

The Baseball Magazine For People Who Hate Baseball Magazines

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2006

Z I S K # 12



This Is Your Body on Steroids?

Our Resident White Sox Correspondent Goes to the 2005 World Series
Bowie Kuhn Era Heroes: Tony Conigliaro, Jim Rice and Willie Wilson
Baseball Fiction: Casey's Real Turn at Bat, Rain on Tin
The 1984 San Diego Padres: The Real Idiots
...and more!

Z I S K

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Publisher's Note:

Our good friend **Mike** is a renown wine connoisseur. His refrigerated wine cellar is stocked with his favorite reds (he keeps whites on hand only for close friends). His credentials are impressive—he judges at the Villenave-de-Rions Wine Festival and contributes to *California Wine Maker*—but what's most impressive is his wealth of knowledge of all wines; the ones he loves and the ones he loathes, he knows them all. Makes sense, right? Civil war historians don't just study the people they admire, they cover both sides of the conflict—this is what separates the historian from the re-enactor.

We here at *Zisk* are forever in search of new ways to deepen our appreciation for the national pastime and more specifically our beloved hometown Mets. Last year on the *Zisk* website, we blogged (yes, we're thinking it's now a verb) the exploits of that 83-79 team each day. We learned a lot about those Mets—it was our very own 162-day afterschool special.

But how to top ourselves? How to maintain our creative interest while still pleasing our audience? Well, taking a page from the **David Bowie/Madonna** book of career reinvention: we fake English accents, put moles on our cheeks, and tweak the way in which we cover our Flushing favorites. Last year we followed one team. This year our initial plan was for each of us to follow one player—for Steve, it would be **David Wright**; for Mike it would be **Pedro**—through his ups and downs of the 2006 season. But it's a given that we would have focused on those guys anyway, and that would have left us repeating what we did last season. Wright and Pedro are our favorites, our **Grant** and **Sherman** (though neither has taken office as an inebriated president nor has either of them torched Atlanta—hell, they can't even defeat a guy named **Chipper** yet alone the entire city). But what about the **Jefferson Davises** and the **Braxton Braggs** of the Mets? The guys we want to see secede from the club? The players who will have us throwing our cats at the TV and going **John Wilkes Booth** on our loved ones? Couldn't we learn from the travails of **Victor** "The Human Base on Balls Machine" **Zambrano**? How about **Kaz** "I've Got **Roger Cedano** on Speed Dial" **Matsui**? Logic says no, we say yes.

Our plan is to write about the Mets 2006 season with a strict focus on the endeavors of four players, Wright and Zambrano (Steve) and Pedro and Kaz (Mike).

Join us as we figure out whether the upcoming season is a vintage merlot or a big bottle of backwash-filled thunderbird. And enjoy the new issue.

—Steve & Mike

23 More to Catch the Yanks! A White Sox World Series Game 2 Report by Jake Austen

I can't fucking believe I got to go to the World Series!

As a longtime Sox fan, I thought I'd seen it all. I saw **Greg Luzinski** hit a moonshot over old Comiskey's roof. I was there when Yankees' hurler **Andy Hawkins** threw a no hitter that the Sox won on a series of 9th inning errors. I witnessed a twenty-minute brawl with the Tigers that featured actual kung fu kicks. But nothing remotely prepared for the wonder that was Game 2 of the 2005 World Series.

The first good sign after taking my upper deck seat was that I didn't see a different crowd than usual. Despite \$140 face value tickets (and I will never reveal what I actually paid for my ticket), this seemed like a group of regular Polish sausage-fed Sox fans. Fathers with sons, buddies drinking beer, people on nacho runs...other than a statuesque blonde Astros fan in a sequined cowgirl suit, these looked like the same folks at a Tuesday Sox/Royals game in May. Except they were 30,000 more of them and they were all giddy.

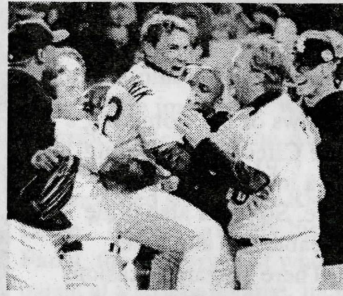
On a personal note, the baseball fairies rewarded my decades of believing that the White Sox would make it to the World Series every year by putting in my hands a ticket that may have not seemed spectacular (6th row upper deck two-thirds down the third base line), but was in fact one of the best seats in the house. Though rain poured down the entire game, the direction of the wind and angle of the roof meant that despite everyone in the lower deck, in the right field upper deck, and in rows 1-5 of section 548 were getting drenched, I miraculously never got a drop of water on me. In contrast with the incredibly tense, dense, uncomfortable vibe of the stadium during the **Jack McDowell** era ALCS game and the Jerry Manuel-era ALDS game I attended, it felt completely joyful and easy to be at the park for this game.



Words can't capture the pandemonium in the seventh after **Paul Konerko** delivered his first pitch grand slam. With our team trailing by two in the World Series, our most popular player

did, without hesitation, exactly what every single one of us was visualizing. As 41,432 people (minus Miss Texas) jumped and screamed for a full five minutes it was obvious that if this lead held we had just witnessed the single greatest moment in White Sox history!

One and a half innings later the Sox' Baby Huey-esque closer **Bobby Jenks** blew the lead and the single greatest



moment in White Sox history reverted back to whatever it had been before (**Carlton Fisk** telling **Deion Sanders** to "run out the ball, you piece of shit?" Disco Demolition?). Now we merely were seeing one of the best World Series

games ever. A half-inning later when wee **Scott Podsednik** did what not a single one of us was visualizing I found myself incapable of jumps and screams. For a glorious post-walk off homerun eternity I merely shook my stunned head back and forth, an orgasmic smile tattooed on my face.

New to the World Series business, Sox management wasn't sure what happens next, so they just let us stay in the stands as long as we wanted. On the field players did interviews, the Sox furry green mascot Southpaw begged Podsednik for a hand slap, and catcher **A.J. Pierzynski** brought out his wife and infant so a photographer could take a family portrait on the Sox' victorious World Series field.

It was a good move by A.J. After a win like this it seemed unlikely that the Sox would have to return to their home field this year. Behind me a pair of pals who had purchased a \$5,000 pair of un-refundable scalped Game 6 tickets were hooting and high five-ing. Perhaps when the beer wore off the financial ache might hit them. But then again, maybe not. Perhaps winning the World Series means the beer never wears off.

*Jake Austen publishes Roctober magazine and helps produce the public access children's dance show Chic-A-Go-Go. He has been to hundreds of White Sox games, his favorite player in **Ron Kittle** and he was a left-handed catcher in college.*

A Bandwagon Jumper's Guide to the White Sox By Jake Austen

As the mighty 2005 Sox returned to the World Series for the first time since the **Eisenhower** era, and won their first since World War I, volumes were being written about the spunky current team. But this is of minimal help for the inevitable bandwagon jumpers who until recently barely acknowledged that Chicago baseball was played south of Addison. If you want to come off as a real Sox fan you'll need to connect with the convoluted, eccentric 104-year history of the Pale Hose, so hopefully these bullet points will help:

Sox Fans

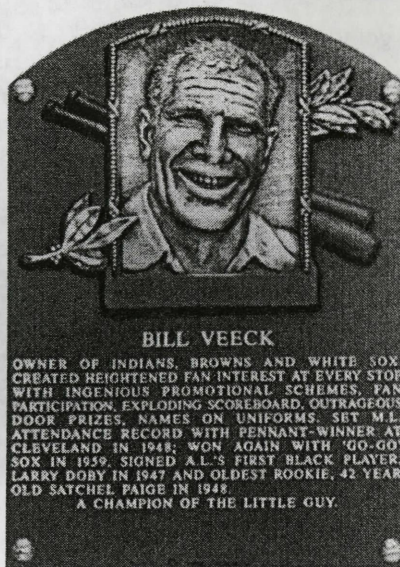
Anyone who sat near the back rows of old Comiskey's upper deck in the 70s recalls the **Cheech and Chong**-like clouds of smoke. Well, despite a long tradition of drunkenness and cannabis-abuse, Sox fans also pride themselves on being knowledgeable and attentive regardless of mental haziness. There are rare occasions when things get ugly (most notably when **William Ligue** attacked a Royals' coach in 2002 for no reason, his arrest leading to U.S. Cellular's nickname, "The Cell"). But generally a Sox game is fun for the whole family, and a great place for kids to learn new cuss words. Note that though all good Sox fans disdained Ligue's crimes, historically we have been more forgiving, particularly to **Shoeless Joe's** posse...

Black Sox

After Sox players conspired with gamblers to throw the World Series in 1919, South Siders continued to support their dishonest heroes, and a local jury gleefully exonerated them. They occasionally threw games en route to the 1920 World Series, for which they had virtually clinched a berth when the big boss, **Charles Comiskey**, ignored their day in court, and canned, then banned, the cheaters for life. To ensure the game's integrity the owners appointed baseball's first Commissioner, Judge **Kennesaw Mountain Landis**. But don't lionize Landis. A virulent racist, he blocked **Bill Veeck's** 1943 purchase of the Phillies upon learning Veeck planned to stock his team with Negro Leaguers and break the color line.

Veeck

The one-legged man-of-the-people (his phone number was listed) will forever be the most beloved Sox owner. He was a populist who sat with the fans, dressed like a Joe, and was legendary for wacky stunts, like having the team play in shorts. And though he never had a midget bat



new park, which by the way...

New Comiskey Park

...no longer sucks. When first built its vomit-colored façade walls crowned by a blue UFO was as incongruous a design as the awful Soldier Field update. Being inside the steep upper deck was dizzying, and due to poor craftsmanship, the concrete walkways were cracking before the first All-Star break. Since then the team sold a bit of its soul (or rather its name, New Comiskey is now U.S. Cellular) to finance an overhaul that included removing the highest rows, replacing the spaceship with classy iron awnings, and designing an area where kids can take batting practice and race against a robot **Scott Podsednik**. The only thing they couldn't bring back was **Andy the Clown**, who not long after being banned from appearing in costume at new Comiskey died a heartbroken clown.

Andy the Clown

Andy may be the key to understanding the heart of the Sox. For decades **Andy Rozdilsky** came to the games in a homemade clown suit. In a voice bordering on asthmatic, Andy led fans in the not-particularly-imaginative cheer "Leeeeeeeeet's gooooooooooooo Sooooooooox!" His big trick was to give a pretty girl a flower but leave her with only the stem. He then had to get the stem back from her, as he only had one gag flower. What could represent the South Side better than a ragged, dependable, working class

for the White Sox (that was when he owned the Browns) he did once have *Fantasy Island's* tiny **Hervé Villechaize** take batting practice. More importantly to Sox history, he introduced the exploding scoreboard with its pinwheels and fireworks, the only design element that made the trip across the street from old Comiskey to the

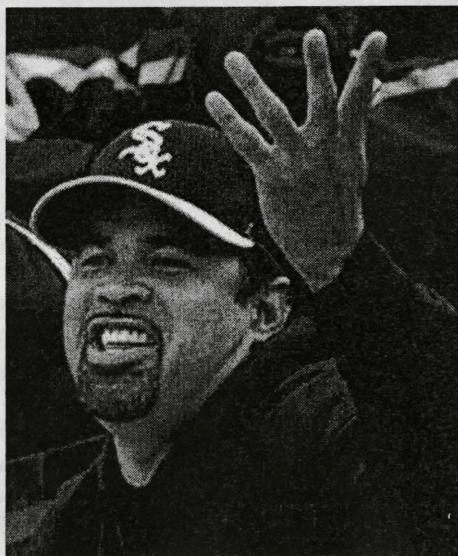


clown. The Sox current mascot, Southpaw, is far less distinctive, and not too funny. For humor these days fans need to look towards the dugout at...

Ozzie!

Ozzie Guillen has spent the last twenty years as a South Side icon. As 1985 *Rookie of the Year* he was immediately accepted by Sox fans because he continued a tradition started in the fifties with **Chico Carrasquel** and **Luis Aparicio** of stellar Sox shortstops from Venezuela (though the organist frequently played "Mexican Hat Dance" as his theme music, and his rooting section "Ozzie's

Amigos" wore Mexican sombreros, but hey, those countries are only 2,200 miles apart, who wouldn't get them confused?). The speedy slap-hitter was a joy to watch, chattering with opposing baserunners and clowning for the fans.



As a manager he's continued the Chicago tradition of nepotism, as the first blockbuster deal of his reign was acquiring **Freddy Garcia** who was engaged to one of his in-laws. As a player he also had an in-law marrying teammate, **Scott "Rad" Radinsky**, who moonlighted in the punk rock band **Ten Foot Pole**. This unfortunately led to Scott recording a heartfelt ballad entitled "Third World Girl," but that's not Ozzie's fault. Speaking of Rad...

Rockin' Sox

The Sox are *the* rock 'n' roll baseball team. Cy Young winning pitcher **Jack McDowell** fancies himself a rocker and still tours with his band **Stickfigure**, though his National Anthem singing won't make you forget Marvin Gaye. More impressive was **Arthur Lee Maye**, the self-described "Best Singing Athlete that Ever Lived" who played for the Sox in 1971, and had a healthy r&b career that included singing on **Richard Berry**'s original "Louie Louie." More gloriously historical is the work of **Nancy Faust**, the Sox organist who was the first to play rock music at a baseball game, including the introduction of **Steam**'s "Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye" to mock opposing players. More impressively she plays rock puns to introduce players ("In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida" for **Pete Incaviglia**). Of course, more disastrously historical was the infamous...

Disco Demolition Night

On July 12, 1979 thousands of under-the-influence youthful South Siders stormed the field and harmlessly



ran amok in the wake of a radio station publicity stunt gone awry, leading to a Sox forfeit. While many critics would point out this event's negatives, including its subtext of racism and homophobia, and that because of it **Steve Dahl** is still on the radio, ultimately this mess was classic Sox. It had a dollop of Veeck absurdity, a hint of Ligue danger, and a whole lot of ragged South Siders not afraid to express themselves.

