustles in the field and has good speed, too.

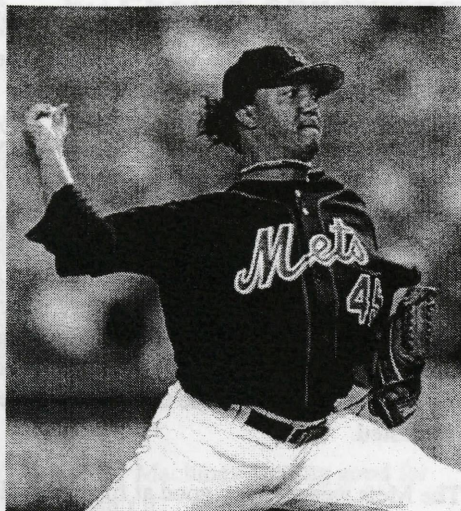
I don't know who will be playing first base and second base on Sunday. The Mets have had a lot of injuries at those positions. That's why you need a good bench. The Mets have been lucky to

get two reserve players (your coach might call them subs) to fill in: **Marlon Anderson** and **Chris Woodward**. They've been the most surprising players on the team this year. Surprising in a good way, that is.

The pitcher who gets to start the game is decided by what is known as a pitching rotation. That means the pitcher who starts the game gets to do so, basically, because it's his turn. Sometimes the rotation changes but if it doesn't, you'll probably see **Kris Benson** pitch. He throws hard and has had a good season. If he can't pitch all nine innings—most starting pitchers don't—the manager, **Willie Randolph**, will select from among six or seven relief pitchers. Who he uses to pitch will depend on how the Mets are doing in the game and what point of the game it is.



You may have heard of **Pedro Martinez**. He's the Mets' best pitcher. He is a lot of fun to watch. It probably won't be his turn on Sunday but I would suggest that the next time he is pitching that, as long as it's



OK with your mom and dad, you watch the Mets on TV. He knows where to throw the ball where the batters can't hit it. Not every pitcher can do that, but Pedro can.

Those are the main players on the Mets. I can't promise they'll all play but probably most of them will. If you're curious about any other players on Sunday, I'll try to answer your questions.

As for where you're going to be on Sunday, the Mets play in Shea Stadium which is in New York City—in Queens, to be exact. Shea was built more than 40 years ago specially for the Mets. The Jets used to play football there, too, but moved to New Jersey, where you live, more than 20 years ago. Now it's used only for baseball and maybe a few concerts. (Your dad and I were going to see one there once but we had to work and couldn't go.)

There are newer ballparks in other cities but Shea has what is known as character. That's a nice way of saying it is old but it can also mean it stands out from other stadiums. What gives Shea character? For one thing, it has a lot of color. The seats are orange, blue, green or red depending on where you sit (we'll be sitting in green seats). The outfield fence is blue as is the outside of the stadium. If the game is good and the sun is out, it becomes a very exciting place to watch a game. It can be a little loud at times because the people who run the ballpark like to play music and stuff over the loudspeaker when the game isn't going on. Character also means that when you go there, you are reminded of the good things that have happened there before. If you look at it that way, Shea Stadium has a lot of character.

Your dad also asked me to let you know a little about the Mets' history. Well, the Mets were born the same year I was, in 1962. They were what is known as an expansion team. The National League, the league they play in, needed a team in New York because New York was the biggest city in the United States and the two teams the league had in New York, called the Giants and the Dodgers, left the city a few years earlier to move to California. (The Mets will be playing the Los Angeles Dodgers on Sunday.) The Mets took their colors from those two teams—blue from the Dodgers and orange from the Giants—and formed a new team. The idea was to get those old fans to come see them but also get new fans interested.

The Mets weren't very good at first. Actually, Alex, they were pretty bad. People called them the Amazin' Mets as kind of a joke. But that made their fans like them even more. Sometimes people like to root for a team that isn't all that good because they know when that team gets good, it will make winning that much better. And you know what? That's exactly what happened. In 1969, after the Mets had been so bad for so long, they got very good and won the world championship. Then they were called the Miracle Mets. That's when I became a Mets fan and I stuck with them after that no matter how they did. Sometimes they were very good. Sometimes they were very bad. But I always liked them and always rooted for them. They were my team. They still are.



The Mets won another world championship in 1986 and have been in two other World Series, in 1973 and 2000. Since 2000, they've had some bad seasons, but they seem to be

improving this year and I think they'll have better luck next year and the year after. To be honest, I would believe that even if I didn't think so. There was a Mets player many years ago named **Tug McGraw**. In 1973, when the Mets were in last place, Tug came up with a saying: You Gotta Believe. Everybody listened and the Mets finished in first place. It's a saying Mets fans live by to this day. Really, all it means is that if you're going to be a Mets fan, you should never give up hope, not during a game or during a season. You gotta believe that the Mets can come

back and win.

I've been lucky enough to go to hundreds of baseball games since I was a kid, not only at Shea Stadium but all over the United States and even in Canada. Every time I go, I feel happy. I don't always feel happy when the game is over, especially when the Mets lose, but there is something very special about going to a baseball game. You'll see why on Sunday. You'll see the colors and hear the noise and cheer and clap and maybe eat a hot dog (check with your mom) but mostly you'll go home with a memory that you can't get anywhere else.

And there's another thing. You will be a part of history. This game between the Mets and the Dodgers will go into the record books. You'll be able to look the date up online and see that it really took place, that you weren't just imagining it. That may sound silly right now. You know you're going to the game, why would you have to look it up? You'd be surprised at how much stuff a person forgets as he gets older. The details of your first game might become hard to remember, but the record books will show it really happened. You'll be able to look it up and point to it and tell anybody, "Hey, that was my first baseball game, my first Mets game, the first game I went to with my mom and my dad and my little brother. I was there at Shea Stadium in New York on July 24, 2005." And when you do, you gotta believe that that will be pretty cool.

Like with most things in life, Alex, baseball is something you need to experience for yourself to know how good it really can be. That's why your folks are taking you and Zack on Sunday. That's why we'll be there to meet you. We can't wait. See you then.

All the best from your fellow Mets fan,

Greg

*In 1969, the New York Mets won something that has stayed with them every bit as long as their first-ever championship. They attained the affection and loyalty of a six-year-old Long Islander named **Greg W. Prince**, who—despite sensing that his new team's achievement was no guarantee of future success—decided to stick with them indefinitely. That kind of perspective has informed Greg's baseball writing ever since. He and his pal Jason cover the Mets daily on Faith and Fear in Flushing (<http://mets2005.myblogsite.com>), the blog for Mets fans who like to read.*

My Dad, The Captain of the Cincinnati Reds by Shawn Abnoxious

I don't remember what year it was, but I know the ball game was a *long* time ago. Riverfront Stadium (as it was known). A hot Saturday afternoon, the Cincinnati Reds, hot-dogs, soda-pops, peanuts and everything else that makes a live baseball game complete!

I was a little kid at the time. This I know because I could *comfortably* still fit in the chairs at Riverfront Stadium with room to spare. Nowadays, as an adult, I can still fit in similar stadium-type chairs, but not like then. Nowadays, Riverfront Stadium is *gone* (made way for two new stadiums for football *and* baseball) and the last time I went to a game (last year, Cincinnati Reds vs Houston Astros; Reds won) I spilled into the seat next to me a little' bit but hey, no shame in any of that!

If I want to be known for one thing, I want it to be common knowledge that I have no problem sharing and I am a fan of fun. I'm a fun-lover! Who can't handle a little' bit of fun? Everyone loves fun, right? Right! So just let me come right out and say it. I am *not* a fan (per say) of baseball. I don't "follow it" but I do enjoy it. Always have and probably always will. Especially a few aspects of the game, like the statistics and the highlights on news programs. Even as a young boy baseball always did me right. I bought baseball cards to read the statistics and went with my dad any chance I got to see a game, played baseball video games any chance I got and I had fun while I did it all.

As I went back and forth from then to now to write this "piece," I realized my memories aren't as sharp as I initially thought so I called my dad to relive the day in question. There's something funny about the fact my dad can remember a conversation we had when maybe I was 10 years old, but he still asks me if I play guitar. I don't make a big deal out of it like I use to. I've given up fighting for him to be interested in something else besides what he is interested in. Playing bass guitar and doing shows around and out of town and putting out CD's mean everything to me and nothing to him.

To me, writing, and playing music and doing art are my *life*. To him, they're forgotten thoughts that never had a chance to earn "memory" status. Yeah, my dad might not give a shit about anything I care about but I love the guy. He is my dad and he was a great dad. An excellent dad plus, a really fucking cool guy to boot. I mean, fuck—he

created hip-hop! But hey, that's a different story for a different time...

