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*Fantasy Expert: The Outtakes*

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# FANTASY EXPERT: The Outtakes

By Ron Shandler

My journey in creating *Fantasy Expert* began many years before I even thought to write such a book. I had been collecting artifacts from the decades-long experience of growing up in this burgeoning cottage industry and figured I might want to use them one day.

I saved every *Sports* (née *Baseball*) *Weekly* Leviathan issue from the Clinton administration through the pandemic. I had newspaper and magazine articles from almost everywhere that I tore out and kept for no reason I can recall. I had every writer application, emails going back nearly thirty years, and every article I ever wrote for anyone.

My initial thought was to create a scrapbook. I expected the results would be a book teeming with everything from ancient newspaper clippings to images of long-defunct company logos. It would be a museum. But Triumph Books reminded me about the effort that would have been required to get permissions to use all this material, and so I had to put much of my hoardings back into storage.

The first final version of the manuscript clocked in at over 167,000 words, not including pictures. That would have bulked up *Fantasy Expert* to 500 pages, maybe more. Triumph's first condition upon

my signing on was that I had to get the manuscript down to 120,000 words.

This was not an easy task. I had to make tough decisions about which people and events were less important. Some interesting narratives had to be cut down to a sentence or two. Some people and their origin stories had to be cut completely. And the photos, oh, the photos! What ended up in the book was a fraction of what I had accumulated. It was like having to play God with history and I did not like it one bit. So, I decided to save the casualties and compile most of them into a separate supplemental book. That's what you're reading.

All right, yes, not a book; more of a PDF.

Okay, *just* a PDF.

Still, I think you'll enjoy this. I'll go chapter by chapter and occasionally add some context to each outtake to provide a little perspective (in italics). I'll also restore some of the photos and images cut from the published book.

Enjoy.

*CAVEAT: If you have purchased this PDF without reading the book, the following will appear disjointed and perhaps confusing. Outtakes typically are. Fair warning.*

## Chapter 1: Backstory

*As I noted in the book, if you are not interested in details about the first 27 years of my life, feel free to skip ahead to the next chapters.*

### Little league

My father signed me up for Little League because that's what fathers are supposed to do. The league was run by the local electricians union so all the teams were named after electrical terms. There were the Ohms, the Amps and the Circuits. My team was the Watts.

One of my cousins bequeathed me an oversized fossilized mitt that was dead weight in my tiny hands. The coach stuck me behind the plate where I could do the least damage. I had no arm and no clue. Did I ever catch a single pitched ball? I don't think I ever did. All I remember is that the team kept winning in spite of me. What else I remember... I'd have to bring \$2 to every game because the coach took the team out for milkshakes afterward and I didn't want to miss out.

I was eight; there were priorities.

So, the Little League season ended, and my Watts won the championship. (Yes, I kept the trophy; do you have a problem with that?) My parents came to the post-season celebration and found out that those milkshake outings were only after each win and the coach was pocketing my \$2 each time the team lost. There were words.

The things you remember.

### Editor-in-chief, SUNY Farmingdale "Rambler"

Running a newspaper was the first time I had ever been in charge of anything, and I reveled in the power. I had no idea what I was doing, but I learned quickly,

assembling a staff of primarily freshmen to cover each department. My associate editor was Phil Schiliro<sup>1</sup>. My spirit guide was Monty Python. Somehow, someway, we managed to publish a newspaper every other week.

It didn't take long for me to come to blows with athletes again. At student government election time, the Athletics Department stacked the ballot with jock candidates. The coaches were telling the players that they would have to pay for their own equipment if their candidates didn't get voted in, so they had to do all they could to stuff the ballot box.

I witnessed first-hand players electioneering at the polls, hovering around the voting area, handing out flyers on official college stationery that listed only the athlete candidates. I also watched as a student was denied access to a polling booth because he couldn't produce a valid school ID. He said, "If I don't vote, the coach won't let me play."

When the student government president took action against the athlete candidates, I became a key witness, and took more heat with another loud banner headline:

**ELEVEN CANDIDATES DISQUALIFIED  
FROM ELECTION  
DRASTIC ACTIONS BY S.G.A.  
HALT VOTE MANIPULATION SCHEME**

Somehow, I had a knack for getting people pissed off at me.

I wasn't a student journalist 24/7. Thanks to a doctored student ID card that granted campus pub access to the still-underaged me, the rest of my sophomore year was a blur. I had a psycho roommate who reported one drunken escapade to campus security, claiming that he saved my life when I tried to jump out of our dorm's 4th floor window. In response, I slept with his girlfriend.

All in all, it was your typical college experience.

### More on my early work experiences

During high school, college, and summers, I held a wide variety of jobs:

- Sold candy door-to-door
- Managed a manufacturing stockroom
- Wrote movie reviews for a Korean newspaper
- Sandblasted aircraft tail assemblies
- Wrote radio spots for local restaurants
- Played at a piano bar



**The Watts win! I'm still waiting for a call from Cooperstown**

<sup>1</sup> Just name dropping here. In 2007, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) was at the forefront of congressional hearings on the use of steroids/HGH in Major League Baseball. His chief of staff—and the person who got him involved in the PED investigation—was Phil Schiliro, who then went on to a major role in the Obama administration. I haven't spoken to Phil now, in about, oh... probably 45 years.



Yeah, I did all that.

You'd think I would have found more newspaper jobs, but I had one ridiculous interview that soured me on the local journalistic scene. I don't recall which weekly paper it was—it might have been in Huntington—but I met with the publisher, who also was a bit of a power broker on Long Island. After scanning my resume for about 10 seconds, he asked, "Why are you here? You're not qualified for a writing job. Your whole resume is about business experience. Either you're an analytical person or a creative person—you can't be both." I coughed out a knee-jerk "Seriously?" to which he pointed to the door. Thinking back on that experience, I keep laughing that I was dissed by the King of Long Island Weekly Newspapers.

As for my post-college career, my father had groomed me to become a corporate drone with a regular 9-to-5 paycheck, 40 years with a single company, and a comfortable pension. Like him. It was also pre-determined that I would go on for my master's degree, but I landed a job a few weeks after graduation, working for a sporting goods distributor as Assistant Sales Administrator. (My experience at the sporting goods company is detailed in the book.) So, when I was accepted to MBA programs at both Syracuse University and Bernard Baruch College in Manhattan, I had a decision to make.

We all face major decision points in our lives, moments that essentially set our life on a specific course. This was it for me. I chose the local school so I could keep the local job. However, if I had even the slightest inkling back then what the subsequent six months would bring, I'd have definitely chosen Syracuse. The program was a better fit for me, and I regretted not going for years afterward... except that the path I did take led me to my future wife.

So, what happened that fall?

Every Wednesday, I took the Long Island Railroad into Manhattan and subways downtown for four hours of classes. I'd leave work early at 3:30pm and get home well past midnight. That got old quickly, so Baruch was a bust. I transferred back to Hofstra in the spring and took home an MBA in Management Science three years later.

The best corporate job I ever had? That's easy.

I worked for Doubleday & Company when Nelson

Doubleday bought the Mets. It was the early 1980s and the team was terrible, so employees got to go to home games for free. All I'd have to do was call Human Resources by 2:00 PM and a pair of box seat tickets behind the Mets dugout would be waiting for me at Will Call that night. I must have gone to 30 games each summer during my three years there.

The job wasn't half bad either.

## My music background

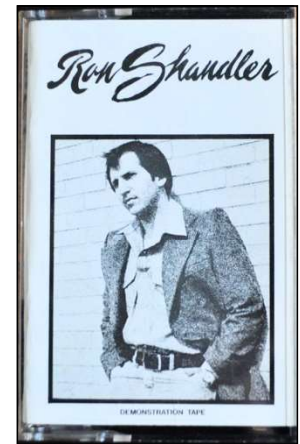
*I note my first entrepreneurial effort—The Song-Rite Company—in the book, but my involvement in music has a longer backstory.*

My father spent his twenties as a Borscht Belt bandleader, so he pushed me into piano lessons when I was six. For the next eight years, I suffered through about a half dozen classical music teachers; my father kept firing them whenever he thought they had outlived their usefulness. I hated it all. Six years in, my teacher arranged for me to audition for entry into a Julliard prep school, which I aced. But my father, focusing only on the cost, said to me, "If you go, you'll have to practice piano seven hours a day—is that what you want?"

I was 12. Hell no.

After my sister died, I taught myself some contemporary theory and found a bit of solace on the keyboard. By college, I was writing original songs; after graduation, I attended workshops in Manhattan with some professional songwriters and performed at various of showcases.

I started sending out demo tapes to music publishers and record companies, and successfully filled a loose-leaf binder full of rejection letters. (My feeble attempt at a "52nd Street" Billy Joel persona probably didn't help.) Songwriting made me happy, but it still wasn't enough. I needed something I could control, take ownership of and succeed at.



**My feeble attempt at a "52nd Street" Billy Joel persona probably didn't help**

## Chapter 2: The Founders

*Admittedly, the original manuscript went into a lot more detail about our founders than it probably needed to. Regardless, it is an interesting narrative...*

### Bill James Baseball Abstract

The Table of Contents included a laundry list of statistics you could easily find online today. But in the pre-internet Mesozoic Era, James had to compile them manually, from boxscores and shale deposits.

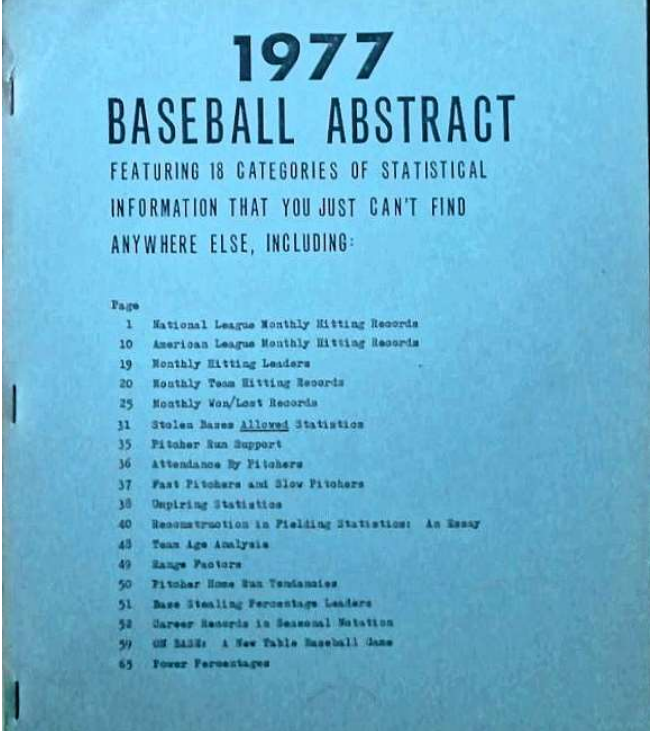
- Hitting records by month
- Pitcher run support
- Pitcher home run tendencies
- Team age analysis
- Range factors
- Base stealing percentage leaders
- Stolen bases allowed (underline was his)
- Umpire statistics

This first effort began transforming baseball thinking, which was a relatively big deal for a relatively small group of followers. Some followers formed the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR); James then dubbed his work “sabermetrics.” His formal definition was “the mathematical and statistical analysis of baseball records,” but the scope would expand significantly over time. As for the creation of this new term, James noted: “Linguistic purists are appalled that I would form a word by cobbling together a Greek suffix and an American acronym, but since I have even less use for traditional linguistics than for traditional sportswriting, I persist.” He was a nonconformist from the very beginning.

### Elias Baseball Analyst

The big banner that the *Elias Baseball Analyst* rode into town on was, as you might guess—their data’s accuracy. They made that perfectly clear in the Introduction to the inaugural edition:

“Our primary aim is to present information that is totally accurate. To ensure accuracy, Elias receives reports from its correspondents at every major-league game. It checks the accuracy of these reports and compares their contents with other reports of the games, such as those provided by the wire services... At this point, the verified reports are coded for entry into a computer system specially designed for the project. The system is fortified with hundreds of checkpoints, which, for each of the more than 2000 games in a major-league season, verify the accuracy of the coding and computer input. At the end of the season, the material is rechecked one more time to



**1977**  
**BASEBALL ABSTRACT**  
FEATURING 18 CATEGORIES OF STATISTICAL  
INFORMATION THAT YOU JUST CAN'T FIND  
ANYWHERE ELSE, INCLUDING:

| Page |   |
|------|---|
| 1    | National League Monthly Hitting Records         |
| 10   | American League Monthly Hitting Records         |
| 19   | Monthly Hitting Leaders                         |
| 20   | Monthly Team Hitting Records                    |
| 25   | Monthly Win/Loss Records                        |
| 31   | Stolen Bases <u>Allowed</u> Statistics          |
| 35   | Pitcher Run Support                             |
| 36   | Attendance By Pitchers                          |
| 37   | Fast Pitchers and Slow Pitchers                 |
| 38   | Umpiring Statistics                             |
| 40   | Reconstruction in Fielding Statistics: An Essay |
| 43   | Team Age Analysis                               |
| 49   | Range Factors                                   |
| 50   | Pitcher Home Run Tendencies                     |
| 51   | Base Stealing Percentage Leaders                |
| 52   | Career Records in Seasonal Notation             |
| 59   | OH BILLS: A New Table Baseball Game             |
| 65   | Power Percentages                               |

Bill James' *Baseball Abstract* had a Table of Contents with a laundry list of statistics you could easily find online today

take care of changes in scoring decisions.”

Never ask how the sausage is made.

That Introduction also made no secret of who the book was taking a swipe at:

“We believe (this book) contains the most far-reaching analysis of major league baseball ever presented between two covers.... We have consciously avoided the practice of conducting algebraic wrestling matches with the numbers. You will find in this book no arcane formulas with strange-sounding acronymic names. If you want to know the product of George Brett's hits plus walks minus caught stealing, multiplied by his total bases times fifty-five hundredths of his stolen bases, all of that divided by his total of at bats plus walks, you must look elsewhere.”

Elias believed that such an arcane calculation had no business being in a discussion of “important” analysis. Why would anyone be interested in something so convoluted, especially when *EBA* offered such clean, accurate data? For those who did choose to look “elsewhere,” Elias was just pointing them to Bill

James' Run Created formula.

But go ahead and point! *EBA*'s debut effort consisted of just troves of their stats—standard metrics with runners on base versus bases empty, home vs. road, grass vs. turf and lefties vs. righties—and team-centered insights driven by those stats. They did make one lone effort at some original analytical research. It was an essay entitled, “Clutch Hitters—They Do Exist.”

Um... no, they don't.

*EBA* kept beefing up their charts and adding analysis each year. Eventually, it evolved into more of a pale *Abstract* rip-off. As one blogger described it, “They wrote up their stupid articles in a preening, self-congratulatory manner as if they believed that what they were doing put the hammer on Bill James. There was a ‘Take that, Bill James’ attitude throughout.”

James was equally blunt. He said that Elias had “ripped off my methods and my research so closely that many passages fall just short of plagiarism.” Seymour Siwoff defended: “There isn't a shred of truth in anything he says. I don't have any malicious feelings toward him; I don't know him, I never met him. We are the custodian of the statistics, and our reputation speaks for itself.”

Custodian of the statistics? Wow. For the record, if I am ever granted the power to be the custodian of just

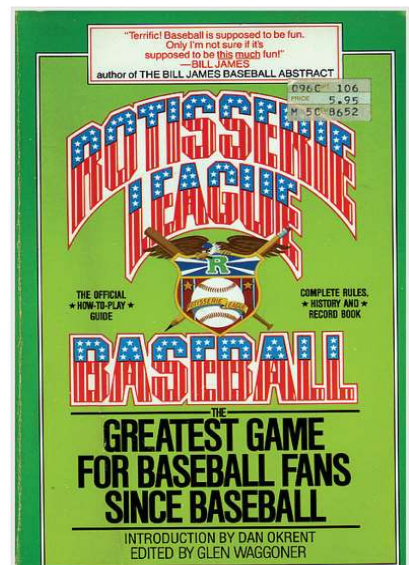
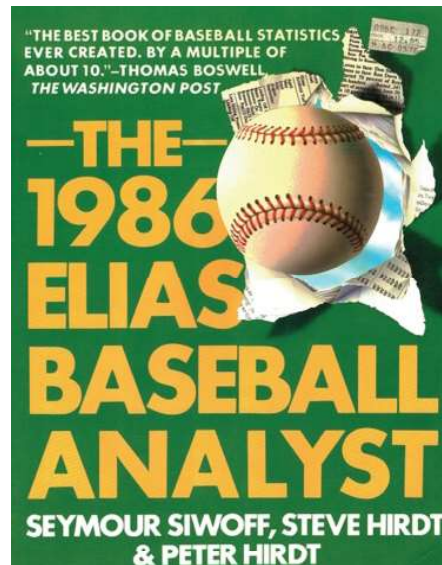
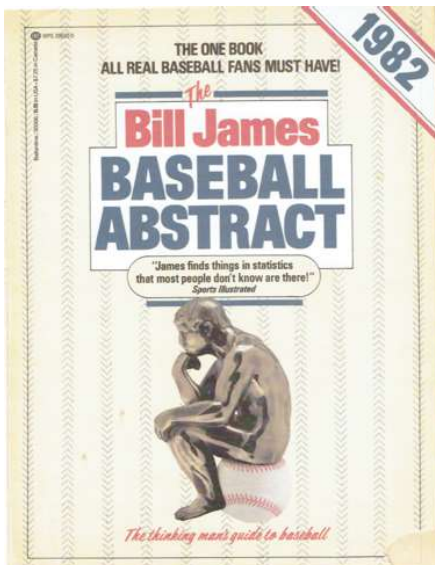
one statistic, I'd choose 755 home runs.

James hung up his *Abstract* spikes in the 1988 edition, saying good-bye in a final “Breaking the Wand” essay. There were reasons for him to sign off as “Sabermetrician, Retired.” On the effect that becoming a mass-market publication had on his once-intimate audience, James wrote:

“If there has been a growth in the access to and understanding of meaningful baseball statistics, there has been an unchecked explosion in access to meaningless ones. The public is just endlessly fascinated by any baseball statistics you can find, without regard to whether it means anything.”

Like Thomas Boswell's Total Average, apparently. According to Michael Lewis in *Moneyball*, James classified Boswell's formula as one of those “meaningless” stats. James said, “The world needs another offensive rating like Custer needed more Indians. What we really need is for the amateurs to clear the floor.” Boswell effectively responded to that slight with, “*The Elias Baseball Analyst* is the best book of baseball statistics ever created. By a multiple of about 10. It revolutionizes baseball stats and obliterates all competition.”

It took about five seconds for Elias to put the quote on the cover of their next book.



James's 1982 *Baseball Abstract* was his first mass-market edition: after self-publishing for five years. He would write six more annual editions; the 1986 *Elias Baseball Analyst* positioned itself as a competitor to James's work and the 'original green Rotisserie Book' was the bible that changed the fantasy baseball world



## Chapter 3: Civil War

### More on the American Dream League's rule changes

One of the primary instigators of rule changes was Hugh Sweeny. A Jersey City prosecutor, he once described his job as “I put people in jail every day for the same things I do every night.” When Sweeny joined the ADL, he started looking for loopholes in the constitution. He may have been the first to orchestrate dump trades—selling off his high-priced talent for prospects. He once traded a player under the condition that the player would be traded back to him before the following season. His annual gambits forced the ADL to institute modifications and addendums that bloated the constitution.

But there was one gambit that put Sweeny on the map. He was the first to draft a team that targeted only high-average speedsters and the best pitching staff money could buy, ignoring home runs and RBIs in the process. The tactic proved to be successful and came to be known as the “Sweeney Plan” (alternative spelling and all).

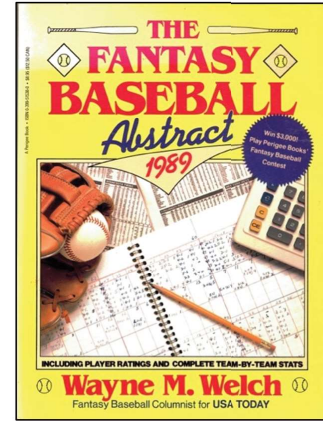
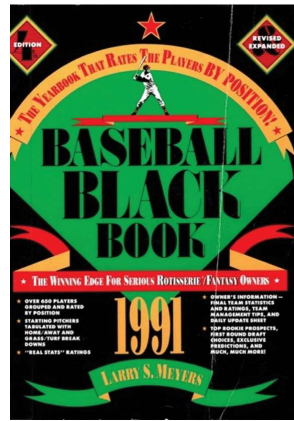
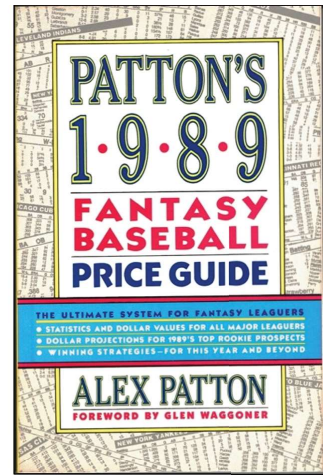
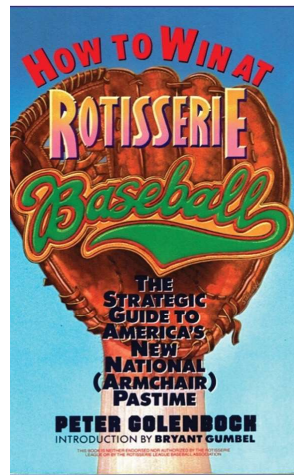
“All the (rule) changes were new and foreign to the Originators, who had distanced themselves from us,” (Bruce) Buschel said. “But it was another incident that sealed our adversarial fates.”

There were hints of the rift in the first edition of the Roto Bible. Tucked away on page 151, the first American League version of Rotisserie merited just a single passing mention:

“The American Dream League in New York consists of a contentious gaggle of whiners and complainers whose only claim to fame is a doubleheader softball victory over the Original Rotissarians. The twin bill took place in Shea Stadium back in strike-torn 1981 on the date the All-Star Game was originally to have been played and attracted a boisterous crowd of at least 35 (0 paid).”

