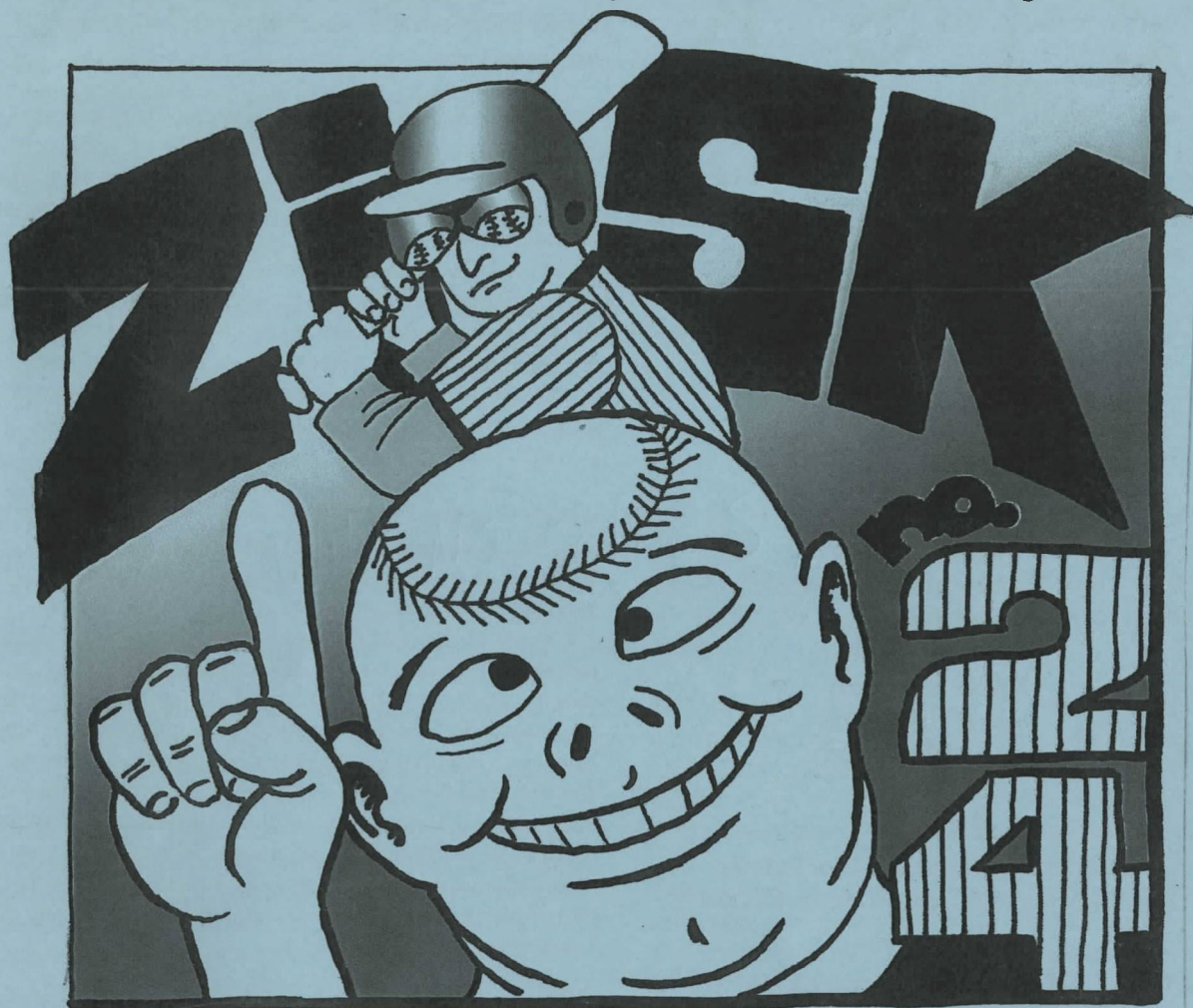


The Baseball Magazine For People Who Hate Baseball Magazines



ONE OF US STILL LOVES THE METS. OH WELL.

*Goodbye, Kiner's Korner.
For the Love of a Bullpen Catcher.
The Case For Guys That Have Used PEDs.
Blue Jays Caps Invade New York: Anatomy of a Fad
Bear Bottoms: The Argument Against Pantless Mascots.
And much, much more!*

Z I S K

P.O. Box 469

Patterson, NY 12563

Email: gogometric@yahoo.com (**Mike**)

ziskmagazine@aol.com (**Steve**)

Website: ziskmagazine.com

Zisk #24 was written by:

Jake Austen
Brian Cogan
Brett Essler
Mike Faloon
Nancy Golden
Abigail Gullo
Mark Hughson
David Lawton
David LeBounty
Abby Mendelson
Jesse Mendelson
Slink Moss
Dan Smith

Publisher/Co-Editor: **Mike Faloon**

Co-Editor/Layout/Design: **Steve Reynolds**

Subscriptions:

Send \$3 per issue (up to five issues). Make it \$4 per issue outside of North America. (Cash or check/money order payable to **Mike Faloon**, not *Zisk*. Paypal also welcome—email Steve for info.)

Yes, we're interested in your contribution.

Email or write us.

Zisk is available direct or through:

www.atomicbooks.com

www.quimbys.com

www.razorcake.com

Social Media:

[Facebook.com/ZiskTheBook](https://www.facebook.com/ZiskTheBook)

[Twitter.com/ziskthebook](https://twitter.com/ziskthebook)

Editor's note:

I'm writing this note on March 19th, the day before one of the most important events of each year—my fantasy draft.

If it seems like I'm overstating its importance, let me assure you that I am not. I have been in the same fantasy league—started and maintained by my co-worker **Doug**—since 2003. During that time span the only other consistent things in my life have been my job and my apartment. I've added many friends, lost some, lost weight, gained weight, lost weight, gained weight, fallen in love, had two dogs take up most of the photo space in my iPhone, co-edited a book, joined a band, started a hugely successful DJ night and probably written two-million words about musicians I openly despise.

The night of the draft has taken upon a significance that I never could have imagined 11 years ago. The decision between **Mike Trout** or **Miguel Cabrera** as the first pick (I believe it was a choice between **Alex Rodriguez** and **Albert Pujols** back in 2003) isn't just about piling up stats any more. It's a sign that a better time of year will soon be upon us. (The fact that our draft is on the first day of spring this year seems a bit heavy-handed—thanks Yahoo.) As my girlfriend and long-time friends will tell you, I'm a person that *craves* routine. And the routine of checking how my lineup did each morning is something that, in all seriousness, makes me feel a tiny bit better. I might get ticked that I forgot to start a pitcher or left my extra outfielder on the bench, but I'll still have a better feeling about the rest of the day than I would on, say, January 11th.

So tomorrow night when I crack open a tall boy of Miller Lite, crank up the new **Baseball Project** album *3rd* (it's very good, especially **Mike Mills'** song about **Dale Murphy**), do some last minute reading about which pitchers I should avoid this season and then see where I'm picking in the draft, it'll be the start of a brand new year filled with possibilities.

And in case you care, these are my Top 3 fantasy team names from the past 11 years:

3) **Graham Parker Posey**

2) **R.A. Dickey Barrett**

1) **Matt Harvey Danger**

—Steve

Bear Bottoms: Clark the Cub and the Statistical Argument Against Pantsless MLB Mascots

by Jake Austen

The offseason signing that made the most impact in Chicago baseball this year is, sadly, Clark the Cub. Though a menagerie of living bears (and dogs, and a rooster) served as mascots for the Chicago Cubs over the team's long, challenging existence, Clark was introduced this winter by a team that had resisted such temptations for the entire Modern Mascot Era.

The Beatles weren't the only history makers to land in New York in 1964. That was also the year the Mets' ball-headed Mr. Met was introduced as a costumed "walk around" character, as opposed to just a logo, and as opposed to the actual animals, disabled people, children, and inanimate objects that served as real-life mascots in the prior century of baseball.

A walk around Clark will appear at events (mostly charity stuff—we are promised he will not cavort in Wrigley's holy aisles) and a cartoon version will appear on kiddie Cubs merchandise. It was the cartoon version that set off the uproar, for several reasons. The most baseball reason is that unlike the crosstown White Sox, who made a series of unspectacular but seemingly smart moves since ending their unlucky '13 campaign (including getting a touted Cuban, recruiting position players with good fundamentals and clubhouse reputations, and classily giving **Paul Konerko** a curtain call season), the Cubs pretty much only acquired Clark. The most obvious reason to deride Clark is that if anything could be more generic than a big cute teddy bear, it's one with a stupid, cocky grin and a backwards baseball hat. But the main reason Clark deserves derision is the most serious one: he's not wearing pants! Is a bare-bottomed mascot fundamentally a problem? We shall explore that momentarily, but not before making it abundantly clear that no pants on Clark, named after the bar-lined street upon which Wrigley is built, is a *serious* problem. Unlike the backwards cap-wearing Poochie on *The Simpsons*, Clark is not so much a rad dude as a *dude*. First of all, his backwards cap is adjustable, with one of those plastic fastener things, so unlike many mascots, he's definitely not on the team, he's a fan, perhaps one of the rowdy Bleacher Bums. And when one encounters a Cubs fan on Clark Street in a backwards baseball hat with a cocky attitude it is hard for your inner-**George Zimmerman** not to profile him—your first impression



might be "malevolent drunk asshole." And if such a dude is in a no-pants situation, good things are not about to happen.

That said, assuming that nearly all actual animal mascots were pantsless pre-1964¹, determining how many Modern Mascot Era characters forego trousers can help determine whether Clark is just going with the flow, or is deserving of his instant appropriation as a naughty Internet meme.

Before delving into team-by-team crotch covering data collection, one important finding is worth sharing: There are three distinct body/character types that most mascots fall into, which seems to determine if one wears breeches or breaches indecent exposure statutes. Mr. Met kicked things off by introducing the **slim regular guy** type, basically a normal human being wearing a giant puppet head, and almost always fully clothed. In 1978 the Phillie Phanatic popularized the **rotund monster** type, with a big, furry, comical belly made funnier by lack of slacks. And in 1990 the Mariners Moose introduced the idea of an athletic, cool character, and these **buff body** mascots (like Sluggerr and Southpaw) wear full team uniforms because they are powerful peers to their teammates, not goofy clown companions.

¹ As an aside, it wasn't the best Super Bowl this year, but how about both sides bringing living animal versions of their team names on the field during introductions?

So, without further ado, let's stare at some mascots' oins....

ANGELS: **Scoop** and **Clutch** were fully clothed bears. **The Rally Monkey** in cartoon form usually does not wear pants, but when an actual monkey is utilized they wisely keep him covered up down there, so in real life he's a ally for the pants side.

ASTROS: The Astros best mascot, **Orbit** the alien, lets his space junk waggle. But their many other shorter-lived mascots all wore pants. **Junction Jack** and his jackrabbit family, **Jesse** and **Julie**, wore top to bottom clothes. And military protocol kept the knickers on cavalry rider **Chester Charge** and the higher ranking **General Admission**.

ATHLETICS: Although the A's have long had a logo of a bat-wielding elephant, wearing naught but an "A's" blanket over his broad back, **Stomper**, their walk around mascot since the late '90s, is fully uniformed.