I have worked through all of my baggage. Like I said, it's *funny*. I came to the conclusion several years ago that my dad isn't a bad guy, even if me holding down a regular job is a big deal to him. If he can't be interested in what I do, then I decided a while back that I will compromise. Just so he could know that I find him interesting, and to give us *both* something to talk about, I bring up baseball as soon as he asks the same question twice about my job. It goes like this:

"Hey son! How's your job? Machines running good for you? Hot in the factory isn't it?" And to all these questions I answer "Yes."

Then he usually asks if my car is running good, to which I answer yes again and then he goes back to the previous set of questions. It's usually at that moment that I bring up baseball or he is libel to talk about his own parents, my grandparents, and their ailing health and how they (well, my grandma anyway) uses it to get attention.

Yeah, he likes basketball and football...but he *loves* baseball. So, every chance I get, I talk baseball with him. He likes it too. I can see it in his face. He is definitely a fan.

My dad—the captain of the Cincinnati Reds.

This is what I remember from the day he told me he could have been the captain of the Cincinnati Reds. Its funny how sometimes when you least expect it, you can leave something even so minute as a phone conversation with a whole new understanding of a principle, a man, and/or his idea of himself. At first, when talking about my dad and how *sure* he was that he could have been captain of the Cincinnati Reds, it was humorous. After my call to re-live the story, it was still humorous but when I asked him how sure he was that he could have been a big league ballplayer, I sensed a longing in my dad. I sensed a sadness at what he missed and I could feel his longing. Things took a serious tone.

Like I said, I was 10 or younger. It was a sunny Saturday afternoon. Not too hot, but sunny. Me and my dad and I can't remember who else were about ten rows behind the

Cincinnati Reds dugout. **Dave Concepcion**, the team captain of the Cincinnati Reds, took the field to warm up with some teammates. My dad pointed him out with a nudge to my shoulder.



"Hey, see him?" he said as he pointed to Concepcion. I had seen him clearly.

"Why does he have a 'C' on his shoulder?" I asked.

He replied, "That is Dave Concepcion, he is the shortstop and team captain of the Cincinnati Reds." He paused.

"I could have been where he is today."

I thought that was cool, and remembered it to this day, but I had no idea what my dad meant by it until I just talked to him several minutes ago and asked him about that day. I mean, I had an idea but now, as an adult, I have an understanding.

He remembered that day vividly. I got the feeling that he was a little bit uncomfortable with my questioning so I apologized but I needed to know, now, as an adult, what he meant that day, by saying that he could have been a Cincinnati Reds team captain.

My dad told me that when he was a young boy, he spent every chance he got on a ball field playing ball. In local leagues, in school, or whatever. He named a few big time players that he played with and against but the only one I remembered was **Pete Rose**. I know this because, as all Cincinnati's, my dad is an *avid* Pete supporter. Yeah, my dad, and me, for that matter, realize that what Pete did when he placed bets on baseball, and his *own* team was wrong. But in this day and age where you can only wonder how many people have used steroids or whatever else but still get inducted into the Hall of Fame, well that's wrong too. It riles him up a bit when you talk about Pete. Some of these same ball fields that my dad

frequented as a child, teen and young adult are still around today. My dad points them out to me whenever he can, each with its own great story.

My dad told me that he was a good ball player but his hitting wasn't worth a shit. He needed a good coach for that. He said he was a sucker for a curve ball. Since he batted left-handed (which doesn't make sense because he writes right-handed) he said a pitcher that knew him and his weakness for a curve ball once threw him three straight curve balls to the inside corner and he swung on each of them and struck out. He said this was a problem he could overcome, though, with the proper coaching and, of course, I believed him.

My dad said his strongest asset was as a defensive player. He said he played catcher, because at that time in Cincinnati, no one wanted to be a catcher. He said he stepped up when other people didn't and in the process, got to be pretty darn good. He told me that **Johnny Bench**, and the work he would do with the Big Red Machine of the '70s would change this. After that, he said, *everyone* wanted to be a catcher.

My dad said that even though his hitting was weak, he was still on the right track to be a decent, if not good professional baller. But one day, and he will tell you how stupid he is for this himself, he was taking some pitches from a warming up pitcher *without* his catching gear, and took a fastball to the temple.

He lapsed into a coma for three days and for 17 days after that my dad said that he didn't know who he was or who anyone else was. He was left with permanent damage, as well as baseball threads imprinted on his skull (as the story goes) and shortly after that, he got a job at General Motors, met my mom, had my brother and then me nine years later.

I asked him to tell me the truth and if that incident changed his life and if he had any regrets by settling down thereafter. He lied to me. This I know because like I've been saying, the man loves baseball. He told me he has no regrets the way things worked out. So I told him that I believed him and then we talked about an outfielder that plays for the Indians with the same last name as ours, Sizemore. My dad tells me he is watching him and his numbers...

My dad has been retired from the General Motors

Corporation since about 1998. His health isn't all that good, but he has his good days and his bad days. Anytime we are out and about, he will point out different communities where ballplayers live. When we actually run into a Reds team member, whether it's at a grocery store or restaurant or whatever, my dad *always* goes and talks a little game with them, and to be honest, I don't know if its how my dad talks to them or what, but they all are really appreciative and enjoy talking to my dad. One time, when I was bowling a Reds pitcher walked in with his family and my dad got all excited and pointed out to me how this guy was suppose to be starting that night. My dad said something to the guy about it too. I know I don't necessarily like how people tell me to do what I do best, but this guy, who I remember was with his family, came over to my dad and told him how he was just getting ready to go down to the field. My dad talked pitching with him a bit, and told him to maybe think about getting some left-handers on an inside curveball. This pitcher took time from his family to talk to my dad about the game that night.

Another time, while at a grocery store my dad pointed out to me that Dave Concepcion was in the frozen foods section with his family. So, of course I thought my dad would go up and chat it up with him but he didn't. I asked why and my dad just got quiet and wouldn't answer me.

Fairfield, Ohio is a suburb north of Cincinnati. That's where I live and **Joe Nuxall** lives there too. I count my blessings that my dad wasn't with me the other day when I was eating breakfast with my future father-in-law and my fiancée when old Joe walked in. I could think that the guy wouldn't get a chance to eat his meal if my dad was around, but truthfully, Joe would have probably loved my dad, as most people do, and taken time to chat with him, which seems to be the thing when it comes to my dad and him running into baseball players.

I believed my dad that day, when I was a kid, when he claimed that he could have been the captain of the Cincinnati Reds. But now, as an adult and after writing this piece for *Zisk*, I can honestly say that I *understand* him as well as believe him.

Or maybe believe in him.

With him being my dad—the captain of The Cincinnati Reds!

Now I realize my dad loves baseball as much as life itself. The same way I enjoy writing, publishing, playing music, listening to music, doing art or taking photographs. And I'm glad that I made that compromise exactly when I did and quit being such a pompous ass and started talking about baseball as much as I can with my dad. I owe him that much for all he has done with me, and for me.

I am proud to say that I have become a fan of the Cincinnati Reds. Whereas they are *definitely* not the best team in baseball, they are my dad's team. Yeah, it's true that I tried to organize a day at the ball-park for the readers of my un-zine. I had plans to get some seats in the cheap seats, have everyone wear red, and hold up signs with sickles and hammers on them saying "WE LOVE THE REDS" but it never happened and nowadays, the new Great American Ball Park, the new home for the Cincinnati Reds, is so damn expensive to go to, I have to wait for free tickets to come along.

There is not as much room for me in the seat these days either.

If you ask him, my dad, the captain of the Cincinnati Reds, he will tell you he has been a fan of the Reds since the '50s so he might as well stay one now, and how he played ball against Pete Rose back in the day and still thinks it is bullshit that the man isn't in the Hall of Fame. My dad will tell you how a fast pitch to his head turned his life around, in one way or the other. How he is a fan of **Adam Dunn** and thinks the Reds should trade him so he could go to a club that can take him to a World Series or two. How he and I, this city, and really, the whole damn sport is awaiting a day when the Big Red Machine will run again. My dad will tell you how he invented hip-hop (amongst other glorious things) and he can even tell you how he could have been captain of the Cincinnati Reds but to me, he always was and ALWAYS shall be.

My dad, the captain of the Cincinnati Reds.

Shawn Abnoxious plays bass in *The Socials*, edits *The Neus Subjex*, has contributed to many different 'zines and was a member of the web-zine *Blank Generation* and the band *Zero Craig*. He continues to do art and take photographs and was recently included in the photo-book *Where are the Kids Going Out Tonight* released by *Tokyo Rose Records*. You can reach him at TheNeusSubjex@aol.com or *The Neus Subjex*, PO Box 18051, Fairfield, Ohio, 45018.

