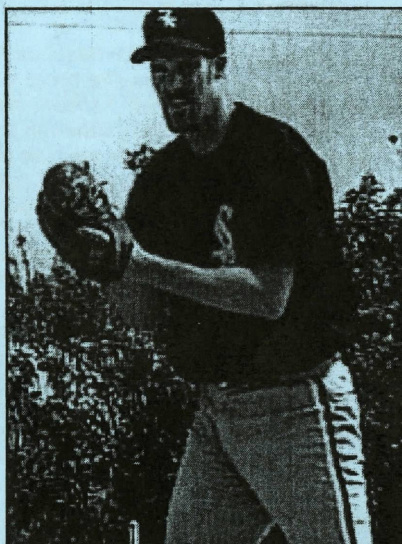


Z I S K

A Magazine by and for Baseball Fans



**BLACK JACK McDOWELL PROVES
THAT THERE IS LIFE AFTER BASEBALL**

Fall 2002

#6

Vintage Baseball

Most Entertaining Players

An Interview with Author David Shields

Plus, Books Reviews, Rants and more...

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As a Mets fan, I spent the '02 season rooting for history's most expensive last-place team. That leaves me with little of interest to say here in the intro, so I'll turn things over to a pair of reviews we received and a last minute contribution to the Most Entertaining Player sweepstakes (*see below*). As for the rest of the page, it may be argued that my choice of newspaper clippings was influenced by the Angels' trouncing of the Yankees last night. Maybe.

--Mike F., 10/6/02

"A true 'FANzine,' filled with solid sports writing, completely free of the smarmy attitude found in the big city dailies. Brutal honesty and true love for the game can be found on every page."

Sports-related zines are a fairly small lot in the U.S., so I hope Zisk keeps publishing."

--A.J. Michel, Low Hug

"A magazine by and for Baseball Fans.' Wow, a true fanzine! It seems like these are getting harder to find these days. So, I should state up front that I'm not a baseball fan (although I was as a kid). But I can appreciate the passion and edge that characterizes this zine. And if I were still a baseball fan, I'd be reading Zisk on a regular basis, as opposed to the crap published in the sports pages. There's gritty writing in here by people who know what they're talking about, but don't have to suck up to some lame sports editor. Unadulterated and well-researched commentary from the fans that's sure to be enjoyed by other lovers of the sport. And it's an amazing bargain at \$1!"

--Sean Stewart, NewPages.com

"Most Entertaining Player? Donald Fehr."

--Pat Helikson, NYC

(L) Troy Percival closes out Game 5.
(R) Alfonso Soriano opens the flood gates in the fifth inning. Doh.

YANKEES ANGELS

Semi-Amazing Deeds by minor Legends of Amateur Baseball:

Part 1 - by Mark Hughson

My grandfather, **Oliver Hughson**, really likes baseball. He grew up playing it, he grew old playing it, and now that he's really old, all he does is watch it and talk about it. I love my grandpa. Back before baseball was organized, categorized, commercialized, and more or less "-ized" up the yang, Grandpa Hughson (though he wasn't called "Grandpa" back then) played for many a team in many a league in Central New York. Here's an excerpt from an interview done in the spring of '02. *(Note: To me, this transcription sounds as normal as anything, but if you can't quite follow it, just pretend an old grandpa-like guy is speaking and nod your head like you understand once in a while.)*

Mark: When did you first start playing baseball?

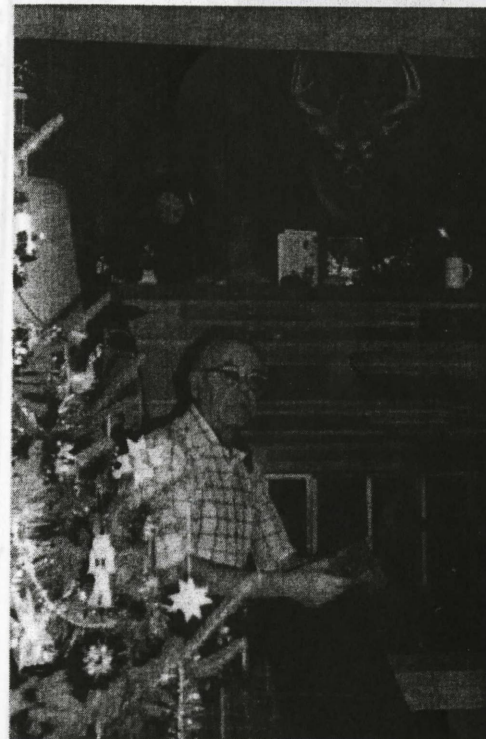
Oliver: Oh, I started way back when I was a kid, heheh.

Mark: I remember you told me you and the gang would take up a collection to buy a baseball, and then just challenge another team...

Oliver: Oh we did that at first I guess. Euclid had a team down there, and we got a team here in Clay, and then we went to play against them, and the winner would keep the baseball. We beat them 36-2. Then I played with a gang from both Baldwinsville and Euclid, back behind the hotel there was a baseball field, we played there for a long time. One my friends at the time played for the **East Syracuse Benedicts**. He says to me, We're playing over at Griffin's Field, why not come and watch us? It was on a Sunday, so after we ate dinner, Ernie *(Note: My great-uncle)* went over to watch 'em. We sat there in the stands, and **Aubrey Brown**, third baseman, one of the fellas I used to play with, he waved at me and told me to come on down. So I came on down. He wanted to know if I wanted to meet George. Well, **George Lawbick** was the manager of the Benedicts. So I went down to meet him and he says, Hughson, didn't you used to play against East-Syracuse once? I says, Yeah I played against East-Syracuse once. And George says, You beat us too I remember. You playin' any ball? I said, No. He says, You wanna? I says, Sure would. Cause that was right at the end of the war when the teams were all broken up you know. Two or three of our members got killed in France. So I went to Tuesdays game and sat on the bench, which is what I expected to do anyway. Thursday night they had a game in the city. **Grayden Brown** was a good batter, but he liked to clown around and talk a lot. He was in the

warm-up circle, you know cause he was the next batter. And he turned around to holler at some guy on the bench and the bat slipped out of the hands of the batter and got him right on the elbow. Boy he turned white as your shirt

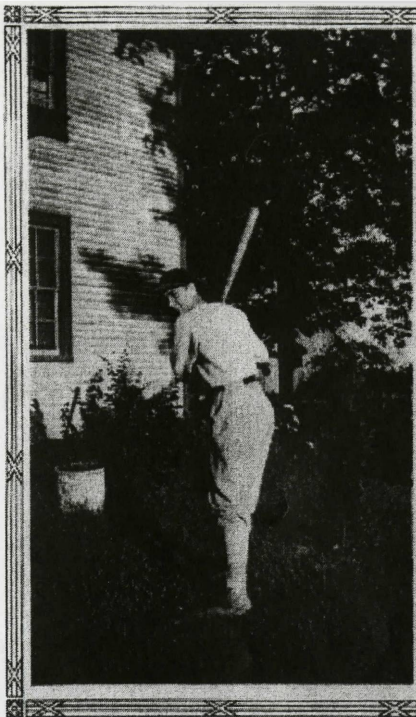
in no time! George turns around and looks at me and says, Get in Grayden's place quick! So I grabbed a bat, got limbered up, but darn if the pitcher didn't hang one over the plate, I drove it right out through for a double. Next game, down in New Woodstock I think, I got another



double the first time up, so, I played regular from then on, heheh.

Mark: That's the way it seems to go.

Oliver: We played in the New York State League. We were on top in the Central Division. So we got to go to Cooperstown and play in the Hall Of Fame Game. Right at the end of the war, around 1946 I think it was, the major league teams weren't allowed to make any unscheduled stops. So the committee down there took the top four teams in the state league, one from each division, and brought 'em in for a double-header. We played all over in the State. We played three games a week, right through to October, and we lost two games all year. We won the state championship. We got down to the southern tier area, we won the game **Smitty** pitched. Boy, he was a crackerjack of a pitcher too! He used to pitch for the **Chicago White Sox**, our shortstop used to play for the **Detroit Tigers**, the catcher and the first baseman were on the Army team at one time. So we had quite a team. So anyway we got down there and won the state championship. Right after we got their last guy out their



manager rushed right over to George and challenged us to another game. He said "I'll get a bunch of guys together and we'll come up and beat you damn Benedicts!" So we agreed to one more game, right in end of October. So they brought in guys from four or five different teams, thought they handpicked 'em sure to beat us...they came up on Saturday.

Smitty couldn't pitch cause he just pitched on Thursday, so I pitched that game and we beat 'em 4-0. I shut 'em out, heheh. We never heard any more from 'em. Heheh. **Mark:** Tell me about your strikeout "record"...

Oliver: *(Goes into detail about having a cyst removed)...* I was in my 40's about this time, almost done playing. They had what they called the Northern League, all the teams north of Syracuse. A team wanted me to manage them, I told them I'd come over and manage and play, thinking I'd go back to the State League when the cyst thing was better. Well, after a few weeks of monkeyin' around with them I said to heck with it, and stayed in the Northern League. So we went and played Caughdenoy, and I pitched the last two innings. Struck out six right in a row. That ended that. Next game was Cicero, and I pitched the last two innings of that game, struck out six right in a row. Next game was against North Syracuse and I got in there and got the first two on strikes. So I had 14 consecutive strikeouts, heheh.

(We talked a bit more about the father-son games, how his knee got tore up on a play at home...Grandma brought in some lemonade. Yes, indeed, things are good, and so is baseball.)

(Guest) Rants from the Upper Deck by Steve Reynolds

I would normally use my column space to complain about how crappy my Mets have been this year. But someone I work with has gone one step better—he sent **Fred Wilpon** and **Steve Phillips** letters to register his complaints. So take it away, Michael...

Dear Mr. Wilpon:

Let me start this letter off by stating that my fellow Mets-fan-friends and myself will not be returning as ticket holders, and the organization has just lost over \$1000 in ticket sales. This may seem like pennies compared to people who shell out more money for better seats for your bottom line, but I'm sorry, we work hard for the little money we make and don't want to waste it on this. We were not satisfied customers for the last two seasons and we're tired of it. Now that I've said that, I want to voice, as a die-hard, life-long Mets fan, my displeasure, disgust, frustration and embarrassment in this team and the organization. Yes it's true, no one could have predicted this kind of flop, but it's heartbreaking that you, your general manager and field manager have let this happen.

The Mets have examples of great baseball organizations in their own backyard, and in their own division to learn from: The Yankees and the Braves. Both organizations have the sharpest scouting staffs, and don't make bad trades. Plus, when it comes to the Yankees, they do not tolerate losing! It's preached from top to bottom. When a player puts on a Yankee uniform, that player is humbled and honored to be wearing those storied pinstripes. Do the Mets preach that? Do they have any tradition? The Mets are a part of New York National League baseball history with the Giants and Dodgers. Those teams were always in the playoffs and/or World Series. If those teams hadn't run into the Yankees so many times, those teams would equally be considered dynasties. Look at the Braves and what they've accomplished. Look at the last two seasons where they started off horribly and then turned it around. This season they turned it around at the same time as last year and are the best team in baseball. They have confidence, talent and fundamentals. I also think their manager and

pitching coach have something to do with it. What do we have????

You have to build a winner and keep it!!!! You can't snap your fingers and expect an instant winner. You have the money to get the players. You should have the scouts signing great prospects!! We have no depth in the minors or the majors. Stop looking back at '69, '73, '86, and '00. Look forward at how you can slowly, and surely build a winner for many, many years. How is it that you can buy a franchise in 1980, turn it around to a winner ('84 to '90), dismantle it ('91 to '96), and not build another winner the way you did it the first time!!!!??? The '97 '98 teams didn't have enough talent and the '99 and '00 teams had the talent but not enough fire and passion. The '01 and '02 teams were complacent. There is no denying any of this!

This is New York. It has the best of everything! Both New York teams should be in the playoffs every year. Or at least fighting and showing some competitive fire and drive. I haven't seen a Mets team with any heart, fire and desire since the '80s. I don't count the Mets teams of '97, '98, '99, '00, 01. Those teams always let the Braves or Yankees intimidate them psychologically and found a way to flop. That's why they never won the 2000 World Series. The '80s Mets never were intimidated. They were the powerhouse team. We were headed for great things and somehow, the ownership and management derailed that train too. Before the 2000 World Series, I had a hard time finding Mets jerseys and memorabilia when visiting Cooperstown shops. After the Series, it was as if Upstate NY realized there were two great teams in NY. Maybe the Mets should start winning all the time so that the perception of the world shouldn't be "there's another team in New York other than the Yankees?"

I am tired of losing. I am tired of being embarrassed. I am tired of playing second fiddle to the Yankees, Braves and other teams. Look at some of the trades the St. Louis Cardinals have made in recent years- **McGwire, Edmonds, Rolen**. It seems as if they never make a bad deal either. Other GMs and owners must be laughing at the Mets organization. It's disgraceful. The Mets haven't won a division title in 15 seasons!!! If it wasn't for the wild card, the team would still have only three pennants! Why do

the Mets settle for less than greatness????? I wouldn't be surprised if **Mike Piazza** asked for a trade!!!

Another example is the field manager. A good manager should be seen and only heard arguing with an umpire, fighting for his team. **Bobby Valentine**, for all the wonderful, charitable things he's done as a person, is not the right manager for the Mets. You need a manager who preaches fundamentals, consistency and a fighting spirit. The winning attitude should be a given. This manager makes the most ridiculous substitutions, double-switches, pitching changes and juggles the lineup card too much. He doesn't allow the players to feel comfortable in their spot in the line up, or define what each player's role is. I know for me personally, I like to know what my role is at my job so I can do the best job I can. He can't even pick the coaches he wants or else **Steve Phillips** will fire them!! How do you justify **Charlie Hough**, a knuckleballer as the pitching coach over someone like **Orel Hershiser**? Look at how Bobby talks with the press. He's uptight and flip. Look at how **Joe Torre** is with the media. Congenial, answers tough questions and uses common sense. With Bobby, it looks as if he's hiding something and trying to come off mysterious. When in reality he acts like a moron. I saw him in Spring Training 2001 and he was like that with the fans.

In closing, some of the trades and signings you're GM has made have been wonderful. But some of them have been equally horrible. I won't name examples, don't want to play GM or come off telling you how to do your job. I don't want to be embarrassed anymore and it kills me that I had to write this letter about my beloved team. If I didn't care, I wouldn't have been possessed to write. I may just be one fan, and you will probably disregard my letter and not care what we have to say, but at least I had the confidence to express the opinions and frustrations that Mets fans all over are feeling. Let us know when the organization has decided to grow up and be looked at as something great. Like the Yankees.

Sincerely yours,

Michael Azar

1876 Barnstorm Tour

by Kip Yates

This summer, my vintage baseball team, the **New York Mutuals**, traveled to the Mississippi playing other vintage baseball teams from around the country. Our Barnstorming Tour had been in the works for several years. At first, a casual suggestion, that suggestion became a plan and that plan became a reality. In the past year, we decided that if we were going to pull this off, we were going to have to seize the day. We are not getting any younger and with each year that we let pass without bringing this much-talked about plan into action, the further the reality of it ever happening seemed. Last summer we grabbed the proverbial bull by the horns and said, "Now or never!" We knew it would be costly and we knew that getting the entire team on the road for almost two weeks was next to impossible. But we had a dream and the desire to make it happen. After all, an opportunity like this comes once in a lifetime. Twice if you are truly lucky! We planned for a full year and as the day for our departure crept up on us; everything miraculously came together, thanks to the tireless planning of **Big Bat**, the New York Mutuals fearless leader. I decided to keep a running journal of the trip. I knew that in my elder years, when the base swapping and showing my "Ginger," as my nickname attested had stopped; I would want to look back on my summer of Aught Two and reflect on that glorious trip that nine teammates and I shared.

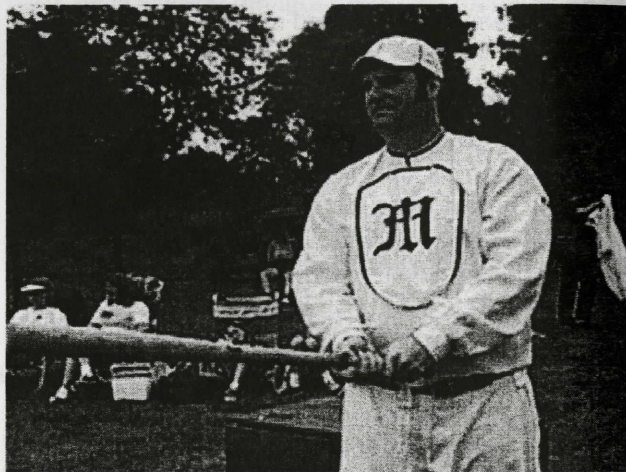
Saturday, June 29th:

I arrived at Old Bethpage Village Restoration a little before seven A.M. for the first leg of our trip to Philadelphia. On the chartered bus that I dubbed *Bertha*, we were restless all morning but eventually settled down for a midmorning nap. We would need to conserve our energy. We had just embarked on an eight city, nine day barnstorming tour that would take us from Boston to Hannibal, Missouri and back to New York. There were only ten of us so none of us could afford to get hurt, or the bus driver would be suiting up and if you saw our bus driver you would know that we didn't want that to happen. I lounged in the back with the youngsters **Kid Speed**, one of the best lead off hitters I have ever been privileged to play with; our Captain, **Squid**, and our team physician-clown-dynamo, **Express**. The older guys on the team, **Big Bat**, **Rabbit**, and **Scoops** stayed up front, afraid to lie down for fear that they would never get up again. **Sully**, **Magnet**, and **Big Dog** watched movies at

the front of the bus with **Harry**, the great grandson of **Dick Higham**, an original New York Mutual.

