

The Baseball Magazine For People Who Hate Baseball Magazines

*Fall*  
2007

**Z I S K** # 15



## **Where In the World is Zisk Now? A Visit to See Japanese Baseball**

*The Mendoza Line: Rock and Baseball Converge Again  
We Can Read About Baseball Too! The Zisk's Fall Bookshelf  
You Asked For It—More From the Mind of Keith Hernandez  
In the 2007 Season, Youth Gets Served (And Hits and Pitches Too)  
...and more!*



# Z I S K

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## Editor's Note:

"I think at times we can get a little careless. We've got so much talent I think sometimes we get bored."

—**Carlos Delgado**

"We have so much talent that sometimes we relax a little bit." —**Pedro Martinez**

"Sometimes when you're a team as talented as we are—I don't know if I'd use the word 'bored,' but I guess you can get complacent sometimes."

—**Tom Glavine**

*"When you're riding sixteen hours and there's nothing much to do/And you don't feel much like riding, you just wish the trip was through/Say, here I am, on the road again/There I am, up on the stage/Here I go, playing the star again/There I go, turn the page"* —**Bob Seger**, "Turn the Page"

"I am celebrity, feel my indifference." You have what most seek but, *yawn*, don't find said life all the fulfilling; whining about the burdens of celebrity. Could it be that the 2007 Mets are the Bob Segers of MLB? A promising start undermined by crummy attitudes and laziness? That's unsettling. My wife and I use Mets games to unwind, background for making dinner and dissecting our days. I didn't want a bitter end to the season.

Then the drafts of the new *Zisk* arrived. Same night as the Red Sox/Angels and Indians/Yankees series went to their respective second games. Proofreading and playoff baseball—a great combination. I was recoiling from the oddities of **John Shiffert**'s "Baseball Truly Is a Religion" when **Travis Hafner** ended the soon-to-be-legendary Bug Game in the bottom of the eleventh, and I was basking in the optimism of **Steve**'s interview with **Tim Kurkjian** when **Manny** swatted a walk-off homer at Fenway.

As someone whose well of baseball-related ideas for articles has (temporarily) run dry I feel like I'm in the dugout for this issue of *Zisk*, and that gives me free reign to sing its praises. Twenty-eight pages of renewal, friends. Enjoy.

—**Mike**

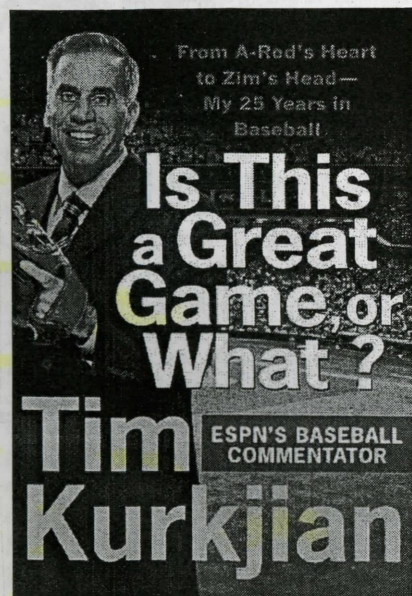


# The Zisk Book Corner by Steve Reynolds

## *Is This a Great Game or What: An Interview with ESPN's Tim Kurkjian*

If you've ever watched ESPN's *Baseball Tonight* over the past decade or so, you've probably noticed the one cheerful voice of reason on the right of your screen, **Tim Kurkjian**. Kurkjian is one of the few print veterans to make the leap to TV without coming off like a pompous know it all—even though he probably *does* know it all. Before he ever got to the Worldwide Leader in Bristol, Kurkjian was at *Sports Illustrated* for eight years and prior to that a beat writer covering the Orioles and the Rangers. After 25 years of covering our favorite game, Kurkjian finally compiled his best stories and thoughts on the game into a book titled *Is This a Great Game or What?* It's a fun-filled read that is chock full of great anecdotes about players, coaches and broadcasting and print colleagues. *Zisk* had the chance to talk to Tim about how baseball is actually fun, the grind of being a beat writer, and the power of being on television every night.

**SR:** One thing about this book I find very surprising is that in world where we've had a lot of sort of negative baseball books is that this is the first one I've read in a while that's actually like, 'Hey, baseball is actually a good thing.' Was that sort of your mindset going into this book that you wanted to sort of show the fun side of baseball?



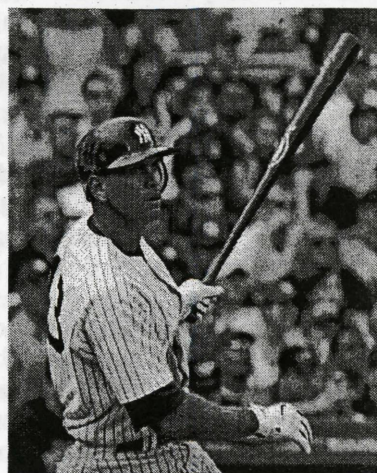
**TK:** Well yeah, and that's really who I am. I couldn't write any other way than what I'm really about and—I don't want to be corny about this—but I love the game. I've always loved the game. And I think if you look at some of the good things that have happened over the last 25 years instead of the labor negotiations and the steroid issue and all the

other things, there's plenty of room to find some really fun, interesting, entertaining stuff. I've found that most baseball fans out there really enjoy some of the inside stuff that happens out there. But it doesn't necessarily have to be the bad inside stuff. There's some good inside stuff, some good behind the scenes funny things that have happened. And that was just my goal to get it out there that this is still a really fun sport and, as always to me, the best sport.

**SR:** It's funny, I think that maybe the media's tendencies—not just baseball, but overall—is to focus on the negative. And in baseball attendance records are being shattered every year. So maybe it's just part of today's culture that was to focus on the negative.

**TK:** Yeah, that's the way the country is going. The news every day is pretty depressing. There's a lot of bad stuff going on. And I've heard about the golden age of baseball being the 50s and the 60s, and I loved baseball back then, but I just think *this* is the golden age. If you really look around at what's going on here, the great players that we're seeing. **Alex Rodriguez** is maybe going to hit 800 home runs, **Barry Bonds** broke the home run record; **Mike Piazza's** the greatest hitting catcher of all time; **Mariano Rivera** is the greatest closer ever. **Roger Clemens**, **Greg Maddux** and **Randy Johnson**—you could make the case that they are three of the 10 to 15 greatest pitchers ever, and they're pitching right now! And **Pedro Martinez** is not far behind. The point is, if you really open your eyes to what's going on, this is history in the making every day that we watch the game. And history is a very important part of the fabric of baseball.

**SR:** When you talk about the inside part of baseball in this book, one of the things you discuss is starting out as a





beat writer. Can you take me through a little bit of the experience of starting out? What was it like? Was the travel overwhelming at first?

**TK:** Well, the travel was great at the beginning because I was young and I was single and I was going to places I had never been before. And it was just tremendous. I loved being on the road because there was really no reason to go home because there was no one to go home to. It was really, really cool. I took one trip with a bunch of baseball writers. The flight was completely packed. And I looked in the back of the plane, and three of my sportswriter friends—all of whom weighed close or over 300 pounds, it must have been a 1000 pounds of sportswriters in one row. And they looked up front and saw me sitting in the middle seat and they made a trade. They traded one of the fat sportswriters for me, and I weigh 140 pounds, and I went back and sat between the two fat guys and I think everyone was a little happier that day. The travel was difficult but I loved it. I don't like it as much today because I have a wife and children at home, but it was the most exciting life I could possibly imagine at that time. Going to a major league baseball game every night, seeing ballpark I'd never seen before, meeting players I'd never met before and I ended up meeting people I never thought I'd meet, including three different Presidents of the United States, all sorts of actors, singers, and stuff like that. It's been a marvelous life and I just felt like I needed to celebrate it on some degree in this book.

**SR:** When you made the transition from a beat writer to working for a weekly, how did that change the way you approached writing about baseball? Because now you didn't have to crank out 'this is what happened in this day's game.' How did you approach that?

**TK:** Well, as a beat guy for a daily newspaper I was like a baseball player. There was a game every single day and I had to write every single day for three editions, three stories a day. It was an unbelievable grind. And yet there was always something to show for it the next day in the newspaper. And if I did have a bad day—and we all did—I could always make up for it tomorrow because tomorrow was another edition of the paper. When I went to *Sports Illustrated*, I kind of became a football player where I'm only playing one day a week. And if I have a bad game, I gotta wait a whole week to get it back. And I had some bad games with *Sports Illustrated*. So that was a big difference. And the other difference was I going to



meet a bunch of a guys—some of whom I'd never met before. In other words, I was coming into town for one day to see **Tony Gwynn** and the next day I was leaving to go see **Manny Ramirez** or whoever it was, as opposed to

being with my team, the same 25 guys every day. And they completely changed the landscape for me because I constantly had to go in and re-introduce myself to people who I hadn't seen in months, as opposed to being a beat guy where I saw the same guys every single day.

**SR:** When you made the jump to ESPN, when did you start getting recognized by people? What was that experience like?

**TK:** (Laughs) Well it was about two *Baseball Tonight*'s before people started to figure out, "Hey this guy's on TV now," which always struck me as odd that I wrote for three major newspapers and then *Sports Illustrated* for eight years and after two *Baseball Tonight*'s I was more recognizable that I had been in 18 years as a writer. There's really something wrong with that. But at the same time, it's been a really good experience and it has allowed me to do a whole bunch of things. It's completely change they way I've had to live. Now I wear more makeup than my wife does, I spend a fortune on clothes because you kind of got to look good on TV when you're sitting next to an ex-player who's wearing \$3,000 suit. And I stand around talking to myself a lot as I get ready to go on a show or something. Those have been the biggest changes from print to TV. It has brought a measure of fame in some degree I guess. I get recognized in certain places. Although a guy at the airport the other day—and this happens a lot—he stopped me and he just stopped in his tracks and he said, 'I've seen you before. Don't tell me where I've seen you. I know, you work at Applebees,



don't you?" And I said, 'No, I don't work at Applebees.'

**SR:** What I really like in the book is the chapter where you talk about working with the different people at *Baseball Tonight*. The way you describe it, you say you have to wing it a lot. And it never looks like that on screen. How does it flow so well if you are winging it? For me, it's the best show that ESPN has to offer day in and day out, so how does it work so well?

**TK:** I think it flows so well because our host for the most part is **Karl Ravech**. All of our hosts are really good at



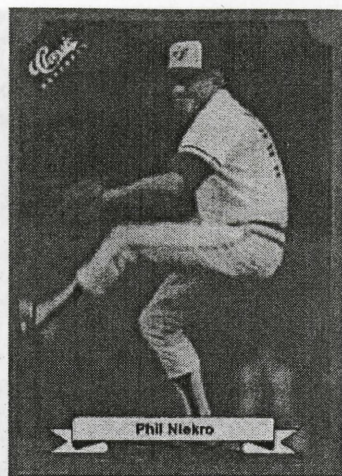
steering the ship and making sure it doesn't get off course. When the host of the show is as polished as Karl Ravech, and the other guys like **John Buccigross** and **Rece Davis** and **Scott Reiss** and **Steve Berthiaume**: and all the guys who host, it's easy. The analysts have a pretty good idea what's going on

because the host and the producer and director in your ear are letting you know everything that's going on. Even though it's a high wire act and it's stressful and it's tense—because we're seeing those highlights for the first time just like everyone else on that 10 o'clock show. Things are happening live and we have to be able to react to them. And really that's all about preparation. That's why the show runs fairly well, because guys like me get in there at one o'clock in the afternoon for a 10 o'clock show. So we're taking nine hours to prepare just in case something comes up, we're ready for it.

**SR:** There are a lot of funny anecdotes about the game in this book. Is there one player over the years who was—I don't want to say your go to guy for something humorous, but was there one player who rises above the rest that would always have something that would make you laugh.

**TK:** Yeah, I think **Mike Flanagan** was the funniest guy I was ever around on a consistent basis. I was walking to Exhibition Stadium in Toronto many years ago. And I was lugging my equipment and my bookbag and my computer, which of course back then weighed more than I do. He saw me staggering along so he stopped to give me a ride. And he was driving one of these Blue Jay rental cars which they give to all of their new players until their cars arrive. And it had Blue Jays written on it and it was hideous looking. We're driving to the ballpark and Flanagan looks at me and says, 'This used to be **Phil**

**Niekro's** car.' Niekro had just been released by the Blue Jays. And I said, 'How do you know it was his car?' he said, 'I found his teeth in the glove compartment.' (Laughs) So we love guys like Mike Flanagan who do not talk in clichés and have something really insightful and really funny to say almost every day. So whenever I needed anything, I usually went to Mike Flanagan first.



**SR:** And one thing I think about baseball that makes it so great is that you find people like that in that game, who have that sort of have that funny view of life, in baseball more than any other sport.

**TK:** Right, and I think that's partly because there's so much downtime in baseball. Let's think about it—these guys get to the ballpark at one, two o'clock in the afternoon and they're still there at midnight. They're sitting around in the bullpen with nothing to do until it's their time to pitch. If you're a starting pitcher you've got four days in between starts just to sit there and watch and think and talk and that's where it comes from. As opposed to NBA players, for instance, who aren't playing every single night and they're not on the bench thinking about all sorts of funny things because the game is flying in front of them at a high rate of speed. Baseball just lends itself to funny stories because there is so much time to basically sit around and ponder.

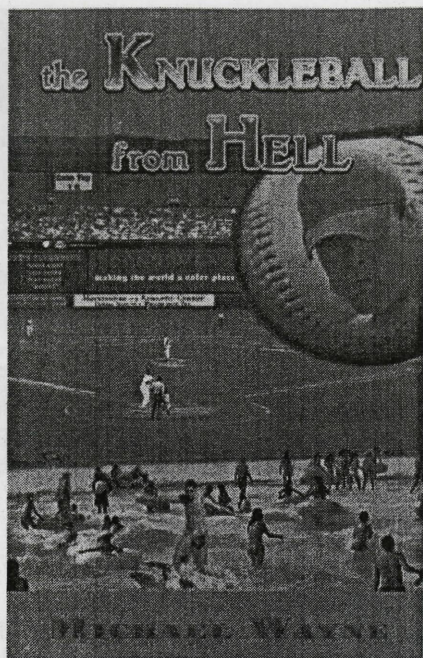
**SR:** It is like the thinking man's sport

**TK:** Absolutely!

### **Tim Wakefield's Got Nothing on This: *The Knuckball From Hell* by Michael Wayne**

When I look over to the left from my computer in my home office, I get a close-up look on my small library of books. It's shrunk over the years due to spatial limitations and my changing tastes. More specifically, I've ditched





almost every work of fiction I've ever owned over the past decade—and kept the music and baseball books.