Now These Were The Real Idiots by Throm Sturmond

The touts who proclaim the 2004 Red Sox the strangest collection of misfits in recent World Series history obviously never followed the 1984 Padres. Now, there was a team of freaks. Political freaks, image freaks, unfortunate freaks. It had them all.

Growing up in rural Wisconsin, it made no sense for me to follow this team. But the baseball bug bit me in the spring of '84, when I was 13. I had just started receiving the *Sporting News*, poring over the box scores, back when the *News* was the bible of sports junkies everywhere, before the Internet and fantasy baseball made statistics and box scores a) instantly available everywhere and b) a necessity for shut-ins.

But I had to pick a team to follow, and I already had suffered through the disastrous post-World Series campaign of the Brewers, back when they still were in the American League. I had to pick a National League team too, and the Padres sounded fun, with their taco uniforms, coming from a land that sounded exotic to someone who only twice in his life had left his cold, snowy, remote home state of Wisconsin.

I followed them off and on through the season, watching them advance to the playoffs against the Cubs. Down 2-0, they rallied to win the final 3 games (Cowboy that, my friend) before being crushed by the juggernaut Detroit Tigers.

They limped through the next season to an 83-79 record, and slid downhill after that. But the memories remain, and oh what memories they are.

Three of their pitchers were members of the **John Birch** society. One of those later saw his arm snap while throwing a pitch after attempting a comeback from cancer. Another Bircher died in a rehab center. Their second baseman was the first major professional athlete to die of AIDS in the U.S. Their All-American first baseman later was found out to play the field as well as **Wade Boggs**. Their all-star right fielder holds a place in my heart as the Best Fat Player of his Generation.

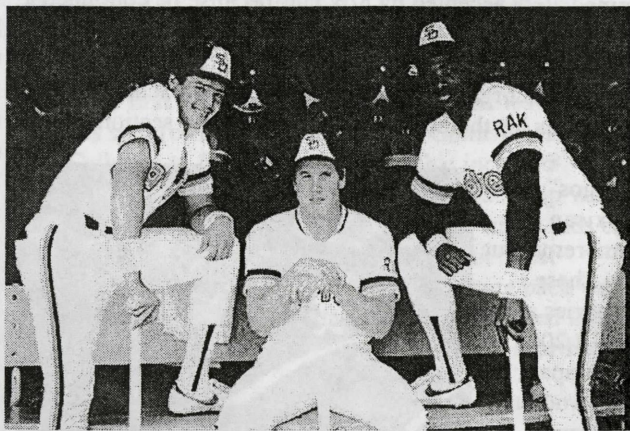
Oh, and their utility infielder has put out folk records. Can't make that one up.

The lineup:

General manager, **Jack McKeon**. Cigar chomper. Trader Jack. Reckless in his approach

Manager, **Dick Williams**. **Wilford Brimley**'s even more hard-assed twin, who helped egg on one of the worst beanball fests ever during a game against **Pascuel Perez** and the Braves in August of '84. Two bench-clearing brawls, three hit batters, six brushbacks, 19 ejected players and even five fans booted!

Catcher, **Terry Kennedy**, left fielder **Carmelo Martinez**; third baseman **Graig Nettles**, center fielder **Kevin McReynolds** and shortstop **Garry Templeton**. Good players, but nothing that weird. Sure, McReynolds drove Padres and, later, Mets fans nuts with his unfulfilled potential. Martinez could produce Manny-like gaffes and stumbles in the field. Nettles wrote one of the best baseball books in history, "Balls." And Templeton will go down in history as the man who was traded for **Ozzie Smith** and flipped off the fans in St. Louis. But compared to the others, nobody stood out. But **Tim Flannery**, the utility infielder? He's recorded seven records, and name me one other former all-star who's also played the Quail Botanical Gardens.



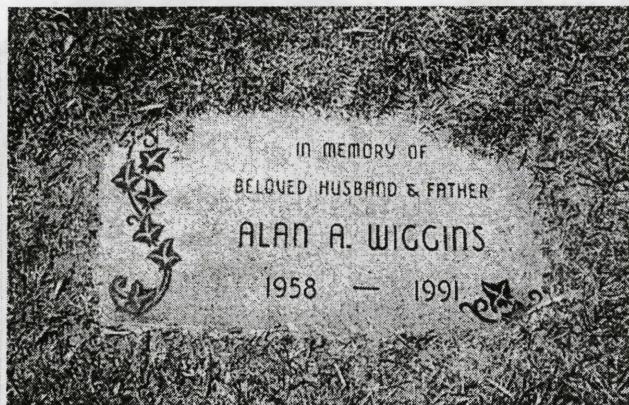
And how can we not mention right fielder **Tony Gwynn**? A star point guard at San Diego State, he holds the school record for assists and later was drafted by the San Diego Clippers. The best hitter of his generation – yes, better than Wade Boggs – the 220-pounder also was the best fat player of his generation. Only two players after the Dead Ball Era weighed more than Gwynn and had 3,000 hits: **Cal Ripken**, who is 5 pounds heavier and 5 inches taller; **Dave Winfield**, about the same weight but 7 inches taller.

But after that, the fun begins.



First baseman, **Steve Garvey**: The smooth-fielding first baseman honed his image as an All-American boy, the wholesomest of baseball players, an endorsement machine because of it. Garvey later proved quite smooth with the ladies, too. After he retired, he was hit with not one, but two paternity suits, and his wife divorced him and wrote a scathing tell-all book. Unlike Boggs at least, he waited until after he retired before his mistresses were unveiled. Once touted as a potential candidate for the US Senate, he now is serving penance on infomercials.

Second baseman, **Alan Wiggins**. The saddest case of all



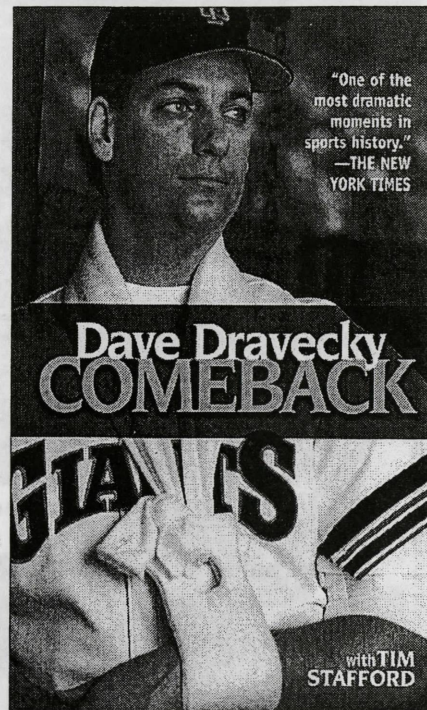
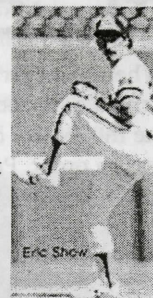
the Padres. A leadoff dynamo, he propelled the lineup into the World Series, even though the Padres only hit 109 home runs all season, with McReynolds and Nettles tying for the team lead with 20 homers. Wiggins struggled with drugs, mostly cocaine, throughout his career and was suspended indefinitely from baseball in 1987 for repeated drug use. When he died at age 32 in 1991, he was the first major athlete in the United States to die of AIDS, and most probably caught HIV from dirty needles while shooting heroin.

Starting pitchers **Eric Show** and **Mark Thurmond**, and relief pitcher **Dave Dravecky**. All three members of the John Birch Society. Never heard of it? It could be because of a U.N. conspiracy. The far-rightist, anti-socialist group is based in Appleton, Wis., home of noted rightist nutjob,

alkie and **R.E.M.** song subject **Joe McCarthy**. To give you an idea of their extremist views, one of their books accused the Republican party of being controlled by elitist intellectuals. But being a Bircher wasn't the worst thing that happened to Show and Dravecky. Show, always a moody player (after **Pete Rose** got a hit off him to break **Ty Cobb's** record, Show sat down and pouted on the mound) and a diehard conservative, died at age 37 of a heart attack in a drug and alcohol center in California. Some reports said it occurred after he did a speedball. Dravecky, later traded to the Giants, underwent surgery for cancer in the arm after the 1988 season ended. In his second game in his 1989 comeback, his pitching arm snapped in two. And to make matters worse, he broke the arm again during the celebration after the Giants won the '89 pennant, then found out cancer had returned. In 1991, the arm was amputated.

The team was tough luck, all the way around. People now want to remember Trader Jack for taking over the 2003 Marlins and managing them to the World Series. Me? I'll fondly remember him for assembling a world-class collection of oddities into the 1984 NL pennant winners.

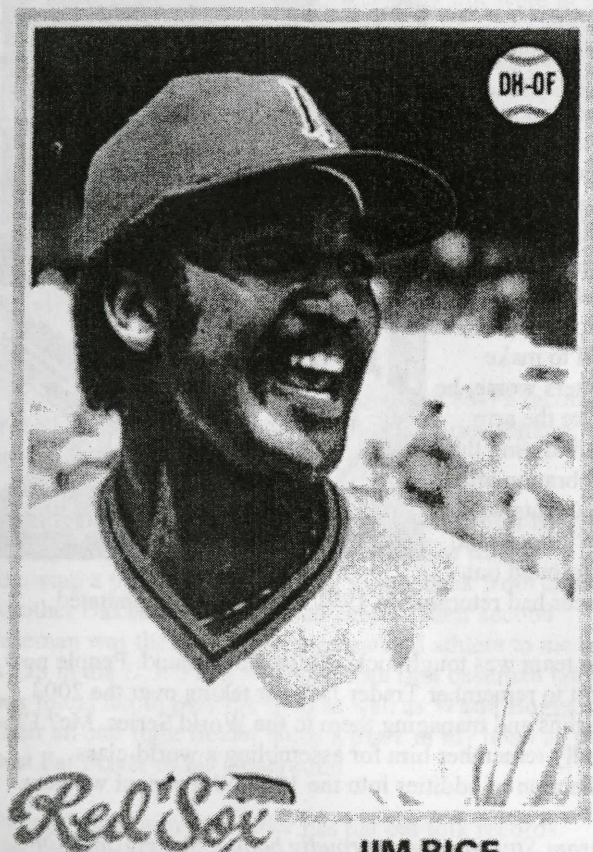
Throm Sturmond was proudly booing Sammy Sosa for his me-first play starting in the 2000 season. He (Throm) gave up Cubs season tickets for a job overseas in Hong Kong late last year. So far, the trade seems worth it.



The Case For Jim Rice by Josh Rutledge

When word arrived that **Jim Rice** had once again been denied entrance to the Baseball Hall of Fame, I reached the immediate decision that some type of drastic protest was in order. Petitions weren't going to cut it. Debate on Internet message boards was futile. Nothing less than a full-blown hunger strike could bring attention to an injustice of such an unprecedented severity. And in my case, I decided, the hunger strike was going to have to be a thirst strike.

Just as I have abstained from Wild Turkey bourbon for the past three years in protest against the *Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's* failure to elect **Twisted Sister** front man Dee Snider, I knew I was going to have to give up a favorite beverage in support of Jim Rice.



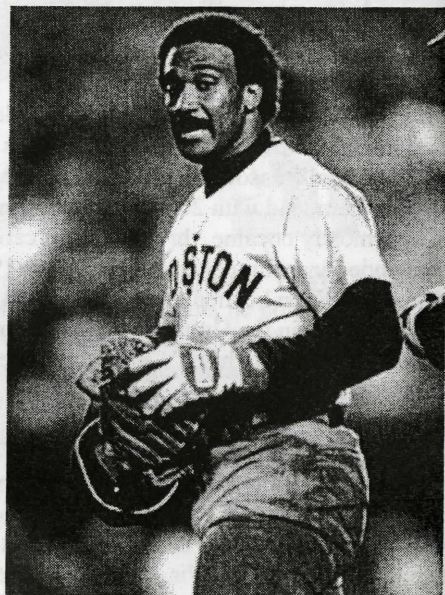
JIM RICE

So I resolved the following: I will not drink another drop of Coca-Cola until Jim Rice enters the Baseball Hall of

Fame. And let the record show that I have no personal interest in Jim Rice. I am a diehard, blood-and-guts, religiously devoted fan of the Philadelphia Phillies. To have ever considered Jim Rice or any other non-Phillie a "favorite" player of mine would have been out of the question. But as a reasonable human being and a student of baseball, I'm shocked and appalled that the most dominant American Leaguer of his generation has been passed over for Hall of Fame induction 12 years in a row. And with **Tony Gwynn** and **Cal Ripken Jr.** on the ballot next year, it looks like Rice will have to wait until at least 2008 to finally receive his due enshrinement in Cooperstown. And Coca-Cola, who in recent years probably generated at least one percent of their annual profits strictly from my purchases, will have to get by without me.

It's been reported in the press that Rice's Hall of Fame snubbing may be "punishment" for the way he treated baseball writers during his career. By all accounts, Jim Rice was a dick. But so was **Steve Carlton**. As was **Eddie Murray**. The pundits argue that the likes of Murray and Carlton amassed such staggering numbers that their prickishness had to be overlooked. I would argue the same in favor of Rice. Murray finished with a .287 career batting average and a .476 slugging percentage. Rice, on the other hand, finished at .298 and .502.

