

The Baseball Magazine For People Who Hate Baseball Magazines

Fall
2011

Z I S K #20



OH YES, WE LOVE CLASSY YANKEE FANS!!!

The Ballplayers Food All-Stars
A Return Trip to Cooperstown
The Real, REAL Joel Skinner Story
Disco Demolition Night, Revisited
A New Definition for America's Team
...and much, much more!

Z I S K

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Editor's note:

The 2011 season at the *Zisk* Brooklyn offices has been odd. I've been torn between immersing myself in as much baseball as possible—and ignoring it altogether. Let's talk about the immersion first.

I had one big reason to be excited to watch the Mets—a brand new 32" HDTV. Friends and co-workers told me how the HD experience had changed their viewing habits, yet I wasn't inclined to believe them. After the first regular season game I watched, I knew *exactly* what they were talking about. The crispness and the broader view of the field made the game even more interesting to watch. And when I found the proper hookup for my sound system, I swore I could hear the vendors at CitiField passing change back to guys that ordered a couple of beers. (The stands are kind of empty this season, so that seems realistically possible.)

My two reasons for wanting to ignore the game I've loved and written about for 20 issues of *Zisk*? **Bernie Madoff** and **Fred Wilpon**. When the Madoff ponzi trustee **Irving Picard** filed the one billion dollar clawback lawsuit against Wilpon and company last December, the last shred of creditability the Mets principal owner had was gone. All those denials about the Madoff situation not impacting baseball operations were exposed as bullshit. Every week there seemed to be another article in the *New York Times* that made Wilpon look shadier and shadier in the whole ponzi scheme. Sure, we're supposed to believe in innocent until proven guilty. But it's so hard to think this guy is clean (or, as he implied in the infamous *New Yorker* article, a rube) when you've witnessed *so much* mismanagement (**Omar Minaya**) and bizarre events (**Tony Bernazard's** shirt-ripping) under his regime.

Even though I love watching this current Mets team, I went to CitiField only once this season to taste the new **Keith Hernandez** burger offered at one of the concession stands. (It was okay, but it's no Shack Burger.) After that excursion, I vowed to never again give my money to the Wilpons. I never thought I'd see the day where I hated an owner as much as the late **George Steinbrenner**. Yet here we are.

Thankfully this issue of *Zisk* has restored my love of the game with a variety of great stories. Hope you enjoy it.
—Steve

Catcher of the Future, Groupie of the Past (The Real Real Joel Skinner Story) by Dr. Nancy Golden

Sometimes it's telling to reach back and revisit how things started. Sometimes...not so much.

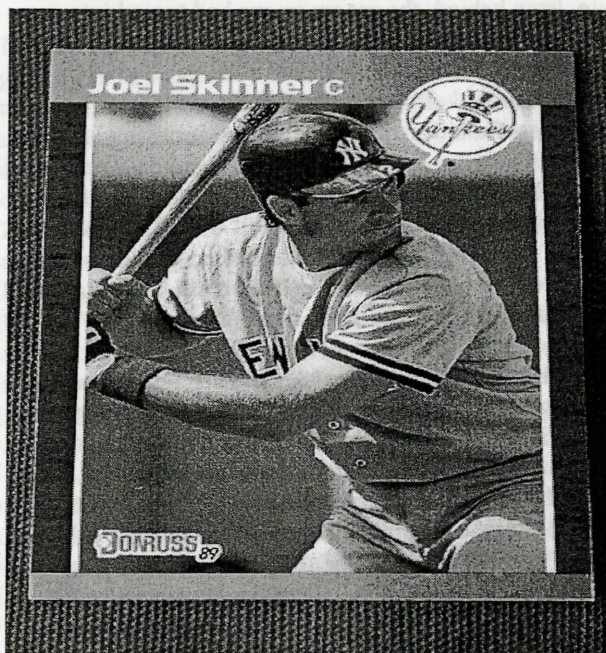
This one started between classes, beside my locker, 11th grade. We were just a few weeks into the baseball season and the guy with the locker next to me, a Red Sox fan, was systematically going through the Yankee lineup relating to me how each of them sucked. I, in turn, would counter each accusation with an anecdote of their awesomeness. It was trash talking at its purist: a declaration of the sucking of one team or player by Party A, followed by a refutation with supporting evidence by Party B. We sparred like this all the way around the bases until we got to the catcher, **Joel Skinner**. Joel Skinner? I had never heard of him. Nevertheless, I defended his honor as if he were **Don Mattingly** or **Dave Winfield**, or hell, even **Mike Pagliarulo**.

"His hitting will pick up," I countered. "And besides, he's a great defensive catcher." It was easy to make shit up. Anyone practiced in trash talking can do this.

That night at home, I looked up the stats on Joel Skinner. And not on Google or ESPN.com. Back then we opened the Sports Section of the *New York Times* and checked the stats box. And the next day we checked the stats box again to see if anything changed. And, wow, this guy really couldn't hit. I wondered how long the Yankees would let this go on, let a guy hit below .100. Here in New York, in the major leagues. But then these weren't the Yankees of **Joe Torre** and **Derek Jeter** and fistfuls of championship rings. These were the Yankees of my youth, of their long pennant-free draught that was the 80's. Perhaps this was all they could come up with.

As it turned out, Joel Skinner really was a great defensive catcher. I learned this as I began following him, watching his at-bats, listening to the announcers try to accentuate the positive as they simultaneously spoke of his batting average in terms of Bingo (O-74!) or, in better days, the interstate (I-95!). I really began to pull for this guy. And he wasn't too harsh on the eyes either. Thus he became not only my guy, but "Joel Skinner—Catcher of the Future," a way for me to firmly establish my belief in his

potential with the team, while fully acknowledging his current lack of hitting skills. The guys at school brought me Joel Skinner baseball cards, all too willing to cast off their extras to the kid with the unexplained obsession. And fearing that I was his only fan, I lugged an old sheet spray-painted with his future superstar status to games in



the Bronx, just in case the other fans were unaware. I even took the time to craft elaborate scenarios every time he got sent down to the AAA affiliate in Columbus. None, of course, mentioned his poor batting skills, rather they fingered **Rick Cerone**, who competed for the Yankees catching position that year, for trying to sabotage Joel's career. (At its extreme, I authored an episodic soap opera while working the slow shifts at the local movie theater, starring my best friend and me. In the series finale, Joel is killed by a wayward ice cream truck, later revealed to be driven by a disguised Cerone. The story was written in flashback and chronicled the development of a film—*Passion: The Real Joel Skinner Story*—intended to replace an earlier exploitative made-for-TV biopic starring **Tori Spelling** and **Jennie Garth**. It was very meta.)

Eventually Joel Skinner got traded away to the Indians, his playing time lessened, and well, I became an adult and lost track of him. The Yankees of my youth were replaced by teams with winning records and no one ever questioned the selection process that produced future favorites like **Paul O'Neill**, **David Wells**, or **Robbie Cano**. Come game time, the ragged bed sheet with crooked blue letters explaining why you should like these guys was no longer in tow, as there was no longer need to explain. With their widely revered talent and all. In a dark blue t-shirt with my guy's name and number written in white, from behind, the grown-up me had turned into any fan.

But Joel Skinner's story didn't end with my ascent into adulthood—for either of us. Years later during a visit with my brother, we reminisced about my fangirl days and wondered what had become of him. Thinking back to how we received letters from a retired **Bud Harrelson** on behalf of the local Chevy dealership while growing up, I was sure Joel would be a used car salesman by now. But he wasn't. Instead of turning to the noble ranks of vehicular barter, Joel continued on with his baseball career without even telling me. After retiring as a player, he managed for six seasons in the Indians minor league system and earned numerous accolades for his five trips to the playoffs, including Minor League Manager of the Year in 2000, when he led the AAA Buffalo Bisons to the best record in the International League. In 2001, Joel returned to the majors and coached most of eight years for the Cleveland Indians at third base, with one year on the bench. During that time, he served as Interim Manager for the second half of the 2002 season, replacing the outgoing Charlie Manuel, and compiling a 35-41 record.

And with this discovery, my fandom was reborn. Only not quite as public. The advent of Ebay saved me from having to explain my sudden interest in a retired catcher with a .228 career batting average, as I could work to complete my Joel Skinner baseball card collection from the comfort and anonymity of my home. I'd receive cards purchased for a dollar (including shipping) at my doorstep in unmarked yellow envelopes like others might receive porn. It didn't take long until I expanded my collection to include Joel's father **Bob Skinner**, who covered the Pittsburgh outfield alongside **Roberto Clemente** and **Bill Virdon**, and went on to manage the Phillies. Joel's 76 games helming the Indians would make them only the

second father/son managing duo in major league history. My favorite collectible—the Bob and Joel Skinner card from the Topps 1985 father/son collection, signed by each under their respective photos—pays homage to them both. But even more fun than the clandestine amassing of widely available and easily attained artifacts of a middling career is rooting for Joel again. Especially on the days when it means you're the only one at the ballpark pulling for the third base coach instead of the cleanup hitter. To do what in that particular game, I'm not sure. Maybe wave someone home with particular vigor and finesse.

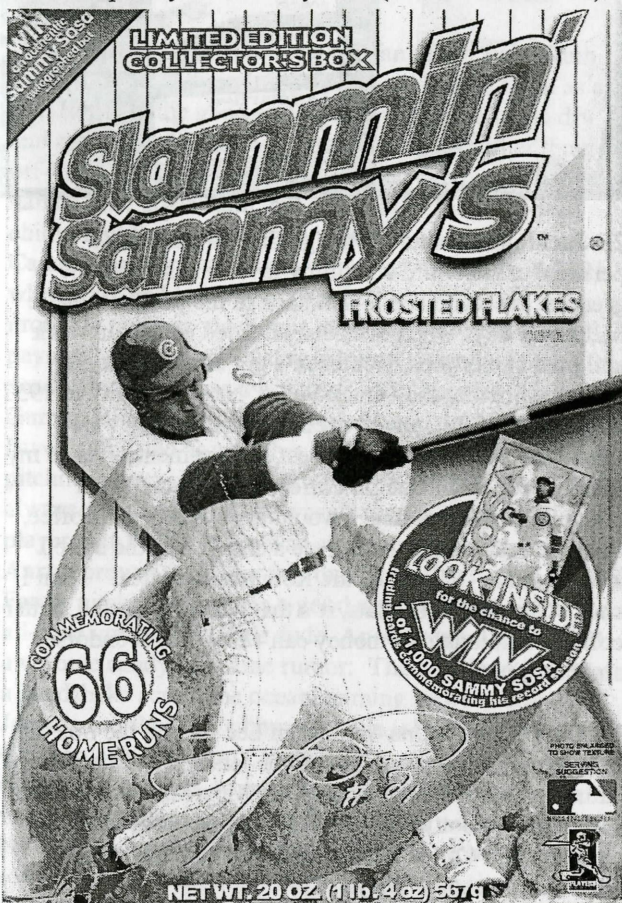
I've thought about trying to meet him, to wait for him after an Indians game or now an Oakland Athletics game, where he's currently bench coach. Having stalked future Hall of Famers (sorry about that, Jeter), I imagine that I'd barely even have to flex my skills. But what would I say? I prefer the kind of celebrity encounter where no explanation of my presence is necessary—an author at a book signing or that astronaut that posed for pictures after his lecture. With Joel I'd always felt as if I'd need to provide the details of why I passed up, say **Grady Sizemore**, for a shot to talk to the third base coach. I'd find myself justifying why I killed off his character to provide a European ending to my story but how it was okay because I had kept the baby anyway. Or explaining how I was too cheap to shell out the \$20 for his Triple A card in grad school but stuck the picture from Ebay in my album instead. Or how my favorite fake pickup line involves a sultry invitation back to my place to see my Bob and Joel Skinner baseball card collection. No, that wouldn't do. None of it. This fandom was born of my youth, of the days before the compulsion to justify every action took hold. Maybe when Joel gets his major league team to manage and ushers them to the playoffs, I'll wait for him outside the players' entrance and get him to sign that old minor league card. And perhaps post a picture of us on Facebook that will make a couple of old high school friends smile. But for now, I think I'll stick to quietly keeping tabs and anticipating my next brown paper wrapper delivery. And rooting from the sidelines. Because....because somebody 25 years ago said he was no good? Nah, not really. Just because.

Dr. Nancy Golden roots for the Yankees and the Nationals, yet we at Zisk still like her.

My Ballplayers Food All-Stars by Jake Austen

Who has time to travel the globe and scour the bodegas to experience every ballplayer-related restaurant, candy bar, encased meat product, sexual-performance supplement, etc.? Not I, but I did have enough time to put together a position-by-position All-Star team of the handful of players whose edible accomplishments I've sampled (Warning: White Sox-centric).

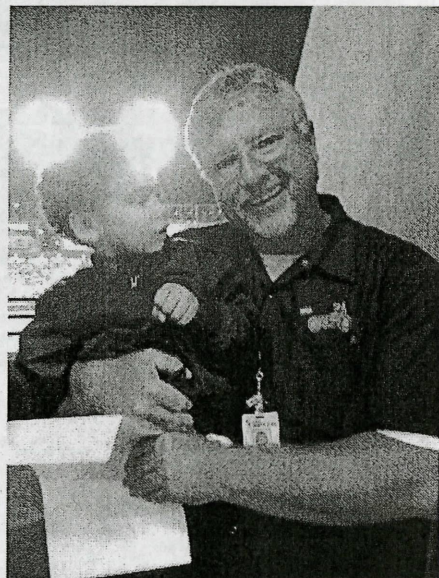
RF Sammy Sosa cereal—Though I've never been a Cubs fan I completely had Sammy Sosa (former White Sox)



fever the year he and Big Mac were having their dinger fest. After that season a New York company called Famous Fixins (which seems to no longer exist) released Slammin Sammy's, a generic-tasting Frosted Flakes-clone "commemorating 66 home runs." In addition to a photo of

Sammy hitting a super homer from inside a bowl of cereal, the box also features two contests (win an autographed bat or a limited edition baseball card), a description of the Sammy Sosa charitable foundation (that works in the "Baseball has been very, very good to me" joke he was rockin' that year), and an order form for some non-MLB sanctioned Sammy Sosa caps and t-shirts. I ate a dozen boxes of this stuff.