(The exceptions to this rule are anything written by Michael Chabon, Tom Perrota and David Sedaris.)

So when the baseball-oriented novel *The Knuckleball from Hell* by Michael Wayne crossed my desk I had a few reservations. My only other

experience with baseball fiction was a sub par Christmas gift called *Searching for Ted Williams* and reading over an article *Zisk* contributor Michael Baker wrote in issue # 8 about five different baseball novels. (Which, on the face of it, really is no fiction reading experience at all.)

In the face of all that baggage, I found *Knuckleball* to be a very entertaining read. Wayne has concocted one doozy of a story that at times had me thinking of the late Kurt Vonnegut. Trying to sum up the plot could take a couple of pages itself—a teen pitching phenom wants to pitch for the Mets, but gets hurt at the end of his high school career. A mysterious professor gives the phenom a chemical that makes his pitches unhittable and helps propel the sad sack Mets towards the playoffs. The Mets owner gets killed in a mob hit and then the team is purchased by a crazy surfer dude who hires the two remaining Mets fans to run the team. Throw in a donut worshipping batboy, a cast of teammates that all speak different languages, a horndog of a commissioner who wants to run for President someday and a movie producer who follows a guru and you've got...hmmm.

Well, reading the above paragraph it looks like you'd have a mess on your hands trying to make that work. Yet Wayne succeeds by moving the story along at a brisk pace, not getting bogged down by focusing too much on one character and generally showing off a wicked sense of

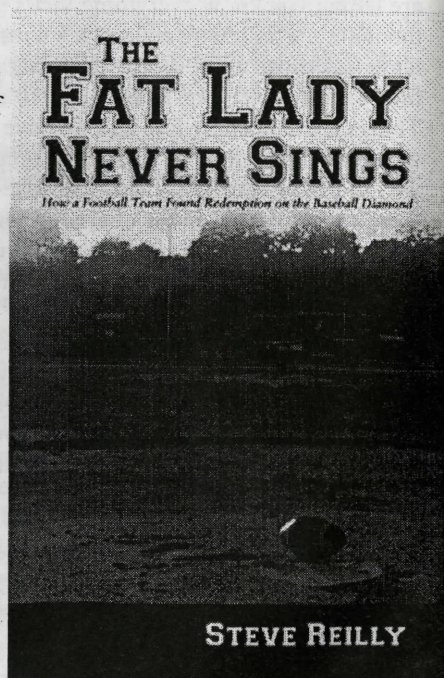
humor about the game, finance, and people who like to wield their power around like they're, well, you can probably come up with your own genitalia metaphor. *The Knuckleball from Hell* does take a lot of twists and turns like its namesake pitch—and that's the fun of reading it.

## Where Can I Buy the Movie Rights: The Fat Lady Never Sings by Steve Reilly

*The Rookie*, *Hoosiers*, *Miracle*—these are just three of the many fact-based sports films that have had fans and critics cheering the aisles over the past two decades. So if you're a Hollywood screenwriter, take note—*The Fat Lady Never Sings* is your next ticket to box office gold. Author Steve Reilly has spun an engrossing tale mixing his own trials and tribulations as a high school baseball coach with those of three football players who used America's pastime as their shot at redemption that would light up the big screen if done correctly

*The Fat Lady Never Sings* describes how in Derby, Connecticut high school football is the be all and end all of sports. And most important of all is the team's 28-year streak with a winning record. When that mark falls in 1991, seniors Gino, Donny and Ben are given a reputation as losers in the town since they failed to keep the streak going. The three players join Derby's varsity

baseball team in 1992 and play key roles in driving the club on the run towards their first state championship game. Reilly's first person narrative is simple yet effective in describing what's at stake emotionally for these three kids, as well as himself. He takes us back through the





history of the team, showing how the second class status they had through the 70s and 80s (young kids would tear up the baseball diamond playing football during the varsity team's games) would later drive him in giving his all as an assistant coach.

At times it's easy to forget this isn't a work of fiction. Reilly has a rich tapestry of characters to draw from—the legendary town football coach who ushered “The Streak” through two decades, the gregarious first base coach who's heartbroken when his real job interferes with games, the hardcore fan in a wheelchair who ends up playing a crucial role in a playoff game and the opposing coaches who give the “fish” handshake when they lose. But the star of it all is Reilly's friend and the Red Raiders head coach, **John DeFrancisco**. His chain-smoking, angst-ridden pacing during the games leaps off the page and leaves an impression that's hard to shake. D (as Reilly calls him) is so intriguing that I'm pretty sure I'd read an entire book covering this guy's entire 30 years career of teaching high school kids the game of baseball. (And not to fall back on film terms again, but it would most definitely be a scenery chewing part for a good actor.)

*The Fat Lady Never Sings* tells a familiar feel good sports story that's been told through the ages. But in the end, it's the reader who comes out the winner.

## Baseball by the Numbers and More: An Interview with *The Baseball Economist* author JC Bradbury

Baseball blogging has exploded in the past three years, so I guess it's not surprising that some of these bloggers have turned their web passion into book deals. Economist **J.C. Bradbury**'s day job is as an associate professor at Kennesaw State University, but his fun time is applying the principals of economics to baseball. Bradbury even coined a term, Sabernomics, to describe his take of applying the theories of economics to baseball's state revolution, dubbed Sabermetrics by the great **Bill James**. Bradbury expanded his blog work into a full blown book called *The Baseball Economist*. It's a fascinating and (and as Bradbury would admit) stat-heavy look at the game with a lot of number-crunching to back it all up. *Zisk* talked to the Atlanta resident about the hype of **Leo Mazzone**, the problems of steroids and how much of an asshole **Tony LaRussa** can be.

**SR:** When did you start the blog (Sabrenomics.com) that predates this book?

**JC:** Three years ago.

**SR:** And what popped into your mind that made you think, this is something I can write about on an almost daily basis?

**JC:** The idea behind Sabrenomics.com was simply that I had all these ideas as a baseball fan. And as an economics professor, I think economics is about so much more than money and business. And I said to myself, ‘Hey, there's some crossover here and I want to write about it.’ And I was already thinking about writing a book on it, so I started the blog and it turned out to be a great forum for doing that.

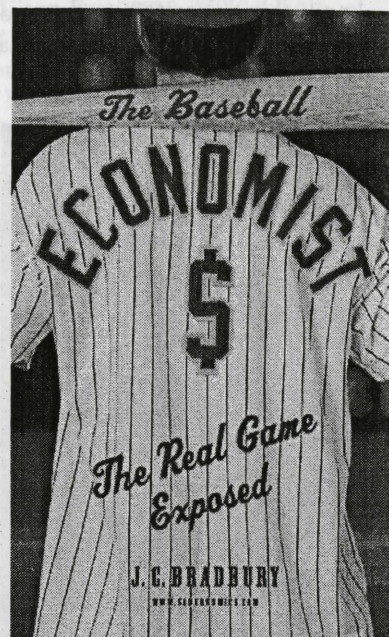
**SR:** I must admit that sometimes I find it hard to write something different every day when I blog during the season. Have you ever had that problem? Did you try different method to generate new ideas each day?

**JC:** Well, you have your slow days sometimes, but I find it amazing that sometimes my best posts are the ones where I come in and go, ‘I have nothing to write about today.’ And then boom, a news story hits and I'll say, ‘This is a great idea’ and I'll go with it and blog traffic goes up and it's great. Sometimes I'll be planning an idea and I'll write it and crickets chirp after I post it. (Laughs)

**SR:** I know exactly how you feel. So in the book you admit you're a Braves fan.

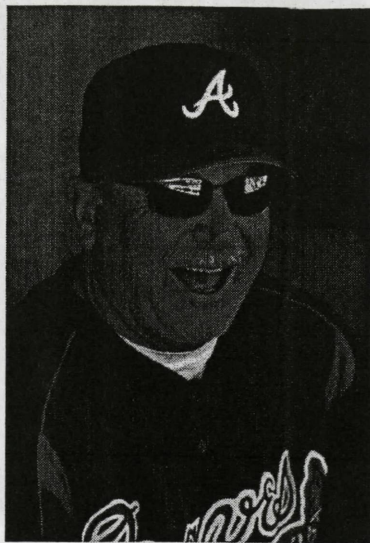
**JC:** Oh yeah, most definitely am.

**SR:** So I found the chapter on **Leo Mazzone**—who I considered evil for many years because I am a Mets fan—really interesting in the way you determine that, ‘You





know, this guy really is pretty good.' Can you take me through the process of proving that Mazonne knows what he's doing?



**JC:** The reason I did this initially is that I thought that Leo Mazzone had to be overrated. I even got into an argument with a fellow Braves fan about it. So what I said was, 'I'm gonna take a look at every single pitcher who's pitched for the Braves and another pitching coach. And I'm gonna see how they did when Leo was their pitching coach and when he was not.'

And I was simply

stunned that pitchers are about half a run better when Leo's their coach than when he's not. You can't just say, well, he had **Glavine**, **Maddux** and **Smoltz**, because Glavine, Maddux and Smoltz actually pitched better for him. And I take into account the age and the parks they pitch in. And it's not just something we observed—like they got out and find an undervalued pitcher and he pitches well for him. I find that after they leave Mazzone, they also pitch worse.

**SR:** Well the Yankees learned that the hard way with **Jared Wright** and **Chris Hammond**.

**JC:** Exactly. You talk to any of the pitchers who've had Leo as a pitching coach, and they all talk about this method and how it helps them. And it's not just something like, 'Here's the secret—low and outside.' Yes, he does say that, but it's a regiment, it's a program and Leo Mazzone is very good at spotting flaws in deliveries and fixing them.

**SR:** Now speaking of pitching, I found it pretty interesting how you discuss the Questec system and its impact on the game and umpiring. When Tom Glavine first came to the Mets it was all people ever talked about when he was mediocre. Can you talk a little bit about your look at Questec?

**JC:** Well, Questec system is designed to computerize the strikes zone and measure how well the umpires are calling balls and strikes. Now everyone knows that part of baseball was arguing with the umpire—'That ball was high, that ball was a strike.' There's no doubt that umpires were feeling pressure to change what they would call. And what I realized is that Questec is going to prevent umpires from changing their calls as much because it's being recorded. It's not just something subjective anymore, it's objective. So what I wanted to look at is what managers were affecting the game. So I looked at what their players were doing in Questec parks versus non-Questec parks. The interesting thing I found is that they really don't have much influence. Partially because you've got two managers barking at the umpire and the umpire's trying to please both. But I did find a few instances, for example **Tony LaRussa** seems to do a good job of helping his pitchers get more strikeouts and have fewer walks.

**SR:** I gotta say that makes sense because Tony LaRussa just ticks me off with his grandstanding.

**JC:** Well, that actually motivated me to do the study because he came to town to play the Braves and he complained about what an awful manager **Bobby Cox** was for complaining all the time. So I did the study to see if Cox was really as bad, and lo and behold LaRussa pops to the top. I just about fell out of my chair when I saw that.

**SR:** If Questec was installed in every ballpark, would it bring a more uniform approach to calling of games? And would it speed the games up?

**JC:** I think there's no doubt about it. I don't really find any excitement in watching old men in baseball uniforms yell at each other. I think we might lose some of that from the game. I think the overall advantage of having Questec is that we have an objective strike zone. There's no more arguing about it. And if it were up to me, I'd treat arguing with umpires like they do in basketball and football—you just don't see it as much. You wanna talk like that? You're gone. And it's very quick. So I think if you want to speed up the game, stop arguing with the umpire.

**SR:** It certainly would. And if we could get rid of the multiple trips to the mound—

**JC:** Ughh, I hate it!



**SR:** Somebody ought to do a study on how much that sucks the life out of the game.

**JC:** Well I would love to do that. They keep records on a lot of things in baseball, but they don't have a record of that. But I would love to get my hands on that data.

**SR:** Now one thing you brought up in the book that I never really thought about was the lack of left-handed catchers in baseball. It's something that people never mention in broadcasts or in writing about the game.

**JC:** You'll occasionally hear it. That's actually sort of where the question caught my eye. One day I was watching a game and the announcer said, 'Well he's lefthanded so he can't play catcher.' And I thought, 'Well why is that the case?' When you go back through baseball history the last lefthander to regularly play catcher was **Jiggs Donahue** over 100 years ago. There aren't too many people named Jiggs anymore, right?

**SR:** Exactly.

**JC:** **Benny Distefano** is the last person to ever do it, and that was back in the Pirates in the 80s but just for a game or two. But the reason behind this is that there seems to be a very tiny advantage to having a right hander who can throw out runners stealing third. But that rarely happens in the game today. And there are certainly some lefthanded players with strong arms who could play catcher. What I found is that if you go out and look at the number of people who are lefthanded, they can play all the outfield positions and first base. Plus, if you've got a lefthander with a good enough arm to play catcher, you don't want him to be catcher, you want him to throw to a catcher. Good lefthanded pitchers are scarce.

**SR:** And if you're a lefthanded pitcher—as many relievers have proven over the years—you can have a career that stretches over two decades.

**JC:** Absolutely. It's definitely a big advantage to be lefthanded in baseball.

**SR:** One of the more controversial ideas you propose in the book is that the union take over penalizing players for steroid use. Do you think something like that could realistically happen with **Donald Fehr** in charge?