Granted, Rice's career longevity (or lack thereof) could be held against him, and 382 career home runs just doesn't sound that great. But let us keep in mind that hitting 382 home runs in 16 years back in the 1970s and '80s was probably comparable to hitting 500 home runs in that same time



span today. And if longevity is a prerequisite for the Hall of Fame, then why is **Kirby Puckett** in the Hall? Shouldn't the true measure of a player's greatness be not how long he did it, but rather *what* he did? And if we measure what Rice did, the stats are awe-inspiring. In a 12-year run from 1975-86, he appeared in eight All-Star games and hit over .300 seven times. Six times he finished in the top ten in the AL in hitting, and four times he finished in the top five. In addition to winning three home run crowns, four other times he finished in the top ten in homers. In nine of those 12 years, he finished in the top ten in RBI. Seven times he finished in the top five. He led the league in total bases four times, and five times he finished in the top five in MVP voting. He became the first player in league history to amass 35 or more home runs and 200 or more hits in three consecutive seasons. And his monstrous 1978 season is still the stuff of legend. His 406 total bases that year were the most in the AL since 1937. He also led the league in hits, triples, home runs, extra base hits, and RBI – and was second in runs

scored and third in batting average. His career .298 batting average was a remarkable achievement for a power hitter.

Compare that to the career averages of Hall of Fame sluggers

Mike Schmidt (.267), **Harmon Killebrew** (.256), and

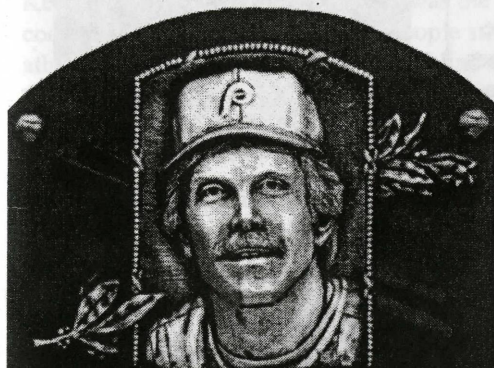
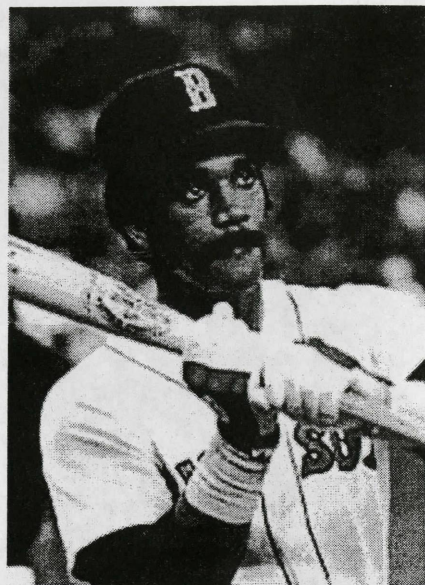
more and more obsessed with gaudy statistics. Five hundred career home runs was a ticket to immortality in a bygone era. But today, averaging 32 home runs a year for 16 seasons doesn't seem like such a lofty standard.

Players like Rice and **Andre Dawson**, who were great stars in their time, may be victims of this new infatuation with giant numbers. And that's a shame. A player can only truly be measured by how brightly his star shone in his day. And if we're talking the years 1975 through 1986, I'd be hard-pressed to name a single major league player who was greater, more consistent, or more feared by pitchers than Jim Rice. Just as importantly, I remember what it

was like to be a little kid in the early 80s and hold a Jim Rice baseball card in my hand. Even if you didn't particularly like Jim Rice, you wanted that card. You'd trade a **George Foster** and a **Dave Kingman** for it – because Jim Rice was money year after year. The numbers on the back of the card didn't lie. And the picture on the front of that card – well, you thought maybe it would come to life and kick your ass if you didn't pay it proper respect. Something tells me that little kids of this decade didn't feel the same about an **Edgar Martinez** card.

I'm tempted to imagine the absolutely sick statistics that a player like Jim Rice would have put up in today's era, but such ponderings would require a serious Coke fix. And lord knows it could be a long, long time before I get another one of those.

Josh Rutledge is the editor of Now Wave Magazine and now exclusively drinks Yuengling Lager. He hopes the Phillies will finally make the playoffs this year but isn't about to hold his breath. Every year, he wishfully predicts the downfall of the Atlanta Braves, so he's picking the Mets to take the NL East in '06.



MICHAEL JACK SCHMIDT

PHILADELPHIA, N.L., 1972-1989

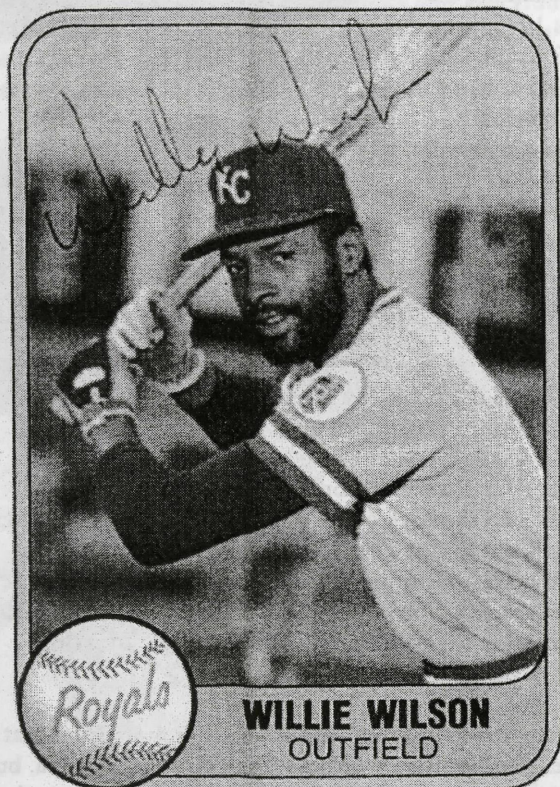
UNPRECEDENTED COMBINATION OF POWER AND DEFENSE WITH UNUSUAL MIXTURE OF STRENGTH, COORDINATION AND SPEED MADE HIM ONE OF THE GAME'S GREATEST THIRD BASEMEN. 7TH ON ALL-TIME LIST WITH 548 HOMERS. HIS 8 HOMERUN TITLES (TIE) BETTERED ONLY BY BABE RUTH. BELTED 40 OR MORE ON 3 OCCASIONS AND TOPPED 30 TEN OTHER TIMES. 48 HOMERUNS IN 1980 MOST EVER BY THIRD BASEMAN. HIT 4 IN ONE GAME IN 1976. 3-TIME MVP WITH 10 GOLD GLOVES FOR FIELDING EXCELLENCE.

Reggie Jackson (.262). **Mark McGwire**, who may be inducted into the Hall next year, finished his career with a .263 average.

In this age of steroids, small parks, and watered-down pitching, it seems that baseball observers have become

Willie Wilson: The Fastest Man Alive by Tim Hinely

Willie Wilson—does anyone outside of Kansas City remember him? I do. He certainly wasn't the greatest player of his era or even the best Kansas City Royal (**George Brett** or even **Amos Otis** would probably get the nod) but when I think back to the late 70s, early 80s and the games I watched as a kid, I remember no one more exciting than Willie Wilson, a perennial speedster who was a menace on the basepaths. In his prime the guy was just mercurial and I absolutely loved watching him on television (at least as many games as we could get in southern New Jersey).



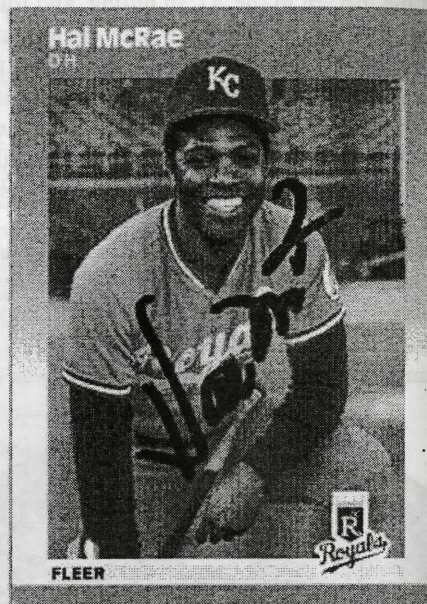
Willie James Wilson was born on July 9, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama and made his major league debut the same year America celebrated its bicentennial birthday, 1976 (September 4th). No great shakes happened that year for Willie, though. He played in 12 games, and went 1 for 6. A mere three years later, in 1979, Wilson's game began to come around when he hit .315 with 185 hits, 113 runs scored, 13 triples and 49

stolen bases. As mentioned previously, the guy could simply tear and he has more inside-the-park home runs than any other player in major league history post 1950 (13).

At 6' 3" and 195 pounds he was a big, aggressive player and definitely big for a base stealer. The Royals team was getting better and better with the previously mentioned **George Brett**, **Hal McRae**, **Amos Otis** (one of the best names in major league history—in fact the Royals had a whole bunch of great names back

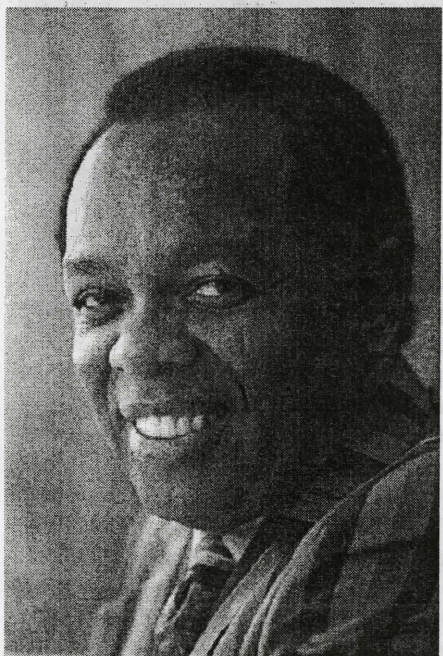
then: **Pete LaCock**, **Jamie Quirk**, **Bob Dethelage**, and of course, **Dave Chalk**) while on the mound they had 20-game winner **Dennis Leonard** plus **Paul Splittorff**. And out of the bullpen, king of the submarine pitch, **Dan Quisenberry** (r.i.p.). 1980 was *the* year Wilson put it all together. He had 230 hits in an unheard of 705 freakin' at bats (a figure which boggled my 16-year-old mind and even now, in the era of **Ichiro**, still sort of does). He hit .326 and had 15 triples. With a year like that (and the Royals powerful lineup) the team was ripe for a strong post season. They pounded the Yankees in the ALCS and eventually went on to the World Series, losing to the Phillies (where Wilson struck out 12 times—is that a World Series record?). Man, what could have been.

Wilson had a solid run after that (and the Royals won that elusive World Series crown in 1985 defeating the St. Louis Cardinals) but his batting average continued to decline (even though he was always near the top of the heap in triples and stolen bases). In 1983, he hit .276 but his off the field exploits caught up with him. At the end of that year Wilson, along with teammates **Willie Mays Aikens**, **Jerry Martin** and **Vida Blue** pled guilty to use





of cocaine and on December 15, 1984 commissioner **Bowie Kuhn** (speaking of nutty names) suspended these players for a year without pay (though later the suspension would be lifted by an arbitrator and they would be back in action by May 15 the following year). Keep in mind that even though this was the 80s and cocaine use was rampant, a lot of people still thought athletes were invincible and turned a blind eye to such things. It was the drug problem, more than anything, that had shattered the belief of the athlete as a larger-than-life hero in America (even **Willie Stargell**, my all-time favorite player, was accused in 1985 during the Pirates drug trial of that year of handing out amphetamines to his teammates).



The most intelligent thing Willie Wilson could say during all of this (as quoted in **Dan Gutman's Baseball Babylon**) was, "All I signed a contract to do is play baseball and that's my job. I didn't sign a contract to take care of anyone else's kids or to be a role model for anyone else." In a sense he's

right but Jesus dude, can't you at least sound grateful. When I was younger I appreciated his attitude as punk rock (not that Wilson listened to the **Sex Pistols** or **Ramones**; **Lou Rawls** (r.i.p.) and **The Commodores** was more like it) but I guess as I've gotten older, I get a sense of these over-paid spoiled brats not having a bit of gratitude (hello **Barry Bonds**) and thus my diminished interest in pro sports. In Wilson's day the douchebags were guys like **Dave Kingman**, **Rick Bosetti**, **Bert Blyleven** and, of course, his royal asshole-ness, **George Brett**. (Ol' Georgie was known for mashing trash cans with his bat if things didn't go his way and one time, after losing a game at Yankee



Stadium, he threw a gallon can of paint against the wall and relished the sight of the subsequent explosion. I'm sure the maintenance crew didn't appreciate that one.)

In the late 80s Wilson's career sputtered out and he was traded to the A's in 1991 and, eventually, to the Chicago Cubs. His final home run came in 1993 as part of a back-to-back-to-back (9/6/93 vs. Phillies). That's a pretty freaky statistic in a career full of such anecdotes. In Chicago he played for two years before finally hanging up his cleats for good at the end of the 1994 season. After retirement Willie made my home state of New Jersey proud by becoming the owner of the King George Inn in Warren. If any of you are in the area stop in and shoot the breeze with a guy who was once the fastest and most feared man on the basepaths.

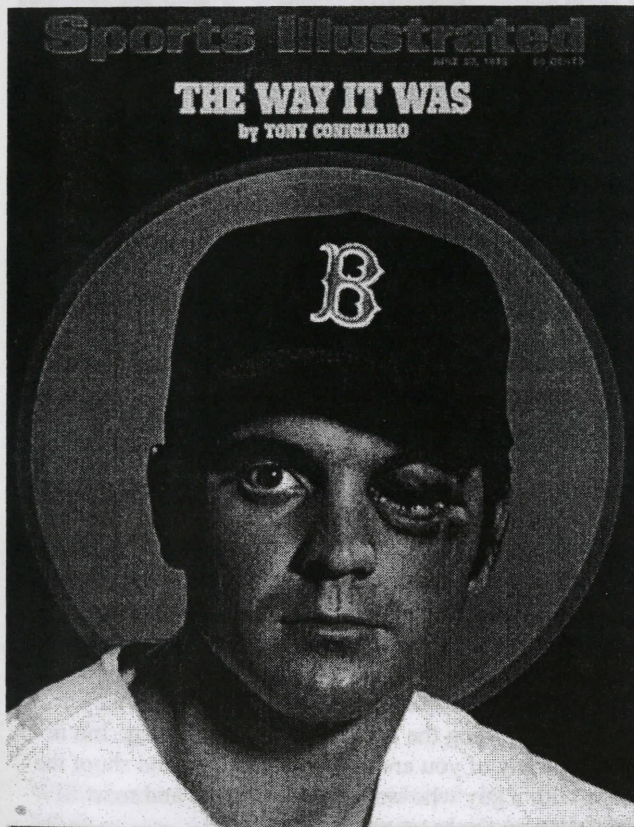
Tim Hinely has been publishing his own 'zine, *Dagger*, for 18 years. To see a copy drop him a line at: P.O Box 820102, Portland, OR 97282-1102 or via email at daggerboy@prodigy.net.