BLUE JAYS: **Ace** and his son **Junior** wear pants, albeit weird cutoffs (perhaps the ragged edges are supposed to mimic feathers?). **Diamond** (Junior's mom?) wore long pants, and sexy pink platform shoes. In the '80s and '90s **BJ Birdy** was naked.

BRAVES: **Homer the Brave** went from Native American to Mr. Met clone, but never went natural. **Rally** (a rotund monster) was pantless, and **The Bleacher Creature** just wore a cap and creepy smile. The wisely abandoned **Chief Noc-A-Homa** was not a puppet character, but a person in Native American garb living in a teepee in the bleachers, and though he preceded the Modern Mascot Era, he shamefully co-existed with costumed creatures into the 1980s.

BREWERS: **Bernie Brewer**, as a regular guy, totally human puppet character better wear pants! **Bonnie Brewer** (not a puppet suit, but a real, live sexy lady) wore lederhosen.

CARDINALS: Just call him freeballing **Fredbird**. Also bottomless: alternate mascot **Rally Squirrel**.

CUBS: Oh, **Clark**!

DIAMONDBACKS: **Baxter Bobcat** wears no pants,

though his jersey is longer than **Clark's** providing smock-like modesty. Their **Luchador** mascot wears *pantalones*.

EXPOS: **Youppi!** wore no pants, and was arguably creepier than **Clark**, because he has a flesh-colored face beneath an orange beard made of the same orange fuzz that covers the rest of his body, making it appear that he is a hirsute human going bottomless. Now the **Montral Canadiens** mascot, he sometimes wears hockey pants when he skates. **Souki**, a Mr. Met ripoff that preceded **Youppi!**, wore pants.

GIANTS: **Lou Seal** is a somewhat rotund, pants-free seal. The short-lived **Crazy Crab** had no pants, but only his arms and legs were exposed outside of the shell, which is like clothes, but no pants is no pants, so give indecency a tally mark.

INDIANS: **Slider** is a rotund furry, whose pantlessness reveals yellow crotch spots that he should get looked at.

MARINERS: **Mariner Moose** debuted in 1990, and was the first mascot I ever saw that had a cool, athletic persona, instead of being a goofy clown or devious trickster. Though not that muscular, and possessing a gentle soul that kids love, I credit him with the rise of the buff body type mascots. He wears a full uniform, though he also has a shorts-pants version.

MARLINS: **Billy** certainly seems to have pants, though why a fish has legs is confusing enough, so maybe his colorful leg covering is supposed to be fish scales, but they're baggy, so I'm counting them in the pants column.

METS: **Mr. Met**, the granddaddy of mascots, the ball-brained bastion of mascot-dom, the standard setter, wears pants, as does his wife, **Mrs. Met**.

NATIONALS: **Screech**, the bald eagle was initially a young bird in an oversized jersey, but no trousers, but he's since come of age into a slim, uniformed bird in baggy pants. On Mother's Day we get to see **Mama Screech** who wears a dress, which covers her rump, so that goes in the pants column. And while many teams have racing costumes (something you give fans to wear between innings for a footrace, like the sausages in Milwaukee), Washington uses their racing president characters as pinch hitting mascots, having them make appearances and do skits, and giant headed **Teddy**

Roosevelt, Abe Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, William Howard Taft, and George Washington always wear pants.

ORIOLES: Other than cleats, socks and stirrups, the Baltimore's **Oriole** is naked as a jaybird.

PADRES: The **Swingin' Friar** wears no pants, but his full-length robe certainly counts. That said, I hear he goes commando. Though the **San Diego Chicken** was not officially a MLB mascot, he appeared at hundreds of Padres games, and thousands of other major and minor league games, so let's count him...in the no pants column.

PHILLIES: The **Phillie Phanatic** is the prototypical rotund monster, his Muppet-esque design and massive popularity influencing antics, design, and pantlessness for the rest of mascot history. He replaced **Phil** and **Phillis**, who wore pants, or half pants (they were Revolutionary War characters so they wore breeches).

PIRATES: The pantless **Pittsburgh Pirate Parrot** is complimented by the pants-clad pirate **Jolly Roger**.

RANGERS: Seventies mascot **Rootin' Tootin Ranger** wore pants, which isn't that impressive because he's a cowboy. Buff-bodied 21st Century mascot **Captain** also wears pants...and he's a horse!

RAYS: Both **Raymond** and **DJ Kitty** are naked from the waist down, though **Kitty** is usually behind turntables.

REDS: **Mr. Red** and **Mr. Redlegs** (both baseball-headed, but not **Mr. Met** ripoffs, as they appeared as logos in the '50s, only becoming real living boys post-**Mr. Met**) both wear long pants, the latter to keep his already red legs out of the sun. Lady friend **Rosie Red** wears a full *League of their Own*-era uniform. Their rotund monster buddy **Gapper** lets it all hang out.

RED SOX: **Wally the Green Monster** wears high-waisted shorts and a belt, looking kinda old man-ish. His friends **Lefty** and **Righty**, a pair of walk around red socks, despite being a different article of clothing, wear pants.

ROCKIES: **Dinger** is not only pants-free since '93 (actually '94, but it didn't rhyme), but he wears a short,

peek-a-boo jersey, and his name sounds dirty. That said, he seems more like an exhibitionist child than someone who'd roofie you on a **Wrigley** rooftop.

ROYALS: **Sluggerr** is one of the buffest buff body types, appropriately introduced at the heart of the steroid era, and perhaps 'roid rage explains some of his actions (he's been sued for a hot dog gun attack and photographed freaking a naked stripper). You're forgiven for not noticing his full uniform if you fixated on his gruesomely mutated, or perhaps surgically modified, head, which has crown-like points jutting from his cranium.

TIGERS: Though **Paws** wears an oversized, crotch-covering jersey, a trouserless tiger can't hide his stripes.

TWINS: **T.C.** is pants-free. Their prior mascot, **Twinkie** had a kind of feathered diaper, and that's weird enough to go in the no-pants side.

WHITE SOX: **Ribbie** and **Roobard**, rotund monster mascots from the '80s, kept their undercarriages aerated. The unofficially official mascot **Andy the Clown** (who was costumed in the sense that he was a clown) wore pants. **Waldo the White Sox Wolf** wore pants (though I think they only had animations and drawings of him, never a costumed character). And the current mascot **Southpaw** (a buff type) wears a full uniform. He is very nice to my son and hugs him a lot, which I might not allow if he were half naked.

YANKEES: The short-lived '70s mascot **Dandy** seemingly wore pinstriped pants, but the Seuss-like character appeared to perhaps have pinstriped fur. But I'm going with pants.

Thus, the numbers can't lie: out of 69 (!) characters in the mascot era, 46 covered themselves, and 23 didn't, and I don't need **Sabermetrics** or a calculator to figure that a .666 average, while **Satanic**, is also Hall of Fame worthy. The numbers don't lie: **Clark** should wear pants! That said, if in his current state of half-dress, the backwards-capped bear inspires the team to end their 10th year championship drought, I wouldn't be surprised if the entire **Chicago Cubs** starting lineup plays in jerseys and jockstraps in '15.

The Case For Guys Who've Used PEDs: The Sporting World Wants to Hang These Guys But We'd Vote Them Into Cooperstown

By Abby & Jesse Mendelson

Prologue

"Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear." —The Lone Ranger

It was a steamy summer afternoon in St. Louis, June of 2000, and we were on our first round of seeing a game in every major league ballpark. The Giants were in town to play the Cardinals.

And 40,000 people showed up to see batting practice.

Why?

Because **Mark McGwire** and **Barry Bonds** were belting them into the stratosphere. Mac parked one in the fourth deck in left field. Not to be outdone, Barry smashed a few lights on the scoreboard. Literally.

We had seen Bonds from the beginning—living in Pittsburgh, we were witness to his rookie season, when it wasn't so certain he was going to make it as a major leaguer.

We had watched his rise to stardom, his excellence in batting and base running.

We had cheered when, in a key 1991 contest, he faced Cardinal fireball reliever **Lee Smith** in the 11th inning—and walloped a walk-off.

We had celebrated as he collected his richly deserved MVPs in 1990 and '92. (We *still* think he should've won in '91 as well.)

But nothing compared to this. Here he was, in a Giants jersey, powering balls that used to travel 350 feet now 450 feet, and more.

And there was McGwire, bashing some of the longest balls we had ever seen.

And 40,000 fans cheered every stroke.

And nobody complained.

Not the players. Not the managers. Not the owners. Not the commissioner's office. And pretty much none of the media. No one.

Instead, they all enjoyed the moment.

Instead, they were all along for the ride.

Irony is Defined as the Difference Between Appearance and Reality

"Who's that yonder dressed in black? Must be the hypocrites turning back." —"Go Tell It on the Mountain" (Traditional)

Recent Hall of Fame voting set our teeth on edge—and our fingers on our keyboards writing this piece.

A few items, *maestro*, please:

Rafael Palmeiro, one of four players to combine at least 3,000 hits and 500 home runs in his career, dropped off the ballot when he failed to garner the required 5%, falling to 4.4%. Palmeiro, who flunked a drug test in 2005 just months after wagging his finger at Congress, saying that he had never used steroids, never gained more than 11% of support.

Barry Bonds, the all-time home run and MVP champ, was chosen on a bit more than a third of the ballots.

Roger Clemens, with his seven Cy Young awards, back-to-back pitching Triple Crowns, and 354 wins, did the same.

Sammy Sosa, one of only eight men with 600 career home runs, barely cracked 10%.

Mark McGwire, who ranks two spots behind Sosa with 583 home runs, finally admitted to using PEDs after years of suspicion. He has never reached the 25%

mark in voting, and his support slipped to 11% this year.

For his part, Jesse, who has visited Cooperstown three separate times, has sworn off the Baseball Hall of Fame until the voting is actually based on players' statistics—and nothing more.

The Pharmacology

"One pill makes you larger, and one pill makes you small." —Grace Slick, "White Rabbit"

Briefly stated, PEDs are, according to *Wikipedia*, made up of a few different classes of drugs—lean mass builders (steroids, HGH), stimulants (amphetamines, greenies), painkillers, diuretics, blood boosters (EPO), and more.

Many think that PEDs started in the mid-to-late 1990s with the homerun craze, but it actually started with Pud Galvin using synthetic testosterone in 1889, continued through the 1930s and 1940s, **Mickey Mantle**, **Tom House** (the guy who, in the 1970s, took stuff they "wouldn't give to horses"), **Mike Schmidt** and **Goose Gossage** with amphetamines, **Tim Lincecum** and **Dale Berra** with cocaine in the 1980s, and then big-time steroids in the 1990s. And that's not counting the allegations of **Willie Mays**, **Willie Stargell**, and others.

Re-read the previous paragraph. How many Hall of Famers do you see? That's right, six. Now the Hall of Fame has decided that such usage in the last 30 years is worthy of punishment, but nothing beforehand.

A Brief History of Drug-Taking

"I've seen the needle and the damage done." —Neil Young, "The Needle and the Damage Done"

It didn't start with PEDs, of course. Using drugs to augment performance has a long and twisted history.

It begins with the fact that it takes a great deal of skill and effort to make the majors. And that once there, players will do virtually anything to stay, and to succeed.

To that end, there is nothing more true than the idea told to virtually every athlete: you don't play injured, but you do play hurt.

Trouble is, since Og threw the first stone, and

Odysseus tossed his discus, that line has gotten more wobbly every day.