**JC:** Well, you never know what people are gonna do.

About 50 years ago **Milton Friedman** wrote a book called *Capitalism and Freedom* and proposed school vouchers. And everyone laughed at him. (Laughs) And now look at what is a hot topic today—school vouchers. What the public is going to find tolerable I don't know. But what we know is that no matter what type of testing you put into place, someone's gonna figure out a way around it. The proposal I put forth in my book says let the players' union do all the testing and the way they punish you is through fines. So that if you're better than another player and you're getting more free agent dollars because you've been using steroids, you fail a test, you then have to pay a fine that's redistributed to those players harmed by you taking steroids. In that sense it says, 'Okay, we'll let some steroids exist, but we're not going to let you benefit financially,' which reduces the incentive for people to take steroids. And I think that the players have the biggest incentive because they don't want to face the health consequences of these things. So I think they're to be more trusted than the owners.

**SR:** Lastly, I've always found that a lot of people who are hardcore baseball fans also—bluntly put—like number-crunching. Is there some correlation between the two?

**JC:** Well, a good friend of mine named **Doug Drennen**, who contributes to the book some, runs ProFootball-Reference.com and he's a huge football stats guy. And we talk about the difference between the communities. And one of the things we found is that it's very difficult to have a conversation during a football game. There's a lot of action, it's packed and it's hard to identify individual contributions. Well baseball is slow. You can talk about batting averages; you gotta have something to motivate you during those lulls. And you are looking at individual numbers; you have stats for every player. So I think that's why it lends itself to number-crunching more so than football. How do you talk about an offensive tackle?

**SR:** Um, he's big?

**JC:** Right, he's big. (Laughs) So in baseball you can say, 'He's got a high on base percentage' or 'Oh, but he strike out all the time.' So these are the arguments you can have so I think the sport lends itself to that.

*Steve Reynolds is the co-editor of Zisk, and can barely balance his checkbook. He also decrees, "No more wrap from Liberty Deli."*



# Give That Man a Guitar: Mario Mendoza and a Humble Indie Rock Band by Tim Hinely

I'm not sure if I heard of the band name first or the phrase, "The Mendoza Line." If it was, however, the band name, then I immediately knew where they got it from. As I've stated in many other articles for *Zisk* that I've written, I'm a Pittsburgh Pirates fan through and through and though **Mario Mendoza** only spent five seasons with the Pirates, for those of us who lived and breathed Buccos, it felt like an eternity.

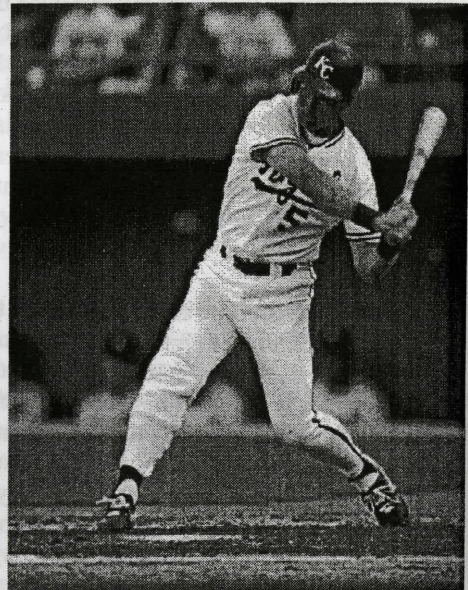
Mendoza came into this world as a late Christmas gift for his parents. He was born December 26, 1950 in Chihuahua, Mexico. While playing for the Mexico City Reds in 1970, Mendoza was known as *Manos des Seda* or Silk Hands. His ability for grabbing grounders prompted the Pirates to pick him up.



As baseball writer **Bruce Nash** once said, Mario Mendoza wasn't just a bad hitter, he was terrible. (However, he still he wasn't the worst hitter to ever wear a Pirates uniform

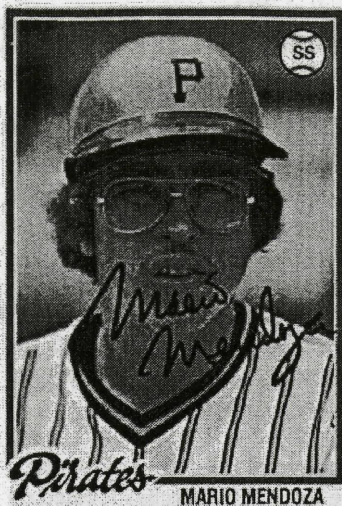
as that distinction would go to none other than Pirates pitcher **Bob Buhl** who in 1962 came to the plate 70 times and failed to get a hit the entire year. Mendoza, eat your heart out!) I hear Tony Suck was pretty bad too (and that's not even a fake name folks). But ol' Mario, with a .215 lifetime average wasn't much better and his .198 average in nearly 400 at bats during the 1979 season for the then-new Mariners was certainly laughable. Rupe's Troops were out for blood. Thank god Mendoza had a decent glove.

If the story is correct, it was Kansas City Royals star **George Brett** who coined the phrase, "The Mendoza Line" (though there is some controversy surrounding that as there are questions over whether the term originated with Mario or with another



player, **Minnie Mendoza** of the Minnesota Twins). Due to Mendoza's hitting skills, or lack thereof, it prompted Brett to state, "The first thing I look for (in the listing of batting averages) in the Sunday paper is to see who's below the Mendoza Line." Apparently when the Texas Rangers released Mendoz in 1982 his average was a paltry .118. Then again, according to some, **Tom Paciorek** was the one who coined it the phrase. Then again, Paciorek has always said it wasn't him but **Bruce Bochte** who was the ball buster. Whomever it was, the phrase has stuck around to become a *Sportscenter* standard. Not only that, but apparently they used the phrase on *Beverly Hills 90210*. When that show was on in the mid 90's I watched it regularly (and *Melrose Place* too, I'm proud to say) but I don't remember hearing a character on the show mention the saying. (Apparently it was "Brandon" in reference to his lousy grades.) Hey, at





least Mendoza is famous for something, right?

After failing to jump on with a major league team in 1983 Mendoza began playing Triple A ball in Hawaii and bounced around there for a while until 1992 when he hooked on as a manager for the Angels farm system.

In the twilight of his career as Angels manager (and right

around the time Brandon was hippping *Beverly Hills 90210* watchers to the famous phrase for mediocrity) a few college friends in Athens, Georgia were forming a band. They loved baseball (or at least one of them did, **Peter Hoffman**) and they loved the idea of naming their band after such a phrase. So in the mid-90's **The Mendoza Line**, the band, was born. Though with a revolving door of members throughout the years (several of them



contributing songs) the duo of **Timothy Bracy** and **Peter Hoffman** were the band leaders and kept the name alive and not just mediocre-ly either. The Mendoza Line released a string of terrific records that any band would be proud to call their own. While their earlier material was more in the indie pop direction (on the Kindercore label) by their third record they were flirting with some classic songwriting styles and writing epic songs. (Bracy has a classic croak that on a good day sounds more like **Bob Dylan** than Bob Dylan does these days.) Seriously folks,

your hard-earned dough would be well-worth plunking down on T.M.L. records like *Full of Light* and *Full of Fire*, *Fortune*, *Lost in Revelry* or the brand new (break up?) record, *30 Year Low*.

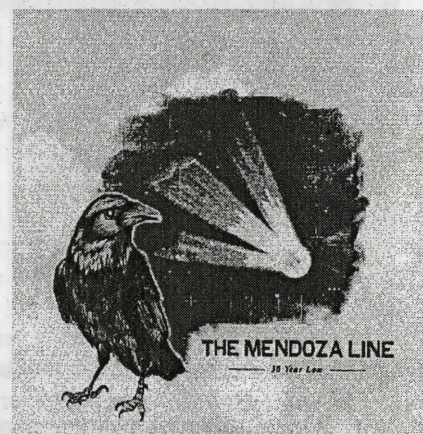
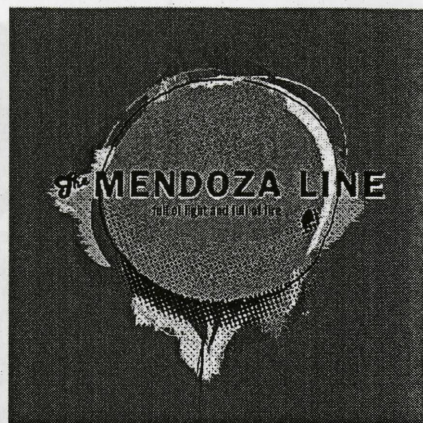
(Hoffman left the band after 2004's *Fortune* and Bracy and his wife, band member **Shannon McArdle**, have recently gotten divorced.)

These days Mario Mendoza is a manager in the Mexican League and as far as the band, well, as stated above, I'm not sure what the status of the band is. I don't think Mario Mendoza has ever been to a Mendoza Line gig and I don't think the band members

in T.M.L. had ever gotten a chance to see Mendoza play live. And although each could have done what they did without the other (the band could have named themselves something else, like **Hoobastank** or something—oh wait that name is already taken), the world would have been a lot less interesting had that happened. If you're reading this article please put down the your copy of *Zisk* and go find some old footage of Mario Mendoza on You Tube or go buy a Mendoza Line CD and bask in the genius, the pure genius of both of them.

(Author's note: Some of this information was found in the July 2nd issue of *Sports Illustrated*.)

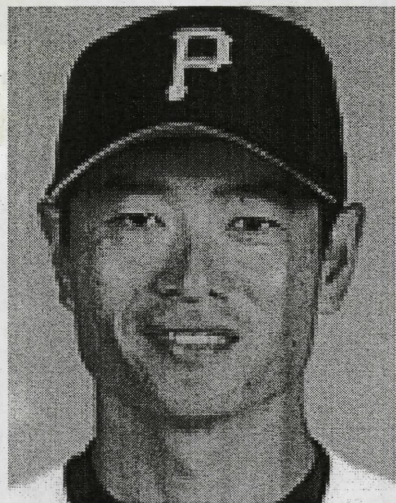
**Tim Hinely** lives in Portland, Oregon where he publishes his own zine, *Dagger*. For a copy please write to [daggerboy@prodigy.net](mailto:daggerboy@prodigy.net).





# Baseball Truly is a Religion by John Shiffert

It would be hard to find a less-ordinary major league baseball player than **Masumi Kuwata** even though he's on an exceedingly ordinary team, the Pittsburgh Pirates. It's not that there still aren't many of Japanese-born pitchers in the bigs. It's not that 39-year-old major league rookies are exceedingly rare (although they are). It's not that he's a 5' 8" (i.e., short) righthanded pitcher, although they are almost as rare as 39-year-old rookies. And it's certainly not his record, a very ordinary 0-1, 6.60, even



though, outside of a terrible outing on July 2 against the Brewers (two-thirds of an inning, seven runs allowed) he's pitched pretty well (four earned runs in 14 1/3 innings.) No, what makes Masumi Kuwata extraordinary, or at least unusual, is something else. As **Clayton Trapp** has pointed out, "Masumi's

apparently an adherent to Perfect Liberty Kyodan, a/k/a, the Japanese Golf Religion" or PL or PLK.

The what? Now, it's well-known that a lot of major league baseball players are golf addicts. They have been back to at least **Ty Cobb's** era. (He called it "Pasture Pool." On the other hand **Rogers Hornsby** refused to play, supposedly saying, "When I hit a ball I want someone else to chase it.") And it's also well-known that golf is a veritable religion among many, be they baseball players, baseball fans or anything else. But the Japanese Golf Religion? Yes indeed, grasshopper. You just need Mr. Trapp to enlighten you, from an article he authored that appeared in the magazine *Fringe Golf* about seven years ago. Trapp prefaces his thoughts by adding, "PLK views strike me as quite benevolent, actually." Here's his story for all you non-golfers...

"Religions throughout the world have attached a special significance to cats, snakes, and wine. It should surprise no one that a religion now attaches a special significance to golf.

"Perfect Liberty Kyodan (Kyodan is Japanese for "Church") is the religion in question. Perfect Liberty (PL) is so enamored with the sport that the religion's international headquarters, its Holy Land, is surrounded by three golf courses.

"In fact opponents malevolently branded PL 'the golf religion.' To their consternation PL embraced the moniker for several reasons: it creates interest in the religion, the more interest the more members; and the members love golf.

"PL membership numbers several million worldwide. Members worship in more than 500 churches located on every continent but Africa. Besides Japan, where one out of every 44 citizens is a member, PL has gained significant popularity in California [*Author's Note: why is that not surprising?*] and South America (particularly Brazil and Argentina).

"Founded in 1924, PL was persecuted sporadically for the next 25 years. One respite from persecution came when **General MacArthur** liberated PL leadership and members from prison. He was substantially less concerned about PL's denial of the "divine absolutism" of Japan's rulers than were... the divine rulers who then replaced the PL leadership in confinement.

"OK. PL is a legitimate religion; it's paid its dues. What's up with the golf business?



"Our Second Founder, the late Reverend **Tokuchika Miki** picked golf as a method of spiritual teaching,' explains **Tatsumi Yano**, a Perfect Liberty Minister in New York, adding that 'PL is a practical religion, and we focus on how to live life happily and meaningfully rather than talking about previous or next lives, or "What is God?" issues.'



"The core teaching of PL is that 'Life is Art.' Golf is an art of special esteem, and self-expression through golf is wildly popular among PL members.

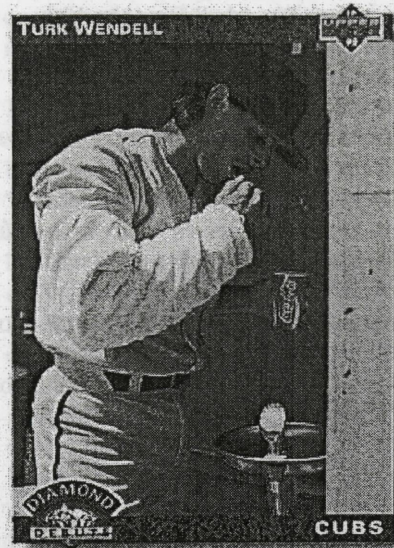
"Golf is very good training for us in learning how to control our emotions, change our points of view, and accept various daily situations positively while making our best efforts at each moment," Yano says.

"Several PL churches feature rooftop driving ranges so that members can practice self-expression as the spirit moves them. 'Man suffers if he fails to express himself' is a basic belief of PL, and one that you might keep handy next time your wife questions your golfing priorities.

"The caricature of PL as the 'golf religion,' if taken seriously, detracts from what its adherents consider important. PL is a religion of serenity and humility. The interlocking concepts of five-irons and spiritual liberation can be attractive, but the real goal of PL is to make one's life art."