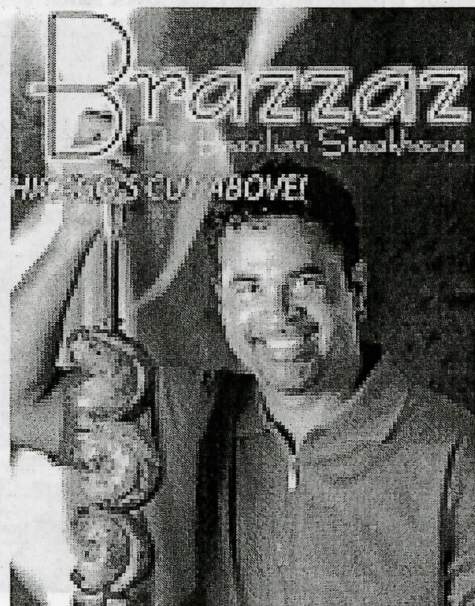
1B Ron Kittle—A few years ago the White Sox stadium gave all their concession stands historical or clever Sox-related names. You get the Winning Ugly is Sweet dessert stand, **Sherm Lollar's** Guard the Plate Grill, **Shoeless Joe's** All Star Stand, and no less than two **Nellie Fox** concessions, Nellie's Pivot Point Pizza and Fox's Frozen Zone (because Nellie loved his margaritas!). Stands are named after **Carlton Fisk**, **Luke Appling**, **Tony LaRussa**, **Jack McDowell**, **Al Lopez**, **Moose Skowron**, **Robin Ventura** and many others. Rarely does the food relate to the player, though the only current Sox honored is **Alexei Ramirez**, as the Cuban Comet stand sells Cuban sandwiches (sliced ham, shredded pork, cheese, pickles, special sauce, something else, on Cuban bread). Of course, most stands just sell hot dogs or variations thereof, so you get **Chico Carrasquel's** Dogs and Polish, **Luzinski's** Rooftop Dog's and Polish, and **Dick Allen's** Rooftop Dogs and Polish. Oddly, Dick Allen only hit one ball on the roof of old Comiskey, though he did it prior to homeplate being moved 8-feet closer in '83 (as did this mag's namesake, **Richie Zisk**, who hit his lone roofie in '77). The Bull hit four of 'em. Oddly,



the man who hit the most of anyone, seven, including the last one in 1990, has his stand called merely Kittle's Brats and Sausage. But, it is actually much closer to the roof, being on the nosebleed upper deck, near the cheap seats where I always sit, giving me full access, so no complaints. Kittle was my fave player growing up and will always be. I went with my son last year to a miserable game and saw Kitty just walking around looking confused and got an awesome picture of him holding my child. For the rest of the game as my friends lamented the shitty play of our team I just kept pulling out my phone and showing them it was actually an awesome game. An awesome game to eat a Ron Kittle bratwurst!

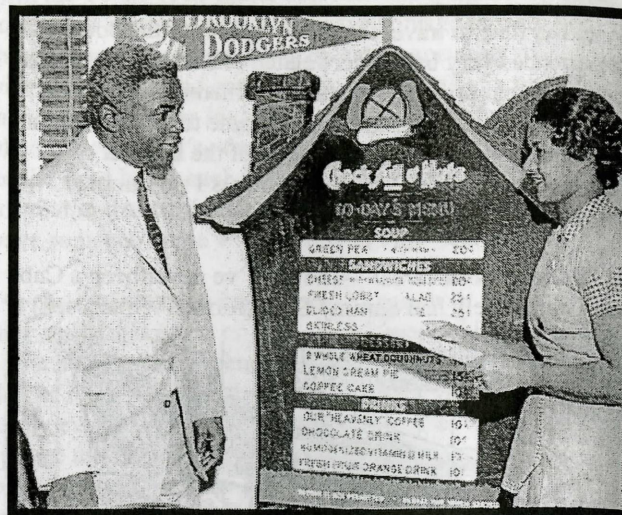
C Josh Gibson—Can't remember if it was called a Josh Gibson burger, but I definitely sat underneath a painting of the great catcher when I ate at the short-lived Negro League Café, a D.I.Y. theme restaurant in the Bronzeville section of Chicago's southside. The restaurant was OK, but not great, and the main thing I remember is not the burger, but hearing the radio in the restaurant play R. Kelly's "Trapped in the Closet," the first time I'd heard it. So today when I think of Hall of Famer Gibson I always think of Kelly crouched in a closet clutching a Baretta waiting to shoot his lover's cuckold.

SS Ozzie Guillen—A few years back Chicago got one of those Brazilian steakhouses, where costumed gauchos roll abundant wagons of meat to your table then cut it to order



with giant swords. The poster/billboard/print ad for the place was Ozzie wielding a meat-covered sword, and nothing ever got me into a restaurant faster than that ad. I brought my mom, mother-in-law, kids,

wife and my hungry self to that place on Mother's Day and ate approximately thirteen pounds of delicious meat in honor of Ozzie's uniform number.



2B Jackie Robinson—Though this isn't exactly a personal connection, one of my fave things about the great Jackie Robinson is that back in the pre-millionaire ballplayer days when even stars needed offseason work and post-career jobs, Robinson's gig after his playing days was joining the Chock Full o' Nuts company in 1957 as Director of Personnel, eventually becoming Vice President. That's one of the best endorsements ever in my mind, because if I bought coffee, and especially if I bought nut-filled coffee, I would always buy this coffee, because every single time I see a can of it in the store I always think, "That's Jackie Robinson's coffee!" Then I sing, "Chock Full o' Nuts, it's that heavenly coffee, better coffee a millionaire's money can't buy!" Best endorser and best jingle!

LF Carlos Lee—One time when Lee was on the Sox my friend was wearing his Carlos Lee jersey when he was eating at Nuevo Leon, the popular Mexican restaurant in Pilsen (next door to the Thrill Jockey Records office by the way) and Carlos Lee was eating at the next table. That's an awesome story.

3B Wade Boggs—I suppose I don't have much personal Boggs experience, besides living in New England for a few years during his reign. Boggs was famed for having to eat chicken before every game, and I seem to recall that when he was caught adulterizing it had something to do

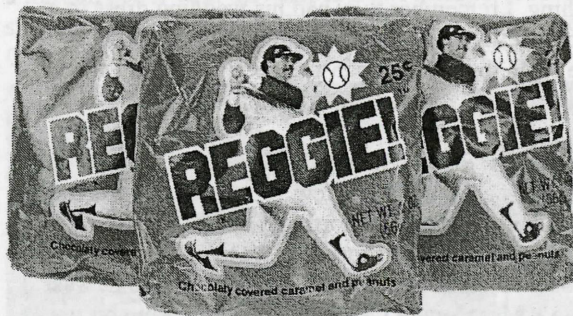
with variety—he needed women with varying chicken recipes when he was on the road. I once saw a cheap looking cookbook by Boggs for sale either at or around Fenway called *Fowl Tips—My Favorite Chicken Recipes*. Did not buy it.

CF Mickey Mantle—I wandered into Mantle's restaurant one day when, for some forgotten reason, I had to kill time around Central Park West, probably in the early 90s (Mantle was still alive, and I overheard someone say he came in occasionally). I seem to recall it was a pretty bland sports bar/family restaurant hybrid, and I either had a very unmemorable burger or decided to just bail.

P Babe Ruth—I was never a big fan of the Baby Ruth candy bar, even though I probably ate tons of them as a kid. It has all the good stuff but it just seems kinda dry and off-kilter. Like they're always stale. Another thing off-kilter about it is the claim that the candy was not named after Babe Ruth, but rather after the long-dead child of ex-President **Grover Cleveland**. The Curtiss Candy Company (of Chicago) named the candy in 1921, when Ruth had become a Yankees superstar, and they probably made up the bogus dead baby story to avoid paying the Sultan of Swat royalties. Or maybe in the 20s dead baby candy was a hot trend, who knows? Though Gummi **Lindbergh** Babies weren't popular 'til the 30s. I have Ruth listed as a pitcher here because of his amazing pitching career in Boston prior to his Yankee-dom. I've always felt that even if he wasn't the all-around ball player that **Willie Mays** was or the prolific dinger man **Aaron** proved to be, the fact that he coulda been a Hall of Famer pitcher or batter is a good argument for him as the all-time greatest baseball dude. Another great untrue but awesome candy bar name rumor: The Oh Henry bar was a handshake across the ocean, naming a sweet treat after Japan's and the U.S.'s home run kings! Of course, Chicago's Williamson Candy Company created their confection in 1920, twenty years before **Sadaharu Oh** was born and fourteen years before Henry Aaron was born. But what an unexpected surprise it would be if somehow that crazy story did turn out to be time-defyingly true. If only I could think of an American short story writer who was good at twist endings to write it?

DH Reggie Jackson—So the story goes Reggie Jackson boasted that if he played for the Yankees they'd name a candy bar after him. Apparently in addition to coming to the Bronx, to earn the candy bar he also had to spend a

year fist fighting with **Billy Martin**, get a nickname (Mr. October), and win the World Series with the best single game batting performance ever on October 18, 1977: Reggie swung the bat three times and got 13 total bases (a 4-ball walk, and three first pitch homers! The last off Hawaiian knuckleballer **Charlie Hough**). Plus he had to survive fans throwing firecrackers at him to honor his greatness. On opening day 1978 (Yanks/White Sox, by the way) they had these bars at Yankee Stadium, and as if



these were firecrackers, fans also chocolate rained these down on him. In an orange wrapper with a photo of Reggie swinging on it, these were made by Curtiss (who made Baby Ruth) and were basically round Baby Ruths, minus the nougat. But despite being kinda dry, they were a little more satisfying than BR's, because something about the shape just worked. I don't know if these were nationally distributed, maybe it was supposed to just be in New York and we got them in Chicago because they made them here, but I sure dug 'em. When Reggie left the Yanks they stopped making them rather than produce a confection with a California Angels uniform on them.

B-Ball Bonus All-Stars



F Scottie Pippen—I think the Scottie Bar was something that schools sold as a fundraiser, not an actual buy-it-in-the-store candy. Can't remember if it was good, but I assume so (it featured caramel and pecans, also known as "A Winning Combination." Not sure if Scottie was the caramel and Jordan was the nuts, or vise versa...but it

woulda make more sense if Jordan was almonds rather than pecans). The back of the candy has a quote from Scottie: "Life is a commitment of hard work and discipline. Set your goals and reach them." Sales goals no doubt. Made by Morley's Candy Makers, Villa Park, Illinois.

Dennis Rodman—Rodman briefly had a bar/restaurant and I got invited for some preview night or opening or something. I remember they had his wedding dress in a glass case and I think they had appetizer-type food, maybe sushi, but I really can't remember exactly what the food was. The place was not around long.

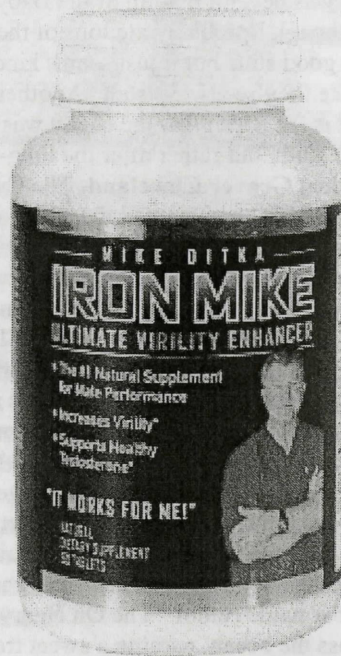
Michael Jordan—Michael Jordan's, a massive restaurant, was around for a few years. It was located near all the novelty restaurants north and west of downtown. The food, American comfort food or some such theme, kinda sucked, but I remember the big selling point was "Juanita's Macaroni & Cheese." I guess playing on the idea that Mike's wife-at-the-time by virtue of her black womanhood must have an amazing, down home, Southern, magical, secret macaroni and cheese recipe they pumped this concept up. It was just regular mac and



cheese.

LeBron James—I definitely chewed a few pieces of LeBron's Lightning Lemonade Bubblicious gum. Nobody likes LeBron anymore, and I don't know if anyone ever liked this lemonade flavored gum, but I liked way the cartoon captured his weird face. But despite not being a Cubs guy, I have to say, I'm more of a Wrigley's man than a Bubblicious boy.

C Shaquille O'Neal—You would think that someone who did the *Kazaam* movie would have a hard time finding anything in his resume more embarrassing than that genie costume, but sadly the Shaq Bar was not even a legit candy bar — it was a foul tasting "energy bar" sold by the evil Amway pyramid scheme organization to its sucker salesmen. I bought one on a convenience store (where it shouldn't have been, a clerk must have been in the cult) and it was bad, but I can't believe I didn't save the wrapper. Did I think I'd ever buy another one? Shaq also appeared on the wrappers of the Canadian Mr. Big chocolate bars. The internet reveals he also put his name to Nestle's "Shaq sized" 9.25 pound candy bars.