A century ago, things may have been different. But even then being hurt had its consequences. In perhaps baseball's most famous case, one afternoon in 1925, Yankee first baseman **Wally Pipp** complained of a headache and benched himself. **Lou Gehrig** went in—and came out of the lineup 15 years later.

Now, the pressure to play—what with deep minor league systems, international prospects, never-ending media attention—is greater than ever. And with medicine cabinets full of new potions, and heretofore undreamt-of surgeries, players can get patched up and back in action in no time.

Careers have been salvaged, franchises have been saved.

Self-help, of course, has a long, time-honored history, either encouraged and abetted by the clubs, or at the very least studiously ignored.

You name it, they've taken it. Everything to get that little, or not-so-little, edge. Enormous amounts of liquor (as a pain killer) to horse liniment, greenies to B-12 shots. Did we forget to mention cocaine? The wonder drug that keeps up confidence and energy until—until, of course, it doesn't.

Remember the drug trials of the 1980s? As Pittsburghers, we most certainly do. That was a time no one in management noticed anything, either. And people wonder why **Tim Lincecum** isn't in the Hall of Fame.

So, chart it in graph paper like this. A little edge gets you to the show, maybe a little amphetamine boost to help over the long season. A little more juice gets you in the line-up every day. And a little *more* gets that ball over the fence, where the big money is.

Lest we forget, chicks dig the long ball.

So does ESPN.

So does every highlight film known to man.

And where she stops, nobody knows.

Clearly, Managers Need to be Outfitted with White Canes and Seeing-Eye Dogs

"I'm shocked—shocked—to discover gambling." — Claude Rains, *Casablanca*

We find it absolutely stunning that with players morphing into Incredible Hulks before their eyes, balls flying out of stadia at previously unimaginable rates, and stamina soaring into the stratosphere, no one on any major league team decided to notice a blessed thing. Including, or especially, the managers, the men most responsible for player production and well being, team standing, and franchise stability.

Reminds us of the '80s, when the Pirates clubhouse was awash in a sea of cocaine, and somehow the manager, smilin' **Chuck Tanner** hisself, Good Ol' Number Seven, averred that he had no idea of what was going on, that he never saw a damn thing, despite dealers and other shady characters wandering in and out of the environs, and players with roadmap eyeballs.

Taken a different way, somehow it's good for managers to win with players who are juiced up, but bad for the players themselves.

Managers are rewarded, but players are punished.

We would like someone to explain this lunacy.

We could continue, but why bother when a) we're literally struck dumb by the gross injustice; and, b) we've been outclassed by eleven-time *National Sportswriter of the Year* **Rick Reilly**, who points out "you could build a wing with the admitted and suspected drug cheats the [recently elected Hall of Fame managers **Joe Torre**, **Tony LaRussa**, and **Bobby Cox**] won with: **A-Rod**, **Roger Clemens** (Torre); **Jason Giambi** (Torre and LaRussa), **McGwire**, **Jose Canseco** (LaRussa); **Melky Cabrera** (Torre and Cox); **David Justice** (Torre and Cox); **Andy Pettitte** (Torre); **Manny Ramirez** (Torre); and **Sheffield** (Torre and Cox)."

"If we get really lucky, maybe disgraced HGH pitcher **Darren Holmes** will show up. He played under all three of them!"

"It's just another year in the Hall of Farce, where

the codes of conduct shift like beach sand; where the rules for one set of men are ignored for another; where PED poppers can *never* enter, but the men who turned their backs to the cheating get gleaming, bronze plaques."

"Hail The Great Enablers!"

You Still Have to Hit 'Em

"Since you cost a lot to win and even more to lose." — **Robert Hunter**, "Deal"

Hitting a pitched baseball requires remarkable eye-hand coordination. Impeccable timing. Tensile strength. Popeye-esque forearms. And a whole lot of baseball smarts. PEDs don't help any of those. They may power the ball a bit farther—OK, in some cases a *lot* farther—but PEDs simply can't bulk up a banjo hitter into a belter. Not in this lifetime, anyway.

So what's the fight about? A few more home runs? Which everyone enjoyed? Fewer injuries? Which everyone benefited from?

One still must be an incredible athlete to hit 'em out of any park.

Here's a case in point. Bloated, bulked up, publicly disgraced, **Barry Bonds** came back to Pittsburgh, playing what would be his last game at PNC Park. True to form, he mashed one over the right field stands, a soaring, breath-taking shot.

We stood and cheered.

And would so again.

Because you still have to hit 'em. And consider, before Bonds was ever suspected of using PEDs, he won three MVPs, led the league in OPS five times, hit 292 home runs, and stole 340 bases.

PEDs Unfairly Destroy the Purity of Any Baseball Records

"Make a mistake you're going to pay for it twice." — **Ron McKernan**, "Chinatown Shuffle"

This may be the most specious argument of all. Aside from modern medicine changing the very face of the players—even a cursory glance at photographs

indicates that today's players are bigger, faster, stronger; better trained, better fed, better cared for—consider the factors that have altered the game. Better-kept fields. Artificial turf. Relief specialists. Dozens of pitchers throwing 100 miles per hour. Night ball. Changes in the ball itself. Changes in bats. Changes in batting and game tactics. Changes in rules. Changes in gloves. Changes on the mound. And so on.

Certainly, there's a family relationship between a hit in 1924, say, and 2014. But **Rogers Hornsby** hit .424 that year. To suggest that **Miguel Cabrera's** 2013 title-winning mark of .348 is precisely the same as the Rajah is pure foolishness.

So what do one year's records really have to do with another's?

Put another way, by 1950 virtually everyone was popping greenies like Skittles anyway.

So please.

Winken, Blinken, & Nod

"I saw nothing." —**John Banner**, *Hogan's Heroes*

If none of the above makes any sense, we would repeat the obvious:

We find it simply remarkable, to the point of brazen lying, that among all the close observers of athletes—press, trainers, coaches, managers, owners—virtually no one had the slightest idea that whippet-thin, or moderately sized, players suddenly bloomed into Michelin-tire models, and that balls that normally went 300 feet were now flying out of ballparks at record rates.

Jose Canseco. Jason Giambi. Barry Bonds. Mark McGwire. Rafael Palmeiro. Roger Clemens. Andy Pettitte. Eric Gagne. Alex Rodriguez. And so on.

Nobody saw anything, other than great stats and money in their pockets.

Nobody asked the obvious questions.

Nobody's taking the blame, especially not those who made a fortune selling seats, souvenirs, suds 'n' sody pop.

Now, however, it's the players' fault.

It's the players' fault that the very culture of competitive sport is winning at any cost, is staying in the majors, is making as much money as one can while one can, is doing anything to have an edge, to stay on top.

For players, teams, and franchises.

Mac was making money, sure, hitting all those home runs. But so were the Cardinals. And ESPN. And *Sports Illustrated*. And so on.

Certainly, PEDs were a shortcut, but so what? Everybody knew. They *had* to know. And everybody did well.

Now the sanctimonious actors in the Morality Play demand that just as we created heroes now we must create villains to pay for success and achievement.

Now it's all Mac's fault.

Now he and Barry and Roger *et al* can roast before Congress, while everyone else shakes their heads and clucks their tongues.

And counts their money.

And burnishes their own Hall of Fame plaques.

They're Immoral. They Lied to Congress.

"We've been poisoned by these fairy tales." —**Bruce Hornsby**, "The End of the Innocence"

Baseball players lying? Cheating?

Never happened!

From **Burleigh Grimes** to **Gaylord Perry**, all sorts of players have openly admitted to cheating.

OK, boys will be boys, even into their 40s.

But, we hear the spluttering, some lied to lawyers, grand juries, and, *gasp!*, Congress.

Reprehensible, sure. Actionable, you bet.

But such actions have nothing to do with baseball credentials.

What's more, puh-lenty of people have lied to Congress. Presidents have lied to Congress. Hell, even *Congress* has lied to Congress. Certainly not behavior we condone, but what does that have to do with on-field achievement?

Well, aren't they supposed to be role models for the young 'uns? Ridiculous. As **Charles Barkley** famously stated, "I am not a role model." On-field performance is not about being a role model. Parents are supposed to be role models. Clergy and teachers and good hard-working folk are supposed to be role models. Athletes are supposed—hell, they're *paid*—to compete. And win.

The perpetually drunk Mickey Mantle. The angry, vicious racists **Ty Cobb** and **Cap Anson**. These are guys you'd never have over for dinner, or let near your children.

Head hunters, spikers, spitballers, and cheats of all stripes.

Somehow, Cooperstown found room for them.

Professional sports are not about taking the moral high ground.

Professional sports are not about testifying before grand juries or before sanctimonious members of Congress, who, we would add, have also been known to do some mighty scurrilous things to win.

As **Joan Rivers** so memorably says, "Grow up!" Baseball players are not role models any more than they are perfect human beings. These athletes are not moral avatars, nor should they be considered as such. They are paid performers, nothing more. To assume they have some sort of special sanctity because they have great eye-hand coordination is absurd. To a man, they don't want to be paragons. They're not. To nominate, or castigate, **Sammy Sosa**, say, as the embodiment of some sort of moral ideal is simply childish, self-defeating, and destructive.

Put another way, we've made up these people—

our **Barry Bonds**, as opposed to the real one—then we blame them when we discover that our creations aren't real.

As anyone who knows the incredibly sad story of **Mickey Mantle** should understand.

Or that the tales of that lonely, difficult creature whom we lionized as the **Yankee Clipper**.

Practice Makes Perfect

"It's got no signs or dividing lines and very few rules to guide." —**Robert Hunter**, "New Speedway Boogie"

Not to make excuses for grown men who lie to the United State Congress, or break the contractual rules of their chosen profession, but they've been given a pass, treated as special creations from Day One.

From special tutors, to winks and nods, to women paid off to go away, boys will be boys, especially if they're making money for us.

So we enable them. We let them get away with virtually anything. We permit, or outright encourage, all sorts of boorish, even dangerous, self-destructive, behavior.

One need look no further than Messers **Martin** and **Mantle** and their legendary '50s antics.

When **Joe D** was a San Francisco high-school dropout, other North Beach kids would carry his shoes just to be near him.

So it is any wonder that ballplayers have about them a sense of entitlement? A sense that the rules belong to someone else, but assuredly not to them?

A Last Look Back

"Come down off the cross, we can use the wood." —**Tom Waits**, "Come On Up to the House"

Hum baby! All those moms 'n' dads, grammers 'n' grampers, public officials and pundits waxing holier than thou, blaming everything in sight for shattered records and shattered illusions and the putrefaction of our beloved Grand Old Game.

What self-righteous cant.

Everyone rode the gravy train. The fans loved the splash, the spectacle. The press wrote immensely popular stories. Players made money. Managers made money, won games, and made the Hall of Fame.

Did we forget to say that franchises made money, appreciated hugely, while everyone involved made a small fortune?

Maybe even large fortunes.

Now the tide has turned.

Now it's time to turn on the athletes, blame them for everything, ban them for eternity.

What hypocrisy.

Our Answer

"What's done is done." Al Lettieri, The Godfather

Absolute testing is the only way to go. But even then, PEDs will always be one step ahead, non-testable solutions will be available, and human beings will find a way to stay on the field.

For now, records are records, achievements are achievements. It's virtually impossible to separate out the very juiced records from the moderately juiced records from the merely astounding personal accomplishments.