While life may or may not be art, or golf, it would seem reasonable to classify Kuwata's beliefs under the "Unusual" heading... putting him on a firm footing with other major leaguers who also had unusual beliefs, some of which could be termed "superstitious," some of which were just idiosyncratic, some of which may have gone against commonly-accepted conventions. For instance, how do you feel about vegetarians? Unusual? Maybe. Well, **Hank Aaron** is one. Along another tack, it should be noted that the 50 or so Mormons who have played major league baseball were all born well after the LDS Church's doctrine of plural marriage was withdrawn in 1890, so there haven't been any doctrinal polygamists in baseball. And, Pedro Cerrano, the Cleveland Indians Cuban voodoo adherent from the movie *Major League* was, after all, a fictional character.

Of more recent and realistic (well, sort of) vintage, recall two pitchers, **Scott Erickson** and **Turk Wendell**. Erickson caused a stir back in 1991 by winning 20 games for the Twins in his first full major league season. Although he didn't win the Cy Young Award that year (he was second to **Roger Clemens**) he did win an award from Kiwi Shoe Polish for totally covering his spikes with black shoe polish before each game. Seems as if he didn't want any identifying marks showing on his footwear. (I should know about that award, since I'm the one that gave it to him when I was doing PR for Kiwi Brands.) Wendell

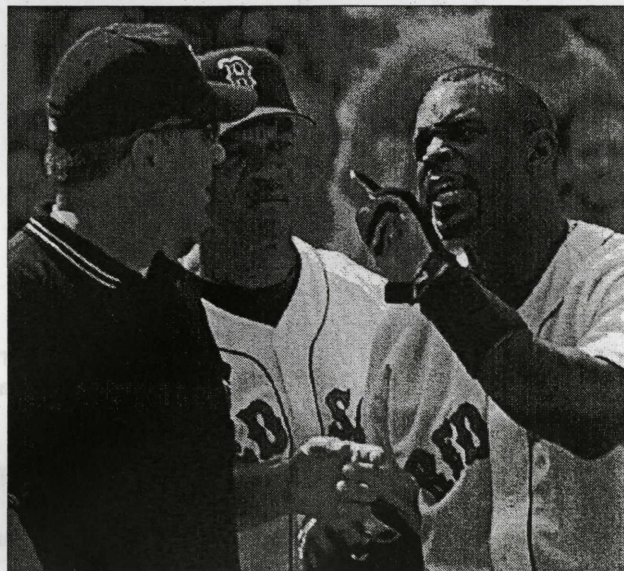


came up with the Cubs a couple of years later, already somewhat renown for his personality quirks, which included chewing licorice all the time, brushing his teeth between innings, and always jumping over the baselines.

While these oddities may be dismissed by

some because they involve pitchers, what are we to make of Reds' outfielder **Ryan Freel**? An August 2006 story in *The Dayton Daily News* reported that Freel talks to an imaginary voice in his head named Farney. Freel apparently told the *Daily News* that everyone thinks he talks to himself, so he tells them he's talking to Farney. As in, "Hey, Farney, I don't know if that was you who really caught that ball, but that was pretty good if it was."

For that matter, what are we to make of **Carl Everett**, who insists that dinosaurs didn't exist, because they're not in the Bible?





Talking heads, dinosaurs and brushing teeth aside, superstition has been a part of baseball from the 19th century to the 21st century. A hundred or so years ago, these beliefs tended to focus on things like hairpins or a truckload of barrels or hunchbacks—all of which were said to bring either good luck or good hitting. In fact, the Giants and Athletics, among others, had hunchbacked batboy/mascots for luck. More recently, individual players, like Erickson, have been known for their specific

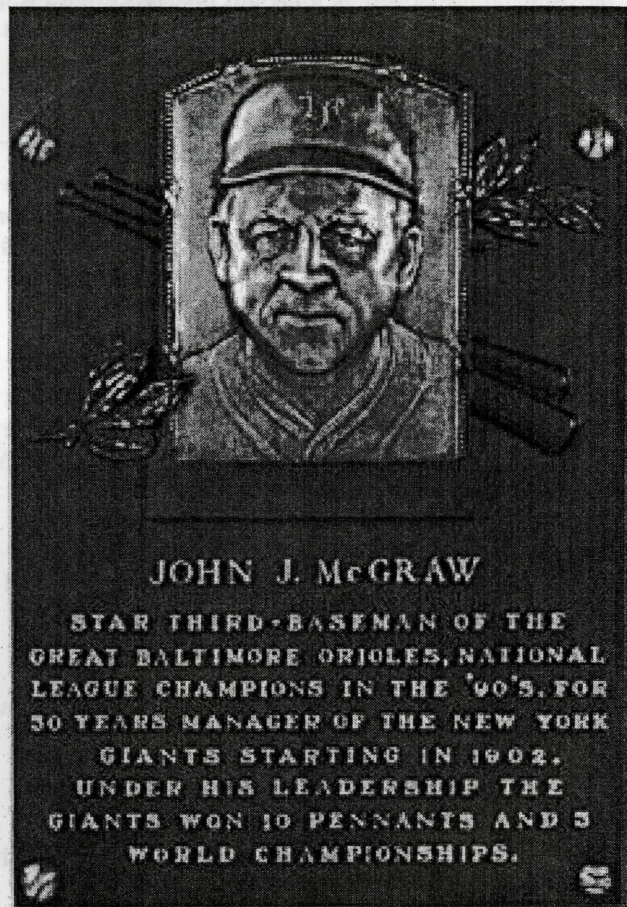


unusual beliefs. For example, most current fans will remember that **Wade Boggs** obsessively used to eat chicken as his pre-game meal. There might also be

some older fans who remember **Babe Phelps**, a catcher just before World War II. A devoted hypochondriac, Babe would stay up all night checking his heartbeat. You see, Babe was convinced that he had heart problems and that while your heart could miss three beats in a row without dire consequences, if it missed four straight beats call the undertaker. So Babe stayed up, counting his heartbeats. Going back a good bit farther, and similarly obsessive, was one of the great hitters of the old American Association, **Pete Browning**. The Gladiator, as Browning was known, not only never got rid of a bat, but he kept them all in his house—and he named them all as well. This may or may not have had anything to do with Browning also being nicknamed the Louisville Slugger, but he apparently not only remembered the names of all his bats, but how many hits he had with them as well. And, when he felt a bat's hits had all been used up, he retired it.

As interesting as these idiosyncrasies might be, Boggs, Phelps, Browning or pretty much anyone else couldn't hold a candle to a couple of early 20th Century managers, **George Stallings** and **John McGraw**. Although this was, as **Charles Alexander** has noted, "a period in which almost all ballplayers had some kind of superstition," Stallings was a piece of work. A southern gentleman off the field and raging maniac on the field, he was profoundly superstitious—he absolutely hated to have any

peanut shells or scraps of paper around his team's bench, and would fly into a rage at the presence of either type of detritus. Even better, he would freeze in whatever position he happened to be in if his team mounted a rally. One story, perhaps apocryphal, has it that once he was leaning over to pick up something—probably a piece of paper—when the Braves broke out in a flurry of hits. By the time the rally was over, he couldn't move and had to be carried from the bench. It should be noted that Stallings managed in street clothes, so he had to stay in the dugout. One can only imagine the sort of stories that might be if he coached on the baselines.



And yet, Stallings wasn't in the same league as John McGraw. In addition to employing the hunchbacked **Eddie Morrow**, he designed the Giants' uniforms on whim and superstition. After his 1905 team took four out of five games from the Athletics in the World Series, McGraw was convinced that the special all-black uniforms he had dressed his team in held some kind of



special post-season magic, despite the fact that the Giants had previously worn all-black uniforms some 20 years before, without any magic results. So, when the Giants next faced the Athletics in the fall—in 1911—he dressed them in all-black once again. However, **Home Run Baker**, **Jack Coombs** and the \$100,000 infield weren't impressed, and took the series in six games. Undeterred, McGraw continued to mess with the J'ints' uniforms almost every year, once going so far as to use violet as the trim color, because he liked NYU.

Even his uniform frolics couldn't compare to McGraw's relationship with **Charles Victor** (or Victory) **Faust**—one of the strangest tales in baseball history. Various versions of the Victory Faust story abound, including those told by **Noel Hynd**, Alexander and **Fred Snodgrass** in *The Glory of Their Times*. Although they all differ somewhat in detail, the essential story is the same. That is, McGraw received a telegram from Faust during the 1911 season, wherein he offered Little Napoleon his services for the pennant drive, having been told by a fortune teller that he (Faust) would lead the Giants to the World Series. Mac didn't think much of it until Faust, a 30-year-old Kansan with minimal, if any, athletic ability, showed up in St. Louis in late July and asked for a tryout. Despite finding out that Faust indeed had minimal, if any, athletic ability, McGraw kept him on after the Giants beat the Cardinals that day. One thing led to another, and Faust stayed with the Giants as a good luck charm for most of the rest of the year, either helping out the batboy or warming up in expectation that he'd actually get into a game. And, what do you know, McGraw actually *did* put him in two games after the Giants clinched the pennant. In both cases, the opposing team went along with the gag, deliberately making three outs and even letting him tour around the bases after he was hit by a pitch while batting.

However, neither Faust's magic nor the black uniforms helped McGraw much against the Athletics in the 1911 World Series, so Mac tried to lose him before the 1912 season started. It didn't matter, since Faust, although certainly a few bricks shy of a load, knew where the Polo Grounds were located and still believed that he was destined to lead the Giants to victory. McGraw finally relented in that he let Faust stay on the bench in street clothes and, wouldn't you know it, the Giants won the pennant again. This time, though, Faust decided to skip the World Series, believing his imaginary sweetheart, Lulu, had summoned him home. And the Giants lost the 1912 World Series as well. By this time, though, Faust

was mentally unstable enough that his brother had him committed to an insane asylum, where he eventually died in June 1915.

Thus ended the strange tale of Victory Faust. A strange story indeed, but no stranger than a story behind a real baseball player, **James "Deacon" White**. In the list of "Unusual Beliefs in Baseball," even John McGraw's belief in Victory Faust can't top Deacon White. An historic figure of the 19th century, White started playing early enough to have faced the 1869 Cincinnati Red Stockings. He then played on three of **Harry Wright's** champion Boston Red Stockings teams, plus the Chicago White Stocking team that won the first National League pennant. One of the first major supporters of players' rights, his career continued all the way through to the Players League in 1890. One of the three or four great catchers of the 19th century (he also played third base, though not especially well), White totaled 2066 hits and an Adjusted OPS of 126 while racking up 28 points on the Black Ink Test, leading his league in batting, slugging, OPS, hits, total bases, triples and RBIs at various times. For a catcher, that's Hall of Fame quality hitting.

In addition, he was, by all accounts, an exemplary fellow. A religious, non-smoking, non-drinking, non-card-playing, sober and serious individual, he was indeed a deacon, although he also looked like a deacon, with a long face, walrus mustache and a solemn expression (at least he had one in his pictures.) **Bill James** named him "The Most Admirable Superstar of the 1870s" in *The Historical Baseball Abstract*.

There was just one little thing about Deacon White—he thought the earth was flat. It's a story apparently first told in the 20th century by **Lee Allen** in *The National League Story* in 1961 and later picked up by Hynd in *The Giants of the Polo Grounds*. And, not only was White convinced the earth was flat, but he tried to convince his teammates as well, pointing out that, if a pop fly came back down to the same spot, well the earth couldn't very well be a spinning globe, could it? Reportedly, he did convince one teammate, but, sadly, he failed to prove his theory any further than that. Oh well, at least he's a hero to the Flat Earth Society.

*SABR member John Shiffert's latest book is called Base Ball in Philadelphia (McFarland, 2007).*



# Ten Cultural Observations While Sitting in the Right Field Corner of the Tokyo Dome during a Yomiuri Giants Game This Past July, Or Why Billy Beane Will Never Hire a Manager from the Japanese League by Jeff Boda

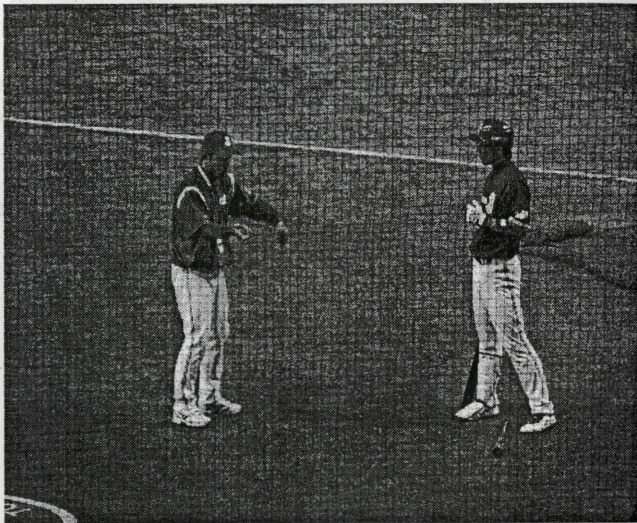
1) In America, we boo. And we love it, and don't deny it. From the boobirds in the supposedly cuddly Wrigley Field bleachers to hurling invectives (and a few fake needles in San Diego) at the top slugger in history, we love to hate in America. But in Japan, there is no booing. None. In the left field bleachers of the stadium sit the visiting fans, and



the right field bleachers are reserved for the hardcore fans of the home team. In the top of the inning, the visitors cheer, and in the bottom of the inning, the right field bleachers cheer. And it's not just a few chants of "Let's go." It's organized flag waving, full brass bands, multiple percussionists and about four thousand people clattering their plastic cow bells at once. Imagine European soccer, without the drunks and hooligans, with 4,000 towels

creating a blur of team colors accompanied by chants urging on their team. But in the most culturally and racially homogenous country on earth, where fitting into the group is the most desirous attribute, there's no booing, because that would upset the dynamic. It's not oppressive, but uplifting, like being at a **Polyphonic Spree** or **Flaming Lips** concert. **Advantage: Japan**