The members of the ADL do recall that doubleheader fondly. It took place before everything went off the rails, and they decided to make the game an annual event. A year later, after the original rift and the infusion of new ADL blood, there was an expectation that this would still be a friendly game. But an incident marred the follow-up contest. Buschel recalled:

“The game was on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. One of our newbies, Hugh Sweeny, stretched a single into a double and in doing so plowed into their second baseman, Glenn Waggoner. Sweeny was a skinny long-distance runner. Waggoner was a



Images cut from Chapter 3 (clockwise from top left): Peter Golenbock's *How to Win at Rotisserie League Baseball* (1987); Alex Patton's *Fantasy Baseball Price Guide* (1989), an early effort to rationalize fantasy player pricing; Wayne Welch's *The Fantasy Baseball Abstract* (1989); and Larry S. Meyers' *Baseball Black Book* (1991)

mountain of a man. A heated rhubarb ensued.”

Taking a player out with a slide was simply uncalled for in a friendly game. But Sweeny claimed he was trying to run from first to third; Waggoner was standing on second base “daydreaming” and blocking his path. “Anybody who has ever played knows that you shouldn’t do that,” Sweeny said. “And anybody who has grown up in the years of Eddie Stanky or Jimmy Piersall knows that when someone is standing in your way, you knock ‘em over.”

Apparently, Waggoner was hurt; the Founders were irate. There would be no more peace after that.

And so, in the little green Roto Bible, the ADL was barely mentioned, even though it was legitimately the first American League Rotisserie competition. The Junior League got all the ink instead. For its 11-year run, the Roto Bible relegated the rogue ADL to just a footnote, even after they started tweaking the rules themselves.



## Chapter 4: The Baseball Association of the Granite State

### More background on the genesis of HAGS

It took only a few months to realize that my decision to move from New York to New Hampshire in 1984 might have been a bit impulsive. I was working in a bank at a job I hated. Everything in the state closed at 9:00 PM. I was planning a wedding to a woman I had been dating for less than six months.

And the winters were interminable. The snow would show up by Thanksgiving and would blanket everything well past Opening Day. I'd come to learn that there were only two seasons in New Hampshire—winter, and winter-is-coming.

When the warm weather finally arrived, I was missing my Long Island softball pals. Unable to make many friends quickly, my geekdom took over and I found myself playing APBA solitaire, taking old player cards and matching their skills to those of my beer buddies. I crossed out Dave Kingman's name and wrote in "Richard Grossman," the power-hitting first baseman who struck out a lot. Ron Guidry became "Dave Heller," the lefty pitcher I could never hit. In an attempt at some realism, I became second baseman Doug Flynn.

These were desperate times.

After discovering the Rotisserie League Baseball book, Walter and I created the Hockey Association of the Granite State (HAGS). There was no mention that the Rotisserie concept could be transferred to another sport, so we were left to our collective imaginations to devise rules for an NHL game. Other than a few typos, I think we did pretty well (see excerpt from our first Constitution, below).

### Some data for perspective and context

As a group, BAGS was pretty typical for the demographic back then. Lee Berryman, a financial consultant who self-published a ratings book for several years in the late 1980s, did a survey of his readers, and we mostly fit the profile. He found that 90 percent of players worked in a white-collar profession, 85 percent attained at least a bachelor's degree and most leagues' budgets were far less than \$260. His \$53,000 mean salary was high for our league, which was populated mostly by high school teachers, but otherwise we fell in line.

| Service                                  | #Lgs |      |         |
|--|------|------|---------|
| Notes                                    | 1989 | 1990 | Cost/Tm |
| North Shore Software                     | 200  | 300  | \$35    |
| <i>America's largest stat service</i>    |      |      |         |
| Roti-Stats                               | 205  | 250  | \$60    |
| <i>America's second largest service</i>  |      |      |         |
| Heath Research                           | 177  | 220  | \$60    |
| <i>Most robust report offerings</i>      |      |      |         |
| All Star Stats                           | 34   | 195  | \$45    |
| <i>\$55 for mixed leagues</i>            |      |      |         |
| Rotisserie League Stats                  | 95   | 140  | \$60    |
| <i>Founding Fathers official service</i> |      |      |         |
| Stats, Inc.                              | 50   | 100  | \$85    |
| <i>Mixed leagues allowed</i>             |      |      |         |
| FASTats                                  | 87   | 100  | \$60    |
| <i>24-hour 800# for roster moves</i>     |      |      |         |
| SR Stats                                 | 4    | 40   | \$30    |
| <i>Unlimited transactions</i>            |      |      |         |
| Simulated Sports Services                | 30   | 37   | \$90    |
| <i>Instant results hotline</i>           |      |      |         |

It was beyond the reach of our wallets to afford a stat service. Stat-keeping for a 12-team league cost from \$360 to \$1,080. These were the only companies in 1990; by 1994 there were more than 60. (Data from *Fantasy Baseball* magazine):

- Each team will consist of 20 players:  
6 defensemen  
4 centers  
4 right wingers  
4 left wingers  
2 goaltenders

- Players are obtained by open bid at the H.A.G.S. auction. Bids start at .25¢ per player and may be increased in .25¢ increments. The final bid of a player will equal that player's salary. MAXIMUM team salary will not exceed \$25.00 (franchise entry fee).

- H.A.G.S. teams are rated on their cumulative player performance in the following statistical categories:  
1- total points (goals & assists)  
2- plus/minus (or +/- ) point totals  
3- penalty minutes (H.A.G.S. teams hate goons)  
4- goals against average  
5- shut-outs  
6- bonus points

In each of the first five categories, teams are rated from first to last. (First getting the most points, etc.)

- BONUS POINTS. As everyone knows, hockey is 10% skill and 90% heart and soul. (unless you are an Edmonton fan). The H.A.G.S. reward individual players for giving that extra effort. Therefore, points will be awarded for the following:

scoring a penalty shot = 2 pts.  
blocking a penalty shot = 2 pts.  
goaltender receiving an assist = 1 pt.  
goaltender getting a goal = 5 pts.  
getting voted player of the week = 1 pt.  
player being voted All-Star M.V.P. = 3 pts.  
player being selected to start the All-Star Game = 2 pts.  
player playing in the All-Star Game = 1 pt.

Before the Baseball Association of the Granite State, there was a Roto hockey league with a detailed Constitution (and a few handwritten amendments)

# They're the teams of their dreams

Fantasy baseball is name of the game in the Granite State Rotisserie League

By Bob Reinert  
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

**M**ERRIMACK - It has the look and feel of a Friday night poker game. But for many it's as much a sign of spring as the call to "play ball" on baseball's opening day.

It's draft day, a tradition for Rotisserie League members all over the country who gather to select major league players on whose real-life statistics they will pin their teams' fortunes over the course of the summer.

So when the members of the Baseball Association of the Granite State met for their sixth annual draft in Rob Theriaque's study last Sunday, they waded through a sea of rosters, statistics and baseball yearbooks rather than cards and poker chips.

"It makes the game a lot more fun for me," said Theriaque. "You appreciate the game. You appreciate the players. It gives you a stake in a whole different manner."

previous year by paying in what it spent to acquire that player plus a 20 percent salary increase. The remaining players go back in the pool and are up for auction.

Each team gets five reserves who can be called up during the season. In addition, three minor leaguers are chosen. If they are brought up to the major leagues in reality, they are eligible for use in BAGS.

Each BAGS team is allowed to make a limited number of roster moves during the season.

"I like to stack up on pitchers," said Shandler with good reason: He established a dubious BAGS record by having seven players on the disabled list at one time last year. In recognition of the feat, his empathetic fellow members presented Shandler with a cake topped by tiny players wrapped in bandages.

"If I didn't have all those injuries last year, I would have been in the thick of it," muttered Shandler of last year's pennant race, won minus



Rotisserie League members (left to right) Ron Shandler, Tom Cecere, Walt Heinhold, Mark Johnson and Neil Claffey.

The Boston Globe reported on draft day for the Baseball Association of the Granite State (BAGS), including co-founder Ron Shandler (left)

6C • TUESDAY, AUGUST 16, 1994 • USA TODAY

## AMERICAN LEAGUE TEAM-BY-TEAM

### BALTIMORE ORIOLES

| Batting    | BA   | SLG  | OB  | G   | AB  | R  | H   | TB  | 2B      | 3B  | HR | RBI | BB | SO | SB | CS | E |
|------------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|---------|-----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|---|
| Palmeiro   | 319  | 550  | 392 | 111 | 436 | 82 | 139 | 240 | 32      | 0   | 23 | 76  | 54 | 63 | 7  | 3  | 4 |
| Ripken     | 315  | 459  | 364 | 112 | 444 | 71 | 140 | 204 | 19      | 3   | 13 | 75  | 32 | 41 | 1  | 0  | 7 |
| Hammonds   | 296  | 480  | 339 | 68  | 250 | 45 | 74  | 120 | 18      | 2   | 8  | 31  | 17 | 39 | 5  | 0  | 6 |
| Baines     | 293  | 465  | 356 | 84  | 326 | 44 | 96  | 158 | 12      | 1   | 16 | 54  | 30 | 49 | 7  | 0  | 0 |
| D. Smith   | 281  | 459  | 324 | 73  | 196 | 31 | 55  | 90  | 7       | 2   | 8  | 30  | 12 | 37 | 2  | 4  | 7 |
| Gomez      | 274  | 502  | 366 | 84  | 285 | 46 | 78  | 143 | 20      | 0   | 15 | 56  | 41 | 55 | 0  | 0  | 5 |
| Anderson   | 263  | 419  | 356 | 111 | 453 | 78 | 119 | 190 | 25      | 1   | 12 | 57  | 75 | 31 | 1  | 1  | 1 |
| McLemore   | 257  | 321  | 354 | 104 | 343 | 44 | 88  | 110 | 11      | 1   | 3  | 29  | 51 | 50 | 20 | 5  | 9 |
| Sabo       | 256  | 465  | 320 | 68  | 258 | 41 | 66  | 120 | 15      | 3   | 11 | 42  | 20 | 38 | 1  | 1  | 4 |
| Holles     | 247  | 449  | 371 | 99  | 332 | 41 | 92  | 149 | 10      | 0   | 19 | 53  | 63 | 73 | 2  | 0  | 7 |
| Hullett    | 228  | 337  | 314 | 36  | 92  | 11 | 21  | 31  | 2       | 1   | 2  | 15  | 12 | 24 | 0  | 0  | 3 |
| Tackett    | 226  | 434  | 317 | 26  | 53  | 5  | 12  | 23  | 3       | 1   | 2  | 9   | 5  | 13 | 0  | 0  | 2 |
| Lo Smith   | 203  | 254  | 333 | 35  | 56  | 13 | 12  | 15  | 0       | 0   | 2  | 11  | 18 | 1  | 0  | 0  | 0 |
| Deveraux   | 203  | 332  | 256 | 85  | 301 | 35 | 61  | 100 | 8       | 2   | 9  | 33  | 22 | 72 | 1  | 0  | 1 |
| Pitching   | W-L  | ERA  | G   | GS  | CG  | GF | Sho | SV  | IP      | H   | R  | ER  | HR | BB | SO | CS | E |
| Bentz      | 0-0  | 0.90 | 3   | 0   | 0   | 0  | 1   | 0   | 10      | 8   | 1  | 1   | 0  | 4  | 14 |    |   |
| Eichhorn   | 6-5  | 2.15 | 43  | 0   | 0   | 0  | 0   | 1   | 71      | 62  | 19 | 17  | 1  | 19 | 35 |    |   |
| Mussina    | 15-5 | 3.06 | 24  | 24  | 3   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 176 1/3 | 163 | 83 | 90  | 19 | 42 | 99 |    |   |
| La. Smith  | 1-4  | 3.29 | 41  | 0   | 0   | 20 | 0   | 0   | 38 1/3  | 36  | 19 | 14  | 6  | 11 | 42 |    |   |
| Williamson | 3-1  | 4.01 | 28  | 2   | 0   | 4  | 0   | 1   | 67 1/3  | 75  | 33 | 30  | 9  | 17 | 28 |    |   |
| McDonald   | 14-7 | 4.06 | 24  | 24  | 0   | 0  | 0   | 1   | 157 1/3 | 151 | 75 | 71  | 14 | 54 | 94 |    |   |
| Moyer      | 6-7  | 5.77 | 23  | 0   | 0   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 149     | 158 | 81 | 79  | 14 | 38 | 87 |    |   |
| Fernandez  | 6-6  | 5.15 | 19  | 19  | 2   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 115 1/3 | 109 | 66 | 66  | 27 | 46 | 95 |    |   |
| Mits       | 3-3  | 5.16 | 47  | 0   | 0   | 16 | 0   | 2   | 45 1/3  | 43  | 26 | 26  | 7  | 24 | 44 |    |   |
| Botton     | 1-2  | 5.40 | 22  | 0   | 0   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 23 1/3  | 29  | 15 | 14  | 3  | 13 | 12 |    |   |
| Rhodes     | 3-5  | 5.81 | 10  | 10  | 3   | 0  | 2   | 0   | 52 2/3  | 51  | 34 | 34  | 8  | 30 | 47 |    |   |
| Phelps     | 1-0  | 6.64 | 38  | 0   | 0   | 10 | 0   | 0   | 20 1/3  | 32  | 15 | 15  | 4  | 11 | 18 |    |   |

### BOSTON RED SOX

| Batting     | BA  | SLG  | OB  | G   | AB  | R  | H   | TB  | 2B      | 3B  | HR | RBI | BB | SO  | SB  | CS | E  |
|-------------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|---------|-----|----|-----|----|-----|-----|----|----|
| Valentin    | 316 | 505  | 400 | 84  | 301 | 53 | 95  | 152 | 26      | 2   | 9  | 49  | 42 | 38  | 3   | 1  | 8  |
| Vaughn      | 310 | 576  | 408 | 111 | 394 | 65 | 122 | 227 | 25      | 1   | 26 | 82  | 57 | 112 | 4   | 10 | 0  |
| Rodriguez   | 287 | 397  | 330 | 57  | 174 | 15 | 50  | 69  | 14      | 1   | 13 | 13  | 1  | 1   | 0   | 0  | 0  |
| Coppage     | 282 | 453  | 333 | 104 | 369 | 49 | 104 | 167 | 16      | 4   | 13 | 53  | 30 | 65  | 0   | 3  | 16 |
| Nashring    | 276 | 414  | 345 | 80  | 297 | 41 | 82  | 123 | 18      | 1   | 0  | 42  | 30 | 56  | 2   | 3  | 6  |
| Nixon       | 274 | 317  | 360 | 103 | 388 | 60 | 109 | 128 | 15      | 1   | 0  | 26  | 55 | 65  | 42  | 10 | 3  |
| Greenwell   | 269 | 453  | 348 | 95  | 327 | 60 | 88  | 148 | 25      | 1   | 11 | 45  | 36 | 26  | 2   | 2  | 1  |
| Bernally    | 263 | 418  | 312 | 82  | 255 | 30 | 67  | 106 | 17      | 2   | 6  | 34  | 19 | 59  | 0   | 1  | 2  |
| Chamberlain | 256 | 396  | 307 | 51  | 164 | 13 | 42  | 65  | 9       | 1   | 4  | 20  | 12 | 38  | 0   | 2  | 0  |
| Dawson      | 240 | 466  | 271 | 75  | 292 | 34 | 70  | 136 | 18      | 0   | 16 | 48  | 9  | 53  | 2   | 2  | 0  |
| Brunarsky   | 234 | 449  | 309 | 84  | 205 | 24 | 48  | 92  | 12      | 1   | 10 | 34  | 24 | 57  | 0   | 2  | 1  |
| Rowland     | 229 | 485  | 375 | 46  | 118 | 14 | 27  | 57  | 3       | 0   | 20 | 11  | 34 | 16  | 8   | 1  | 1  |
| Fletcher    | 227 | 335  | 296 | 63  | 185 | 31 | 42  | 62  | 9       | 1   | 3  | 11  | 16 | 14  | 8   | 1  | 1  |
| Tinsley     | 222 | 292  | 315 | 78  | 144 | 27 | 32  | 42  | 4       | 0   | 2  | 14  | 19 | 36  | 13  | 0  | 0  |
| Liton       | 095 | 095  | 091 | 11  | 21  | 2  | 2   | 2   | 0       | 0   | 1  | 0   | 5  | 0   | 0   | 0  | 0  |
| Pitching    | W-L | ERA  | G   | GS  | CG  | GF | Sho | SV  | IP      | H   | R  | ER  | HR | BB  | SO  | CS | E  |
| Ryan        | 2-3 | 2.44 | 42  | 0   | 0   | 26 | 0   | 13  | 48      | 48  | 14 | 13  | 1  | 17  | 32  |    |    |
| Clemens     | 9-7 | 2.85 | 24  | 24  | 3   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 170 2/3 | 124 | 62 | 54  | 15 | 71  | 168 |    |    |
| Howard      | 1-0 | 3.63 | 37  | 0   | 0   | 5  | 0   | 1   | 39 1/3  | 35  | 17 | 16  | 5  | 12  | 22  |    |    |
| Selle       | 8-5 | 3.83 | 22  | 22  | 0   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 143 1/3 | 140 | 69 | 81  | 13 | 60  | 105 |    |    |
| Hesketh     | 1-0 | 4.26 | 25  | 20  | 0   | 1  | 0   | 0   | 114     | 117 | 70 | 44  | 9  | 46  | 83  |    |    |
| Bankhead    | 3-2 | 4.54 | 27  | 0   | 0   | 3  | 0   | 0   | 37 1/3  | 34  | 21 | 19  | 5  | 12  | 25  |    |    |
| Viola       | 1-1 | 4.85 | 14  | 0   | 0   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 31      | 34  | 17 | 16  | 5  | 17  | 9   |    |    |
| Farr        | 2-0 | 4.76 | 44  | 0   | 0   | 14 | 0   | 0   | 34      | 35  | 18 | 8   | 6  | 15  | 31  |    |    |
| Finn        | 2-1 | 5.72 | 30  | 0   | 0   | 16 | 0   | 0   | 28 1/3  | 41  | 21 | 18  | 5  | 18  | 20  |    |    |
| Finn        | 0-4 | 5.94 | 8   | 8   | 0   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 36 1/3  | 45  | 27 | 24  | 4  | 15  | 17  |    |    |
| Velez       | 0-6 | 6.06 | 11  | 0   | 0   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 19 1/3  | 20  | 11 | 11  | 3  | 8   | 9   |    |    |
| Darwin      | 7-5 | 6.30 | 13  | 13  | 0   | 0  | 0   | 0   | 75 1/3  | 101 | 54 | 53  | 13 | 24  | 54  |    |    |

### MILWAUKEE BREWERS

| Batting   | BA    | SLG  | OB  | G   | AB  | R   | H   | TB  | 2B      | 3B  | HR  | RBI | BB  | SO  | SB  | CS  | E   |
|-----------|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Seitzer   | 314   | 453  | 375 | 80  | 309 | 44  | 97  | 140 | 24      | 2   | 5   | 49  | 30  | 38  | 2   | 1   | 11  |
| Lustach   | 296   | 352  | 333 | 16  | 54  | 8   | 16  | 19  | 3       | 0   | 0   | 2   | 3   | 8   | 2   | 1   | 3   |
| Harper    | 291   | 398  | 318 | 64  | 251 | 23  | 73  | 100 | 15      | 0   | 4   | 32  | 9   | 18  | 0   | 2   | 3   |
| Nielsen   | 275   | 451  | 326 | 109 | 337 | 51  | 109 | 179 | 28      | 3   | 12  | 69  | 34  | 81  | 1   | 0   | 2   |
| O'Leary   | 273   | 409  | 329 | 27  | 66  | 9   | 18  | 27  | 1       | 1   | 2   | 7   | 5   | 12  | 1   | 1   | 0   |
| Reed      | 271   | 341  | 362 | 108 | 399 | 48  | 108 | 136 | 22      | 0   | 2   | 37  | 57  | 34  | 5   | 4   | 3   |
| Hamilton  | 262   | 389  | 331 | 36  | 141 | 23  | 37  | 52  | 10      | 1   | 1   | 13  | 15  | 17  | 3   | 0   | 0   |
| Schurhoff | 261   | 485  | 336 | 40  | 134 | 20  | 35  | 65  | 11      | 2   | 5   | 22  | 16  | 14  | 0   | 1   | 4   |
| Meske     | 259   | 432  | 320 | 84  | 259 | 39  | 67  | 112 | 13      | 1   | 10  | 38  | 21  | 62  | 3   | 5   | 4   |
| Vaughn    | 254   | 478  | 345 | 95  | 370 | 59  | 94  | 177 | 24      | 1   | 19  | 55  | 51  | 93  | 9   | 5   | 3   |
| Speers    | 252   | 308  | 316 | 73  | 214 | 27  | 54  | 66  | 10      | 1   | 0   | 17  | 19  | 42  | 7   | 1   | 8   |
| Diaz      | 251   | 369  | 285 | 79  | 187 | 17  | 47  | 69  | 5       | 7   | 1   | 17  | 10  | 19  | 5   | 5   | 2   |
| Jaha      | 241   | 412  | 332 | 84  | 291 | 45  | 70  | 120 | 14      | 0   | 12  | 39  | 32  | 75  | 3   | 0   | 0   |
| Valentin  | 239   | 421  | 330 | 97  | 285 | 47  | 68  | 120 | 19      | 0   | 11  | 46  | 38  | 75  | 12  | 3   | 20  |
| Cinillo   | 238   | 381  | 309 | 39  | 126 | 17  | 30  | 48  | 9       | 0   | 3   | 12  | 11  | 16  | 0   | 1   | 3   |
| Vaite     | 232   | 375  | 348 | 46  | 112 | 14  | 26  | 42  | 8       | 1   | 0   | 10  | 18  | 22  | 0   | 2   | 3   |
| Ward      | 232   | 367  | 328 | 102 | 367 | 55  | 85  | 131 | 15      | 2   | 9   | 45  | 52  | 68  | 6   | 2   | 0   |
| Singleton | ---   | ---  | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---     | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Pitching  | W-L   | ERA  | G   | GS  | CG  | GF  | Sho | SV  | IP      | H   | R   | ER  | HR  | BB  | SO  | CS  | E   |
| Mercedes  | 2-0   | 2.32 | 19  | 0   | 0   | 5   | 0   | 0   | 31      | 22  | 9   | 8   | 4   | 16  | 11  |     |     |
| Fellers   | 1-4   | 2.54 | 42  | 0   | 0   | 31  | 0   | 17  | 46      | 41  | 16  | 13  | 0   | 27  | 31  |     |     |
| Bones     | 10-9  | 3.43 | 24  | 24  | 4   | 0   | 1   | 0   | 170 2/3 | 166 | 76  | 66  | 17  | 45  | 57  |     |     |
| Scanlan   | 2-6   | 4.11 | 30  | 12  | 0   | 9   | 0   | 2   | 103     | 117 | 53  | 47  | 11  | 28  | 65  |     |     |
| Bronkney  | 1-1   | 4.35 | 16  | 0   | 0   | 9   | 0   | 1   | 20 2/3  | 20  | 10  | 10  | 3   | 12  | 13  |     |     |
| Wegman    | 8-4   | 4.51 | 19  | 19  | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 115 1/3 | 140 | 64  | 58  | 14  | 26  | 59  |     |     |
| Ignasiak  | 3-1   | 4.53 | 23  | 5   | 0   | 5   | 0   | 0   | 47 2/3  | 51  | 25  | 24  | 5   | 13  | 24  |     |     |
| Henry     | 2-3   | 4.60 | 25  | 0   | 0   | 7   | 0   | 0   | 31 1/3  | 32  | 17  | 16  | 7   | 23  | 20  |     |     |
| Edred     | 11-11 | 4.68 | 25  | 25  | 5   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 179     | 158 | 96  | 93  | 23  | 84  | 98  |     |     |




## Chapter 5: Thanksgiving (Images from the cutting-room floor)

THE SUN SUNDAY, MAY 15, 1988

# Loss of talent doesn't translate into loss of games

### BASEBALL




TIM KURKJIAN

plete waste of time." Still, Chambliss reportedly made an extra \$1,030.22 for coming back as a player . . . The last two pitchers the awful Braves have recalled are Juan Eichelberger, 34, who hadn't pitched in the major leagues since 1983, and Jose


1983 World Series, the Orioles are Phillies (who played in that series) are a combined 645-712 (.475). The Phillies haven't been in first place for one day since 1984. The Orioles haven't been in first since 1985.