Ford Frick placing an asterisk next to **Roger Maris'** 61 home runs because he had more games than **Babe Ruth**? Didn't play then, doesn't play now.

From spitballs to long seasons, 100 MPH relievers to previously unimaginable surgeries, the game has changed in dozens of ways.

No one in their right mind is going to suggest that **Mariano Rivera**, say, is going to be denied a berth because 80 years ago his job didn't exist. Or that he had **Tommy John** surgery. Or threw a thousand fewer innings than **Hoyt Wilhem**.

Put another way, it's time to give Mac and Barry and Roger, and the others, their Hall of Fame plaques.

They've more than earned them.

Elegy for The Shooter (Rod Beck 1968-2007) by David Lawton

A desperado fell on the road today
One more relic consigned to the past
The old school needs another shooter
But they don't make 'em like that anymore

It's a bio-engineered, money-slick world
Getting ready for its airbrushed close-up
It ain't easy for a man with a Chu and a chaw
And a six-gun on his side

In the saddle every day
Never showing them your fear
Laughing it off in the bar every night
With your whiskey and your beer

Riding the lonely road
To do the thing you love
Hoping you can make it for a little bit more
Feel that honest sweat on the back of your neck

Working any angle so they don't see
You're not that fast anymore
Whooping it up like a wild coyote
With every stranger at your trailer door

Staring at the ceiling in the dead of night
At a galaxy of shooting stars
That clear the fences of your quick-draw nightmares
And leave your boot heels pacing twilight floors

We all have our demons
Everybody's got it comin'
This gunslinger kept on ridin'
Toward the sunset in the west

So bow your heads for just a moment
'Cause a moment's like a bullet in the chamber of a gun
And kindly take your hat off for The Shooter
'Cause The Shooter surely would've done the same for you.

Playing the Field: For the Love of the Bullpen Catcher by Abigail Gullo

I was finally back in south Florida for spring training after too long of an absence. There was a time when I felt like I went every year. My grandparents were snow birds in Deerfield Beach for 25 years and my aunt Marie had a house in Port St. Lucie where my beloved Mets have their spring training. I even found myself driving my gramps and grammy over to Tampa so she could see her “boys,” the Yankees. My grammy has been a Yankees fan since she saw **Babe Ruth** hit a homer in the old Polo Grounds, before he built the “house” that he built. My heart may be true to the orange and blue, but I wasn’t going to begrudge her wonderful baseball history.

I had only been down to Florida (with a fellow baseball loving gal pal) for spring training once since my gramps and my aunt Marie passed away. But now my parents have a place of their own in Delray Beach. And since I moved to New Orleans a year ago, I have been starved for my favorite team playing my favorite game. My mom actually made plans to take my 94-year-old Grammy to a game later in the week. But I could not wait. The Mets were playing the team from Venezuela leading up to the World Baseball Classic. Using the excuse that I had never seen an international team play, I took off for the Treasure Coast in my rental car. Love songs on the radio made me feel giddy. Who was I missing in New Orleans? No one. So why did I feel the butterflies in my stomach, a clear sign of the anticipation of love?



Suddenly I realized the culprit. I am in love with baseball. The thought of seeing my boys of summer in the spring caused a physical reaction in my body. The endorphins were flooding through me. My body was telling my brain I am in love. Who was I to argue?

Having familiarized myself once again with Tradition Field—and the tacos in a helmet—I returned the next day with my family in tow. We had amazing seats right in front of the Mets’ bullpen. I could hear the chatter of the coaches and the thwack of the ball hitting glove. They could also hear me, I soon learned. “Oh! There is **Colin McHugh**,” I exclaimed. “I follow him on Twitter!” And then I shrank in my seat when he actually turned to look at me.

The front row was full of middle aged old white men begging the players for balls. There are a certain type of old men at spring training; idol worshipers who treasure their artifacts more than the experience. All they want is the signed merchandise to prove that they were there (or perhaps to sell later for big bucks). I am not that type. I prefer to just relish the experience. Watching our soon-to-be ace **Matt Harvey** warm up while I took iPhone videos was as invasive as I was going to be.

When I go to a game, I’m not the type to dress head to toe in Mets gear. My baseball fashion idol is Annie Savoy from *Bull Durham*. I wear vintage dresses, big sunglasses and wide picture hats. I will iron on Lady Met decals onto black sundresses and also gravitate towards orange and blues. I am proudly pretty, if no longer young. As I am a big girl, I have grown used to being invisible, especially to men, no matter how I dress

or how many tattoos I get. And I am ok with that now that I am on this side of 40. I dress for myself now, finally!

So I was surprised when I seemed to be getting a stare down from the bullpen catcher. I had been checking the scoreboard over his head when I noticed he seemed to

be checking me out. I felt that flush of unwanted or unknown attention. At this side of 40 I'm still not very good at relations with the opposite sex. (As I mentioned, my body is more likely to get worked up over a sport than an actual human being.) My options for flirting seemed slim, sitting between my mother and my grandmother. But I couldn't let this connection pass me by. The next time I caught his eye I took a chance.

"Can I have a ball for my grammy?"

Sure enough, he nodded and tossed me a ball.

Disappointment erupted from the middle aged losers in front of me, but was my grammy pleased as punch! What a nice guy!

The next day I dragged my cousin and his two-year old son back to those same seats. I caught the bullpen catcher's eye again.

"Can I have a ball for my little cousin?"

Another game ball comes sailing into my hot little hands.

By the third game, he waved to me as I was taking my seat and I was in love.

I waited until I was safely out of Florida before I Googled him. I didn't want to look too desperate and I like to take relationships slow. It turns out my bullpen catcher was, pardon the pun, quite a catch. The job of bullpen catcher is a tough one. You wear a uniform, but you're not on the roster. You aren't a coach and you work for tips, basically, as much of your pay comes from tip outs from the pitchers. As a bartender, I felt a kinship with my catcher. They usually don't stay in that position long, but my guy seemed to have stuck it out since the **Bobby Valentine** years. He also happens to be best friends with **David Wright**. It's gotta help when you are best pals with the franchise player. That night I dreamt how much fun we would have on double dates with David and his gal.

That baseball time in Florida wasn't enough for me this year. I decided I would go visit my sister in Los

Angeles and my high school boyfriend **Steve** in San Diego. Oh yeah, and the Mets just happened to be having a West Coast road trip. I made sure all my tickets were near the visiting bullpen. I showed up to the first game in Los Angeles wearing a t-shirt with my bullpen catcher's name and number on the back. He was warming up with **Matt Harvey**, our all-star, in the bullpen. I stood casually with my back to the bullpen and was delighted to hear the good-natured ribbing he took from his teammates for my



t-shirt. They obviously love to tease for stuff like that. I'm sure they could clearly tell I meant it as tongue firmly in cheek, right?

Things went even better in San Diego, which is now my new favorite ball park in America. (What a beauty! Too bad the Padres play there.) As he was carrying equipment to the bullpen from the dugout, I caught his eye and he waved at me—right in front of my high school boyfriend **Steve**. (The *best* boyfriend I ever had, by the way.) "What was that?" **Steve** asked. I shrugged it off. "Oh, we kind of have a thing since spring training this year." I acted cool. My insides were flying.

The Mets lost every game I saw this year. But the bullpen catcher waved to me three times, twice in front of the one love of my life. The last time I saw him, as we both leaving San Diego in defeat, I told him I would see him again at spring training. Who knows? I might even let him get to second base next year.

I Love The Mets. Help Me.

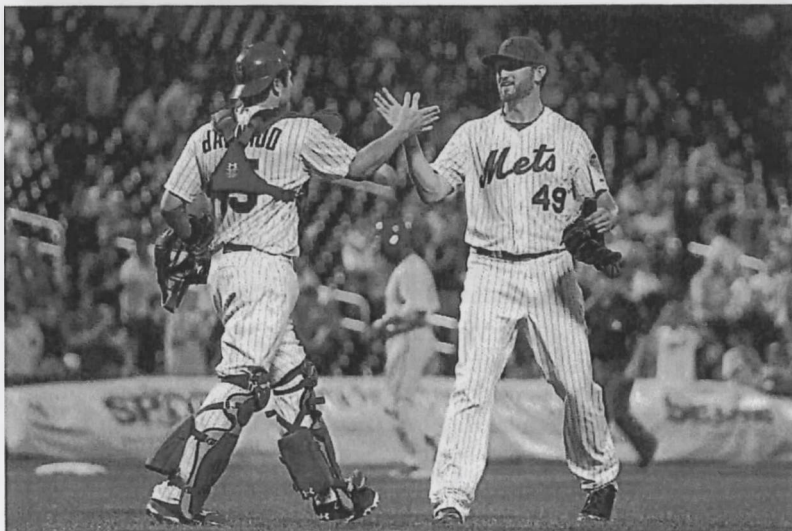
Dear Family and Friends,

I sit down on this chilly winter morning to ask your understanding and if you can find it in your hearts, your forgiveness. I recognize that this may be an unrealistic request. Given what I'm about to embark upon—willfully, joyfully—I may be asking too much.

I don't want to mislead you. I'm not going into a witness protection program. I'm not going to take my own life. What I'm planning won't be a quick, private act. It will drag on for months in a very public, likely very embarrassing, way.

I'm going to root for the 2014 Mets.

The Mets were a bad team last year. They will be worse this year. And yet I'm more amped about the coming season than I have been in years. Granted, this long, ugly winter could be wreaking havoc on my melon, distorting my view of the coming season. But I know better. It's the games themselves, Mets game in particular. I'll be watching them every day. Ten games into the season I'll be multiplying all of **David Wright's** stats by sixteen, crunching the numbers to see if he's on pace for thirty homers and a hundred RBI. I'll be watching **Jonathan Niese's** WHIP—can he keep it below 1.20? Finally reach 15+ wins? I'll be doing the same for every hitter in the Mets line up and every pitcher in the rotation.



by Mike Faloon

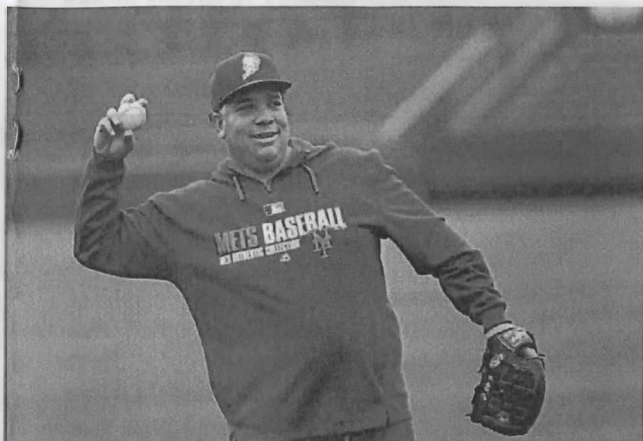
I'll be figuring out what Mets management means when they say that Bartolo Colon manages his weight well. Like everyone other fan of a cellar dweller, I'll be redefining "success" for 162 games.