1975 - 2005: 30 Years Since Tony C Retired

By Frank D'Urso

Tony C (Conigliaro) is very much missed in Boston. It is sad that we are unable to share with him the still incredible joy we experienced with the final break through World Series victory of 2004. Tony witnessed the heartbreak of the '86 World Series much like the Red Sox previous two World Series appearances in '75 and '67. Tony played a big part in getting the Red Sox rolling in the "Impossible Dream" year, only to have what would have been his best chance to play in the post season (and almost his life) taken from him.

Tony signed with the Red Sox as an amateur free agent in 1962, his father acting as his agent, signing the initial contract on the kitchen table in their East Boston kitchen.



The St. Mary's of Lynn Spartan made his big league debut in 1964 and established himself as a slugger, hitting 24 homers his rookie year, 32 homers in '65, 28 in '66 and had 20 by the time of his accident in '67.

He missed the 1968 season entirely, but battled back to

almost top form in 1969 (20 HRs, *Comeback Player of the Year*) and 1970 (36 HRs). Battling back is a theme in Tony C's life and the Red Sox destiny. Tony was traded to the California Angels for the '71 season and after a drop in his numbers (4 HRs in only 74 games) he was let go in the off season.

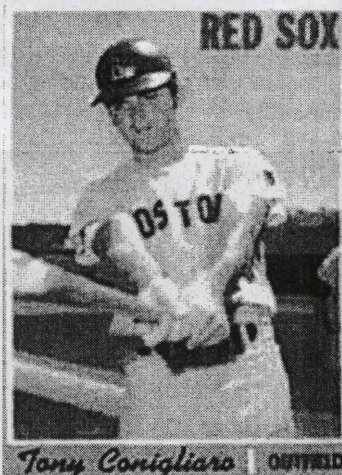
For me, the story of the 1975 Red Sox began with the signing and reclamation of Tony C on March 5 of that year. I was excited that the *legend* of Tony C was returning. I was ten years old and my hero who I had never actually seen play was making a comeback, he could finally answer all the "what if" scenarios and the Impossible Dream season was back ON in the spring of 1975 when everything was new and fastened with Velcro.

Well, Tony gave it a shot, battled his way up from AAA Pawtucket and made the roster on a team jam packed with talent. He played 21 games and hit two more round trippers. He had a total of 166 Home Runs in what could have and should have been a Hall of Fame career. Tony C was the first to promote the center field seating policy that led to today's Major League ban on center field seating within the sightline of the batter behind the pitcher. His accident also promoted the standard use of batting helmets.

Perhaps subconsciously his 1975 teammates learned how short their opportunities could be, maybe they learned on some level how to play like champions, maybe some players were reminded of their earlier run at greatness, maybe a part of the Impossible Dream rubbed off on them all.

You know, maybe Tony C shared with us the wonderful championship season after all.

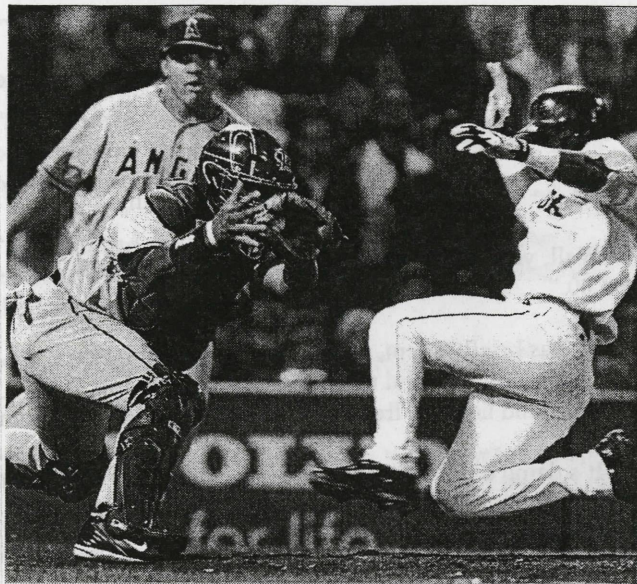
Frank D'Urso is a member of SABR and travels to Cooperstown every summer.



Rain On Tin by Jackson Ellis

The Red Sox-Angels game out in California had just ended after a 12-inning pitchers' duel. Jon turned up the volume on the TV as highlights flashed across the screen, scattering colors around the otherwise dark room. He lay in the twin bed with the paisley, flowery hotel blanket pulled up to his armpits, and his farmer-tanned arms flopped out on top of the covers, the only part of his body exposed below the neck. It was so frigid in the air-conditioned room he could see his breath.

"Ha!—Ha ha! The Sox lost!" he shouted with glee. He looked over at Sean, who was in the other bed dozing off.



Jon whipped a pillow at his head.

"Hey, bitch. Wake up. Your team lost."

"What." Sean blinked open his right eye and looked at the clock. The left half of his face was sunken into the down pillow. "Jesus Christ, Jon, it's almost 2:30. What the hell do you want?"

"I said, Boston lost today."

"Fantastic," he said dryly. "Who threw?"

"Wakefield, but you know, he tossed a pretty good game. Didn't even give up a run till the sixth and then he just got hammered. You never know what you're gonna get with

him when he throws. You just never know with knuckleballers."

"That can happen to anyone. Shit. Did the Yanks lose?"

"No, they *buried* the A's, like, 12-1 or something. Clemens got the win," he added with a big grin and a single nod of the head.

"Dammit. What are the Sox now, five games back?"

"Yeah, and they could have pulled ahead of Oakland in the Wild Card standing if they'd won."

"Pssh. Five games back and it's only April. What a shit day."

A low roll of thunder rumbled in the distance. Rain had drizzled all day and now it began to pour in thick sheets. Wind whipped fat droplets against the room window, a soft percussion that lulled Sean back to sleep.

"There's that black cloud that follows us everywhere!" shouted Jon suddenly, sitting up and pointing emphatically out the window. "God is *pissing* on our team."

"There is no God," mumbled Sean, half-asleep. Jon slumped back down, defeated again. He looked at the sportscast on TV. They were showing the Mets and the Dodgers brawling.

With the club far out of contention, Sean and Jon knew this trip to Maryland would be it—the final games of their college careers, at least, on the road. The following weekend would bring Monmouth up to the Connecticut shore for a pair of meaningless matches, and that would be that. While the top teams of the Northern and Southern divisions would spend the month of May competing for the league crown and a trip to the championship series in Omaha, Sean and Jon would be out looking for jobs. They'd be relieved to hang up their Bears caps, grateful to put their final miserable season in the books.

"I can't believe that in four years we never made it to the playoffs, not once," Jon said while riding south on the chartered bus. They were somewhere between Newark and the Delaware Bridge, and had been sitting silently for

nearly 45 minutes. "Fucking bullshit, man! That's four years of bad coaching! We should've made it, at least once. We *had* talent. I swear, ballplayers come to this school to die—fucking coaches. It's like, like—" and he shook his head and shifted in his seat.

"I don't care," said Sean, without looking up from his book. "Look around the bus, look at these assholes. It's a few less weeks that we need to be around them." He meticulously folded a page corner and slapped his book shut.

"Hmm." Jon looked down and shook his head again. He shifted in his seat. "Yeah."

It was cold in Maryland. The first game of the weekend was a single nine-inning battle on Saturday against Baltimore, and the teams struggled through late-inning rainstorms, patches of black mud, and sudden chills that often come with spring baseball—one minute it's a bearable 55 degrees, the next a 35-degree wind is whipping into the tobacco-stained dugout, swirling dust about like dirty snow. Baltimore handled the Bears with ease, dropping them by a lopsided score of 17-4. Sean and Jon were handed mop-up duties. Jon tossed two-and-a-third innings and surrendered the last five Baltimore runs. Sean notched the last two outs in the bottom of the eighth, but not until a bases-clearing double allowed the three runners Jon had stranded to cross the plate.

Baltimore's pitcher pumped his fist as he fanned the final batter in the top of the ninth on a curve in the dirt. The win sealed their place atop the Southern division. As the teams packed up their gear, a cheery voice announced over the loudspeaker:

"Please be sure to join us tomorrow at 12:30 for a double-header between the 5-32 Bears and your Division Champion Knights!"

The two clubs lined up and shook hands. Sean stared blankly, saying nothing, checking out girls stretching in the stands, the oriole on the backstop, his cleats scuffling dust.

Jon walked ahead of him, "Good game, good game, nice job, yep, guhgame," he said to each player. After the last pleasantry he turned to walk back to the dugout. He adjusted the ice pack wrapped around his shoulder.

"Fuckers," he mumbled under his breath, looking at the grass.

"Look at this, Sean. Sean—look," said Jon, nodding at the television screen. "Man! Four weeks into the season, and the Mets have been in, what, six brawls?"

"Like two, maybe three," replied Sean. "Hey, sorry I let your runners cross the plate. If only I'd gotten that first kid out, those runners you left wouldn't have scored."

"Yeah, well, Peterman's a tough out. He's, like, third in the league in average," Jon responded, tugging his blankets.

"Still, that was a stupid pitch for an 0-2 count. Goddamned stupid! Fastball on the inner half of the plate, belt-high. I should've been low and away with a slider, see if he'd chase it."

"Eh, he would've seen a breaking ball coming."

"Well, you can blame me if your ERA got pushed over 8.00."

Jon was briefly silent, mulling the statement before clapping his left hand to his forehead and saying, "Oh, fuck!" and he leapt from bed and headed to the bathroom.

"It's damn cold in here. Aren't you cold?" he asked when he came out, closing the door behind him, yet forgetting to shut off the light.

"Not really. It's damn cold on that field all day, though. Even when the sun is shining I always shiver and I can't figure out why. It's as though my blood stops pumping. Remember three years ago, that freezing game on Staten Island? We stole coach's jackets and wrapped them around our legs and hid the number on the sleeve so he didn't realize it was his, and he pissed and moaned all game. Goddamn, it was so great!" he laughed. "I always think about that."

"I always think about that game I had freshman year, I think it was my *first* game in fact—"

"Seton Hall, down at that Florida tourney."

"Yeah...I was good, huh? Seven innings!"

"That really was something, Jon. Seriously, that was great. Too bad we still lost."

"But man, I was on. It's like, I came in to relieve when we were already losing by 10 runs, but I didn't even care. It was like I could do no wrong."

Sean turned over on his left side to face Jon.

"That was something. You've still got it, too. It's just, something—something *small* has been off for you this year, and no shitty coach here will ever catch it, you know? It's not your fault."

"Well—" started Jon.

"And think about it, your *first game*," continued Sean. "Shit! You remember my first one? I got lit up, and all the older guys on the team were so hung over from the night before they couldn't catch a fucking thing."

"Sam pitched well that day, though," said Jon. Sean's eyebrows relaxed; his brow unfurrowed. He paused and thought.

"That's right—he did, didn't he? I forgot about that. We both made our debuts that day."

"Ha! Yeah, and he was so nervous, too!" laughed Jon. "He was *always* so nervous! I never saw a kid throw four wild pitches and four walks and get out of an inning unscathed. So fuckin' lucky!"

They both laughed and went silent as the rainfall regained dominance of the room's acoustics. They stared at the ceiling as they both realized that it had already been a year.

It was a Friday morning. Sean burst into Phillips Hall in a hostile whirlwind, late, as usual, head down. It was the warmest day of the year, a Friday, and the sun caught the back of his neck as the door swung shut. In retrospect, he thought, it was the warmest the sun ever felt, or would ever feel from that day forth. He got that familiar sinking feeling of trivial dread over his CJ 101 exam. Thirty feet into the building he caught the eye of his oldest and best friend at the school, who rushed up behind Sean as he turned to walk up the first flight of steps.

"Sean I don't know if it's true," said Jon with panicked

excitement as Sean placed a foot on the first step, "but I just heard this crazy rumor just now that Palmiteri didn't wake up this morning."

Some other guys on the ball team stood around, leaning against the wall, indifferently conversing, goofing around. Sean looked into Jon's eyes, unblinking, silent.

"I don't know what that means, man. What—what the fuck does that mean?"

Jon opened his mouth before any sound came out. "They found him in his bed this morning and he wasn't breathing."

"What, I don't understand it. I don't know what you're saying. ... They revived him, right?"

"No. Sam's dead." He shook his head and looked down.

Jon shut off the TV. The two boys lay shivering and silent, pulling their blankets up under their chins; their silent ruminations lingered heavily, as perceptible as the ghostly fog of their breaths dissipating into the blackness, made blacker still by the thick layer of steam coating the window, blocking the orange streetlamp glow.

"I remember the day coach cut him from the team, sophomore year," said Sean, breaking the tenuous silence. "I skipped fall tryouts that day because I couldn't be around to watch. I knew he had it coming. Coach had it in for him. I had to visit him that night."

"It was ugly," replied Jon, quietly. "Even *he* knew it was coming. I never saw anything like it. If he had lost any more of his composure, I swear he would've started crying out there on the mound. Every pitch he threw in the dirt, bounced off the plate...shit, he even let one fly to the backstop..." and his voice trailed off as he offered a sad "hmph."