2) The group matters, not the individual. Sacrificing for the group is glorious, and Japanese teams have fully drunk the kool-aid on this concept. Leadoff batter gets on during the first at-bat of the game? He's bunted over, automatically, because the Japanese believe scoring the first run of the game also means delivering a



psychological blow to the opponent. So, you give of yourself to help the team. I've seen teams ahead 2-0 in the top of the third, and the number-three batter—with a .335 BA, a .400 OBP and a slugging percentage of about .650—bunt over the leadoff batter. Now imagine **Gary Sheffield**, **David Wright** or **Derek Lee** being asked to do the same, and doing it with nary a peep. Someday, **Billy Beane** and **PECOTA** and **OPS** fans are going to



convince the Japanese that bunting really doesn't end up in more runs being scored overall. Until then, I'll be thankful I can watch Derek Lee swing away instead of bunt. **Advantage: U.S.**

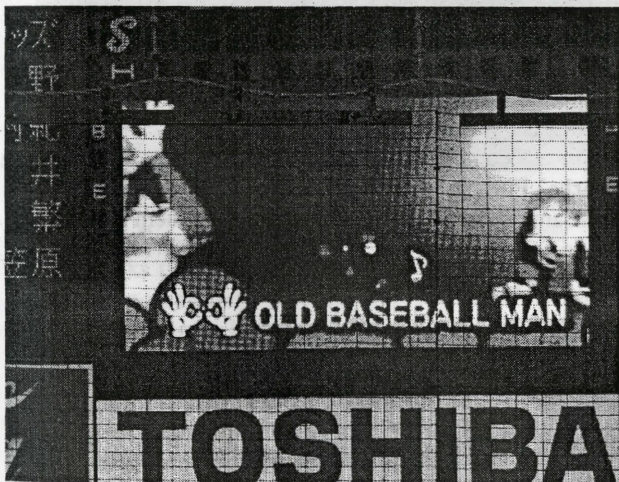
3) Nationalism is a source of collective pride, in accomplishments that help boost the group, and not as a way of bonking you over the head and saying our country



is better than yours. In Japan, there are stories every day in the papers about how Ichiro, the various Red Sox pitchers and even

Devil Rays third basemen do. Boston games are shown live in the middle of the night because the Japanese want to see how their players stack up against the best. In America, we've destroyed decades of tradition by starting to sing "God Bless America" during games because it makes us feel better to think the big cloud in the sky approves what we're doing. **Advantage: Japan**

4) In America, we like to celebrate our individuality, our entrepreneurship and our freedom of thought and speech by joining together to sing the national anthem before games. In Japan, there's no national anthem sung before



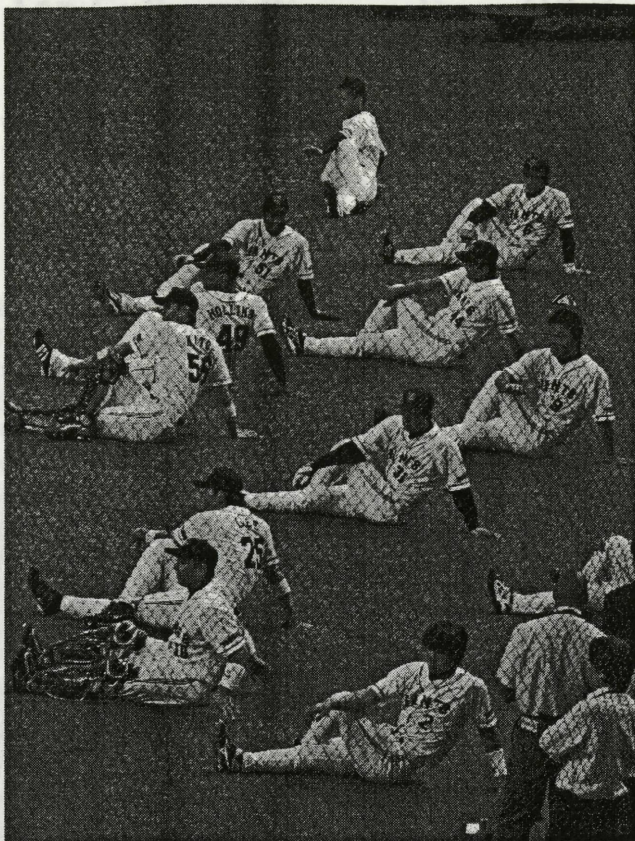
games. At Jingu Stadium, home of perpetual losers the Yakult Bay Swallows, there's synchronized cheerleaders on the field to get people to join together to sing "Old Man Baseball," with the immortal line, "Now, Yes Do My Best." So while the team may suck for decades on end, at least we're all in this together. Japan wins points for consistency and cool songs, but tradition counts for something, too. **Advantage: Push**

5) In the states, bigger is better. Who do we love: **Jamie Moyer** or **Randy Johnson**? **Brandon Webb** or **Curt Schilling**? We love the overt displays of success, be they the Hummer or the 14-strikeout game. It's no fun to see someone record a 2-1 game with the winning pitcher getting 21 groundouts. But in Japan, the pitchers don't throw anywhere nearly as fast; most top out in the high 80s. But fastballs are few and far between; about 80% or more of the pitches are junk the likes you've never seen before. (Ever played *RBI Baseball* for the original Nintendo in the 1980s and wonder why they let you curve a ball in three different directions? Well, that's because that's what they grew up watching.) It's a land of subtlety—there are dozens and dozens of protocols for bowing—and of craftsmanship, where it's better to be the best instead of the biggest. (Honda and Toyota vs. Ford and GM through the decades.) And that's extended to the diamond. Pregame warmups center around turning double plays, hitting your cutoff man and bunting the man over, not mashing it out of the park. **Advantage: Japan**

6) In Japan, as in much of Asia, there still is an embedded respect for the elderly. So much that Respect for the Aged Day is a national holiday on the third Monday in September. That flows over onto the ball diamond; the coaches come in and spend a few minutes watching the relief pitchers warm up and make sure he's doing OK before he pitches to the first batter. The managers are quoted most often in the next day's paper, not the players. In the States, we beat up near-octogenarian **Don Zimmer** and throw him to the ground during playoff games. But then again, our rebellion against those older than us helped us create punk rock, rockabilly, and grunge. **Advantage: U.S.**

7) In Asia, including Japan, there's less of a rush in everything, mostly because of the group dynamic that permeates everything. Road rage is the rare exception, not the rule; when you're in a car and signal to change lanes, the other driver slows down to let you in instead of speeding up so he can flip you off as he speeds by. It's

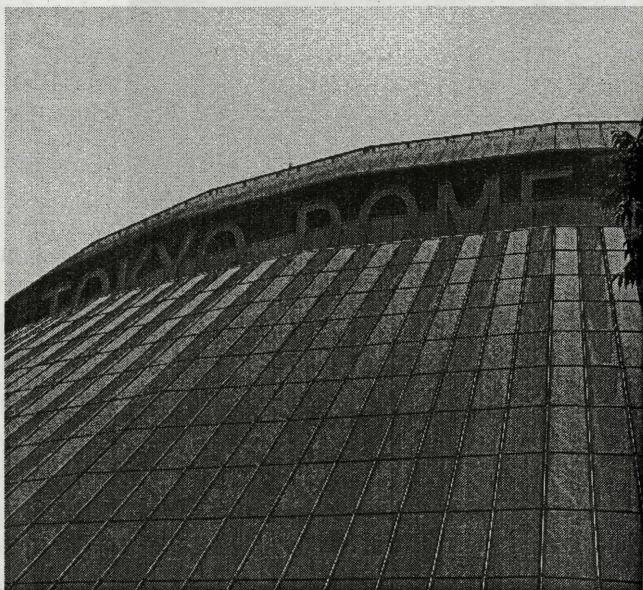




better for the group to work as a whole, even if it takes a little more time, than for things to be disruptive but time-saving. There's no such thing as a two-man conference on the mound in Japan between the pitcher and catcher; everyone in the infield joins. It takes about 40 seconds, not 20, to establish the next pitch and convey it because you need to figure out how to outwit the batter with junk instead of blowing them away with a fastball. That said, imagine a land where every game is like **Steve Trachsel** pitching against Steve Trachsel, with Steve Trachsel relieving, then closing. That's Japan, so **Advantage: U.S.**

8) The best way to learn about a country is through its food. America's the great melting pot, and not just socially. We take in everything, no questions asked. We may bitch about it for a while (first the Germans, then the Irish, then the Italians and now the Mexicans) but eventually they all get absorbed into our whole. We accept outsiders, and eventually the original cultural identity is absorbed into the whole. And that blends over into the food, too. Anyone who has eaten in Italy or Spain or France and compares those dining experiences to their

counterparts in the U.S. will see what dissolution does. We've blanded everything down so everyone fits in; why eat diced wild boar at an Italian restaurant when there is spaghetti with red sauce, or why have tripe when we can have chicken breast? Japan, on the other hand, is the most homogenous culture on earth. It takes in bits of other cultures, but stands firm in its love of its own. There are plenty of non-Japanese restaurants in the Tokyo area, but their influence hasn't seeped into their food, which they love for good reason. In America, you go to a ballpark in Chicago and there are hot dogs (German), pizza (Italian) fries (Belgian or French) soft tacos (Mexican) and Budweiser. We've based our food on our interpretations of the original, but made them worse. In Japan, you go to a



stall and order curry rice bowls, sushi, the best pork cutlets on earth and edamame (instead of peanuts) and the best macrobrewed beer on earth. (For the record, you can get a hot dog at the Tokyo Dome. And truth be told, it's better than what I've had at ballparks in America, because Japan is a country of craftsmen that refuses to do anything poorly.) Plus, in Japan, you don't throw your garbage and edamame pods on the ground. You save them and take to the recycling bin, in the spirit of fitting in with the group. **Advantage: Japan.**

9) Japan, for all its group dynamics, still has an incredible amount of repression going on, a lot of it sexually. You walk into a 7-11 and there are porn mangas right by the checkout. There are kiosks near train stations that sell cards with numbers of teenage girls any older man can

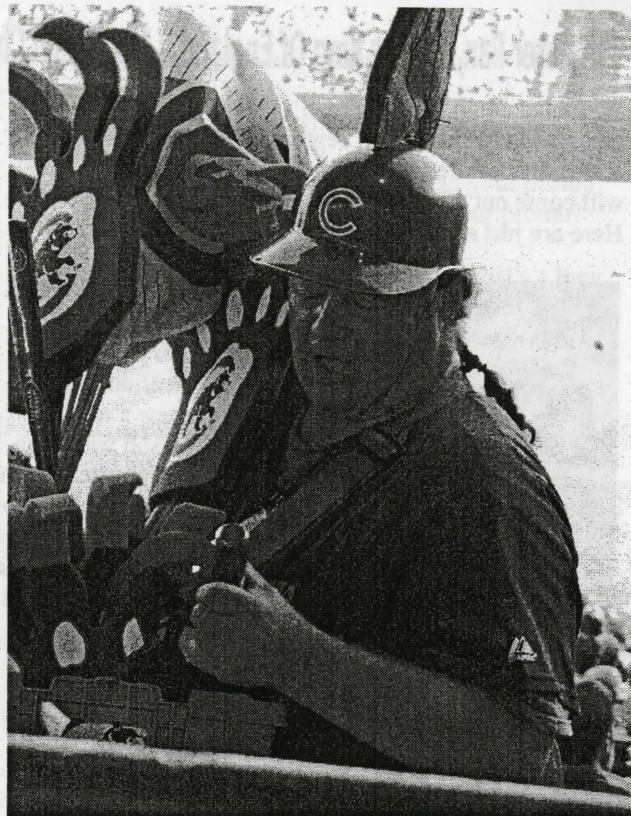


call and talk to. And it's not uncommon for a 40-something to help "support" a teenage girl, who needs to have the latest fashion and trend, right then. The pervs aren't hidden like in America; it's right in the open. And who are the vendors selling beer and whisky in the aisles at the Tokyo Dome? Incredibly cute young women, most in their late teens I would guess, wearing short skirts or shorts, as part of their uniform advertising the beer they sell. Japan knows sex and youth sell and embraces the fact, unlike America, which sells sex and youth but then denies it. That said, it's more fun buying beer in Japan. You know which beer each girl sells because it says on



her uniform, instead of someone yelling out what beer they're selling at the top of their lungs. They wear backpacks filled with just-tapped beer, so each cup you order is poured fresh just for you. And service is with a smile. The single beer fan in me says that cute young women in short skirts pouring fresh Kirin beats loud-mouthed, greasy mullets selling tepid Bud Light any day, even if the liberal in me says that's sexist. So be it.

**Advantage: Japan.**



10) In Hong Kong, my current hometown, there's a phrase called FILTH. It's short for Failed In London, Try Hong (Kong). If you can't succeed in the west, either professionally or romantically, try Asia. It's where you go to cash in if you don't have the chops to make it back home. That's what the Japanese League is for baseball. There's a reason **Tuffy Rhodes** didn't succeed in the majors, even if he did tie the all-time record for homers in Japan. In Yokohama, **Matt White** might get known for his pitching skills with the Baystars instead of owning land in Massachusetts worth billions because of the quarry-able stone underneath. America still is the land of opportunity, and that's why you see a one-way flow of talent; they call it the big leagues for a reason.

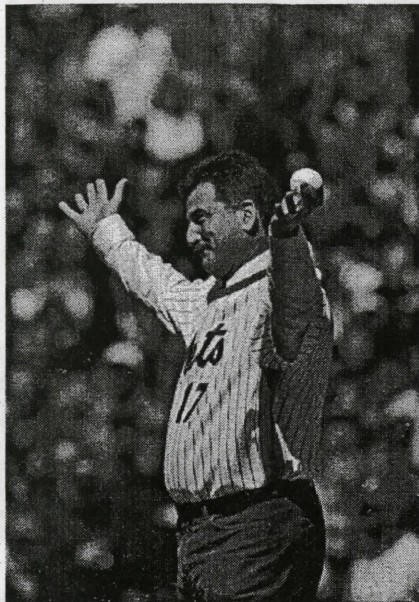
**Advantage: U.S.**

*Jeff Boda lives in Hong Kong and gets his baseball fix via Cubs webcasts while he's having his morning coffee. He made his first trip to Japan this past summer, going to a Yakult Bay Swallows game and two Yomiuri Giants in Tokyo, and heartily recommends visiting Japan for music, food, and baseball.*



# I'm Peter Pan, I'm the King Of England, I Have High Cheekbones: Crazy Keith's Corner 2007 by Steve Reynolds

While watching the Mets hasn't been a joy for most of this season (especially in September), listening to what **Keith Hernandez** says has been. One never knows what will come out of his mouth and end up on the *Zisk* blog. Here are just some of the highlights from this past season.