The Mets are six years removed from their last winning season. They're doing everything possible to continue this streak. For the third season in a row they'll open the season without their best player from the previous year. First there was **Jose Reyes**, winner of the NL batting title in 2011. He left via free agency. Next, **R.A. Dickey**. He earned the NL Cy Young Award in 2012 before being traded north of the border. Then came **Matt Harvey**. The best Mets phenom since **Doc Gooden**. Harvey was positively **Seaver-like** all last year (less the tendency to marvel over himself). Now he's out for all of 2014 due to Tommy John surgery. Maybe the Mets should consider adding **Tommy John** to the back end of the rotation. He was still pitching well at age 46. Admittedly, that was back in 1989, but how much worse could he be now? He could probably toss some decent long relief, make the occasional spot start. Someone's going to have to fill in when **Dillon Gee** goes down. Maybe invite John to spring training rather than a guaranteed contract.

That's what the Mets are doing with **Daisuke Matsuzaka**. He was about as effective as a seventy-year-old when he first came up last year. He could barely wobble through three innings. He was getting punched up for four or five runs every time. It was brutal. His ERA needed an oxygen tank. But then Dice K. turned it around. He was still giving out walks like Halloween candy—that's always going to be part of his game—but he cut back on the hits, went deeper into games. His streak only consisted of four starts, but Dice K. returned with full force. And he's on the periphery. He's but one of the reasons I'm on board for 2014. Turning disaster into hope, redemption. Look at the Mets roster. Does any club have more guys angling for comeback player of the year?

The 2014 Mets won't be in the

running for a playoff spot. They probably won't flirt with .500, but they're long on potential. Look at the skies above Mets' training camp—even now, in early March, at the outset of spring training—and you'll likely see a flock of "What if's circling overhead. The biggest free agent to swoop in was **Bartolo Colon**. He's a hearty forty. He



harkens back to the era of **Luis Tiant** and **Fernando**—hefty hurlers whose physiques make the people at Frito-Lay feel better about their products. And Colon's just two years removed a PED suspension. But he has a quiet sense of character. You say, painfully out of shape and unlikely to duplicate his numbers from 2013; he signed with the Mets to collect a paycheck and avoid any sense of pressure that comes with playing for a winner. To your second point, I say touché, he may well, in fact, be in New York to coast. To your first point, I say, he's comfortable with his body image and ready to roll. Anyone looking to cast *Major League IV*?

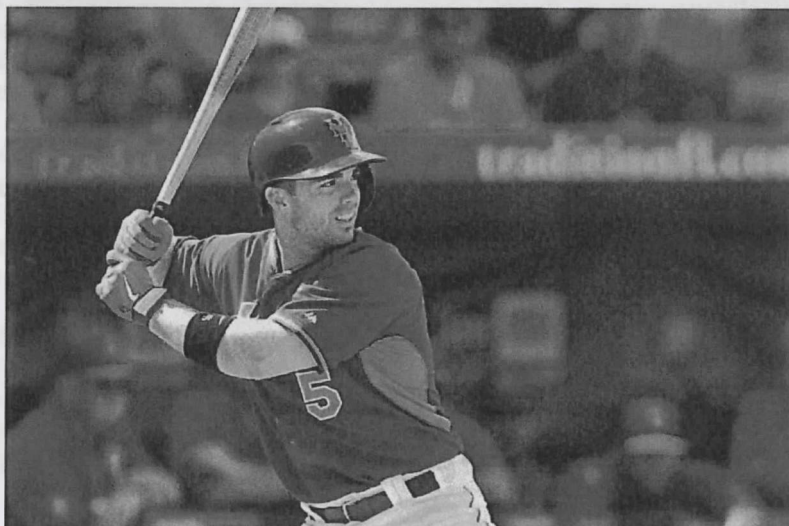
Then there's fellow free agents **Curtis Granderson** and **Chris Young**. What if they approach their best numbers? Well, they'll feel right at home with the Mets: Mendoza-line batting averages, big power numbers and strikeouts by the bushel. It reminds me of the first game I attended last season. Even though starter **Shaun Marcum** was 0-4, I thought the Mets might be able to sneak past Reds starter **Johnny Cueto**, just back from the D.L. Then I saw the Mets line up posted on the scoreboard:

Lucas Duda .214
Ike Davis .156
Rick Ankiel .220
John Buck .228

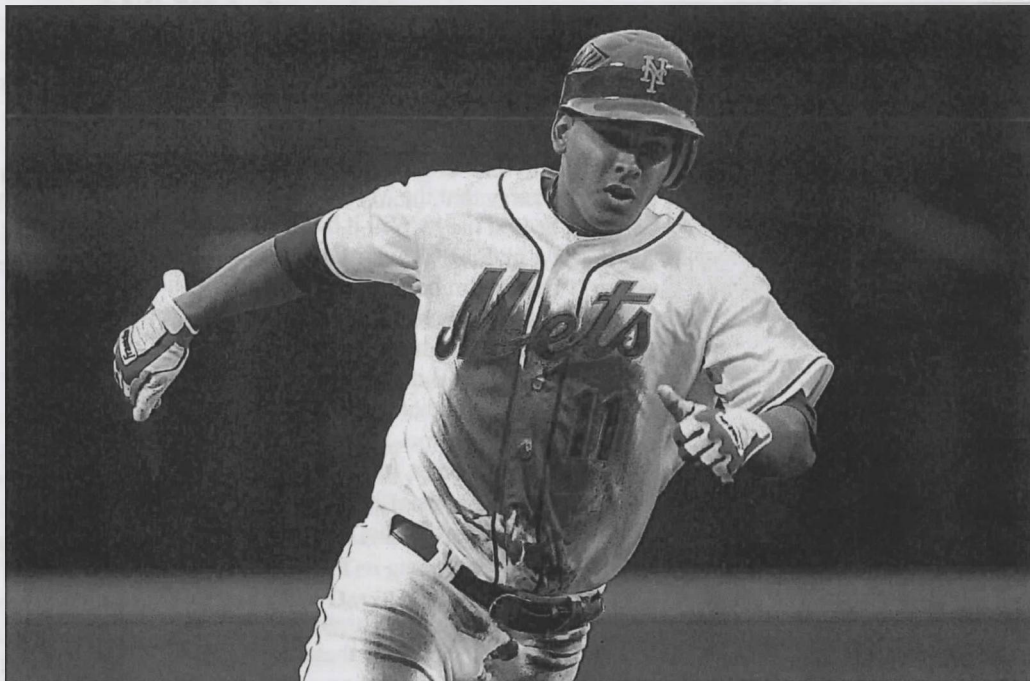
It was late May and each of those players was on pace for 20+ homers but hitting south of .230. Did the Mets clone **Rob Deer**? What do we get for leading the league in solo homeruns?

Buck and Ankiel have moved on but Davis and Duda remain. For now. They represent the closest thing to a controversy that the Mets can muster these days: who will start at first base? Will it be Ike "I don't like to hit in April, May, or June" Davis? Or Lucas "Do I have to swing?" Duda? I'm hoping they both make the cut. I love rooting for them. Davis is the consummate professional. Says and does the right thing even when mired in a career-long slump. But when Ike gets a hold of one, man, there are few sights that are prettier to behold. Such a sweet swing. Duda, too. He may lack grace on defense. Speed and consistency, too, but not doubt that the dude is hustling. He wears his effort on his sleeves. Apparently he's a big self-doubter, too, which is all the more reason to root for him.

I hear the counterargument: I'm being selective, focusing on the leaky glass that might actually be half full, if not in better shape than a year ago. What about **Travis d'Arnaud**, the young prospect the Mets received in exchange for R.A. Dickey? Forget his .202 average



from last year. Overlook the painful absence of power. He's our "hitter with big things to show" for 2014. (And he's a step up from last year's "kid with big promise" candidate, **Ruben Tejada**—he of that rare "hit like **Belanger**, field like **Offerman**" school.) How far will **Zach Wheeler** come without having to pitch in Matt Harvey's shadow for a year?



And then there's David Wright. Easily the most talented player on the roster. Ten years into a career that promises to be the best in Mets history. He's coming off his best season ever (if you believe in the power of the adjust OPS) and signed through the next decade. He could have left for greener pastures a few years ago but reupped with the Mets. (If only he can reach 600 at-bats. He hasn't hit those heights since 2008.) He says he's excited about the Mets future. He always says stuff like that. And I think he means it.

Too bad he doesn't run the team. The **Wilpons** certainly don't share his enthusiasm for the franchise. They don't seem very fond of the fans who do. How else could you explain the naming of this winter's first Queens Baseball Convention—a gathering of Mets fans at the Mets stadium in celebration of the Mets team bearing no

official signs of support from the Mets themselves. Sounds like the 50th Anniversary of the Mets at Hofstra University in 2013. Three days of people talking about the Mets and not a team sanctioned logo in sight.

But I'm still on board for 2014. I'll be hoping that every "he might" and "if they" comes to full fruition.

I've already invited friends over to watch the first Saturday game of the season. I'll be trying to convince people to attend games even when the team is plunging to the painful, bends-inducing depths of sub-.500 ball. **Zisk** co-publisher **Steve Reynolds**, a friend of over 25 years won't pay to go to a Mets game. He refuses to give the Wilpons a nickel. My friend **Pedro**, same thing. Still, I'll try.

Cynics—and realists, too—might liken my outlook to traveling to the North Atlantic and diving into the icy depths in the hopes of saving a few passengers of the Titanic. The band's already played. The ship's already sunk. This doomed group has met their fate. Accept it and move on.

The Mets are a mess, and I'll be getting my hopes up every time they take two out of three from the Marlins or pull within spitting distance of the Braves. To borrow a phrase from Mets historian **Greg Prince** I'll be among the "long celebrating" fans.

I'll also be moaning and groaning when the Mets fall short. I'll be crushed and grumpy and defensive when they sink to the depths more rational prognosticators are predicting. I may not always be pleasant when all of this unravels. Forgive me.

It Still Counts

by David LeBounty

Long before last year's Opening Day, Gabe brought me the Oakland A's schedule.

"The A's will be in town in May and September."

"Good for them," I replied.

"When do you want to go see them?" he asked.

"Not going," I replied.

"Yes, you are, Dad."

"I told you I wasn't going back to that stadium."

"We'll see."

After my last trip to Arlington (see *Zisk #22*), I swore off the stadium—I was boycotting The Ballpark. I know what you're thinking, 'What kind of fan doesn't go see their favorite team when they come to town?' (Or maybe you're thinking, 'What kind of fan doesn't just root for their hometown team or move?' I'd move, but it's Oakland, people. Come on. Get your head in the game.) In fact, there aren't many places I wouldn't go to see Oakland play, including the Coliseum. We were already planning to drive down to Houston the first weekend of the season to see the A's play our newest AL West rivals, and in July we were making a stop in Pittsburgh to see the Green and Gold. I just didn't want to go back to Arlington.

But, of course, I did.

The A's and Rangers battled all summer for first in the West, but heading into September, Oakland had a 4.5 game lead on the Rangers.

Gabe came to me the week before the A's came to town and asked again if we could go. Previous commitments meant the only game we could attend was the

Sunday afternoon rubber game, so this is what I told him:

"I'll take you to the game on Sunday, if Oakland wins the Friday or Saturday game—and Alabama beats Texas A&M."

"Deal."

(A smarter father probably would have asked for an A on the next chemistry test or at least have the kid take out the garbage.)

My reasoning for the bargain was simple. I didn't want to go if there was a chance the A's would be swept, not with such a tenuous lead, and I didn't want to be around A&M fans if Bama lost. (Every time I've worn my Alabama shirt to an A's game in Arlington, we've won. It's all about the statistics.)