COACH

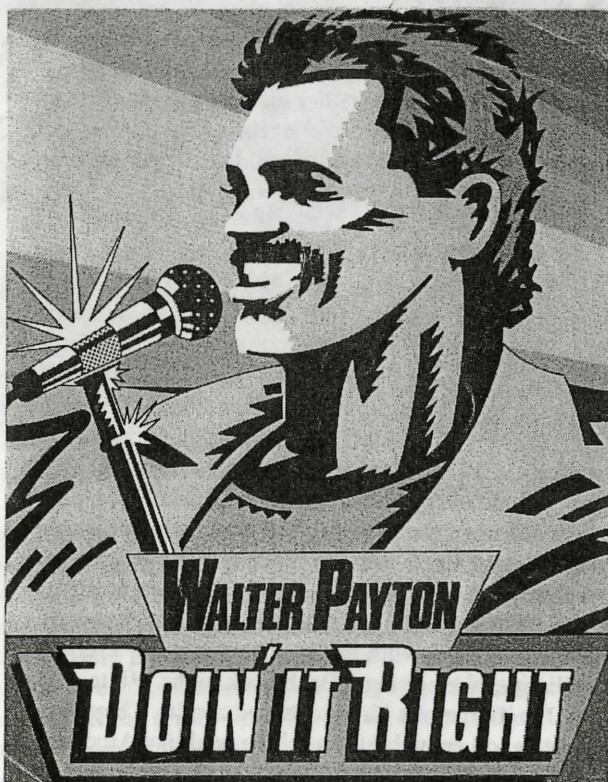
Mike Ditka—Where to start! Ditka has his own steakhouses, a line of fine wines, vitamins, a salsa featuring Da Coach in a sombrero on the bottle, a product called "Mike Ditka's Bear Cheese" and a pill called "Iron Mike Ultimate Virility Enhancer." Plus he threw his gum at a heckling fan once, which I think qualifies as his own line of one-of-a-kind, custom, designer candy.

ANNOUNCER

Harry Caray—I've never eaten at Harry Caray's restaurant, though I've walked in a few times, but I have eaten his two foot-high plate of fried, grease-soaked



potato “chips” at the Taste of Chicago outdoor food festival...and that is some seriously Chicago food! That stuff borders on Wisconsinian!



BENCH

Walter Payton (football) Though “Sweetness” would

have been a natural for a confection, he went the savory route with his endorsement, appearing in ads for Kentucky Fried Chicken where he sang a soulful jingle about how both KFC and the greatest running back in NFL history (I’d wager that even Emmitt Smith’s mom doesn’t think her son is better than Payton) are “Doin’ it Right.” This was significant because you could get a flexi disc of him singing the song at this chicken joint, which was the late Payton’s only solo record. He, of course, had a million-seller with the “Super Bowl Shuffle,” recorded a single with a Blackhawks/Bears blues band called the Chicago Six, and did a hip hop 12” with the Fridge.



Mr. T (competitive bouncing – as in bouncer at a club, not pogo sticking) Quaker’s Mr. T cereal tasted like Captain Crunch, made a guest appearance on an episode of *Pee Wee’s Playhouse*, was shaped like the letter “T” and I ate a Ton of it! I probably ate 2000% more than my daughter ate Kellogg’s Hannah Montana cereal. I almost dated Mr. T’s daughter, ask me about it sometime.

Stan Mikita (hockey) – Despite what *Wayne’s World* implies, the Blackhawk great does not own a donut shop in Aurora. To my knowledge.

Jake Austen is editor of Roctober magazine and produces the all-ages children’s dance show Chic-A-Go-Go. His latest book Flying Saucers Rock N Roll: Conversations With Unjustly Obscure Rock N Roll Eccentrics was just published by Duke University Press.

America's Team

by Johnny Tsaur

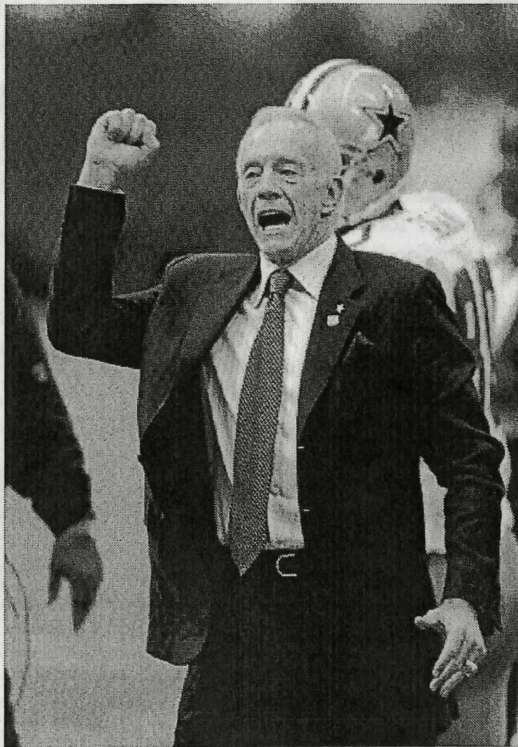
Not to digress from baseball for too long, but I recently came across an article that labeled the NFL's Dallas Cowboys as "America's Team"—and I agreed for all the wrong reasons. The Dallas Cowboys do represent a side of America, but not precisely one that we should be proud of. No disrespect to the great people of Texas, but the Cowboys are precisely a representation of what America looks like from the outside looking in. Delusional, over-the-top, can't win a big game to save their life showboats. They're the home of the world's largest TV and a 6-10 record.

It's hard to see what makes the Cowboys so deserving of the title. In fact, not living in Cowboyland, I find it hard to recollect a conversation about them that even relates to football. The conversation is never about what they do on the field, but is so focused on the grandeur of the sidelines. The Cowboys are the clichés that people see when they look at America. The focus is built on the flashy, talented, but misguided wide receiver in **Terrell Owens** of 2007, or the strained relationship with his All-American quarterback, **Tony Romo**. Tony Romo's girlfriend (whoever it is, when you read this), **Jerry Jones**, the Texas oil man, satisfying his need for bigger and better things by building the Cowboys Stadium, the largest domed arena in the world, home of the largest HD screen, a screen so large, it directly interferes with the game. They are a team of caricatures and represent a cartoon America.

For a little background, I'm a 24-year-old college student in Southern California, and have been a fan of the hometown Dodgers for the last 15 years. Going into the 2011 season, there are moderate expectations to respond to the Giants' World Series win last October. If you were to ask me who My America's team is, it's without a

doubt, the Los Angeles Dodgers.

The history of the Dodgers shows a connection to the multicultural roots of our national melting pot. They broke the color barrier with **Jackie Robinson**, but it's more than just that. Dodger blue is a place where **Sandy Koufax** can find a balance of his religion and his duty. Dodger blue is where a Mexican teenager can become

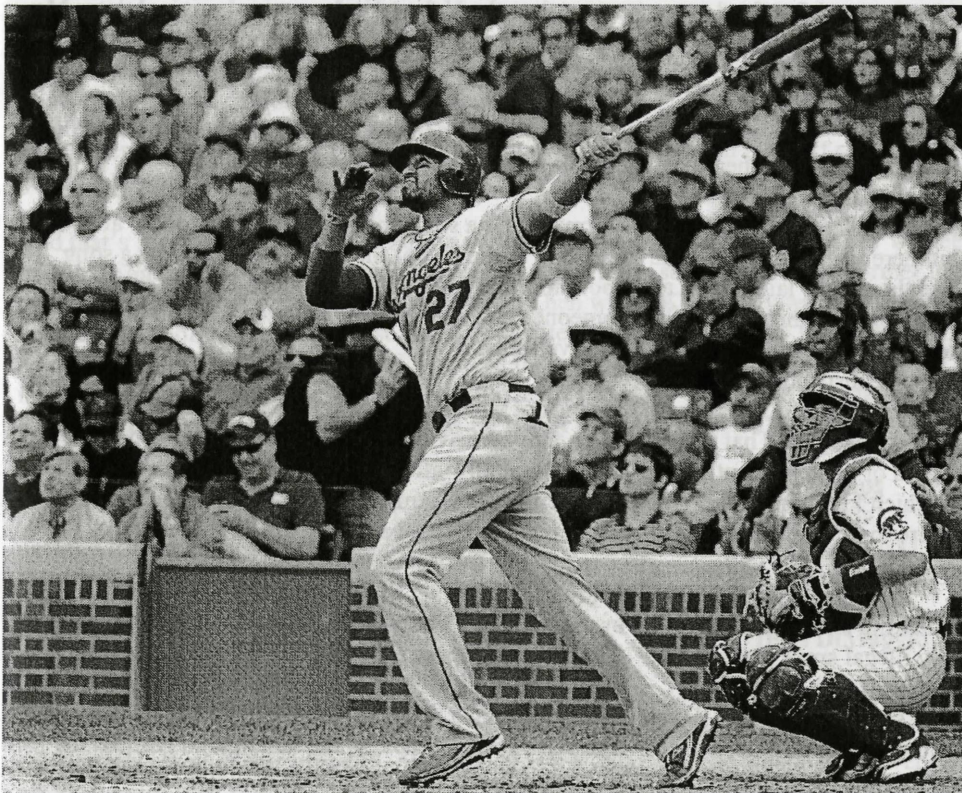


Fernandomania! Dodger blue is where **Hideo Nomo**'s rookie season bridged the gap between East and West. Dodger blue is where **Orel Hershiser**'s bulldog, blue-collar work ethic can make an everyman into a World Series MVP. Dodger blue is where, just when you think they can't, a man with two bad legs from Michigan pulls through in the bottom of the ninth. That is what America is all about; many people coming together underneath one banner, the best of the world putting their effort to build a unified place in history.

This, unfortunately, is not where the metaphor ends. Being a college student, it's hard to turn in any direction and not receive some bad news. The economy is so bad you won't be able to get a job, there are wars going on

across the globe and we're spread too thin, there is "terror" around every corner. Being born in 1987, I was one year old when the Dodgers had won their last World Series, and have lived with the mediocrity of the Dodger Blues ever since. The problem has always been too large, and much like America, the small fixes are just band-aids on an open jugular—with the most recent being a retreat to familiarity, like putting a Bush back in the White House, **Joe Torre** was hired to mixed results. They've been just "good enough" for too long, and like America, we need a new identity.

With the **McCourt's** ugly divorce being headline news in the sports section, there is an obvious lack of direction of the team. There is political strife in America, much like there is in the Dodger front office. However, with a new spring training and a new season ahead, there is hope. The hope rests on the shoulders of a new generation: **Andre Ethier, Matt Kemp, James Loney, Chad Billingsley, Jonathan Broxton, and Clayton Kershaw**. The youthful core is there to build around to win a championship. Talented, hungry, and done waiting their turn, there is hope that they are to be the heroes for those born in 2011.



Enter Andre Ethier. An NL All-Star this last season, the bi-racial heartthrob was leading the National League in home runs, RBI and batting average in 2010 before his pinky injury. Then comes Matt Kemp, the powerful 26-year-old CF. He ended the 2010 season with five home runs in five games, showing off the youthful swagger by topping off the season with the streak. First baseman James Loney returns to the lineup after a down season, however he has given the Dodger fan base plenty of chances to remember why Baseball America labeled him the best pure hitter of his draft year. Then there is the

pitching core: Chad Billingsley, an Ohio born RHP, All-Star in 2009, he appears to be the incumbent ace in the rotation. Clayton Kershaw, a Texas born LHP, a former *USA Today* high school player of the year, and a YouTube sensation for throwing one of the nastiest curveballs I've ever seen. These pitchers represent Middle America, what they lack in flamboyant personality, they make up with a combined 1,248 strikeouts in their young careers. Last but not least comes Jonathan Broxton, a 26-year-old closer for the Dodgers. A paragon of "throw the ball as hard as possible" style pitching, he broke a 103

MPH fireball against the Padres in 2009. Although coming off a bad season in 2010, Broxton is reminiscent of Eric "Game Over" Gagne, a dominating figure who was unfortunately linked to the steroids scandal of baseball. They have personality but more importantly, they have upside.

It is time to leave the **Andruw Jones'** and the **Manny Ramirez-es** behind and to build the new identity. It is time for the youth to turn promise into production, to step up and become the new legends of Chavez Ravine. When one comes to see a game at Dodger Stadium, the first thing they notice are the vintage giant posters that

cover the outsides of Dodger Stadium, immortalizing the past heroes that donned the Dodger Blue. They are sun-faded and vintage photographs, at first reminding the fans of their original personalities, but also reminders of their talent. They are images of a unique era in Dodger baseball; however, one must remember that they are only reminders. Koufax will not step out of the poster and pitch tomorrow. Much like America, it is time for the new generation of leaders to rise and make the Dodgers no longer a place where great things used to happen, but a place in which they still do.

Pale Blue Eyes

I've screwed up. I'm driving through eastern New York, halfway to Cooperstown. I'm on my way to the Baseball Hall of Fame to spend the weekend with my dad and my brothers. We're celebrating our dad's birthday.

I'm not lost. That's usually how I mess up on roadtrips, especially when I'm on a route I've never traveled before like this one. The drive is really nice. Two lane roads that gently twist and wind with very little traffic in either direction. I haven't seen a chain store and fast food restaurant all day. There's just one mom and pop place after another. Sometimes I forget we can still travel considerable distances free of Targets and TGI Fridays.

There aren't many gas stations along the way either, which is a bit unsettling but nothing compared to the yard sale I pass where some dude is selling shotguns. I know this reeks of creative license but here's what I saw: At the end of his driveway this guy had three guns laid out on a folding table. A second guy stood on the other side of the table—the one closest to the road—and looked through the scope of a shotgun, not aiming it, inspecting it. It seemed very much like a pending transaction. This is not how friends check out each other's weapons. That takes place in the garage or the backyard or the basement. Those are also the locations in which I assume home-based guns sales take place. Were there sun flares today? What did I miss?