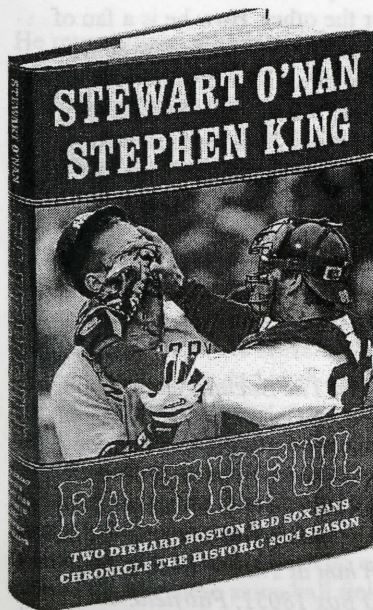
Prescription For a Post-Season Media Diet by Heath Row

Had it not been the day after April Fools Day, I would have been tempted to think it was some sort of cruel Catholic prank. Finally, after almost a decade of being trucked around and man handled like some kind of Muppet or weekend-less Bernie, **Pope John Paul II** had died. Or—it just being a week after Easter—had he? Might we not witness a second, second coming?

Turning to the newspapers of April 3, 2005, the conspiratorial question became almost moot. Witness that Sunday's *New York Daily News*. A 24-page commemorative section focusing on the Pope's life and times was almost eclipsed by 22 pages of baseball coverage. And in the *New York Times*, an eight-page special section celebrated the Pope's good works—while the *Old Grey Lady* dedicated 10 full pages to a standalone baseball preview, as well as three additional pages of coverage in the Sunday Sports section.

Roll back the stone, and as *News* columnist **Bill Gallo** wrote, "Let the sun shine in." Baseball is back.

Only one thing could preclude the passing of a pontiff: Opening day. At 8 p.m., Sunday, April 3, America's pastime promised the pairing of the New York Yankees—last season's pinstriped pariahs—and the Boston Red Sox—the team that could, and that could still save the game of baseball despite its frustrating failings and foibles.



Just ask **Stephen King**. A lifelong Red Sox fan, and coauthor of the 2004 season chronicle *Faithful*, King contributed a piece to the April 3 *Times* headed, in part, *The Gloom Is Gone in Mudville*.

But the gloom that had hung over the Sox like the sword of Damocles since its last World Series win in 1918 ("There's always next season.")—or the

depression felt by Yankees fans following last year's Beantown bounce—is not the shadow most importantly dispelled by the relative sunlight of opening day. No. I'm talking about the postpartum depression that has festered and grown since 2004's baseball fan finale.

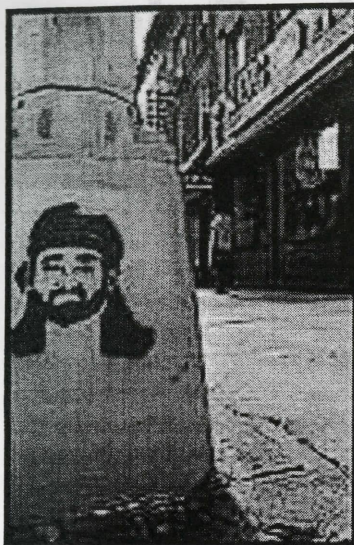
For depressing it was. After the surprising and satisfying success of the Sox, all I wanted was more: More baseball, more games, and more wins. Instead, until the exasperating yet illuminating emergence of the steroid scandal and the loudly lauded auction of baseball memorabilia that included **Babe Ruth's** record-breaking bat, I wandered aimlessly in a desert of despair. Even those news events were stale saltines compared to the fine fever felt when the Sox stepped up to the plate and performed with poise and perfection.

Where to turn for a post-season baseball fan's fix? My only hope was the sports magazines. So, while flying home to the East Coast after Thanksgiving in the Midwest, when I felt the downer at its deepest, I ponied up for the primary players' periodicals: *Sports Illustrated*, *ESPN the Magazine*, and the *Sporting News*.

The November 29, 2004, issue of *Sports Illustrated*, leading with a piece on "sportsrafe" following **Ron Artes's** mid-month basketball fan attack, included a scant two pages of baseball coverage—less than 2%

of its content. Half a page featured reader letters in response to the November 8 *SI* cover story about "What's next for Boston's new world champions?" Half a page





addressed the newly minted Washington Nationals' need for a place to play. And a three-column-inch item in **Lisa Altobelli's** front-of-book column, "The Beat," touched on *Shepard Fairey*-like **Johnny Damon** stencils subtly sullyng the streets of Brooklyn, New York's best borough.

Readers of the November 22 edition of *ESPN*, which was almost twice as thick as *SI*, fared little

better. Almost seven pages—just more than 4% of the magazine—banded about baseball. **Stuart Scott** dedicated his "Two Way" column to the game. Editors nestled a page-plus standing section in the back of the book. And—to *ESPN's* credit—**Jeff Bradley** contributed a five-page feature about **Curt Schilling's** contributions to the success of the Sox. At least baseball rated some real estate in the feature well.

And *The Sporting News*? Well, not only did the November 15 installment of the measly magazine feel like an advertorial for Fox Sports, the sad second to the now-defunct *Sport* dedicated less than five pages to baseball—still claiming the top slot with about 8% of its page count. Most of the *Sporting News's* coverage was short form and dissatisfying, especially the two pages of *USA Today*-like league reports, which gave about one column inch to each team. While I shouldn't have been surprised—after all, sports are seasonal—so much for the majors.

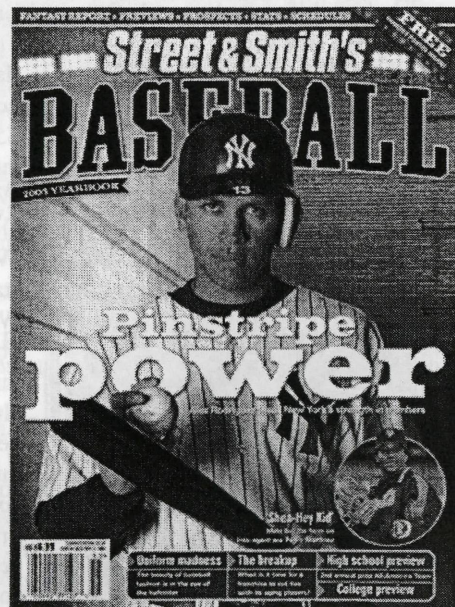
Looking slightly further afield, I tracked down the December issue of *Baseball Digest*. Founded in 1942, the diminutive, low-design digest is published by the Century Publishing Co. based in Evanston, Illinois. Century also publishes the self-explanatory *Basketball Digest*, *Football Digest*, and *Hockey Digest*; and *Baseball Digest's* small staff employs about as many people fielded during any given inning.

Now this is a magazine for baseball fans. Not only is 100% of its content dedicated to the game, the 120,000-circulation *Baseball Digest* targets fair- and foul-

weather—as well as on- and off-season—fans alike. The near-monthly leverages a learned letter column, contains critical columns about the state of the sport, analyzes a wide array of athletic aspects of notable current players, and holds forth on historic happenings in the "Game I'll Never Forget" interviews.

In every issue, *Baseball Digest* courts lifelong baseball fans, blending coverage of the new and the old. While the mag is a bit statistic heavy—which almost makes me numbers numb—it is a periodical I'll probably peruse regardless of the time of year. If its letter column is any indication, its readers are more intellectually invested in the game; and given the advertisements for the Replay Baseball game, Shepherd's Pro Sports' "throwback jerseys," and MLB Advanced Media baseball tapes—which offer cassette recordings of radio broadcasts dating from 1951-1988—I can rest assured that baseball is a sport that never stops.

Now that the 2005 season has started, the famine of the fans is finished, and we no longer need to turn to magazines for our fix of news and commentary. Still, several weeks ago, I picked up Athlon Sports' *MLB Preview* and Street &



Smith's *Baseball Yearbook*. King and Stewart O'Nan's *Faithful* perches prominently on my reading pile. As I write, the Yankees are up 4-1 halfway through their opening game against the Sox. And the Mets open against the Reds tomorrow.

Am I glad baseball is back? Heck yeah.

Heath Row is a pedestrian, amateur historian, and media geek. He roots for the Mets. You can read his blog at [MediaDiet.net].