We arrived at the park in Philly and taped our fingers, got into uniform, mentally prepared for the game. **John Fogerty's** "Centerfield" blared from the speakers. We left the bus to warm up, stretch, and physically prepare for our game. We played a round of magic circle to get the crowd excited and waited for our opponent, the **Elizabeth Resolutes** to arrive. We had lost to the Resolutes only a month earlier and we were not prepared to go down again. The last time we played, we let up in the middle innings and they clawed themselves back into the game before we knew it and took the lead for good in the top of the ninth. There would be no letting up today. We won 26-11. **Kid Speed** stole home and the *Express* hit one of his legendary long shots. I scored two runs. We celebrated our fiftieth victory as a team with a couple bottles of bubbly and set out for Boston, where we would stay the night.

Arriving in Boston was a godsend, for that meant that a shower was imminent. We had a long day behind us and all I wanted to do was sleep.



The Big Bat Warms Up

Sunday, June 30th:

I awoke early the next morning and boarded *Bertha* the bus for the trip to the Boston Commons, where we would play *Zisk's* very own **Frank D'urso** and his merry band of Bostonians (and Minnesotans), the **SABR Nine**. Almost everyone on our team was interviewed by Boston Fox news. It was here that I began to get comfortable with my clichés as **Crash Davis** once

advised. In my interview, I mentioned that while I played ball, I imagined thousands of ghosts of years gone past watching me play the game to make sure that I played the game the way it was supposed to be played: hard, fast, and like a gentleman. Reporters eat that up and that's my story and I'm sticking to it. The game almost never occurred. Right before our first pitch, a Boston constable in turn of the century uniform rode up on his horse and threatened to arrest Squid if we played ball on a Sunday. He explained that it was against the law and after some haggling and much laughter shared by all; he sang our national anthem and shouted, "Play ball." The game was special in that Sully played all nine positions. The game got out of hand early. At last count, the score was Mutuals 37, the Sab's 5.

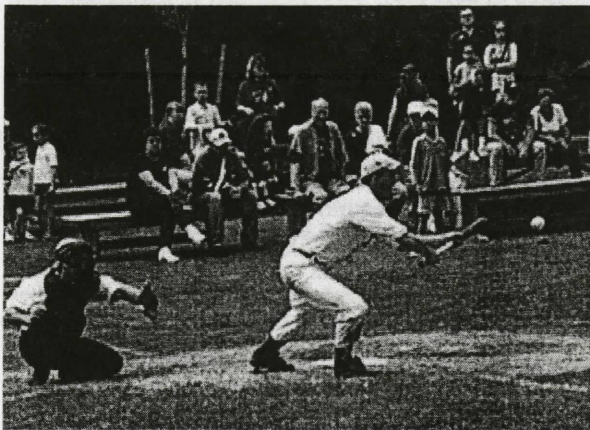
After the game, we all posed for pictures, said our huzzahs, and I became acquainted with Mr. D'urso. We signed each other's copies of *Zisk* and had a couple of photos taken. The Mutuals went to Cheers for a celebratory beer and then boarded Bertha for Akron, Ohio. Unfortunately, Bertha's air conditioning broke down en route and we spent our last day with her, as a replacement bus awaited.

Monday, July 1st:

After a nondescript stop over in Scranton, Pennsylvania, we arrived at our hotel in Akron long enough to unpack and rest a bit. Our game against the **Blackstockings** that evening was a hot one. The Mutuals had our stiffest test yet against the brutal Ohio humidity and the Blackstockings themselves. We took the field first and found ourselves behind for the first time all trip. Going into our frame, Akron led 1-0. It wouldn't last. We hung ten on them in the first inning and then spent the remainder of the game holding off their spirited attempts at a come back. Before we settled down defensively, the score was 16-9. That was as close as they would get to matching our score. We all put forth our best effort and came out ahead 20-11. Express hit a home run, which was tough to do over a hundred years ago and equally tough today. Big Bat legged out a couple of doubles. Sully and Rabbit played a stellar third and left respectively and Big Dog was an exemplary backstop, despite a hamstring irritation. I made a timely catch in centerfield and Scoops hurled a solid game. The Akron squad thanked us for a fine game and fed us before sending us on our way. I had a date with the hotel jacuzzi after dinner.

Tuesday, July 2nd:

We awoke the next morning in great spirits. We had the day off. It was a travel day and we were headed for the Windy City. We watched game six of the 1986 World Series and I still cannot believe what transpired that evening at Shea Stadium. As exiting as it was on the bus, one would have thought that the game was happening live. Some guys went sightseeing and Express and Big Dog and I had a relaxed dinner at Carmines.



Wednesday, July 3rd:

We rode to Rockford to take on a fairly new squad to vintage baseball, the **Midway Maulers**. The name sounded softball, but they were far from it. They gave us a good match though the 37-9 score was not an indication. I scored six times. We just kept getting on base. Big Dog and the Magnet were hurt. After some negotiation, it was agreed that they could play the field but would not be required to bat. We had seven in the order and it seemed as though every time we scored and grabbed a cup of water, it was time for us to grab a bat and go again. We were moving around the bases with such rapidity. There was a house in left field with new windows that had the Express's name all over it. Alas, though he had plenty of opportunities to sail one of his trademark long balls into the house, Mighty E failed... breaking the hearts of women and children everywhere who had gathered to watch the Mighty Express fulfill his own prophecy.

Thursday, July 4th:

On the afternoon of July 4th, we arrived at the village in Cincinnati to play the legendary **Redstockings**. That squad plays a spirited game of ball. We played with their ball, which is much heavier than the ball we are accustomed to, so our "power" game was taken away.

Even so, Express still managed to hit four ground rule doubles into the forest beyond the outfield as well as keep the ball in our infield as a hurler. The most unorthodox play of the tour came from Magnet, who while playing third, snagged a ball on the sprawl and then without missing a beat, relayed the throw to Express who finished the 5-1-3 play to Big Bat at first...TWICE! Sully made the defensive play of the game when he snagged a line drive over second base and doubled the runner for an unassisted double play. Scoops also connected with Big Dog for an outfield assist at the plate. We won 17-4.

Later that evening, we watched the Ohio River Fireworks show and some went out for a night on the town while others, myself included, went back to the hotel for some rest. I started to feel the rigors of the trip that day and was pulled in the eighth inning for an aching knee I suffered while scoring the previous inning.

Friday, July 5th:

We toured the Louisville Slugger Bat Co. briefly before our game against the **Indianapolis Blues**. If there was a game for me to have my best day at the plate, this was not it, as absolutely no spectators made it out to the Semi-pro ballpark in Louisville to watch some team from New York play some team from Indiana. It was as if no one cared, except us. I hit two doubles and scored four runs. It was one of the quickest games we played. It was over before we knew it. We remained undefeated, 16-3.

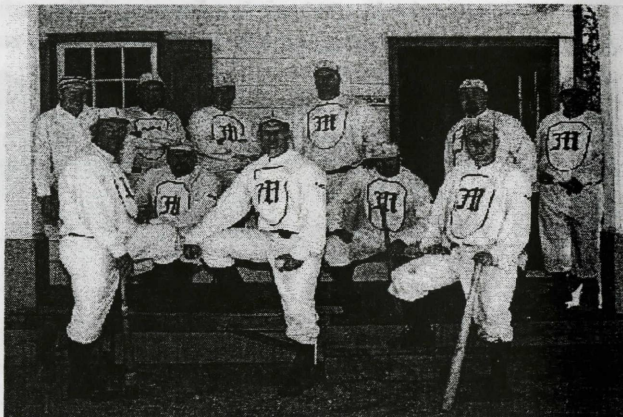
I will never forget the ride from Louisville to Hannibal to play our final two games of the trip. I had fallen asleep listening to my headphones and was awakened by Squid with the news that **Ted Williams** had passed earlier that day. I thought it was ironic. I read Teddy Ballgame's *The Science of Hitting* all off-season to improve my hitting skills and after my second double in that day's game, I gave a silent nod of thanks to the Splendid Splinter while standing on second. We arrived early in the morning and I watched the tributes on Sportscenter until my eyes weighed heavily and I put the day's events behind me.

Saturday, July 6th:

We arrived at Clemens Field in the morning and the weather was already atrociously hot. We had a double header that day and we were all praying for a quick and merciful end to the both games. We knew that if we struck hard and often, both games would be no contest and we would go home undefeated. The games coincided

with the Tom Sawyer Days Festival and featured our best crowd yet, over five hundred people. We played by our hosts, the **Washington Eagles**, 1860s rules of ball. These rules we were well familiar with however other rules were introduced that I could not quite fathom. We could not slide, could not steal, could only lead a couple of steps, the infielders could only play a couple of steps off the bag, and the ball we were playing with was hard as a rock. However, since it was a sunny day, the Eagles team captain proclaimed that we could wear sunglasses if we wanted. Go figure! We abided our host's rules and disposed of them 13-3.

Scoops the Mutual hurler started the second game of our double header against the **Decatur Ground Squirrels** and was perfect through three. However, he lost his bid for perfection in the fourth when the Ground Squirrel batter put a knock just inside the left field foul line that Rabbit was unable to get to because the rules forbade any outfield maneuvering save for in and out. Again, as in previous Mutual victories, everyone contributed to the 14-2 victory.



We did it. We went 8-0 on the trip. We weren't completely surprised but with this game we knew anything could happen. We were exuberant over our accomplishment and thankful that we didn't sustain any major injuries. We went out for a celebratory meal and then started our long journey to Columbus, Ohio where we would stay the night before heading home.

The trip was sometimes tough but ultimately a blast. The games, the bus rides, the camaraderie! To this day, if I listen closely, I can still hear our laughter. I will never forget this trip for I have many fond memories. Huzzah, Mutuals! Huzzah!

Interview with Writer David Shields

"Baseball is Just Baseball" The Understated Ichiro is a fascinating book. In it author David Shields collects the most interesting quotes from Ichiro's rookie MLB season (2001). But there's more than meets the eye, both in the way in which the quotes are presented and, as he reveals in the following interview, the way in which Shields thinks about those quotes. Long story shorter, here's what happens when an uncommonly intelligent and insightful writer gets completely wrapped up in the exploits of an uncommonly talented and enigmatic player. (Interview by Mike Faloon)

Zisk: I really enjoy the book a lot.

David Shields: Thank you very much.

Z: The introduction is excellent.

DS: That was important to get that right, somehow set the tone. For all of last summer Ichiro, it was very weird; he kind of dominated my summer. From gathering the quotes, to writing that article about Ichiro (for the New York Times Magazine), to cheering on the Mariners. It was very strange how totally he occupied our house for that summer. I remember on June 7th saying to someone, I've got to put together these quotes of Ichiro, every day I'm struck by these hilariously funny and subversive and anti-cliché quotes of Ichiro, and then Adam (from TNI Books) published the book two months later, it was amazing.

Z: That's remarkably fast.

DS: It really was. We were very aware that it was a special season and we thought if we had a chance to gain some attention this was it, right now, so Adam and I went into overdrive. It was a really interesting project.

Z: How would you characterize the extent to which you followed the Mariners before that?

DS: Pretty much of a fan. I don't know if you know some of my other books, I wrote a book called *Black Planet*, which has a subtitle *Facing Race During an NBA Season*. That book is sort of about me being a Gary Payton fan. My first novel, a book called *Heroes*, is about a sports writer in the Midwest who's obsessed with this college basketball player. It's clearly a theme that pervades my head. I'm definitely a sports fan. I keep trying to not be but that seems to be part of my make up. I'm definitely a baseball fan, but that year was amazing. It really had a nice feel in Seattle that if you walked around at night you'd hear the radio coming out of houses and you know, you drove around and you heard people cheering. It was a shame it ended so abruptly although you were probably happy if you were a Yankees fan.

Z: No, I live in New York but I'm a rabid Yankee hater.

DS: Good for you. To me it's bizarre anyone who'd be a Yankee fan. I was born and raised in LA and my dad was raised in Brooklyn so I have this anti-Yankee thing. To

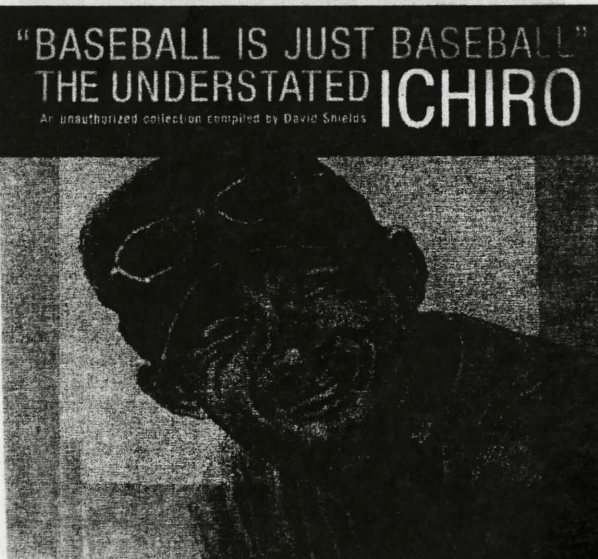
me it's weird to root for the Yankees so I'm delighted you're not.

Z: My two favorite teams are the Dodgers and Mets so hating the Yankees, I could go on all day. One thing I noticed about the book is that all of the quotes are from March through June, about the half of the 2001 season.

DS: Good point.

Z: So now you've had the second half of last year and most of this year, how does that alter or add to your perception of Ichiro?

DS: During that time I had these huge cardboard boxes of everything Ichiro had ever said. I had Japanese grad students translating these things from Japanese for me. Since the book got published I haven't been paying quite as careful attention to Ichiro's utterances but I feel like in the last year I've become more convinced of the argument in the book. To me, the argument the book tries to make, kind of a delicate thesis, is: is it just bad translation? Is Ichiro oblivious of American clichés? Or are there some people who want to make every utterance that Ichiro makes into some kind of Zen wisdom? At the time I published the book I was honestly open to saying perhaps it's just bad translation. But over time I've become more than ever convinced that Ichiro really is this amazingly alert and in tune person whose gift is the way he does exist within the moment, is completely oblivious to abstraction, to obsessing on the past, to worrying about the future, and is just amazingly present. He has all kinds of gifts. He has great eyesight, great eye hand coordination. He works very hard at his craft but I think one of his main gifts is that he's really amazingly in the present moment. Like a ball is coming to him and he actually watches the ball. He doesn't sort of watch the ball; he really, really, really watches the ball. I think that a lot of Ichiro's sayings, a lot of their core is him taking sports writers' clichés and refusing to answer on the cliché



grounds that the cliché happens to be based on. And instead trying to affirm, you know, I'm just in the present moment. The best example I can think of occurred after the book got published and he made this great catch, I think to help achieve win number 113 or something, and they asked him, When did you know you were going to catch the ball? And Ichiro said, When I caught it.

Z: (laughs)

DS: I'm glad you laugh because people say, What's so funny about that? He's supposed to give them all this melodramatic Sturm und Drang and instead he's just there in the moment. So to me it's really this sort of wisdom book about really paying attention to where you are, whether you're an athlete or a bus driver or a writer or whatever. It's really about being there, you might say.

Z: When you say that it reminds me of the Peter Sellers movie (*Being There*).

DS: The title of my article for the *New York Times* magazine was "Being Ichiro" so I guess they were trying to make that connection too. Some people want to say he's some kind of idiot savant, that American writers like me are making too much of him, that he'll say, I want some lunch, and I then pretend that's brilliant Zen statement. In the last year his play, his demeanor, and his statements do nothing but confirm my sense that he is indeed the sort of Zen craftsman or Zen artist that I want to claim that he is. Absolutely nothing has happened that diminishes that sense for me.

Z: If you were to take a book of quotes from any other baseball player it wouldn't be this engaging.

DS: No.

Z: And there are plenty of intelligent guys who give good interviews but nothing Tom Glavine says makes you scratch your head or think about the game in a different way. And Ichiro's not the first person born in Asia to come to a lot of attention in the U.S. so there are precedents on many levels and no one is like him. Some of his quotes are as simple as the one you just mentioned—I knew I was going to catch it when I caught it—but there are others like, I like the fans, I appreciate them but I don't play the game for them.

DS: Exactly.

Z: I didn't expect a quote like that.