A final note on Billy Martin and his penchant for fighting and lying. Former Rangers owner Bob Short once told Martin, "There are three things that can happen to you: You will kill someone, someone will kill you or you will kill yourself." . . . Yankees reliever Dave Righetti is upset at Martin for not using him enough. "He's not treating me like a No. 1 reliever. He's treating me like a guy who used to have success," said Righetti . . . The Red Sox have just one more home game (17th) . . . bases. They are one hitter short of winning it, so they won't . . . Friday night, Seattle manager Dick Wil-


### Maybe you didn't notice



REUSCHEL



VAN SLYKE

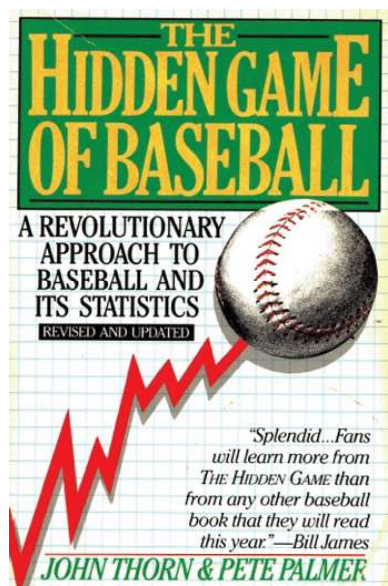
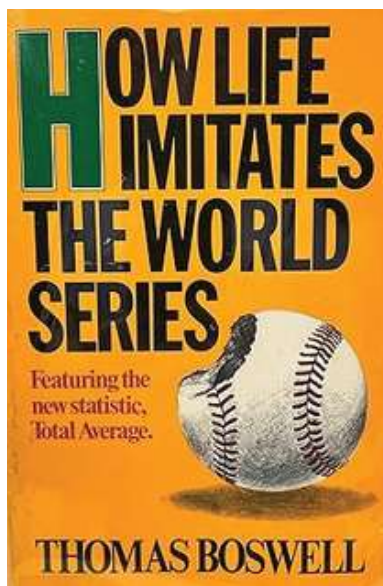


VALENZUELA

**We'd love to see this**

There is a computer whiz in Merrimack, N.H., named Ron Shandler. Somehow, he took every game of the Orioles' 21-game losing streak and played it against the 1962 Mets team, who finished 40-120. The Orioles won eight of the 21 games against the Mets but were no-hit by Al Jackson.

The Baltimore Sun's Tim Kurkjian offered a blurb about a 'computer whiz in New Hampshire' who used a simulation to replay all 21 straight opening-season losses by the woeful '88 Orioles against the legendarily bad 1962 Mets



Thomas Boswell's *How Life Imitates the World Series* (1982), which introduced a metric he called 'Total Average; and John Thorn and Pete Palmer's *The Hidden Game of Baseball*, a seminal work in early Sabermetrics. It used Palmer's linear weights and other advanced math to present 'Total Player Rating,' a precursor to WAR, and an Expected Runs Matrix



## Chapter 6: The Next Pioneers

The focus of the book was on the people who wrote about the games, but the games themselves—especially the pioneering formats from the late 1980s—had interesting origin stories too. Those were unfortunate cuts.

### Bill James Fantasy Baseball

Bill James wasn't sitting on his hands during the first few post-Abstract years. In 1989, he published a one-off, *This Time Let's Not Eat the Bones*, which might have been considered an abstract of his *Abstracts*. In 1990, he started a new series, creatively titled *The Baseball Book*, which was an eclectic mix of analysis and history. He was living in his wheelhouse, and his success gave him license to write about whatever he wanted.

He also became an investor in STATS, Inc., a company started by John Dewan that had been selling Project Scoresheet data and eventually assumed the collection work itself. There, his role was primarily in product development and some involvement with the books they published, like the *Great American Baseball Stat Book*. But STATS, Inc. owner John Dewan also decided they needed to hop onto the fantasy bandwagon, and the name Bill James would surely give any effort more credibility.

As you see from the ad, James saw Rotisserie as a flawed—"distorted"—concept, not "realistic" or "simple" enough, so he designed his own game, stamped his name on it, and Dewan launched it in 1989.

Bill James Fantasy Baseball (BJFB) could be played by telephone, mail, or by logging onto the STATS computer for 25 cents per minute (off-peak). Leagues consisted of 12 teams taken from both the AL and NL, defying one of the Imperial Rotisserie sacraments. Rosters had 20 active players with eight reserves. Transactions could be made daily, a level of control unheard of at the time.

Further distancing itself from Rotisserie, these were leagues where you scored points for each positive event and lost points for negative events. There were category limits, so your team could never amass more than 200 home runs or 100 wins. There were also relationship limits whereby saves could never exceed wins and RBIs could never exceed Runs, which was a wonderful rule. Defense counted too. These rules and benchmarks were tweaked over time.

As much as the unique format was a draw on its own, perhaps the biggest selling point was that Bill James himself drafted a team in each league. If you

### Bill James On Fantasy Baseball

"Hi. This is Bill James. A few years ago I designed a set of rules for a new fantasy baseball league, which has been updated with the benefit of experience and the input of a few thousand owners.

My goal was to develop a fantasy league based on the simplest and yet most realistic principles possible — a league in which the values are as nearly as possible what they ought to be, without being distorted by artificial category values or rankings, but which at the same time are so simple that you can keep track of how you've done just by checking box scores. Here's what I want:

- 1) *I want it to be realistic.* I don't want Lofton to be worth more than McGriff because he steals lots of bases. I want good ballplayers to be good ballplayers.
- 2) *I prefer it simple.* I want you to be able to look up your players in the morning paper, and know how you've done.
- 3) *I want you to have to develop a real team.* I don't want somebody to win by stacking up starting pitchers and leadoff men.

I made up the rules and I'll be playing the game with you. STATS, Inc., supplier of boxscores to USA Today and The Associated Press, is running the leagues. They'll run the draft, man the computers, keep the rosters straight and provide you with weekly updates. Of course you can make trades, pick up free agents and move players on and off the inactive list, too."

"Only BJFB has daily transactions which puts it on a level of continuous involvement unmatched by the others." — Oz Fontecchio, Philadelphia, PA

"12 months of baseball-frenzy!!!" — Jim Holland, Seattle, WA

"This is the coolest fantasy league in the world as far as I'm concerned." — Lance Gose, Lombard, IL

**Sign Up Below! We can answer your questions at (708) 676-9270!**

☐ Yes, I can't wait! Sign me up to play Bill James Fantasy Baseball in 1994. Enclosed is my non-refundable deposit of \$25.00 on the franchise fee of \$89.00. A processing fee of \$1.00 per player is charged during the season for roster moves.

Team Nickname: \_\_\_\_\_ (example: Erie Sailors)

Would you like to play in a league with a team drafted by Bill James? Yes No (circle one)

Would you like to receive information on playing BJFB on-line? Yes No (circle one)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Method of Payment (U.S. Funds): ☐ Check (no Canadian checks) ☐ Money Order ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

Cardholder Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholder # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail To:**  
STATS, Inc.  
7366 N. Lincoln  
Lincolnwood, IL  
60466-1708

**For faster service:**  
Credit Card Orders:  
1-800-63-STATS  
More info:  
1-708-676-9270  
Fax:  
1-708-676-0821

The new *Bill James Fantasy Baseball* game had daily transactions, a level of control unheard of at the time

finished ahead of Bill, you won a tee shirt, though you weren't really competing against him. Once the drafts were over, Bill turned over the in-season management to STATS wonks. But by playing the game, participants got closer to rubbing elbows with royalty.

BJFB built a solid following and sub-culture with the help of two fan conferences they ran in 1992 and 1994. Several writers dedicated their work to this format too. One of the best of those was Paul Siebel, whose self-published *Absolutely Baseball* was a terrific saber-fantasy read, even if you weren't a BJFB player.

Siebel's book contained complete team and player write-ups, statistical insights, BJFB ratings and enough intelligent reading to keep you occupied until well after the All-Star Break. What might have been lacking in statistical projections was more than made up for by

the strength of the commentaries.

Siebel was not afraid to challenge James. Writing a “Dear Bill” letter in a 1994 edition of his *FANTasy obSERVer* newsletter, Siebel admonished James’ reaction to fan pushback when an ill-advised rule change was implemented in the game. James had added a 10-point penalty for teams that did not record a hold in a given week. Fans revolted and James responded with a four-page screed that Siebel described as “at best condescending and at worst insulting.”

Siebel then put forth his own multi-page argument, ending it by asking James why he was even playing his own game. He noted that one of James’ own teams had amassed 100 points in holds penalties.

Similar to how the *Abstract* community started, BJFB’s following was feverishly loyal. However, it was not the game that the mainstream was playing, and it was not universally accessible. STATS Inc. kept proprietary stewardship over the process, and interest waned.

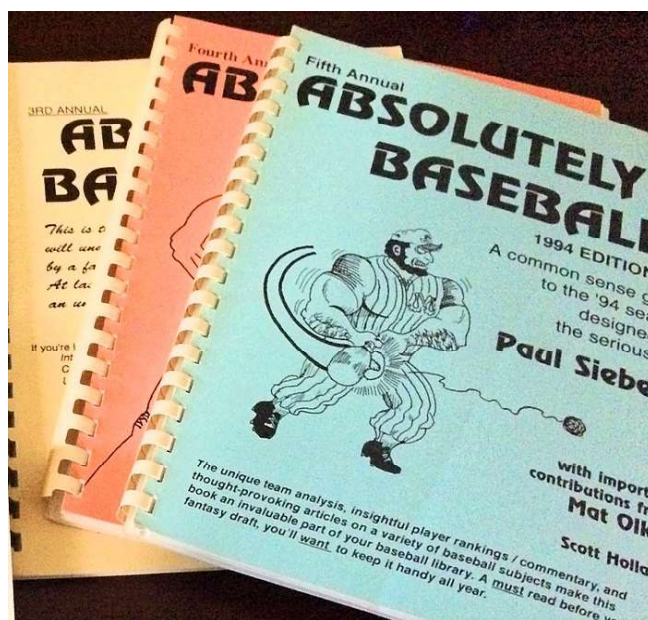
The following 1996 forum post put the problem in perspective:

“I have played BJFB for three years. It’s a great game, but too expensive. The entry fee is around \$70 and the online fees really add up. I tended to get hooked on the game by May and would call up for updates 3-5 nights per week. This racked up charges of \$50-\$75 per month! Further, the server is extremely slow at times (no break on the per-minute charge, though!) and the interface is an old DOS terminal format. Unless they update to a better format with affordable fees, I will not play again this year.”

To be honest, that was the exact reason why I never played the game.

Another post put into perspective the possible error of James’ ways: “I don’t play *Rotisserie* as a form of baseball simulation (I’ve got *Strat-O-Matic* for that). I play it to enhance watching baseball games... The problem is that people are trying to turn roto into a “best” team evaluator. I prefer to think of it as a “most exciting” team evaluator.” So, according to this poster, *Rotisserie* was mainstream because it appealed to fans’ thirst for excitement. BJFB’s quest for realism was admirable but apparently less marketable. Admittedly, I got it.

Though I didn’t play BJFB, it was a good game. I was a big proponent of more realistic game formats and recognized that the *Rotisserie* concept did have issues. I even spent a good deal of ink in the early days of my newsletter, talking about *RotoElitism* and trying to keep a door open to other formats.



Paul Siebel’s self-published *Absolutely Baseball* was a terrific saber-fantasy read, even if you weren’t a BJFB player, with complete team and player write-ups, statistical insights, BJFB ratings and other intelligence

Eventually, BJFB fell out of favor but not because of the format. The game was run on STATS’ dial-in phone communication system while everyone else had moved to the internet. That likely doomed BJFB.

### Not the only game in town

Like James, the growing industry gave writers more game formats to opine about and more ways to reach audiences. BJFB had plenty of company.

Singles games were the most widespread because they didn’t require assembling a group into leagues. Participants competed individually, building their teams from lists of players. *Dugout Derby* was one of the first, launched in 1990. It ran in 14 daily newspapers in major US markets and offered large prizes, including trips to Hawaii. It was the first truly national game; allegedly, more than 200,000 readers participated daily. Participants used a 900 number to enter their teams and make changes, and the newspapers received a small percentage of the revenue generated from those calls.

Others used that concept as a springboard as well.

Charlie Wiegert was a lifelong St. Louis Cardinals fan. He started playing fantasy baseball in 1984 with a bunch of sportswriters at the newspaper where he sold advertising space. Since he wasn’t a journalist, the writers figured him for an easy mark, but he won the league in its first three years.

Wiegert then went on to win national championships with *Fanta Sports* in 1989 and *Boxscore Baseball*



in 1991. By 1990, he was playing in eight leagues against folks in several industries. Competing in one league against aerospace company execs, Wiegert met programmers Brian and Carol Matthews, who approached him about providing his fantasy expertise for a national contest they wanted to create. The partnership became CDM, Inc. and the inaugural 1992 season featured a singles contest called “Carol’s Fantasy Baseball Challenge.” Wiegert’s concept—using player salaries and a cap—was a first; the format would come to be known as “challenge” or salary-cap games.

The following year, during a routine visit to the local *Sporting News* office to check on an ad placement, Wiegert had a chance meeting with TSN’s head honcho, Bill Topaz. Several conversations led to a five-year partnership to create The Sporting News Fantasy Baseball Challenge. The game peaked in the mid-1990s with 17,000 people playing. But when the contract ended, the internet had amped up competition and CDM started partnering with other media outlets.

An off-shoot of dice games like APBA and Strat-O-Matic, Scoresheet Baseball was launched in 1987 by brothers David and Jeff Barton. Scoresheet combined the in-game strategy of simulations with the real-time uncertainty of current fantasy formats. Participants would set their batting lineups, pitching rotations, and certain strategic decisions; then Scoresheet would run a computer simulation based on the players’ actual statistical performances from the previous week. Participants received full boxscores for their team’s games from that week.

Scoresheet became popular with the sabermetric crowd as it was the format that most approximated the decision-making process of a major league field manager. I was also a huge fan and made sure to include Scoresheet strategy articles in my publications.

I even ran my own competition for a few years in the early 1990s, called the Forecaster Challenge. Mine was a singles game that used Pete Palmer’s linear weights formula for scoring. The rules were designed to force participants to do serious draft prep homework because every in-season player replacement came with a points penalty. Those penalties increased as the season progressed and cost \$5 each. It was a flawed format but generated a nice response in its first year—any new game was worth trying once. Participation plummeted in year No. 2, partly because that was when my daughter Justina was born, and I didn’t have the time to do adequate marketing. But I doubt the concept would have survived anyway. The disaster was put to rest at the end of the second season.

**\$25,000 Cash Grand Prize**  
PRIMESTAR presents  
*The Sporting News*  
**FANTASY BASEBALL CHALLENGE**  
The Game You'd Expect From America's Sport Authority!  
Enter Early and Save!  
NOW IN OUR 5TH YEAR!

**How To Play**  
Pick a team of 25 starters using a \$30,000,000 salary cap  
3 WAYS TO EARN CASH PRIZES  
• Division (1 in 5 earn cash)  
• Overall (Top 100 earn lots of cash)  
1 in 25 will earn at least \$500

| Place         | Overall Prize | Division Prize | League Prize |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1st           | \$25,000      | \$2,500        | \$500        |
| 2nd           | \$10,000      | \$1,000        | \$250        |
| 3rd           | \$5,000       | \$500          | \$150        |
| 4th           | \$2,500       | \$250          | \$75         |
| 5th           | \$1,250       | \$125          | \$35         |
| 6th to 10th   | \$500         | \$50           | \$15         |
| 11th to 15th  | \$250         | \$25           | \$5          |
| 16th to 100th | \$100         | \$10           | \$2          |

Plus \$100 will be awarded to the overall leader each week and \$150 will be awarded to each division leader at the All-Star break.  
Beginning with April 1996 salaries.

**COST TO PLAY**  
• \$75.00 for an entry by January 1, 1997.  
• \$85.00 for an entry by March 1, 1997.  
• \$95.00 for an entry after March 1, 1997.  
• \$75.00 for each additional entry.  
• \$15.00 for reports to be mailed to a second address.  
• \$15.00 per address per team for reports to be mailed weekly rather than biweekly.

**ENTRY DEADLINES**  
Entries must be placed or faxed by: 6 PM CT Sunday, March 31, 1997. Mail entries must be postmarked no later than March 30, 1997 and received no later than Wednesday, April 3, 1997.

**REPORTS**  
• Receive a full-page report weekly or biweekly. You will receive a full-page report weekly. Reports with your entry fee, beginning April 15, 1997.  
• Receive computer simulations for all teams in your league every other week.  
• Unlimited league roster and top 10 for your division & top 5 overall and every 5 weeks.  
• Fax service available. Call for details.  
• Weekly reports available via the Internet.

**TRANSACTION FEES**  
• To make player transactions, a full-time M2 number and an account number will be provided.  
• The transaction fees are as follows:  
Charges before season starts (unlimited)...\$1 each  
Team Squad Switch (unlimited)...\$2 each  
Team Squad Switch (unlimited)...\$2 each  
On Draft (unlimited)...\$2 each  
On Draft (unlimited)...\$2 each  
September Call-up (\$25-\$50) (one)...\$2 each  
12th Man (unlimited)...\$2 each  
Player Transactions must be made by Sunday 11 PM Central Time to be effective the following Monday.

Play and enter a friend who plays and receive a \$20 Credit

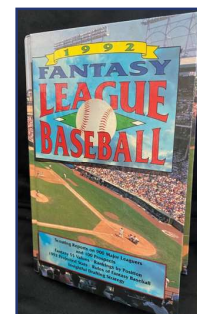
## A chance encounter led to the five-year partnership behind the *Sporting News* Fantasy Baseball Challenge

These formats had their dedicated followings, and some had regular writers who supported them. But while the number of participants ranged from the low thousands to allegedly hundreds of thousands, Rotisserie remained the format that drove the most coverage and created the largest cottage industry.

## One more book

Steve Mann was not the only higher profile name to attempt a fantasy-relevant publication. *1992 Fantasy League Baseball* was a nearly 700-page hard-cover digest-sized (5.5" x 8.5") book. This monstrosity would have easily been dismissed if it hadn't been put together by a quintet headlined by heavyweights Gary Gillette and Pete Palmer.

FLB was essentially the fantasy offspring of the *Great American Baseball Stat Book*. But if GABS could be used to barricade a door against tropical force winds, FLB posed a serious challenge to the Saffir-Simpson hurricane wind scale.