Bat Boy For a Day

by Mike Faloon

Last spring the *Chicago Tribune* gave Zisk a great write up. In the weeks that followed we received a number of letters and emails, the best of which came from a White Sox fan named **David Gershbein**:

I was a bat boy for the day during the year of the South Side hit men (I think it was '77). I was around 12 years old...Richie Zisk was telling a story to two other players. One was on his right and the other to his left. I walked up to them and was facing Zisk to complete the circle in time to hear him inform the other players that he had just read that the average male penis erects over a mile per year. A little insight as to what players discuss during down time.

Naturally, we wanted to know more. (Interview by Mike Faloon)

David Gershbein: Before you ask any questions I did some research so you have a little background. The day of the game was May 22, 1977. This was batboy for a

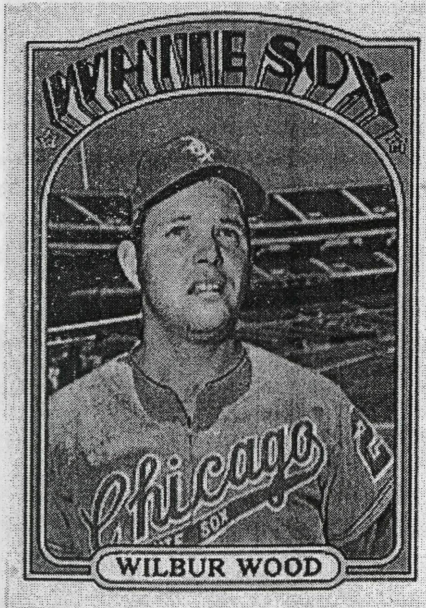
day, I believe it cost my parents \$50 at an auction. The White Sox lost to Detroit 14-3.

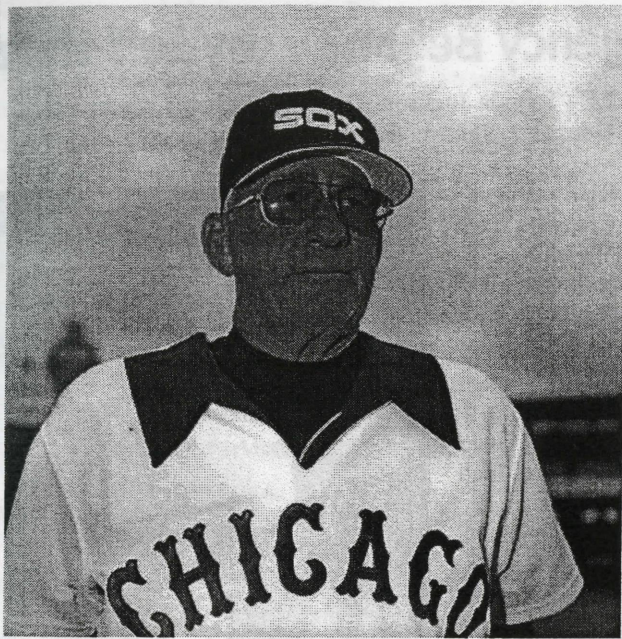
Wilbur Wood started for the White Sox. His box was one inning pitched, although I think he probably went into the second, six earned runs. I remember him getting yanked, coming into the dugout and whipping his mitt into the back

of the dugout. He was all sweaty after one inning. He just whipped his mitt and went into the clubhouse. The manager for that team was **Bob Lemon**, and they said to me when they were showing me around to people, Don't go by Bob, he doesn't like to be bothered. He's one of those managers who sat in one corner of the dugout and didn't talk to anyone. None of the guys could talk to him. He didn't move. When I got there they showed me



around the clubhouse. I remember **Oscar Gamble** was getting dressed there with his big Afro. **Chet Lemon** came up to me and introduced himself. It was his second full year in the big leagues, so he was in his early 20s—“You need anything, you come see me. My name's Chet.” He bent over backwards. I was not yet 12. Nicest guy you'd ever want to meet. He got traded for **Steve Kemp**, just an awful trade. The winning pitcher for the Tigers was **Dave Rozema**. Gamble and Zisk had solo home runs. The big day for the Tigers was **Jason Thompson** who had a single, a triple, a homerun, and five RBIs. **Rusty Staub** had three RBIs. Like I said, they were showing me around the clubhouse and at one point Richie Zisk, this was on the field, was talking to two other guys and walked up in time to hear him tell the end of a story or say something that he'd read that the average American male penis erects over one mile per year. That's the one thing I remember about Richie Zisk from that day. Before the game I picked up a bat and was swinging it on the steps of the dugout and some guy came up to me and said, Son, don't swing the bat over here. You almost hit Brian. I looked down and **Brian Downing**, the catcher, was putting his shinguards on, pretty damn close. I think about it now seeing on ESPN *Sports Center* some batboy hits the catcher in the head. I remember having a picture with **Jorge Orta**, but I don't remember talking to him. The clubhouse was pretty old fashioned, they didn't have a big spread in there. They had a big tray, like what you'd see at a banquet, filled with Campbells's Chicken Noodle soup, with crackers all





around it, and they had some beverages. I remember **Franciso Barrios** was enjoying the soup. **Ken Brett** was on the team, George's older brother, he was great. He was like, Hey, kid, how are you doing? Do you have an older sister? I said, No, I don't. He said, Get out of here. I knew he was kidding around. You know, the reputation of the Brett brothers.

Zisk: You'd mentioned that before the game someone told you to stay out of Bob Lemon's way. Did they give you any other tips or preparation before the game?

DG: They had a batboy go out and get the bat from the batter's box, this is one of the full-time batboys, and I was to go out to meet him, get the bat, and bring it back to the dugout. I remember one time during the game they stopped play and I went out onto the field to pick up a hot dog wrapper that was blowing across the field. They did a good job showing me around. Then around the seventh inning they were like, All right, you've been doing a good job, why don't you take a break. I went into the clubhouse and had something to drink. For \$50 I can't believe my parents got it for that.

Zisk: What was it like being so close to a game?

DG: It was really cool. This was before the modern stadiums and ESPN and the ballplayers making all the money. It was the gap between the old time days and the

new. It was the start of free agency. Some of the guys were a little stand-offish, but like I said, Chet Lemon, that response, I don't think you'd see something like that today.

Zisk: That was the year the White Sox were known as the South Side Hitmen...

DG: Yeah, in '77 the White Sox were in first place for two or three months. Mid-August they fell out of first. That was the year the fans began singing "Nah Nah Nah," (**Steam's** "Na Na Hey Hey (Kiss Him Goodbye)") in Comiskey. They do that in a lot of parks now. The reason I was a White Sox even though I lived on the North side was because of **Richie Allen**. He won the home run title two of his three years in Chicago. He was a great team guy on the field, even though he showed up late off the field, and every team he was on won more when he was there and when he left they won less. He was almost a Hall of Fame talent. In my lifetime the White Sox have had a half a dozen special teams and that '77 team was the first one of them. They had the Winning Ugly team in '83 and a couple of good teams in the 90s and then 2000. They're 3-10, I think, in the playoffs in my lifetime. People don't talk about the White Sox like they do the Cubs and Red Sox but they've only made one World Series since 1919.

Zisk: And that '77 team didn't even make the playoffs, but they're still pretty well known in Chicago. Was it their early season success, their personality, both?

DG: It was both. They were making a run at the playoffs, and they played the longball and fans identified with it. There was a team in '64, the White Sox won 98 games that year and finished one game behind the Yankees. That was before I was alive but you never hear anything about that team in Chicago.

Zisk: So there's more to a team's lasting reputation than success.

DG: Yeah, it was also (owner) **Bill Veeck** and they had the exploding scoreboard, Harry Caray calling the games and it was that time, the 70s. Everything fit the South Side Hitmen. Zisk and Gamble were the big name guys, they were hitting a lot of homeruns. They were portrayed as a colorful team by the Chicago media—longball hitters and crazy personalities—I saw a little bit of that that day.

Who's The Best Since Free Agency Began? by Jeff Herz

This is a list I compiled based upon overall offensive and defensive ability. It is by no means 100% accurate, and I am sure I am missing a key few players. I also tried to include such attributes as World Series appearances, Gold Gloves, Hall of Fame records, and how I perceived them against other peers at their positions. For example David Cone appears on this list, because he was considered a mercenary in the late 80's and early 90's who would your team get to and win the big game, though I doubt he is ever going to the Hall of Fame. I also tried to keep the player at the position they were primarily known for, so **Stargell** is at 1B, **Carew** at 2B, and **Rose** at 3B, rather than other positions they played during their careers.

Here is my list in no particular order, mainly as I remember them with no significance put to where their place on this list.