DS: I know. Just when you think you have him typed as some sort of polite Japanese player he'll say something fairly aggressive in his assertion of his own right to be left alone. He's very hard to track in that way. When the book came out last year I developed a little talk about it and there are ten themes cascading through the book and I try to pattern them so they're sort of presented in mini clusters, sort of Zen moments, when he refuses to be a symbol of Japanese baseball, there are all kinds of others.

Z: Yeah, one of the things I was curious about in reading the book I noticed the quotes were not in chronological order. Is that what you had in mind, what you were just referring to?

DS: Without being too grandiose about it, I do think of the book as kind of an act of composition. It's not just me slapping together about 110 quotes. Adam and I really spent a lot of time trying to get the quotes right so that they felt like they have a rhythm, some kind of

pattern and, yeah, chronological was the last thing we wanted to do. I'm sort of digging out my notes here. What are some of the patterns to it? There's this whole focus on sort of fighting the hype in which they'll ask why he wouldn't appear on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* and he says, Because I haven't done anything yet. Then there's this one where he uses humor. They ask him what his acupuncture stick is called and he says, Wood. He's constantly trying to take away abstraction from the eyes of the questioner and say, Listen, it's just a piece of wood. You may want to gloss it all with all these sort of Asian stereotypes and have me do this whole shtick about being Asian but I'm just going to tell you that it's a piece of wood. One thing that I think is really nice about him, he's really aware of the limits of communication. I did a short interview with him for my *New York Times Magazine* piece and he's really aware that in a twenty-minute interview you're not going to get to know each other very well. You can't even begin to know me in twenty minutes so let's not pretend. He has a sense of how profound and difficult human communication is and he just has a wonderful sense of, I'll try to answer your questions but I'm not going to pretend we're going to become best friends in twenty minutes. Whereas some one else would go through this shtick where you're trying to bond in this sort of symbiotic way and the journalist is getting what he wants and the athlete is getting what he wants. The key to his appeal is that, to me, he really is this pretty mysterious person.

Z: Even though he is so well known around the world, an international figure.

DS: Right, and I think that's really true of most really iconographic people like Madonna or Elvis Presley or even Jesus. They're real contradictions and that's a point I try to make in my *New York Times* magazine piece. I try to argue that a lot of icons, I talk about Michael Jordan perhaps, Elvis Presley, Madonna, Jesus, Ichiro, obviously you can think of exceptions that don't prove the rule but I think that a lot of them, they embody contradictions in this very complete way. They're both total rebels and completely conventional. You can't really solve their mysteriousness because to me the moment you can really name what they are, they lose their hold on you. I think Ichiro is really very much like that.

Z: Did you receive any feedback from either Ichiro or the team?

DS: No. Just like when I published my book about the Sonics, absolutely zero response from the team. If you're not sort of writing the totally standard thing it doesn't really register for them. A few other themes that strike me as important about the book are his emphasis on focus on process, you know, don't focus on the product, focus on the process. The way he tends to value experience over expectation and the way he urges kids to find something passionate to believe in. The way he tends to refuse being viewed as a symbol whenever someone wants to turn him into a symbol of Japanese baseball he tends to definitely refuse that gesture. I've gone into a bunch of schools and those are the themes I talk about. To me it's a book of wise sayings that kids can apply to their own lives.

Z: How about the feedback from readers?

DS: I've gotten a lot of wonderful comments out of nowhere, people just loving the book. It's sold pretty well. It's published by Adam's small press, TNI, and sold more copies than some books I've published with major corporate publishers. It was published in Tokyo and it was on the paperback best-seller list in Japan. It's been fun and for awhile there was a guy who had a stand near Safeco and he was selling the book like a couple hundred yards from Safeco Field, it was neat. Days I would go to the game and walk by his stand you felt very much a part of the community; it was sort of cool. And he would tell me, We sold 18 this week, or whatever. It was sort of a wild idea I had and two months later there it was on a stand right next to the guy selling popcorn.

Z: Books aren't usually sold that way.

DS: Exactly. About a year later Simon and Schuster published a book of mine called *Enough About You*, a series of essays about autobiography, and I felt very disconnected to it. It got published and it got 27 reviews and it doesn't have anything to do with your life in a strange way. Whereas this book felt very much connected to my daughter and me watching games, to going to games, to taking a photograph of Ichiro when I was doing an article about him so I could give the picture to my daughter. It was all part of my life; it made a lot of sense. Whereas a lot of times you write a book you feel like your life is over here and your publishing life is somewhere else. I guess that's one of the cool things, you feel more intimately connected with it because you're seeing it through the whole process.

Z: Yeah, that's very true of self-publishing, almost to the other end of the spectrum. It's ironic that you'd say that because the guy who tipped me of to the book had a book published by one of the bigger publishing companies and was frustrated by the way it turned out and ended up publishing his second book himself and it did much better.

DS: That's amazing. I'm kind of drawn toward both. I'm a little bit beholden still to the mini glamour of the big publishers but I'm so disgruntled with the whole process that I've sort of, if I had any courage I'd leave behind the corporate publishers and do it on a smaller level.

Z: There seem to be a lot of, we can accept Japanese pitchers but Japanese position players won't be able to cut it. And I got from that some very racist, 'Asians are too small to come up against big, bad Americans,' almost a Eugenics thing. And there was a quote in the book where (ESPN commentator) Rob Dibble said, 'I'll run through the streets naked if he (Ichiro) hits better than .280. These comments sounded similar to those made when Blacks began playing in the majors in the 40s and I'm wondering what you thought of that.'

DS: Definitely, my *Times* magazine piece gets to that but yeah, absolutely. Ichiro faced a little bit of fairly overt racism when he played the first couple of weeks against the A's in the Oakland Coliseum and people were saying things like, Remember Pearl Harbor, and stuff like that. And they were throwing quarters at him and making derogatory remarks and gestures, all kinds of stuff. He sort of amazingly refuses to ever engage in self pity or, you might say, play the race card even when it seems

completely justified. But through humor and wit he beautifully transcends it and shows these people to be just completely inferior to his intelligence because he just says, "Oh no, those weren't quarters, that was rain coming from the sky." And in so doing, to me, he brilliantly retires the issue and transcends it. He has a wonderful way about him. Other players like him; he tends to be funny and self-deprecating. He's sort of a show off and he's not a typical, the sort of way that Americans view Asian players typically. He can be exhibitionistic and demonstrative, and he's sort of a showboat at times. It's almost like he says, from the moment he arrives, I'm not going to be your Japanese houseboy, I'm just not going to do it. I'll either be funnier than that, I'll be more aggressive than that; I'll be more subversive than that, I'll be wittier than that. In a way it's very assertive, I'm not going to play that role for you. So even though he's very different from say, Gary Payton, the trash talking Seattle Sonics player, in a way he's just as subversive of American sports clichés and I think that was sort of my connection to him, that I'm really interested in language, in people, you might say, screwing up the language. Gary Payton screws up the language in a certain way, Ichiro screws it up in another way. He's really amazing.

Z: It also came up with the fact that leagues in Japan play about 130 games a year and Major League Baseball plays 162, 'Do you have the stamina to hold up for an American season?' He down plays that too and it goes back to what you said before, weighing experience over expectation—'I'll let you know in game 131.'

DS: Exactly. There was a moment around early August or so where he really seemed to be tiring, and perhaps they figured him out blah, blah, blah. Bust him inside with fastballs and throw these curves on the outside that he doesn't have the strength to hit out and just when your worst fears were starting to be realized he went on this amazing streak where he batted about .700 with runners on base, it was unbelievable. Just when you needed him to prove the doubters wrong that's exactly what he did. Again, if you asked him if that's what he's doing he'd say, Of course not. But then he'd sort of wink at you. The way his performance and his articulation are at complete variance really fascinates me because you know that's what he's doing, trying to prove these naysayers wrong but ask him if that's what he's doing and he would dearly deny it. It was fascinating to watch. He's like a great performance artist who always keeps you from seeing, almost like a strip tease artist, you never quite see what you want to see. (Laughs) He's always keeping you off balance a little bit.

Z: The other day I was watching an Andy Kaufman video...

DS: I'd love to see that.

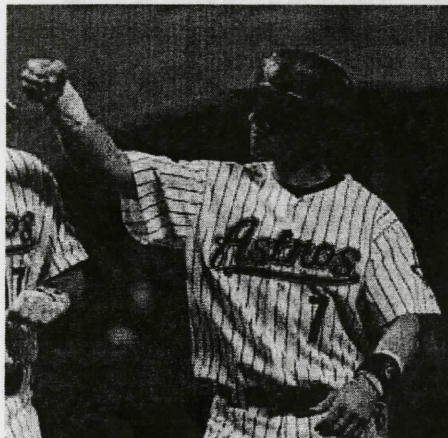
Z: He does this amazing bit where he's a character playing a character playing a character and yet none of them seem like the real guy.

DS: And it's crucial that you can never quite touch ground, crucial that you never feel quite safe.

The Zisk Staff Picks Their Most Entertaining Players

Editor's note: *What makes for a Most Entertaining Player? Zisk's contributors would rather show you than tell you. (And no, that's not a way to weasel out of the fact that we don't know what we're talking about.) Just keep in mind that an MEP is not necessarily the best player on a team...and enjoy the following nominations for MEP.*

Craig Biggio



Craig Biggio is neither colorful nor flamboyant. If I wanted to write about those types of players, **Derek Bell** or **Jose Canseco** would be the subjects of my article.

However, Biggio does

play for my favorite baseball team and he is one of the scrappiest players playing the game today. I have chosen to write about Big (pronounced Beeej) because he embodies what I like about the game of baseball and represents the sort of all around player that I think every player should strive to be. I know that when I am between the white lines, I try to play the game with the same intensity that Big plays with.

Big broke into the majors the year I graduated from high school, 1988. He was the first position player from the 1987 draft to make it to the Show. A graduate of Seton Hall University, Big had a couple of firsts off of future Hall of Famers. His first hit came against **Orel Hershisser** and his first homerun came courtesy of **Goose Gossage**. That was over fourteen years ago and Big still plays with the same tenacity as he did when he made his debut as a catcher.

Big became the first **Astros** catcher ever named to an all-star team in 1991. He moved to second in 1992 and that

year became the first player in Major League history to make the All-Star team at both catcher and second base. He has six appearances in the (what used to be) Midsummer Classic and has four Gold Gloves for his outstanding play up the middle. Among his many career highlights: In 1998, he joined HOF **Tris Speaker** as the only players to hit fifty plus doubles and steal fifty or more bases in the same season. Big is the all time Houston Astro record holder in games played, hits, runs, doubles, and stolen bases.

Big, also known as Pigpen for the way he plays and the appearance of his pine-tar stained batting helmet is never afraid to get dirty or take one for the team. He currently leads all active Major Leaguers in hits-by-pitch. He gets it done playing small ball. He isn't a prolific homerun hitter, but has been known to lead off more than a few games with a yack ball. Big relies on speed, excellent base running skills and situational hitting to be a key cog in a potent line up. He is one of only three players to play an entire season without grounding into a double play, accomplishing the feat in 1997.

Despite a horrific knee injury in 2000 at Florida, Big continues to be big time ballplayer in the Astro organization. As testament to his grit, Big applauded Florida's **Preston Wilson**'s slide into second base that ended his season, saying that it was the right way to play the game. Though he has slowed down just a bit since the injury to his MCL and ACL, Craig Biggio is still one of the best second basemen in the game. His drive and determination as he tries to steer the Houston Astros to the World Series championship attracts admirers and imitators around the league. Craig Biggio may not be the most colorful guy in baseball, but grit has to count for something.

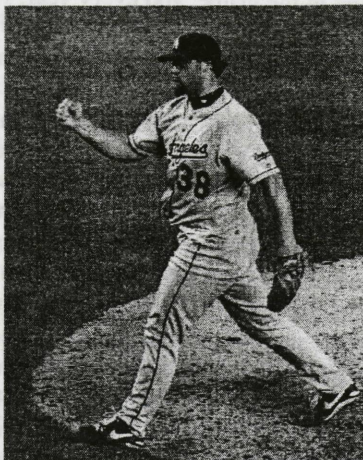
Kip Yates
Brooklyn, NY

Eric Gagne

Well, as of July 16, my favorite **Dodger** is **Eric Gagne** (although **Shawn Green** gave him a run for his money). The Dodgers, while in first place, have completely surpassed my expectation level for this season. However, I'm afraid they will pull a **Boston Red Sox** and end up in 3rd place—or three games out of the wild card before the season is over.

Anyway, why Gagne?

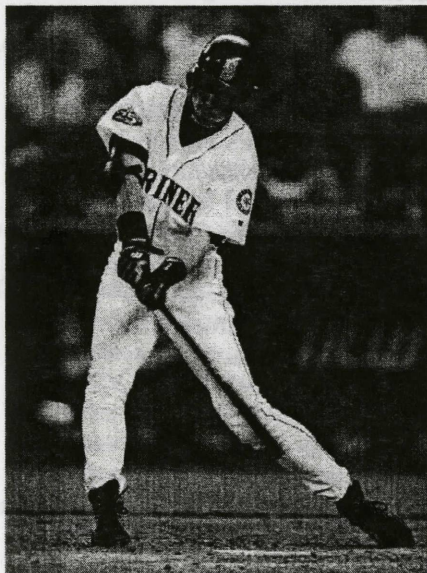
1. He has a dirty hat.
2. He has those goofy goggles.
3. He throws 98 miles per hour (at least through the first 40 games).
4. His change-up is three mph faster (88 mph) than **Jamie Moyer's** best fastball (85 mph tops).
5. He throws strikes.
6. 63 k's to six walks in 47 innings (with two of those walks being intentional).
7. He has finally made me feel at peace when the Dodgers are in a tight game going into the 9th.
8. He's Canadian (not necessarily a positive, but it adds to his overall goofiness).
9. He sucked last year as a starter.
10. He wants to throw nine strikes each inning, with none of them touching wood.



Go Dodgers!

Scott Lee
Seattle, WA

Ichiro



In Japanese the word "Ichi" means "one" and the suffix "ro" means something akin to the word "mister." "Ichiro"—said to be a relatively common name for first-born sons—thus means something akin to "Mister Number One." Yeah, that's him. If anybody is gonna hit .400 in our lifetime, this

is the cat. I'm not quite sure how he does it, but Mister Number One is capable of beating out a ground OUT to shortstop. I've seen it five or six times at least—not to mention the dozens of infield hits to the hole that fast mortals are capable of beating out... I'm talking about regular GROUND OUTS that Mr. Number One can turn into hits. I saw **Rod Carew** in his prime, **Ricky Henderson** in his prime, and Mr. Number One is faster—or, should I say, quicker? He's definitely the most exciting player I've seen and a genuinely nice guy off the field, it would seem. Oh, and did I mention he has an arm? Or that he's a contact hitter who strikes out infrequently? Or that he's capable of putting on a long ball stroke when the situation dictates it? Or that he's a significantly BETTER hitter with runners in scoring position???

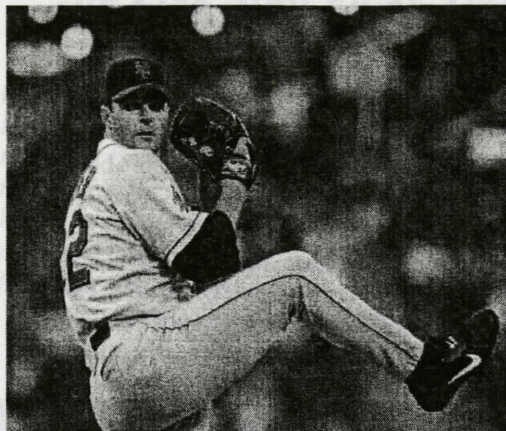
He's gonna be a Hall of Famer despite "breaking in" as a 27 year old "rookie." Best player in baseball, actually...

Tim
Mutant Pop Records
Corvallis, OR

Al Leiter

As a Mets fan, I've thought long and hard about who to pick as my most entertaining player. When our esteemed editor suggested this topic, I first figured it would take me five minutes. Then I realized, "Crap, the Mets haven't been entertaining since the 2000 NLCS!" The 2001 season was disappointing, but 2002 has been even worse. I had my hopes built up for a playoff team with the addition of **Mo Vaughn**, **Jerome Burnitz**, **Roger Cedeno** and **Roberto Alomar**. I was totally fooled in early May when the team went on an offensive tear. I foolishly believed that these 25 guys that could score a lot of runs and give up only a couple each game. Heck, I even predicted in these pages the Mets would win the World Series. Ha! World Series my ass.