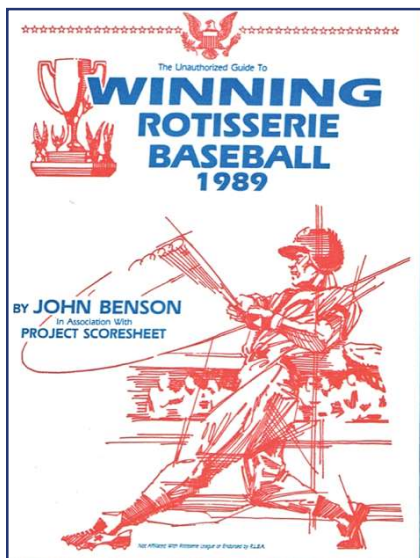
**Fantasy League Baseball:** heavyweight authors but wouldn't lie flat



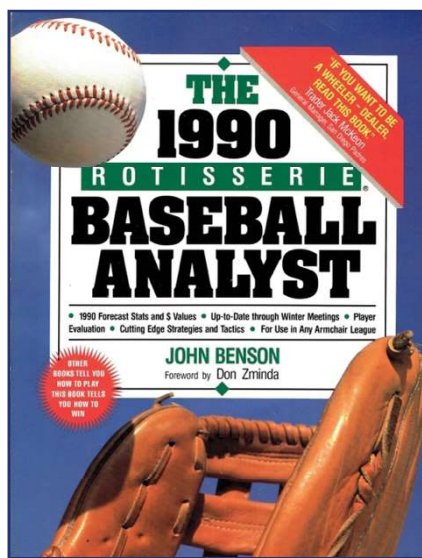
The information in the book was excellent: detailed stats, splits and projections for 900 players, and numerous ranking lists. But it was a marketer's nightmare. Start with the vanilla title that immediately tossed it among the dozens of generic publications.

But the format! It was over two inches thick and couldn't lie flat during a draft unless you broke the binding, making it completely unusable when you needed it most.

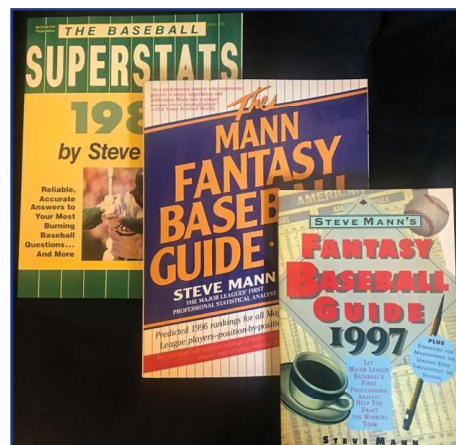
## Images from the cutting-room floor: Chapter 6: The Next Pioneers



John Benson's first book, *Winning Rotisserie Baseball*, first came out in 1989



Benson's very next edition, with a new title: *The 1990 Rotisserie Baseball Analyst*



Three books in the 1989-97 evolution of Steve Mann's series, starting with *The Baseball Superstats* before getting 'fantasy' into the titles



The *Sandlot Shrink* logo is still in use today



The logo from Rick Wilton's *Fantasy Baseball Journal*, which was eventually folded into *BaseballHQ*, where Wilton became News Director



Scoresheet Baseball combined in-game strategy of sims with standard fantasy's real-time uncertainty. It's still played today.

## Chapter 7: The Golden Age of Fantasy Media

*Before the official launch of Baseball Weekly...*

USA Today decided to float out a trial balloon. In the winter of 1990, they published a prototype of the tabloid.

This publication went out onto the newsstands just like any other newspaper and we had to pay \$1.00 to read it. Despite being called a “Preview Edition,” it was, in fact, just a prototype. Publisher Thomas J. Farrell wrote in his opening note to readers, “The content is based in large part on a real week in baseball last August.”

In other words, we were paying a buck for a few feature articles, but otherwise they were selling us useless five-month-old news, and our dollars were being used for their market research. I’m not much into foreshadowing, but practices like this would become a theme later.

I suppose enough people — admittedly, me included—were fooled into buying that issue, and the real inaugural issue of *Baseball Weekly* hit newsstands around Opening Day 1991. That issue was 72 pages and had just one page of purely fantasy content—John Benson’s biggest gainers and biggest losers—buried on page 64, just before the classified ads.

There was also one lone page of statistical analysis articles and one for baseball collectibles, both meriting earlier placement in the newspaper.

Also...

- Four analytical pieces by the well-known sabermetrician Gary Gillette
- 26 pages of team previews, including rosters, stats, schedule and analysis (these were nicely designed)
- A non-Rotisserie opinion piece about Charley Kerfeld by ... Glen Waggoner (!)

- Jeff Sagarin ratings for 681 players, squeezed onto two pages in what looked like 4-point type
- Radio, TV and cable affiliates for each team, along with maps of the coverage areas (also very nice)
- Top minor leaguers and maps of where teams were in each league (again, well designed)
- And Benson’s piece, hidden in the back.



The BW ‘Preview’ cost a buck and contained five-month-old baseball news



The first edition of BW had 72 pages—and one page of fantasy content

You could always tell how the fantasy baseball industry was doing by checking out the advertising in *BW*. By 1994, their special fantasy edition in March (which came to be known as “the Leviathan”) contained 18 pages devoted to fantasy company classified ads, fully 25 per cent of the entire publication.

Those 18 pages included ads for hundreds of different companies, selling, among (many, many) other things:

- The current edition of the *Rotisserie League Baseball* book
- Bill James Fantasy Baseball
- Rotisserie games, salary cap games, pick-em games
- Dozens of print publications
- Dozens of draft prep and league management software packages
- Many dozens of stat services
- Baseball for Windows (note that this was pre-Windows 95)
- Fantasy team logos
- Fantasy team shirts
- Hand-painted pewter figures in your fantasy team colors



30 • MARCH 12, 2003 • USA TODAY BASEBALL WEEKLY

NEWSLETTERS

STAT SERVICE

Rotisserie Owners!

You Want To Win  
This Year, Don't You?

Get FBJ's  
Winning Formula

FBJ's  
The Best Information

Expert Analysis  
•  
Invaluable Strategies

You Can't Afford  
To Wait

Get Fantasy Baseball  
Journal Now!

Send \$30.95 for 60 Full Year or  
\$24.95 for 16 Issues to  
Fantasy Baseball Journal  
1701 755 Butterfield Rd.  
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181

or Call Toll Free

1-800-872-7360

Send no money now! We'll bill you.

DRAFT REPORTS

Who's *Hot* (Initially) better than *Cool* (Right)?  
While *Hotness* plays well to lose this year's *Hot*  
lineup, *Who's Better or Who's Not?* The answer  
is in the *Complete Baseball Almanac*. But be  
giddy in *hot* line available online.

The *Complete Baseball Almanac*

The "Adversity" Feature  
"Adversity" is a feature that lists 100 most and  
least likely to succeed players for all  
12 major league teams.

Hot tips to take your fantasy team to the  
next level. The *Adversity* is a professional, no-nonsense  
analysis by veteran pro writers from John  
Lundgren and "Scouting Service" 1992. The book is  
a must-read for all fantasy players.

To order, send \$12.95 + \$2.00 shipping (five-class  
mailing) to:

CBS Publications, 1914 Hamilton Rd.,  
St. Charles, MO 63043

DRAFT REPORTS

WIN THE MONEY

Sandberg Breaks Hand, Wetland Leads Too.

There's still time to adjust your strategy  
if you order the guide that includes these developments

**TODAY**  
Order the NEW Draft Cheat Sheet compiled by EXPERTS who ALWAYS find  
the best players. Use our PROVEN METHOD to get the RESULTS YOU WANT.  
Get the Edge TODAY! SEND \$9.95 Check or Money Order to  
TRIPLE CROWN LTD., P.O. Box 983, STROUDSBURG, PA 18380.

BLIND TO THE 1992 BILL JAMES FANTASY BASEBALL NATIONAL CHAMPION

WHICH PITCHER WILL PERFORM BETTER IN 1993?

Dennis Martinez...or Tom Glavino?  
Jack McDowell...or Sid Fernandez?

Rick Aguilera...or Jeff Morgan?

Wrong. The exclusive HASKAP Rating System, based on a year in advance analysis and  
developed by the 1992 #1 JIM JONES LEADER, one of the country, will tell you why.  
Includes top 100 starters and top 100 relievers in the National and American leagues.  
Ten different breakdowns. Cross-comparison of stats and players' value for each  
league. Plus essays on ratings, expansion and more.

Only \$15.00. Check or money order with name and address to:  
HASKAP Pitcher Ratings, 928 West End Avenue, Suite 4C,  
New York, NY 10025.

WHAT'S A PLAYER WORTH?

Custom Stat Service™

We're ready to provide your Fantasy League with the  
most possible service at the lowest possible price. Call today  
for the details and sample report!

- Low price just \$36.95 per Team!
- Discounts for full seasons!
- Complete team coverage, stand-  
ings, transaction & free agent
- Your choice of categories!
- Toll-Free Service!
- Economical Two-Week service  
and Budget Package available!
- Call today for FREE brochure!

1-800-800-8521 P.O. Box 3115 Champaign, IL 61826

Spectrum Stats

Fantasy Baseball Statistics Service

The Personal Stat Service

\$35/Team (800) 25-STATS

"A Million thanks for all your help. The service we received from Spectrum Stats went  
beyond and beyond the call of duty."

John Riedel - Pleasantville, NJ

Weekly Reports:

League Standings

Position Eligibility

Transactions

Team VTD & Weekly Stats

Free Agents

Point Guards & Losses

We are entering our

7th year of service. We offer

many more options. Call our

toll-free number to receive

our free brochure.

Free Agents

Point Guards & Losses

FREE:

Call for Weekly

Stat Categories

Flexible Reporting

Lower Rates

HL, TLF, Phone/FAX

HL, AL, Midwest, & Ultra Lite

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Point Guards & Losses

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Point Guards & Losses

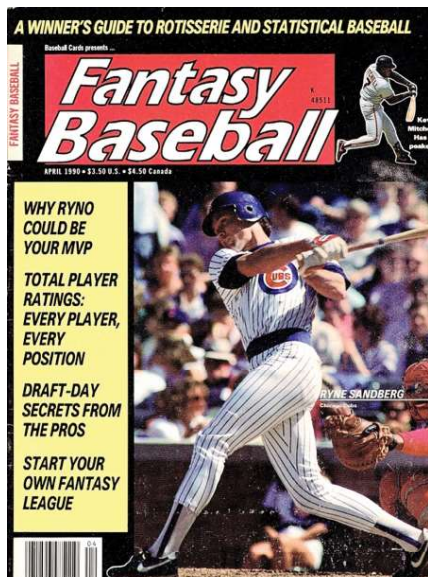
Point Guards & Losses

Point Guards & Losses

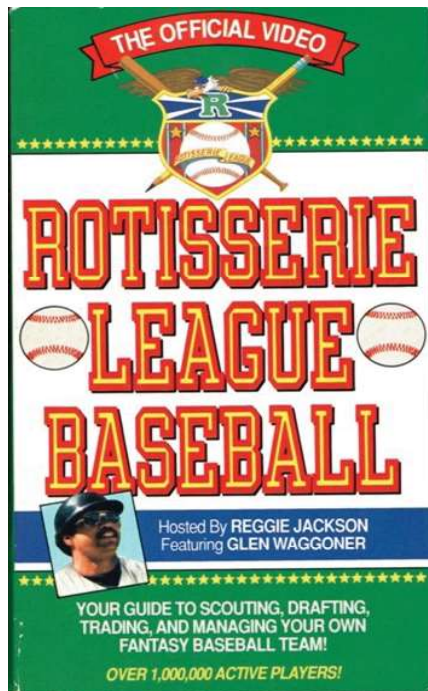
Point Guards & Losses

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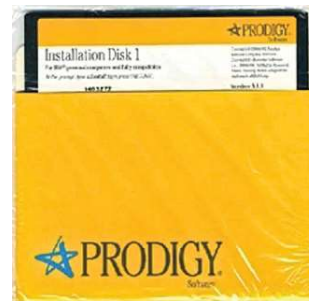
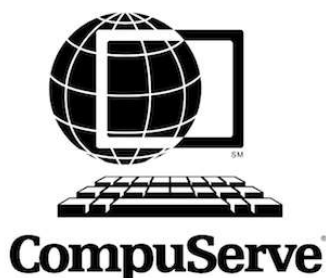
The inaugural edition of *Fantasy Baseball* magazine, from Krause Publications and edited by Greg Ambrosius, who would later go on to found the National Fantasy Baseball Championship



The *Rotisserie League Baseball* VHS videotape was hosted by Reggie Jackson and featured Rotisserie founding father Glen Waggoner



*The National Sports Daily* was an all-sports tabloid paper that started publishing in January, 1990 with a 'Murderer's Row' of top sportswriters, led by *Sports Illustrated* legend Frank Deford. Though loved by sports fans, it ran into business and circulation issues and shut down in June, 1991



Early pre-internet activity was centered in three services: CompuServe, America Online and Prodigy. The CompuServe forums, AOL discussion boards and Usenet newsgroups were where the first fantasy-focused communities were built

## Chapter 8: Seeds of Discontent

### The Florida firefighter story (director's cut)

Randy Bramos was a 13-year veteran of the North Lauderdale Fire department in Florida. He was a lieutenant and the department's second in command and had once been considered for fire chief. Despite being competent, Bramos had frequent run-ins with North Lauderdale's public safety administrator, George Atkinson. Atkinson had a strong police background and took issue with Bramos' lack of professionalism, mainly since one of his roles was to train police officers in the fire code.

Bramos' history was far from spotless. He had been suspended twice, reprimanded for leaving the firehouse without permission, and once called a city official a "snake" during an argument. Bramos simply did not fit the mold of a high-ranking official that Atkinson expected. Still, Bramos' biggest transgression was that he ran a fantasy league he had founded three years earlier. Atkinson claimed that Bramos was spending time running the league while on duty, so a recommendation was submitted for his dismissal due to "poor work performance." Instead, Bramos was suspended without pay for 60 days while the State Attorney's Office investigated him on suspicion of illegal gambling.

Bramos faced three official charges, all related to gambling. The first was a felony for running a gambling operation from the firehouse. The second was a misdemeanor for using city equipment to gamble. The third was a misdemeanor charge of gambling. He faced the possibility of seven years in prison and a large fine.

In 1990, Florida was a state in which it was legal to play poker as long as the pot didn't exceed \$10 in any single hand. Golf and bowling tournaments with cash prizes were legal, as were dog racing, horse racing and jai alai. And Florida ran the country's largest state-sponsored lottery. So it was odd that Bramos would get nailed for a pursuit that cost its participants about \$10 a week.

While orchestrated under the guise of illegal gambling, it became clear early on that the charges against Bramos were actually a political vendetta perpetrated by Atkinson. He simply didn't like the guy. So, Atkinson used fellow firefighter Roger Kraus as a plant to obtain evidence against Bramos. Kraus told officials that Bramos was "receiving a high number of pages on his beeper and then making phone calls from different rooms in the firehouse," according to

the South Florida *Sun Sentinel*. The real motive for Atkinson's efforts was also made clear from the fact that no other league members were charged. In fact, two of the members were a county vice officer and the mayor's campaign manager.

However, when Florida Attorney General Bob Butterworth issued an opinion that playing fantasy baseball was a direct violation of Florida's gambling laws, the national media perked up. Butterworth said, "Fantasy leagues depend more on chance than skill and money prizes are awarded based on the performances of professional athletes over which fantasy team owners have no control."

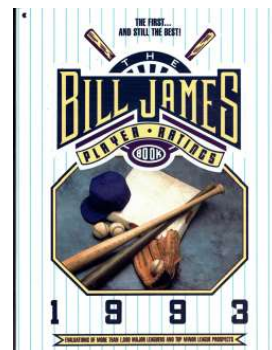
From *Fantasy Baseball* magazine: "The case hinged on a notebook that Bramos used to compile player statistics, league transactions and fees. The book was to have helped the state prove that Bramos was actually the head of an illegal gambling operation that cost each league member an average of \$600 a year on fees and transactions." Bramos kept that book in his personal duffle bag. One day, when he was out on an emergency call, Kraus grabbed the book and photocopied portions of it. That's what the state presented as their key evidence at trial. The judge ruled that the evidence was obtained illegally. Given that the book was the core of the case, the state had to drop the charges. End of story.

(Fifteen years later, Bramos was charged with indecent assault and molestation in a child sex case. The headline in Florida papers probably read, "Proof that Fantasy Baseball is a Gateway Drug.")

### RotoElitism

I could criticize Bill James' treatment of Rotisserie all I wanted, but I was a bit of a heretic in my own way. Besides my own rejection of the Holy \$260 Sacramento, I had gotten an early reputation for hating Rotisserie. I addressed that reputation in the *Baseball Forecaster*:

RotoElitism is the tendency for some people to define fantasy baseball by the strict traditional rules of rotisserie (I'm sick of capitalizing. Let them come after me.) I do not dislike rotisserie—I play it



Bill James' first foray into "legitimate" fantasy analysis, his *Player Ratings Book*

myself. What I take offense to are people who lead you to believe it is the only set of rules in town.

“The fact that we use the word ‘rules’ in the same breath as ‘fantasy’ is an oxymoron. I’ve found that the biggest high in playing the game is tinkering with the rules. But this is what happens when people get trapped in the rules. I know of a group of nine co-workers who hesitated to create a league because they couldn’t find 12 willing participants. Their rationale—they wouldn’t be able to use the dollar valuations in the roto books. They very nearly denied themselves the chance to play. This was just plain stupid.

“The other thing I don’t like about rotoelitists is their persistence in evaluating players using the \$260-based dollar values. You see, I have no freakin’ idea what a \$30 player is. The winning bid on any player is highly variable depending on...

- the salary cap limit if you’re not in a \$260 league
- the number of teams in the league
- each team’s roster size
- the impact of any protected players
- each team’s positional demands at the time of bidding
- the statistical category demands at the time of bidding
- external factors, such as hometown bias or man-crushes

“So, I haven’t the foggiest idea who is worth \$30. Now, if you ask me which players have the best raw power skills, or which pitchers have the most talent... that I can tell you. And that information is far more valuable for drafting a fantasy team—especially rotisserie—than any variable dollar value will ever be.

“So, then you ask me, without dollar values, how would you know what to bid for a player? Well, astute roto leaguers usually sit back for a while at the beginning of a draft to get a sense of general bidding levels. After a dozen or so players are out on the table—usually eating up a fair chunk of change—you should have a good feel for what the going rates are likely to be from that point on. Closers go for this much. Speedsters go for that much. That dollar amount, or range, will be different for each league experience. You can’t use someone else’s list of player values to tell you that.

“I play rotisserie. I quite often win rotisserie. I enjoy the game. What I hate is the attitude.”

Soon after, I challenged a bunch of the leading writers to answer a simple question: Why is Rotisserie a better game? Here were the answers I received.

Roto was better because:

- More people played it.

- For most people, it was their first language.
- More books were written about it.
- You could share experiences with other Roto players.
- It was a realistic simulation of the decisions made by real baseball executives.
- The Founding Fathers work represented the cumulative and progressive thinking of the game’s greatest minds.

Gag me. These don’t prove anything. These are same arguments for deciding that the best cheese is cheddar. It’s the default cheese at most sandwich shops. It’s the easiest to find in Kroger. It’s what they automatically melt on a Big Mac. But give me a hunk of gruyere any day of the week.

## Critiques

*Here are a few more publication reviews I wrote for the newsletter:*

**Jes-Mer Enterprises** (\$9.95) opens with the comment, “Players are evaluated by an innovative point system taking into account past performance and our inside knowledge predicting what a player will do in 1992.” Nowhere is this “innovative” system explained nor are there any credentials to support this “inside knowledge.”

**Fantasy Baseball Player Ratings** (\$9.98) is a series of by-positional tables of 1991 and projected 1992 player stats. As is common with many of these new pubs, they use a rating system that they claim is the next best thing to a direct link to Nostradamus. However, also common is a complete lack of support data and explanations on how the system works. Apparently, they expect us to buy their system on faith alone.

**Grelor Ratings** (\$11.95) does not include projections, but their “most accurate and sophisticated player evaluation system ever offered” attempts to support the use of last year’s numbers as adequate rating tools (“Baseball is ‘What have you done for me now’ and not ‘what have you done in the past’ ”).

**The LockerRoom** (\$30): FINALLY! A publication that assures that some people will finish out of the money. The epitome of “anyone with a typewriter” can do this. Some excerpts (with spelling as it appears): “Ortres Destrada is known for his home run power, which he will produce”, “Eddie Zosky had a misreble year last season,” Tony Pena and Tom Pagnozzi are two “oldsters” who are still excellent picks, Charlie Hayes’ “stock is raising a mile high,” Unless Milt Cuyler plays more his numbers will drop.



## Chapter 9: Marketing 101

*I did not want the book to become a business manual, but the original manuscript contained more stories, a bunch of valuable marketing insights and sample promotional pieces. Here is what you missed:*

### Early promotions

The quickest and easiest way to reach this small but growing audience in the 1980s was to place an advertisement in one of the major sports publications, but there were better ways to target potential readers. The more targeted the publication, the more I could focus my sales message. I also swapped ads with Dennis Lepore's *Sandlot Shrink*. The fact that Dennis was open to running my ad might seem brave... because we were direct competitors.

I learned from corporate marketing that it's not about being brave but about being smart. What better a targeted audience than the people who read your

competitors? As long as you are secure in the quality of your own product, there is little risk in swapping ads with competitors. You might lose a few customers who find more value in the competitor, but odds are you'll net out way ahead. At least in this industry, readers devoured as much information as they could so the risk of exposing your own readers to a competitor was small.

Again, this only works if your product is good and can stand on its own.

A reader's commitment to the *Baseball Forecaster* in the early 1990s was not inexpensive; the book cost \$19.95 and the newsletter was \$49.95, a \$70 investment. So my marketing promotions were typically two-step efforts. I'd offer a free or low-cost teaser, and then hard-sell the prospective customer with the sample they'd receive. One of the most successful offers I used to run was this one:

# The Most Important \$2 You'll Ever Spend On Your Fantasy Team...

**Winning is not a matter of luck.** It is a refined skill. It is knowing the players, building the strategies and learning how to manage a roster. Winners have developed the innate ability to make the numbers work for them. They don't shy away from pitchers. They can read the true potential of rookies. They have access to non-traditional information sources.

Winners read *Ron Shandler's Baseball Forecaster*, the most scientific approach to player evaluation and roster management available anywhere.