So the relief that comes from thinking small town America is still alive is offset by illegal small arms sales. (What's a dose of **Norman Rockwell** without some *Deliverance* mixed in?) But that's not my mistake. I was right to choose backroads over the interstate.

My mistake is the playlist on my mp3 player. In the words of Neil from *The Young One* the music is making me "all heavy and uncool." I thought quiet, sparse songs would put me at ease, wash away the workweek, and put me in a place where I could fully appreciate the weekend. That plan has backfired.

The playlist starts with **Townes Van Zandt's** "If I Needed You" and **Sam Phillips' "Reflecting Light."** Then there's a bunch of **Kelly Hogan** songs, **Willie Nelson's** "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," and the song

by Mike Faloon

the closes the mix, the song that put me over the edge: Kelly Hogan and **Alejandro Escovedo's** cover of "Pale Blue Eyes." Their version is even more delicate than the original. It's an equal mix of their voices and his guitar. It feels like they've already crumbled apart and they're just waiting for the wind to carry them away.

There is one line in particular that really gets to me. I've heard it dozens of times over the years—first **R.E.M.'s** cover, then the **Velvet Underground** original, later **Mo Tucker's** version. It's passed by unnoticed for over 20 years but now it's burrowed straight to my heart. "*I've thought of you as my mountain top/I've thought of you as my peek/I've thought of you as everything I've had but couldn't keep/I've had but couldn't keep.*"

Normally it's a song about lost love but today, after listening to the rest of the playlist it's become a song about mortality. Not mine, my kids'. How could someone, someone like my kids so pure and full of beauty not live forever?

This is not what anyone wants to think about, especially when they're driving to Cooperstown to spend a weekend at the Baseball Hall of Fame with their dad and brothers. Apparently the **Norman Rockwell/Deliverance** hybrid isn't enough. I've let some *Beaches* seep in, too.

I slowly drive down Main Street and the sadness evaporates. It's gone by the time I meet up with dad and **Casey** at the entrance to the Hall of Fame. They've already been inside and have come out to meet me. My dad is wearing a "Happy Birthday" button. He's tickled. The setting, the company, the fact that he got into the Hall of Fame for free because it's his birthday (or maybe because he's a veteran—that's not clear). Dad gives me the details of their drive from Syracuse. Casey makes fun of me. I'm in the right place.

It's been 30 years since my last trip to the Hall of Fame. My mom tells me we made a day trip when I was a kid. No one else in the family remembers that trip. I do recall coming to Cooperstown for a Boy Scout trip in sixth grade. My painfully lame troopmates could barely wait to leave the HOF. They were far more interested in the Farmer's Museum down the road.¹

As I pay to enter the hall my dad strikes up a conversation with the attendant.

"I got in for free because it's my birthday," he says, "either that or it's because of this." He points to his Vietnam Veteran hat. Dad served a tour of duty in '66-'67 leading a transportation unit.

Attendant: "Do you have your 20-year service id?"

Dad: "No."

Attendant: "**Tiffany** must have been feeling nice."

So not only does the Hall of Fame allow you to reenter the place as many times as you'd like once you've paid, sometimes they let people in for free because they're in a good mood.

And that's just the start. A few strides in we see a display of **John Fogerty's** bat guitar, which apparently spent five days under flood waters before being donated. Then we enter the art room. One of the first rooms is devoted to paintings. Along with the Norman Rockwell, there's also fascinating outsider art (**Ray Materson**, **Charles Fazzino**) and a portrait of Turkey Stearns by **Kadir Nelson**.²

Next we're off to see the plaques. I'm ready to cruise past the 19th century inductees but Casey lingers. "**Harry Chadwick**. He wrote the first rulebook and invented the box score. He's the all mighty father!"

A few minutes into the tour my brother **Pat** surprises us. We weren't expecting him for a couple of hours. With the quartet now complete it's not long before we get into our first argument of the weekend. We love to argue, but we have a different way of arguing. In our family there is a general aversion to conflict, but with that there is also an intense need to voice and cling to opinions. So if you overheard us arguing you'd hear two, or more, different claims being asserted. You wouldn't hear meaningful exchanges or follow ups or critiques. You'd just hear the same opinions repeated and/or rephrased—ideas cruising along side each other on parallel tracks, shaking their fists at each other. It usually irritates me but not today. Most of the time we hold onto these silly notions until the bitter end. Our claims are seldom mutually exclusive but as

siblings it's our duty to pretend that they are and that something significant is at stake. This weekend the disagreements dissipate rather quickly. This only makes them funnier.

We open this weekend's round of squabbling with the following: why are baseball gloves bigger now? I make the technological argument: we've learned to make better gloves. Pat makes the evolutionary argument: we've grown larger. We bow out after two or three exchanges, each convinced that he's right.

Typically museums are quiet, but the four of us never stop talking. When we get separated for a bit in the broadcasters' exhibit my dad calls out to Pat, "We're over here!" To which Pat responds, "I know. I could hear you guys in the next room."

The general pattern of the weekend is that we argue now and again but mostly we geek out on baseball. After seeing a photo of former Phillie, and 1950 NL MVP, **Jim Konstanty** we start keeping track of players who wore glasses. We find nine by the end of the day:

Jim Konstanty
Darrell Porter
Andre Thorton
Ken Phelps
Ron Kittle
Greg Luzinski
Reggie Jackson
Julian Javier
Dom DiMaggio

We also see **Pete Rose** photos and references all over the place. Not having a plaque seems to have little impact. Charlie Hustle is all over the Hall of Fame.

Our second argument: the role of **Robert Moses** in the development of New York City, specifically his impact on the Brooklyn Dodgers decision to relocate to Los Angeles. Or maybe we're arguing about the demolition of the Polo Grounds. I can't say that we listen all that well and I quickly lose track of who's arguing what. I don't think we listen to each other. I listen when I'm at home. I listen when I'm at work. But when dudes gather, talk prevails.



My next note simply says “1976, **Hal McRae**.” He finished second in the batting race that year but I don’t think that’s why I wrote the note. I think it’s because he had cool facial hair on his ’76 card. The sentimental has its place at the Hall of Fame, but so does the silly.

The best exhibit is called “One for the Books.” It features artifacts from

historic games. A game ball from Jack **Chesbro**’s last start of the 1904 season, when he was going for his 42nd win. The bat from **Rennie Stennett**’s 7-hit game. The spikes **Sachio Kinugasa** wore when he tied **Lou Gehrig**’s consecutive games played streak in 1987.³ The more esoteric and removed from my firsthand knowledge of the game, the better. There is one exception, though. **Eric Bruntlett**’s jersey from a 2009 Mets/Phillies game. I was in attendance that day. I remember being relieved when I saw that Bruntlett—then hitting .128—was starting at second base in place of notorious Met killer **Chase Utley**. Of course, Bruntlett went 3-for-5. He also recorded the first game-ending unassisted triple play in National League history. Ironically, the two runners were on base as a result of Bruntlett’s miscues at second. Two ground balls were hit to him and both times he failed to get an out. He came so close to handing the game to the Mets. They were down 9-7 with two on and no outs. Then **Jeff Francouer** smashed a line drive up the middle. I was stunned by how little time it took for my hopes to rocket and then for Eric Bruntlett to record three outs.

The rest of our time in the hall is a blur. I’m too swept up in things to break out my notebook. But not our arguments. I’ll always make time for those. Topic number three: Leaf blowers.

“I’m sorry leaf blowers are not in my lexicon!”

“If you knew how many leafs we have in our yard.”

Like its predecessor this disagreement passes and we’re soon relaxing in a pub. I’m surprised by the extent to which the locals size us up as we walk in. I figured they’d be tired of checking out the tourists given how many of us pass through their town each year. But those seated at the bar make it clear that we enter only with their consent. And that’s fine, it bonds us. The place has a good selection on tap—including a variety from the local Ommegang Brewery—but they also have soccer on both of the televisions.

Casey sees a flyer for the pub’s weekly trivia competition. “We could do really well.” He points to Pat, a research scientist by profession, “Science.” He points to himself, “Movies.” This makes sense. Casey can recall dialogue from a movie he’s seen only once. He points to me and shrugs. He points to our dad. “Old shit.”

Nearing the end of our pints we approach a decision. What should we do next? This could take forever. It usually does. My family does not make decisions quickly or easily. We can take twenty minutes to part ways. We’ll say goodbye half a dozen times then renew the conversation. Our low threshold for conflict renders us less effective than **The Three Stooges** when it comes to collective decision making.

Take last summer, for example. Dad, Pat, my family and my Uncle **Steve**’s family had gathered in Gloucester, Massachusetts for the weekend. After considerably maneuvering we made it to a beach but the group was split as to whether or not we should stay. The question before us: stay or return to the beach from the day before.

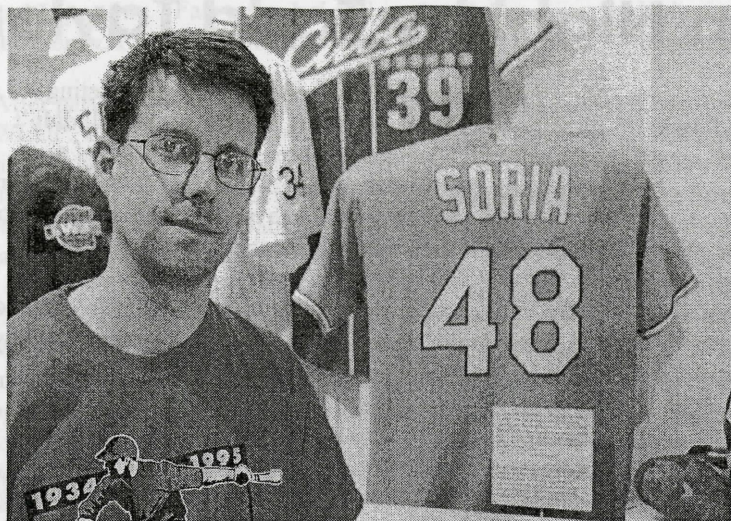
“With our half price parking voucher it’s only \$10.”

No reaction from the group.

“We only have to pay \$5 for parking because of the parking vouchers.”

“I need to be in the shade or get some sunscreen.”

“If we’re going to just do a beach for the day, why make this our beach?”



"The seaweed's not that bad and because we're protected by the cove we won't feel the wind. When we went to the other beach it was kind of breezy."

"There are stones but they're small and you won't even feel them when you get a little ways out."

That's us. That's my family, slowly reaching a decision. It's kind of like a game of football where everyone decides not to use their hands or their feet. Notions are nudged forward but no one will pick up the damn ball and run with it. But this weekend is different. We're in Cooperstown and we have a clear directive: make dad happy. It's his birthday. Let him decide what to do. He wants to check out Doubleday Field.

From beyond the stadium we can't tell whether or not there's a game. We walk up the runway and see a batter hit a pop up behind the plate. It takes a bounce and winds up in the hands of a thrilled 6-year-old. I stand behind the fence along the first base line. It's quiet and low key. There are only two people in the third base section of the grandstand. The on-deck hitter picks up a foul tip as the sun ducks behind the trees.

We don't know who's playing. The girls in front of us are rooting for players by name. We figure they'll know and they kind of do. "The Colts are from Massachusetts and the other team is the Sea Dogs, I think." It's a ballgame. Why sweat details?

When it comes to dinner there are two frontrunners. One is an Italian restaurant. The other is a pub. At first, no one steps up to advocate for one over the other. No one is surprised by this. We defer to dad who senses that the votes are split. Pat makes his move. As we look at the pub's menu he points to the photo and reminds us that we would not be eating in the upstairs dining room that is visible through the plate glass window, classy but closed. We would be eating downstairs, in the pub show in the photo. Whoever took the photo used far too much flash. The most brightly lit object is the back of a faux leather high back chair. I have to admit that the picture does suggest Wonder bread and those cheap plastic menus that stick to your arms. Italian it is.

And it's the right call. There's no wait for a table and when our drinks come Dad raises his glass for a toast. "I'm going to make this quick." He almost tears up. "You're the best sons a dad could ask for." After what happened this morning I think I understand the look in his eyes a little better.

Back at the motel I put on the playlist. The rest of the songs are pretty and soothing but I skip the Kelly Hogan and Alejandro Escovedo duet just in case.

Mike Faloon is the co-editor of Zisk. His first book, The Hanging Gardens of Split Rock, is available through Gorsky Press. He's currently working on a one-shot music zine called Learning to Surf.

¹ A bunch of 11 and 12-year-old kids from the suburbs choosing agriculture over sports—like the roadside gun sale this too sounds like I'm making it up. But it's been my steady recollection ever since sixth grade.

² Next time you're in a bookstore—you still go to bookstores, right?—check out Kadir Nelson's *We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball*. It's in the kids' section and the artwork is beautiful.

³ Which I never knew about before seeing this exhibit. Kinugasa eventually ran up a streak of 2215 games from 1970-1987. How did I miss this during the Ripken mania of 1995?

Disco Demolition Night by Todd Taylor

CIVIL RIGHTS... AND EXPLOSIONS

Bill Veeck, Jr. was owner of the Chicago White Sox in 1979. Veeck had been a journeyman baseball club owner and a staunch supporter of civil rights.

In 1947, Veeck hired the American League's first black player, **Larry Doby**. A year later, he signed forty-two-year-old Negro League pitching legend **Satchel Paige** to a contract, making Paige the oldest rookie ever to play professional baseball. Although Veeck had an artificial leg, he participated in a day-long civil rights march in Selma, Alabama in March 1965, without the use of crutches. Fellow baseball club owners often derisively likened Veeck to circus huckster PT Barnum: a sucker for a good promotion.