*--Keith likes his lollipops*  
**Gary Cohen** mentions that he knew a new season was upon us because "Keith is about to chomp into his first Tootsie Pop of the year." Keith went on to say he started on it in between innings, but now that they were back on the air, he was all business. "When I'm broadcasting, I have to be

professional. I can't have chunks in my mouth." When asked by **Ron Darling** how long one Tootsie Pop would last, Keith said four to five innings. Gary wrapped up the culinary conversation of the evening by saying, "they're not supposed to last that long."

*--Keith still loses track of the game*

**Carlos Beltran** was tagged out by **Scott Rolen** on a ground ball hit to third. It was unavoidable and at least Beltran made sure there was no attempt at a double play. As the replay rolled Keith commented, "A rare base running error—oh, wait, it's first and second. I'm out of my mind."

*--Keith is still looking for more things to pitch...as an ad man*

Not satisfied with just Just For Men, Keith seemed ecstatic that there were new sponsors for certain moments in the game. After Gary read yet another sponsor billboard, Keith gleefully remarked, "We have so many new sponsors this year—it's exciting." Gary, who has to learn all this new copy, sighed and then with the driest

deadpan ever said, "It is." Later on Keith was analyzing a pitch when two sped-up highlights from earlier in the game were shown on screen.

**Gary:** That was the *Keith Hernandez Confused Moment of the Night*.

**Keith:** I was going to ignore that completely. I was doing my Sergeant Schultz impression.

**Ron:** If we had a new sponsor for that, we'd have one every night.

*--Keith likes fights...and beer*

As Gary and Ron started throwing out words for fights, Keith chimed in with, "I like brew ha-ha. And after the game, you can have some brew ha-has. Ha ha!"



*--Keith doesn't feel old yet*

Gary Cohen mentioned the AARP (gotta love what they talk about in blowouts), which inspired this conversation:

**Keith:** No, I didn't join them, even though they keep sending brochures.

**Gary:** That's okay, you're not a joiner. You're still a kid

**Keith:** I'm like Peter Pan, a kid at heart.

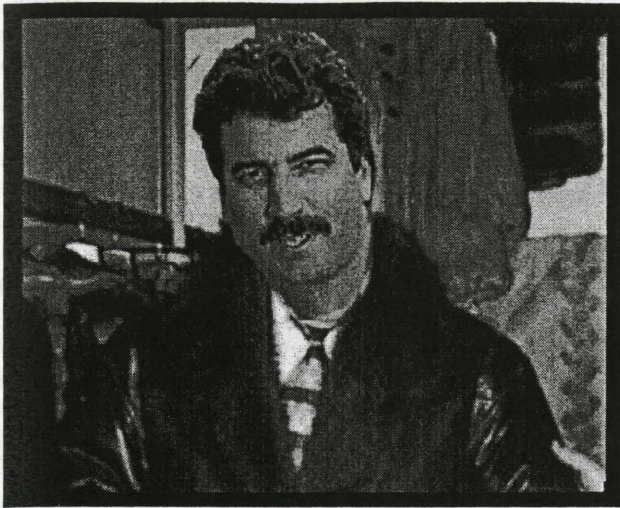
**Gary:** I can't picture you in green tights.

**Ron:** Keith's like **Groucho Marx**, he doesn't want to belong to any club that would have him as a member.

(Then Keith seems to realize a game is still going on)

**Keith:** Hey, what did **Alou** do his last time at bat? I got confused writing it down.





*--Keith needs his nap*

Keith mentioned the great job SNY director **Bill Webb** did working on the FOX telecast of Saturday's Mets-Braves contest. Then Gary, who seems to always be looking for a way to egg Keith on, chimed in:

**Gary:** Did that keep you interested the whole time?

**Keith:** No, I feel asleep.

**Ron:** Hey, those 4 p.m. starts are prime nap time.

*--Keith knows his history*

Keith describes the shift the Braves employed while Carlos Delgado was up.

**Keith:** That hole there, you could drive a whole panzer division through there.

**Gary:** Um, how many tanks is that?

**Keith:** Um, a lot?

(Ed note: a typical panzer division had about 250 tanks in it.)

*--Sometimes even having a multiple highlighters to keep score isn't enough for Keith*

**Gary:** (After a rundown play on a botch suicide squeeze) That's 2-5-6-4 if you're scoring at home.

**Keith:** I'm not.

**Gary:** Yes you are!

**Keith:** No, I protest.

*--Keith loves, Keith hates*

**Keith:** These are the games you love on getaway day; the games you love to hate.

*--Keith doesn't nap during games...and doesn't like promos*

**Gary:** With the wind blowing in from left tonight you can't doze.

**Keith:** I don't doze—why don't you read your promo. (Gary laughs) Do you want me to read your promo?

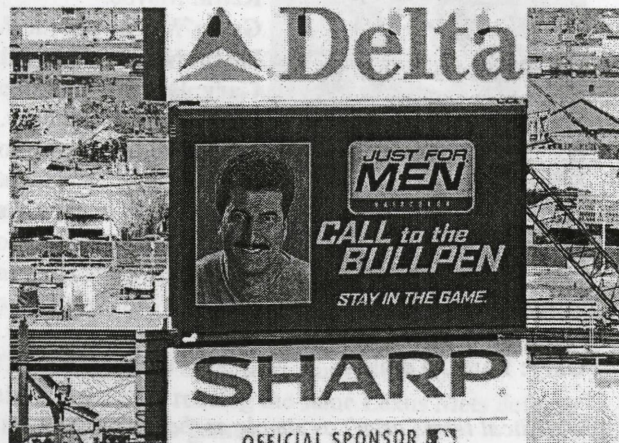
**Gary:** Sure

**Keith:** (Pause after grabbing card) Wow, that's a long one. (Keith proceeds to read the entire promo about watching games via Mets.com, and then lets out a huge sigh) Whew, my goodness, what is this? It's a novella!

*--Keith isn't a fan of the Ask the Booth feature*

**Gary:** [This fan] asks, 'Keith, do you think Jose Reyes could hit 30 home runs, steal 60 bases and hit 30 triples?'

**Keith:** Well, if he hits 30 triples, I'm the future King of England.



*--Keith is a scoreboard watcher*

While **John Maine** was pursuing a no-no, Gary and Keith were pursuing the mystery of the Marlins scoreboard. Each picture of a Mets hitter was placed in front of a Times Square background...which for some reason had a picture of Borat.

**Gary:** Why does Carlos Delgado have Borat with him?

**Keith:** I have no idea.

**Gary:** It's like where's Waldo?

(The conversation continued after a couple of pitches)

**Gary:** I loved that movie, but what's Borat doing in Metsville?

**Keith:** I'm aghast.

*Borat wasn't the only film referenced in the game. As Jose Reyes was trying to get his fourth hit of the night,*



Keith mentioned that when you're a hitter having a hot night in a blowout, you don't want to give up an at-bat that easily. Gary then took it home:

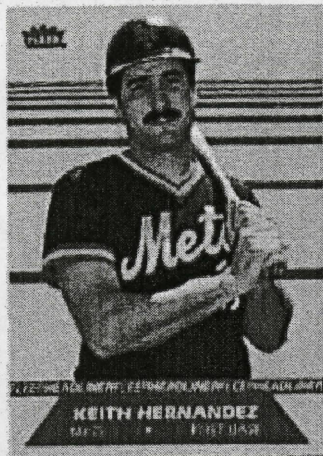
**Gary:** As a hitter, you wanna be Gordon Gecko.

**Keith:** Yes, a Mike Douglas special.

(Then a few seconds of silence)

**Keith:** Um, Michael, yeah.

--Keith's moustache 1, Borat's moustache 0



(Gary notices that Borat has been wiped away from the background on the Marlins scoreboard)

**Gary:** You think somebody somewhere said something?

**Keith:** Maybe.

**Gary:** Was it you?

**Keith:** No.

**Gary:** But, you know, you're Keith Hernandez.

**Keith:** No...

(A minute later, third base umpire **Bill Drake** said

someone at the plate didn't check their swing)

**Keith:** He doesn't like that call.

**Gary:** Hate the drake.

--Medical terms aren't as simple as they used to be

**Gary:** Here's Aaron Boone. He replaced Miguel Cabrera. He was removed earlier with what's being called (Gary chuckles) a 'tight right torso.'

**Keith:** That's pretty...vague.

**Gary:** I've never heard that term before.

(Both laugh)

--Keith likes the comic page in the Daily News

(Gary points out a guy wearing a bizarre mask in the crowd)

**Keith:** He looks like Beetle Bailey. (Pause) I'm not being contemporary with this am I? Well, what I remember in the paper was *Blondie* on top of the paper and on the bottom was *Beetle Bailey*.

--Keith doesn't like **Randy Newman**

**Keith:** I'm six feet tall—and these days everyone's taller than me. I don't like that.

--Pressure? What pressure? Tangent? What tangent?

**Keith:** There's no pressure in this job; I don't have to be on the field. If I get ripped in the paper in a review for what I say, it's not like I went 0 for 4 and left 15 men on base.

**Gary:** I've been reading the reviews.

**Keith:** What reviews? We're under the radar here.

**Gary:** Well, they're all good.

**Keith:** Well, thank you.

**Gary:** See, that's how you can chew on that lollipop and why you're so footloose and fancy free...

(A couple of seconds go by)

**Keith:** To get back to the game...we kind of went on a tangent there...

--Keith gets wacky during a Florida road trip

Friday night Gary and Keith mentioned the hot tub in Dolphin Stadium, to which Keith exclaimed: "Hey, if they had pools by the bullpen while I was playing, I would have wanted to be a reliever instead of an everyday player." Then they showed a shot of the pool area, it was a bunch of 14-year-olds in bikinis.



Saturday night Keith somehow had a pair of Thunderstix and he was hitting Gary in the head with them. Then just to makes sure no one got the idea to bring them back North, Keith said, "Mr. Wilpon, please don't have these at Shea. You can play the music as loud as you want, just don't have these things." Gary chimed in, "Mr. Wilpon, tear down the Thunderstix."

Sunday the Marlins players had their eyeblack drawn down the side of their cheeks...

**Keith:** I never could wear that, I could always see it because I have high cheekbones.

**Gary:** It's that model's face that you have.

**Keith:** Oh yes, thank you, partner.

--Keith likes old game shows

Ron moved down into a little box behind home plate to talk about the game from the fan's level. Field reporter



**Kevin Burkhardt** chimed in about Ron invading his territory. Then director **Bill Webb** divided the screen into three boxes, proclaiming Gary to say, "Welcome to *Hollywood Squares*," to which Ron added, "I'll take **Paul Lynde** to block." After much guffawing, Gary said that Kevin didn't know what show they were talking about. Kevin turned his mic back on and said that of course he did. Which led to...

**Gary:** You know, these guys played against Peter Marshall's son.

**Keith:** What was his name?

**Gary:** Pete LeCock.

**Keith:** Yes it was. (Laughs all around.) I'm so sorry folks.



--Keith doesn't like to think about 1989

Gary announced that the last three Mets to hit back-to-back-to-back home runs included Keith as the third batter. Keith didn't believe he was hitting behind **Darryl Strawberry** until Gary told him it was 1989...

**Keith:** Oh, that was my horrible year.

**Gary:** At the time, you were batting .216.

**Keith:** Oh, thank you. (Ron chuckles in the background) That computer's not going to be long for this booth.

**Ron:** Someone in loge, look out!

--Long rain delays make everyone nutty  
(In the bottom of the 8th)

**Keith:** What inning is it?

**Gary:** Bottom of the 8th.

**Keith:** Ah, I lost track.

**Gary:** Isn't your color-coding working?

**Keith:** Yeah, I guess I should have just looked down at the scorecard.

(30 seconds go by)

**Keith:** Why don't we just zip it for the rest of the game?

**Gary:** The only problem with that is that they might realize they could do without us.

(In the top of the 8th, during a discussion about London)

**Keith:** I had high tea in a pub once.

**Gary:** That's not called tea.

**Ron:** That's called Guinness.

--Keith? Confusing? Nah.

Keith gives a compliment to Cardinals pitcher **Anthony Reyes**, then pauses.

**Keith:** I should clarify, that's Anthony Reyes. I just confused the producer in the truck. He's yelling in my ear screaming, "Jose doesn't pitch!"

**Gary:** That's okay, you confuse us sometimes too.

--Keith knows his French

After a discussion where Keith and Gary talk about Hernandez's brother also being named Gary, Ron chimes in.

**Ron:** You know, Gar in French means war.

**Gary:** Well, that's spelled differently, right?

**Keith:** Right, G-A-R-R-E?

**Ron:** Yes, that's it.

**Gary:** You guys are a fountain of information.

**Ron:** We are the Ministers of the Useless!

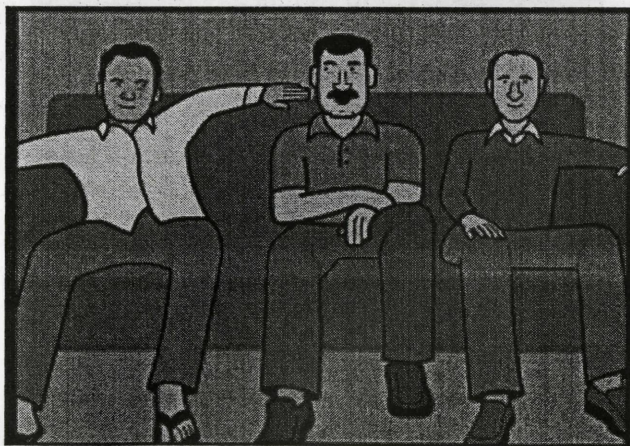
--Those sponsored billboards can get boring

Keith speaks after reading the same Lexus Mets defense as the previous two games.