**No other publication or information service...**

- ✓ gives you as many draft day preparation and in-season roster management tools.
- ✓ contains info on as many major and minor leaguers every month.
- ✓ covers as many format types -- rotisserie, simulations, pick-a-player, computer games, more.
- ✓ is dedicated to creating winners.

If you've never heard of the *Baseball Forecaster*, you're not

alone. We are not in the bookstores or on magazine stands. But we've been in business for 10 years and have thousands of subscribers. Chances are there's a contender in one of your leagues who knows about us... and is keeping it his own little secret. Now is your chance to find him out...

---

**Special Introductory Offer plus a FREE GIFT!**

The best way to discover the value of the *Baseball Forecaster* is to try it out firsthand. We'll send you a copy of our current issue, packed full of valuable information, so you can see for yourself.

**Plus...** Take advantage of this exclusive offer now and receive the Special Report, "*The 10 Most Dangerous Mistakes Fantasy Leaguers Make*" absolutely free!

Both publications -- your sample issue and special report -- are yours for just \$2 (postage and handling)! Discover the *Baseball Forecaster* today... and take the first step towards winning your league's 1996 championship.

*"An invaluable tool, whether you're a sabermetrician or a first-year fantasy leaguer." John Hunt, Baseball Weekly*

*"This is the datum bible -- baseball's best kept secret -- fantasy or otherwise. Shandler is to baseball numbers what Webster is to the English language."*  
**Dennis LePore, The Rotissarian**

*"...the only projections with any guts; everyone else pussyfoots."*  
**Alex Patton, Player Profiles**

**Ron Shandler's  
Baseball  
Forecaster.**

*Our 10th Year*

Send \$2 (P/H) to  
**Shandler Enterprises Co.**  
P.O. Box 20303-X  
Roanoke, VA 24018

One sample copy per person, please.  
Offer expires February 15, 1996.



An ad like this would bring in upwards of \$1,000-\$2,000 in cash--mostly actual dollar bills. This initial cash covered the cost of the samples and often much of the ad cost. Then it would generate a few hundred

new subscription orders on the back end.

But as much as I succeeded with space ads, my direct mail programs were the promotional vehicles that really made bank.

## What I learned from the geezer ladies

My longest corporate job was about six years with a business-to-business publisher. They did all their marketing with direct mail, sending out catalogs of their offerings to every conceivable type of retail and service business.

Inside the facility was a huge room about the size of a typical Trader Joe's. There were dozens of desks in a tight grid filling much of the inner space. On each desk was a computer; behind each computer sat an older woman doing data entry. I think the qualifications for the position were 65 years of experience on Earth, good eyesight, and functioning fingers.

You'd walk into this room and feel overwhelmed by the chatter of the keyboards and the whiteness of the bobbing heads. But the most remarkable feature was that all four walls were lined with bookshelves 4-5 tiers high. Those shelves were packed with every Yellow Pages phone book in the United States.

I was the Marketing Manager responsible for customers who were building contractors. My personal group of ladies were inputting names and addresses of plumbers, electricians, masons, and anyone else in the trades into a huge database, used to mail out our catalog of contractor products. The database was the most valuable asset the company owned.

I learned that the mailing list was the most important part of a direct mail promotion. A terrible promotion sent to a highly targeted list would be far more successful than the world's best promotion sent to a bad list. The hundreds of addresses being data-entered every day by these ladies would be mailed catalogs containing products specifically targeted to their needs. Yes, it was junk mail, but it was an incredibly successful approach for a very successful company.

So I focused my early direct mail efforts on accumulating as many names and addresses of fantasy leaguers as possible. I traded addresses with other companies and rented a few lists as well. The better the list was targeted, the better it performed. Back then, a typical direct mailing might generate a 1-2 percent response and be profitable. My early efforts were pulling anywhere from 5 to 10 percent.

Sometimes I tried to get innovative. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. Once I was on the phone with a customer and he tossed me this throwaway comment: "Every lawyer in Orange County, CA is playing fantasy baseball." The light bulb flashed on. So, I rented a mailing list of lawyers in Orange County and sent out a mailing. Long story short—not every lawyer in Orange County played fantasy baseball. The

promo netted out in the red and I never did it again, but it only shows what's possible if you can identify the right audience. In this case, it was "good process, bad outcome."

A typical direct mail package might contain an outer envelope, an order card, a return envelope, a sales letter and a brochure. Some included other upsell tidbits as well. As effective as the medium was, printing, fulfillment and postage could make these programs extraordinarily expensive. But I had become proficient in the process and had a solid vendor support system.

The sales letter shown on the next few pages was hailed by award-winning industry copywriter Ed MacLean. It delivered, over and over.

That "Unbelievable Triple Guarantee" at the end of the letter seems incredibly scary from a business perspective. How could I guarantee that someone's team will improve and offer all their money back if the team didn't? Another lesson from my corporate days was that the sales generated from such a guarantee typically far surpass the number of refund requests.

And this letter did generate many thousands of dollars in sales. Over the three years that I was mailing this promo, I received refund requests from a grand total of three people.

Three. Total.

I'd like to say that the *Baseball Forecaster* was so incredibly good that nearly everybody improved their team, but of course, that's not true. Most people simply had forgotten about the guarantee by the end of the season. Some probably considered that they still got value from the publications even if they didn't improve. And some just wouldn't take the time to request a refund. Getting a refund puts the onus on the reader to take the time to send a request. But promoting such a strong guarantee up front undoubtedly helped convince thousands of people to become customers. Opening the door is the most challenging part. The onus was then on the strength of the publications to persuade those customers to renew.



# The 10 Most Dangerous Mistakes Fantasy Leaguers Make . . .

Dear fantasy leaguer,

Everybody makes mistakes. It's the risk inherent in playing fantasy baseball. But some mistakes are more costly than others. In 1993, many fantasy owners were kicking themselves all summer because they...

*...dropped out of the bidding for John Olerud with their sights set on Mark McGwire.*

*...paid megabucks for Dennis Eckersely or Roger Clemens.*

*...lost patience with Dave Justice or Cal Ripken, Jr. and traded them away in May.*

*...signed Pat Listach to a long-term contract.*

Mistakes happen. But all of the above could have been avoided.

To succeed at any type of fantasy baseball competition -- from Rotisserie to head-to-head to computer simulations -- you must have the best information resources you can find. And you must know how to use them.

The *Baseball Forecaster* has been creating champions since 1986. It is not a mainstream publication for reasons you'll soon see. But, in the winter of 1992, it told its subscribers that John Olerud would have a breakout year, Pat Listach would not even come close to his 1992 numbers, and Dennis Eckersely could be on the threshold of a breakdown.

Now... the *Baseball Forecaster* can help you avoid mistakes in 1994. In fact, a subscription to the *Baseball Forecaster* can help you avoid the 10 most dangerous mistakes that fantasy leaguers make...

## **MISTAKE #1: Taking the numbers at face value.**

Any way you look at it -- it's a numbers game, but the only way to win is to know how to really read the numbers. Homeruns, batting average and ERA are just outcomes of specific events... The real value is knowing what those numbers represent -- power, batting eye, pitching effectiveness -- and being able to chart and project the growth and erosion of those base performance skills.

Take a player like Robin Ventura, whose homerun total dropped from 23 in 1991 to 14 in 1992. Last winter, the *Baseball Forecaster* showed how his power skills actually increased during that time. It showed why the homerun drop was deceptive and projected a return to the 20-homer plateau in 1993. And Ventura did rebound.

The *Baseball Forecaster* tracks the numbers you're familiar with -- as well as the base skills they represent. Every month, for every player.

MORE . . .

**MISTAKE #2: Drafting players based on last year's numbers alone, or nearly as bad, three-year averages.**

Most fantasy leaguers are finally getting away from looking at last year's stats alone when evaluating players for next season. But, the latest craze is three-year averages, which can be even more deceptive.

The *Baseball Forecaster* starts with a 5-year trend in constructing a base player forecast. This projection is adjusted for variables such as a player's age, strike zone judgment, batting order position, home ballpark, injury status and more. No other publication uses as complex a forecasting model, based on publisher Ron Shandler's 15 years of forecasting experience and 25 years as an avid gamer and fantasy leaguer.

**MISTAKE #3: Waiting until March to prepare for your draft.**

Time is a premium for all of us. But rushing through your draft preparation is one of the leading causes of lost fantasy seasons.

The *Baseball Forecaster* is mailed FIRST CLASS every month. So you don't have to search out the information you need -- it is delivered direct to your mailbox. In fact, in March we publish two issues... to be absolutely certain you have everything you need for Draft Day.

**MISTAKE #4: Relying on outdated information sources.**

There are those who live and die by the word of Bill James or John Benson or Glenn Waggoner. And that is fine, as long as they are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each. People who rely on retail off-the-shelf books often don't realize that by the time your local bookstore gets them, the information inside is as much as four months old!

Last March, that meant you could have gone into your draft with outdated projections for over 150 players!

The *Baseball Forecaster* publishes its Annual Review in November and then updates it every single month. In fact, when our April issue hits the mail in late March, our readers get the most current information for their draft available anywhere!

**MISTAKE #5: Looking for an advantage among easily available publications.**

The secret to winning is finding an edge over your competitors. But everybody is reading Mazeroski and James. John Benson had already told the world to grab all the 26-year-olds. Baseball Weekly had already tabbed Piazza and Salmon as Rookies of the Year back in February 1993.

If everybody is reading these publications... how can you hope to find that hidden sleeper nobody has seen?

The *Baseball Forecaster* has been providing fantasy leaguers with a competitive edge since 1986. Only Bill James has been publishing longer. Yet, we've kept a low profile because that's how we maintain our high value. We've been called "the fantasy leaguer's best kept secret".

Now we can be yours. Just be sure nobody else in your league finds out.



#### **MISTAKE #6: Misreading minor league stats.**

The success of Mike Piazza was no surprise -- after all, he did bat .350 in the minors in 1992. But what about players like Mike Trombley or Rod Bolton? While the newspapers were hyping them as guaranteed keepers last winter, the real numbers said otherwise.

The *Baseball Forecaster* is the only publication that contains major league equivalent (MLE) stats for over 1,200 AAA and AA level batters and pitchers! We are also the only publication that uses these MLEs in our major league player trend analyses... with amazing results!

#### **MISTAKE #7: Breathing a sigh of relief at the end of draft day.**

Some Rotisserie experts will tell you that 90% of your work is done on draft day. It is true that a good draft is important to build a solid foundation for the year, but lots can happen over a long baseball season.

Roster management is probably the most overlooked aspect of the game... and you spend 26 weeks doing it! The best draft prep in the world won't help you when that first player goes down with a pulled hamstring or when your team's ace reliever blows his first four saves.

Only a constant flow of updated information can help you weather the unexpected. The *Baseball Forecaster* reacts to changing conditions by adjusting its expectations. We revise every player projection -- every month -- so you know what to expect over the balance of the season.

#### **MISTAKE #8: Misunderstanding the impact of averages.**

Everybody knows batting averages and ERAs, but we often don't understand how to use them. We'll trade for a .300 hitter in August and think it will have a major impact on our team's .270 batting average. To improve our team's 3.75 ERA, we'll pass up a middle reliever with a 2.00 ERA and pick up a starting pitcher with a 3.00 ERA. (Both tactics will fail.)

The *Baseball Forecaster* shows you how to keep the numbers in perspective. It identifies the trends and shows you the impact of these averages. That impact changes every month... and we are right there with you every step of the way.

#### **MISTAKE #9: Making player moves based on yesterday's performance rather than tomorrow's potential.**

It was a tough temptation to resist... Chad Kreuter was batting .431 at the end of April and Sparky had proclaimed him as his starting catcher. So everyone began picking him up in a frenzy. Then, from May 1st on, Krueter batted a hefty .248.

So many fantasy leaguers rely on a player's short-term past performance when considering trades and player moves. (How often do you check out Baseball Weekly's "Last Three Weeks" column?) But you can't win with yesterday's stats.

MORE . . .

The *Baseball Forecaster* keeps a pulse on the in-season trends every month. It lists balance-of-season projections for every player based on what they've done to date -- but grounded in the reality of what their historical trends are. It's a formula that works time and time again.

**MISTAKE #10: Defending the right to strike out on your own.**

Everyone has their own system. Some years it works and some years it doesn't. Why waste all that valuable time and energy when success can be at your fingertips with the proven best tool on the market?

Open up your horizons to some new possibilities. And bring your team up to the next level of success with the *Baseball Forecaster*.

In fact, I personally guarantee that the *Baseball Forecaster* will improve your team in 1994... or I'll refund every penny of your money! See below for details on an incredible guarantee.

Look over the enclosed materials for a complete description of what the *Baseball Forecaster* offers you. Then, complete the order card and send it with your check or money order in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

Do it now... and guarantee your success in 1994!

Best regards,



Ron Shandler  
Publisher

P.S. Would you be willing to make an investment of less than \$6 a month to absolutely guarantee that your team will improve in 1994... or you get your money back? It's a no-risk deal. You can't lose.

## The UNBELIEVABLE TRIPLE GUARANTEE

**1**

Order the  
1994  
*Baseball  
Forecaster  
Annual Review.*

If you are not satisfied -- for any reason -- simply return it in resaleable condition within 30 days for a full refund.  
*No questions asked.*

**2**

Order a  
subscription to  
the *Baseball  
Forecaster*  
reports (1 year or  
6 months). If you are not  
satisfied -- for any reason  
-- cancel at any time and  
we will send you a refund  
for all unmailed issues.  
*No questions asked.*

**3**

Order both the  
1994 Annual Review and a  
one-year subscription to the  
*Baseball Forecaster* reports.

**This is your complete 1994 arsenal.**  
With these tools in hand... if you do not improve your fantasy team's finish in 1994, we will refund every penny of your money. Next October, simply write us and tell us, and your refund check will be in the mail to you within 24 hours! *No questions asked.*

**Shandler Enterprises Co.**

**P.O. Box 1001**

**Merrimack, NH 03054**



## Tidal wave

As the world shifted to online marketing, I tried to port my skills over to email. It seemed perfectly logical to me that I could accumulate email addresses of fantasy leaguers and fare just as well as snail mail, and at a far lesser cost.

So, I began accumulating email addresses from every possible baseball and fantasy baseball website. I bought the harvesting software, cast out a wide net and downloaded thousands of addresses into my database. I grabbed emails from websites that offered stat services, ran leagues and sold support products. *John Skilton's Baseball Links* and *Fantasy Baseball Central* were directory sites and my own personal online Yellow Pages. The best part was that I knew these emails would connect me to people with a demonstrated interest in fantasy baseball. It was the epitome of target marketing.

And the results! Oh. My. God. The first email promotion I sent out was phenomenal. It generated a 40 percent response rate!

Yes, 40. Four—oh.

I was giddy with delight at my new source of business. The unexpected infusion of revenue helped me exceed all budget expectations. I had effectively put my business on steroids and taken it up to a totally new level.

And then my internet service provider shut me down.

The email from my ISP came out of the blue. Apparently, of the thousands of people who I had emailed, one person complained about the unsolicited message. It prompted my service provider to look at my usage and make the shutdown decision without warning. I balked. I explained to the ISP rep that this was an accepted practice in the marketing world and how I had been doing this with snail mail for years. It was not like I was some Nigerian prince trying to share my wealth or a sideshow barker hawking male enhancement devices. I was offering a relevant product to people I knew would be interested in it. Nor was I filling mailboxes, landfills and recycling bins with reams of useless paper. If the recipient wasn't interested, all he had to do was click DELETE.

Frankly, it's an argument that I stand behind even today. The ISP rep was unimpressed. I promised to stop, but there was no way I'd be willing to shut this massive cash flow spigot. So, I did a little research and figured out the identity of the one disgruntled email recipient and deleted him off my list. Then I started mailing again.

I squeezed out a few more months of revenue before "SPAM" suddenly became an ugly word and I had no

choice but to stop the practice. It was a particularly tough blow for someone who was a huge Monty Python fan.

## FLAG

Over the years, I have seen some excellent products fail due to poor marketing. I have even offered my help to some competitors because I thought they had good products but were going down the wrong path. I've found that, due to ego or ignorance, people tend to choose their own fate, for good or bad.

That sounds like I'm full of myself. But say what you want about anything else I've done in this industry, when it came to marketing, at least back in those formative years, I knew what the hell I was talking about. The success of the *Baseball Forecaster* by someone like me was a testament to that.

Thankfully, some colleagues decided to hop on board when I started a co-op mailing program. In 1991, I created the Fantasy League Advertisers Group (FLAG). Those familiar with the Val-Pak mailers you get at home will immediately understand the concept. I rounded up a bunch of fantasy baseball vendors who each contributed a flyer to a group mailing; everyone shared in the costs.

Each vendor provided their customer mailing list, or some portion thereof. I sent out the lists to be merged and duplicate names removed. Then I charged each vendor for printing their flyers and a percentage of the mailing cost, based on how many names they contributed to the list. Those that contributed more names paid a lower percentage of the per-piece cost. A few vendors opted not to contribute any names and they were charged a significant premium. I took no fee for the effort; it was worth my time to assemble the program and have access to all those juicy names. My own direct mail efforts were locked in, so adding this mailing fit seamlessly into my process.

The companies that had flyers in these mailings were mostly smaller vendors looking for an inexpensive means to access a pool of prospective customers. In fact, *Fantasy Sports* magazine was the only major organization to participate. But the cooperative nature of the mail program benefited everyone. The participants included:

- *Fantasy Baseball* magazine
- *Baseball Sabermetric* book
- Pursue the Pennant game
- Sports Books, Etc. bookstore
- Centerfield Software
- Stallvalue System
- Bingham Baseball

- Dream Teams Baseball Catalog
- Action Stats
- Lights Out Sports Fans
- Power vs Speed Fantasy Baseball Challenge
- BDJ's Sports Diamond Fantasy

Stallvalue's Bob Stall and Jim Johnston of Centerfield Software were two participants in the first mailing, and both experienced good success with the program. Their products also shared some synergies, so they started looking for ways to take advantage of their respective strengths. For instance, Johnston automated the spreadsheet applications that Stall was selling and Stall provided content for Johnston's customers. The pair started cross-promoting their



**Bill James got into the newsletter business, but the product was an unfortunate marketing failure**

products regularly.

Johnston was interested in getting involved in more of these community efforts, so he took over running the FLAG mailings in 1993 and 1994.

## Chapter 10: The Most Accurate Projections in the Universe

*The only major cuts to this chapter were efforts to temper the descriptions of my multiple run-ins with John Benson. I could have reprinted the complete missives that we exchanged. I could have included some commentary I had added for comic relief that probably would come off as mean. I think the chapter speaks for itself as is.*



## Chapter 11: Meeting of the Minds

### More about *Baseball Weekly's* first fantasy supplement

Perhaps the most interesting part of the 1992 guide was a survey of several well-known writers—John Benson, USA Today's Rod Beaton, Steve Mann, Founding Fathers Glen Waggoner and Harry Stein, and *Baseball Weekly's* Paul White—asking their opinions on players to avoid, overpriced players and possible bargains. They were also asked things like:

#### What are the advantages/disadvantages of a draft versus an auction?

The responders dug in their heels on their preferred format. The two Founding Fathers obviously opted for an auction, with Waggoner saying, "One is fun; one is not." Beaton preferred a draft because, "money only complicates things," while Benson said, "auctions create an element of excitement because they are more complicated."

#### How much money do you invest each year?

Mann led the group with \$500 worth of skin in the game. Benson said he did not play for money, and Waggoner said, "I haven't touched my pension or kids' college fund or robbed a convenience store."

#### What is your philosophy when it comes to rookies?

Almost everybody's philosophy on rookies was to avoid them. Waggoner wrote, "A rookie is like a first wife—pretty exciting at first but chances are you're going to get burned."

### More about the 1993 pre-LABR zygote league

A notable addition to this issue of *BW* was an exhibition fantasy league composed entirely of *BW* staff members. "The names have been withheld to protect the ignorant," noted (John) Hunt. But he gave the competition a name—the Official *Baseball Weekly* Rotisserie Pre-Auction Auction (OBWRPAA). There were actually two—an AL version (OBWALRPAA) and an NL version (OBWNLRPAA).

Hunt hadn't yet mastered the science of acronyms.

Owners were identified as "Team A" through "Team L" and were described in the headline as Rotisserie 'Experts.' Why was 'experts' in single quotes?

Extensive research offers up a few speculations:

- The humans behind Teams A through L were not really experts.
- Some were experts, some were not, but it was inaccurate to use a collective noun.
- They were not official, having never graduated from expert school.

Still, in the gestational history of public fantasy exhibitions, this 'expert' league could have been considered the zygote. And despite this tentative toe-dipping exercise, the 1993 guide was a huge step up from 1992.

### More from the first LABR AL draft

The first-ever LABR draft was the American League-only contest, held on Tuesday, March 8, 1994, via conference call. Twelve intrepid souls phoned into a toll-free 800 number at 7:30 PM and conducted their auction.

In the first snafu of the fledgling league, Keith Olbermann showed up expecting to be in the National League affair. Unprepared for the AL, his phone clicked off and Hunt had to scramble to find a replacement. *BW's* layout editor, Greg Frazier, stepped in to draft and then turned the team over to Glen Waggoner, who was scheduled for the next night's NL auction but was unexpectedly sent on a business trip, opening that slot for Olbermann.

Did you get all that?

"I didn't draft this team," Waggoner said. "It was drafted by a well-meaning Australian shepherd who has never seen a baseball game in his life. It was assigned to me by default when he had to return to the outback for spring shearing." Given that most of his experience was in NL leagues, he promised to "learn the first names and American League affiliations of all my players by the All-Star Break."

### More from the first LABR NL draft

*This was the draft I was in.*

Michael Laub made it very clear in his publication that he wanted no part of any player coming off a career year, thereby telegraphing his draft strategy. He was the last of the group to land a player, and when he did start picking up names, they were all players on the rebound. After he picked up his first two pitchers, Bret Saberhagen and John Smiley, someone commented, "Ah, the all-rehab team!"