C – **Johnny Bench, Carlton Fisk, Ivan Rodriguez, Mike Piazza, Gary Carter**

1B – **Mark McGwire, Frank Thomas, Eddie Murray, Willie Stargell, Keith Hernandez**

2B – **Joe Morgan, Ryne Sandberg, Roberto Alomar, Craig Biggio, Rod Carew**

3B – **Mike Schmidt, George Brett, Wade Boggs, Pete Rose**

SS – **Ozzie Smith, Cal Ripken Jr, Derek Jeter, Alex Rodriguez**

LF – **Manny Ramirez, Barry Bonds, Carl Yastrzemski, Tim Lincecum**

CF – **Ken Griffey Jr, Kirby Puckett, Rickey Henderson, Robin Yount**

RF – **Reggie Jackson, Daryl Strawberry, Juan Gonzalez, Sammy Sosa**

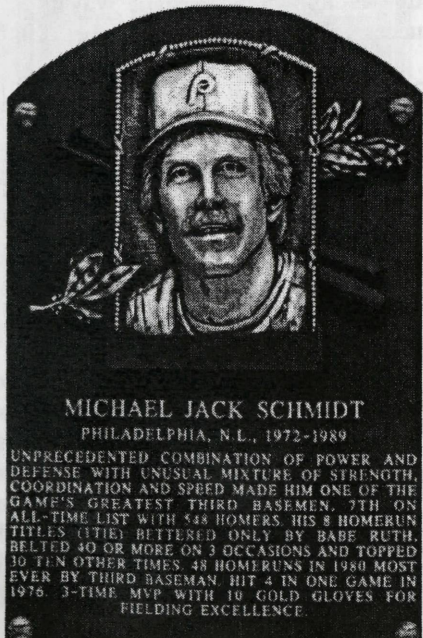
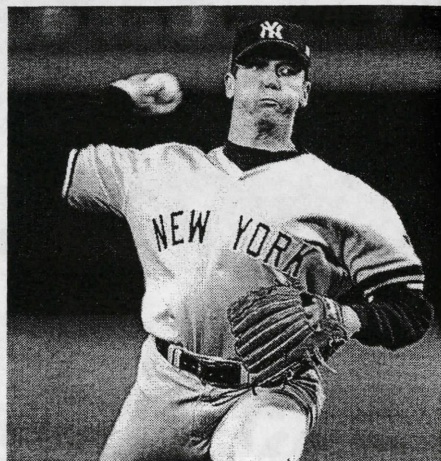
RHP – **Roger Clemens, Pedro Martinez, Nolan Ryan, Jim Palmer, Tom Seaver, David Cone, Dwight Gooden, Greg Maddux, Jack Morris**

LHP – **Randy Johnson, Steve Carlton**

CL – **Rollie Fingers, Lee Smith, Goose Gossage, Mariano Rivera**

If you notice I have left off DH's (**Molitor, Winfield, Edgar Martinez**, etc.) since I believe if you cannot play the field after a certain point in your career, you are not really a baseball player regardless of what statistics you accumulate over your career. I also have included some players who have been linked with steroids (**IRod, McGwire, Bonds, and Gonzalez**) simply because they were not illegal until the 2005 season. Whether these guys were doing steroids or not, they were still considered the top players in the game at the time and should be considered for this list. If there needs to be an asterisk or a little syringe icon next to their names in the record books that is another debate for another time.

Here is a breakout of the teams they played the majority of the careers for and how many of them played for that team during their "peak." For instance Roberto Alomar played for a butt-load of teams (Padres, Blue Jays, Orioles, Indians, Mets, White Sox, and Devil Rays) during his career, but he is remembered for being with the Toronto, Baltimore and Cleveland, so I have listed him 3 those teams. It is interesting to note that only 14 out of 50 players (**Bench, Thomas, Stargell, Sandberg, Biggio, Schmidt, Brett, Ripken, Jeter, Yaz, Puckett, Yount, Palmer, and Rivera**) on this list played their entire career for the same team.



NY Yankees – 7 (Jackson, Jeter, Rivera, Gossage, Henderson, Rivera, Cone)

NY Mets – 6 (Piazza, Carter, Hernandez, Strawberry, Cone, Gooden)

Cincinnati Reds – 5 (Bench, Morgan, Rose, Griffey Jr. Seaver)

St. Louis Cardinals – 5 (McGwire, Hernandez, Smith, Carlton, Smith)

Baltimore Orioles – 4 (Murray, Alomar Ripken, Palmer)

Boston Red Sox – 4 (Fisk, Yaz, Boggs, Ramirez, Clemens, Martinez)

Oakland A's – 4 (McGwire, Jackson, Henderson, Fingers)

Texas Rangers – 4 (I-Rod, A Rod, Gonzalez, Ryan)

Toronto Blue Jays – 4 (Alomar, Henderson, Cone, Morris)

California Angels – 3 (Carew, Ryan, Jackson)

Chicago Cubs – 3 (Sandberg, Maddux, Sosa)

Chicago White Sox – 3 (Fisk, Thomas, Raines)

Montreal Expos – 3 (Carter, Martinez, Raines)

Philadelphia Phillies – 3 (Rose, Schmidt, Carlton)

Seattle Mariners – 3 (A Rod, Griffey Jr. Johnson)

Cleveland Indians – 2 (Alomar, Ramirez)

Pittsburgh Pirates – 2 (Stargell, Bonds)

Houston Astros – 2 (Biggio, Ryan, Clemens)

Minnesota Twins – 2 (Carew, Puckett)

Milwaukee Brewers – 2 (Fingers, Yount)

Atlanta Braves – 1 (Maddux)

Arizona Diamondbacks – 1 (Johnson)

Detroit Tigers – 1 (Morris)

Kansas City Royals – 1 (Brett)

Los Angeles Dodger – 1 (Piazza)

San Francisco Giants – 1 (Bonds)

It is interesting to note—as a Yankee fan—that they are the most represented team. But to be fair, they have also had the most success over the same period. I also have not included A-Rod and Randy Johnson in the Yankees roster, since they really made their names on other teams. A Rod seems to be able to make the transition to being a “real” Yankee in his second season. Johnson could still make the list by picking up his game and pitching the way he has in the past and driving them into the playoffs before his contract expires, but it seems like he might be like an aging Guy LaFluer playing his final days in a New York Rangers uniform, trying his best, but ultimately nothing but a shell of his former self. Or at least not the

intimidating strike out artist he was with the Mariners and Diamondbacks.

The other teams represented at the top also had strong runs during this time period, so it does not seem out of balance to me. I was questioning whether to include Gooden and Strawberry in this list, but they were so strong good and dominant when they came up that it is hard to ignore their overall contribution. I think everyone else speaks for themselves under the criteria I have provided.

Here are some future considerations, who could make this list assuming they keep on their current trajectory. This list is noticeably missing relief pitchers, and that is because it is very rare that a closer comes along and is consistent and considered a leader for more than a few years. **Eric Gagne** could be represented here if he is able to recover from his injury this year and pick up where he left off, otherwise he will be just tossed onto the scrap heap of other closers whose lights shown brightly and then were quickly extinguished. Granted, that could happen to any of the players listed below, especially considering how young many of them are. Let's check back in a few years and see how well I did.

C – **Joe Mauer** (Twins), **Victor Martinez** (Indians)

1B – **Albert Pujols** (Cardinals), **Lance Berkman** (Astros)

2B – **Alfonso Soriano** (Yankees/Rangers), **Chase Utley** (Phillies), **Brian Roberts** (Orioles)

SS – **Jhonny Peralta** (Indians), **Jose Reyes** (Mets), **Bobby Crosby** (A's)

3B – **Scott Rolen** (Phillies/Cardinals), **Chipper Jones** (Braves), **David Wright** (Mets), **Morgan Ensberg** (Astros)

OF – **Vlad Guerrero** (Expos/Angels) **Jason Bay** (Pirates) **Adam Dunn** (Reds), **Andruw Jones** (Braves), **Carlos Beltran** (Royals/Astros/Mets), **Vernon Wells** (Blue Jays)

P – **Oliver Perez** (Padres/Pirates), **Roy Halladay** (Blue Jays), **Tim Hudson** (A's/Braves), **Barry Zito** (A's), **Mark Mulder** (A's/Cardinals), **Johan Santana** (Twins), **Jake Peavy** (Padres)

The Art of War: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying About Placido Polanco's Head and Love Baseball by Michael Baker

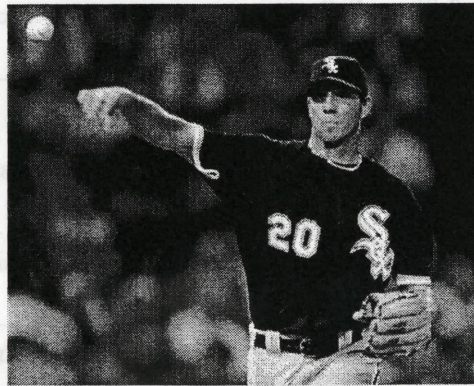
The gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing positive knowledge.