Well, damn if the A's didn't win both the Friday and Saturday games and Alabama won a nail-bitter in College Station. So, we got tickets behind right field. It was the perfect spot to get a good view of **Josh Reddick** and maybe catch a homerun. (And it was in the shade. It's still damn hot in September down here.)



It was actually a pleasant day for a game, and the crowd was surprisingly large for a Sunday afternoon (the Cowboys were playing in Philadelphia). Our section wasn't empty, but there was room to spread out, and as the game went on, more and more fans left as they realized the Rangers were still slumping. By the end of the 8th inning, with the A's leading 3-1, there were large swaths of empty seats in the stadium.

We were cautiously optimistic at the start of the 9th. After getting the first out of the inning, the Rangers' pitcher, **Joakim Soria**, walked **Derrick Norris** on four straight balls. Then Reddick came up to bat. Reddick, who was having a down, injury-plagued year, connected with the first pitch he saw, and I said to Gabe, "Holy crap! It's coming straight for us."

Sure enough, Reddick's ball was on a straight line for our seats. Gabe and I rose just as the ball cleared the wall and smacked into the empty seats a few rows in front of us (you could actually see us on the replay on TV).

Frankly, I was a little shocked. Earlier in the season, Gabe and I sat in the Crawford boxes in Minute Maid Park in Houston. They are great seats behind left field that usually see a lot of home runs, and we actually had two come into the section during the game we were at, but nothing close enough to scramble after. Reddick's ball was right in front of us. It was ours for the taking.

But by the time Gabe pointed it out, and I spotted it under the seats in front of us, someone had already rushed over to snag it.

The lucky bastard held up the ball, then did something that angered me to my core:

He threw the ball back on the field.

The few remaining Texas fans

applauded this simpleton.

I was stunned. Sure, I had seen this act of arrogant ignorance on SportsCenter, but never in person. By the time I recovered, I was speechless, except for what I said:

"What the fuck!?"

(I often forget I am not in the comfort of my own home when I express my irritation. Happens a lot when I drive. But not when I play *Grand Theft Auto*. Go figure.)

But I wasn't done. I was so mad I started chanting, "It still counts! It still counts!" like a four-year-old.

Gabe, for his part was the model of maturity. (I'd like to think his silence was shock-induced, but I now realize he was probably trying to distance himself from his tantrum-throwing father.)

The A's went on to win, I think, by a score of something to something. I was just so mad, I didn't care. And it wasn't that I was mad that we didn't get the ball or that the jackass somehow "disrespected" my team. I was mad because that doofus was given a gift from the baseball gods, and he tossed it back like so many empty peanut shells.



Do you know the odds of catching a homerun at a major league ballpark? Neither do I, but it's probably lottery-like numbers. Probably struck-by-lightening-indoors numbers.

People don't throw foul balls back. They proudly hold them up in triumph, as if they just made the game-winning out, even though those things don't mean jack.

This was an honest-to-god home run. Why the hell would you throw the damn thing back?

On the drive home, I asked Gabe who started the whole throwing-the-homerun-back heresy. He didn't know, so when I got home I went straight to the trusted Internet.

Legend has it that this phenomenon can be traced back to 1969 and a Chicago Cub's fan named **Ron Grousl**. Ron, the man who is credited with starting the "Bleacher Bums," caught a **Henry Aaron** home run and was so upset, he threw it back.

Seriously?

Leave it to Cubs fans. You can have your billy goat curse and Bartman incident theories. I'll tell you the real reason the Cubs haven't won the Big One in forever: They started throwing home run balls back on the field. Henry Aaron home run balls, no less.

I'd be willing to bet that on that beautiful day in '69, the baseball gods were up in Heaven (or Iowa, or wherever), and one god turned to the other and said, "You know, I think it's time to let the Cubs win the Series."

"Really?"

"Sure. It's been fifty years. I think they've suffered enough. Hey, Henry's about to hit a homerun. It's your turn to pick the fan who gets it."

"I'm thinking I'll send it over to those guys in the bleachers. I like their spirit."

"Good call. And there it goes. Henry has got a sweet swing, doesn't he?"

"Nice catch . . . wait. What the hell was that? Did that asshole just throw a Henry Aaron homerun ball back onto the field? That's it. Another hundred years of the curse. That'll show those bums."

It seems I'm not the only one with a strong opinion about catching and releasing homeruns. Some argue that throwing the ball back shows you are a real fan. Some say it's not just bad sportsmanship, it's childish.

But what if there is some potentially historical significance attached to it?

One of the best baseball moments I've had at a ballpark did involve a homerun being returned to the field.

We were in LA during one of our Bookstore and Baseball tours a few years ago, watching the Angels play the Kansas City Royals. It was only the second game for a young Royals player named **Mike Moustakas**, and in the fourth inning, he knocked a pitch into the stands. It was his first major league home run, and the fans were surprisingly appreciative, giving Moustakas a rousing ovation.

Then the Angels right fielder, **Torii Hunter**, asked for the ball back. There was a pause in the game until the fan threw it back and Hunter promptly threw it to the KC dugout.

Now that was classy.

But not every ball hit into the stands is a Moustakas first homerun. Most dingers are just one of many statistically insignificant scores, but for the person whose lap it lands in, it can be the souvenir of a lifetime.

So here's what I'm asking if you are ever lucky enough to catch an opposing team's homerun: don't throw it back. If you don't want it, give it to a kid. Better yet, look around your area. If there is a kid wearing the opposing team's jersey, toss him the ball. Do that, and you will have made a friend for life.

Maybe the gods will even smile on your team. You bums listening?

From One to Two Girls

by Nancy Golden

I stood on the street corner outside the sandwich shop, holding the phone close enough to hear over the rush hour traffic whizzing by. It was my doctor, calling to relay some encouraging test results about the 11-week old fetus I was carrying. And she had one other piece of information to share.

“It’s a girl.”

A girl! A....girl? I did not see that coming. I was not disappointed as much as surprised. I had always pictured having a boy: someone with whom I’d play catch, watch the game, and if he was anything like his mother, collect baseball cards of random players. I know, it’s ironic as a woman—and acclaimed baseball writer (quick...somebody say something nice about my baseball writing)—to have automatically attributed these traits to a boy. While obvious now, in the moment it would take me days to fully appreciate my own sexism. But then it finally sunk in: I’m a girl, and I do all those things. Duh. And then with no conscious effort, my mind transformed and I couldn’t possibly imagine the little plum inside me as anything but a girl. As well as someone to play catch, watch the game, and collect baseball cards of random players with. Just maybe in pigtails, and with a Hello Kitty mitt in her hand.



I came out about the pregnancy slowly over the next few weeks before my bulging stomach betrayed my secret on its own. As a single woman (who decided to go it on my own before I got too old and missed my chance), I had the element of surprise on my side. So when I quietly named my fantasy baseball team *Two Girls* (in response to a pair of father-son rivals called *Two Guys*), I had to be fairly explicit with the

other managers who the second *Girl* was. It was a far departure from my previous team name, *Inglorious Basterds*, but I figured she’d be responsible for all of my decisions for a while so might as well share in the credit/fault for the team’s fate.

With the sex determined, the number one inquiry from friends, family, and strangers alike was whether I had picked a name. The procrastinator that I am, I couldn’t honestly say that I had until the night before her birth. In the meantime, I was treated to an unending stream of suggestions, some of the most entertaining of which commemorated our nation’s pastime. Classics such as **Ruth** and **Seven** received passing consideration, while more creative entries like **D’ereka Jeter** or **Paula O’Neill Golden** were appreciated for artistic merit alone. Though these weren’t the most outrageous of the lot (happy hours at the local beer garden, for instance, inspired such contenders as **Rogue**, **Nitro**, and my personal favorite, **Hot Ham and Brie**), none quite made it to the finals. However I must admit that **Ruth** earned a second look after a friend recommended adding “Les” as its accompanying middle name. Who’d mess with my baby with a name like that?

With nothing as overt as a name to guide her, I’d have to raise my daughter to be a baseball fan the old fashioned way: shove it down her throat before she was old enough to exhibit freewill and hope she didn’t later rebel. But how would I convince her that while we supported the local team for reasons of proximity, she was really a New Yorker at heart? My friends did their part—the DC ones bought her Nationals onesies and a teeny tiny red and white jersey. The New York crowd stepped up with Yankees outfits, bibs, and blankets. From my Michigan friends, I got a Tigers sun hat from their trip to Comerica, and I have forgiven them





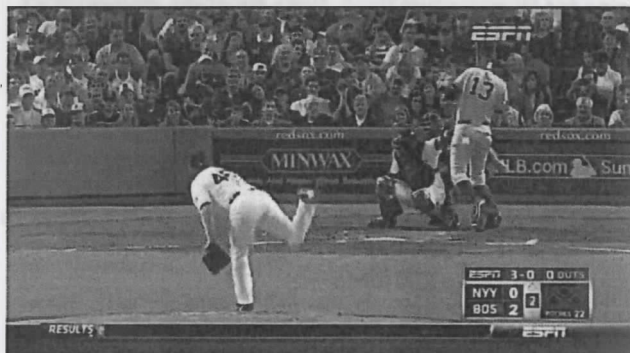
for their blatant attempt to confuse the issue. And then I followed up the paraphernalia with research. Which is funny to me now, as I find I'm not really a researchy type of parent (there just aren't enough hours in the day). But this I made time for. I talked to my siblings, all four of us children of a Mets fan who now root for the Yankees. I interviewed my friends' children, like the ones who could name every batter in Detroit's lineup without ever having lived in the Midwest. In the end I concluded that it would take me monopolizing the TV when the Yankees were playing, pilgrimages back to the motherland for games, and a significant wardrobe budget. All sacrifices I thought I could make.

And then before I knew it, six months had passed since I stood on that street corner and it was time for her to enter the world. **Leah Violet** (named after no one at all) was born Friday, August 16, the first day of a three game Yankees-Red Sox series. Still in the hospital Sunday night, the last of our visitors left and I switched on the TV. The nurse came in to check on us. "Aw, look at you two, snuggling up in bed together!"

I pointed to the screen, "We're watching the game." ESPN was showing the series tiebreaker as their matchup of the week, and it provided no shortage of teachable moments. The nurse left us to our lessons as I educated Leah about the rivalry, the Curse of the

Bambino, and touched on some more recent historical figures like **Bucky Dent**, **Wade Boggs**, **Pedro Martinez**, and **Roger Clemens**. I explained to her that we'd discuss the 2004 ALCS when she was older. Much older.

"That's A-Rod," I narrated, as the batter angrily made his way to first base after getting beamed by Red Sox pitcher **Ryan Dempster**. "They're booing him because of a thing called 'performance enhancing drugs'."



Normally I don't support booing...or Red Sox fans...but in this case, they may have a point." We drifted off to sleep after a 4-run sixth inning that included a payback home run by Rodriguez and put the Yankees in the lead for good. It was the last time I'd stay up that late for the rest of the season. And maybe the next.

As I write this another six months has passed. The phone rings. It's my childhood friend Laura, calling from California to break the news of **Derek Jeter's** announced retirement at the end of the season, scooping emails from both the Yankees and MLB by a solid half hour. It's been almost 20 years since Laura and I stood on the streets of New Year City together watching Jeter celebrate his first World Series ring with a parade along Broadway's "Canyon of Heroes." After all that time, we agree that we owe him a proper send-off. And, perhaps most importantly, we need to get Leah to Yankee Stadium to see him play. We hang up noting the need for early and intensive planning in the weeks ahead.