"It was," said Sean, "like a premonition to everything that happened. I've never seen such shame as I saw in his eyes. He kept saying, 'I'll never face my father again, my grandfather, too, everyone's going to be so disappointed in me. I can't face up to them.' The kid couldn't face up to anyone. He couldn't talk to girls he liked, always worried what the guys on the team thought of him." Sean sat up and placed his hands in his lap, and stared at the wall. "I swear to God if you ever saw him look in the mirror, you

could see the shame—he *hated* himself.”

“No, man, he didn’t hate himself,” said Jon. “He just couldn’t control the way he was. He wouldn’t have died if we were with him that night.”

“What he did was *suicide*!”

“No, he just didn’t know when to stop. He didn’t know any better.”

“It was *like* suicide...it was like he *wanted* to die. But he was unsure of that, too.”

Coach cut six eligible returning players in the fall of Sean’s sophomore year. The night after the news was posted on the locker room door, the six expatriates gathered at the field at midnight. They shattered the lock on the storage shed; a bucket of practice balls, home plate, and all three bases were dumped into the nearby river; the rolled-up field tarp was inscribed “Fuck You!” with a pocket knife; the batting cage was demolished with a rake and a spade. The L-screen was cut and a player was nearly killed a week later when a batting practice line drive rocketed off his skull from 35 feet. Someone took a shit on the mound.

“But that’s just how those guys dealt with it,” Sam explained the next evening. Sean nodded slowly, sitting in a folding chair in Sam’s bedroom. “All I could do was just watch, and even though I’m angry...and sad...it’s nobody’s fault but my own. What good would it do? It’s over. I feel like I’ve died.”

“Jon...after the funeral you pretended like Sam never meant a thing to you. Seemed like everyone at the school—all those assholes who didn’t give a *flying fuck* about Palmiteri—they all acted like he was their best friend. You didn’t even think about him.”

Jon moved uncomfortably under his blankets and kept his pensive gaze fixed to the ceiling.

“I think about him a lot,” he said, finally. “I didn’t like how thinking about it made me feel, so I shut it off. And, one day, I realized I couldn’t pretend any longer. I knew him well—I mean, I didn’t spend too much time with him the last couple years, but for a while it was us three...you know, until he got cut from the team.”

“Sad how those things go.”

Jon didn’t seem to hear.

“I really did know him pretty well. He stayed at my house in Brooklyn and I talked to him every time I saw him wandering around campus. I talked to him the day he died. I have dreams about him sometimes, and he’ll be the same old Sam, only I’ll know, in the dream, that he’s dead and that even though I’m talking to him—even though I’m listening to him—something is very wrong, and only when I wake up do I realize what it is.”

Sam couldn’t convince the pretty waitress to serve him a beer. Sean couldn’t care less. It was Sam’s idea to drive down to Milford for dinner, to try and take Sean’s mind off the girl who’d broken his heart that day. He sat silently ignoring Sam’s jokes and pointless chatter.

“You know, Sean,” said Sam, matter-of-factly, “when I first met you I thought you were a real asshole.”

Sean looked up, surprised. Sam finally had his attention.

“Yeah...the first week of fall baseball, out of all the new recruits, you were the last one who ever talked to me. You were always quiet and serious-looking and you never smiled. And I just thought, man, that kid is a total dick. You acted like you thought you were better than anyone else.”

“Hm,” grunted Sean.

“But then I got to know you...and you’re my best friend on the team.”

Sean slowly nodded, a sour frown frozen on his stone face. Sam continued, undeterred by his friend’s non-response.

“I don’t get it, man. I don’t know why she ditched you like that. I don’t understand why you have such a bad time with girls. You know...you’re a good guy. Not a scumbag like me. Not like all the guys I live with. You’re a nice guy, Sean. You know that. You’re quiet and smart, and, you know...you’re just a good guy,” and he spoke embarrassedly, looking downward at his fingers as they twirled a straw wrapper, visibly startled by his own candor.

Sean looked at him and nodded. "Fag," he said under his breath, and the two quietly laughed, waiting for their plates to arrive.

Sean kicked the quilts off his bed and swung his legs over the edge, shivered, and inched toward the window to the air conditioner. He shut it off, violently flicking the switch. Jon didn't notice. He had fallen asleep and breathed in a steady, even pace, oblivious to the hour of the night, the icy air, the puddling street water. Sean smeared his palm in a circle on the windowpane, wiping away the steam, and stared out into the early morning.



The city of Baltimore beamed in the distance; orange effervescence defying the sheets of water that fell by the tubful from the empty

heavens. Rain everywhere.

We're going to be trapped in Baltimore another day, thought Sean. The field is likely flooded through and through.

"Hey Sean, did you see Allie today?" said Sam with a sly grin. "Boy, she sure looked pretty. I wish I could talk to her."

It was a storm that had engulfed the entire seaboard. That's what they'd said on the news. At that moment, at 4:46 a.m., rain was driving into the Boston Harbor, pelting the Prudential Building and the Fens; it was glistening on the tollbooths in Delaware and the endless suburban tracts on the New Jersey coast; it was soaking cattle in Plymouth, Vermont and old farmhouses in Harrisonburg, Virginia; just miles away it engulfed the Inner Harbor of Baltimore, and beyond that the alleyways of Manhattan, and surely, surely it was crushing into a lonely, lifeless cemetery in Long Island, running down the length of the blades of grass that grew six feet north of Sam's head, seeping down through the soft loam, lurking towards his well-dressed and stone-cold body.

Sam hated the cold. The time they stayed in Florida for the baseball tournament, all he could say was how much he hated Connecticut and New York, how great Florida was. But there was that winter weekend trip to Vermont. Racing together through the pine trees on snowmobiles, there was so much contentment in his face. The cold wasn't the problem.

I can't sleep, panicked Sean, and I feel though I may never sleep again. At that moment, a motion in the corner of his eye drew his attention to a utility shed in the back of the hotel parking lot. A mangy cat that he'd give a scrap of his breakfast sandwich to that morning was desperately circling the shack, searching for a way in to stay warm and dry. Sean noticed the corrugated cap atop the shed.

The tin roof! There is no sound like the sound of rain on tin. I'll surely be asleep soon.

Sean ran his fingers along the bottom of the glass, trying to open the window so as to let in the hypnotic sound of rain on tin. The window was impressively soundproof and fully sealed shut.

Defeated, Sean breathed out a heavy breath and looked out the window, up to the sky; the jet black ink had faded to early morning navy, the first foretelling of the sunrise to come; Jon lay motionless, peaceful; Baltimore glittered silently and orangely and beautiful, motionless, sparkling wet; streetlamps reflected along the length of the shiny blacktop streets; the cold, unloved cat had vanished; the tin-roofed shed, plainly in sight, played a tranquil opus for no one to hear.

"I've got no one else to talk to, Sean," cried Sam, shit-faced, on the verge of tears. "You're the only person I can trust."

"Goddamnit!" moaned Sean, but his words were choked in his tense, convulsing throat. He leaned into the glass. Raindrops fell from the silver eaves of the utility shed like silent tears.

Jackson Ellis is a former Division I collegiate pitcher, a co-founder of Scissor Press, and is the publisher and editor of Verbicide Magazine. His work has previously appeared in *Broken Pencil*. He lives in New England and can be reached at jackson@scissorpress.com.

The Best of the Zisk 2005 Blog by Steve Reynolds & Mike Faloon

(Editor's Note: When we launched the Zisk website last April, I had the crazy idea that Mike and I should write about each Mets game on the site. So here we present the highlights from our daily Mets blog. May I never have an idea like this again.--SR)

4/7 - Getting to Know Willie

Last night, down 5-3 in Cincinnati, **Willie Randolph**, was called for failing to inform the umps about a double switch in the bottom of the 8th. **Fran "The Illuminator" Healy**, calling the game on MSG, said, as the camera panned to Willie, sitting in the dugout post-scoling, "Willie's hot." But the Willie we saw on the screen was expressionless, placid. "Willie upset" looks exactly like I would picture "Willie checking mangoes in the produce section at Price Chopper," which, by extension, is probably just like "Willie's just learned that his daughter aced the SATs," or "Willie just convinced **Bush** to step down, conceded his inherent lameness, and turn the reigns over to **Kerry**." (I like Willie so I'm going to assume he runs with the anti-Bush crowd.) As we learned later in the game, "Willie's ticked" also looks just like "Willie's just watched journeyman **Joe Randa** crush a grand slam, to straightaway center, no less, off of the Mets already concern-causin' bullpen (aka The Dear-God-Make-Sure-They-Wear-The-Flame-Retardant-Pajamas-At-Night Crew)."

So if we can't get a sense of Willie's internal monologue from his facial expression (I use the singular there because I believe there really is but one possible look on the dude's face), what should we watch for? (And, subconsciously, am I merely giving myself other activities—like decoding Willie, for instance—to engage in because I fear the Mets are in for another long year?) —MF

4/14 - Hernandez Trumps Wordsworth

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils."

—William "Hell, Yeah, I'd Have Been a Mets Fan"
Wordsworth

Last night...Mets vs. Astros...The dog is curled up at my

feet, there's a finely chilled can of Natural Ice in my hand, and there are three pitchers duels on TV, chief among them, **Kaz Ishii** vs. **Roger Clemens**. I press 'mute' on the TV as my wife comes home and tells me that the bank has approved her small business loan (which gives her the green light to deliver the definitive "hasta la vista" to her nutjob boss). A delicate balance—between man, cheap beer, life, and ball game—has been achieved.

Then I pressed 'mute' again, and the voice of **Keith Hernandez** fills the room with all the grace of an airborne-pathogen.

What we see on the screen: "**Craig Biggio** - fielding percentage .993."

What we hear from Keith: "Biggio's fielding percentage is nine- nine-three..."

Or, same game, bottom of the 11th inning, score tied at zero, Keith, to play-by-play man, **Fran Healey**: "What, Fran? I was distracted."

Thanks for looking out for us, Keith. You and the rest of the Light Bulb Gang (**Seaver**, Healey) are always there to shatter the best of times. Keep stomping on daffodils, Keith. —MF

4/19 - Mets 16, Phillies 4

I was optimistic earlier today, but not THIS optimistic! A team record seven home runs!?! **Victor Zambrano** hitting a 2-RBI triple? What in the name of **Butch Huskey** is going on here? Apparently **Willie Randolph** must have had a good conversation with his hitters, asking them to approach every inning like it was the 8th or 9th. I can even forgive **Jose Reyes**'s error (which should have been two errors with his throw to Zambrano covering first) when he hits two home runs and makes a sterling play to end the 6th. I was so glad that I decided at the last minute to not go for a jog and just listen to the game.

And yes, I said listen. Even though I am not a shut-out Time Warner customer, I wanted to see how the Red Sox game was going because I have **Bronson Arroyo** on my fantasy team, so I put WFAN on the tuner and watched the Sox without the sound. And I'm so glad, because there's no way **Fran Healy** could come up with quotes like this:

"This one is heading to Camden!" —**Howie Rose** describing **Mike Piazza's** home run in the 3rd.

"They are taking batting practice against **Vincente Padilla**." —Rose in the 3rd.

"I'm **Mark Scott**, and welcome back to *Home Run Derby*." —Rose heading into the bottom of the 4th, referring to the host of the '60s televised baseball show. —SR

4/26 - Pedro vs. Smoltz II

Pedro's starts have become an event in our house. The other day, **Allie** told me that, in general, she's found herself looking forward to watching Mets games after work, but "Pedro's pitching" has a special ring to it, makes her want to get home sooner. And that's saying a lot for a guy who's only played four games as a Met.

Whoever gets home first has to/gets to walk the dogs--Rosie, the 80-pound elder statesman, and Kaiser, the younger, 60-pound spazz. Last night the chore/honor was mine. But, like I said, Pedro was pitching, so I fended off anxious hounds for the first two innings. I was willing to wait nine, but the Braves were on Pedro like cold on ice, scoring three, two-out runs in the first inning.

By the bottom of the second, Rosie's stare was burrowing into the side of my head and Kaiser was bucking around in circles, like a bronco on acid. It was difficult to ignore their protests—and try to convince myself that the game was more important—with the Mets getting spanked. MSG announcer **Keith Hernandez** didn't help my cause...

Ted Robinson: This night in 1988, Keith Hernandez hit a grand slam in Atlanta. He drove in seven runs for the Mets that game.

Keith Hernandez: I also got divorced that day. Let me tell you, I was out late that night. HA!

Which reminds me of another Hernandez gem, this one from the night before. Bottom of the fourth, Mets down 1-0...

Fran Healy: He's been terrific!

Keith Hernandez: Who?

Fran Healy: (The Mets') **Chris Woodward**.

Keith Hernandez: I wasn't paying attention.

Error #1: daydreaming on the job. Error #2: telling everyone about error #1 just in case they missed it.

I think it's about time MSG sprung for one of those seven second delay modules, one of those devices that allows the guys producing the game to hear everything a few seconds before the TV audience does. I'd take awkward silences of Keith.

In the meantime, I finally gave in and walked the dogs. When I got back, the Braves had pushed their lead to 4-1. Inning after inning, the Mets had baserunners but failed to muster anything approaching a comeback; **John Smoltz** bent but didn't break. Yet I stayed tuned in the whole time, this is the new Mets, after all, even when Allie came home, saw the score, and asked if we could watch *House* on Fox. With all due respect to Dr. House and cast, I was planning to go down with the ship last night.

And so was everyone at Shea. There were a lot of people on hand making a lot of noise when **Piazza** pinch-hit in the bottom of the ninth. Before I knew it, the Mets were back in the game: 4-3. Then **Beltran** singled and Piazza went first to third (When's the last time we saw that?); **Reyes** was dancing on the dugout steps. Two out, bottom of the ninth, and the team's hottest hitter, **Cliff Floyd**, at the plate. **Bobby Cox** went to the bullpen, pulling his closer, **Danny Kolb**. Unfortunately, Cliff popped up, but that's how you want to end games—a ninth inning with five hits, two runs, and a good chance to win. Tonight the Mets go for the series with **Glavine** facing **Hampton**. It's good to be a Mets fan. —MF

5/12 - The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

So 35 games in, and the Mets season can easily be broken down into categories defined by the best of **Sergio Leone's** "Spaghetti western" trilogy starring **Clint Eastwood**--*The Good, the Bad and The Ugly*. So here's some quotes from the lead characters, and how they apply to the Mets in 2005:

The Good, which was Clint Eastwood's character, **The Man With No Name (a-k-a Blondie)**: "Two hundred thousand dollars is a lot of money. We're gonna have to earn it."