Dottie Enrico was the founder of the first all-female Rotisserie league. She was impressive, not so much with her choice of players but as a strategic auction participant. By targeting relievers early, she got tons of money out on the table, and effectively closed me out on landing any front-line closer of note, dammit.

For Rod Beaton, this was his first ever auction draft. "I have committed the standard by which all mistakes

## RON SHANDLER

► **Strategy:** Self control. It's not often you get a chance to compete against a group of people who *all* know their stuff. So, it was important not to get too enamored with any players in the early going.

► **Did it work? Surprises?:** No. I couldn't resist some front-line pitchers, and by the time I regrouped, all the ace relievers and heavy bats were gone.

► **Best thing:** Probably the best pitching staff in the league.

► **Worst thing:** My overpaid, second-string, yet deep bullpen awaits the failures of first-string gamblers Olson, Franco and Harris.

► **Key to success:** Rod Brewer, Kevin Bass and Jerry Browne each need to have 30/30 years, or I'll have to resort to trading one or two of my starters for some solid bats.

► **Bargain of the draft:** Salomon Torres (Baron) at \$6.

► **Most overpriced:** Ben Rivera (Hunt) at \$12 and Glenn Davis (Olbermann) at \$10 are even worse than Barfield.

► **Team to beat:** Michael Laub.

### RON SHANDLER,

Publisher of *Baseball Forecaster*, a monthly publication with a statistical perspective on performance skills and trends. (For more info, call 1-800-4CAST-20). He holds an MBA and has played fantasy baseball for 20 years.



#### Ron Shandler

|    |                 |      |
|----|-----------------|------|
| C  | Eddie Taubensee | \$7  |
| C  | Danny Sheaffer  | \$1  |
| 1B | Fred McGriff    | \$36 |
| 3B | Dave Hansen     | \$5  |
| CO | Rod Brewer      | \$1  |
| 2B | Bret Boone      | \$18 |
| SS | Walt Weiss      | \$6  |
| MI | Bip Roberts     | \$17 |
| OF | Ray Lankford    | \$25 |
| OF | Ryan Thompson   | \$9  |
| OF | Karl Rhodes     | \$8  |
| OF | Chris Jones     | \$2  |
| OF | Kevin Bass      | \$1  |
| UT | Jerry Browne    | \$3  |
| P  | Jose Rijo       | \$30 |
| P  | Tommy Greene    | \$18 |
| P  | Curt Schilling  | \$18 |
| P  | Jeff Fassero    | \$15 |
| P  | Trevor Hoffman  | \$14 |
| P  | Greg McMichael  | \$14 |
| P  | Mel Rojas       | \$9  |
| P  | Mike Hampton    | \$1  |
| P  | Tom Wegmann     | \$1  |

**My first LABR roster listing in *Baseball Weekly's Leviathan*. The most important thing was my 800 number**

could go \$6 on Salomon Torres. Several of the other owners graciously doled out accolades, but we secretly wished we had budgeted better. Of course, Torres ended up going 2-8 with a 5.44 ERA, a 1.56 WHIP, and almost as many walks (34) as strikeouts (42).

are judged," he said, after dropping \$5 to roster Jesse Barfield, who hadn't had an at-bat since 1992 and would never see another. Rod was doing a radio show during the proceedings and kept disappearing for blocks of time. In the wee hours of the morning—and with an 8:00 AM plane to catch—he was down to \$2 and two players left to draft. His frustration level rose as he spent several rounds unsuccessfully trying to get two \$1 picks past the rest of the group. He finally closed shop after landing Trevor Wilson and Brian Holman.

In a testament to keeping on top of late-breaking news, Al Chaby went frantic after landing pitcher Pete Harnisch at \$24, then finding out Harnisch had been hit by a batted ball that afternoon. "Hey, wait a minute! Are you guys kidding?" came the anguished cry that pierced the phone lines. Harnisch was fine.

Stu Baron landed what many of us considered the steal of the draft when he was the only one with a pitching slot open who

The special *Fantasy Guide*—the mega-draft prep edition that John Hunt dubbed the "Leviathan"—appeared on newsstands one week later. On page 49 was my first experts league roster—with its uncharacteristic \$120 pitching staff—along with my postage-stamp-sized mug shot and a brief bio. More important than anything else, my company's 800 phone number sat beside my mug. Now folks would know who Ron Shandler was, that he wrote the *Baseball Forecaster*, and how to get in contact with him. Sweet!

## More about the final standings

The final standings were an interesting study.

### NATIONAL LEAGUE OF ALTERNATIVE BASEBALL REALITY

|                     | BA   | HR   | RBI  | SB   | ERA  | W    | bb+h | Sv   | Tot. |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. John Hunt        | 8.0  | 11.0 | 9.0  | 8.0  | 11.0 | 8.0  | 10.0 | 10.0 | 75.0 |
| 2. Michael Laub     | 9.0  | 8.0  | 7.0  | 11.0 | 9.0  | 12.0 | 12.0 | 3.5  | 71.5 |
| 3. Ron Shandler     | 6.0  | 9.5  | 10.0 | 4.0  | 10.0 | 6.0  | 7.0  | 12.0 | 64.5 |
| 4. Rod Beaton       | 3.0  | 9.5  | 11.0 | 2.0  | 12.0 | 11.0 | 8.0  | 6.0  | 62.5 |
| 5. Al Chaby         | 12.0 | 12.0 | 12.0 | 10.0 | 4.0  | 5.0  | 4.0  | 2.0  | 61.0 |
| 6. Golenbock/Patton | 1.0  | 5.0  | 6.0  | 7.0  | 8.0  | 3.0  | 11.0 | 11.0 | 57.0 |
| 7. Scott Newman     | 1.0  | 5.0  | 6.0  | 7.0  | 6.0  | 9.0  | 9.0  | 9.0  | 52.0 |
| 8. Stu Baron        | 7.0  | 6.0  | 8.0  | 5.5  | 5.0  | 7.0  | 6.0  | 5.0  | 49.5 |
| 9. Keith Olbermann  | 5.0  | 3.5  | 2.0  | 1.0  | 7.0  | 10.0 | 5.0  | 7.0  | 40.5 |
| 10. Steve Mann      | 4.0  | 7.0  | 5.0  | 5.5  | 3.0  | 4.0  | 3.0  | 3.5  | 35.0 |
| 11. Bill James      | 11.0 | 2.0  | 4.0  | 9.0  | 1.0  | 2.0  | 2.0  | 1.0  | 32.0 |
| 12. Dottie Enrico   | 2.0  | 3.5  | 3.0  | 3.0  | 2.0  | 1.0  | 1.0  | 8.0  | 23.5 |

Standings provided by Heath Data Services

### AMERICAN LEAGUE OF ALTERNATIVE BASEBALL REALITY

|                      | BA   | HR   | RBI  | SB   | ERA  | W    | bb+h | Sv   | Tot. |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Larry Labadini    | 12.0 | 4.0  | 7.0  | 10.0 | 12.0 | 10.0 | 12.0 | 11.0 | 78.0 |
| 2. Greg Ambrosius    | 6.0  | 10.0 | 11.5 | 11.0 | 11.0 | 6.5  | 8.0  | 10.0 | 74.0 |
| 3. Danny Sheridan    | 10.0 | 6.0  | 8.0  | 12.0 | 9.0  | 6.5  | 10.0 | 9.0  | 70.5 |
| 4. John Hunt         | 9.0  | 7.0  | 11.5 | 9.0  | 8.0  | 3.0  | 7.0  | 7.0  | 61.5 |
| 5. Mike Gimbel       | 7.0  | 12.0 | 6.0  | 1.0  | 10.0 | 11.5 | 11.0 | 1.0  | 59.5 |
| 6. R. Schaufelberger | 4.0  | 8.5  | 10.0 | 8.0  | 1.0  | 8.5  | 1.0  | 8.0  | 49.0 |
| 7. Lisa Winston      | 8.0  | 8.5  | 5.0  | 5.0  | 5.0  | 11.5 | 3.0  | 3.0  | 49.0 |
| 8. Rot. Sports Hour  | 3.0  | 11.0 | 9.0  | 4.0  | 7.0  | 2.0  | 5.0  | 6.0  | 47.0 |
| 9. Paul White        | 11.0 | 5.0  | 2.0  | 2.0  | 4.0  | 5.0  | 9.0  | 2.0  | 40.0 |
| 10. Steve Zipay      | 5.0  | 2.0  | 4.0  | 3.0  | 6.0  | 4.0  | 6.0  | 5.0  | 35.0 |
| 11. Glen Waggoner    | 2.0  | 3.0  | 3.0  | 6.0  | 3.0  | 8.5  | 4.0  | 4.0  | 33.5 |
| 12. Bob Stall        | 1.0  | 1.0  | 1.0  | 7.0  | 2.0  | 1.0  | 2.0  | 12.0 | 27.0 |

Standings provided by Heath Data Services

Golenbock/Patton went into the season planning to use the "Sweeney Plan," punting home runs and RBI while maxing out everything else. Despite drafting Bonds as a red herring and trade chip, they were mostly successful in getting the other pieces they needed. They just didn't land enough starting pitching.

Larry Labadini's winning team nearly ran the board in the pitching categories, but anyone who thought that performance represented Larry's M.O. would get blindsided a few years later.

Glen Waggoner demonstrated what happens when you put an NL-only guy in an AL-only league to run a team drafted by a well-meaning Australian shepherd who has never seen a baseball game in his life.

For all of Bob Stall's superior methods, the only thing he got right was saves. Then again, his wife had given birth on the day before the draft, so it was probably a miracle that he stayed awake long enough to draft anyone good. At least he got some relief. (Rim shot!)



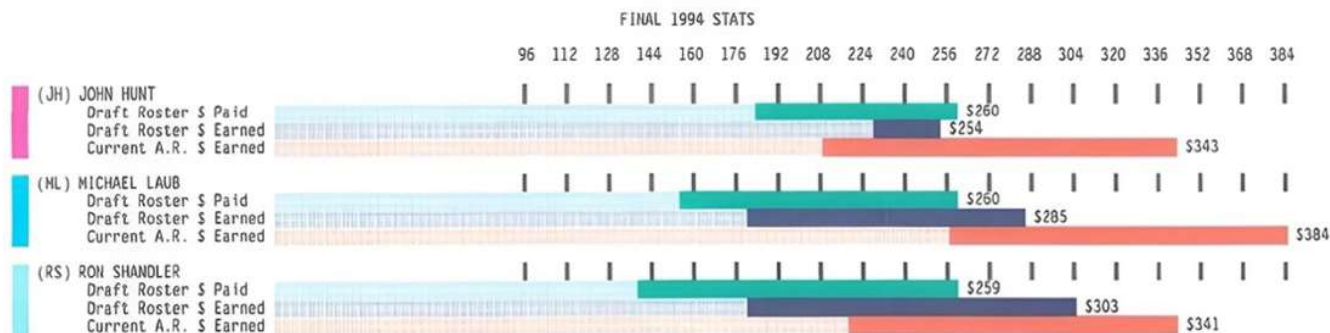
A week after the end of the season, we were regaled with a treasure trove of information when Jerry Heath's final reports hit our mailboxes. In it were dozens of

pages of analytical reports on the 1994 season.

This is a small piece of what heaven looked like in 1994 (also see the chart on the next page):

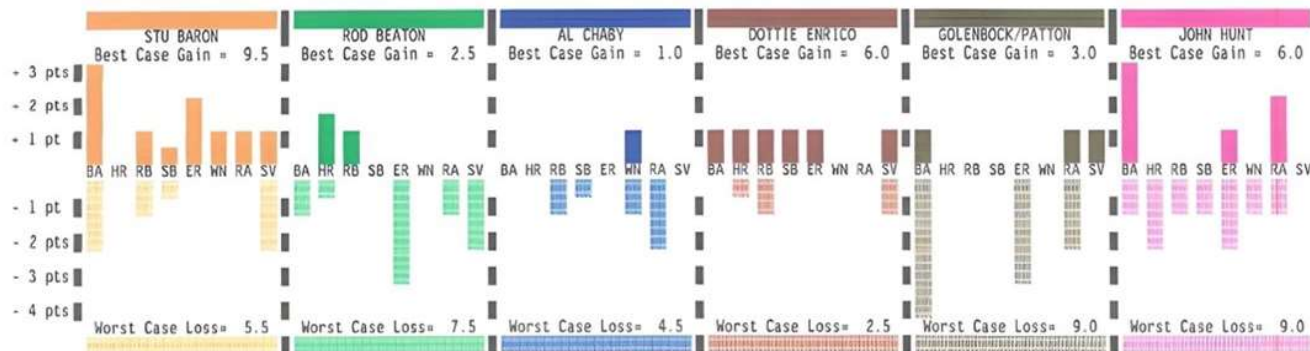
## MONTHLY REPORT / DRAFT ROSTERS VS. CURRENT ROSTERS

\$ Earned for Draft and Current Rosters are calculated using Heath Data's Player Values. These values are updated weekly and posted on our free computer BBS. All values are based on the customary \$260 team salary scale. Left side of each dual-shaded bar represents HITTERS; right side, PITCHERS.



## NEXT 3 WEEKS: BEST CASE / WORST CASE PROJECTIONS

Best Case Gain assumes a team will have BEST team stats in each scoring category for the next 3 weeks while all other teams have average stats for next 3 weeks. Worst Case Loss assumes a team will have WORST team stats in each scoring category for the next 3 weeks while all other tms have average stats for next 3 weeks. This Best Case/Worst Case report is updated weekly on our free Computer Bulletin Board System. Anyone with a computer and modem may call the BBS, 804-498-8405.



## HYPOTHETICAL 1994 SEASONAL STANDINGS BASED ON ORIGINAL ROSTERS ( As if no moves had been made since Draft/Auction Day. )

|              | HYP.<br>TEAM<br>PTS. | ACTUAL<br>STANDINGS | B AVG | Pts.  | HR   | Pts. | RBI  | Pts. | SB   | Pts. | ERA  | Pts.  | WINS | BB-H/9IP | Pts. | SVS   | AB  | HITS  | IP    | ER     | BB-H  | ACTIVE | ROSTER |    |     |      |  |
|--------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|------|----------|------|-------|-----|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|----|-----|------|--|
|              |                      |                     |       |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |      |          |      |       |     |       |       |        |       | MOVES  | Trd    | RL | W/D | Totl |  |
| 1. SHANDLER  | 66.5                 | 3rd- 64.5           | 9.0   | .282  | 7.0  | 112  | 7.0  | 465  | 4.0  | 68   | 12.0 | 3.40  | 4.5  | 34       | 11.0 | 11.6  | 57  | 3563  | 1005  | 669.0  | 253   | 860    | 5      | 2  | 28  | 35   |  |
| 2. G/P       | 65.5                 | 6th- 57.0           | 10.0  | .283  | 1.0  | 75   | 1.0  | 348  | 12.0 | 134  | 11.0 | 3.60  | 8.5  | 45       | 12.0 | 11.1  | 42  | 2994  | 846   | 795.1  | 318   | 985    | 7      | 5  | 21  | 33   |  |
| 3. CHABY     | 61.5                 | 5th- 61.0           | 12.0  | .295  | 12.0 | 163  | 12.0 | 659  | 10.0 | 109  | 3.0  | 4.44  | 4.5  | 34       | 2.0  | 12.8  | 15  | 4222  | 1247  | 583.2  | 288   | 832    | 6      | 8  | 15  | 29   |  |
| 4. LAUB      | 59.0                 | 2nd- 71.5           | 6.0   | .278  | 8.0  | 114  | 2.0  | 396  | 11.0 | 112  | 7.0  | 3.98  | 12.0 | 68       | 9.0  | 11.7  | 10  | 3004  | 836   | 961.2  | 425   | 1252   | 9      | 4  | 14  | 27   |  |
| 5. BEATON    | 57.0                 | 4th- 62.5           | 3.0   | .267  | 10.0 | 139  | 11.0 | 579  | 2.0  | 49   | 8.0  | 3.90  | 11.0 | 60       | 7.0  | 11.9  | 13  | 3590  | 957   | 846.0  | 367   | 1119   | 5      | 2  | 4   | 11   |  |
| 6. NEWMAN    | 55.0                 | 7th- 52.0           | 1.0   | .254  | 2.0  | 88   | 6.0  | 455  | 8.0  | 90   | 9.0  | 3.75  | 10.0 | 48       | 8.0  | 11.8  | 43  | 3234  | 823   | 776.0  | 323   | 1018   | 4      | 4  | 22  | 30   |  |
| 7. OLBERMANN | 52.5                 | 9th- 40.5           | 7.0   | .280  | 3.5  | 89   | 4.0  | 427  | 1.0  | 41   | 10.0 | 3.72  | 8.5  | 45       | 10.0 | 11.6  | 31  | 3063  | 859   | 841.0  | 348   | 1082   | 0      | 4  | 15  | 19   |  |
| 8. HUNT      | 51.5                 | 1st- 75.0           | 11.0  | .291  | 11.0 | 141  | 10.0 | 560  | 5.0  | 82   | 2.0  | 4.96  | 2.5  | 33       | 3.0  | 12.7  | 29  | 4386  | 1276  | 629.2  | 347   | 891    | 10     | 9  | 21  | 40   |  |
| 9. MANN      | 49.5                 | 10th- 35.0          | 5.0   | .270  | 5.0  | 98   | 3.0  | 406  | 9.0  | 94   | 6.0  | 4.02  | 7.0  | 44       | 6.0  | 12.1  | 31  | 3007  | 812   | 716.2  | 320   | 964    | 8      | 8  | 18  | 34   |  |
| 10. BARON    | 44.5                 | 8th- 49.5           | 2.0   | .264  | 9.0  | 125  | 9.0  | 514  | 7.0  | 86   | 5.0  | 4.13  | 6.0  | 39       | 4.0  | 12.4  | 9   | 4152  | 1097  | 785.1  | 360   | 1082   | 7      | 5  | 18  | 30   |  |
| 11. JAMES    | 35.0                 | 11th- 32.0          | 8.0   | .281  | 3.5  | 89   | 5.0  | 436  | 6.0  | 85   | 4.0  | 4.37  | 2.5  | 33       | 5.0  | 12.3  | 6   | 3249  | 914   | 634.0  | 308   | 868    | 0      | 5  | 6   | 11   |  |
| 12. ENRICO   | 26.5                 | 12th- 23.5          | 4.0   | .270  | 6.0  | 111  | 8.0  | 499  | 3.0  | 58   | 1.0  | 5.45  | 1.0  | 18       | 1.0  | 15.8  | 9   | 4110  | 1108  | 353.2  | 214   | 622    | 2      | 5  | 34  | 41   |  |
|              | 3.64                 | 4.68                |       | .2767 | 1344 |      |      | 5744 | 1008 |      |      | 4.055 |      | 501      |      | 12.12 | 295 | 42574 | 11780 | 8592.0 | 11575 |        | 63     | 61 | 216 | 340  |  |
|              |                      |                     |       |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |      |          |      |       |     |       |       |        |       |        |        |    |     |      |  |



RS

## BB WEEKLY'S LABR-NL

RON SHANDLER ( 3rd/ 64.5 pt)

| PERIODS ON SHANDLER A.R.  |     |                 |      | CUM. STATS COMPILED FOR |      |      |     |    |  |
|---------------------------|-----|-----------------|------|-------------------------|------|------|-----|----|--|
| 1111111111222222          |     |                 |      | SHANDLER in 1994        |      |      |     |    |  |
| 1234567890123456789012345 | SAL | HITTER          | AB   | AVG                     | H    | HR   | RBI | SB |  |
| ** *****                  | 1   | dHO BASS, Kevin | 161  | .298                    | 48   | 4    | 26  | 2  |  |
| *****                     | 18  | CI BOONE, Bret  | 381  | .320                    | 122  | 12   | 68  | 3  |  |
| *****                     |     | CI BRANSON, Jf  | 0    |                         | 0    | 0    | 0   | 0  |  |
| *****                     | 3   | FL BROWNE, Jer  | 329  | .295                    | 97   | 3    | 30  | 3  |  |
| *****                     |     | dNY CANGELOSI   | 24   | .250                    | 6    | 0    | 1   | 2  |  |
| *****                     |     | dSL COOLBAUGH   | 15   | .200                    | 3    | 2    | 4   | 0  |  |
| *****                     | 5   | dLA HANSEN, Dav | 8    | .250                    | 2    | 0    | 1   | 0  |  |
| *****                     |     | dCO HUBBARD, Tr | 3    | .667                    | 2    | 0    | 0   | 0  |  |
| *****                     |     | dSD HYERS, Tim  | 15   | .267                    | 4    | 0    | 1   | 0  |  |
| *****                     | 11  | PH INCAGILGIA   | 212  | .231                    | 49   | 12   | 28  | 1  |  |
| *****                     | 31  | AT JUSTICE, Dv  | 170  | .300                    | 51   | 11   | 36  | 0  |  |
| *****                     | 25  | SL LANKFORD, R  | 416  | .267                    | 111  | 19   | 57  | 11 |  |
| *****                     |     | dSD LOCKHART, K | 11   | .091                    | 1    | 0    | 2   | 1  |  |
| *****                     |     | dPH LONGMIRE, T | 44   | .182                    | 8    | 0    | 4   | 0  |  |
| *****                     |     | dSD LOPEZ, Luis | 68   | .294                    | 20   | 1    | 10  | 0  |  |
| *****                     | 36  | AT MCGRIFF, Fr  | 424  | .318                    | 135  | 34   | 94  | 7  |  |
| *****                     |     | AT OLIVA, Jose  | 57   | .298                    | 17   | 6    | 11  | 0  |  |
| *****                     | 8   | CH RHODES, Tuf  | 205  | .254                    | 52   | 7    | 15  | 6  |  |
| *****                     | 17  | SD ROBERTS, Bl  | 323  | .310                    | 100  | 1    | 26  | 17 |  |
| *****                     | 1   | CO SHEAFFER, D  | 110  | .218                    | 24   | 1    | 12  | 0  |  |
| *****                     | 7   | CI TAUBENSEE    | 187  | .283                    | 53   | 8    | 21  | 2  |  |
| *****                     | 9   | NY THOMPSON, Ry | 334  | .225                    | 75   | 18   | 59  | 1  |  |
| *****                     |     | dCO VAN BURKLE  | 0    |                         | 0    | 0    | 0   | 0  |  |
| *****                     |     | dCO VANDERWAL   | 12   | .167                    | 2    | 0    | 2   | 0  |  |
| *****                     | 6   | CO WEISS, Walt  | 423  | .251                    | 106  | 1    | 32  | 12 |  |
| *****                     |     | dPI WOHACK, Ton | 0    |                         | 0    | 0    | 0   | 0  |  |
| *****                     | 19  | SL ZEILE, Todd  | 87   | .310                    | 27   | 7    | 29  | 1  |  |
|                           | 27  | HIT. TOTALS     | 4019 | .277                    | 1115 | 147  | 569 | 69 |  |
|                           |     | HIT. CAT. PTS.  |      | 6.0                     | 9.5  | 10.0 | 4.0 |    |  |

Before you draft. Before you trade. Before the first pitch.  
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**KEITH OLBERMANN**  
**PETER GAMMONS**

Featuring Keith Olbermann and Peter Gammons of ESPN. Plus Other Nationally Known Experts including Rod Beaton (Columnist, USA Today), John Benson (The Rotisserie Baseball Annual 1994), Bill James (Bill James Player Ratings Book '94), Allan Simpson (Editor, Baseball America), Glen Waggoner (Editor, Rotisserie League Baseball) and Paul White (Editor, Baseball Weekly). Greg Ambrosius Editor Fantasy Baseball.