Now that I've gotten this off my chest, let's turn to the matter at hand—who is the most entertaining player on my Mets? First one that comes to mind is **Joe McEwing**. He can play every position and is always hustling. But it's hard to hustle when you go 33 at bats in a row without a hit. That's not entertainment—it's torture. So I'll choose the Met most likely to go into broadcasting after he retires—**Al Leiter**. Picking a pitcher as the M-E-P probably goes against the grain since Leiter isn't out there everyday. But the New Jersey native that dreamed of



playing for the Mets is always fun to watch on the mound. He lets it all hang out. More than any pitcher I've ever seen, he

uses body language to will balls to go foul. When he gets frustrated with himself, he has no qualms about yelling at himself on the mound. He's never one to shy away from answering tough (or stupid) questions for the throngs of the New York media. Even when he's just in the dugout as a spectator, the camera will catch glimpse of him talking to other pitcher or rallying the troops to score a run or two, especially since that's all the Mets can usually provide.

Finally, I've seen Al Leiter rocking out at a **Bruce Springsteen** show, which automatically ups his entertainment value. I look forward to the days when Al is on *Baseball Tonight*, as he shows **Howard Reynolds** (no relation) and **Dave Campbell** why they suck. Perhaps he'll keep saying gems like this—here's our man Al on the fan voting for the 30th man at the All-Star Game: "The 30th Man should be a non-superstar name who deserves it because of the year he is having as a role player—in other words, a bench player or a setup reliever. Will baseball finally have two spots of the best utility player and best setup guy? 30th Man, schman. Give these two valuable positions their long-overdue credit. Give them a spot!"

Steve Reynolds
Brooklyn, NY

Kevin Mitchell

In the annals of great sports losers, the Cubbies and the Bosox get all the slobbery press. Us West coasters are fed a steady diet of sappy pieces about those "loveable" laughing stocks that an entire nation is supposed to get all

weepy aw-shucksy over every year when they fall face first in the grime, and every year, I refuse with more vitriol and spleen than ever. Why? Because we have our own soul crushers on the bay, damn it, and they're **Giants** in heartbreak only. Since they left their old Polo Grounds stomping ground, the Frisco boys in black and orange have failed to deliver a single championship to the faithful. That would be zero for you counting at home. These days, it's even more difficult to prop yourself up on the couch and submit to September disappointment, because outside of **Richie Aurilia** and **Dusty Baker** (a sad and pathetic prospect to think that the manager, for god's sake, is the most popular member of a sports organization), the Gyros are decidedly unlikable. You can root for **Barry Bonds** because he transcends the game, but he's one miserable human being. **Jeff Kent's** most endearing moment was that cockamamie story he concocted about falling off his truck while washing it at the do-it-yourselfer. His moustache speaks for itself.

Alas, it wasn't always this way in Giant land, for while they never quite reached the level of screwball team character of those A's asylums of the 1970's, they at least used to produce a few first-class nutcases. **Gaylord Perry** produced more gobbers than all of London in '77. Who can forget the Hac Man, **Jeffrey** (don't call me Jeff) **Leonard**, and his patented One Flap Down home run trot during his four homers in the LOSING playoff series to St. Louis in '87? But for my dime, the greatest spaz at the Stick was Kevin Mitchell. Now Mitch only played five of his fifteen seasons with San Fran, but what memorable ones they were. Legend has it that he started in baseball to escape the mean streets of San Diego (I ain't ever seen 'em, unless you're talking 'bout the locals who beat up tourists trying to breach proprietary rights at the big surf), where he collected no less than three gunshot wounds while running with the notorious Syndos gang. He also brawled with **Daryl Strawberry** during a pickup basketball game, and we all know the Straw never got over that. In his first year as a major leaguer, few remember that Mitch started the Mets' rally with a two-out single in the game that Buckner lost, but he was later traded to the Padres, where he was pegged to be the local boy who would turn that sad train around. Didn't quite work out, as he began running with the homies and, in baseball PR-speak, "lost his focus."

He was traded to the Giants, and I remember exactly where I was the day he played his first game—drinking tequila in the parking lot of a Jackson Hole motel, playing

Frisbee with my little brother and contemplating our choices of destruction for the evening. The Giants were in Chicago (and it's no accident my friend, that the Cubbies and Red Sox continue to play prominent roles in this story—losers find each other), and we sat riveted in front of the set as the big man hit two out on Waveland Ave. We were plastered at that point in the afternoon, riding that rare wave of intoxication, winning and freshly traded player done good. Mitch was in our drunken hearts forever.

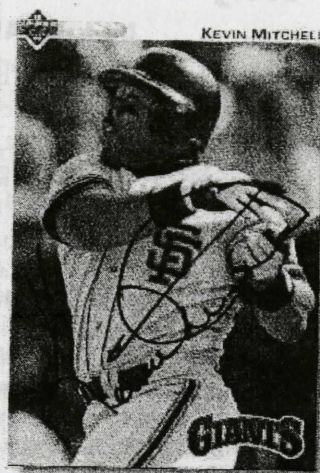
Never one to shy away from a drink or a feast, Mitchell continued to put on weight during the '88 season, resembling a sumo bulldog with a gold tooth. He slumped during that year, but his greatest moments were yet to come. Still my all-time favorite baseball highlight, during one game Mitch, probably hung over and half-asleep in the outfield, broke late for a fly into the left field corner. Either incapable or unwilling to break stride, he overran the ball and then reached back with his BARE HAND to make the catch. He could have dropped dead on the spot and his godliness for late-night *This Week in Baseball* watchers would have been assured. I still think they ought to place a marker of some sort on that spot, like "Here lies the last American Baseball Badass." Fuck, those modern day pansy ass left fielders can just run around it. Mitch went on to hit 47 homers and drive in 125 runs that year, winning the National League's Most Valuable Player award. Along with **Will Clark**, he also helped lead the team to the World Series, which, in true Giant fashion, was overshadowed by a huge earthquake that rocked the Stick and delayed the Series. The team never recovered, and neither did Mitchell.

He was eventually traded to the Mariners, where he showed up 30 pounds overweight (which is about 70 by us normal folks' standards) and never found a home in Starbucks land. He found some success in Cincinnati, but he made headlines again when he signed in '95 with the **Fukuoko Hawks** of the Japanese league, becoming the highest paid player in the history of that league. Trouble bubbled again when the team refused to let Mitch return to the States for knee treatments, so he went AWOL for ten weeks, hanging in the old hood, quaffing down Scotch and sodas for "physical therapy." He finally went back and hit a cool .300 for the season, but he came back to America for good the next year. The nation of Japan breathed a collective sigh of relief.

His last MLB seasons were relatively undistinguished, as he bounced from Cleveland to Boston and finally ended his career here, in my hometown of Oakland. And while in the next year we heard rumors that Dusty wanted to give Mitch a tryout, Kevin never made it back to the majors after that final season with the A's.

He did, however, make it back to the sports pages. In 2000, he joined the Western League's **Sonoma County Crushers**, and in one game, after **Solano Steelhead Jim Converse's** pitch sailed behind Mitch's back, he charged the mound and popped Converse in the mouth. A brawl ensued, and after Mitch started getting into it with some Steelhead fans, he went over to the stands and punched Steelhead owner **Bruce Portner** in the face. The owner pressed charges, which did little to deter the team. The Crushers fought with fans two games later in Yuma, AZ., while Kevin sat out his nine game suspension. Did I mention the manager of the Crushers was Jeffrey Leonard? Two years later Mitchell took over as Crusher manager, and it didn't take him long to live up to his team's name. In another game against the Steelheads (I believe there are more than two teams in the Western League, but do your own research, you lazy bastard), the new manager attacked Steelhead third base coach **Larry Olenberger** for allegedly stealing signs, and was ejected. His spot at the helm is said to be shaky.

Kevin Mitchell won the highest prize in professional baseball, and he missed part of spring training after undergoing surgery to repair a tooth damaged by a microwave chocolate doughnut. He has a mean temper, and he loves his grandma more than anybody else in this rotten world. He invented more excuses to get out of games than **Kenny Stabler** in the exhibition season, and he has a beatific smile. Giant fans are used to losing. But it sure does make the medicine go down a whole lot easier if it's taken with a spot of insanity and a gold-toothed smile. Thanks for the memories, Mitch. Have a trough of drinks on me.



Ken Derr, Oakland, CA

Why I Wear Number 44

by Lisa Alcock

I play second base on our co-ed company softball team. This year when we got to choose jersey numbers, my very first choice was no. 44, the same number worn by my all-time favorite player. No, not **Reggie Jackson** (please!), but in my opinion, the *only* no. 44: **Henry (Hank) Louis Aaron**.

I'm only 32, not old enough to have seen Hank play in his heyday or really remember him in the early 70's, up until he retired, in 1976. But from what I've read about him, and seen on sports specials/documentaries, hands down, Hank is the man.

Hank might not have had as much flair as **Willie Mays** in the outfield, but he didn't need to. Hank got the job done. He also didn't need to loosen his hat so it would fly off when he ran for a fly ball...like Mays was known to have done. In Hank's 23 seasons, he played mostly right field (he also played first, second and third and was a DH in 1976). He played in 3,298 games with 7,436 put outs, a fielding percentage of .982 and only 144 errors. He has four Gold Gloves. Despite these numbers, I think Hank is mostly known for his hitting. Everyone knows the significance of the number 755; it is the most recognizable statistic in baseball. Hank's lifetime batting average was .305. He was the first player to have 3,000 hits and 500 homers. He has two National League batting titles. In 12,364 at bats Hank has 2,174 runs, 2,297 RBIs, 3,771 hits, OBP is .374 and his slugging percentage is .555. His statistics are amazing...and what got him into the Baseball Hall of Fame. But that's not the only reason

I admire Hank.

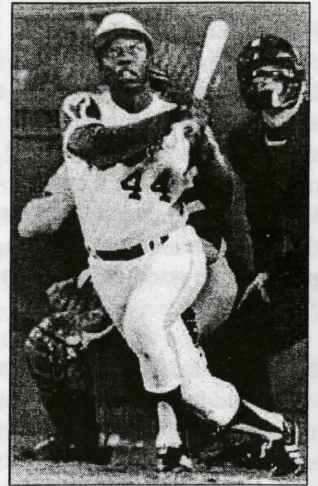
If I could go back in time, he is one of the players I wish I could have seen play. He is the epitome of grace and power and quiet strength. He shut up a lot of critics when he surpassed the Babe's HR record. I get goose bumps and a little teary-eyed when I see news footage of that game. If I could nick one

baseball moment in which to be present, it would be April 8, 1974, Atlanta, Georgia, Dodgers vs. Braves. In that one defining moment a man from Mobile, Alabama made a statement and wrote baseball history.

It was the 4th inning; **Al Downing** pitches to Hank...

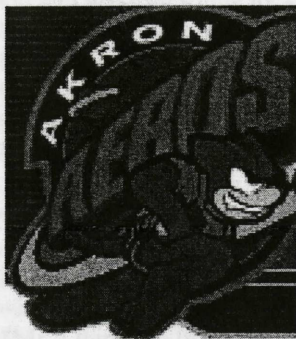
Thwack! The ball was gone!!! There was Hank, rounding the bases...two fans ran onto the field and patted him on the back...the crowd erupting into a frenzy, and there, waiting at home plate along with his teammates, was his mom. She grabbed him and hugged him and clung onto him because she had feared he would get shot that day. She has said in interviews that if her son was going to get killed, she was going to go with him. Hank had received many death threats and thousands of pieces of racist hate mail on his road to beating **Babe Ruth's** homerun record. (He'd also received letters of praise and encouragement, both of which he's saved). Through the racist climate in Atlanta and throughout the country, Henry persevered and excelled. He let his bat and glove speak for him. Hank and his family were threatened as he moved closer to passing Babe Ruth's HR record. (FBI agents accompanied his daughter **Gaile** when she attended Fisk University.) He had to endure things that no one should ever have to endure. He was the pillar of strength and dignity at the darkest hour. He was a strong, somewhat shy, reluctant hero. He's someone to look up to. Not only did he achieve baseball greatness, he brought attention to the fact that baseball didn't exist in a vacuum; the sport was also affected by the racist climate in the U.S. He gave hope to thousands of kids and adults (myself included) as to how far one could go. If you apply yourself, you can write history. I would think that many players today stand on the shoulders of this giant.

Now, when I step up to the plate, I admit, I'm no Hammerin' Hank. I'm lucky if I get a double. But in the back of my mind...Hank is there, the reserved, dignified hero. Number 44.



Batman: Making the Case for the Akron Aeros MEP

by Mike Faloon



One of the most difficult aspects of following a minor league team is that the players turnover at such a high rate. This is especially true when a good minor league team, like the **Akron Aeros**, is feeding a dying major league team, like the **Cleveland Indians**.

Despite this, every Aeros home game I've seen in the past two years has delivered entertainment. Sure, the players are great, especially the 2002 club, but they have nothing to do with the Aeros' guaranteed ability to entertain.

That obligation rests on the shoulders of the team's adult batboy. Or, rather, their batman. Or, to get it right, **Batman**.

Clad in an Aeros uniform with "Batman" blazing across the back, donning wrist bands and glasses that border on being Sabo-esque, Batman puts on a show each time he steps onto the field. My wife and I became fans at our first Aeros game.

Most batboys pick up a stray bat and scurry back to the dugout. Batman uses a stray bat to kick-start his show. He passes the bat between his legs, twirls it behind his back, and then uses the handle to scoop up a batting helmet. He moves so fast you're certain he'll impale himself but he's as accurate as he is fearless.

In between innings, as the public address system cranks out the hits, Batman steps onto the dance floor. He snaps his fingers to "Run'around Sue," struts to "Hungry Like the Wolf" and unleashes a vast array of full-body spins, side-to-side head bobs, and various manners of arm movements. And, like any great artist interpretive artist, he's not bound by his material, choosing to air guitar to the piano-driven "Great Balls of Fire."

Like a great pitcher, Batman knows how and when to pick his spots, never getting in the way of the

game. And he supplements his role as showman with that of ambassador.

He strikes up conversations with the umps when he brings out fresh balls or a between innings beverage. He guides the first base coach to the coach's box as if he's bringing a plane in for landing. He chats it up with the opposing players, sitting in their dugout while the game's in action.

Watching Batman break out his dance moves, the visitors bust out in laughter. But Batman is unfazed. My theory was that he didn't care if people were laughing with or at him, if they were laughing he felt he was doing his job.

Without planning to do so, I put this theory to the test at the last Aeros game we saw before moving away from Akron. I went down to field level and snapped a picture of Batman. As I readied for another shot, Batman saw me looking up at the scoreboard.

Batman: Who's Cleveland playing tonight?

MF: Boston, I think.

Batman: Huh, it looks like they're in Cincinnati.

MF: Oh yeah, it's interleague tonight. By the way, I've always enjoyed the way you entertain the fans.

Batman: Thanks. (*Offers to shake hands.*)

MF: By the way, what's your name?

Batman: Brian.

MF: I've always known you just as Batman.

Batman: (*Walking back to dugout*)

Batman is my stage name.

That's a man who knows where it's at, thus proving my theory that Batman is the Akron Aeros' Most Entertaining Personality.



From Blackjack to Stickfigure

An interview with Jack McDowell
and bandmate Mike Mesaros

By Dave Schulps

"This is a difficult business to break into and I don't want to be thought of as some ballplayer who's dabbling in music," 1993 A.L. Cy Young Award winner **Jack McDowell** recently told ESPN's **Peter Gammons**. "Music is now my entire life. I once was a pitcher who played music, now I'm a musician who used to play baseball."

Botched elbow surgery (a "minor" arthroscopic operation that left one of the muscles in his throwing arm permanently paralyzed) in 1997 brought McDowell's baseball career to a premature end two years later at age 33. But even while he was playing, McDowell was laying the groundwork for the music career he hoped to begin when his playing days ended. A big **Beatles** and **Who** fan as a kid, thanks to his older brothers, he was influenced in his teens by the likes of **R.E.M.**, **the Replacements** and **the Smiths**. In the early '90s, McDowell, who sings, writes and plays guitar, put together his first band, **V.I.E.W.** In winter 1991-92, they were asked to open a winter tour for New Jersey rockers **The Smithereens**, mostly on the recommendation of that band's bassist and baseball fan extraordinaire **Mike Mesaros** and guitar-playing soundman **Mike Hamilton**. **V.I.E.W.** would eventually break up after recording one EP. For McDowell's next project—his first full-length studio

album—he chose the name **Stickfigure** (an old high school nickname spawned by his 6'5," 185 pound frame). Among the players on that album, 1995's *Just a Thought*, were Mesaros, Hamilton and ex-**Del Lords** drummer **Frank Funaro**. This became the original touring

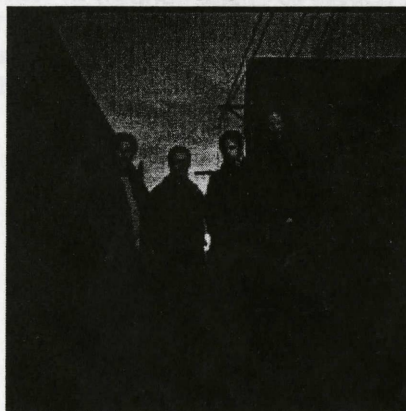
line-up of **Stickfigure** and a second album, *Feedbag*, followed in 1997. With the end of his playing career, music became McDowell's full time occupation. He began writing intensely for a new album and having written over 30 songs began recording what would become *Ape of The Kings*, with super drummer **Josh Freese** (**The Vandals**, **Paul Westerberg** and a gazillion others) replacing **Funaro**, who with Jack's blessing had left to join **Cracker** full time. Released this year on What Are Records?, the album should appeal to anyone whose tastes run to the kind of taut, tuneful songwriting that characterize Jack's abovementioned influences and, of course, **The Smithereens**, too.