That's right Mr. Eastwood—well, except that **Pedro Martinez** and **Carlos Beltran** signed for much more

money than that. But earn it they have. It's obvious to see that every time this team goes out when Martinez pitches, they feel that they're going to win. And the crowd at Shea is *electric* when he pitches--the dirty old stadium in Flushing feels like it's 2000 again when he racks up a strikeout. And Beltran is quietly putting together another great season, and it's quite possible he's even a better fielder than **Mike Cameron**.

The Bad, which was **Lee van Cleef's** character, **Angel Eyes**: (As he's beating a prisoner) "How your digestion now?"

Um, not so good, Lee. You see, **Kaz Matsui's** batting is bad, even with new contact lenses. Every time he's up, the crowd at Shea is chomping at the bit to boo, just so their stomachs don't get totally filled with bile. Another 35 games like this and fans will be waiting to make sushi out of him.

The Ugly, which was **Eli Wallach's** character, **Tuco**: "You never had a rope around your neck. Well, I'm going to tell you something. When that rope starts to pull tight, you can feel the Devil bite your ass."

That's right Eli, the Devil is certainly on the asses of **Tom Glavine** and **Victor Zambrano**. For Glavine, if he doesn't turn it around soon, he could be looking at a one way ticket out of town. I wouldn't be surprised to see **Omar Minaya** find a team to take him on, with the Mets paying much of the rest of his contract. And Zambrano is just begging to be sent down to hell (a.k.a Triple A Norfolk) when **Kaz Ishii** comes back.

So there you are, the Mets in terms of one of the greatest Westerns ever. The Cards are coming to town--let's hope for at least one win. —SR

5/24 - Readin's Swell: The Mets Literacy Program

David Wright: The past two games have been rough for me. I've made costly errors which have diverted attention from the good things I've done, like when I dove into the stands to catch a foul pop up against the Yankees, or when I golfed a shoestring pitch into deep center for a homerun against the Braves. But that's what happens when things are going bad; people overlook the positives.

Jose Reyes: That's right, David, we know that our miscues will draw criticism from the fans. That's part of the game. What hurts, though, is when our charitable

efforts off the field go overlooked. That's why we're taking time to promote *Readin's Swell*, the Mets' new literacy campaign. Every time a Mets player coughs up a routine ground ball, blows a double play, or walks the opposing pitcher...

David: Like **Kaz** did last night. Man, I've been messing up lately, but that was fugly.

Jose: Fugly?

David: Yeah, fucking ugly.

Jose: Right, well, anytime we make a monumental mistake we want you, the Mets fans, to turn off the TV in disgust and pick up a book. Last night, for example, after I let that ground ball scoot through my legs, my girlfriend read three chapters in **Joe Meno's** *Tender As Hellfire*.

David: How is that anyway?

Jose: She loves it. She really digs Meno's ear for dialogue and his ability to make unbelievable events seem realistic.

David: My girlfriend's about to start his last book, *Hairstyles of the Damned*. They should call each other next time a Met botches a key play.

Jose: So remember, Mets fans, even when your team's stinking up the tri-state area...

David:...Readin's swell! —MF

6/22 - Zisk Readers' Poll #1

What was the weirdest part of my day?

A) Hearing **Rob Halford** from **Judas Priest** on NPR's **Fresh Air**. (Terry Gross: "Rob, the early songs have such pop hooks!")

B) Listening to reggae on the drive home. Voluntarily. (**Black Uhuru's** *Red* album...*I say you punch right here and you punch over there/It's sponji reggae*...)

C) Watching the **Mets** rack up eight runs last night against the **Phillies** (a good team playing at home behind a very good starting pitcher)

Vote early, vote often. —MF

6/27 - Two Out of Three Ain't Bad, But It's Not Enough

"Unable to say exactly what the disease is, I want the Sonics to cure me." —**David Shields**, writing about his weakness for the **Seattle Supersonics**

Yesterday was an unpleasant day. It wasn't awful—no compound fractures were suffered, no bankruptcies filed—but it was unpleasant, nonetheless. The dog had diarrhea and I found out that book/zine tour I was scheduled to go on in August had been cancelled. So I turned to the Mets to lift my spirits. They were going to complete a sweep of the **Yankees** in the Bronx, for the first ever, and, for the first time in weeks, I was going to be able watch the entire game. I tuned in not hoping for a Mets win, but needing a Mets win. Their victory would turn the tide on my crummy day and set the tone for a great week to come. It was a low-scoring, thin ice game from the start, **Kris Benson** topping **Randy Johnson** 1-0 for most of the evening. I started feeling better, noticing that the dog was nearly back to normal and that, by not going on tour, I'd actually save money. Then the Yankees defense went **Bad News Bears** and the Mets pulled ahead 4-1. I started feeling great, thinking about how I could work on the website for my other magazine with the time freed up by the cancelled tour. The Mets success was bringing validation, perhaps even euphoria, within sight. Then **David Wright** bobbled a grounder down the third base line. The door to a comeback was open just a crack and, true to **Torre**-era form, the Yankees came barging through, bold and rude, like always. True, the Mets were still up 4-3 in the bottom of the ninth, but I knew it was over. Once the Evil Ones got a runner to third base I left the living room, fuming, and went downstairs to read, foul mood guaranteed. When Allie came downstairs and confirmed that **Looper** had blown the game, I, well, read Steve's entry from last night. He says it all. —*MF*

6/26 - Yankees 5, Mets 4 Braden Fucking Looper.

Fuck.

7/14 - Mets 6, Braves 3

Most of New York was watching the bigger rivalry between the Yankees and the Red Sox last night, which is rather unfortunate. Those folks missed out on one of the most dramatic baseball games of the year, and easily the best Mets game of the season.

This late inning comeback against the Braves brought back echoes of the late 90s when **Mike Piazza** truly was one of the most feared hitters in the game. His three-run shot in the bottom of the eighth to win the game was perhaps his most dramatic home run since that September night in 2001 when he crushed a ball to center field, propelling the Mets to a win in their first home game after 9/11. I never saw that game live because I was down in Austin, but when I saw the highlights on *Sportscenter* at this cool local dive, I never wanted to be at Shea more than that moment. Watching last night's game at a local Brooklyn haunt (surrounded by Yankees fans salivating at their comeback against the Sox) and seeing Piazza hit another majestic blast, it gave me almost the exact same feeling.

Piazza hasn't smiled at all this season—until last night. His look when coming out of the dugout to take a curtain call has been M.I.A. It was the look of a player who enjoys the game. The tons of slugging he's gotten from fans and the media didn't matter. Where his team is in the standings didn't matter. And the constant speculation about the end of his Mets career (or entire baseball career) certainly didn't matter. This was a look of joy on the face of a player who has brought a decent amount of joyous moments in his Mets tenure, which most Mets fans (myself included) are very quick to forget in the wake of the last two seasons.

This game was also more than about Mike Piazza, it was also about the "new Mets." **David Wright** continued his penchant for coming up big (two solo homeruns), making a boneheaded error (which cost one run) and then in the words of some movie I can't seem to recall, "You come along and *totally redeem yourself!*" Wright worked a walk and came around to score the tying run in the 7th, and then made a great grab of a **Kelly Johnson** bunt in the air on a squeeze play, leading to an unassisted double play in the top of the 8th.

Hopefully this game won't color **Omar Minaya's** judgment, where he trades away the future to fill some holes in the present. This team won't be contenders until next year at the earliest. Let's keep that schedule in mind, Omar. And let's hope one of the best catchers who ever played the game can go out with dignity, and a little pop in his bat. —*SR*

8/2 - Mets 9, Brewers 8 (11 Innings)

"This was a war of attrition." —**Howie Rose** on the

WFAN post game report

Growing up I was a big fan of the miniseries—*Winds of War*? Saw it. *The Thorn Birds*? Saw it THREE times. *V*? Watched it religiously. This battle between the Flushing faithful and the Brew Crew was like some made for TV epic that just didn't know how to end. 4 hours and 29 minutes of drama spread over 11 innings, making it the longest Mets game of the 2005 season. Let's recap what happened:

--**Victor Zambrano** had his worst Mets outing ever, giving up approximately 26 home runs in less than 2 innings.

--**Aaron Heilman** is a decent pitcher, and should be starting over **Kaz Ishii** until **Steve Trachsel** comes back.

--**Doug "I CAN Have a Good OBP" Mientkiewicz** might be coming out of his season-long slump by getting on base 5 times tonight.

--**Mike Cameron** has shook off all the trade talk, and hit a spine-tingling home run in the bottom of the 9th that made **Gary Cohen** sound like he'd gone through puberty again.

--This is the first time in 3 years the Mets have come back from a 4 run deficit.

--**Carlos Beltran** got booed while going 0 for 6. If he doesn't start hitting during this homestand, he will soon become the new **Kaz Matsui**.

--**Mike Piazza** might not be the same hitter he was 4 years ago, but he can scare the shit enough out of some relievers that they'll throw four straight balls to allow the game-winning running to come across the plate.

Finally, here's one of the funniest things I've ever heard during a radio broadcast:

Howie Rose, while describing the Brewers rotund relief pitcher **Dana Eveland**: "His physique is Wellsian."

Gary Cohen: "Is that David...or Orson?" —SR

8/15 - Moving On

"Damn it!"

"What's wrong?" my wife asked, looking up from her copy of *Ear Diseases in Small Animals: An Illustrated Guide*.

"The Mets are dead," I answered.

"I thought they died last week."

"Last week was their practical death, when they stopped drawing air. This weekend was their spiritual death. First there was the collision between **Beltran** and **Cameron** and now this, **Pedro**'s no-hit bid turned 2-1 loss."

"But it seemed like they got a lot of hits today, how did they lose 2-1?"

"That's just it, that's the key to this game, not the two runs that **Pedro** gave up—I expected him to cruise today because the Dodgers were basically fielding a Triple A team; their big star is **Milton Bradley**, a reject from the Indians—but the fact that the Mets racked up 10 hits and scored only one run. Those aren't players out there, they're ghosts."

"Turn off the TV, honey." —MF

8/16 - Mets 6, Pirates 2

It would have been very easy for the Mets to come back home and totally give up on the season after their disastrous West Coast swing. But I'll give them credit, they didn't show any signs of giving up last night, which might be a testament to **Willie Randolph**'s skills as a motivator. Who knows? **Kris Benson** didn't have his best stuff, but somehow gutted out 7 strong innings.

Radio highlight of the night came during the reading of the out of town scoreboard:

Gary Cohen: "...and the Royals, who haven't won since the **Johnson** administration, will be in Seattle later."

Howie Rose: "You mean **Andrew Johnson**, right?" —SR

9/6 - Braves 3, Mets 1

Another night at Turner Field, another brutal loss. While listening to the game (my cable is out and the Cablevision bastards can't make it to my house until MONDAY), I was reminded of this horrible song by the **Nirvana** ripoffs **Bush**. The chorus in it goes, "Oh, those little things can kill." And indeed they can: **Kaz Matsui** not being able to turn a double play; **Ramon Castro** not making **Pedro Martinez** aware of **Marcus Giles** running home; the head-slapping failure of the Mets to get any of the folks that provided the 5 extra base hits across home plate. I could go on and on, but I think I won't.

Come to think of it, maybe it's good my cable is out—I didn't get to see the bungles in the field, and I don't have to hear **Fran Healy** and **Keith Hernandez**. Perhaps

Cablevision knew what they were doing. Hmmm....

And tonight's WFAN highlight: When **Willie Randolph** called on **Shingo Takatsu**, **Gary Cohen** said, "Here's someone just old enough to remember **The Beatles**, which is good since he has what can only be described as a Beatles haircut." **Howie Rose** then said, "When was he born? 1968? That's right around the time of *The White Album*." Rose paused, and then said, "Am I really going to do this?" He chuckled, then said, "I bet he said to the White Sox, 'Don't Pass Me By.'" —SR

9/6 - You Know It's Bad When...

...a **Don Henley** song pops into my head (and by that I mean a song sung by Don Henley, not a song about Don Henley, like **Mojo Nixon's** "Don Henley Must Die"), in this case that song that goes "Kick 'em when they up/Kick 'em when they down."

Tonight I tuned in just in time to watch **Victor Diaz** take a 3-2 pitch for a called third strike that ended the ballgame. It was the first time all season that I saw dejected looks on the faces of Mets players, looks that said, We aren't going to make the playoffs.

The Mets need to start winning, not to make the playoffs but to prevent more crappy classic rock songs from seeping into my melon. —MF

9/29 - Selling the Sizzle

It's been a lot of fun watching the Mets play winning baseball the past two weeks, and tonight's been no exception—they're up 7-0 over the Rockies as I type. But I had to turn the sound off because the Mets broadcasters were doing nothing but trying to sell tickets for 2006.

Fran Healey: Ralph, when's the last time you saw such a young, exciting Mets team?

Ralph Kiner: The 1968 Mets.

Ok, ok, I get it. This team is young and fun and, yes, full of potential, but let's not lay it on too thick, guys. We're still talking about a team that will certainly fall short of 85 wins. All these big expectations for the coming season remind me of '96 when manager **Dallas Green** predicted that the Mets would have three pitchers—**Paul Wilson**, **Jason Isringhausen** and **Bill Pulsipher**—win 15 games each. (Note: They went a combined 5-12 in '96.) —MF

10/2 - Rockies 11, Mets 3

So Game 162 ended up being a blowout, being distinguished only by the appearance of three of the most hated Mets pitchers in one game (**Victor Zambrano**, **Danny Graves** and **Shingo Takatsu**). Still, 83 wins and 79 losses was enough to tie for the fifth best record in the N.L., and better than the West Division champs the San Diego Padres.