—Albert Einstein

It is August, I am outside New York City, and it is Rwandan sweltering, in the year of our Lord and Savior, **Travis the Hafner**, 2005. The city is in ruins: blue-haired grannies from Dubuque search angrily with needle-sharp elbows for Broadway discounts; young, dark-eyed dudes from Nebraska, potential mass murderers all, pretend to care about CBGB's closing, the Parthenon of punk clubs; vicious, marauding gangs of Yankees lovers search for one fucking original thought to drunkenly sputter. At home it was much worse—I was working (cleverly) on ignoring my wife for the 437th consecutive day, easily smashing **Joltin' Joe's** famed streak of discord with **Marilyn** the Mammarian; somewhere was my infant son, my love, my guilty future, roaming unseen through stacks of Baseball Prospectus printouts; I was geekily hording every note (mono, stereo, parlophonic, 8-track octophonic) ever struck by **Lennon** and What's His Name; and at least two editors had started to write obituaries for me concerning my prolonged absence and my pathetic life. For I had become earlier in the spring, when all hope is permanent and crystalline, the proud owner, head executive, and manager of a baseball fantasy club, the streaky but iridescently glowing Expos. I was no longer a fantasy virgin.

Fantasy baseball, or for that, all fantasy sports, started where most great ideas start: over cocktails at a French restaurant. In this case, it was NYC's La Rotisserie Francaise and it was baseball/business writer **Daniel Okrent**, with some pals, who drew up rules, established teams, picked the players, and decided the scoring for a season-long contest of managers vis-a-vis managers, and their innocent and oft-hobbled selected players. In my league it was ten teams, two divisions, with head-to-head competition weekly; the two leaders of the divisions will square off in mid-September for a two-round playoff. Scoring in a head-to-head league is based on the team that you had selected from your pool of 22 available players, and whatever motley has-beens that you have exchanged for later, that are already on your team; if your pitcher is going against **Peavey** at home or faces the Rockies for an

afternoon game then obviously you will select another teammate, the pitcher, let's say, who has two starts at home, against Kansas City and the Mariners. You chose your team thirty minutes before the first game on each week's Monday. Although the league cares about total points for the season the real meat is found in the weekly competition; the scoring is skewed to the Big Bopper; a **Rod Carew** Hall of Fame type night (4 singles, a walk, a run scored) will net the same points as a meaningless solo shot in Philly; the narcissistic solo home run guy may be an indifferent teammate, a world class inept fielder, slower than **Bush's** response to the hallowed and holy grounds of New Orleans (forgive us, Reverend **Louis Armstrong**), an upper cutting free swinger who makes contact as often as *Friends* is funny, but in these leagues this über **Dave Kingman** is going to be a better fantasy player than a steady and sure handed **Shannon Stewart**. Singles hitters drive Hondas and date stagehands; home run sluggers, Hummers and **Lohan**.

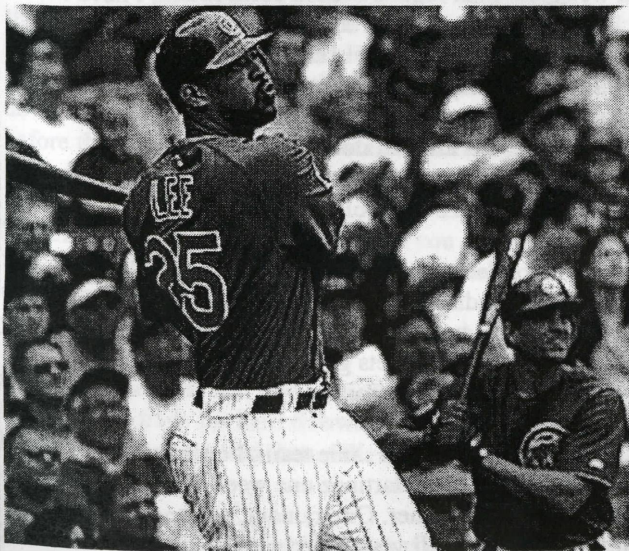


The pitching statistics—there are no penalties for losses, blown saves, or screwing an L.A. reporter—center on the inevitable: getting dudes out,

preferably in a winning cause and through the mechanism of the strikeout. Points are taken off for base runners and earned runs; points are gathered, conversely, through the elimination of such concepts; pitching against the Nationals in cavernous Washington every game will make you a stud, with a capitol S on your chest. But a crafty **Moyer**, consistent **Maddox**, wild **Elarton**, and smooth **Garland** are not the league's cup of tea. We reward and revere flamethrowers; for instance, in a 4-3 loss, a pitcher who K's 11, allows six hits and one walk and those four runs, will score for your team a solid 16 points; a finesse pitcher who in 7 innings wins 5-3 and walks three, allows seven singles, and strikes out only one will also get you

16 points. A **Lidge** can come in for a mop up 8-5 save, strike out the indifferent side, and get 15 points for 4 minutes of work.

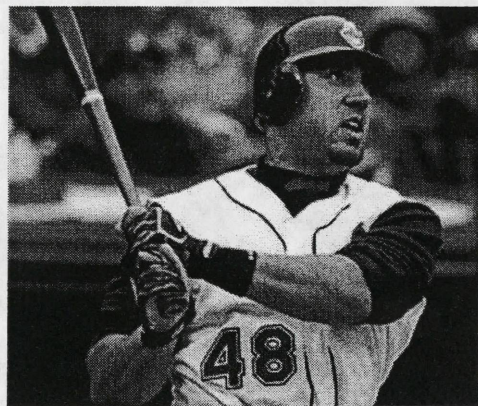
The winner of our league ("The Wine and Roses") from the previous two years was in last place. One team had five relievers; another had only one; some teams got lucky with breakout years by mediocre artists; others got saddled with a **Barry Bonds** all year—there is a list of 50 players or so who cannot be cut, so an injury to a **Prior**, **Pujols** could really cripple your maneuvering. This was one reason I dumped **Cliff Floyd**: he was on the list and always breaks down around Labor Day, right? This was a tough but knowledgeable league. My trade offers were not even responded to or were rejected via e-mails instantaneously. Some of the owners were eerily silent throughout the entire year. But who needed human company when you had numbers? The site's operators kept up to the minute updates on all the players, their peccadilloes, their histories, their statistical breakdowns, and their Herculean possibilities. There were polls, a message board with the other 9,000 leagues, informative essays regarding minor league prospects, individual pages for each player and his past and present stats, and pitch by pitch description of all games played in real time. It was the best \$9.95 I ever spent, if you discount that hooker in Montana but that is quite another story, possibly better suited for *Field and Stream*.



Early on I experienced emotional problems with my team: **Jose Reyes** was walking less than Detective Ironsides; **Floyd** bailed against lefties; **Derrek Lee** couldn't be that

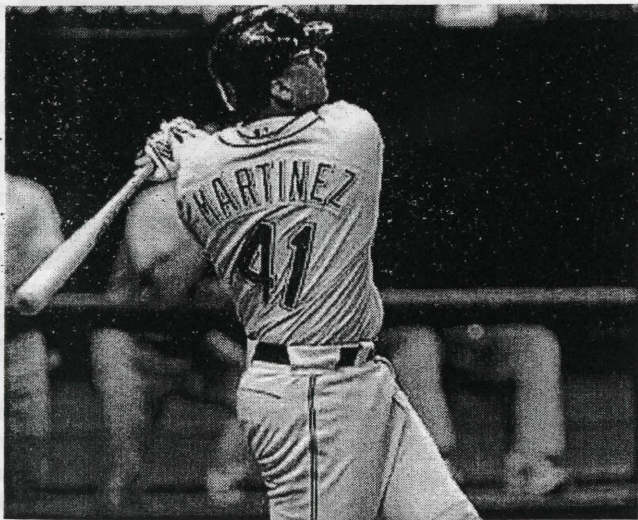
good; **Tejada's** unethical and geriatric line up protection (**Palmiero** and **Sosa**) was a combined 106 years old; **Victor Martinez** was hitting so far below .200 **Minnie** and **Mario Mendoza** were threatening a class action suit; and my pitching staff (**Odalis**, **Penny**, **Hudson**, **Hampton**, **Lawrence**, **Franklin**) was either on steroids or needed them. I found myself—gasp—rooting for weird causes, all dictated by that week's matchups, like praying for that wanker **Mike Maroth** versus my sainted Tribe. I was a mess. I was obsessed. I was not thinking clearly, emulating **Pete Rose** trading autographed bats for a tenner on the Braves, getting six. I was a mad scientist in search of a larger laboratory. And yet, I was eight and one—simultaneously, a shithead novice and merciless scourge. It was then I decided to revamp my team. I sought perfection.