**Premiering Tuesday, March 29th, 10PM ET/ 7PM PT**  
**Only on Pay-View**  
Check listings for replay times and dates.

**Baseball Weekly**

In March of 1994, ESPN tried to cash in on Rotisserie by producing a special: The Great Rotisserie Pay-Per-View.



SportsCenter anchor Keith Olbermann and Baseball Tonight reporter Peter Gammons co-hosted the special.



Panelists (left to right) were 'nationally known experts' Olbermann; Rod Beaton of USA Today, John Benson; Bill James, Glen Waggoner; and Paul White of Baseball Weekly. ESPN charged \$19.95 for the two-hour PPV; 'Half the price of Howard Stern, and no nudity,' Olbermann quipped.



## Chapter 12: The Great Strike

### When the players walked out

I contacted Jeff Barton of Scoresheet Sports with a radical idea: “Why don’t you play out the rest of the season using your simulation software and we all could use those stats for our leagues?” Jeff agreed it would be cool, but the idea never got off the ground.

For us, anyway. Several local newspapers started running stories about computer-simulated games. The New York *Daily News*, the Chicago *Sun-Times* and the Bergen County, N.J. *Record* published fake game summaries, standings and statistics. But purists scoffed. Everette Dennis, executive director of the Freedom Forum Center for Media Studies, said that computer baseball is a sign of “the bankruptcy of sports journalism.” Newspapers were “slavishly wedded to these professional teams.” Without daily games, “they don’t have anything else to write about.” Inventing matches “trivializes sports.” I’d imagine that Mr. Dennis wasn’t big on fantasy sports, either.

*Baseball Weekly’s* Executive Editor Lee Ivory said, “Readers pay good money to read about real stuff, real people and real happenings.” Given *BW’s* opinion about fantasy baseball, this was about the most honest thing Ivory could admit.

### In the *Baseball Forecaster* newsletter

The monthly newsletter was soldiering on. As it turned out, there was plenty to write about. For the next few months, I filled the pages with many interesting features.

The September issue included a look at the year’s top minor league performances and a list of 1994 free agents. It was sort of a pseudo season review, but a month early.

I gave the October cover article over to Paul Seibel, publisher of *FANTasy obSERVER* and *Absolutely Baseball*. He advised readers not to waste their time boycotting baseball and creating fan unions. Instead, he suggested we write our congressmen to threaten repeal of baseball’s anti-trust exemption. Some topics never age.

I also gave space to my readers, who lamented the loss of the game. Here was one:

“I wonder how much it matters who the players are on the field. Should the owners conduct a season with AAA players, would it really make that big of a difference? The personalities in today’s game often strike me as its most repugnant ingredient. Granted, a single season of sub-par players would be a disaster

(as proven by the NFL), but with a couple years to build affection for the new players, I believe we wouldn’t know the difference.”—Jim Roll, Ann Arbor, MI

I responded to these posts by reinforcing my mantra, “Baseball is not dead!”

I also suggested that there were other games to keep us engaged, like historical replay simulations. In fact, major league players had talked about the possibility of creating their own Super League composed of all the best talent. So I put together 12 teams of the very best players and then simulated a 162-game season. It was an interesting exercise that would show the statistical impact of putting the best batters against the best pitchers for a full season. How much statistical erosion would it yield? Batting stats fell by 23 percent; pitching stats fell by 34 percent. The aggregate batting average fell 17 points and only 10 of 60 starting pitchers managed an ERA under 4.00. It was a fun exercise and I even made a contest of it, asking readers to project the final standings. Nobody won, but I gave out some consolation prizes.

In a piece entitled, “Surviving the Nuclear Winter,” I asked readers to let me know what they would be doing to survive without baseball. I published the best of their responses the following month:

- I am thoroughly enjoying myself this winter, immersing myself in the analysis of baseball statistics and minor league talent.
- I will not play in any games that include replacement players. This is not so much a political stance as my feeling that the product will not be fun to watch.
- If 1995 is a washout, I’ll sit the fantasy season out.
- I have picked up a couple of teams in a computer simulation through Compuserve using the Pursue the Pennant game. We’ll be replaying the 1994 season in total.
- The interruptions of baseball and hockey have forced me to return to pre-fantasy sports lifestyles. My wife has adopted me as her new “hobby.”



The logo for the 1994 World Series, cancelled by then-Commissioner Bud Selig

By engaging my readership, it turned out that there were plenty of things to write about.

### Tidbit from the first fantasy conference

During our four days in the desert, we did a fair amount of player scouting. Back then, the prospects sent to the AFL were still at least a few years away from the majors. But we saw one interesting infielder during the inaugural event. Here was Rick Wilton's scouting report:



Yes, *that* Michael Jordan, appearing in the Arizona Fall League

get into 15 Major League games the following year (making a pair of errors) before exploding as Rookie-of-the-Year in 1996.

### After the conference

Before I left for the airport to fly home, Rick and Jim (Dressel) asked if they could speak to me about a delicate topic. The three of us sat down in the Marriott lobby and they told me their company was in financial trouble. The strike had taken a massive toll on their fall renewals and they were bleeding cash. Well, they were taking an obvious loss on this conference, but the news still came as a surprise to me. Rick had told me back in September that they were doing fine. They seemed to be a well-run organization and their products were slick and informative. But yeah, the strike; I got it.

The pair presented me with a proposal. They asked

if I'd be willing to invest in their business in exchange for an ownership share. At the time, that seemed incredibly gutsy to ask this of a direct competitor. But I knew they had some valuable products and some other interesting potential synergies.

I tried to figure out what was in it for me. We negotiated that I could have access to their mailing list of 4,000 subscribers to promote my own products. They ran a bulletin board service that I could make use of. There were other potential cost savings from shared promotions. I asked for their financials to send to my accountant for review.

The numbers were bad. Over the previous 12 months, they had taken in \$53,000 in revenue; their expenses were over \$90,000. They had spent nearly 50 percent of their revenue on advertising, much more than what would have been prudent. More things were going wrong than just the strike.

I told Rick that I couldn't agree to the deal. But I could tell they were desperate; Rick had maxed out his credit and Jim had been dipping into his retirement accounts. They had blown through investments from a half dozen other people. These were good guys, and I had some cash reserves I could dip into; I just had to figure out a way to get more out of the relationship. So we kept talking.

From the beginning, I was in love with their golden child—the *Hot Sheet* fax report (Remember? Catnip? Chapter 6.) I wanted to see that survive, purely for selfish reasons—I relied on it myself! But at the same time, they also had a book and newsletter that competed directly with my *Baseball Forecaster*. Hmmm...

I made them a proposal and was surprised when they agreed outright. I offered to front a chunk of cash in exchange for them discontinuing their newsletter and book. (You never know unless you ask.) As it turned out, those two products were major cash hogs, so they agreed. That would allow them to refocus on expanding distribution channels for the *Hot Sheet* and a few other products. We also agreed to talk about the development of future joint projects; Rick was a perpetual fountain of ideas.

I confirmed that my investment would provide me with a proportional role in the decision-making of their product line. And, then the icing on the cake. If *FBJ* went under, they committed to publishing the *Hot Sheet* until my investment was paid back. At that point, there seemed to be little risk. It also positioned me nicely in the case that everything went south. So, we made it all legal and I signed on.

I was not in a position to save struggling companies,



but this particular situation had too much potential upside. Financially, I was managing. The fall revenue from *Forecaster* book sales was helping me pay the bills. I was eight years into building a dedicated and loyal customer base and that seemed about as solid a foundation as I could hope for.

### Two favorite lines from the 1995 LABR draft

Mike Vogel landed two high-priced players early—Sammy Sosa for \$34 and closer Rod Beck for \$33. “\$67 for eight letters,” Mike observed. “I hope it gets better.”

John Snider was one of the few West coast participants who benefitted by an early 4:00 pm start time. Unfortunately, this left John doubling as a babysitter for his young daughter during the early rounds. As he landed Wil Cordero for \$30, the toddler began screaming, to which one of the sympathetic competitors consoled, “It’s okay, honey, he’s a good player... and a very nice man.”

## Industry publication forced out of business

The fantasy baseball industry took a major hit June 16 when *Fantasy Baseball Journal* announced it was going out of business.

*FBJ* was in its fourth year of publication and had emerged as a leader in the field, putting out perhaps the timeliest and most informative newsletter in the industry and also sponsoring fantasy scouting trips.

“Due to the heavy fan apathy from the strike and the lack of an agreement between the players and owners, we have lost a large portion of our customer base,” said *FBJ* presi-

dent Rick Wilton.

“This apathy will continue as long as the players and owners do not have an agreement. The future of fantasy baseball is very unsettled at this point.”

Ron Shandler, who has collaborated with Wilton and *FBJ* publisher Jim Dressel on numerous projects, including one that appeared in *Baseball Weekly*, has offered to fill Wilton’s subscriptions with his *Baseball Forecaster*.

Said Wilton:

“They had the reserves to weather the baseball storm, we did not.”

Despite my investment in their business, the *Fantasy Baseball Journal* closes its doors six months later

## Chapter 13: Building the Mother Ship

*The on-ramp to the launch of BaseballHQ.com had a few more feeder roads...*

After I took over the remnants of *FBJ*, Rick Wilton became our news director and started the fantasy industry's first injury analysis column. All our content was generated by just the two of us. In September 1995, I received this email from a reader, Terry Linhart:

"My friend Deric and I are big minor league fanatics and do really well at predicting their future success before draft day. Deric is great at noting who'll get called up before they do. We have quite a few minor league franchises within a 3-hour drive, plus a satellite dish at Deric's house, and we see many minor league games each year. We'd love to prove our prowess at this and find a forum to write in."

I did not have much expertise in the minor leagues, so I was open to adding some writing talent. Terry and his friend Deric McKamey turned out to have excellent scouting sensibilities. In fact, Deric was a veritable encyclopedia of minor league information. You could ask him about any player down to the low minors and he'd tell you his height, weight, high school GPA, and who he took to the prom. Pretty much.

While their early writing was sound, the duo was eager to build a support network, so they made quick friends with minor league expert John Sickels at STATS, Inc. ("He's SUPER nice!" Terry told me.). Their confidence growing, they began taking stands behind their opinions, even pointing out questionable analyses elsewhere: "A leading Rotisserie newsletter claims that Andruw Jones is basically Karim Garcia with speed. Anyone who has seen these two players firsthand could tell you that there is no comparison."

The newsletter was starting to build a staff with some attitude, and I was thrilled. But as much as we were in a groove, I felt like our growth opportunities were limited. I watched all the activity going on in places like the Compuserve forums, AOL boards and Usenet newsgroups, and realized that I needed to find a way to tap into those communities.

Our first online exposure came unexpectedly. At a time when the only Major League team with an official website was the Seattle Mariners, we were recruited to contribute data to a Toronto Blue Jays site run by a college graduate student. That early exposure was nice, but it didn't generate very many eyeballs. So, I started focusing on offering some of our products in digital format. I was hoping that these could eventually be stepping-stones to something more widespread. By

late 1995, our complete product line looked like this:

- *Baseball Forecaster* book (hard copy and on disk)
- *Baseball Forecaster* monthly newsletter
- Fantasy Baseball Symposium at the Arizona Fall League
- *Fantasy Draft Guide* (via FAX or email)
- Call-ups FLASH report (via FAX or email)
- Player projections (on disk)
- Major League Equivalent stats (on disk)
- Rick Wilton's *Hot Sheet* (via FAX, email or phone)
- *Forecasting Pitching Careers* book (by Wilton and Shandler)

That was a lot of stuff. As much as I wanted to be a one-stop shop for a fantasy leaguer's informational needs, I also knew that there was an inverse relationship between the number of options and the odds of a customer making a decision. I was worried that someone faced with all these choices might just resign himself to a copy of *The Sporting News* and call it a day.

But what to do? I decided to offer the whole freakin' shooting match in one massive package... via a monthly email. What a great idea! We'd save so much money by eliminating the costs of postage and faxing. I'd just have to attach a bunch of text docs and spreadsheet files to an email and send it out to thousands of subscribers. It was genius!

*"The step between genius and insanity is very short."*  
– Albert Einstein

What could possibly go wrong? Let me count the ways:

- My modem kept dropping the line.
- My internet provider kept sending me nasty messages.
- Many customers did not receive the email.
- Some of those who did couldn't figure out how to open the files.
- Many who opened the files were not adept enough to manipulate the data.

This was June 1996; it was still a primitive time. The disaster lasted one month before I waved a white flag. However, it was abundantly clear that some type of electronic distribution was the only way to grow the line and build profits.

*The book touches on some of my business philosophies and practices. A bunch more were included in the original manuscript.*



## The evolution of my ridiculously onerous hiring process

In mid-1999, Rick Wilton received an offer to join STATS, Inc. It meant a bigger paycheck and benefits, things I couldn't provide. I would never stand in someone's way to advance his career, so I reluctantly wished him well. We had already built the foundation of something really good, and I felt confident that I could restructure the organization to fill the void.

His departure left a huge hole in our news coverage. But rather than hiring another full-timer and leaving myself vulnerable again, I opted instead to hire a group of analysts who each took smaller chunks. It required more coordination but was a far safer way to operate. I had already added a dozen writers to cover various other sections of the site; to cover the news department, I hired a dozen more.

To all my past hires: My apologies for putting you through this.

*(The first phase of the hiring process is described in the book.)*

The second phase of the process was more involved. Depending upon the open position, I had different writing projects, but the most demanding prompt was for News Analyst. I needed to find not only someone good at analysis but also someone who could identify which news items were worth writing about. Once it appeared that other websites would soon claim ownership of the news reporting format, we had to shift gears and carve out our corner of the news analysis space.

The watchword at BaseballHQ.com became "actionable." We would only write about news items that provided actionable information for fantasy roster decisions.

The News Analyst writing prompt provided the candidate with about 20 mock news items from some hypothetical day in August. The instructions were to write an 800-1000 word article that analyzed the most relevant of those items. Typically, about three or four items absolutely had to be included, like trades or major injuries. There were another few that needed to be included too, like poor performances backed by strong skills metrics. There might be a few items worth covering if there was still room, like a short-term streak or day-to-day injury. Finally, I always tossed in a handful of meaningless, innocuous news items. Those absolutely had to be excluded, and hiring decisions often hinged on a candidate recognizing that those items were not remotely actionable.

Those who successfully weathered this exercise joined the staff, and the process did yield an incredibly

high caliber of writing talent. Those who didn't make the cut, well...

## The evolution of my rejection letter

Let's back up a little.

After I lost the bank job in 1985 (okay, let's back up a lot), I interviewed for a marketing position with several firms outside Hartford, Conn., including Cadbury. In the past, I've had interviews that have gone exceedingly well, but my visit with the chocolate company was nothing short of amazing. Forget the fact that the entire building reeked of heavenly chocolate. I met several people up and down the food chain, from my potential direct supervisor to VPs. They gave me every indication that a job offer was imminent without actually signing me up on the spot. I left the building four hours after I had arrived, enveloped in the sweet, auburn aroma of new employment.

So Sue and I started some preliminary research into communities where we might want to move. We had given New Hampshire about a year and a half and figured it was time to move a little closer to our families in New York.

About a week after the interview, I had not heard anything, so I called the company to get an update. The HR rep told me that no decision had been made yet, but they would be finalizing their plans with the next week or so. When I was there, they had seemed overly busy getting ready for some presentation—I had contributed to the process!—so I was not surprised that this might take a while longer. Another two weeks passed, and still no answer. I called again and could not get through to my contact but left a message with the secretary; she promised he'd get back to me. Another week and there was no word. Another call, another message left. No lie—it took more than two months before someone said to me, "Oh, we chose a different candidate."

Apparently, this type of ghosting is pretty common now, but back then, it was not, and I was irate. I had been on plenty of interviews in my career and had never come out of one believing it was a slam dunk like this one. (Pardon the hoops reference; let's say I thought I'd hit a home run in those interviews.)

At that point I thought, if I ever owned my own business, I would never treat people like that. If you put effort into an interview, you deserve to know the result. I also thought that, if the result was bad, you should also be able to find out where you fell short. It's just courtesy.

A decade later, I was in that position, conducting my first major hiring spree to fill about a dozen positions at

Baseball HQ. I did receive more than 100 applications and had to give bad news to about 90 of them. So, like I promised, I sent anyone who didn't make it past the first phase of the process an email informing them of that fact, and explaining why they fell short, albeit in

general terms. Yes, you could call it a Dear John letter—and a Dear John form letter at that—but it served its purpose: Applicants could hold the letter up to a mirror and usually figure out where they fell short. Here is the note:

Dear [writing applicant],

Thank you for submitting your application for one or more of the open positions at Baseball HQ. We received submissions from more than 100 candidates, making the selection process very difficult. We have narrowed the field, but unfortunately, have decided not to use your services at this time.

In the past, when I sent this note out, some people wanted to know how we could screen out candidates without so much as a writing sample. I'll try to anticipate your questions now and hopefully provide some insight should you decide to apply again in the future. The application read, "This is the first stage in the evaluation process, and will be used to screen candidates," so the editors and I did look at all submissions very closely. Some of the more important elements that we keyed in on included the following:

- No matter how qualified a candidate sounded, if the two brief paragraphs requested were filled with spelling or grammar errors, rambled on endlessly or did not reflect an organized train of thought, it did not make the cut. You had to be able to write reasonably well and be able to convey the important elements of the two questions concisely.

- We asked for a "brief paragraph describing why you believe you'd be an asset to Baseball HQ." Many of you told us about all your achievements and titles but gave us little or no indication of what you could offer us. While we were impressed by your exuberance for fantasy baseball, those who did not provide a strong sense of the skill behind their championships were screened out.

- Those who made no effort to match their background to the specific position they were applying for were not considered. For instance, candidates for the Simulation Gaming columnist who did not check off that they had experience in that style of play were screened out.

- We have specific needs for the open positions. Some of you had incredible pockets of expertise; you would have easily risen to the top of our list if we were currently looking for other types of content. But for our needs, for right now, we had to pass.

- We put a good amount of weight into the evaluation question you were asked to analyze. We asked you to "describe the process you used to rank these pitchers" and were looking for sound, concise, supportable analysis that focused more on method than results. We did not screen you out if your rankings differed from ours so long as the process was based more on fact than opinion.

- There were some difficult, subjective calls we had to make. While we asked for "brief" paragraphs, we frowned upon submissions that reflected little thought or time. And anyone who was the CEO of an international corporation but would "find the time to write" was typically screened out as well.

- Those of you who thought it would be cool to get paid to write about baseball or figured that you're doing all the work anyway so you might as well get paid for it, but really did not show us any motivation beyond the paycheck, did not make the cut.

Finally, if you missed the deadline, you got cut.

Those were the general guidelines we used. Unfortunately, due to the huge volume of submissions, we cannot go back to any individual application and provide more detail. Three sets of eyes that looked at each application, and it might have been any combination of criteria that determined a YES or NO disposition.

I tend to be blunt, but I am also realistic. With all the applications we had to read, odds are that we may have made a mistake or two along the way. What this means is that I'm not going to designate your application for the circular file just yet. With the small group of candidates that have been moved into the second stage of the application process, it's possible that some won't make it past the writing sample. In fact, a few years ago, one of our writers didn't make the first cut but found himself a member of our staff by the following February. He's now one of our directors.

So, we'll keep the communication lines open.

Above all, thank you for taking the time to write. I appreciate your interest.

Good luck!

Ron Shandler, Publisher



## More on “Editorial is Marketing”

Part of that effort was in the construction of articles on the site. I wanted all writers to present themselves as experts, and their writing had to always reflect the quality of their particular expertise. But the writing itself had to be highly accessible to our readers.