And so it begins, Leah. So it begins.

Nancy Golden is very excited to finally take advantage of "Fans 12 and under" promotions at the ballpark. Although in retrospect, borrowing a neighbor's kid probably would have been a lot easier.

Invasive Species: How Baseball's Least Popular Brand Scored a Win on the Road, or the Anatomy of a Fad

By Brett Essler

Growing up in the 1970s and '80s, it felt like Buffalo's MLB affections were up for grabs.

Our Triple-A Bisons were the team to watch for prospects of the rust-belt Indians or Pirates, and local politicians had for years convinced us that Buffalo was ripe for an expansion team. For a fix of the majors, most of us tuned into WPIX to watch the Yankees (and disturbing Carvel spots).

Just an hour-and-forty-five minutes up the QEW was Toronto's CNE Stadium, home to the closest MLB team, but it never seemed like Buffalo gave the Blue Jays much love. Sure, we'd pile in the car to catch a game once a summer, but I can't recall a single die-hard Jays fan among my circle of friends.

In 2014, not much has changed. A recent Harris Interactive poll revealed that the Jays are the least popular MLB team in the states. (In Canada, where they are the *only* MLB team, one supposes they rank a bit higher.) I state this data point not to pile on regarding the Jays' historical lack of enthusiasm among fans south of the border, but to contrast empirical market research with facts on the ground.

These days I call upper Manhattan home and my daily A train commute through Harlem and Washington Heights takes me to the heart of Yankees country. On a clear night, I can see the stadium lights from my roof. It is in this seemingly inhospitable environment that Blue Jays caps have begun appearing with alarming frequency amidst a dark blue sea of Yankee swag.

My trips to (capital-S) Subway tend to be transactional, but one day last fall when I noticed that the pickles-pepper-sauce guy was wearing a black Jays cap I could not help but engage. The question of why people with no Jays affiliation would be wearing their caps was making me twitchy.

"Is that a Blue Jays' cap?" I ask, which likely makes me look quite foolish since I obviously know it is.

"Yeah," he responds, glancing past me at the growing line of customers eager to ingest fresh-baked

bread laced with a chemical also found in yoga mats.

"Curious, why are you wearing it?"

"I dunno. The colors, I guess. What do you want on this?"

"Pickles, banana peppers, a little sweet onion sauce...not too much."

Back at the office I gnaw on my sandwich. Unsatisfied in every way.

A few weeks later, my wife and I were strolling through the Village when we came upon the New Era store on East 4th. Out of the corner of my eye I spot a display worthy of a precious artifact—in a glass museum case, lit for maximum sparkle, is a black, gold-logo Jays cap. The brim is stiff as a board; the jay's beady black eye stares listlessly from its climate-controlled habitat, Alpha-male Yankees logos peering down from every direction.

We step inside and I ask the sales clerk, "What is the deal with the Jays' cap trapped in amber?"

"Oh, it's Drake's cap."

My wife: "Who is Drake?"

Me, flexing my pop culture bona fides: "A rapper."

Clerk: "He was on *Degrassi High*, his character was in a wheelchair."

My wife: "Oh, we used to watch that show when we were kids."

Blank stares all around. *Degrassi High* is possibly Canada's most enduring/endeared television export—more well known, though less beloved, than *Hockey Night in Canada*. A Canadian Menudo or *Mickey Mouse Club*, its cast members going on to mainstream fame (Drake) or, occasionally, indie fame (Sarah Polley)

But Drake alone could not be responsible for

what my friend, a journalist and Yankees fanatic, deems nothing more than a passing fad. As my grandfather always said, when New Yorkers will give you no satisfactory answer regarding a pop culture trend, ask a Canadian.

Vijay Setlur, a sports marketing professor at Toronto's York University tells me the appeal of the Jays' caps stems from a variety of factors—the colors, the logo that straddles the line between vintage and modern, and the simple fact that the logo is “an actual image rather than just simply a letter.”

He does not discount any number of other reasons for the brand's popularity outside of the Jays' traditional market—Drake's boosterism, the team's historical relationship to the Dominican community—but feels that, ultimately, “youth are always looking for the latest and the newest trend.”

Setlur relays his own Jay spotting in New York story to back up his thesis.

“A couple of years ago I was on the train going to Jackson Heights, and I noticed that a young kid was wearing the old Blue Jays logo, the one from pre-2012 with the angry looking bird,” he recalls. “I asked him why he's wearing that and I guess he just said he liked the look of it.”

Setlur says the trend is largely an organic, youth-driven cultural phenomenon not initiated by the club in any organized way. His suspicions are confirmed when I speak with **Anthony Partipilo**, the Jays' VP of Marketing and Merchandising.

“The exact reason for it, I don't know,” he says. “It may just be the fact that some people really love the style of that cap. It's just a fashion item, it looks great, it looks terrific, the colors are vibrant, obviously blue and red are very powerful colors, and it may hook up very well with whatever they're wearing.”

Any sales figures beyond the anecdotal are difficult to come by, as the MLB, Blue Jays, and New Era are all privately held and will not disclose data. Partipilo says that sales of Jays' merch “is up very significantly, double digits over what they would've been prior to

2012,” the year the team re-branded with an update of their vintage bird/maple leaf logo after eight years of the aforementioned “angry-looking bird.”

Rennie Gajadhar, from New Era's Canadian headquarters, tells me in an e-mail that the 2013 Diamond Era Jays' cap “was the number one selling Diamond Era cap in all of North America” and that Drake's OVO cap—the one in New Era's Village retail store—“definitely gave the logo and team some worldwide exposure.”

“While the goal of every professional franchise is to grow their global appeal, at the end of the day I don't believe the Jays have been making a concentrated effort in any specific markets outside of Canada, so this must be happening organically,” he says.

“Organic” is the type of success any brand would be delighted to have. The downside? Without beating the brand over the heads of the cap-buying demographics like some other teams, the Blue Jays moment in the sun may be short-lived.

“Once something that's new becomes old and outdated, then people move on to the next thing,” Setlur says. “It's almost like an emerging area of the city—once it becomes more mainstream and people start inhabiting it and visiting it more often, then the tastemakers like to find a new area of the city to kind of cultivate and grow different types of business.”

In New York, the baseball season never really ends. But fall does eventually turn to winter and the stiff-brimmed fitted caps get placed on the shelf until next spring when they very likely will be replaced by another team's snarling regional bird or '70's throwback logo.

It's New Year's Eve and I haven't seen a Jays' cap in maybe two months. Had the blue jays' hawk-like jeer gone silent? Migrated to Boca for off-season rehab?

I sit on a 2 a.m. uptown A with a dozen other bleary-eyed souls. The doors slide open at 145th and across the tracks was a kid slumped on the bench.

Perched on his head: a bright-blue Toronto Blue Jays cap, the only fleck of color in an otherwise dreary, earth-tone subway station.

Goodbye, Kiner's Korner

by Brian Cogan

Ralph Kiner lived a good, long life. He came, seemingly out of nowhere, to become one of the great sluggers of his era. He had to be shut down after ten years in baseball due to a bad back. Today, they would probably build him his own mobile whirlpool to drive back and forth to the stadium. There would be special trainers and a masseuse and even a towel boy (same uniform as a bat boy) whose one job would be to run over with a towel as Kiner got out of his "whirlpool on wheels" to make sure that he was relatively dry by the time he stepped to the plate. Heck, any team today would very likely buy a separate private plane for someone who could consistently hit home runs with a ratio of 7.1 home runs per 100 at bats. In that ten-year span, Kiner averaged over 100 RBIs per season, while leading the National League in slugging parentage in three of his ten years in baseball.

When a lot of hitters' careers are over, that's it. (Had their also been a DH back then, perhaps Kiner would hung on for a few more years and might have hit over 500, or even 600 home runs.) They had their time in baseball. It was fun, they met some pretty girls, had some great poker games on the road, then retired to some sleepy

town to open a bar and tell the same stories over and over again. Then there was Ralph Kiner. Instead of opting for the easy life of local celebrity, Ralph Kiner decided that he would rather tell old war stories on the new medium of television, and so instead of opening "Kiner's Korner," the finest suds place in Alhambra, California (where he was raised), Kiner joined the New York Mets.

The Mets were a colorful team cast of cast-offs, has-beens and players well past their expiration date, and if you really want to experience the '62 Mets in retrospect, go and read **Jimmy Breslin's** *Can't Anyone Here Play this Game?*, which nicely evokes the fans overall sense of bemusement at the new team's futility. Maybe it was because of manager **Casey Stengel's** indefatigable chuckle in the face of yet another game ending strikeout, or even the overall goofiness of some of the early players sheer inability to even come close to playing actual baseball, but deep down, I think that many Mets fans, and many baseball fans in general, give credit where credit is due. The Mets have consistently had the best announcers in baseball, from the original trio of **Kiner, Lindsey Nelson and Bob Murphy**, up to today's troika of goofiness, **Keith and Ron and Gary**. Mets announcers have been light years ahead of most other teams. And for all of that time, up until last season, for over fifty years, Ralph Kiner was a part of it. Even when Bell's Palsy made him slur his words and made his announcing sound as tanked as (supposedly) he and fellow announcers Lindsey Nelson and Bob Murphy got after every game, Kiner never gave up and just before he died, the one thing he had discussed with his family, was the possibility of doing even *more* games the next season.

Enough has been written about Kiner's malapropos, once even calling himself "Ralph Korner" during a game, and you can read the standard obituaries for that, but I'd like to mention one thing that most people left out of their fond remembrances of Kiner. Don't get me wrong, those of us of a certain age loved *Kiner's Korner* almost as much as the actual ballgame. What other team would allow the other teams stars to be interviewed after a Mets game? While that was



certainly one of his legacies, to me, it was how much I associated him with baseball and with the Mets. That for over *five decades* and to millions of people, he was the face and voice of the Mets. Nelson left the Mets in 1978 to announce for the Giants for the next three years.¹

Murphy moved over to be exclusively on radio in 1982 and that left Kiner as the last of the three on television. He was paired with a who's who of announcers afterwards, including **Tim McCarver**, before he started to ease up his workload and let the kids take over, first Keith in 2002 and then Gary and Ron 2006.

Kiner never "retired" per se. He was just phased out gradually. I'm not sure if it is my general paranoia about the bone-headed moves of various Mets owners and tone deaf inconsistency that makes me think that Ralph was a little "old fashioned" for a new game where Sabermetrics demanded that every time a new hitter approached the batter's box, an array of statistics must be thrown at the audience ("Brooks is batting .327 against left handed hitters during Thursday games in April!") as if manna to the fans, wandering starving in a desert of meaningless statistics. My theory is that the Mets management knew that Ralph would lovingly mangle those statistics just as he would mangle the players' names. They thought they would graciously slide him into retirement, bringing him back a few times a year for old time's sake. Maybe it was Kiner's frustration with his speech problem that made him cut back. Either way, it wasn't as jarring as it could have been. We loved Gary and Keith and Ron, but when Ralph was there, the booth had an entirely new dimension, it sounded both livelier, and more focused. I think, even towards the end, the three younger announcers were always a bit in awe of Kiner. Even Keith was usually on his best behavior when Kiner turned up to announce a game.