Having known Mike Mesaros since the earliest days of **The Smithereens** and had many long discussions on both baseball and rock 'n' roll with him, I figured *Zisk* would be the perfect place for a lengthy interview with Jack and Mike. We spoke prior to **Stickfigure's** show at the L.A. club **The Mint** this May. I'm sure Jack—who's admitted that the toughest thing for him has been convincing people that he's not just an ex-ballplayer trading on his notoriety—will be pleased to know that a friend of mine who attended the show's first comment on his performance was: "Hey, this guy's actually a legitimate musician."

DS: Jack, what music did you grow up listening to?

JM: I had two brothers and an older sister that were 7, 8, and 10 years older than me, so pretty much what they were listening to was my first taste of the music world and I got lucky. My oldest brother was a huge **Beatles** fan. My brothers used to sit me on the bed, play **Beatles** records for me and have me tell them who was singing. You know, ask me "Which one of the them's singing?" and I'd have to figure out who it was. If I was wrong they'd smack me around. That was one of their fun games. So I kind of grew up on the **Beatles** and moved on from there.

DS: What was more memorable for each of you, your first big-league ball game or your first rock concert.



McDowell and his band Stickfigure

line-up of **Stickfigure** and a second album, *Feedbag*, followed in 1997.

JM: The first rock concert came when I was a teenager, so the big-league ball game definitely because you're a kid and just everything looks so surreal and the uniforms are so white and everything is so clean and nice out on the field. The field's perfect compared to the little league fields you're playing on, so that was definitely more memorable.

DS: What was the first ball game you ever saw.

JM: It was probably a **Dodgers** game. I'm trying to think when exactly was my first game. It must have been early grade school.

DS: And what about first rock concert, do you remember when that was?

JM: I think the first rock concert I may have gone to was **Genesis** in the early '80s. A couple of high school friends had tickets and I didn't really go to shows. I didn't get over to clubs, obviously. Being underage, I couldn't go into clubs over in Hollywood. Oh, you know what, **Genesis** wasn't actually my first show. My brothers took me to see **Springsteen** when they were in high school. He was doing the crazy 3 ½ hour shows way back when. I did get to see that. That was probably the first one I went to see. It was either at the Forum or at the Sports Arena, I think it was the Sports Arena.

DS: How about you, Mike? Which do you remember best, first concert or ball game?

MM: I remember both. The first rock show I saw was **Canned Heat** and the **Grass Roots** at the Steel Pier in Atlantic City, where my parents had once gone to see **Abbot and Costello** and **Bing Crosby** and **Frank Sinatra**, so that was really cool. I remember my first ball game was with my little league team and it was at Yankee Stadium, the old Yankee Stadium, and it was some time in the '60s and I remember **Mel Stottlemyre** was pitching that day and **Mickey Mantle** was in the line-up. It was a great way to start, and just like Jack says, there's a thing about walking in and seeing that green, that grass, and the uniforms, how beautiful they looked. I think to this day, one of my favorite things about going to a ballgame is just looking out and seeing that grass for the first time, especially at a place like Fenway Park or Wrigley Field.

JM: Did you guys wear uniforms to the game.

MM: Yeah.

JM: Absolutely.

MM: And I remember **Billy Cantor**. I was so grossed out the way he was eating a hotdog with mustard all down his face. Ugh.

JM: Soiling your little league uniform.

DS: I grew up about two miles from Yankee Stadium and used to pass it all the time and you just wanted to be there

seeing a game every time you passed.

MM: It had to be torture if there was a game going on and you weren't going.

DS: So staying on this topic, how about your first time on the mound versus your first time on stage.

JM: There's no comparison, because certainly the first time you take the stage you're not throwing in front of a TV audience and 20,000 or 30,000 people, so pitching the first big-league game was nuts. I was talking about it the other day with somebody, reflecting way back when.

Carlton Fisk was my catcher. I'm looking around and seeing all these guys I've been watching on TV and I'm two months out of college. It's like they put you in the middle of a video game or something. It's just a completely surreal experience. Talk about tunnel vision; I had so much tunnel vision that after about the second or third inning, I was walking off the field and walked into one of the railings of the dugout. I didn't want to look at anything; I was so locked into my own head I didn't know what was going on.

DS: Was the College World Series good preparation for that?

JM: Yes and no, I mean we played in front of a couple of thousand people in college in different places. Stanford has a nice facility and you got to play for a lot of people in the regionals, but nothing like in the big leagues. I mean you walk into a stadium compared to a ballpark. It's completely different.

DS: And your first show on stage fronting a band?

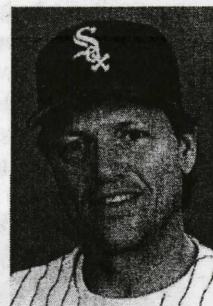
JM: I think my first show was... I did acoustic shows with some guy in Chicago in a bar. That was the first time I was ever out playing my music in front of people. The first show the band ever did was at a park, probably 100 feet from my house in Chicago at the time. It was kind of crazy; definitely different.

DS: Was the press on to the thing?

JM: No. It was pretty low key. I mean, people knew I was doing it, but it wasn't like it was a big, crazy thing.

DS: Did you have one highlight as a major leaguer that stands out above the rest?

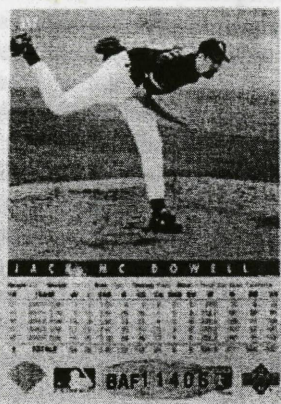
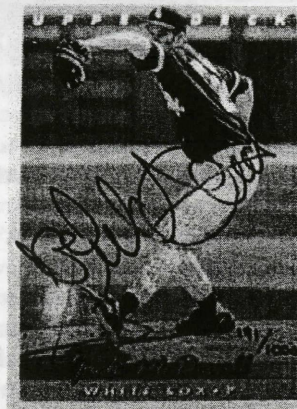
JM: I think the highlights I had were the clinch days going toward the playoffs. I was never lucky enough to actually win a playoff series in the handful of years I got to go, so I think the highlight was when you finally reached that first step. You set out a goal and you get to reach it, so I think those days are definitely the highlights,



sprinkled along with the things I got to enjoy, like a couple of milestones Carlton Fisk had when I was with the **White Sox** and we got to celebrate with him. That was great, too.

DS: Having Carlton Fisk catch your first major league game, what did that mean to you?

JM: Oh, it was great. The one story I tell about Pudge all the time is I came to the majors with a good fastball and a mediocre split-finger fastball. I mean, I was still developing that pitch, so I mean I was a 1½-pitch pitcher at the time. So he got really good at using my fastball. I've related this a bunch, but there were times when I would go into the windup and he would move to set up his target and he'd be literally behind people, like "OK, if you're missing, throw it through this guy." That's the way I learned to pitch early on with him.



DS: Were you kind of a **Drysdale** disciple attitude-wise?

JM: Yeah. I was pretty aggressive on the mound and I went after people, you know, but I never liked to waste pitches. I wasn't trying to scare anybody by throwing up and in, but I would throw inside to try and get people out. You know, you miss by 6 inches and you're right on them. You make the pitch you want to and they're not going to hit the pitch. That's the thing; if you're trying to throw strikes on the inside part and you miss, it looks like you're trying to dust somebody off the plate. I never liked to waste pitches. I liked to get to it, get after them, and get them out as quick as I could.

DS: Is there a constant battle with the batter moving in on you and the pitcher trying to keep him off the plate?

JM: There is, especially nowadays. The thing is, they stopped calling the inside strike for a long time, so batters just got up on top of the plate. Basically, the outside corner of the plate was right down the middle where these guys were standing and you'd throw a perfect pitch inside

and they'd jump off the plate and everybody would think you're throwing at them. Meanwhile, the pitch is right there. It's a strike if you go back and look at it. They weren't calling that for a while so you had to be more aggressive in there. The trick for me was getting them into a situation to exploit that and I used to use it in the opposite way from most pitchers. When I'd get behind in a count, I'd challenge people inside and they'd see fastball and think, "This is something I can handle." Early on in my career, when I had a good enough fastball, I'd be able to get in on them. That's how I used that.

DS: Later in your career, when the fastball was not as good, did you develop other mechanisms?

JM: You know I never got a chance to get to that point. I kind of just went boom [McDowell's career ended at 33 after a botched elbow surgery] and I was done so I never got to it. But I was stubborn; it would have taken me a while. I still would get to a situation where I'd go, "I'm going to jam this guy inside here." I would try to throw my 84-mile-an-hour fastball by somebody and he'd remind you that's not a good idea.

DS: How did you and Jack meet, Mike?

MM: I saw Jack on **Roy Firestone's** show in 1990 and he was on with, I think, **Lee Plemmel** who was a member of Jack's band **V.I.E.W.** I remember he played a song called "Prodigal," and it made quite good musical sense to me. I can tell in one song if a person is coming from the same musical place as I am. Then through a mutual friend we met and those guys came out on the road with the **Smithereens** for a good month on tour in '91 or '92.

DS: Was that your first bona fide tour, Jack?

JM: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I tell these guys now, but I didn't tell them at the time, that we had only done a handful of **V.I.E.W.** shows with that band together and they called us out to do the **Smithereens** tour with all these packed crowds and I remember showing up, the first gig was in Louisville, and having the auditorium just jam packed with kids. It was nuts and the first thing they see is us, because we're the opening band, and we go out there, and I remember finishing the first song and I know the whole crew of the **Smithereens** were checking us out, because they didn't know what we were all about. Nobody had heard us or anything. So we had the added pressure of the veterans looking on plus all the kids. At the end of the song, the kids were going nuts and I thought, "Oh we can do this, this is cool." I probably learned as much during that three weeks on the road as I have since.

MM: There was no hazing going on, though. We didn't give them the shave and all that.

JM: That's right. They were nice to us.

DS: So, Mike, were you the one responsible for having V.I.E.W. on the road with the Smithereens?

MM: Yeah. I knew it would be musically compatible, which it was. A good guitar-oriented rock and roll band. I knew it would be a hell of a lot of fun, which is one of your main concerns. A gig is only an hour, or 90 minutes, then you've got the rest of that time out on the road, so it's good to have good things going on then so that everything's going to be fun and going to work.

DS: So Jack, were you a Smithereens fan?

JM: Oh, absolutely. I was sitting there playing their songs one winter. Me and Lee were learning their songs as we were sitting around messing with each other and here we are a year later and they're calling us up to go on tour with them and we're just looking at each other and going, "OK, now what do we do?" It kind of stepped things up for us in a hurry, which was great.

DS: Did the kind of discipline and practice regimen you had in baseball carry over into learning to play the guitar and sing.

JM: I think so, but I'm not so sure it's from baseball. I think you either have that kind of mentality or not, but it definitely comes in handy. A lot of the same disciplines that I used in baseball that were my strong points I've used in music—as far as having tunnel vision and going for it and working hard and working on your craft and all that stuff. This record that we have out now is the first project that I've been able to put all my efforts into and not have the old baseball day job stepping on its toes. It's been great. You know, it's a lot of work running a band and getting things going. You want people to be able to hear the music. It's all about getting it out there to the people and there are different ways to do it, whether it be sitting and talking to you about it or playing shows or whatever. There's a lot to it.

DS: Do you have to be in the same mind frame to get up on stage as you do to get up and pitch.

JM: It's not so much of a competitive thing. What do you think of playing sports, Mike?

MM: Well, you're not trying to beat someone who's trying to beat you; there's no one trying to make you look foolish and if you make a mistake, you're not going to get booed and it's not going to be part of your permanent record in a book forever and ever that you made this many mistakes this particular tour: "You made 33 mistakes on that tour in 1988." It doesn't work like that, but baseball's like that. Every move you make is recorded forever.

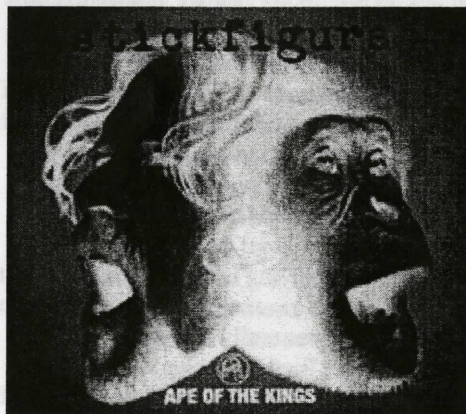
DS: What about the competition between bands on a bill?

I mean sometimes you hear about that kind of thing.

MM: I don't believe in that kind of thing between musicians. Comparing one band or musician to another is like arguing about which is a better color, red or blue. How do you argue that point? It's all in the ear or eye of the listener or beholder. You know, if you're a naturally competitive person you do have a certain amount of it, but often, if you're playing on a bill and there are other good musicians and their performance is good and it goes good, well, that works in your favor because it fires you up. Maybe you're beat or tired and you need that little extra kick in the butt to really put out at the top of your game so in that way it could work for you.

DS: So you guys really got to know each other on that tour. When and how did you decide to work together?

MM: Well, Jack asked me to play on a few tracks on one of his subsequent records and it went well and we have a good musical rapport. It's a comfortable fit. It's fun for me because Jack's writing is different from **Pat [DiNizio]**'s writing because Jack is a little bit of a different generation. He's coming from a different place; not as rooted in the '60s as the Smithereens. Jack has a lot of that, but there's also a few more contemporary things as far as what feels we're going to use drum-wise and stuff like that. So, it's a good way for me to expand my vocabulary.



DS: What was recording this album like?

JM: It was kind of crazy because it was done over maybe a year and a half or two years, the last couple of

years that I was playing ball. I had my home studio that I was doing a lot of the stuff on and I would do drums at an outside studio. It was a period of time where I probably recorded about two records worth of material, which I pared down to one record for this. I've got a whole 'nother bunch of songs sitting around waiting to be redone better now that we've been together as a band as much as we have the last year or so. But it was weird because it was a definite outlet for me and a lot of songs came from

the emotional roller coaster, I guess you could say, of seeing the end of my career and not knowing what's going on and thinking, "Wow, this record might actually be something I might be doing fulltime." When I started doing it I was planning on it being just another record that I put out while I played ball. So it was all things in one.

DS: What are some of the specific songs that are tied to your career ending or that kind of thing?

JM: "The Grave," the song that leads off the record, is the one that most directly relates to it. There's lines in there about where I'm going and what I'm doing with my life, basically. You know, it's interesting because as you write a song, you write certain things and you have certain things in mind, but you go back after a while and look at it and so many more things come out. You know, every song you write is going to have an element of where you are emotionally at the time, at least the way I write. I'm not necessarily the type of person that is crafting a song just to craft a song. It's usually about something I'm passionate about or feeling at the time or moves me to discuss in song. So, obviously, where I'm at at the time emotionally is going to set it off a little bit.

DS: There's a song, "Hey Man." Was that inspired by the brawl you got into in New Orleans with **Eddie Vedder**?

JM: No, not at all. That song was actually inspired by a spiritual retreat I went on a couple of years ago and they told a story about their thinking that we choose to come down here and take human form and kind of their thoughts on what religion really is and what spirituality really is. And that song was basically what came out of that little story for me. But what they believed in was that Eddie was God, so you had it tied in. [laughs]

DS: How did you meet Eddie?

JM: My wife, **Meredith**, used to live with his wife, **Beth**, way back in the San Diego days. They were roommates when he was playing in **In Style** and doing the San Diego thing and when me and my future wife at the time met in Chicago she was really into music and that was one of the things that kind of hooked us up and she said, "Oh, I've got another friend in music and he's really good." And it was right as the [first] **Pearl Jam** stuff was being recorded and going down, so we got to kind of watch that from Day One.

DS: Last year you did a charity show in San Diego that Eddie was part of. Is that something you're going to be doing yearly?

JM: You know what? It is. We're doing it again this year. Last year I was sitting out on my balcony just going "What am I going to do with this band? What's going to happen?" And I started thinking about the All-Star game.

And I thought I could probably put something together. We're not that busy right now. The record's not out. The record was done. We were shopping it and getting ready for it to come out. All that kind of stuff. So, I said maybe I'll put on a benefit and I just started calling a lot of my favorite bands. And everyone was totally down with it. I said I'd get them tickets for the All-Star game if they'd do the show. And it turned out great. Last year's lineup was **Mudhoney**, the **Supersuckers**, and **Eddie** played with both of them. **Matt Cameron**'s band, **Wellwater Conspiracy**, **Pete Drobe**, **Marcy Playground**, and the ever-rising **Stickfigure**. So that was the lineup last year. This year we're actually doing two shows, one in Chicago and one in Milwaukee.