Veeck's accomplishments forever changed the face and tenor of baseball. He was the first owner to introduce fireworks displays after games. At Comiskey Park, he developed and deployed the "Monster," which was an enormous, garish, Willy-Wonka-inspired scoreboard. It came with sirens, sound effects, flashing lights, and multicolored pinwheels. It also shot fireworks whenever the White Sox hit a home run. As a fan of the fans, another Veeck innovation was the picnic area in the ballpark. He created this by replacing portions of the left field walls with wire screens and setting up picnic tables under the seating areas.¹

On May 2, the Detroit Tigers vs. Chicago White Sox game at Comiskey was rained out. American League rules called for the game to be made up at the teams' next meeting in Chicago.

The 1979 Chicago White Sox were "second-rate," to put it nicely. More bluntly, they sucked pretty hard. At 40-46, they were twenty-two games out before the All-Star break. Average attendance was slightly more than 10,000 fans.

On July 12, the White Sox were scheduled for a twilight doubleheader against the equally struggling Detroit Tigers to make up for the previously rained-out game. The preceding night's game had drawn only 15,520 fans.

Veeck put his son **Mike**—and White Sox marketing director—in charge of getting asses in seats. Bill didn't balk or blush when his son brought up the idea of a promotion, an event hyperbolically billed to "bring an end to the disco era." Bill lived in hyperbole when it came to promotion. It didn't sound like that big of deal.

Mike Veeck had been listening to a twenty-four-year-old DJ, **Steve Dahl**, on the radio. Dahl was planning to blow up disco records in a shopping mall.

"I called him at 10:05 AM, as soon as he got off the air," Mike said, "and offered him the chance to do that at Comiskey Park. He was going to do it in front of three thousand kids. It didn't take long to convince him he could do it in front of forty thousand kids." The planned promotion was a joint effort between the White Sox and Chicago radio station WLUP-FM, The Loop, and also involved station Promotion Director **Dave Logan** and Sales Manager **Jeff Schwartz**.

The promotion promised the presence of Steve Dahl and the official "Rock Girl" of the station, Lorelei², who was featured in all of the radio station's advertisements. Disco had become a personal battle for Dahl, not just an abstract potshot or a woefully easy musical target. Previously, Dahl gained popularity in Chicago at FM rock station WDAI. In 1978, WDAI abandoned its AOR rock format. It embraced disco and changed its name to "Disco DAI." This prompted an abrupt and unexpected end to Dahl's show and employment at the station. He and the station parted ways on Christmas Eve in 1978. Happy holidays, Steve.

Disco's ubiquity couldn't be denied. *Saturday Night Fever*, the **Bee Gees**, and **Donna Summer** swarmed the airwaves. Kermit the Frog sang "Disco Frog" on Sesame Street in 1979. That same year, a band called **Chic**³ entered 1979 riding the very top of disco's rollercoaster. Their debut single, "Le Freak," sold a million copies within a month. It hit number one in America, where it remained for six weeks. According to *Billboard*, it was the third most popular song of 1979. (One of Chic's founders, **Nile Rogers** denies that Chic was disco. Rogers stated that, "People couldn't tell the difference between us

and **Lipps Inc.**” Fair enough. I still can’t tell the difference. I’m no discomusicologist.)

After parting ways with WDAI, Dahl landed on his feet at WLUP. The Loop’s format had recently changed from light to hard rock. Dahl’s fans followed him and echoed his pro-rock, anti-disco sentiments. Dahl smashed disco records over his head. Dahl mugged for the cameras taking bites out of disco records.

Dahl also cited philosophical, dermatological, and classic Marxist reasons for his disdain for this particular genre of music: “Disco is a disease. It’s a thing you have to be near-perfect to get into. You have to have perfect hair and a three-piece suit, and musically it’s just the same song with different words... I’m allergic to gold jewelry, hate the taste of piña coladas, and I’m a cheapskate.”

Dahl had formed an on-air anti-disco, card-carrying army called the “Insane Coho Lips.” The strange name was an amalgamation of The Insane Unknowns⁴, a well-known South Side street gang, and the Coho salmon fishing fleet in Burnham Harbor that Dahl passed every morning on his way to work. The Cohos lofted Dahl’s “disco sucks” banner and zealously attacked a form of music they considered exclusive, expensive, and empty. They got their class war on by attacking the soundtrack to the

hedonism of the elite. They also just liked having fun and laughing along with Dahl.

Disco-makers viewed Dahl and his listener-army differently. “It was the rockers versus the discoers,” said **Harry Wayne Casey**, frontman of Florida band **KC And The Sunshine Band**⁵. “We were like Elvis in the fifties and the Beatles in the sixties. Of course there was a backlash. We changed music... I had two hits on the charts, ‘Please Don’t Go’ and ‘Yes I’m Ready.’... I just figured the guy [Dahl] was an idiot.”

The meeting between the White Sox and The Loops’ management went well. A name for the promotion was agreed upon: Disco Demolition Night. It was a simple promotion distilled to a short sentence: Let’s blow up some disco records.

AN OUNCE OF PRECAUTION?

The plan called for admission at the double header to be 98 cents for any fan who brought a disco record. The ticket price matched The Loop’s frequency. FM 98. The hope was that 20,000 disco records would be collected by the ticket takers, placed in a big box in the outfield, and the box would be detonated between the two games by Dahl, signifying the hopeful and abrupt end to the disco era.

Disco Demolition Night overlapped the ballpark’s Teen Night. The consensus was they needed more than Cub Scout and Boy Scout troops to fill the stands. It was predicted and hoped of the promotion would draw 25,000—10,000 of which would be new patrons to the old ballpark. Sox Park had a seating capacity of 52,000.

“I was really just trying to get through the evening without being humiliated,” Dahl said. “I mean, how many people could you draw? A few thousand? The park would still look empty.”

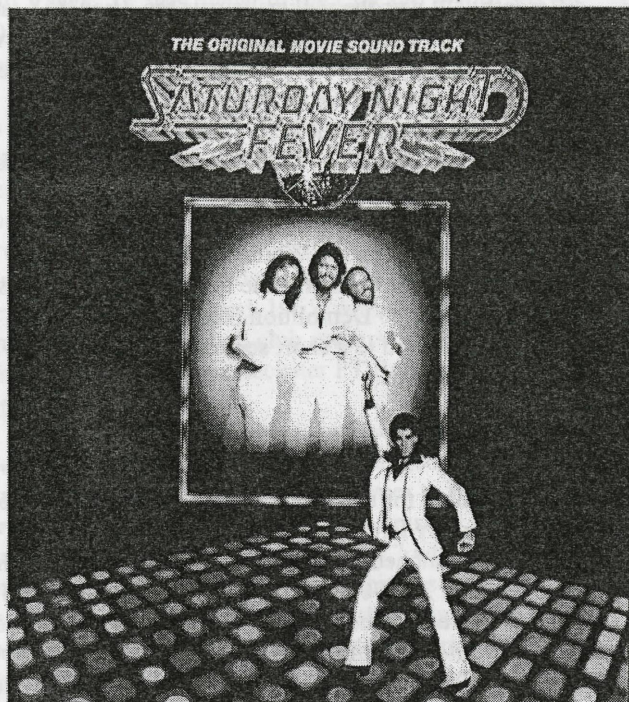
“Rock Girl” Lorelei threw out the first ball.

Once the gates opened at the beginning of the first game, it quickly became apparent that Disco Demolition Night would exceed all attendance expectations.

“I remember forking over a **Bee Gees** disc for 98 cents



and, as I recall, they actually gave back two cents in change when turning in the voucher with your dollar at the ticket box,” said fan **Glenn McCullom**.



“We brought the *Saturday Night Fever* Soundtrack, a double record, which was good for two of us to get in,” said **K.M. Lisowski**, another fan.

Attendees also brought along and strung up homemade banners, primarily made from bed sheets. On TV, the “Disco Sucks” battle cry could be clearly read from throughout the ball park. Not televised were the “What do **Linda Lovelace** and disco have in common?” banner and the more political, fuck-you-Australia “Welcome Home Skylab” banner⁶.

Fans made giant paper airplanes with the Lorelei posters and threw them onto the field. Other fans came ready for a battle against disco with bottle rockets and long cardboard tubes. The empty center of wrapping paper rolls served nicely as suburban bazookas. For reasons still unexplained, the second base umpire was particularly targeted for bottle rocket attacks.

Beer vendor sales were brisk. **Brian Pegg** reported that,

“On Disco Demolition night, I sold forty-nine cases of beer. Ordinarily, twenty cases were considered an outstanding total for a single night game. Thirty to thirty-five would be pretty good for a double header.” Math showed that’s just shy of two-and-a-half times the usual volume of beer sales at a typical game. Raging against disco proved a thirsty business.

After 20,000 disco records were collected for demolition, ticket takers let fans keep their records—proof of how unprepared they were by the boosted attendance. “So that was a bad start,” Dahl admitted. “And then things just kind of got worse from there.”

In short order, fans glided records like Frisbees all through the park. The game was stopped constantly as disco records were thrown out on the field. Vinyl’s sharp. It shatters, leaves ragged edges.

“They would slice around you and stick in the ground,” **Rusty Staub**, player representative for the Detroit Tigers said. “It wasn’t just one, it was many. Oh, god almighty, I’ve never seen anything so dangerous in my life. I begged the guys to put on their batting helmets.” Defensive players. Guys in the outfield. Not just guys batting. **Ron LeFlore**, a former convict and center fielder for Detroit, was visibly afraid. In the later innings of the first game, fans remember the Tigers running back to the dugout, then removing their helmets.

The Tigers were not the sole targets of the record fling-a-thon. Chicago pitcher **Ed Farmer** picked up a record that had sailed by closely to his face. He was confused. It was a **Beach Boys** record. It wasn’t even disco.

Other fans suffered from the flight of records.

“Later that night,” Sox fan K.M. Lisowski said, “my friend’s husband got hit in the head with a ‘Frisbeed’ record, and I remember getting cut with the edge of a broken 45 that had been flung our way.”

David Schaffer, director of operations for the Sox, said that security had been beefed up from thirty to forty-five men in anticipation of a large crowd.

Another miscalculation: This wasn’t the typical baseball crowd. It was a rock concert-type crowd.

The White Sox lost to the Tigers 4-1 in the first game.

A SUCCESSFUL DISASTER

The umpires ordered the grounds crew to clear debris from the warning track between innings of the first game.

By the end of the first game, the ballpark was filled well beyond its maximum capacity. On the books, paid fan attendance for the evening was 47,795. Over 12,000 extra fans crammed in.

The majority snuck in though the Sox's porous security. The official tally didn't include the fans who brought ladders, formed human ladders, or shimmied up drain pipes into the park.

It was at this time that Mike Veeck, along with The Loop and the Sox organization, realized they had woefully underestimated the draw of disco's

suckage. "It turned out there were 60,000 inside the park and another 30,000 to 40,000 on the streets around the park," Veeck said "Traffic was backed up all the way out to O'Hare Airport. Who had any idea that many kids would come out? WLUP was a 5,000-watt station, it wasn't a giant."

The Chicago police department closed exits on the Dan Ryan Expressway at 31st and 35th streets to discourage late-arriving fans. Traffic gridlock stretched for miles around Chicago's South Side.

Dahl was dressed like a character in M*A*S*H. He wore an Army jacket bedazzled with fishing lures over a Hawaiian shirt. An Army helmet was strapped loosely to his head. He was ushered to the outfield in a Jeep with his second-in-command **Garry Meier**, Lorelei, and body

guards. Dahl admits he hadn't prepared a speech.

"Steve started to get the crowd excited as only Steve could do, chanting "disco sucks" over and over," Lorelei said. "I think that mantra was probably the kicker—the swarming sound was getting louder and louder. It was deafening." The crowd was going bananas in their seats.

The big box filled with the fans' 20,000 disco records had been brought out to center field. A short burst of

fireworks were touched off in a row in front of the box. That lead up to an impressive percussive charge, which detonated a fireworks "bomb." Vinyl disco records were blown to bits. Some continued to burn after they landed in fragments on the field.

"That blew up real good!" Dahl exclaimed.



NOW WOULD BE A GREAT TIME FOR A PLAN... RUN!

Dahl didn't really have a plan after the explosion, except to get off the field, maybe go home, maybe watch the second game. There was no advisement from anyone with a microphone to the fans to stay in their seats, to remain calm. Folks were riled up.

Here's a recap: big explosion; adrenaline-high levels of "disco sucks!" excitement in the air; a large, mostly empty, beautifully-lit, largely-untouchable field beckoning fans; crazy-low security; and a silence so pregnant that its water was about to break.

This is when the trouble began.

What started at 8:40 PM was a confluence of several key factors.

Outside the park, some of the temporary ticket booths—staffed with older people—were being rocked by disgruntled fans who couldn't get inside the park. Some of the yellow-jacketed security guards were moved off the field to take care of that issue.

"What happened next was the worst thing that could possibly happen," said Mike Veeck. "The crowd began thinking as one and they realized there were only thirty-five to forty police [security] on the field. When a crowd begins thinking as one, there is no such thing as 'crowd control.'"

Conservatively, on the field, it was one security guard per 1,333 fans. Not good odds for reestablishing order.

"It was like popcorn. Boom! Everyone jumped on the field." One fan stated. The fans' feeling of rushing the field was, "sort of like the pennant celebration we would never get."

The players who had returned to the field for pre-game warm-ups for the second game quickly retreated.

"Before I knew it, I had a bodyguard on either side of me," Lorelei remembered, "Each grabbed one of my upper arms and literally lifted me off the ground, running with me towards the Jeep, throwing me in the back. Steve jumped in the Jeep and we started rolling. I looked behind me and understood why I was whisked off—crowds of people were streaming onto the field."