And now, Ralph Kiner has passed away. There are still players alive from the 1962 team, but as far as I can tell, (there may be an elderly groundskeeper I'm missing) this severs the last line to the 1962 team. It also severs a link to baseball in the 1940s, to players who served in World War II and accepted less money when the team wasn't doing well. The passing of Ralph Kiner will be commemorated by the Mets. There will be a Kiner's Korner in the stadium, as well as a patch for the players to

wear this year. But Ralph is gone and with Ralph, one of the last links to a time when baseball really was the national game. I'm not naive enough to think that no one cared about salary in the old days. But hearing Kiner reminisce, even well into his eighties and nineties, the way he talked about baseball, the game itself, the

hopelessly bloated monstrosity of today's baseball game, just seemed like so much *fun*. If you are reading *Zisk*, you are probably a baseball junkie, hopelessly hooked on a

team (you have yours, I have the Mets) who's owners seem hell bent on squeezing every little bit of fun and spontaneity out of a wonderful game. When I heard Ralph Kiner's voice, I knew that no matter how the Mets did, I was going to enjoy the broadcast. I obviously never heard Ralph when I was at the stadium, cursing the Mets and wondering if I had enough spare change to somehow get nine dollars together for a beer, or maybe a pretzel and a half in a stadium seemingly designed by someone who had never set foot in a major league stadium before. And then I could say to myself, if you were watching this at home, you would be having fun not because it was cheaper, but because Ralph is calling the game. And sitting there, in the cheap seats, at least I knew that Ralph was there, in the booth that I couldn't see from my cheap seats, probably mispronouncing a player's name, and then I realized, it's enough to know that Ralph was present. Here's a real fact about baseball fans, the teams don't make the sport fun, we as *fans*, make things fun ourselves. The teams don't own the team, we do. If that's the fiction I needed to get me through the game again, then Ralph provided that for a long time. We will still have fun at a game, but when I look over at Kiner's Korner, I'll realize that a huge part of what made the game fun for me is gone.

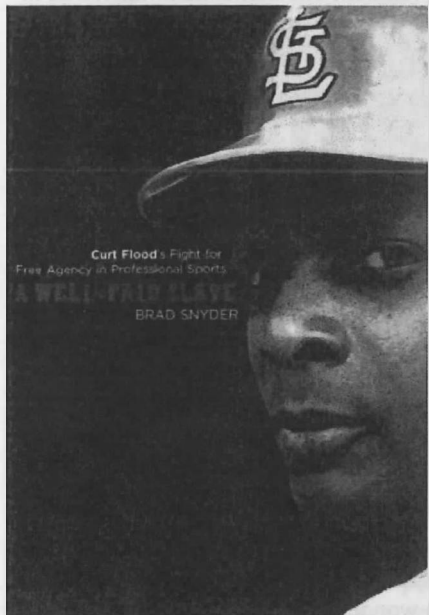


¹ 1962-1978 is an awe-inspiring run as an announcer in today's terms

The Zisk Book Review Corner

by Mark Hughson

A Well-Paid Slave: Curt Flood's Fight For Free Agency In Professional Sports, by Brad Snyder



There was much I learned from this book, but the biggest shocker came when I was halfway through *A Well-Paid Slave* and realized that it was not written by a baseball scribe, but by a lawyer. After that revelation, the style of writing and the overall focus made a lot more sense. The book is *extremely* detailed, (for example, I now

know that pitching coach **Howie Pollet** brought the salad to the Cardinals' 1962 spring training barbeque), and when Flood's case hits the Supreme Court, the actual *game* of baseball takes a back seat to legal procedures and politics.

That being said, the book is not without merit. It consistently shades Flood as a brave (but flawed) hero, balking at a \$100,000 salary to do what he believed was right. The fact that commissioner **Bowie Kuhn** and all the team owners are portrayed as moustache twirling villains, counting their money in the backroom, is satisfying as well. Snyder takes the time to establish Flood as a strong, civil-rights minded individual, highlighting the racism he endured in the minor leagues and his trade from the Reds to the Cardinals in '57, after which he vowed never to be "treated like property" again.

Even though every ballplayer alive today owes their wealth to Flood, he is generally not recognized by them. However, he was a household name in the late '60s, both as a player and as a media/sports tabloid icon, and the star power of the book is pretty solid. He was a good friend of teammate **Bob Gibson**. **Jackie Robinson**

and **Hank Greenberg** testified on his behalf at his trial. During Flood's brief return to the major leagues he butted heads with then-Senators manager **Ted Williams**.

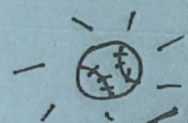
Aside from the fact that I now feel like I'm qualified to practice law in at least three states, the book did pour a lot of baseball info into my brain. I think the biggest lesson involved just how unfair the reserve clause was. In terms of salary, yes, it was unfair, but from a baseball lover's perspective as well—and that includes both the players and the fans. For example, let's say you were a darn good first baseman. You could be a starter on another team for sure. Except, you *aren't* on another team, you're on the Twins with **Harmon Killebrew** or on the Reds with **Frank Robinson**. *Those* guys won't be scratched off the line-up card anytime soon, and you're stuck riding a bench, sometimes during your prime years. But what if you truly are a superstar, and you deserve to be an everyday player? Maybe the manager will trade you to a team that could use you. No, actually, they won't, *and for that exact reason*. Some great baseball players lost their chance to play, not because the players deserved punishment, but because teams did not want superior talent to go to the competition.



It was kind of a harsh reality, and Curt Flood's fight was indeed martyr-like—he more or less became a penniless recluse for the last 20 years of his life. Not a very "sunshine and green grass" baseball book. However, the benefits of what he did are still seen in the game today, and this book recognizes that with a great amount of respect. And detail. Lots and *lots* of detail.

George Herman "Babe" Ruth Jr.

by
Slink
moss



PITCHER

1916

W: 23

L: 12

ERA: 1.75*

COMPLETE
GAMES: 23

SHUT
OUTS: 9*

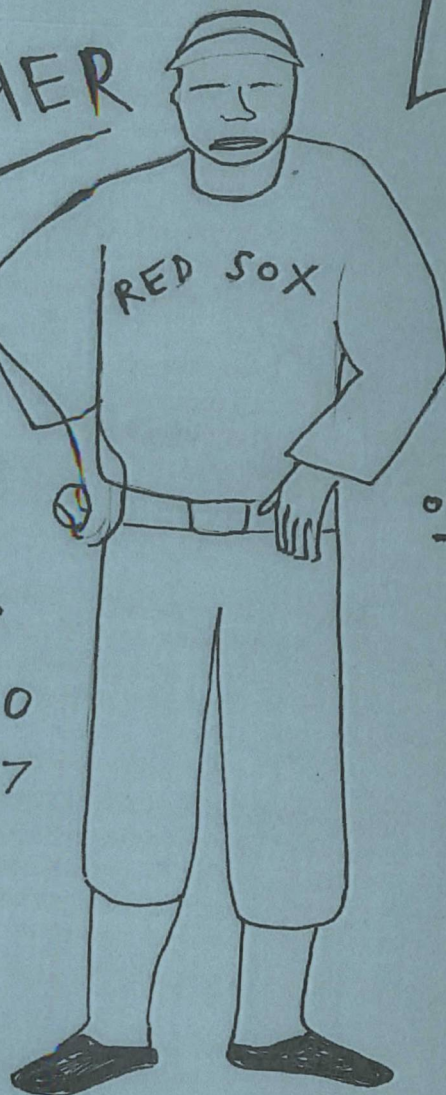
CAREER
PLAYOFFS

W: 3 L: 0

ERA: 0.87

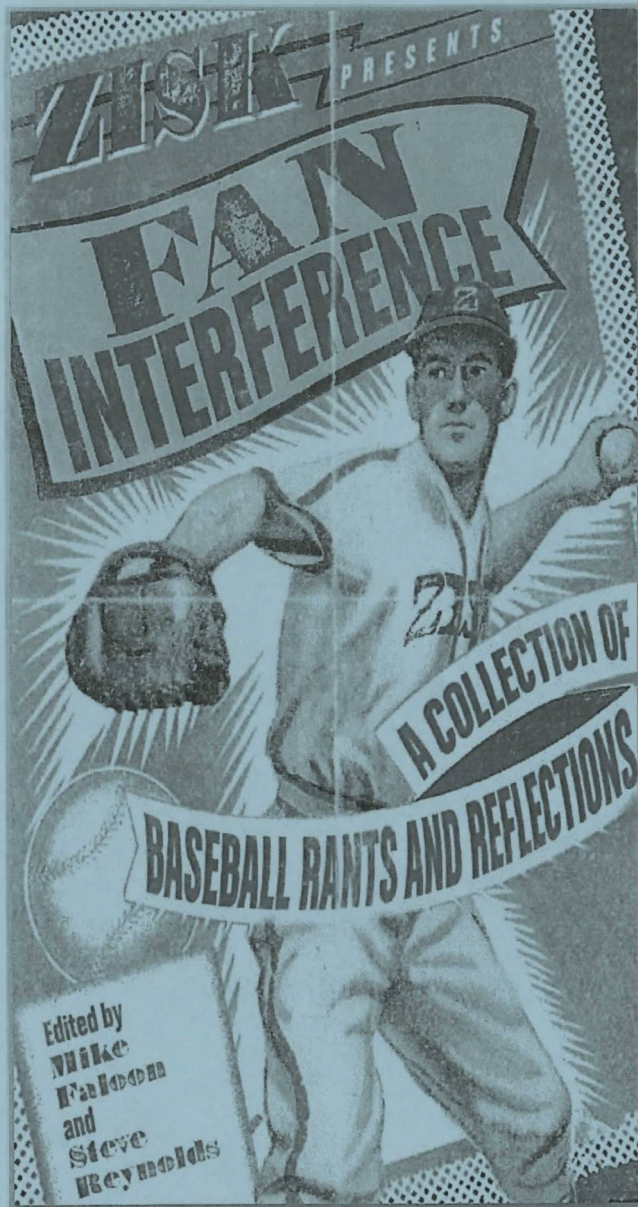
ONE OF

The
Best
EVER!



*League Leader

Zisk
P.O. Box 469
Patterson, NY 12563



Mike Faloon and Steve Reynolds present *Fan Interference: A Collection of Baseball Rants and Reflections* from the pages of Zisk.

This anthology, fourteen years in the making, is filled with some of the funniest and most thought-provoking fan reflections on America's Pastime.

Includes an introduction from Josh Wilker (*Cardboard Gods*) and over 45 features from the Zisk archives as well as new material.

"Zisk is a zine for those who love baseball for its charm, history and eccentricities and not merely as something to play a fantasy league around. It's for the true fans who populate the upper deck, not the party animals in the bleachers." —*Chicago Tribune*

"Even though I don't like baseball, this well written baseball zine was strangely appealing. If you thought trekkies were fanatical, try baseball nerds on for size." —*Quimbys*

"Baseball is the most important thing in the world. It's also completely meaningless in the grand scheme of life. These guys recognize that those two philosophies can co-exist in the human brain, which makes their writing a truly electric, and all too rare, jolt to the synapses." —Deborah Sprague, *Variety*

Available now from Blue Cubicle Press. Order at bluecubiclepress.com/zisk.htm