DS: What was that show like for you last year, Mike?

MM: The party afterwards was great, which means I don't remember much about the previous few hours.

JM: It was a rock and roll evening, let's put it that way. Eddie was coming up to me and going "How did you put this together? There's no promoter in Seattle that could have brought this group of Seattle bands together."

Basically I did it all myself. I got on the phone, got in touch with all these people, booked all their hotels and flights. I did everything myself with a little help from my brother. And at the end of it, I just couldn't wait to get done with our set so we could just sit down and let it happen. This year I've got someone to help me with it and it's going to be a lot easier.

DS: How many of the players were into the same kind of music you were?

JM: I'd say at the most, two per team. If you found two that listened to any similar music or knew any of my top-10 favorite bands or stuff that I'd have in my car it would be interesting. Most of my time was spent on the fringe guys, who kind of liked the popular stuff, the watered down stuff of what was really good. And I'd go and get all the good CDs and give it to them and say, "If you like all that, listen to these. This is the good stuff of that stuff." I was always trying to convert.

DS: So you were really a proselytizer for the music.

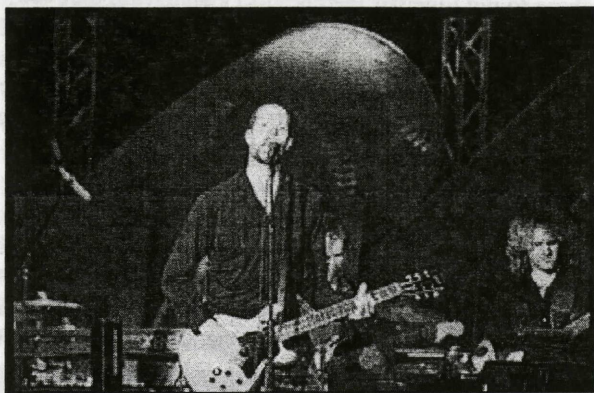
JM: Definitely. I don't know how many **Wilco** *Summerteeth* records I've bought just to give to people. I do that all the time. I mean, I buy my favorite records and say, "Here, listen to this." That's my passion about music. I believe everyone should listen to music that's really cool. If they did they would enjoy it.

DS: So in a clubhouse you probably have 25 guys who are into different music, if they're into music at all. Does everybody just listen through headphones?

JM: There's always a stereo playing. I never corralled

the stereo. I knew I was going to knock off 23 of the guys right away. SO I never even got on there at all. It was usually something very lowest-common-denominator-ish.

DS: Obviously, there are some players who really like to hang out with musicians and some musicians who really



like to hang out with ball players. Are there places where the two intersect. You know, bars in various cities.

JM: The strip clubs, I'd have to say. What do you think?

MM: There are a few bars where that intersection takes place. I've had some really interesting times at the old Wriggleyville Tap below Cabaret Metro in Chicago.

DS: Did a lot of ball players show up at Smithereens shows. I remember Mike telling me, Jack, about your namesake **Roger** showing up at a Smithereens show in Kansas City.

MM: I met Roger during spring training. I was down there and there was someone I knew who worked for MTV at the time who knew Roger and he introduced us. Roger used to come out a lot. And, you know, just from being on the road a lot and being in hotels.... One time I got out of the bus and somebody's standing there looking out as I walk out. And it was **Rick Cerrone**, who was then with the **Red Sox**. So I got to be friends with **Todd Benzing** and **Denis Lamp**, who were with the Sox at the time. They and Rick came to the show that night. So one thing leads to another and you have mutual friends. I've had phenomenal experiences as a baseball fan, seeing the game in ways that are absolutely not accessible to the average fan. The more I learn, the more I see, the more I experience, it all influences my appreciation of the game, and I enjoy it all the more for all these experiences and talking to players. It's really cool to be able to watch, say when Jack was pitching, and be able to ask him what was going on in a given situation. "What were you thinking?" And you really get the inside game. It's a great education and I really feel I have a little bit of a unique perspective

on the game that the average person doesn't have.

DS: How much baseball and sports are talked on the van or bus while you're traveling? Is that the way you pass the time between shows?

MM: I'd say a good deal. I'm always talking about baseball even to people who don't have any idea what I'm talking about, so it's fun for me to be around people who know what I'm talking about, let alone a major-league player. Unfortunately, most of the things I've heard from Jack I can't tell you about. [They both laugh.]

JM: That'll come out in my book, right after **Jose [Canseco]**'s.

DS: Since you brought it up, what did you think of his recent pronouncement that 70% of ballplayers were on steroids?

JM: I don't know. What's the reason? I mean, does he just feel so hurt he's got to go out and hurt everybody else, saying stuff about other players? What did they ever do to this guy? I don't understand why he'd do that.

MM: If he's mad at the powers-that-be or the so-called power structure in the game, why would you want to come and bring guys' names into it who were teammates; who went through the wars with him, so to speak.

JM: But that's the reason why. We were discussing this on the way down here. Jose doesn't look at it that way. It's not the wars to him. It was him trying to hit home runs. His thought was, "They come out here to see me hit home runs and you got 24 other guys out there." When I was a little kid, I always pretended I was winning the World Series in my backyard. And the guys that don't get that, are never going to get that. That's where you have a guy writing a book like that, who doesn't get what it's all about. And that's all I have to say about that.

MM: There's only one *Ball Four*. I think Jose's overestimating his own importance.

DS: Do you think Jose's being blackballed by Major League Baseball?

JM: For what reason? If he could put up numbers, they'd throw him out there. If he wasn't hurt every two weeks, they'd throw him out there. The fact that he can't play defense takes away half the teams that he's going to be able to play for. Most of the others have DHs, he's not your pro-type pinch hitter. He strikes out a lot. He's not putting the ball in play, and he's not hitting for average anymore. And basically he told all of baseball, I want to come back so I can hit 500 homeruns. Who the heck's gonna want that guy on their team? I think that blackballed him as much as anything did. That would be my guess as to why there wouldn't be the interest in some places that maybe you'd think there would be.

DS: Speaking of that kind of attitude, I've got to ask you your feeling about **Derek Bell's** "operation shutdown" this past spring?

JM: Mike should comment on that because it was the same week as the big Anaheim versus **Padres** brawl with **Klesko** and **Sele**. Take it from there Mike....

MM: I don't remember.

JM: I'll refresh you and then you can run with it. The quote from Derek Bell was "I'm just in shutdown mode, because I didn't walk into this job."

MM: Oh, I'm going to go into operation shutdown if I'm not assured of a job.

JM: And at the same time, guys are fighting in spring training and getting fined and suspended. In spring training we played a Stickfigure show down in Arizona. We were saying, "How warped is that?.... Spring training fights.... Everyone saying, "Oh these players, they don't care about the game anymore." Well, you know what, you get into a fight in a spring training game, that's gotta show you that when you actually step on the field, you're getting it on. I mean, we might fight because we care about the game, and you care about your turf and winning and that kind of shows people that the game is strong and it's real, it's not just about making money and going through the motions. On the other hand, Derek Bell can say that and it really hurts the game. [to MM] That was your comment on it.

MM: Right, if there were a real commissioner, which there is not, there's only one in name, he would come down on someone like Bell for making those statements. It wouldn't take the **Pirates** to have to release him for the good of the game. Remember when that existed? "For the good of the game.... In the best interest of the game." Somebody like Bell causes more damage because the implication is that he's not giving a hundred percent. That is the most damaging thing in baseball, because then it starts getting into the area of pro wrestling. Is it sport or sport-entertainment? When you buy a ticket to a major-league ballgame the inherent bargain you're making is that you're seeing players who are giving 100% of themselves to try to win that ballgame and are out there performing at the best of their ability, whatever it is, on that given day. Anything less, you're being cheated. To sum up, if I were the commissioner, somebody making a statement like Bell's or some of the statements that **Gary Sheffield** has made over the years, those are the people who'd be getting fined, not guys that are getting in brawls. I would let the players police the games themselves. They have it backwards.

DS: What general manager in his right mind would hire

Derek Bell?

JM: The same with Canseco. If you're trying to build a team, you want to have team players. That's the hardest thing to put together the chemistry on a team that can actually win. That's why you can have Montreal and Minnesota that they want to get rid of up on the top and doing well. It has nothing to do with money, big name players and all this other stuff. It has to do with a bunch of guys all working to win games.

DS: Who are some of the best team players you've played with?

JM: There are a lot. **Robin Ventura** is a great team guy, a great guy to play with. Just about the entire **Yankees** team in 1995; that was probably the tightest-knit group of guys that were all on the same page of anybody I played



with.

DS: And they seem to have kept that going.

JM: Yeah, that was basically the core of the team that's run off the streak that they have.

DS: So how does Robin like right field in Yankee Stadium.

JM: It looks like he's liking it a lot.

DS: Which ballplayers can you count on to show up at a Stickfigure show?

JM: If **Charley Nagy's** anywhere in the vicinity, he'll be there. He's been at all of them that he's been able to get to. Just kind of a smattering when they really get the urge.

DS: Is the groupie scene any different in baseball than it is in rock and roll.

JM: I don't know. We've got to start getting more people to our shows, and maybe I'll tell you.

DS: I mean, I know you're both married guys.

MM: That was so long ago, Dave, I can't remember.

JM: The one thing I have to say about it—just on a general theory—is in baseball you're in a town for three

day. In music, you're there for the show and usually you're taking off to go somewhere else, and very rarely are you even staying that night. So you'd better put some fast work in if you're looking to get in on the groupie scene. I think you've got a little more leeway if you're a sports guy, if you want to go down that road.

MM: But people like us, we don't have that kind of thing going on anymore. Years ago, a guy like **Pete Townshend**, says he picked up the guitar just because it was a good way to get girls. There was a thing—a guy with a guitar—that was something that really appealed to women. Now I don't know what appeals to women and girls. Not guitars.

DS: Jack, how much have you learned from Mike about the history of music?

JM: Tons. I had little pieces here and there, but to get deeper into it has been great. I have a strong knowledge from the 80s on and just little nibbles of what's been behind it.

MM: That's one reason I don't like a lot of current bands, when I hear their roots don't go back beyond **Jane's Addiction**. That's not to say anything about Jane's Addiction one way or the other, but that's not where it starts. You don't start something, you don't get into a field, in the later part of the timeline. I feel it's necessary to go back and to embrace the very beginning and to make that part of your vocabulary. I can hear that lack of classic roots in many musicians today.

JM: I love when *Mojo* magazine does those backwards lineages. These guys were listening to these guys who were listening to this.

DS: Will the Smithereens be recording anytime soon?

MM: Probably. I don't know when and I don't know how as far as labels and everything and whether we would just want to put out something ourselves. That's what I would like to do. I'd like to just have it sold on the Internet. I'm very disillusioned with the music business.

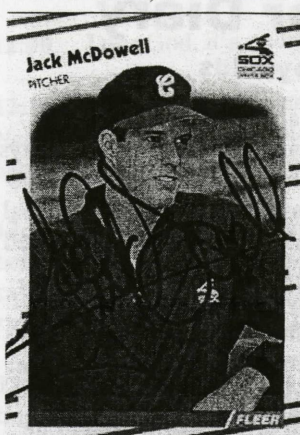
JM: Oh, come on, Mike. What do you mean?

MM: I hate record companies. I hate them.

DS: How do you feel about that, Jack? You're just starting out in this.

JM: I've been around it enough to realize that it's changed even from the time that I started in the music business. At that point, you could still have music conversations with people in the industry, like we are now, and relate at some level. Nowadays, if you find one person around an office that you can have any kind of conversation with about music or music history or what's good and what's not.... Those kind of people just don't exist anymore. It's a bunch of marketing geniuses who

are there to stuff the American feedbag. It's all sales, which is fine, it's a business, but there should be more.



DS: Speaking of business, do you think there'll be a baseball strike?

JM: Yeah, absolutely.

They've been trying to get a cap for the last seven or eight years. They've got a worldwide pay-per-view plan they've been holding onto for a decade. You wonder why they're paying \$10 million just to negotiate with these top Japanese players and then doubling it up to pay them.

They're trying to increase the

worldwide awareness and interest, which they already have, and then they're just going to go over and go to South America and Europe, Japan and make it pay-per-view. And if they've got a salary cap, that is just cleaning house. And that's what they're going to try to do. They don't care if they have to shut the game down again and shut the World Series down again. Players have nowhere to go, because if players don't strike, at the end of the season, they can implement any situation they want. It's a bad scene.

DS: Do you think that has anything to do with **Selig's** call for contraction?

JM: I think that was just something to take everyone's eye off the ball. And I don't know that from anything other than when I first saw it, I said, "He's just trying to get everyone's eye off the ball," which is the labor disputes and talk about something else for a couple of months, which everyone did. The whole thing with contraction, too, is they don't want these teams to move to another city because if a team moves to another city, no one gets any money. But if they shut down these teams and then a team starts, like Arizona did or Colorado did, the new ownership group, on top of just buying into it, have to pay like a \$250 million initiation fee that everyone gets to share. You're talking about half a billion dollars if two teams shut down and two new ones start as opposed to moving. It's not too hard to figure out. If you buy the team, it's going to cost you enough just to get the team up and running but then you have to pay a \$250 million initiation fee to join the club with all these owners who are going out of business supposedly.

An All-Star Diary

by Steve Reynolds

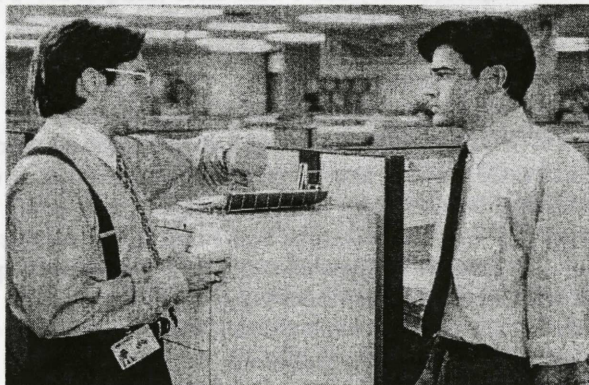
Baseball's All-Star Game has always been a summer centerpiece for me. When I was growing up it was always an opportunity to stay up past my normal bedtime. There would usually be a good old-fashioned baseball-type meal that night—hot dogs, potato salad, beans, a pitcher of iced tea and some ice cream somewhere around the fourth inning. After rediscovering my love of baseball (and all sports) in the early '90s, I would always try to replicate one of those nights of my youth. On the way home from work I'd hit the local supermarket and buy all of the aforementioned foods, and then set myself in front of the T-V for a few hours. This year I decided to keep a diary of my All-Star night...

7:30 Arrive at my stifling hot apartment with 26 bucks worth of food in tow, including hot dogs, buns, chips, salsa, dip, cheese and a big steroid size bucket of potato salad.

7:49 Cooking the hot dogs has made the kitchen so hot I contemplate putting my A/C on "hi cool" and stuffing it down my shorts.

7:50 Realizing that I can barely fit into my own shorts, I decide to run the A/C on high and let it keep its precious freedom.

8:00 The Fox pregame comes on with a horribly hokey opening where actors reenact great scenes from baseball's past.



8:00:30 I check to see if *Office Space* just might be on Comedy Central. Dammit, it's not. Back to the vomit-

inducing opening montage

8:01 Jennie Zelasko and Kevin Kennedy start talking, and suddenly my dreams have been answered—Kennedy's lips are moving but I don't hear a single word. Alas, it's just a bum mic, not the K-chip I installed.



8:08 Holy shit—Shoeless Joe Jackson is on the field. Oh, wait, it's just Ray Liotta coming on to introduce the 30 greatest moments in baseball history.

8:10 Seriously, isn't *Office Space* somewhere on cable?

8:20 Okay, I know Mastercard sponsored this 30 greatest moments shindig, but I thought their tagline was "priceless," not "timeless." As in, "this presentation will go on forever, therefore it's timeless."

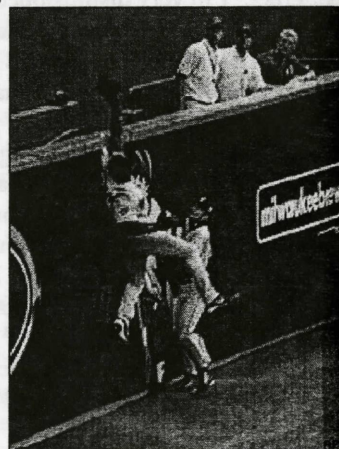
8:34 Alright, finally onto the game! Oh, wait, it's the lineups. Oh look, Jorge Posada let his kid run out to take his place in the starting lineup. Isn't that cute. If this were the good old days, Pete Rose would have run the kid, and then Jorge, over without blinking an eye.

8:52 Pop diva Anastacia is singing...well, perhaps emoting the Star-Spangled Banner. Shit, I lost my remote.