The Jeep drove out of the stadium and onto the street. It looped around and its occupants snuck back inside as 10,000 people ran onto the field.

Among the revelers was actor **Michael Clarke Duncan** (the big dude in *The Green Mile*), a Chicago South Side native. He was among the first fans to run onto the field and slide into third base. Other fans took the roles of umpires, calling both "safe!" and "out!" Fans took bases. (An usher salvaged first base.) Fans dug out home plate. The pitching rubber was stolen from the infield. Duncan admitted to stealing a bat from the dugout.

Bill Veeck's "Monster" flashed, "Please Return to Your Seats."

Harry Caray stared down in disbelief at the field from his broadcast booth as the batting cage was wheeled out to the outfield then trounced, disassembled, and set on fire along with the remains of the disco records and the big box. A shirtless fan climbed to the top of one of the foul poles. Another fire burned in centerfield. The head groundskeeper shook his head in disbelief as the benches from the special picnic area were dragged out into the middle of the field and set ablaze. Revelers jumped through that fire.

Harry Caray tried to restore order by yelling "Holy cow!" over the public address system. He then asked the crowd, "What say we all regain our seats so we can play baseball again?" When none of the excitable fans took their seats, a tremor of horror resonated in Harry Caray's voice. "People, people, please get off the field!" **Jimmy Piersall**, Caray's broadcasting partner, was openly disgusted and repeated over and over that, "These are not baseball fans here. These kids are obviously on something more than beer."

Unruly? Absolutely.

Chicago Sun-Times columnist **Bill Gleason** called the event "an unmitigated horror... They were vulgarians who came to Comiskey Park to be ruffians." But people weren't physically violent to one another. This was no replay of the 1968 Democratic National Convention bloodbath eleven years prior in the same city. Fans were really worked up; they got all hyper. Much of the crowd, once on the field, simply milled around aimlessly. Some sat in the infield.

Fans from the upper decks couldn't get down to the field. More than half of the fans on the lower deck didn't go on the field and began chanting, "Na na na na, na na na na, hey assholes, sit down."

Bill Veeck looked at a quickly dissipating silver lining. "The great thing was all the kids were stoned," he said. "Had we had drunks to deal with, then we would have had some trouble. The kids were really docile."

At 9:08 PM the Chicago police department's tactical force

entered Sox Park and efficiently took care of business clearing the field. Within five minutes, they had the situation under control. The cops had no trouble dispersing the crowd. The police and players showed an incredible amount of restraint in their dealings with the unruly revelers. This was not a true riot. True riots offer resistance to law enforcement and provide cops ample opportunity to work on their batting averages. This event was a gang load of partiers not given enough supervision. It was a bunch of nutty kids.

After the police sweep, Bill Veeck returned to the playing field and grabbed a microphone. "Please keep your rain checks," he told the crowd. "We'll tell you what to do with them once we figure it out ourselves." Behind the scenes, Veeck was busy rescheduling the game as part of a Sunday doubleheader against the Tigers.

Surveying a field strewn with bottles, exploded cherry bombs, smoldering patches in the midfield, and broken disco records, The Tigers countered that the Sox forfeit on the grounds that the delay was not a result of "an act of God." Tigers manager **Sparky Anderson** was vehement that his players would not take the field in any case due to safety concerns.

Umpire crew chief **Dave Phillips** agreed with Sparky and stated, "The field is not in playable condition." Home plate had been uprooted from the ground and hadn't been measured. The grounds crew was showing no effort to put it properly back in.

The White Sox were ordered by American League president **Lee MacPhail** to forfeit the second game of the two-night doubleheader. It was only the fourth forfeit in American League history⁷.

At the end of the evening, six people reported mild injuries. One vendor broke a hip. Thirty-nine people were arrested for disorderly conduct.

The Sox lost both games.

GET YOUR BIG FOAM POINTY FINGER OUT

The local Chicago press wasn't kind to Dahl, the Veecks, or Disco Demolition Night. Predictably, the media asked, "What went wrong? How did this disturbance by youthful

crowds happen?"

Channel 7's **Rosemarie Gulley**'s insight was as good as any for this cocktail of hyperactivity: "The explosion, the heat, and a lot of drugs."

Other talking head snippets called the promotion "a gimmick that's gone too far," and "They created a climate... (word not omitted, just a pause) "an error in planning." (End of statement, back to footage.)

Deputy Chief **Charles Pepp** invented one word and one new meaning in his short explanation of the promotion. "It was a good *methology* to get a crowd, but it overworked." (*Italics mine.*) Bill Veeck echoed the chief's sentiment. "Sometimes a promotion can work too well."

Later, a report caught up with Dahl and his thoughts on the Demolition.

Reporter: "You don't feel culpable?"

Dahl: "I'm not a security guard."

Reporter: "Would you do it again?"

Dahl: "Yes... with more security guards."

Later, Dahl—in a less pragmatic mood—expressed some regret. "I've always felt bad. I'm a baseball fan. I've always felt bad that the second game was canceled."

Two days later, Sox Park hosted a large concert called The Loop's "Day in the Park," featuring Eddie Money, Molly Hatchet, Thin Lizzy, Santana, and Journey, further ripping up the outfield for the rest of the season.

IT'LL BE SO FAMOUS, IT'LL BE INFAMOUS

Predictably, Disco Demolition Night⁸ was criticized throughout the disco community.

Unpredictably, Sox promoter Mike Veeck was blacklisted from Major League Baseball. "After that, I didn't work for ten years," Veeck said. "The second that first guy shimmied down the outfield wall, I knew my life was over... It backfired, and I took the heat. And it cost me

personally. I went down the sewer. I didn't work in baseball until 1989."

Twenty-two years after Disco Demolition Night—in Miami, Florida on Thursday, July 13, 2001—Mike Veeck, then a marketing consultant for the Florida Marlins, asked Harry Wayne Casey of KC And The Sunshine Band, to accept his apology on behalf of the entire disco world. Casey accepted. "I feel redeemed," Casey said. "It gives closure to the whole thing... It wasn't a very nice thing to do. There was no reason or call for it. It was a direct hit on myself and other artists who did that for a living. I didn't bash his baseball team."

So, did Dahl kill disco? Maybe yes. Maybe no. Maybe both. Most likely not. Well, no.

"You know, I think that it was a fad," Dahl said. "And it was probably on its way out. But I think it hastened its demise. I don't want to take credit for killing it." Later, however, the Bee Gees personally told Dahl that he did, in fact, destroy disco.

It feels good to blame someone else and to know the exact moment things started heading downhill for good. It's much easier than looking inside.

The disco juggernaut was still able to prance around in sparkly platforms and satin bodysuits behind bubble machines and into the national consciousness post-Disco Demolition Night. On Wednesday, October 17, 1979, The Pittsburgh Pirates won the World Series in the best of seven games against the Baltimore Orioles. The Pirates proudly blasted **Sister Sledge's** hit disco anthem "We Are Family" as their adopted theme song throughout the final game of the 1979 season.

*Todd Taylor is co-editor and co-publisher of Razorcake fanzine. When he was eight years old, sitting on a Pic 'n' Save floor, looking up at the blasting speaker overhead, he wanted to become a millionaire and then spend every last cent of it making it illegal to play whatever was playing over the loudspeaker. (It just happened to be disco.) Separately, he also vowed to never again wear bell bottoms, starting the day when he could buy his own big boy pants. He also thanks **Mary Clare Stevens** and **Kari Hamanaka** for their assistance with this piece.*

FOOTNOTES:

1 Bill Veeck, in 1960, added player's surnames on the back of their uniforms. Veeck also installed a shower behind the speaker horns in the center field bleachers for fans to cool off on hot summer days.

2 Lorelei Shark: "I even did a spot with **Pete Rose** and another with a baby orangutan."
"Yes, I am those famous biting lips in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* poster."

3 Chic's Nile Rogers had been an active Black Panther at the age of sixteen. **Duran Duran's** bassist **John Taylor** had envisioned the band he was in as a combination of Chic and the Sex Pistols.

4 The Insane Unknowns itself was an amalgamation. Two gangs, the Division Skulls and the Unknown Souls, merged in 1967 and called themselves the Insane Unknowns.

5 K.C and the Sunshine Band took their name from lead vocalist Harry Wayne Casey's last name ("KC") and the "Sunshine Band" from KC's home state of Florida, "The Sunshine State." KC originally called the band **KC & The Sunshine Junkanoo Band**.

6 Skylab was engineered to fail within five years. The day before, on July 11th, 1979, NASA's version of duct taping a pair of Chucks to get every last step out of them—called Skylab—broke up in the atmosphere and scattered its remains across the Australian outback.

7 Other forfeits in baseball history: June 4, 1974's ten-cent beer night fiasco and forfeiture in Cleveland preceded this event. On August 10, 1995 30,000 Dodger fans throwing baseballs onto the field followed this event.

8 Steve Dahl has copyrighted the term "Disco Demolition."

Book Reviews by Mark Hughson & Steve Mandich

Mark Hughson Reviews *Where Have You Gone, Vince Dimaggio?* By Edward Kiersch

went to an estate sale last summer. My wife and I own a house now so I feel like going to one of these is some kind of "circle of life" thing. Amongst the usual furniture, tools, and clutter was a huge bin of sports books, many of which I've already read (and reviewed for *Zisk*). I had to get one. There's just something about a paperback baseball book from the 80s that brings a warm feeling to my innards. *Where Have You Gone, Vince Dimaggio?* by **Edward Kiersch** was my selection, and it proved to be much more of an adventure than I anticipated. Over 300 pages, and in some sense only about half of it is about baseball. The book's tagline summarizes the content well enough: "From baseball's biggest sluggers to its all-time bobbles—Where did they go when the cheering stopped?" Seemed like a good premise, and as I poured through all 55 (short) chapters, stories ranging from exciting to mundane, joyful to terrifying, and funny to sad hit me like a ton of bean balls.

The "past and present" element was the main focus of each story (kudos to the author, wherever he may be, for the research and dedication to this project), but throughout the book two other themes struck me. Ball players circa 1950s-1970s, especially the benchwarmers, weren't paid the ridiculous salaries of today. Nowadays a guy can bat .230 in the majors for a few seasons and practically be set for life. Back then you'd bust your ass just as much and earn about 15 to 30 grand a year. This of course leads to an interesting little game of "Where are They Now?" (see next page). The other running theme is that baseball, especially for the super stars, does number on your noggin.

Ernie Banks, Mr. Cub himself, was a star player and then an organization man over the span of 25 years. "I had to be a psychologist. I didn't know how to deal with my environment, the real world. It's fabulous being a baseball star. But too many people direct your life. You're always doing what you're told. This hurts you. Functioning later on is so difficult. I got tired of people recognizing my face, my voice, my walk. I just wanted to be alone to find some answers."

Gene Conley, one of the early two-sport athletes (91-96 lifetime with Boston Braves, Milwaukee, and the Phillies, as well as a player on the Boston Celtics in the late 50s, averaging 10 PPG), adds another sad element to the mental struggles after hanging up your cleats: The longing for your hey-day. "I only know that I'm still adjusting to being out of sports. When my playing days were over I couldn't go to a ball game. I still can't. Maybe inside there's a feeling that I can do it better than the guys out there. I don't know what the pain is. I just miss those games. Now I'm on the other side of the fence, they've locked me out, and it's cold." Cold, indeed.

Some athletes took it better than others. **Mickey Lolich** (217 Wins, 2,832 Ks, three spectacular wins in the '68 World Series) went on to run a bakery. "You just have to accept that you're living another life, that you're an average workingman. I still have my home, I can maintain it, sure. I just can't blow \$100 a night on dinner, or buy a new car every year. If you're a ballplayer, you never think about these things. You just go out and buy what you want. Now that's impossible for me."

The list of accounts goes on and on—I've got every other page marked with interesting quotes of regrets, dreams, and humbled nostalgia. The stories themselves are entertaining, as some of the players had some exciting (albeit brief) careers despite not putting up great stats. Remember this was over five decades ago, when a B-list ballplayer could disappear for two days on a bender and it wasn't the biggest scandal of the weekend. There's also some odd photography included. Some typical posed "baseball card" shots, some action shots, and then there's a picture of **Gene Woodling** (hit .318 and scored 21 runs in five World Series with the Yankees in the early 50s) vacuuming his living room. Huh? Overall the book succeeds at the double-duty. It reviews the careers of some superstars (**Roger Maris**, **Harmon Killebrew**, and **Boog Powell** all have chapters) as well as some forgotten oddballs, and it also gives the reader a glimpse into the psychology of post-baseball life. If you comes across this one in a garage sale by all means snag it. If I had a stamp that said "charming and weird" I'd be pressing it on the cover as we speak.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (Well, not *now* now, but now then)

THEN

THEN WHAT?

Orlando Cepeda
ROTY in '57, MVP in '67
Lifetime .297 w/ 367 HRs

Busted with 160 lbs
of pot in his trunk.
Ran a baseball clinic.

Ron Bryant
20 game winner and Cy Young
contender in 1973

Card dealer in a Cali
casino.

Warren Spahn
HOF pitcher with 363 Ws

Ran his own 3,000
acre cattle ranch.

Jim "Mudcat" Grant
1st black AL pitcher to win
20 games. 6 shutouts in '65

Singer in the
R&B group Plum
City Band

Elroy Face
3 saves in the '60 WS, did not
allow a hit from Mantle, Maris,
or Berra

Maintenance
at an asylum for
criminally insane in
Pittsburgh

Karl Spooner
Struck out 27 batters in his
first two major league games
2-0, 0.00 ERA IN '54

Middle management
at a citrus corporation

Mark Hughson lives in Syracuse, NY and roots for the Oakland A's. His prediction/curse (the Yankees will never win a WS while Jason Giambi wears pinstripes) from Zisk # 16 was validated in 2009, as the Yanks won the title after cutting Giambi the previous season. Not that he holds a grudge or anything. If you want to read about very current music instead of very old baseball paperbacks, visit www.beattheindiedrum.com.