Our league has no limit on free agent moves. At last count I had made over 200. The other nine owners combined for roughly one fourth of that staggering total. Now,



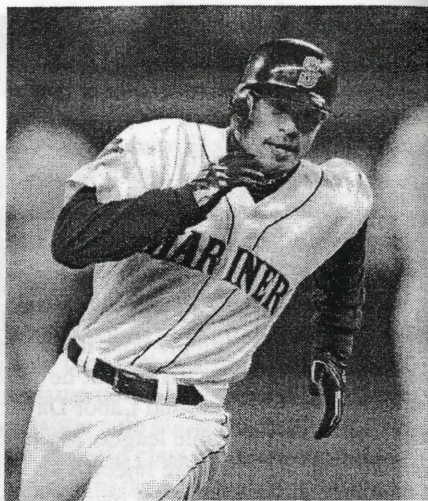
many of that total was simply playing around, an insane tinkerer picking up **Hidalgo**, **Guillen**, **Encarnacion**, **Cameron**, **Beltre**, and then before they even donned my imagined uniform—**Fatty Arbuckle's** strangling of an actress—I would drop them and pick up for the bench an equally worthless **Fuentes**, **Backe**, **Batista**, **Loaiza**, or **Chacon**. I dumped **Hafner**, stockpiled solid reserves for trade bait (**Floyd**, **Cameron**, **Michael Young**, **Sizemore**, **Ordonez**), and decided in separate deals to trade **Tejada**, **Cabrera**, **BJ Ryan**, **Hoffman** and **Lidge** (I was 8-1 for a reason!) for better starters and more speed. Say hello to **Mussina**, **Weaver**, **Silva**, **Eaton**, **Soriano**, **Benson**, **Beltran** and **Bay**. And last place here I came! I lost a couple of matches by 18 points in a league where the average winning score was 360 or so; I lost the truncated week of the All Star break which doesn't even count to me; I lost **Mora** one week on a Monday costing me dearly. But losing I was and more troubling was that I got pounded by the two league powerhouses, **Gagne's Gruppo Sportive** and **Stiff Little Rollie Fingers**.

I also made beginner's mistakes; my draft day naiveté landed me three shortstops: dumb. I kept Hafner in the line up way too often during his May swoon; I traded Michael Young and then **John Patterson** for peanuts; I gave up on **Haren** and **Capuano** too early. My pitching staff resembled—with its roster of 10 cent heads and 5 cent arms—a Lollapalooza tour. After I re-acquired him I immediately played Hafner after his beaning, thinking it was a glancing blow; I traded for Eaton when he was hurt: dumber. I chose Mora over **Cantu** in August. I should have been more patient with Cliff Floyd. I fell in love with the 2004 playoff Beltran, not seeing the complete sissy hermaphrodite that he had become: dumbest. But my myopic shortcomings were balanced out by my sagaciously prescient (and lucky) moves: Bay and **Soriano** more than made up for Tejada and Cabrera. I had picked up Garland, BJ Ryan, John Patterson, and **Todd Jones** off waivers. I did draft Derrek Lee, I was patient with Victor Martinez and **Tim Hudson** (even if I offered Martinez in May to every other team), and **Reyes** has been a monster.



You have to start seven pitchers every week, and can keep six reserves of any position for any given week, pitchers or non pitchers. And my staff soon stabilized; I beat the Stiffs by five points with an improbable late Sunday night comeback; was barely bested by Gagne—a team managed by my pal from Omaha who secured for me my initial inclusion. Hudson is now healthy and I no longer keep any everyday players as reserves—it's all about the pitchers: with limitless moves possible among 13 hurlers I try to have a great closer (Todd Jones) and five or six of my remaining six pitchers to have two starts each. Going

into the playoffs I own Derrek at 1B, Reyes at SS, Soriano 2B, Mora at third, Victor Martinez catching, Hafner (picked off waivers in late June) DH'ing, and Beltran, Bay, Ichiro in the OF. In any given week my opponents will face two starts from, let's say, Florida's **Vargas**, **Ervin Santana**,

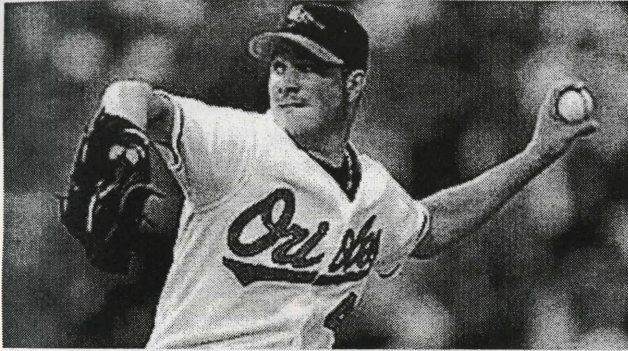


Mussina, **Silva**, Weaver, or for the next session, my foe will have to tolerate 10 starts from Hudson, Benson, **Cliff Lee**, Eaton, and Jon Garland. Only Lee and Hudson were initially drafted by me. I'm not sure whether my team is stronger than it was in April, but I sure have an OK starting staff versus early on a staff comprised of malcontents, stiff necks, and retards driving around the parking lots in broken-down cars thinking they were in downtown Akron.

I'm losing this week in a meaningless playoff tune up; next week, the final regular season competition, I have my stacked line up all ready for domination in the playoffs that start on the 19th. I like my chances: Gagne lost **Halliday**, Stiffs rely on **Turnbow** and **Looper** too much, and the Replacemits have many, many all or nothing hitters: **Pudge**, **Peralta**, **Blalock**, **Roberts**, **Casey**. In other words, I will probably get destroyed, but that's cool, because I have learned the following things:

1. Never make decisions based on allegiances. I skipped over **A-Rod** (I had second pick), but traded for Mussina has been solid for me. Part of my love for Beltran was conditioned by the 162 Mets games on television. It has not been must watch TV. Painful.
2. Don't start players from same team; I once had Sizemore, Hafner, and Martinez one week, and Reyes, Beltran, Cameron another. One rainout, one encounter with an **Oswalt** can kill your week's scoring.
3. Who needs a hitters' bench? Stockpile arms, 90% of them starters.

4. In the draft, don't waste a high pick on corner infielder or third outfielder; the point differential between the fourth best 3B and the tenth (remember: in a ten man league you are assured of the Major League's tenth best positional player) isn't worth drafting a Mora over a **Millwood** or **Lackey** or **Morris**. I wasted valuable mid round selections on **Corey Patterson**, **Orlando Cabrera**, Mora, and **Jimmy Rollins** that should have gone to third starters on above .500 teams.



5. Don't hang onto an injured player who is not a stud—for every **Bedard**, **Odalis Perez**, or **Eaton**, there is a potential producer who may even blossom: a **Duke**, a **Francoeur**, or an **Utley**.

6. When drafting, you must secure a stud pitcher in his late 20's and a reliever for a contender in the second through fourth rounds. Stay with them all year. **Zito**, **Clemens**, **Santana**, **Lidge**, and **Rivera** are having monster years, even with all the early question marks and downsides. If you had chosen a **Thome** or a **Mike Lowell** before these guys your season was finished before it started.

7. Make trades: in an "even" situation you are 50% likely to get better and therefore reduce another's team's effectiveness. And you have percentages on your side: if you have five OF'ers a trade will certainly help your team.

8. Study matchups; don't be sentimental; AL outfielders, NL pitchers; trade for hard throwers; take a chance on a Rockies pitcher now and then. OK, maybe not that last one.

9. Don't buy cocaine from a man named **Tarique**.

10. Ignore the rules.

Most of all, talk to the other owners: keep your enemies placated and pacified with a periodic transaction, a funny line, a good bit of your own humility. I was chastised by my own friend once for taking a loss hard: it destroys the fantasy game aspect to be angry he claims, which in retrospect, was fairly easy to say, especially since it was his team that beat me. But, of course, he's right, and my knowledge of baseball has grown in leaps and bounds. Tendencies of lefthanders in Dodgers Stadium, stolen base percentages, Triple AAA catching prospects, the direction and speed of the wind at Wrigley later this afternoon: ask me and I just might tell you the truth. I am also a more patient baseball fanatic, less willing to reduce athletic complexities into one sentence, or one glib rejoinder. At

least once a week (Mussina) I don't hate the Yankees more than I hate the Bush daughters, genital herpes and **Grand Funk Railroad** combined.