8:53 Find remote just in time to hear Joe Buck say, "In case you forgot, we've got a game coming up next."

9:06 First pitch. I drop the remote and start to relax.

9:17 Oh, Bonds crushed it. Oh HOLY SHIT. TORI HUNTER! Wow—now that's what the All-Star Game is all about! That catch we'll be seeing for the rest of the season. There's no way anything in this game could overshadow that robbery of Bonds.



10:15 **Bob Uecker**, who has been the voice on the Milwaukee Brewers for years, enters the booth with **Joe Buck** and **Tim McCarver**.



10:16 I'm laughing at Bob Uecker so much my stomach hurts.

10:21 As McCarver and Uecker talk about their wild days with the Cardinals, Buck sets up a great line.

Joe: "You guys were married back then though."

Uecker: "Well, not to each other."

Ha ha.

10:23 Uecker leaves, and I consider the turning the T-V off. Why isn't Uecker doing games nationally?

10:50 I have not seen **Twins** closer **Eddie Guardado** all year. I realize that he's pitching wearing what looks like bowling shoes.

Perhaps that's the next career he'll try if contraction actually happens.



11:08 I must have accidentally slipped in a tape of last year's World Series, as it looks like **Byung-Hyun Kim** has just blown a lead.

11:19 Now **Sasaki** has blown a lead? What is going on here?

11:36 Oh shit, it's tied. How long will this game go into extra innings?

11:48 Only in Milwaukee—Baltimore third baseman **Tony Batista** almost gets run over by a guy in a sausage costume.

12:00 Dear God, it's midnight. When will it end?

12:15 Uh-oh, this could end in a tie they're saying? Nah, no way Selig would allow something like this to happen.

12:26 Okay, what is taking so long this conversation between **Torre**, **Brenley** and **Selig**? Have they decided to call this game a tie just because they're worried about stretching two **STARTING** pitchers past two innings?

12:30 They just made the announcement that if the NL doesn't score, the game ends in a tie. I realize that if I ever meet Bud Selig, I'm going to kick him in the cock.

12:31 Fans start booing.

12:32 Fans still booing.

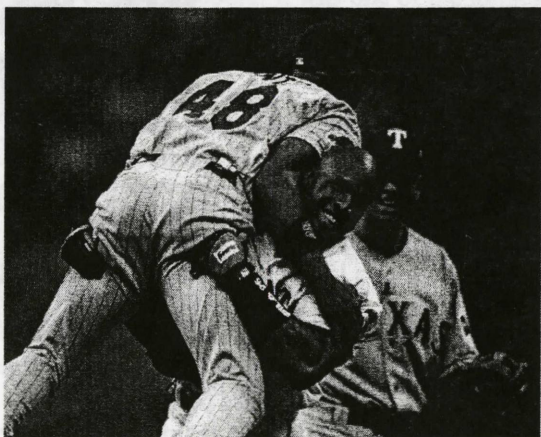
12:33 I join in with the fans booing.

12:34 Here's a chant I've never heard before in a ballpark: "Let them play! Let them play!"

12:37 Game over. What a disgrace. I can't believe I wasted this much time. It's not like I turned on a Major League Soccer match—I deserve some closure!

12:39 Fox says they hope to have Selig explain his decision, but for some reason they have to sign off before they can find him. What a chicken shit.

12:41 I go to bed just like I have after many a Mets game—extremely frustrated.



A View From the Upper Deck

by Mike Bonomo

I was reading in the book *The 25 Most Amazin' Games in Mets History*, by Howard Blatt, that the Grand Slam Single playoff game at Shea in 1999 was played in a hard driving rain. But for the record, it was a relatively light rain. A mist really. I remember getting home from the game and seeing clips on TV and thinking, "wow, it looks like it's pouring." Yes, I saw the game the way I've spent most of my time at Shea, in the upper deck.

You see it was really that game that made me love the upper deck. I saw the game for \$50. But my seats were behind the plate and that makes all the difference. There are people who paid \$150 for that game and sat near the foul pole in the lower deck far further from home plate than my perch in the sky. For regular games I pay \$12. (plus the \$3 service charge those pieces of shit put on each ticket even though I got them from

the Mets club house store. Only buying tickets at Shea precludes this. (It's part of the amazing Met magic that printing tickets on a laser printer at Shea is \$3 cheaper than printing them on a laser printer at the Met store.) Now I must admit right off that if I could afford the box seats behind home plate I would sit there and never look back. But I can't, so those people are all jerks. I have sat in great seats now and again. I saw St. Louis

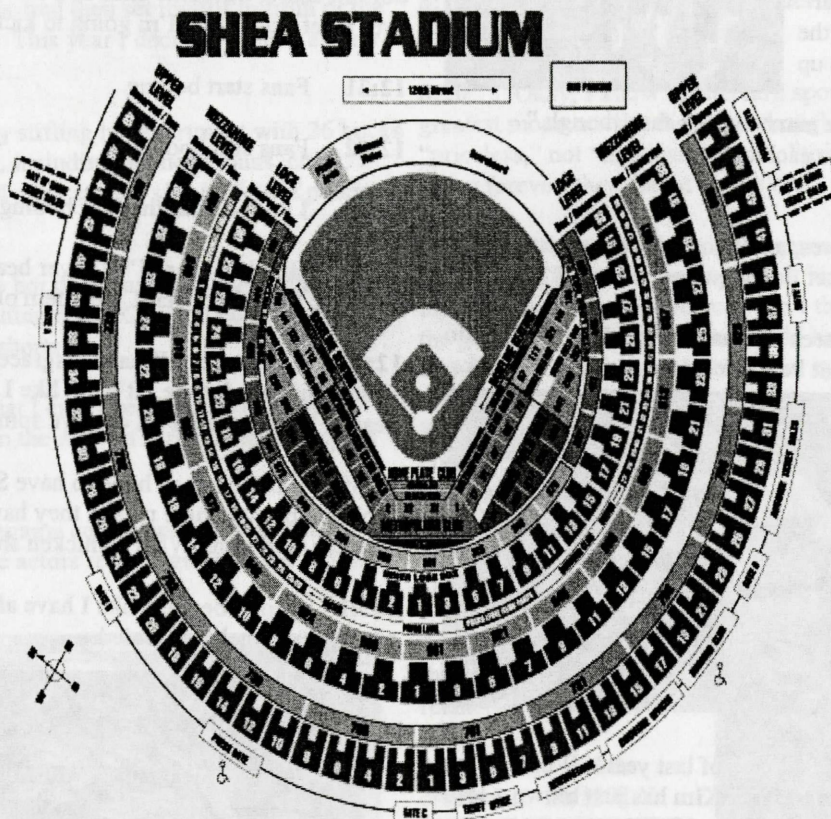
play the Mets in 2000 from the 2nd row off the field at first base. Sadly **Big Mac** was out with a hurt back that July. I remember hearing the crowd from the upper deck chanting "Let's Go Mets!" and yelling that certain players sucked. In the box seats, not a chant or a comment. I suppose if they had flashed stock quotes on scoreboard that might have gotten similar "you suck" chants from the field level. But for baseball, nothing.

I got the NLCS Game 5 ticket from my friend **Michael**. I am usually an eclectic sports fan (read:

pothead) and at that time I didn't go to many games. I'm not saying you can't be a huge sports fan and a pothead, many are, especially the players, but I'm just telling my story. When we got to the game, the rain was slowly coming down. The scalpers were selling on the subway. The Mets had lost the first three games to the Braves and everyone thought they were going down in four like chumps. That and the rain kept 'em

away. Could have gotten seats for \$20.

It's hard to remember now the first innings of the game really. In Howard Blatt's book (a great book) **Masato Yoshi** is quoted as saying that by the end of the game he didn't even remember that he had been the starter. I do, however, remember the antics of the drunks vividly. Guys with Mets logos tattooed on their



arms clanging cow bells pointing at sections and getting them to stand up for a rousing "Let's Go Mets!" In the early part of the game, it didn't take much to get 'em going. Somewhere around the 5th inning or so, a drunk jumped on his friend's shoulders with a cowbell and really got my section screaming. For some fans the walkway that separates the lowly upper reserved section from the upper reserved box seats is a stage to display their various fan cheering talents. The guy with his friend on his shoulders swaying drunkenly and precariously, like a high-wire act that might come tumbling down at any second captured the hearts of Section 8. We cheered along with them mightily and at times even got the entire stadium going.

But then came the long ugly stretch where every Met opportunity came and went. I begged whatever baseball gods I could think of to please, please just let this one guy get a hit, or walk or hit by pitch. Rally caps. Rally knishes, anything. (I'm not sure really how the rally knish works but I think you have to run down, buy a knish and be in your seat before the inning starts for it have effect.) **Melvin Mora** gunning down **Javy Lopez** at the plate was the defensive play of the series. But it was just a blip on a long sea of painful moments. I remember **Rey Ordonez** coming to the plate in a bunt situation. I guess paying the guy millions doesn't include learning what most Little Leaguers do for free: how to lay down a solid bunt. All year long the Mets, and especially Rey Rey could not execute a bunt. A voice rang out among the tired fans: "If you miss this bunt I'm going to kill you!" This comment got nervous laughter from the crowd. Nervous not so much for the threat, clearly idle, but because we all just knew he was going to miss that bunt. Of course he bunted the ball into the air and when it was caught the boos were unrelenting. Somewhere along this stretch, the drunk got onto his friend's shoulders and tried to start the crowd. Their voices chanting, "Let's go Mets" seemed weak and alone among the tired and pained crowd. It had been hours of tough grueling baseball. The only voices met with any agreement were the ones yelling out tremendously long strings of derisive cursing or ever the popular and succinct "You Suck!"

But the big moment came in the 15th. The rain

gently coming down was really no bother at all. No, the discomfort was being down by one run in a game that had transcended the series itself. It was watching **Keith Lockhart** hit a triple to put the Braves up by one run in the top of the 15th on a ball that **Shawon Dunston** misplayed. It was waiting between innings with the feeling that we were going home losers that day. It was looking in to the bullpen and realizing that they had no one left. **Rick Reed** standing alone in the rain behind the bullpen fence with his mitt on his hip waiting to see if he would be needed. The big moment was Dunston's lead off at bat. He worked the count full and then kept fouling off pitches. Right box seats. Left box seats. Straight back. With each foul ball the crowd got more hopeful.

Recognizing that this was the moment, the guy jumped on his friend's shoulders to get the crowd going. This time the section just exploded. Dunston hit a single and Mets went on to load the bases. When McGlinchy walked in the tying run I went nuts. Arm pumping, fist clenched, screaming at the top of my lungs. "You suuuuck!" The Grand Slam Single brought the kind of joy rarely found in life. Hugging your friends and the guy sitting next to you. High fiving everyone all the way home. Literally dancing with total strangers.

On the 7 train back to Manhattan, the doors shut, and the entire car erupted into a "Let's Go Mets!" chant spontaneously. Afterwards, the exhaustion of the almost six hour marathon game set in and there was complete silence. Except one guy on his cell phone. "Hey baby how ya doing? What? I was at the game. No really... Yeah, for 6 hours! It was one of the longest games in history.... I swear... but baby.... Here, listen." At this point he held the cell phone up to the quiet subway car and attempted to get everyone to follow his lead and chant again. We were just too tired and nobody responded. But then a voice rang out from somewhere in the back of the subway. "Aw come on, it's to save his marriage." Immediately a string of giant "Let's Go Mets!" chants rang out with the guy dancing and holding up the phone. I don't know if it saved his marriage or not, but we gave it a shot.

For \$12 I sat in the Upper deck for the first

game back after 9/11. **Diana Ross**, **Liza Minelli**, bagpipes, honor guard and baseball. We cried during every between inning performance. Even for Liza. She blew the place away. High kicking and dancing in front a backdrop of firemen and cops belting out "New York, New York" while the whole crowd swayed together to the music arm in arm with a tear on every face. Even now when I try to explain this to people who weren't there I say, "Really, she was that good." Incredulous stare. "No. Really." They reply, "Liza sucks." Then I say, "I know how you feel, I always thought of her as a talentless, boozed up nobody and I too couldn't believe people paid attention to her, but I'm telling you she was just so unbelievably good." I get laughed at for this one, but she really was that good. Really.

The worst upper deck moment came just a few weeks later against Atlanta. **Armando Benitez** on the mound. The Mets way ahead. They had to win and the **Phillies** had to lose their game. The Phillies had been ahead all day, but at the beginning of **Brian Jordan's** at bat, they were behind. The Mets were going to do it. I believed! For just a second, I believed. As Benitez threw fastballs to Jordan, "Strike One!" I yell, "Strike Two!" and again on the third one "Strike Three!" As Jordan rounded the bases I couldn't believe he had hit one. That was alright, we can't blow a six run lead. Ah well. As Jordan hit his second home run that inning I looked up at the scoreboard and saw the Phillies had moved ahead. In slow motion I yell out in horror with voice slow and deep at half speed "Nooooooooo!" I guess the look on my face must have been priceless. Fate had beckoned ever closer just so it could give me the biggest ball splitting wedge of a lifetime. This was the first time I almost literally cried over the Mets losing a game.

I went to opening day this year. Sat in the upper deck with my family. It was great seeing a game with my Brother, his wife, my Dad, and a couple of nephews. When **Jay Payton** hit a solo home run, a guy a few rows in front of us threw his hands up in joy, beer flying out of his open beer bottle unbeknownst to him.

I went to all three Yankee-Met games at Shea

this year. These games started out good-naturedly. On the way to the game, as the subway approached Shea, a Yankee fan declared, "Shea Stadium home of gay pride." I called out, "**Piazza** may be gay, but at least he's tougher than **Tino**."

The guy's friends cracked up at that one. It was on. That Friday game was a tough one. Seeing **Bernitz** get plunked in the head on Friday night and Ventura's return to Shea with a winning home run really sucked. It was too much to take. The weather was exactly the same as the Grand Slam Single game. A light misty rain that wasn't too uncomfortable. The only discomfort was my guts ripping from my chest.

The next day the showdown with **Clemens** was all anyone was talking about at the game. When **Estes** missed him I remember thinking that I should become a fan of a less sucky team, like let's say, Tampa Bay. But Estes' and Piazza's home runs atoned for it and I felt good about being a Met fan again. (Every time Clemens faces the Mets they snap another of his streaks. Two years ago it was his 17 winning starts in row. Later that year he gave up the first grand slam of his career to Piazza. The Estes' home run was the first Clemens gave up to a pitcher.) The Sunday game brought out the ugliness in all fans. I spent the entire time arguing with the guy behind me. It was all in good fun, but it was nonstop. I went hoarse yelling that weekend.

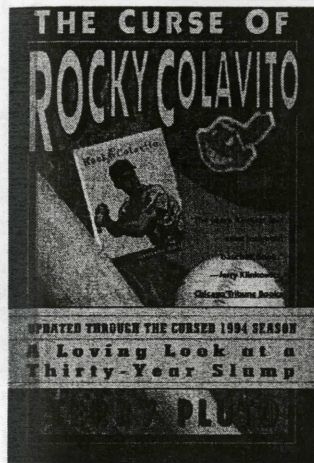
Later this season, at a rain delay, the crowd in the upper deck with nothing to do but wait decides to do the wave. I hate the wave and I was really glad when the 80's ended and people stopped doing it, but it's rearing its ugly head again. The worst part is that other fans start yelling at me, "Get up, you're ruining it." My friend **Blair** suggested we do a "NY Wave." Instead of jumping up and waving our arms like idiots on *Let's Make a Deal*. (Hey, I'm old and so are my references.) The crowd, with wave like precision, would flip the bird section by section around the park. Not just a casual old man flip either. But a-left-fist-meets-right-elbow-just-as-the-right-arm-forms-a-ninety-degree-angle-and-up-pops-the-middle-finger-like-ya-mean-it flip. Yeah, it could happen. In the upper deck..

Baseball Book Reviews

by Mark Hughson

There are three things in life I enjoy: reading, writing, and baseball. Since my life is entirely about self-gratification, I thought it would be beneficial (mostly to me) to read a bunch of baseball books and write some reviews. Books are not baseball cards, I assure you, yet there is something about looking through those 50 cent crates in the library basement, or passing by a used rack filled with copies of **Orel Hershiser's** *Out Of The Blue*. Sure, you can go to any book store and look at all those slick, glossy, coffee table (as in, big enough to be a coffee table) hardback anthologies, yet really the fun still lies within the heart (not within the *TeenBeat*-esque pictures of **Derek Jeter**).