**Keith:** I feel like a broken record

**Gary:** You mean a scratched CD.

**Keith:** Right. I guess the same defensive lineup is a sign





of a good team, but I'm tired of reading the same thing. Can't we get rid of it?

**Gary:** You don't want to show the defense, you're gonna have to give back that Lexus.

**Keith:** Oh, I forgot about that.

*--Keith doesn't know all his diseases*

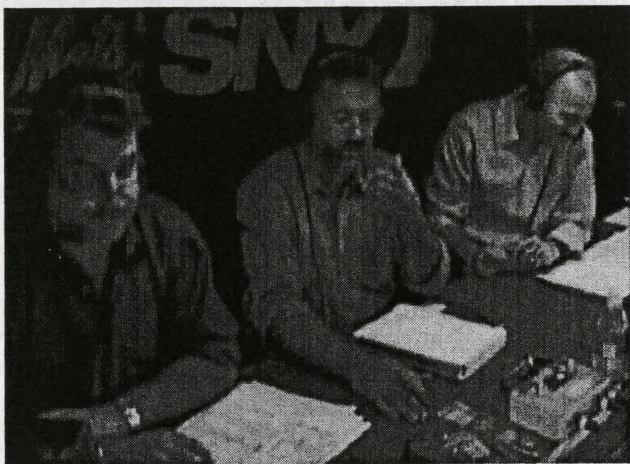
After a shot of **Mike Pelfrey** rolling the mouthguard around in his mouth, Gary decided an explanation was in order.

**Gary:** He's got the mouthpiece for his TMJ.

**Keith:** What's that?

**Gary:** Well, it's a jaw problem.

**Keith:** You're sure? I thought it was a banned substance.



*--Keith wants everyone to get an education*

The SNY cameras caught **Willie Randolph** and **Jose Reyes** having a very lengthy discussion in between innings, and all three of them were trying to figure out what it was about.

**Keith:** Kevin's close. We should send Kevin to lip-reading school in the offseason.

**Kevin:** I'm gonna take French too, just in case the Mets sign someone else.

*--Keith loves Merengue Night*

**Keith:** The best part of it is that after the post-game there's no traffic jam.

**Gary:** You sound like you don't like Merengue Night.

**Keith:** Mets fans will enjoy it I'm sure.

**Gary:** (Sighs) Me, me, me, me.

*--Keith could fix the Florida Marlins troubled pitcher Scott Olsen*

**Keith:** He needs a couch he can lay down on.

**Gary:** Would you be in the big fluffy chair on the end?

**Keith:** I got a guy for him.

*--Keith and Gary like their classic rock...but get some details wrong*

**Paul LoDuca** comes to the plate.

**Keith:** "Smoke on the Water" again.

**Gary:** That's not a Dominican song.

**Keith:** No, but it was written about a fire in Tokyo.

[Ed. note: Actually, it was about a fire in Montreux, Switzerland]

**Gary:** Was it at Budokan?

**Keith:** I don't know.

**Gary:** At Budokan was a great **Cheap Trick** record. But it was a little later than **Deep Purple**. (Pauses a few seconds) You know, I want you to want me?

**Keith:** I like that song

**Gary:** "Surrender?"

**Keith:** No, I don't know that one.

*--If it's a doubleheader, Keith must be eating*

**Gary:** What are you eating?

**Keith:** My ice cream. It helps my pipes.

**Gary:** Well, it clogged your pipes because I couldn't understand what you were saying.

**Keith:** It must have been the chocolate syrup.

*--Keith is a klutz...we think*

An SNY camera caught Marlins manager **Freddi Gonzalez** with a cut on the bridge of his nose. Gary decides to explain.

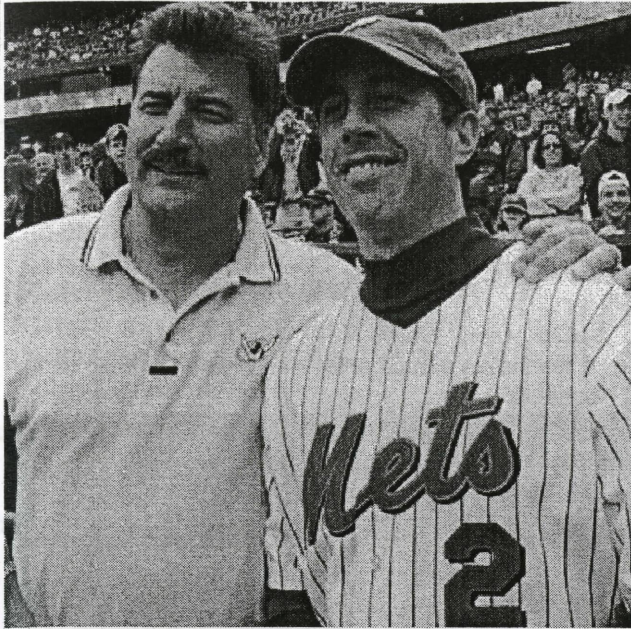
**Gary:** Freddi Gonzalez has a scar on his nose. He walked into a plate glass window at a Starbucks today.

**Keith:** I've done that.

**Gary:** I'm sure—and I bet it was late at night too.







--Keith only cares if he understands

**Keith:** I know I'm getting technical here, but if you don't understand it, well, sorry.

--Keith is amazed that Gary has a good memory for player and game details...or at least can read the media guide updates

**Keith:** You never cease to amaze me, Gary.

**Gary:** Well, the feeling is mutual, Keith

--However, Keith doesn't inspire the same confidence when recalling a tidbit of trivia

**Gary:** Excellent recall, Keith.

**Keith:** I know, that's rare.

**Gary:** Yeah, if that's right! (All laugh)

--Keith's plan to lose five pounds went the way of most diets

**Ron:** A lot of foul balls up here tonight.

**Keith:** Was it up here?

**Ron:** It was close.

**Keith:** I missed it.

**Ron:** You're our Gold Glove guy, you're supposed to catch it.

**Keith:** But I was eating my ice cream, that's more important.

**Gary:** I thought you weren't going to have ice cream tonight?

**Ron:** Hey, he lasted four innings.

--Keith awards medals at will

Gary mentions that **Bobby Cox** got ejected once again from a game to set the major league record.

**Keith:** He'll be going into the Hall of Fame—that'll be on his plaque.

**Gary:** You think????!!

**Keith:** Yeah, it's like his purple heart.

**Gary:** (Laughs) You know, on the Braves telecasts they keep an open mic next to where Cox is in the dugout, and you hear him complain about every single pitch.

**Keith:** He's...(pauses)...tough on umpires.

--Keith and Ron are psychically linked

A replay is showing a ball being thrown from left field to the Pirates third basemen.

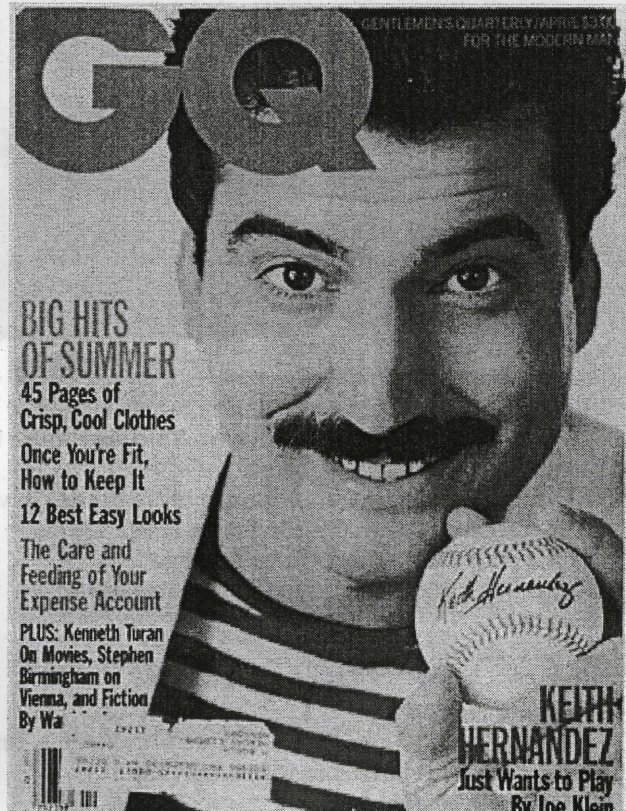
**Keith:** It goes to the cutoff man—hello, there's a runner on first base.

**Gary:** (Chuckles) You know, Ron dropped a McFly on the Marlins Sunday. (Pauses) Hello, McFly!

**Keith:** It's been a long time since I saw that movie.

**Gary:** *Back to the Future*.

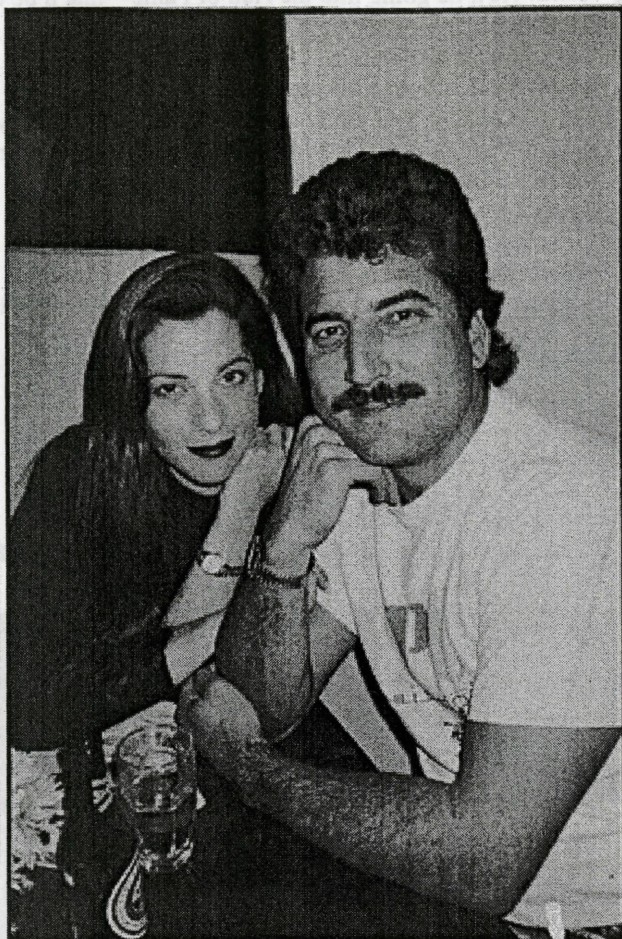
**Keith:** Yeah, it's been a while since I thought about it. He really said that?





**Gary:** Yeah, that's why I totally thought you were going to drop a McFly on me.

**Keith:** No, I totally forgot that.



*--Keith likes Gary's mastery of turning a phrase*

**Ryan Church** missed the cutoff man, which allowed a Mets runner to advance an extra base. Then they rolled the replay.

**Keith:** Well there's the #1 rockhead play of the day. I will keep track today. Boy, these last place teams. He didn't have a prayer of catching him at the plate.

**Gary:** Not a prayer, on a Sunday, for a guy named Church?

**Keith:** Oh, you're good.

*--Keith is modest*

A replay shows **Shawn Green** making a nice grab at first.

**Keith:** I couldn't have done it better myself.

**Gary:** Oh, you did.

**Keith:** Well...

*--What does friendship mean?*

**El Duque** hits **Austin Kearns** in the back as he's running to first, and the Nationals outfielder is called out for running inside the baseline

**Keith:** How is that scored?

**Gary:** 1-3, my friend.

**Keith:** I'm your friend?

*--Keith knows how to party, example #538*

A fan makes a catch in the stands while holding on his bottle of Bud.

**Keith:** It's hard making a catch with a Budweiser in your hand.

**Gary:** You say that from personal experience?

**Keith:** Well, there were times I wished I had a Bud on the field.

*--Next time, do a little research*

As part of a promotion, the Geico caveman was in the "Dream Seats," making Gary, Keith and Ron cackle.

**Kevin Burkhardt:** So does that ad in the airport still upset you?

**Caveman:** That's not me in that commercial—do you think we all look alike? This interview is over.

*--Keith is okay with losing out to **Wes Parker** for the All-Time Gold Glove team*

**Keith:** I was crestfallen. Oh well. There's always next year.

**Gary:** You mean the 51st anniversary team?

**Ron:** You've got 25 more years in you, you could make the 75th.

*--Gary knows a different brand of German*

Gary and Keith talk about Dodgers pitcher **Joe Beimel** and his German last name.

**Gary:** I believe Beimel is German for "Cutting your hand on a shot glass."

*--Keith has soul*

After the Phillies' Adam Eaton was warned for hitting Carlos Beltran, he was extra careful throwing inside.

**Keith:** Eaton was cruising, but now he looks like **Archie Bell and the Drells** out there.

**Gary:** You mean he's doing the "Tighten Up"?

*--Keith watches the news on the road*

**Keith:** Did you see the sharks at Coney Island?



**Gary:** Well, there's always been sharks at Coney Island

**Keith:** There was one that was six feet long—and they even got footage of it.

**Gary:** You mean footage of the ones in the water.

**Keith:** Ah, yes. But I was amazed. I didn't need a coffee after I saw that.

*--Keith and Gary have dirty minds*

**Gary:** The new Reds pitcher is **Jon Coutlangus**.

**Keith:** Oh, oh, yeah. We mean it with that name.

**Gary:** Yes, it's very carefully pronounced.

**Keith:** That's a tongue twister, isn't it?

(10 seconds of silence)



*--Keith will bribe a Nielsen family if need be*

**Keith:** A game like this, I'm sure we're racking up the ratings.

*--Keith likes his coffee, with an extra shot*

Keith talked about meeting some Mets fans while he was attempting to have his morning coffee at the team's hotel, which lead to this exchange during a pitching change.