Steve Mandich reviews *The Underground Baseball Encyclopedia* by Robert Schnakenberg

Baseball constantly rewards us with historic, unforgettable moments— new milestones, no-hitters, World Series victories and so forth. But for every **Lou Gehrig** farewell speech, there's a Disco Demolition Night, as baseball also delivers an ever-increasing amount of arcane, oddball lore. There are enough drunken antics, wild '70s hair hairstyles, and **George Brett** hemorrhoids to fill an encyclopedia. Now, thanks to Brooklyn-based author **Robert Schnakenberg**, they finally do.

The Underground Baseball Encyclopedia (Triumph Books, 2010) is a tidy, cross-referenced compendium of the game's underbelly: the sordid and the silly, the scandalous and the stupid. Other than tasteful coverage of a few truly ugly episodes, Schnakenberg usually goes for the laughs. And why not?

Here's an A-to-Z sampler: Astroturf, *The Bad News Bears*, Cocaine Seven, Double Knit Uniforms, Eephus Pitch, Fuck Face Card, Greenies, House of David, The Isotopes, Juiced, **Harry Kalas**, Lake Erie Midge, **Morganna**, "No Pepper," **Saduharu Oh**, **Joe Pepitone**, **Dan Quisenberry**, Road Beef, Schottzie, Tomahawk Chop, **Bob Uecker**, **Bill Veeck**, Winfield Seagull Incident, Xenophobia ("See **Rocker, John**"), Youppi, and **Don Zimmer**.

Baseball is a game full of eccentrics, and the *UBE* has loads of 'em—players (**Dock Ellis**), fans (**Steve Bartman**), broadcasters (**Harry Caray**), and various other characters (wacky ballpark vendors, secret mistresses, "disgraceful" National Anthem singers). There's Chief Wahoo and Chief Noc-a-Homa, **Billy Bean** and **Billy Beane**, The Baseball Bunch and *The Brady Bunch* (specifically, the episode guest-starring **Don Drysdale**). And, of course, mascots. Nearly 60 are listed, and while most of the book's entries are limited to a few sentences, the Phillie Phanatic has by far the longest *UBE* write-up, spread across four pages.

Schnakenberg admits up front that his survey is "far from comprehensive," but a few oversights remain: the (Mario) Mendoza Line, 1975 bubblegum-blowing champ **Kurt Bevacqua**, Kenny Powers... Granted, defining what constitutes "underground" is pretty much impossible, yet some inconsistencies are apparent: Dodger Dogs are included, Fenway Franks are not; **Johnny Bench** Batter Up is in, the **Rod Carew** Batting Trainer is out; there's **Larry Doby's** Cock, but no **Merkle's** Boner.

Still, the *UBE* is a fun read for both casual and hardcore fans, at least those of us whose appreciation of the game isn't limited to the **Ken Burns**-y, *Field of Dreams*-type stuff, but who dig the offbeat sidelights just as much. Maybe even more.

Steve Mandich runs the blog Super Ichiro Crazy! at <http://superichirocrazy.wordpress.com>.

It's Not Working Anymore

by Mike Faloon

Here's the way I heard it. A bunch of players were getting together at this barbeque restaurant. Closing time was supposed to be one o'clock. This was Bradenton, '79, spring training. It was early on. They hadn't made cuts yet, so everyone was feeling pretty good and a bunch of the veterans arranged to keep the place open after hours. It was walking distance from the hotel but the rookies had an early curfew—lights out at midnight and the owner was strict. He had a guy posted at the hotel entrance. He was checking on the rookies and Donny came up with this idea. He had a breakout year in '78 so his spot on the roster was secure, not that he wouldn't have acted any differently. Anyway, he told the rookies to go back to their rooms, tie together some bedsheets, scale down the wall, and come back to the bar. They were on the second floor. No big deal. So they went back to their rooms and tied together a bunch bedsheets and snuck out, and they got away with it. They stayed out all night and made it back into their rooms without getting caught.

The next day the team was taking the bus to the ballpark and the owner decided to take the bus, too. They passed the hotel and the bedsheets were still hanging out the window. The owner spotted them, put two and two together and started freaking out. He was yelling at everyone. Then he made eye contact with one of the rookies. Of course it happened to be his room but the owner didn't know that. It was just dumb luck but the kid was blushing and he was about to confess when Donny spoke up. He said it was his room. A year before he might have been cut or fined but like I said, Donny's spot was locked up, the team needed him in the bullpen, so the owner just said don't let it happen again.

Donny would probably still be alive if he'd done more things like that. Though maybe the Illiterate Assassin would still have come after him. It's a wonder Donny lived as long as he did.

I'd been on Donny duty for a week when he called me. It was late on a Saturday morning. He was scheduled to appear at the Greater Central New York Boat Show, "a personal watercraft extravaganza." He called early and asked me to drive him. He was antsy. "Get your ass over

here toot sweet," was the phrase he used.

I was still rolling to a stop when he approached my car. Sunglasses, flip flops, tattered Ocean Pacific shorts that might have been cool five years earlier. More beach bum than former all-star.

"Slide over, hoss. And screen my calls."

He tossed me a cell phone. This was the summer of '93, so the thing was the size of shoebox.

"Call the dentist."

"Dentist?"

"I've got a twelve o'clock appointment. Tell 'im I'm running late."

I looked at my watch to verify that this wasn't true.

"Don't answer if a guy named Lou calls."

He handed me a list of phone numbers and money for expenses. "There's more if I get to ballpark on time."

The "if" made me nervous. The game wasn't for hours and the stadium was only five minutes away.

Donny Blackstone was a legend, even if a fading one. He'd first come through Syracuse in the mid '70s, making his way up through the Yankee system. He went to Pittsburgh in the Goose Gossage trade. He was a mainstay of the Pirates' bullpen during their Papa Stargell/"We Are Family" era. He spent the early eighties with the Cardinals setting up Bruce Sutter. Four trips to the Series. Two rings. The guy had been around a lot of success.

Donny was back in Syracuse to work on a new pitch. His pitching coach in Toronto didn't think Donny could rely on his fastball anymore. He wanted Donny to work on a change up. The Jays' GM agreed. The plan was to have Donny make a few successful appearances before returning to the Blue Jays for the stretch drive. His first games didn't go well, so his stay was extended. Hitters

knew what was coming and where it would be. The illusion was gone. They were on to Donny but he didn't seem to appreciate the gravity of his situation. He was showing up late to team meetings. Dozing off in the bullpen. Refusing to work on a change up. The rap on Donny had always been that his million-dollar arm was attached to a ten-cent brain, and neither of them was getting any younger.

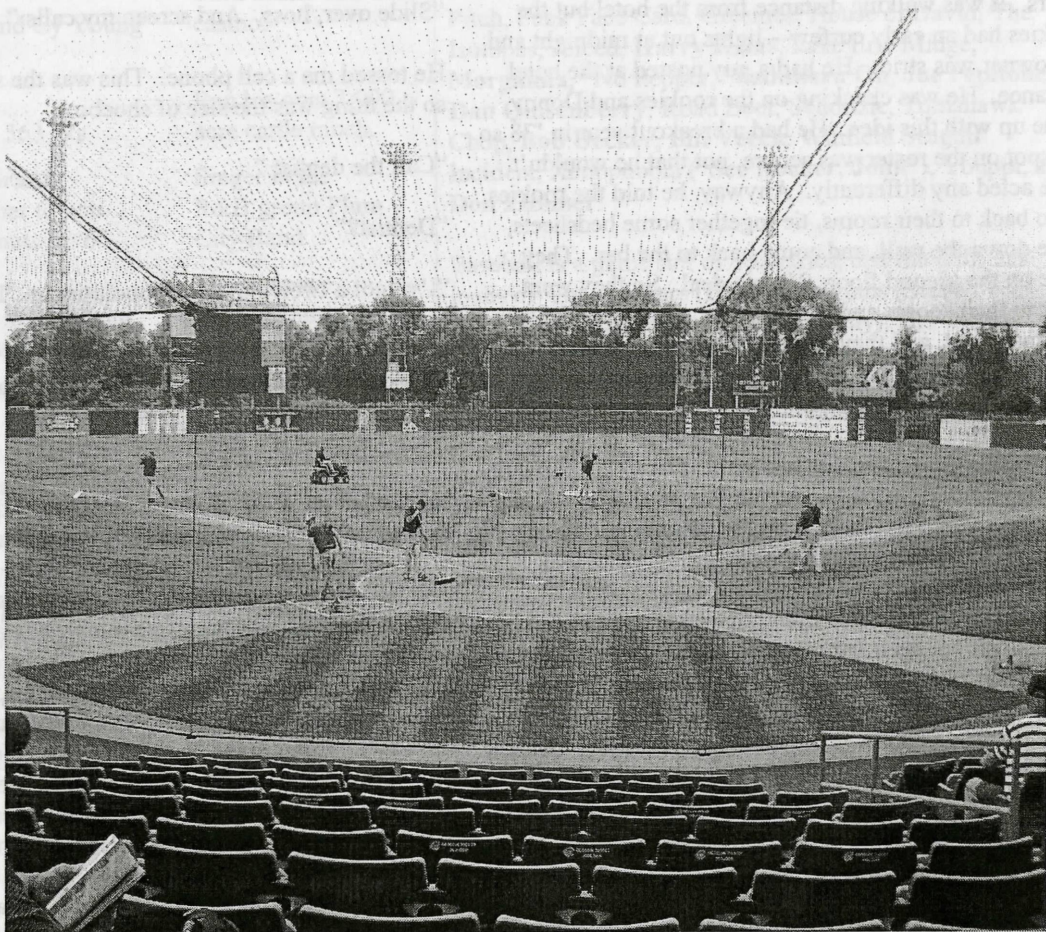
My job was to make myself available to Donny before and after games. Run errands, give him a ride from the Hotel Syracuse. If nothing else prevent any escapades that would make the papers.

That Saturday was the first time he'd called. I'd left messages with Donny, but he never returned them. Everyone in the front office hoped, however naively, that he'd finally started to pace himself, think about his future. Even if he didn't make it back to the big leagues that season he still had potential as off-season trade bait.

There was a lot of talk about Donny. Baseball types like to present themselves as gruff, stoic types, men of few words but behind closed doors we cackle like hens. That goes for management and players. The latest was that Donny had worn out his welcome at the players' bars and was in danger of losing his driver's license. Rumor had it

that even the cab companies were hanging up on him, so now he was holed up at the hotel, palling around with the cast of California Suite from Syracuse Stage. The guy who played Marvin Michaels—Walter Matthau's role if you've seen the movie—later testified that Donny liked to buy drinks for everyone.

Donny wanted to eat before the boat show. We went to Twin Trees, which surprised me. A lot of ballplayers



went there and he'd been avoiding player hangouts. Twin Trees was a cozy place, a tiny split level restaurant with tables upstairs and booths and a bar downstairs. Autographed pictures of Yankees past and present lined the wood paneled walls. Lou Pinella. Thurman Munson. Reggie. Rick Cerone. The owner was a friend of Steinbrenner's.

We were sitting at a booth downstairs. Donny's pepper and onion pie had just come out when I noticed him staring over my shoulder. I turned to see a couple walking down the stairs. He was vintage early '90s Syracuse, sleeveless t-shirt, goatee, mullet. She looked like an old Tanya Tucker album cover.

Sleeveless saw Donny first.

"Are you Donny Blackstone? 'We Are Family?'" Sheila, it's Donny Blackstone."

Her face changed when she recognized Donny. She looked at him with daggers.

Donny and Sheila hadn't seen each other since shortly after the cancer fundraiser. They met back in '75. She was waiting tables at the Westwood Diner. Donny was in his second season with the Chiefs. He went all out trying to woo her. He contacted her family and got the recipes for her favorite childhood foods. Her mom's ramen noodle casserole, her grandmother's clam chowder, her aunt's Moon Pies. He poured on the charm. He genuinely liked her. She may have felt the same way. They were both anxious to move on to the lives they were hearing about. Then Sheila was diagnosed with melanoma. She and Donny decided to have a fundraiser.

They rented out the backroom of the Westwood. Hundreds of fans came out. They raised over ten grand. Exactly how much and who spent it depends on who you asked. Two weeks later he was called up to New York and she left for Florida. They stayed out of each other's lives until Donny's book came out in the mid-'80s. He claimed that she lied about having cancer. She said it was a bad diagnosis.

"You sack of dirt."

"Good to see you, Sheila."

"I burn every copy of your book that I see."

"Come out to the game tonight. I'll put you on the list."

"I have better things to do. I'll always have better things to do."

Sleeveless had this puppy dog look in his eyes, like he knew not to cross Sheila but was dying to ask Donny what it was like to pitch in Game 7 of a World Series. "Come on, Jerry, let's go."

Sheila didn't look at any of us when she turned and left. Just expected that we all knew our roles. Donny did. I did. Keep quiet, that was my part the whole day. But Sleeveless lingered for a moment. I thought about offering him tickets for the game but he snapped to before I could take down their names.

To the casual fan Donny still had it. He could still ring up strikeouts and hit the mid-nineties with his fastball. But his ERA was climbing and he was losing his movement, running more full counts. Right-handed hitters were laying off his fastball, drawing more walks. Most guys in that situation would have doubled down with the pitching coach. Donny wasn't worried about getting back to the big leagues but he should have been.

After lunch Donny guided me to strip mall in North Syracuse Mall, a non-descript string of stores that lined Taft Road. On one side of the dentist's office there was a hardware store, pet supplies on the other. When we arrived Donny asked me to call the first number on the list and leave a message for someone named Lou.