The Curse Of Rocky Colavito by Terry Pluto



Players, writers/sports journalists, managers, umpires, historians, broadcasters—they've all written a baseball book. But what I've rarely seen is, I guess in some sense, the book version of *Zisk*—that is, a book written by and for baseball *fans*. The bleacher rats, the hecklers, the never-say-diers; the warmhearted, the heartless, and the heart broken. Here we have,

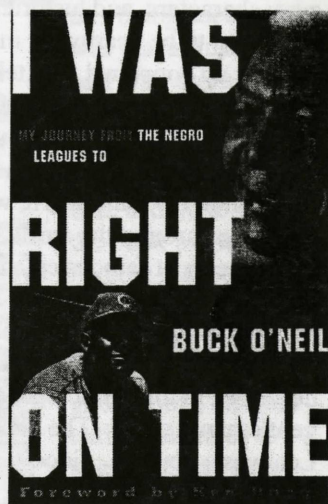
succinctly stated by the subtitle—"A loving look at a thirty year slump." The team: **Cleveland Indians**; the years: approximately early '60s to early '90s; the curse: freak injuries, accidents, disease, death, weather, and last but not least, horrible trades. Cleveland, at one time or another, had **Rocky Colavito**, **Norm Cash**, **Roger Maris**, **Tommie Agee**, **Tommy John**, **Dennis Eckersley**, **Joe Carter**, and a slew of others on its team or in its farm system, and they were all thrown away for a bunch of duds and a few extra pennies. Each and every one of them became superstars...after they were traded (actually Rocky, Eck, and Carter all did well with Cleveland but were given the heave for various ridiculous reasons). Anyway, Pluto is a fan

without a doubt, he loves his Indians and the nice-guy-on-hard-times attitude shines through. Plenty of funny stories (usually unrelated to the curse) and lots of thought provoking "what ifs," make this an interesting read. But what really has me sold is the fact that Pluto now has me sold—the Indians are cursed. The case here is made so strongly I can't help but believe it.

I Was Right On Time—My Journey From The Negro Leagues To The Majors by **Buck O'Neil**

Yes, the same Buck that was in **Ken Burns' Baseball**. Yes, the same Buck who played on the legendary **Kansas City Monarchs**. The same Buck who scouted and signed **Ernie Banks**, **Lou Brock**, **Lee Smith**, **Joe Carter**, and **Oscar Gamble**, among others. It's true that Buck was a player (a pretty good one too), yet after reading this it's clear he is also an enthusiast. Why can't he be both? Before reading

this book my knowledge of the Negro Leagues started and ended with **Satchel Paige** and **Rube Foster**. Now, I know. I realize, recognize, and respect the talent, the work, the adventure, and now more than ever, the *meaning* of black baseball in the first half of the 20th century. This is no dissertation mind you, this is like listening to grandpa—and let me clarify grandpa. Not specifically your blood related grandpa, but *the* grandpa. The one who has been around so long and been so loving, sharing, and wise, that everyone just affectionately calls him grandpa. Buck takes us from his segregated elementary school in Florida, around the country, into the Hall Of Fame (he's on the Veterans Committee), and back to Florida—where ball parks are named after him. There are too many stories to tell here, which has been said in many book reviews, but in this case it takes a special meaning, because unlike the oft-repeated tales of the **Babe**, **Mantle**, and even **Jackie Robinson**, these stories would most likely slip through the fingers of our generation if not for Buck,



and of course a sharp eye in the library basement. My recommended book of the season.

Nice Guys Finish Last by **Leo Durocher**

If you want some stories about baseball, you might as well talk to the guy who's seen it all. Was it some uncanny skill? Was it luck? Was it just Leo? The golden age of baseball was filled with amazing teams, zany characters, and historic events; Durocher just happened to be nearby (or in the middle of the mess) while it all happened. He tells tales of the renowned 1920's Yankees and his scuffle with Babe Ruth, the antics of the 1930's Gas House Gang, his days as a manager in Brooklyn and the struggle to keep Jackie Robison in the majors. He was there when the shot was heard around the world, and when **Willie Mays** made the most famous catch in baseball. No umpire was safe, no opposing team could be fully prepared, not even his own upper management could match Leo. He wasn't that nice of a guy. But, as he so accurately describes in this autobiography, baseball is not a gentleman's game. The diamond is a battlefield and Leo was a general. Good read.

The Glory Of Our Times by **Lawrence S. Ritter**

(Note: who I'm sure was really an editor/compiler, this is really "The Story of Baseball Told By The Men Who Played It")

These next two books are about as different as night and day. I'm glad having read both of them, but it came as somewhat of a dual shock to me when I read them back to back. Keep that in mind. So, you want to hear from the old timers eh? No, I don't mean **Nolan Ryan**.

No, not Mickey Mantle, keep going back. Nope, even before **Ty Cobb**. We're talking about old old timers. These guys helped invent the game. These guys were on the field when

mitts looked like batting gloves, the fence was a row of trees, and the leagues were just being started.

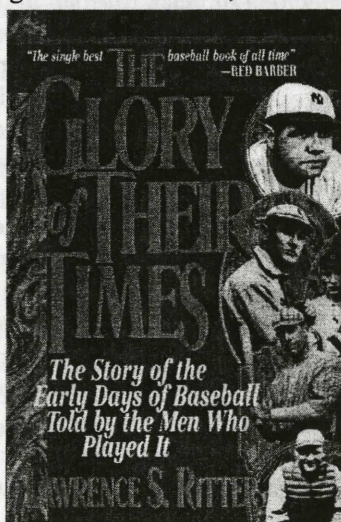
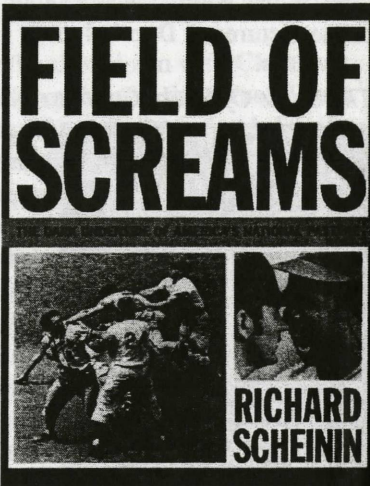
Apparently, these were good times. This is a collection of fond memories, when baseball was a way of life, not a salary or a business venture. If you want stories of the warm hearted, look no further.

Field Of Screams by **Richard Scheinin**

If you want stories of the heartless, look no further. This book was written, among other reasons, in response to *The Glory Of Our Times*—in order to set the record straight. This is the "Dark Underside Of America's National Pastime." (What's with these books and their subtitles? Sheesh.) Baseball was not all smiles, songs, or even sportsmanship. There was some nasty shit going on back in the day. I know, I don't like to think of baseball like it's hockey either, but truth be told, there were brawls, scandals, and eye-popping violent outbreaks in the game, and this book put them on a highlight reel. The book makes its point early on, and after three-fourths of the book I was ready for something else. However, the stories it does tell shines a fuller light on the game. There was both glory and gore. That's baseball. For those of you who pride yourself as baseball buffs, don't read one without the other.

Sweet Lou by **Lou Piniella**

I like Lou. It's hard to believe that he was a smooth faced dough boy at one time (though maybe they air brushed his face on the cover). I like this book for three main reasons. One) Though a bit of a wiener in his early days, Lou is a modest guy. He's no cocky bastard, and the way that he writes about cocky bastards like **Reggie Jackson** and **George Steinbrenner** is amusing. Actually, no huge dirt is



spilled here. Reggie was just *misunderstood*. Two) This is Lou's major league life (starting in farm systems in the late 60's till 1986 when the book was published). Sure he was named Rookie of the Year and played on the **Yankees** championship teams of the late '70s, but it was no dynasty. It was a humble time, full of ups and downs. What made Piniella's ride to the '77 and '78 World Series more exciting was the fact that the Yankees didn't always win. They tried, failed, worked, struggled, and earned victory...and then they went back to failing. Real life, people. 3) I also like this book because a majority of it took place after I was born (1976). I love those older decades too, but this is something I could relate to more...**Don Mattingly's** early years, Lou as the skipper, ahhh sweet childhood...

Voices Of Baseball—Quotations On The Summer Game compiled and edited by **Bob Chieger**
This book is 227 pages of one liners—yes, that's right, a book of all quotes. Surprisingly, the book does go somewhere. Weaving its way through every decade, team, dynasty and basement dweller, you get a good feel for the immensity of baseball. The book has 40 chapters for crying out loud! (Ok, so the one on coaches and scouts is a page and a half). Humor abounds overall: One of **George Brett's** quotes: "My problem's, uh, behind me now." (Brett following his hemorrhoid surgery during the 1980 World Series.) Chieger also sneaks in some quotes from writers (not sports writers mind you—**John Updike**, **James Thurber**) which truly bring out the mythological transcendence of the spitball. Too many good ones to list, but I thought I'd throw in some special quotes, ones that will let the reader see a different side to the "Yankee Mystique:"

"Any girl who doesn't want to fuck can leave now."
Babe Ruth, at a party in Detroit, 1928

"What the hell were you doing last night? Jesus Christ! You looked like a monkey trying to fuck a football out there!"

George Steinbrenner,
berating a poor fielder, 1978

Ron Luciano

Ron Luciano, Former Umpire In Majors, 57

By RICHARD GOLDSTEIN

Ron Luciano, a former major league umpire known for his flamboyant style and later the author of colorful reminiscences on the baseball world, was found dead yesterday in the garage of his home in Endicott, N.Y., the police reported. He was 57.

"The preliminary investigation shows no obvious signs of foul play," said Detective Lieut. Harlan Ayers of the Endicott police, who reported that officers found Luciano's body at about 3:50 P.M. in response to a 911 call. An autopsy was to be conducted.

In his 11-year career as an American League umpire, Luciano displayed a theatrical flair.

Recalling the reaction of a fellow umpire, Luciano once noted how "one game, Bill Haller came into the locker room afterward and said, 'I just can't believe it. You set a new record out there today. You called that runner out at second base 16 times without stopping.'"

Luciano's encounters with Manager Earl Weaver of the Baltimore Orioles were memorable, and he once ejected Weaver from both ends of a 1975 doubleheader.

After retiring in 1980, Luciano worked as a sports television commentator for NBC. In the books "Strike Two," "The Umpire Strikes Back," "The Fall of the Roman Umpire" and "Remembrance of Springs Past," all written with David Fisher, he spun scores of baseball stories.

At 6 feet 4 inches and 300 pounds, Luciano, a former football lineman at Syracuse, cut an imposing figure. He worked the 1974 World Series and served as president of the Major League Umpires Association.

After leaving baseball, he reflected on the changes in the game.

"When I started, it was played by nine tough competitors on grass, in graceful ball parks," he observed. "But while I was trying to answer the daily Quiz-O-Gram on the exploding scoreboard, a revolution was taking place around me. By the time I was finished, there were 10 men on each side, the game was played indoors, on plastic, and I had to spend half my time watching out for a man dressed in a chicken suit who kept trying to kiss me."

The Umpire Strikes Back by Ron Luciano

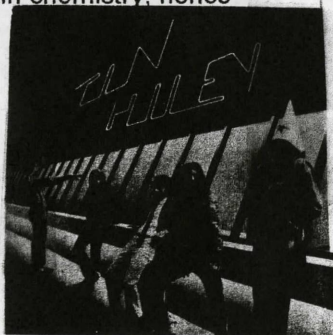
This is just pure comedy. After chuckling through a couple of chapters I was using the line "Who's your writer? (Apparently it's **David Fisher**). At first I thought a book like this being successful was just a fluke, but half way through I knew this was the real thing. Luciano makes more fun of himself than everyone else in the book put together (except maybe **Earl Weaver**). Light reading for sure... there's so much goofing off, on field antics, and tales to spin, Luciano only spends a chapter or two about the life and times of an umpire. They have no affiliations, they become everyone's enemy. The only thing that keeps an umpire from going off the deep end (and some of them did, mind you) is a good mind-set. Luciano's mind was set on looking cool, being an entertainer, and possibly making some out/safe calls when he's paying attention. Fun read all around.

How does a guy from Northeast Ohio become a Yankees fan? That was the question that came to mind when, in the process of exchanging emails with Harvey Gold from the legendary and overlooked band Tin Huey, I learned that he's a baseball fan. He replied with the following...

The story: 1961. My older brother (11 years older) plops me down in front of the B&W TV to watch, as often as they air, the big race: Maris, Mantle and 61 homers. They seem to air (given that we DID have a local team, and only three stations) more games than they would normally. I see Whitey Ford with his cap slightly tilted, Mickey Mantle (till he got hurt), Roger Maris, Joe Pepitone, Tony Kubek, Cleve Boyer, Elston Howard... what's a poor kid to do? Changed my life.

Fast forward a year or two. Maple Valley Little League. Little League Day at Cleveland Municipal Stadium. Indians vs. Yankees. 50,000 Little Leaguers in attendance. Mom gives little fat Harvey enough money for a souvenir. Harvey immediately buys a Yankee pennant. Later, li'l Harvey has to pee. As he pees in the Men's room, a few bigger Little Leaguers take issue with the little fat shit rooting for the Yankees. Li'l Harvey experiences a whooping of sorts, but retains the pennant (and the Yanks beat the Tribe... of course). Scars in hand, he never blinks when criticized for being a Yankee fan, and never waivers, even during the Ed Whitson AND Kenny Rogers days... so goes the legend. Next big life change (already had discovered masturbation years before and had attended the in depth lecture series on anxiety and guilt from older brother at age seven. Very advance child, li'l Harv), The Beatles. Next unalterable change in brain chemistry, hence destiny, "Sister Ray."

Harvey, second from the right, sports the long locks and zebra stripe jacket. Third from the right is bandmate Ralph Carney, donning an Indians cap. (What you can't tell from our high-tech reproduction of the cover art?)



Couched Bubbles of Dreams

By Dan Buck

As Dan fully couched in his sudzie living, sleeping, room, he clearly dreamed of buying into the bubbled world of professional baseball cards. And, if he correctly cured never fixing his teeth, he could own a portion of his airy pursuit. So, he began beginning begun by resting on a semi chewed stick of powered, hard gum.

Like a shorter stop, he pitched only catching a few winks, when his VIP phone rang and woke him unnaturally up. He, of course, knew it was his ownly, first based mother.

"I decided to move movely in with you and leave you all my money." His switch handed mother, Amy, said.

"Can't I just finish catching my out of it?" Dan saidly said, saying mostly to the crowded, cloudy walls.

"Of course," Amy hardly said, "you can't."

"What about my owning professionally a bubbled gum baseball card company?" Danly completely whined up into pitching to her.

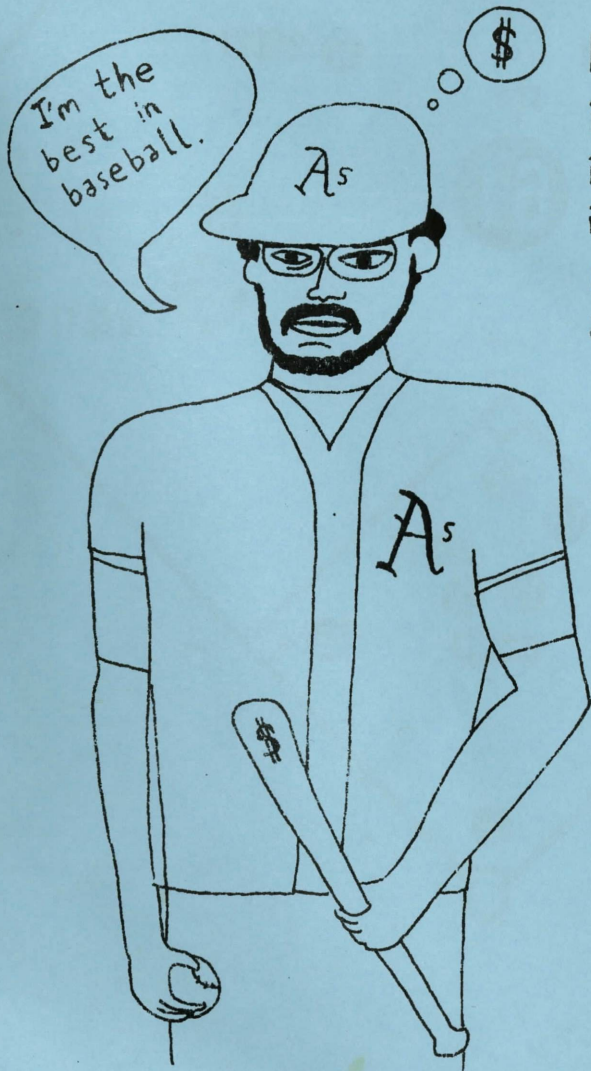
"That's wholly, fully what I was thinking. But, naturally, thirdly you have to umpire" Amy commoned his uncommon senses, "fixing all your ungripping, bunting teeth firstly first."

So, doubled days later, he painfully ached with owning instead one company of three half stranger teeth. But, then then bitefully he bit in with his awesome dentist, who owned, at least, mostly all the baseball players teeth.

A's Reggie Jackson's MONSTER YEAR

BY SLINK
MOSS 2002

1973



Leads League
in homers (32),
in RBI (117),
in runs (99),
and slugging pct. (.531),
and wins AL MVP.

Then Reggie
wins World Series
MVP as the A's
beat the Mets
in 7 games.

"If I was in New York
they'd name a candy
bar after me."

— Reggie Jackson
in 1973

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