The season is long and a player's

concentration and desire may disappear for ten days or so, or he will temporarily lose his bite on his curve, or get over anxious about the three way he's getting at the Chicago Hyatt later that night. Cut the players some slack. They are just like you or me: multi-millionaires who can hit a god damned **Mulder** cut fastball 470 god-damned-feet into the night skies over dying strip malls. Well, we can fantasize. So, draft eight or nine solid dudes and stick with them like family for the entire campaign, a family that, of course, suffers the occasional brotherly suicidal leap off a bridge, hides the perv uncle from Portland, or dresses up the tomcat lesbian cousin from Indianapolis. But love them anyway. It's all you got. Or ever will.



World Series here I come. Wish me luck.

Michael Baker teaches composition at New Jersey colleges, where his students write about their fierce hatred of the New York Yankees.

A Memory by Lisa Alcock

I saw the deadline on my calendar, “Zisk article due today,” but couldn’t motivate myself to write anything. Not to say that I haven’t been writing a lot lately, just not about sports. I’ve been watching baseball on TV and finally got my ass to a Mets game. None of my ideas really panned out beyond the lines, “I don’t care if **Barry Bonds** returns to baseball. I don’t want him to surpass **Hank’s** record.” Maybe I’m in a particularly emotional and sentimental mood because of the images of devastation and the loss of life from Hurricane Katrina, or the upcoming four-year anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. I don’t know for sure, but it’s a good guess. I do know that these two events got me thinking about the role of sports—baseball in particular—during the darkest times.

I’ve mentioned before that I play second base for my company softball team, the Pubs. Every year, sometime after our season ends, we have an intra-squad game. In September 2001, I wasn’t too sure if we were going to have a game. After the attacks, the police closed off everything below 14th Street. Unless you were a resident with ID, the guards wouldn’t allow you to pass through. Our office, located about a mile and a half north of the World Trade Center site, was re-opened a week after 9/11. Amongst the Pubs, e-mails circulated. There was discussion of not playing our annual intra-squad game. It almost didn’t feel right yet to actually enjoy ourselves, to joke around and play a light-hearted game of softball. Our coach, **David** sent out an e-mail, asking us, “Should we play?” and “Do you want to play?” People overwhelmingly responded “yes,” yours truly included. It was settled, our game would be Friday, 9/21/01.

Though I don’t recall every moment of our game, I remember that we had a good time. We played in Central Park on the Great Lawn. Afterwards, we went to our usual after-game bar, the Gin Mill, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, which has several TV’s always tuned into baseball games. We sat in the back of the bar in front of the five TV’s. The Mets-Braves game was on. It was the Mets’ first home game since the terrorist attacks. Mets-Braves games were always emotional, but this one was different. The rivalry was there, but it didn’t seem to matter as much that we hated **Chipper** or **Andruw Jones**, because the game seemed bigger than that. After the moment of silence, and the bagpipes, and the National Anthem, the game was on. We sat, drank and ate bar food

and talked about our season and our personal experiences on 9/11, pausing every now and then to watch the Mets play. We found ourselves cheering and then complaining about the Braves, and our renewed hatred for them surfaced. It was good to be with my friends. The Mets beat the Braves too, 3-2. The Mets weren’t doing too well that season, but it didn’t matter: for us, baseball became a starting point. We couldn’t forget what happened on 9/11, but we began to heal by way of the game.

In the wake of human loss, sports seem so insignificant. They mean nothing. And yet, they mean everything. They *are* significant. Sports bring people together. Baseball (and softball) brought my friends and I together. There, I stood silently, weeping, in a crowded bar with my friends and teammates, **Kip, Daryl, Mike, David, Jackie, Peter** and **Gregg**, watching the commemorative ceremonies for those lives lost in the World Trade Center attacks, in Washington D.C. and in that Pennsylvania field. I had sort of been in a stupor since 9/11 and I cried and worried a lot. Like many New Yorkers, I remembered every moment of September 11th, from what I wore, to what the weather was like, to what I ate for breakfast, to what I was thinking before the first tower was hit, to my co-workers and I standing across the street from our office building looking South down Hudson Street, watching the towers on fire, and thick, black smoke filling lower Manhattan. I—we—needed something seemingly normal to do, which was to play softball and watch a baseball game.

The Yankees went on to play against the Diamondbacks in the World Series that November. I knew that I was slowly getting back to some normalcy, when the Yankees lost and I found myself screaming out my apartment window, in my best **John Sterling** impersonation, “Thaaaa Yankeeeee LOSE! Thaaaaa Yaaankeeee LOSE!!” The next day I was walking across Carmine Street on my way to work. I spotted Kip on the corner, I yelled “Kip!” He turned and we both hugged and jumped around, and yelled, “The Yankees lost!!! The Yankees LOST.” We tried to contain our joy, but it was almost impossible.

I knew then that we were going to be OK.

Lisa Alcock is happy to see that the Mets are doing better than her fantasy league team, “Mrs. Wright.” She’s also been enjoying the spots featuring a silly Mr. Met. All Hail Mr. Met!

THE POWERS OF THE Catchers

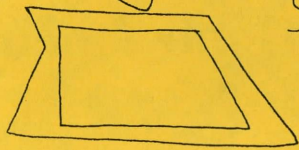
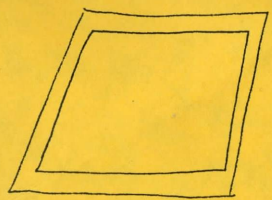
By Slink Moss

Examples:
Throwing out
a runner,
Blocking
the plate,
Calling
the game,
Hitting
for
Power,
Knowing
the rules.

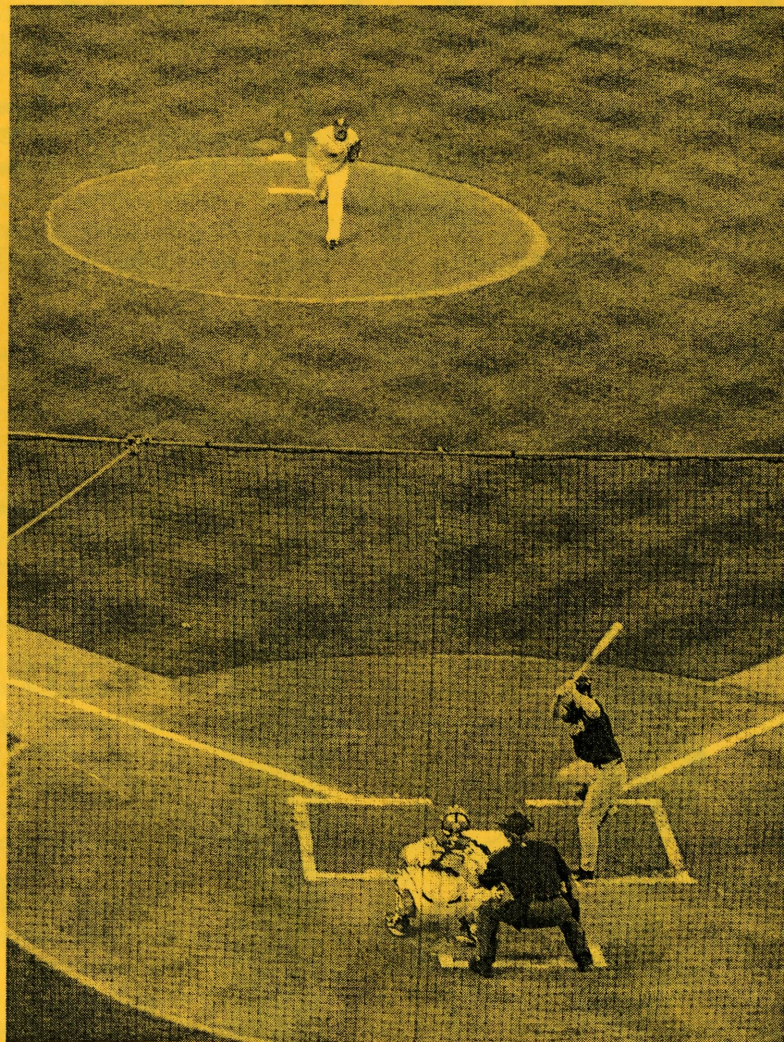


Knowledge:

Signs
Pitchers
Batters
Coaches
Umps
The Plate
Home
Special
equipment.



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**Livan Hernandez Throws the
First Pitch at the Nationals
Home Opener, April 14, 2005**

(Front and Back Cover Photos by Nancy Golden)