This loss didn't mean anything to the 47,000 plus who showed up on a brilliant fall day at Shea Stadium. This game was all about one man, **Mike Piazza**. His last game in a Met uniform was as emotional as I've seen Shea get since the first home game after 9/11. With every lengthy roar of the crowd when Piazza came to bat, I kept wishing I was there. Even with this parting being bittersweet, each side took the high road: the Mets went all out in honoring a player that wasn't retiring, that they were essentially booting out the door, while Piazza was obviously touched by the lengthy video tribute and the cheering that never stopped and never mentioned that fact that the team could (and perhaps should) offer him a one or two year contract.

Piazza never led the Mets to a World Series win, but he was the key cog in getting this team into the playoffs in back-to-back years for the only time in its existence. When the trade for him was completed in May of 1998, I remember thinking "How could they do this to **Todd Hundley**?" who was my favorite Mets player at the time. Yet I knew the difference the trade made when **Mike** and I went to Shea to see Piazza's second game in the Met uniform. You could feel the stadium come alive when his name was announced—it's the same feeling that only **Pedro Martinez** gives the Shea faithful nowadays.

The impact Mike Piazza had on the Mets on its fanbase is undeniable, and I was so happy to see the summer crowds give him his proper due for years of great service (1998-2002), and gloss over the injury-filled and botched position move (let's tell the press first about 1st base, **Art Howe**?) frustrations over the past few years. Wherever Mike goes to finish his career, I think he'll find it hard to forget the pure love Mets fans showed over the past few weeks. —SR

Steve Reynolds is the co-editor of Zisk, and still can't believe the Mets are the favorites in the NL East.

Mike Faloon is the co-editor of Zisk, and still can't believe he's going to be a father for the first time.

Casey's Real Turn at Bat by Peter Anderson

(Author's Note: "Casey at the Bat" was written by Ernest Lawrence Thayer, and first appeared in the San Francisco Examiner on June 3, 1888. The poem is believed to be in the public domain.)

**It looked extremely rocky for the Mudville nine that day;
The score stood two to four, with but one inning left to play.**

Old Harrison's ledger-book was enduring as difficult a year as his Mudville squad was having on the playing field. The Mudville nine was losing as often as they won, despite the considerable sums he had spent during the previous off-season bringing in new players. The fans were attending sporadically, in large numbers in good weather and minimally in poor, their indifference reflecting the indifferent play on the field. He had over-spent on the players, that much was clear, and especially for that damned Casey, who could thrill one and all on one day with his prodigious clouts, and then sulk through a week of strikeouts and ground balls.

The club's high expenses and erratic revenues had begun to tax the fortunes of the middle-aged merchant. He had gotten into this venture out of simple-minded civic pride, but one-upmanship soon overcame him, and now, after having spent at the level of wealthier clubs in larger neighboring cities, his business and livelihood had come under considerable distress. He and his team needed a long winning streak, with an attendant surge in revenues, but neither appeared to be beginning today. For it was two to four, in favor of Millersburg, in the bottom of the ninth frame.

**So when Cooney died at second, and Burrows did the same
A pallor wreathed the features of the patrons of the game.**

Cooney might as well be dead for the little good he's doing, Harrison thought as he sat in the back row of the grandstand. The imposing edifice was another expenditure he had come to regret. A former horse track, fallen from favor thanks to the efforts of moral crusaders, the grandstand was purchased at a higher price than was warranted—given its nearly complete lack of alternate

uses—which combined with his expansion of its seating capacity had put him deep in debt with the local bank.

Cooney, that fool, was always pulling recklessly idiotic stunts, rarely stopping at first on soft hits, always getting thrown out at second. *This will definitely be Cooney's last season with the club*, Harrison mentally noted. Burrows knew how to reach base but thought far too highly of his running abilities, and here he was once again getting thrown out attempting to steal. In the ninth inning, down by two runs, with the heart of the order coming up. Harrison turned his head and spat in disgust over the back of the grandstand.

We could have had two runners on base with no outs, and Flynn coming up. Flynn, of the portly belly and spindly legs, who couldn't run to save his life. *But he can hit the ball*, thought Harrison. Despite this favorable assessment, however, he felt his mood darkening.

**A straggling few got up to go, leaving there the rest
With that hope which springs eternal within the human breast.**

On this bright sunny day, there were several thousand patrons in the grandstand, Harrison estimated, and now some were already preparing to leave. He could understand those who were departing, but not those who chose to stay. What compelled them to sit and watch this hopeless squad? His own presence was easily enough explained, as he had an investment to evaluate and protect. But these fans, as they came to be called—*fanatics*, indeed—why were they still here? Surely there were better things they could be doing, at their offices or farms, or with their families.

More than likely, their continued presence was due to their inexplicable infatuation with one Daniel Thomas Casey. Even if Casey had only one productive at-bat per week, and stranded runners by the score at all other times, they simply adored him. Certainly he was handsome, dashing, charismatic. But surely these fans should expect more than just good looks and personality. Their devotion would be better spent on a ball player of genuine talent, as would Harrison's cash. He had already decided to renew his search for quality players during the following winter.

For they thought: "If only Casey could get a whack at that."

They'd put even money now, with Casey at the bat.

Part of the fans' attentiveness was due to Casey's baffling appeal, but also due to the large sums of money being wagered. Harrison saw money changing hands throughout the game, back and forth on the most insignificant of events. As he surmised, the bettors wouldn't trust others to relate the outcome of whatever they were wagering on, and thus stayed put to protect their investment. *Somewhat like me*, Harrison pondered, though he considered his investment a legitimate one, unlike theirs.

Gambling had clearly infected the game, staining the purity which had first drawn Harrison to it in his youth. It had gotten to the point that every unlikely loss, misplayed ground ball or untimely strikeout was met with suspicion. Rumors abounded as to whom was on the take, which games had been rigged. Several otherwise upstanding businessmen in town, men known to have dabbled in wagering, were said to have "contributed" financially towards their preferred outcomes.

Perhaps that explains Cooney's foolishness, Harrison suddenly conjectured. Cooney's performance had weakened precipitously from the previous season, a decline which Harrison had previously attributed to resentment of his spurning of Cooney's contract demands. Now he saw the decline in a different light, and he certainly did not appreciate the illumination.

But Flynn preceded Casey, and likewise so did Blake

And the former was a puddin', and the latter was a fake.

Fat, sloppy Flynn. A man who never met a meal he didn't like—steaks, gravy, fried potatoes, enormous desserts—and ate voraciously and gluttonously, disregarding its dire effect on his physical condition. Though his eye was still keen and his reflexes sharp, thus retaining his considerable skills as a batsman, his even more considerable girth prevented him from running any distance, regularly shaving one base off of every hit. Doubles became singles, and triples became doubles. At his present rate of decline, Flynn had only one or two seasons left in his lump of a body. Blake was of little significance. While he covered a broad

expanse of ground from his position in center field, his batting was barely competent. Harrison had argued the entire season, to no avail, against Berrigan's decision to bat Blake third in the order. Even if Flynn were to reach base, hauling his bulk down the base line like a wagon teetering down a bumpy country road, Blake's meager batting would never be enough to bring any runs home.

**So on that stricken multitude a deathlike silence sat;
For there seemed but little chance of Casey's getting to the bat.**

Still, Harrison thought, *just because Flynn and Blake were up to bat before Casey is no excuse for the crowd's utter silence*. One would think it was a state funeral, not a simple ball game, by the way they sat mutely, on their hands. One has to support the entire club, and not just a single player, especially not a player so undeserving of their adoration. Flynn and Blake, for all of their shortcomings, were no less likely to prevail than was Casey.

As Flynn waddled toward the plate, moving as slowly and delicately as any self-respecting athlete dared, Harrison began to reconsider the entire issue of his ownership. What was he getting from it, after all, other than the daily sight of over-paid and under-performing ball players, which only brought him exasperation and—on those days when he had a particularly hearty lunch—indigestion? Harrison had to admit, despite what little as he thought of Casey, that the fans who came out did so mostly for the ball player. Casey, despite his shortcomings, was one of the few things keeping the enterprise afloat.

Flynn finally stepped into the batter's box, flicked his bat toward the mound a few times before resting it on his shoulder, and peered out at the pitcher. *At any rate*, Harrison thought, *Casey's drawing power isn't nearly enough*.

But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,

And the much-despised Blakey "tore the cover off the ball."

Flynn clouted a mighty drive into left-center field but, true to form, was only able to bounce and wheeze himself as far as first base, ingloriously settling for a single. There was much sarcastic wonderment in the stands that he had

made it even that far.

Harrison held out little hope for the game's outcome as Blake stepped to the plate, amidst the jeering whistles of the long-frustrated Mudville fans. From the volume of the crowd, it appeared even those who had wagered on Millersburg were joining in Blake's derision. Blake stepped to the plate briskly, his wiry frame tense with anger. His physical tension was so apparent that anyone not suffering from myopia could see he would swing at the first pitch, doing so to either quiet the crowd with a defiant base hit or to quickly end the game with an out.

The pitcher could easily see Blake's intentions, but challenged him anyway. Blake responded by hitting a dart down the right field line, practically jumping out of his skin. He would have easily had three bases were it not for the lumbering Flynn ahead of him, the older man collapsing into third base barely ahead of the tag as Blake walked into second.

**And when the dust had lifted, and they saw what
had occurred,
There was Blakey safe at second and Flynn a-
huggin' third.**

From his perch on second base, Blake stared scornfully at Flynn, who laid prostrate in the dirt, his arm barely reaching the base before the tag was made. *There is vigor in Blake's nature; at least he's making an effort*, Harrison thought while watching him shake his head at Flynn's pitiful display. *But Flynn might not even have one season left in him.*

Flynn slowly climbed to his feet, breathing heavily, looking as if each breath might be his last. Time was called while he composed himself, gathering up his failing strength for what could become a mad dash home. Flynn would have preferred the slow stroll after a game-winning home run, or even the blameless departure after a game-losing out, to a ball being put in play with Blake charging hard right behind him.

Fortunately for Flynn, he knew that Casey's two most likely outcomes would require no running on his part. Unlike that bastard Blake—him and his infernal line drives.

**Then from the gladdened multitude went up a
joyous yell—
It rumbled in the mountaintops, it rattled in the
dell;**

There they go again, Harrison muttered to himself. Mindlessly lauding Casey, a batter who was ten times more likely to strike out than to hit one out of the park. Either way, Casey would look grand doing so; he'd do it with style. And that, for some reason, is valued more highly by the fans than a batter who can put the ball in play every time, challenge the defenders and reach base more often.

The crowd had risen and was shouting itself hoarse, whistling, clapping and stamping their feet, all in adulation of Casey. He was Mudville's prized acquisition of the previous winter: bold and dashing, with sinewy arms, broad shoulders and a graceful stride; eyes of the deepest blue, a devilish grin revealing impeccable teeth under the shadow of a virile, reddish moustache. He was capable of hitting prodigious clouts, farther than anyone had ever seen, and they willingly forgave his empty-swinging failures for the hope of a long ball. Casey had been purchased for a hefty sum from arch-rival Freeport, and paid what was rumored to be the highest salary in the league.

**It struck upon the hillside, it rebounded on the flat,
For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.**

Mighty Casey, they were calling him, thought Harrison in disgust. What was so mighty about a man who couldn't succeed in the simple task of bringing home a runner from third base, so intent was he on hitting the ball over the fence? *Measly Casey is more like it.*

The crowd roared on, imploring Casey to deliver them to victory and bring them happiness for another day. He would come through for them, not to mention for their wagers. They still remembered that glorious day in May, when the overhead sun oozed radiant warmth for the first time all year, a sweetly fragrant breeze wafted toward the outfield, and Casey erased a six-run deficit in just the last two innings, with a three-run blast in the eighth and a two-out "grand slam" in the ninth for the victory. After the latter, Casey casually circled the bases, soaking in the crowd's adoration with a serene smile on his face, before crossing the plate into their welcoming arms. Their hero.

Harrison heard the May game referenced repeatedly in the excited chatter of the two fans sitting in front of him. *May*, he muttered, clearing his throat. *Nearly three months ago*. He steadfastly refused to be drawn in by the crowd's ardor.

**There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped
into his place,
There was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile on
Casey's face.**

He strode slowly and calmly towards the plate, like a cat languidly rising from a nap in the warm sun, flexing and stretching his muscles as he went. He moved with supreme grace, effortlessly, as if he hadn't a care in the world. Some called it confidence, others arrogance; but everyone had an opinion of Casey, and he preferred even negative attention to being ignored. He needed the crowd, craved and fed off of its energy, and strove to channel their passion into a vicious slashing at the first fast ball he saw.

The cocky white-toothed grin never left his face as he came to a halt ten feet from the plate, feigning devotion to his calisthenics while, in reality, tarrying to make the moment last as long as possible. Soon the crowd would be silent, and he would assume intense concentration, transforming his body from relaxed ease to taut readiness.

Knowing the moment would soon be gone, he grasped at keeping it alive, just a bit longer, with a grand gesture which seemingly acknowledged the crowd but actually served to draw more attention to himself. Turning to the stand, his smile broadened as he removed his cap and bowed.

**And when responding to the cheers he lightly doffed
his hat,
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey
at the bat.**

His self-serving gesture momentarily revived the crowd, which had begun to flag from the exertions of their applause. The doffing of his cap threw a new spark into the crowd, which flared up into renewed cheering. This latest round could not last, however, and the crowd soon hushed in anticipation, breathlessly, longingly awaiting Casey's next heroic feat.