"Let him know I'll make the boat show."

I wondered why this needed confirmation when the actual event was so close. There was no answer so I left a message.

"The boat show is supposed to be the only thing on today's 'to do' list, no?"

"Let's just enjoy ourselves and make it to the park on time."

I was beginning to catch on. "And don't answer if Lou calls?"

"Slicker than hair on a trout, son."

The receptionist lit up when Donny walked into the waiting room. Sauntered, more like it. She came out from behind the desk. They hugged, groped a little. The

dentist, Dr. Roland, entered and patted Donny on the back, showered him with accolades. Ass grabbing and ass kissing. The room was saturated with ass-related activity.

They had just escorted Donny to the exam room when I heard a phone ringing. It took me a moment to place the sound. It was Donny's cell phone. I answered.

"Where the hell are you?"

"Donny's not here. May I take a message?"

"What do you mean? It's his phone. Of course, he's there. Put him on." The voice grew more intense. "This is Lou Zantini. You called me, remember? Tell Donny he's late."

"Mr. Blackstone has a dentist appointment."

"I knew this was a mistake."

Lou hung up. I looked at my watch. Lou was right about Donny being late.

All I could do was wait. I flipped through a couple of issues of People, even tried the "What doesn't belong?" page in a well-worn copy of Highlights but I couldn't focus. Donny wasn't a hero of mine, not by any stretch. I'd heard too much of the lore. But still, his face was always among the cards I collected and counted and sorted as a kid, and this day had been really unsettling.

For the next hour no one else entered or left the office. Then I heard Dr. Roland's voice.

"Then we'll use the hot tub." Donny roared at what must have been a punch line.

Dr. Roland turned to me and said that Donny needed rest. He spoke as if Donny were no longer in the room. He handed me a prescription for Tylenol with codeine. "Just in case."

Donny was already heading for the door. "Boat show. Quick stop on the way."

It was my second season with the Chiefs, the Triple A affiliate for the Toronto Blue Jays. My business card read

"Assistant Director of Merchandising," which sounded better than my actual job duties. I sold tickets. I stocked the concession stands. I could reach the back rows with the t-shirt cannon. I also turned on the sprinkler system during a sold-out, 4th of July game, stalling a rally with two-out in the bottom of the ninth. It was an accident. The general manager said he believed me but he had his doubts. I could see it in his eyes. I was young but I could tell. I'm pretty sure Donny duty was my reward for that mishap.

Rumpy's was Donny's next stop. It was an old man bar from Syracuse's factory era. Rumpy's opened early and closed in the middle of the afternoon. Or at least that's when the last bartender clocked out. The owners lived upstairs and most days they didn't come down to lock up until after the six o'clock news. In the meantime, regulars poured their own drinks and left money in a jar beneath the counter. From an outsider's point of view the place was abandoned. The windows were cloudy and cracked. The concrete steps were crumbling and the Utica Club sign that hung out front was obscured by rust. It had been years since one could make out the images of Schultz and Dooley, the cartoon beer steins. The sign read "Utica Club" but it said "Stay away."

I parked in front. Donny told me to stay put.

I waited for half an hour before going in. I locked both doors but figured even in this part of town an '84 Ford Escort was safe. As I stepped inside Rumpy's I questioned my decision to major in sports marketing. It wouldn't be the last time that day.

Donny was hunched over a set of dominoes. Beside him were two empty pint glasses and a bowl of popcorn. Across from him was what I can only assume to be a typical Rumpy's patron. The whiteness of his hair was striking but secondary to the uniformity of its curliness. It looked like it had been snapped into place. I think it was a wig.

The look of concern on my face must have been more evident than I realized.

"Don't worry, kid. We'll make the show. But don-imoos can get tense. Gotta take the edge off." Donny laughed and clinked White Wig's glass. I went to the bar and

ordered a seltzer when Donny started outlining plans for an off-season fishing trip to Hudson Bay.

Four years at BYU. Graduated with honors. Worked my way up to Triple A in three years. Now I was babysitting.

"The funny part was the look on his face."

It was Donny.

"He looked so damned confused."

He was talking about White Wig, pointing at him and laughing too, but he was looking at two older guys at the next table.

"Womp! Pulled the door right into his face. Must have hurt like hell."

White Wig shook his head ever so slightly and got up from the table. Donny's badgering trailed him.

"Womp! Pulled the door into his face! Who does that?"

A couple of minutes later a figure passed behind me. I assumed it was White Wig but the footsteps sounded different. They were heavier, slower, more purposeful.

Donny's laughter ceased. The song on the jukebox suddenly seemed too loud.

"You heard me. Forty grand. Pay up. It's simple." The voice was loud and angry. "Are you listening to me?" If Donny responded, I didn't hear him.

By the time I turned around Donny's table was upended and he was pinned to the wall, held a foot off the ground by a mountain range of a man. The papers would later dub him the Illiterate Assassin.

Donny was confused. He insisted that he had no idea what the Illiterate Assassin was talking about. He was telling the truth. What none of us realized at the time was that the Illiterate Assassin was supposed to be in Cleveland, chasing down another portly relief pitcher, Chet Rollins. He was the one who owed forty grand. The Illiterate Assassin, true to his name, couldn't read and he'd confused the Chiefs' logo with the Indians' logo,

wound up in Syracuse rather than Cleveland.

"Your word? No, shithead, I have your throat. I have your life in my hands. This is what your word gets you." He lowered Donny to the ground.

"You've got two days."

He declined Donny's offer to have a drink.

Donny dusted himself off and approached the bar.

Having his life threatened hastened Donny's stay at Rumpy's and we finally made it to the boat show. Donny was beaming even before he saw the line of autograph seekers. He spotted the banner the moment we entered the State Fair pavilion: "Appearing today, 2-time Roloids Fireman of the Year: Donny Blackstone."

The place was packed with people and boats, new, used and demo'd. It was that kind of crowd. They moved aside for Donny, smiles and slaps on the back, as we made our way across the Astroturf covered floor.

At the front of the line stood a set of twins decked out in matching Chiefs hats, t-shirts, and wristbands. Their father stood behind them, an arm around each boy.

Donny sat down, opened an iced tea, and turned on the charm. He signed 8 x 10 glossies, baseball cards, and the occasional Sister Sledge album. He joked about his weight. He talked trash about the rest of the American League East.

I spotted a man walking toward us. "In a huff" would be an apt description. I was about to meet Lou Zantini.

I tried to defuse the situation. "Donny is glad to be here. He was just discussing an upcoming bass trip to Long Island Sound. Maybe that could lead to a sponsorship deal with the Sea Craft people." I don't think Lou heard me.

Donny sipped his iced tea. "Very refreshing. Have one, Lou."

Neither iced tea nor fishing boats were on the forefront of Lou's mind.

"The great Donny Blackstone has finally decided to grace us with his royal presence. How considerate. And I see you've taken the time to don the royal tank top and the royal flip flops. Let's bow. Let's grovel. Let's beg for handshakes or a splotch of marker on an eight by ten or a baseball card or a goddamned program. You're late, lard ass, over two hours late. Sign until your heart's content. Sign away. Then ask to get paid. Please, Donny, please ask me to pay you."

The unspoken collective decision was to stare at Lou. Me. The kids. Their dad. The dozens of people in line behind them. It seemed like an inordinate amount of anger to direct toward a tardy ballplayer. I'd worked dozens of these events. Players never showed up on time. But there was more to the situation. As I was quickly learning there always was with Donny.

At the trial I found out that Donny and Lou had been business partners. They'd met during Donny's first time through Syracuse. Donny had the idea. Lou had the money. Ultra bowling. Ultra bowling didn't exist but Donny convinced Lou that it was the sport of the future. He'd read an article in *Sports Illustrated* about the Western States Endurance, a 100-mile footrace that started in California in the '70s. Ultramarathons started popping up everywhere. Donny was amazed by the fact that people were willing to do so much of a thing that nobody really liked in the first place. People only went running because their doctor or their coach or their guilty conscience told them to go running. Bowling was different. People liked to bowl. Donny figured why not take something people enjoyed and do more of it. Hence, ultrabowling. If a few nutjobs were willing to run for days at a time, then a whole lot of people would love the chance to bowl around the clock.

"Go ahead, Blackstone, ask me to give you more of my. I'm still booking boat shows because of you. It's been over 15 years and I'm still doing boat shows because of you. The least you could do is show up on time. That's the least you could do. 'They'll bowl for days, Lou, they really will. Some of 'em will bowl for days! Keep it open 24 hours and they'll bowl for days.'"

I tried to intervene on Donny's behalf. Lou told me to call his lawyer. At least that's my translation. His choice of words was considerably more colorful.

Donny went to the clubhouse when we got to the park. The skies had clouded over and the temperature must have dropped ten or fifteen degrees since the early afternoon. I chose to sit in the upper deck. I needed some distance, which was easy to find. With the chill and the threat of rain there were only 400 people in the stands. But what the stadium lacked in people it would soon make up for in sheer panic and mayhem. I found a seat between home and third. I couldn't see Donny for most of the game. My view of the bullpen was obscured by the bullpen car.

The Chiefs went up early but Rochester matched them run for run. After seven innings both bullpens were depleted and the game was tied at nine. A sac fly in the bottom of the eighth put Syracuse up 11-9. The Chiefs only had two pitchers left, Donny and Toby Corbett, a 19-year-old just up from Double A.

Corbett got the nod and he walked the bases loaded. Twelve straight pitches. He wasn't even close. They brought in Donny. When Lombardi, the catcher, started jogging out to the mound Donny sent him back behind the plate. Donny looked in for the signs. He waved off Lombardi several times. He stepped off the mound and picked up the rosin bag before coming set and throwing his final pitch.

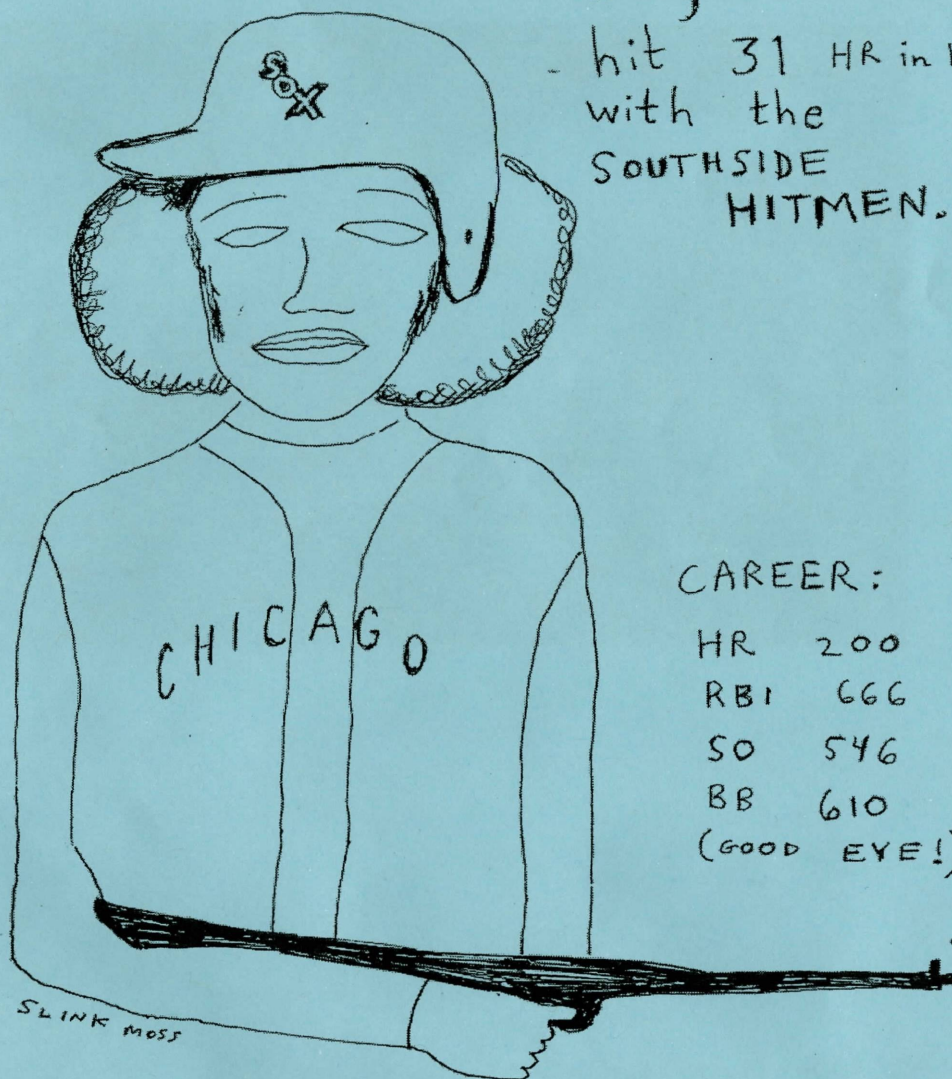
It seems odd but I think I noticed the infield dirt spraying up before I heard the gunshots. Most fans ducked down. Some ran. Players either dropped to the ground or froze, except Donny. He twisted hard to the left, then back to the right. Then he slumped to the ground.

It wasn't hard to figure out who killed Donny Blackstone. It wasn't hard to apprehend any of them either. Sheila and Sleeveless were caught at the Canadian border. The border guard probably would have let them go but they were arguing about whether they were going to Ottawa or Toronto. The Illiterate Assassin was at the bus station asking someone to read the schedule to him. Lou was having a beer at the stadium club. At the trial everyone wanted to take credit for killing Donny but forensics could not determine which bullet was fatal. The thing that gets me is that I'm pretty sure Donny's last pitch was a change up.

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