**Gary:** Keith talked about going down for a coffee in the morning, so here's a Venti, **Todd Coffey**.

**Keith:** Wow, he's like three extra shots [of espresso].

*--Keith is alert, Part 1*

**Keith:** There's a bunch of Red players asleep on the field.

**Gary:** Good thing we're alert.

**Keith:** That's because I'm in a reposed position.

*--Keith is alert, Part 2*

**Keith:** (Sigh)

**Gary:** You tired?

**Keith:** No.

**Gary:** I thought we needed to get you a cot.

**Keith:** No, I'm standing up now.

*--Keith is bored, Part 1*

**Gary:** And **Ruben Gotay** walks on the tenth pitch of that at bat.

**Keith:** Lord, have mercy.

*--Keith is bored, Part 2*

**Gary:** I think we have reached the point where Keith needs to be entertained.

(SNY camera shows Keith spinning around on a chair in the booth.)

**Gary:** He looks like a kid at a luncheonette on that thing!

*--Gary and Keith enjoy literature*

After a couple of cracks about getting text messages in the booth, they spring this upon us.

**Gary:** This game is reading longer than *Beowulf*.

**Keith:** Grendel, please come down and devour this field.

**Gary:** My friend texted me and said he'd give me five bucks if I got *Beowulf* into the telecast.

*--Keith might like to wake n' bake*

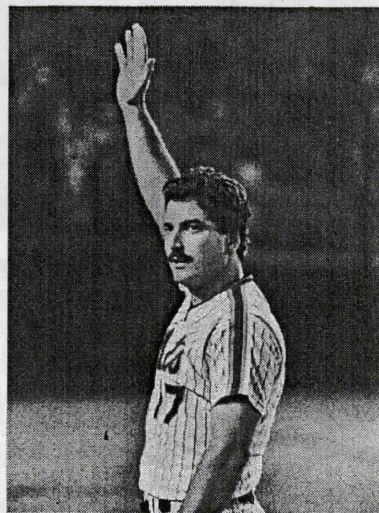
Ron calls Gary during the telecast. Keith says Ron's out in California so he can watch the game at 6:30 and then go out to dinner.

**Keith:** In Hawaii football games start at 7:00 a.m.

**Gary:** That's way too early.

**Keith:** It's perfect—a little bloody mary by the pool.

**Gary:** You know how to live my friend, you know how to live.



*--Finally, this season made Keith a bit upset*

**Gary:** Let me say this—you're really angry today.

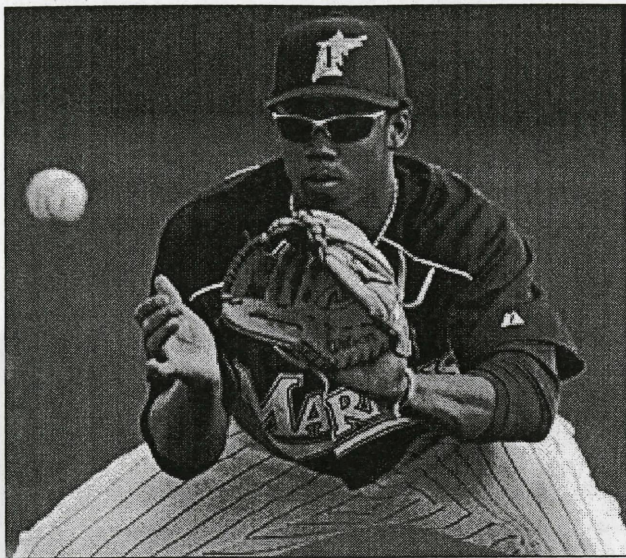
**Keith:** I've been testy. It's been a long year. I didn't get a nap in yesterday.

**Gary:** There was that movie *12 Angry Men*—you are the one angry man today.



# The Joy of Baseball is in its Youth: A Series of Note to Self by Andrew Mendillo

**Hanley Ramirez** is an exciting player to watch, maybe the most in all of baseball. At 23, he will be this much fun for years. **Jose Reyes, Ryan Braun, Hunter Pence, Joe Mauer, Delmon Young, Troy Tulowitzki, the Uptons, Chris B. Young, Dustin Pedroia** (my personal favorite), **Chad Billingsley, Phil Hughes, Justin Verlander, Clay Buchholz.** Baseball does not get much better than its young stars. On top of their super abilities, they play with integrity. They bring a vintage feel back to the game, a feel I do not remember in baseball.



Not very long ago, baseball was a game of giants. We rooted for the home run heroes to murder the records of our fathers' teams. The home run derby was the highlight of the summer, even pitchers joked about how "chicks dig the long-ball." I remember having **Frank Thomas's** poster on my wall, despite loving the Red Sox. I pretended to be **Mark McGwire** in backyard wiffle-ball—my cousin was my bash brother. We played home run derby every day; we imitated their batting stances. Every spring, when little league started, I remember teams of kids hoping we could pick our numbers giving us the privilege of having number 25, 35 or 33 on our backs. (But of course they went from 1-16, and only the fat kids got the high numbers.)

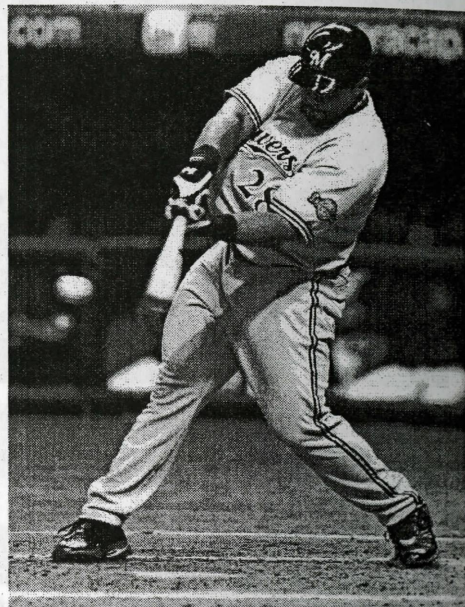
Oh fat kids! A lot of fat kids played. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but I'm sure more fat kids played baseball than beach volleyball. The reason for this is that they had major league fat guys to look up to. I'm excited

to see the fat baseball player re-inventing himself. For years **David Wells** was scorned for being the fat guy in the MLB, and it was unfair because baseball is not exclusive to athletes. It's a fat man's sport much like bowling and sumo. Wells wasn't alone, other fat guys were around but they sucked. David Wells was the fat guy on the field with super athletes, but now he can wait in buffet lines with **C.C. Sabathia** and **David Ortiz**—super sized super-stars! I miss **Tony Gwynn, Cecil Fielder, Mo Vaughn, John Kruk, and Fernando Valenzuela.** But, I am giggling at the sight of **Miguel Cabrera, Joel Zumaya, Andy Marte, Joba Chamberlain** and **Prince Fielder!**

The big hitters of my childhood were big guys. **Frank Thomas**, though not fat, was the biggest man I had ever seen. I saw him in person at Fenway Park and gave up pitching the same day.

**Thomas** was much bigger than the rest of the players on the field; his arms were the size of everyone else's legs. He used his muscles to hit the ball further than anyone else in the game. Everyone in the game wished they could hit with the power of **Thomas**, but if you wanted to hit as far as him, you needed a perfect swing like **Ken Griffey Jr.** Things were promising watching those stars as a child. If I wasn't born as big as **Thomas**, I could perfect my swing like **Griffey**—ah, innocence.

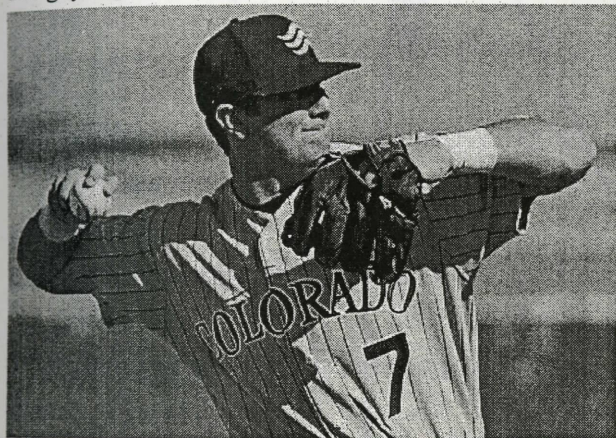
Then juice squeezed its way into the media, and the feelings toward the home run hitter, and baseball changed. At one point, I remember jokingly saying **Rafael Palmeiro** was Major League Baseball's **Ned Flanders** only to see he was MLB's number one suspect. I was so





hurt to see what these players were actually doing behind closed doors. Steroids turned the game ugly, we know this much. But back in 1988, would anyone actually believe **Jose Canseco** could be on TV with a gorgeous model and Peter Brady, and not be the one banging the model? It's surreal! For people like me, the image of Canseco is forever linked with a clip art picture of a prescription bottle that reads "steroids." I secretly wait for Canseco to announce that this is all an attention scheme, but it is in fact the harsh reality. My favorite player became **Greg Maddux**.

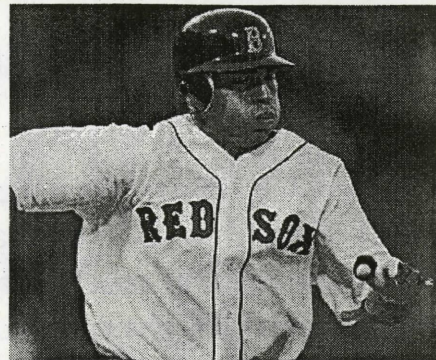
If morals didn't deter the young players out of trying steroids, the public humiliation in getting caught has. These young guys are big, bigger than me, but in no way could I imagine Dustin Pedroia taking anything illegal to better his game. These last couple of seasons have been a joy to watch because of these young stars, and my fantasy teams are proof. I have been so excited about the young crop that I have sacrificed proven players to load up on fun guys I prefer to root for. Granted, some moves were



not so bright. I drafted Troy Tulowitzki over **Adrian Gonzalez** for my utility role, dropped Griffey for **Billy Butler**, and when having the option of picking up either **Chris Young** (SD) or **Tim Lincecum**, I chose Lincecum—in both leagues. Making my fantasy league's playoffs is now a fantasy of its own.

Baseball is great to watch when the players on the field play to the best of their abilities. They work for every out, and every run. I'm pleased with the changes that are apparent in the last few years. Baseball is back to where it should be in my mind. That may be because I, like many, chose to disregard the passing of Aaron, and see the no-hitters by Verlander and Buchholz as the greater, more

enjoyable games. Granted, I may be just a little over excited at watching my Red Sox win with youth. It's been a joy watching Pedroia dig to China to



preserve Clay's no-no, seeing **Brandon Moss** disassemble the scoreboard on the Green Monster, and **Jacoby Ellsbury** make such a good catch he had to confirm with an umpire that it actually happened!

This also could be more of a subconscious reaction to the fact that all of these players are younger than me. And that from now on, everyone in this new generation of baseball players would have been born after me. I first made this discovery my senior year in college. That year I watched **Chris Rix** of Florida State flip over a lineman for a touchdown. The star quarterback was the first athlete I remember watching who was younger than me. It made me jealous. No less jealous am I to watch New York women use the image of **David Wright** as an aphrodisiac. This guy is my age and literally can choose any girl he wants, while playing the game I love, and getting paid to do so!

Many people reading this may have had these thoughts years ago, but think back to how that felt. You played in high school; you were good, but not good enough. You remained a fan and watched players younger than you emerge as stars. But the group before this one did so with controversy, they cheated. I am seeing my generation of stars bring the hustle back to the game. At first it is depressing, but with more thought, it is something to be proud of. I may not wait in line anymore for an autograph, and feel silly wearing a jersey of someone my younger brother's age, but I have no problems rooting for these... (here I go)... "kids."

*Andrew Mendillo is a comedy writer and die hard Red Sox fan living in Brooklyn. While writing this opinionated piece, San Diego keeps its playoff dreams alive throwing **Greg Maddux** up against LA's **David Wells**, and **Frank Thomas** hits a walk-off single to beat the Yankees...thus making Andrew feel stupid for writing about his feelings.*



# Baseball and Barbed Wire

by Thomas Michael McDade

When Joe Morris hit baseballs  
out of hand to us in the back field,  
I never thought much about the gap  
between the sight and sound  
of a ball flying off a bat.

That lesson came another day  
at the top of the backstop  
where I wondered why I was better  
at things that didn't matter  
like climbing fences  
and telephone poles than hitting  
fastballs and judging line drives.

The field was empty except for  
two guys in deep left center.

Joey Arnold offered a friendly hand  
to Russ Miller and a sucker punch  
in the face was what he got in return.

He dropped like an equipment bag  
but it was eternity before the loud  
crack  
like when Joe Morris gave a ball  
wings.

That's all the fight there was.

They walked past my perch like that  
haymaker had been the only thing  
between friendship and me  
tracking the speed of light and sound

When I told Johnny Nicastro,  
he said he'd seen Joe Morris beat on  
a truck driver up close for an hour  
and he heard what he saw  
when he saw it.

Like a catcher, I said.

Johnny pitched to me for a while  
and I foul-tipped four or five.

Then we went to a fence at the race  
track  
that had barbed wire like prison.

*(Author's note: This poem originally  
appeared on Fight These Bastards:  
[donwinterpoetry.com/  
FightTheseBastards.html](http://donwinterpoetry.com/FightTheseBastards.html))*

**Thomas Michael McDade** is a lifetime  
Red Sox fan who grew up in  
Pawtucket, Rhode Island, home of the  
Triple A Pawtucket Red Sox.



# The INTIMIDATOR

1968

Bob Gibson

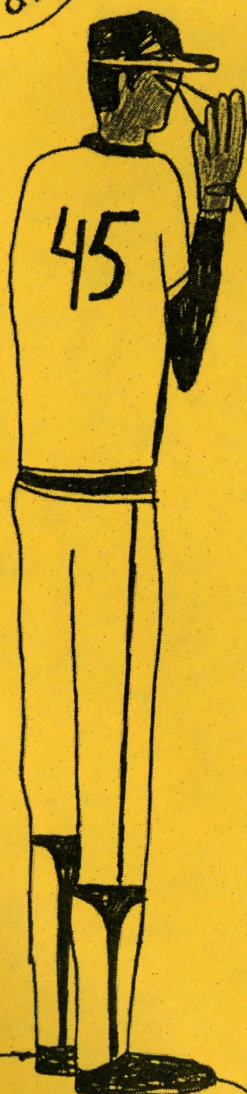
22 wins

28 COMPLETE  
GAMES

13 shut outs

1.12 ERA

you die ooo



SLINK MOSS



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