Now he would step to the bat, and coil those muscular arms, and drive a pitch deep into the outfield, the fielders turning away in futile pursuit as Casey glided around the bases, smoothly and quickly as a doe through a meadow. Flynn and Blake would score easily with Casey dashing across the plate shortly after, and the win would be Mudville's. The fans could return home, gladdened in victory, still warmed from the afternoon sun and the fond memory of a moment of magic.

**Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his
hands with dirt,
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped
them on his shirt.**

Every insignificant act of Casey's held the crowd in thrall. Stooping slightly, he grabbed a handful of dirt, rubbed his hands together—the tiny clods sifting out and falling to the ground—and wiped the excess on his shirt. The crowd murmured approvingly as he grasped his bat and wrung his hands into the handle, ostensibly providing a better grip but in reality showing off his rippling forearms to the crowd.

At long last, his veiled theatrics completed, he stepped to the plate. He stared at the pitcher with casual disdain, maintaining an air of utmost confidence. This same pitcher had faced Casey numerous times that season, dispatching him with little difficulty, a fact which never crossed Casey's mind. Had he been asked, he would have attributed his previous lack of success to any one of several factors, including bad luck, glaring sun, persistent flying insects, or faulty equipment. The cause was never, ever, a lack of ability on his part.

**Then when the writhing pitcher ground the ball into
his hip,
Defiance gleamed from Casey's eye, a sneer curled
Casey's lip.**

The pitcher fluttered his arms outward, stretching not unlike a long-winged bird about to take flight, and stood grinding the ball into his right hip, summoning all of his abilities into setting Casey down once again, and gaining another victory for Millersburg.

Fifty feet away, Casey sensed the pitcher's ill will. Clearly he thought Casey would be short work, and anger began to build inside Casey in response to the pitcher's insulting

posture. He glared right back at the pitcher, his lips tightening menacingly. Casey would make him pay for his arrogance, but he would be patient and do so on his own terms. He could wait for the pitch he wanted, and not be dictated by the pitcher, and would drive the ball as hard and as far as he ever had.

**And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling
through the air,
And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur
there.**

The pitcher wound and threw, and though the pitch was easily within Casey's reach, he let it go past with an air of indifference. Not quite to my liking, his posture seemed to say.

Recognizing that the pitch would be well within the strike zone, the crowd rose in anticipation. The situation was just so perfect—Casey hitting a three-run clout that snatched victory away from the jaws of defeat—that they would waste no time in starting their celebration.

**Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded
sped;
“That ain’t my style,” said Casey. “Strike one,” the
umpire said.**

Casey didn't like the pitch, but the umpire did. The old umpire had tired of Casey's antics over the years, particularly Casey's persistent intimation that any pitch which he found unacceptable couldn't possibly be considered a strike. Casey's recurring acts of superiority offended the umpire as blatant signs of disrespect, and as such he had no misgivings in calling the pitches exactly as he saw them, independent of Casey's assessment. More often than not, the umpire saw them differently for Casey than he did for any other batter. Even a marginal pitch, a ball to anyone else, might very well be called a strike, so intent was the umpire on putting Casey in his place. There was only one authority on the ball field, the umpire believed.

Although the batter muttered his disapproval as the ball sped past, the umpire raised his fist and emphatically called it a strike.

**From the benches, black with people, there went up
a muffled roar**

**Like the beating of the storm waves on the stern and
distant shore.**

The crowd's bitter reaction was nothing new, the umpire thought. These Mudville people worshipped their ball players, and thought any affront to their unquestioned glory to be an invitation to violence. This ill feeling was prevalent in every town in the league, but was particularly vehement here. Last season, a beer bottle thrown from the stand had grazed his temple, drawing blood, and a few years earlier a fan punched him square in the jaw as he left the field after another Mudville loss.

Their fury built up slowly, the air seething with venom, their muttering voices threatening to explode at any moment. The old umpire had seen and heard it all, the angry threats and vitriol, in his thirty-plus years of calling these games, but all of his experience did not prepare him for what he heard next. He was instantly chilled to the depths of his soul as a single enraged voice tore through the crowd's simmering rumble.

**“Kill him! Kill the umpire!” shouted someone on
the stand;
And it's likely they'd have killed him had not Casey
raised his hand.**

The umpire tensed, his body recoiling instinctively in self-defense even as his intellect told him the words meant nothing. *This was simply going too far*, he objected inwardly, and though the fear soon began to recede, it didn't leave him completely. The fear would remain with him for several days, lurking in the deepest recesses of his mind. *You can never forget something like that*, he thought with a slight shiver.

But his fear was soon replaced by disgust at the sight of Casey, once again showing off, raising his hand to the crowd to silence it. As if to say the umpire's decision was meaningless, that Casey thought it no more than a pesky gnat to be shooed away. Though the umpire knew Casey's attitude could reasonably be justified by his having two more strikes coming, the umpire rejected this rationalization, instead feeling only resentment towards Casey's slight.

**With a smile of Christian charity
great Casey's visage shone; He stilled the rising
tumult, he made the game go on;**

Casey smiled broadly toward the umpire as if to say *No harm done*, but with his eyes narrowing into thin slits and then closing beatifically, he was unable to see the umpire's deepening scowl.

The crowd was becalmed by Casey's magnanimity, and remembering that their mighty Casey required only one great swing—thus rendering three strikes superfluous—their mood shifted from anger to one of resumed and heightened excitement. One swing is all it would take, and surely it would happen with the very next pitch.

**He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the
spheroid flew;
But Casey still ignored it, and the umpire said,
"Strike two."**

Casey turned away from the crowd, his orchestration complete, and again faced the pitcher. He waved as if to say *You may proceed*, his haughty air only angering the pitcher further. The latter again ground the ball into his hip, summoning the fullest extent of his abilities before winding up and flinging another pitch.

As before, the ball flew directly toward the middle of the plate where Casey could easily reach it, with only a flick of his strong arms needed to send the ball hurtling out of sight. The pitcher immediately knew he had made a mistake, that he had put nothing on the ball but velocity, and he inwardly cringed in dread of the ball's imminently towering arc. This might very well have come to pass, but for the fact that Casey again stood with his bat on his shoulder, watching disdainfully as the ball passed by him.

Although the scowling umpire was prepared to vindictively call a strike on any pitch that didn't bounce, such generosity was unnecessary. It was unquestionably a strike, and he raised his fist and called it so.

**"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and the
echo answered, "Fraud!"
But one scornful look from Casey and the audience
was awed;**

Again the crowd exploded in anger, their shouts echoing through the rafters of the grandstand. Catcalls, some clever but most of them childish vulgar, rained down from every direction.

The cries of "Fraud!" were what bothered the umpire the

most. Though he might have been inclined to compromise his usual impeccable judgment at Casey's expense, that had not been the case here. Casey had let two perfectly good pitches go past him, without even attempting to swing. *They can't fault me if he doesn't even try*, the umpire complained to himself.

As before, Casey exploited the situation to deflect attention from his failures, turning to the crowd and glaring with a look which admonished *Don't you ever doubt me. I don't need three strikes*. The crowd, chastised, sat back down in silence, awaiting whatever Casey designed to do next.

Harrison remained in his seat in the back row, disappointed as ever with Casey's performance but silently marveling at the power he held over the crowd. One gesture from him silenced them into cowering submission. *He'd make a good preacher*, it suddenly occurred to Harrison.

**They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his
muscles strain
And they knew that Casey wouldn't let that ball go
by again.**

Refraining from any further gesturing, Casey resumed his position in the batter's box, his face hardening into a ruthless grimace, his muscles steeling as he dug his spikes into the dirt and maintained a death grip on his bat. Never had he been more ready, nor had the situation ever been more ideal. His concentration was unimpaired, his mind emptied of every thought but the ball and how he would hit it.

His entire worth as a ball player, his validation as a true hero, all came down to this moment.

**The sneer is gone from Casey's lips, his teeth are
clenched in hate,
He pounds with cruel vengeance his bat upon the
plate;**

But, suddenly, his steely concentration snapped. For in reality his preternatural calm, his supreme confidence, and his arrogant assuredness all masked an ocean of doubt and frustration. *How could these people expect so much of me? What have I ever done to earn their adulation? How could I ever do anything but disappoint them?*

His frustration finally boiling over, he broke from his stance and straddled the plate, pummeling it again and again with the barrel of his bat in a blind rage. The pitcher, understandably shocked, halted in mid-windup, and the normally unflappable umpire was so flustered that he neglected to call time, instead gawking at Casey, along with five thousand fans and both teams, all of whom stood in stunned silence.

As quickly as the spell came upon Casey, however, it was gone. He was once again calm, grinning, defiant, settling back into his coiled position and challenging the pitcher with the mere glint of his eye. Though Casey's outburst was far from intentional, and was something he never could have explained, perhaps it would work to his advantage, giving the pitcher something to think about.

**And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets
it go,
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's
blow.**

But the old hurler had been through many such confrontations during his career, and to him this was merely one more. After Casey composed himself, the pitcher resumed his routine, wound up, reared back and flung the horsehide toward the plate.

A split second after the pitch was released, Casey knew it was *his*. Reflexes and physical strength were his best qualities as a batter, with poor judgment and over-eagerness being his worst, but he recognized this pitch as being quite generous, and instantly uncoiled his upper body, whipping the bat forward with unsurpassed force. The ball was coming rapidly from one direction, the flashing bat blurring from the other, and in anticipation the crowd let out a great collective gasp.

**Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is
shining bright,
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere
hearts are light.**

Base ball brought uncommon joy to hundreds of thousands of fans across America. The simple pleasure of seeing a ball in flight and swift runners circling the bases captured the country's imagination, and the game was thought to represent its greatest attributes: democracy, physical vigor, the perfect combination of rugged individualism and collaborative effort.

Ball players were admired, revered, and treated like gods; their successes glorified and their failures dismissed. Each town had its local hero, its favorite son, whose glorious exploits made the sun shine brighter, the air feel warmer, and life itself seem better. Celebrations would often continue long after the game had been won, late afternoons and evenings filled with music, laughter and good cheer.

But on this day, no such cheer would be felt by the people of Mudville.

**And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere
children shout,
But there is no joy in Mudville—mighty Casey has
struck out.**

Casey's great swing failed to connect. The ball deposited itself into the catcher's glove with a loud *thwack*, and the umpire called the third and final out. Casey's strong body went limp, the bat falling from his hand to the ground as he turned away, slump-shouldered and staring downward. He shuffled away from the field, listlessly, passing the Mudville bench without a word as he began the long walk home.

The crowd, drained and silent, similarly filed out of the grandstand, leaving Harrison sitting alone in the last row. Bemused and thoughtful, he had already made up his mind. There were plenty of others in town sufficiently enamored of athletic feats and respectful of civic duty, upstanding men who would still consider the Mudville nine to be an attractive investment. Parsons the banker and Drummond at the sawmill had each expressed keen interest, and Harrison envisioned being out from under this shadow by the turn of the year. For him, the coming months would improve upon the disappointing summer just passed.

The Mudville nine, alas, would not see a championship that year. The air would soon turn cold, the memories of glorious summer rapidly fading away. The deflated fans departed, sighing at the thought of the long months of winter ahead.

Peter Anderson is a rookie fiction writer, with his first story publication appearing recently in Storyglossia, and a lapsed Cubs fan. He is a devoted family man (husband to Julie and dad to Madeleine) who lives in Joliet, Illinois, the one-time home of the Jailbirds.

Hit this knuckler
S.O.B.

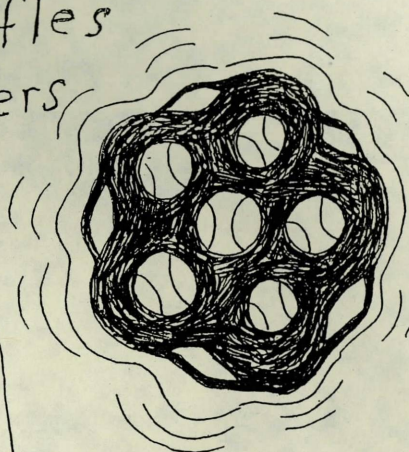
WILBUR
WOOD

Baffles
hitters

SOX

LEGEND

Loves a
good
cigar!



1972:

24-17

376 innings

20 complete
games

1973:

24-20

359 innings

21 complete
games

SLINK
MOSS 06

Zisk
801 Eagles Ridge Road
Brewster, NY 10509



Editor's note: Just as we almost wrapped up this issue, the Hall of Famer **Kirby Puckett** passed away much too young at the age of 45. Much has been written about his sad post-baseball downfall, and since that has been covered elsewhere (especially in that shocking 2003 *SI* cover article), I just thought I'd share a brief personal note about the man and his relation to magazine you're holding right now.

Puckett's career spanned almost the exact same time frame as the two phases of my baseball fixation. When he was called up in 1984, I was immersed in the game, a love which lasted into my first college days in Ithaca in 1987 when Puckett helped the Twins win their first World Series. As college went on I paid less and less attention to baseball (and more to booze, babes and radio shifts). I graduated in 1991, and after a brief miserable stint back at home, I moved back to Ithaca with no solid plan for my post-collegiate life.

That October I still had no job, so I basically drank on cash advances from my credit card. One fateful night I went to a bar in downtown Ithaca called Plums with a couple of people still going to IC to (most likely) drink some sort of Canadian beer. We ended up getting there just in time to see most of perhaps the best post-season game of all time—Game 6 of the 1991 World Series. On that night, Kirby Puckett reignited my long-dormant passion for the game that continues to this day (even through the '94 strike). Puckett's amazing catch of **Ron Gant's** fly ball in the 3rd inning and his home run to win the game in the 11th were stunning to watch. I'm not sure if any baseball player has single-handedly won such a crucial game all by themselves. Listening now to the replay of the late **Jack Buck's** call of that game ("And we'll see you tomorrow night!") I get the same chills I did that cold fall night in Ithaca.

Thanks Kirby—Zisk might not have been a part of my life without you. —SR