- **Maximum 800-1000 words.** Research has determined that to be the range of the optimal attention span of the online reader. If an article merited a longer treatment, I'd have it split into multiple pieces and their publication staggered over several days, or weeks. That fed our “crave the next one” mantra and multiplied the eyeballs.
- **Write in 2nd or 3rd person only.** There is a natural tendency to write in the first person, but I steered writers away from that. Second or third person denoted an air of detachment, which was important when an unknown writer presented himself as an expert. If one of our writers became individually popular and drew a following, then he could write in first person.
- **Write concisely.** In general, all writing needed to be as concise and succinct as possible. No long intros; cut to the chase quickly. BHQ had to meet the internet's market demand for quick, easily accessible information. Think sound bites, not documentaries. When five words say the same thing as 10, use five. Avoid adjectives. Partial sentences are acceptable as long as a flow is maintained. This 76-word paragraph could have been written in two words.  
(You're not the type of person who will go back and count the words in that paragraph, are you? I hope not.)
- **No unsupported opinion.** This was one of my huge red-hot buttons. All assertions had to be backed up with data or facts. If I ever saw the phrase “I think,” that writer would immediately be in hot water.
- **No personal league war stories** unless framed in general terms. Dan Okrent once said, “There is nothing more interesting than my fantasy team. There is nothing less interesting than someone else's fantasy team.” I did not want to subject my readers to any of that.
- **Write “stat friendly” for English majors.** Back when I first started writing in the 1980s, a reader wrote: “Please explain these statistical concepts so us English majors can understand.” It was a point that stuck with me. Showing off how smart I was didn't endear me to readers.

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**(Our) writing had to always reflect  
particular expertise ...  
BHQ had to meet  
the internet's market demand  
for easily accessible information...  
no unsupported opinion ...  
no league war stories ...  
and ‘stat friendly’ for English majors**

---

Even if the term “standard deviation” was one of the most basic statistical concepts, if only 35 percent of my audience knew what it meant, I couldn't risk alienating the other 65 percent in the name of ego. That didn't mean I would talk down to my audience; I had to find a balance so that everyone knew what I was writing about.

## Mound Conference

All of this was reinforced in a monthly “Mound Conference” e-letter I sent to my staff. I suppose this was an idea borrowed from corporate culture, but I saw the missive as more than just a company newsletter. I used it to share information about our products and things going on in the industry, but also as a forum to discuss ways to make things better.

In addition, I provided the following to all the writers:

- **Staff survey:** A resource directory of each writer's pockets of expertise. It was always good to know that if you couldn't unearth a tidbit on the Red Sox coaching staff, there was a Bostonian on staff who could help.
- **Peer review:** A means for writers to get feedback from each other. Some of our writers were also editors in real life, so that often came in handy.
- **Competitor site tracking:** Each year, I'd choose a new “mole” to subscribe to other industry sites, and report back on what they were doing. It was marketing insight for me, but often spurred column fodder for writers.
- **Reader survey results:** I'd provide relevant highlights to the writers each year. This exercise often helped us focus on features with low readership and learn from industry trends.

And, there was a monthly “keynote”:

“The one thing that sets us apart from other sites is ‘original thought.’ It's easy for others to rip off our open source analytical process, but not as easy when

we create new gauges or new types of analysis. As more voices keep getting added to the fray, the stakes escalate. I'd like to challenge all of you to do more "thinking outside the box" (I hate that phrase, I know) and focusing some brainpower on opportunities for more 'original thought.'

"This does not necessarily mean coming up with the next great statistic. Unformed concepts can also be a springboard to bigger things. Innovative approaches to

an old idea are things we can put our stamp on it. Worst case, others may copy us, but we can always claim to be the first.

"So, let the creative juices flow. If you have any ideas, either fully formed or embryonic, pass them on to everyone. I've opened a thread in the forums for us to have a virtual brainstorming session. I've launched the breeding process with a few zygotes of my own."



## Chapter 14: LABR Unrest

### More about the Florida Fantasy Festival

Jim Johnston of Center Field Software and Bob Stall of Player Projections, Inc. were trying to organize a spring training fantasy baseball conference. They dubbed it the “Florida Fantasy Festival” and secured a hotel conference room across the street from Al Lang Field in St. Petersburg, Florida. As I described it in my newsletter:

How much does it cost?

Zero. Zip. Nada. It's free to attend. Just show up. Bring your friends. Bring your wife. Bring the dog. Make a weekend of it.

What's the catch?

You have to pay your own way to get there, stay there, eat there and attend games there. The fantasy vendors attending will be hawking their wares after the seminars, so you'll have to put up with that too.

### The hucksters

*In the descriptions of some of the LABR competitors, this was a tough cut in an already too-long chapter. But since I had written earlier about the origin story of this dynamic duo, I made a difficult sacrifice here*

Irwin Zwilling and Lenny Melnick were LABR's own Yiddish vaudeville act, a pair of street corner hucksters selling sour pickles on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Their shtick always seemed to include a little extra embellishment, some name-dropping, and the deft execution of thickly veiled trash talk. It was a New York thing, or maybe a radio thing, but it was brilliant. I loved to listen to them even though I didn't have the banter or the flair; it wasn't how I communicated. But, having grown up in my father's



Irwin (left) and Lenny:  
At the table, they were stone serious and legit

# FLORIDA FANTASY FESTIVAL



**SCHEDULE:**  
THREE SEPARATE SESSIONS

**SAT. MAR 16** (9AM-NOON) &  
1 HR AFTER CARDINAL  
EXHIBITION GAME

**SUN. MAR 17** (9AM-NOON)

**LOCATION:**  
**ST. PETERSBURG HILTON**  
**ST. PETERSBURG, FL**  
ACROSS FROM AL LANG STADIUM

**CO-SPONSORED BY:**  
CENTER FIELD SOFTWARE  
&  
PLAYER PROJECTIONS

**PARTICIPATING:**  
**JIM JOHNSTON**  
OWNER, CENTER FIELD SOFTWARE  
**BOB STALL**  
PRESIDENT, PLAYER PROJECTIONS  
**JOHN HUNT**  
FANTASY BASEBALL COLUMNIST,  
USA TODAY BASEBALL WEEKLY  
**MIKE GIMBEL**  
CONSULTANT, BOSTON RED SOX  
**JAY DARBY**  
FREELANCE AUTHOR ON  
ROTISSERIE BASEBALL  
**LARRY LABADINE**  
AUTHOR OF LABRINE'S 1996  
PROJECTIONS AND DOLLAR VALUES  
**IRWIN ZWILLING**  
HOST OF ROTISSERIE SPORTS  
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**STEVE MOYER**  
STATS INC.  
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EDITOR, FANTASY BASEBALL  
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The Festival itself was free. Everything else wasn't

household, I had finely-tuned bullshit radar, which occasionally came in handy.

Lenny and I were both alumni of Francis Lewis High School in Queens, so you'd think we'd share a common approach. I guess not. Maybe it was because he graduated a full decade before me, just after Prohibition but before the invention of indoor plumbing.

The duo regaled us with stories about all their experiences and successes. Their “home league” was an oddity called the Yoo Hoo League, which they claimed was created shortly after the Founders invented Rotisserie.

Yoo Hoo had a slightly different twist to standard Roto rules. Instead of each owner nominating a player, major league teams were drawn one-by-one out of a hat, then ran through each 25-man roster, player by player, similar to how the original Stardust League worked. Since you never knew which team was coming up, a superstar like A-Rod could cost about anything, depending upon when the Texas Rangers were selected.

“This is the best league you’ll ever play in,” Irwin would say, and kept inviting me to participate. In 2001, my schedule lined up and I joined their draft, held in a conference room at a Holiday Inn just off the Long Island Expressway. In my bizarre Yoo Hoo experience, the last team out of the hat was the hometown Mets. Mike Piazza’s name was announced, and after a frantic few seconds, was passed over without a bid. Nobody had an open roster spot to fit him in! The lucky owner who drew the first seed in the reserve round ended up with one of baseball’s best catchers.

For free!

I never quite understood the allure of this format—such randomness is not a friend of fantasy—but Irwin kept doubling down on how this was the greatest concept ever. My one experience was more than enough.

Still, the duo was legit. When it came to LABR, the defending American League winners reeked confidence and drew attention their way with constant banter. But at the draft table they were stone serious; they could read a room and pick up on everyone’s tells with the cool, calculated sagacity of a Hercule Poirot.

Their approach was driven by a strategy so foolproof that it guaranteed them a perfect draft and outsized odds for a title. Lenny called the strategy, “Control the Draft.” Basically, they went into a draft knowing exactly which players they wanted and how much each one would cost.

Irwin described how he and Lenny would sit down beforehand and assign bid amounts to each player based on how they expected the table to value each one. “We know our competitors and we know how they’ll bid,” he told me. Just before the draft, he said, “Watch. I’ve got a list of 30 names on this page. When we walk away from the table, every one of our 23 players will come from this list.”

It was a bold boast. But wouldn’t you know it, they pulled it off every time. At least that’s what they told me. I never actually checked. But they won LABR two years in a row, so they must have been doing something right.

### More about the LABR 1996 draft

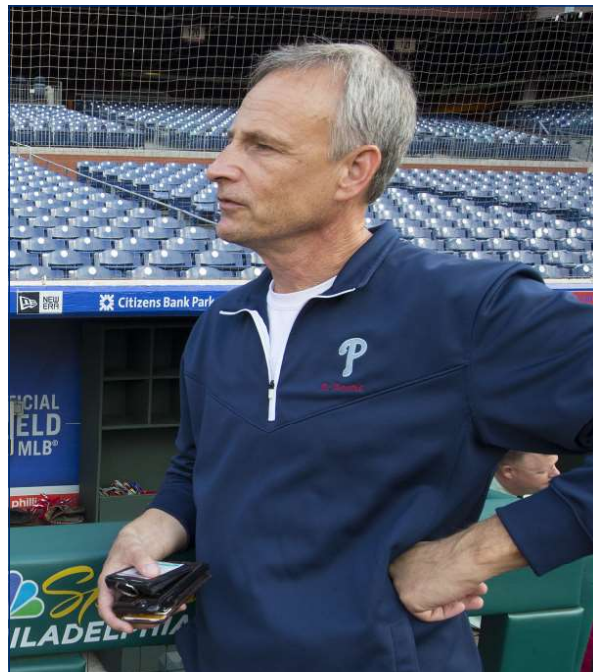
Bill Kulik<sup>1</sup> noticed the wide range of materials the LABR drafters had brought to the table. He wondered, “I dunno... the most important thing for me is to have fun. If you want to draft your favorite player, just do it.

The worst thing is to go through the season reading about Ken Griffey Jr.’s exploits benefitting someone else because you wouldn’t go a few extra dollars to get him. Some people get too obsessive about this. It’s just a game.”

So I wondered, too, which of the LABR experts had fun that weekend? I ran through them in my head... did, did, definitely did not, might have, did, didn’t, definitely did. It seemed that those who had done the most meticulous preparation and came to the draft stocked with the most books, magazines and printouts... were the ones who did not seem to be having much fun. But did these individuals fare any better in their drafts? I didn’t think so. With their collective noses deep into paper, they were missing the in-draft nuances that required real-time decision-making. It was one thing to do your homework. It was another to be anal-retentive about it.

As for me, I disagreed somewhat with Kulik’s

**MOYER OUTSIDER FACT:** *Bill Kulik almost ended Cal Ripken’s streak. He was once doing a story on the Orioles and borrowed a bat from Brady Anderson. Afterwards, he put it on the ground near the batting cage. Ripken tripped on the bat and twisted his ankle. Fortunately, it wasn’t serious.*



**Bill Kulik: ‘Some people get too obsessive about this’**

<sup>1</sup> If you have spent any time in the Philadelphia area, you might know of Bill Kulik. He was born in New Jersey but raised in South America and spoke fluent Spanish. He has broadcast Phillies games in Spanish for years, and was part of five World Series broadcasts with the Phillies and Red Sox.



“obsessive” comment. I enjoyed the game and loved my Mets, but LABR was about creating a footprint in the industry. I probably stopped short of being obsessive, but I was pretty serious about the competition. I wanted to win these leagues even if I never owned a Met. So, I tried to learn about my competitors, picking up on a few tendencies and tells.

### More on the LABR 1996 draft post-mortem

The season itself was a disaster. Stat reports were missing, trades weren’t communicated to all owners, in-season coverage in *BW* all but disappeared. There was speculation that (John) Hunt, who was still acting as the commissioner for both leagues, was again using the inside information afforded his role to win an inordinate number of FAAB bids. But Hunt wasn’t just being improper or indifferent; he was also M.I.A.

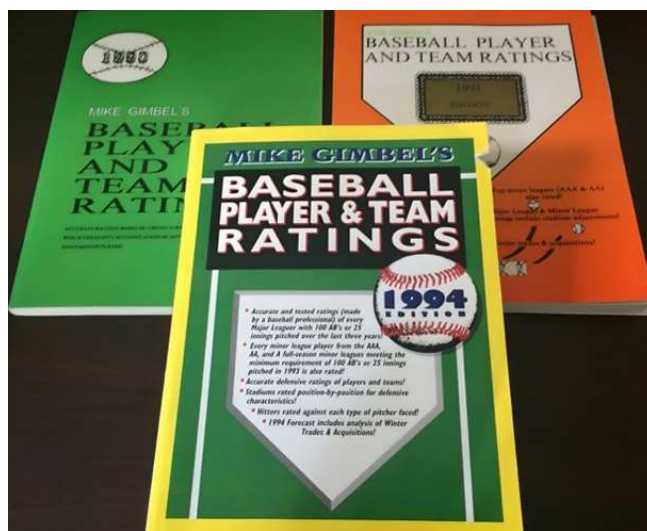
In July, I wrote to Scott Newman of *Sandlot Shrink*: “LABR’s a mess. Hunt moved to Portland and disappeared (although *BW* let him keep his column). It takes a week or more to get transactions. Lisa Winston abandoned her two teams, but Hunt hasn’t done anything to get new ownership. Everyone is pretty ticked off. Unless another organization takes over in 1997, I don’t think too many of us will be back.”

Scott concurred and said that *Sandlot Shrink* would also be reassessing their future involvement. We both saw it as *BW* dropping the ball on a promotional vehicle with industry-wide benefit. It seemed that they had no interest in helping to grow the industry from

which they were reaping the benefits. It was infuriating.

Jim Johnston had an idea to expand LABR’s reach, which would help everyone, including *BW*. Before formally presenting it, he floated the proposal to *Fantasy Baseball* magazine and STATS, Inc.; both organizations bought in. Then he shared it with the rest of us. Its key points:

- A \$1000 prize pool for each league.
- League administration would be handled by a neutral party. (Johnston’s company volunteered to do that gratis. Obviously.)
- Increase visibility by creating a LABR presence on America Online, including public forums.



Mike Gimbel's Baseball Player & Team Ratings books



**ABOVE** A *Baseball Weekly* photographer took pictures at the LABR 1996 festivities, but just two actually made it into print. This one, with (left to right) Mike Gimbel, Mike Gimbel's laptop, me and Irwin Zwilling, was taken in the heat of the bidding for Cleveland reliever Eric Plunk. It was a masterful specimen of action photography to have caught all four of us at the exact moment of full engagement. (Sadly, Plunk went to Stu Baron for \$3, and had a pretty good year.)

- The Florida Fantasy Festival and LABR drafts would be an annual public event.

The whole thing would be paid for by charging admission and selling sponsorships at the event.

BW had no interest. Zero. Nada. They shot it down without even giving it a hearing.

### Controversy at the 1997 LABR draft

The 1997 season was the first for interleague play. A few weeks before the LABR draft, there was a discussion about the rule where teams lost the rights to any player traded out of the league. A contingent of owners argued that we should be able to keep the players' statistics because an interleague trade was no fault of a fantasy owner. And teams were now playing opponents outside of their league anyway.

Hunt put it up for a vote. By a narrow margin, those who wanted to keep the traded-away players won, and that was the understanding as we arrived for the draft.

But the issue came up again as trade rumors were swirling that March. The losing side of the earlier vote was indignant, and Hunt—he of the losing side—decided to put the issue up to a second vote after that day's draft. By a 7-5 count, the second vote reversed the first. Tempers flared as owners rightfully complained that they would have adjusted their bidding for players at risk of being traded. But Hunt held firm.

Searching for some common ground, Alex Patton offered up an innovative proposal. He suggested that since we were all fielding a team in each league, an interleague trade



ESPN's Karl Ravech interviewed John Hunt when *Baseball Tonight* did a LABR segment, with Lenny (right) and I also in the shot

should merely shift the affected player to the owner's team in the other league. Despite the creativity, it was emphatically rejected.

I thought it was a great idea.

Less than a week after the draft, outfielder Kenny Lofton was dealt across leagues, from Cleveland to Atlanta. Thanks to the reversed ruling, Mike Gimbel suddenly had a \$43 hole in his roster. It was still two weeks before Opening Day and his team never had a fighting chance after that. Hunt wrote:

"As dictator, excuse me, acting commissioner of the LABR leagues, my stance has always been: This is how most leagues do it and we want to be representative of most leagues. The numbers back me up: Of the 600-plus leagues that USA Stats services, only 16%

of AL leagues and 11% of NL leagues kept stats of players traded to the other league."

At least he was clear about his true role in the league. But within two years, LABR would reverse the ruling. Again.

| LABADINI  |                    |    |
|---|--------------------|----|
| To allocate 97% on hitting vs. 3% on pitching — I met all my offensive goals and was lucky in the pitching crapshoot with Mulholland, Cormier, Osborne and Christiansen.<br><b>Bargain:</b> John Hudek at \$6.<br><b>Bust:</b> Luis Gonzalez at \$27. |                    |    |
| ACTIVE ROSTER   |                    |    |
| C   | Pat Borders        | 1  |
| C   | Matt Merullo       | 1  |
| 1B  | Jeff Bagwell       | 35 |
| 3B  | Dave Hansen        | 1  |
| CO  | John Vanderwal     | 1  |
| 2B  | Bret Boone         | 20 |
| SS  | Barry Larkin       | 32 |
| MI  | Jeff Kent          | 17 |
| OF  | Sammy Sosa         | 38 |
| OF  | Gary Sheffield     | 37 |
| OF  | Brian Jordan       | 28 |
| OF  | Ryan Klesko        | 24 |
| OF  | Devon White        | 16 |
| UT  | Brooks Kieschnick  | 1  |
| P   | Donovan Osborne    | 1  |
| P   | Jason Christiansen | 1  |
| P   | Terry Mulholland   | 1  |
| P   | Joey Eischen       | 1  |
| P   | Rheal Cormier      | 1  |
| P   | Paul Wagner        | 1  |
| P   | Jose Guzman        | 1  |
| P   | Xavier Hernandez   | 1  |
| P   | Dave Mlicki        | 1  |
| RESERVE ROSTER  |                    |    |
| R   | Mike Mimbs         |    |
| R   | Terrell Wade       |    |
| R   | Roger Salkeld      |    |
| R   | Tavo Alvarez       |    |
| R   | David McCarty      |    |
| R   | Tom Henke          |    |

**LEFT** The offense-heavy Labadini Plan. Larry made a lot of trades, and finished fourth, eight points short of winning the league.  
**RIGHT** A typical almost-as-offense-heavy Steve Moyer LABR team

| Steve Moyer  |                   | RotoNews Direct |  |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|--|
| Pos.   | Player            | Cost            |  |
| C  | Stinnett, Kelly   | \$1             |  |
| C  | Pena, Angel       | \$1             |  |
| 1B   | McGwire, Mark     | \$29            |  |
| 3B   | Rolen, Scott      | \$24            |  |
| CO   | Nevin, Phil       | \$23            |  |
| 2B   | Abbott, Kurt      | \$1             |  |
| SS   | Renteria, Edgar   | \$24            |  |
| MI   | Womack, Tony      | \$30            |  |
| OF   | Walker, Larry     | \$29            |  |
| OF   | Griffey Jr., Ken  | \$34            |  |
| OF   | Alou, Moises      | \$30            |  |
| OF   | Perez, Timo       | \$5             |  |
| OF   | Sanders, Deion    | \$1             |  |
| UT   | Grace, Mark       | \$13            |  |
| P  | Appier, Kevin     | \$3             |  |
| P  | Trachsel, Steve   | \$4             |  |
| P  | Prokopec, Luke    | \$1             |  |
| P  | Stottlemire, Todd | \$1             |  |
| P  | Brocail, Doug     | \$1             |  |
| P  | Cabrera, Jose     | \$1             |  |
| P  | McGlinchey, Kevin | \$1             |  |
| P  | Mota, Guillermo   | \$1             |  |
| P  | Nunez, Vladimir   | \$1             |  |
| P  | Worrell, Tim      | \$1             |  |
| Henderson, Rickey; Guzman, Gerald; Downs, Scott; Byrd, Paul; Croushore, Rick   |                   |                 |  |
| <b>What did you learn from last year?</b> There's never enough offense.  |                   |                 |  |
| <b>This year's strategy:</b> Like the guy in <i>There's Something About Mary</i> who invented 7-minute abs, I decided to invent the \$10 pitching staff. I strayed from that in the end, but it was close. |                   |                 |  |
| <b>Did it work?</b> All appendages are crossed.  |                   |                 |  |
| <b>Bargain:</b> Appier.  |                   |                 |  |
| <b>Overpaid:</b> Moises Alou.  |                   |                 |  |



### The first nakedness proposal

At the end of the grueling two-day affair, I offered up a proposition to the group. I suggested that in 1998 we conduct at least one of the drafts “blind”: We could bring in absolutely no prep material except for an unmarked list of each MLB team’s 25-man roster. The only thing we could write on that sheet would be a line through each player’s name as he came up for bid, and a running total of our finances.

The response to this proposal was predictable. At first there was quiet consideration. Then there came a few hesitant votes of “that might be interesting.” Then, those who were busy gathering up their computer

printouts and loose-leaf notebooks and magazines began shaking their heads and muttering about the inability to track draft inflation and the loss of control. To my mind, that was the exact reason why we needed to do this.

It would have been fun to strip away the security of draft lists. It would have been fun to trust our knowledge of the player population and our own instincts. But even among the nation’s top experts, there were too many who could not handle the nakedness, and so the motion failed.

I was just trying to shake things up a bit; a half decade later, I’d bring it up again.

## Chapter 15: The Next Wave

### Cynicism

*'The internet can make anyone a journalist, but buyer beware.'*—Marc Spiegler, WIRED magazine

With cyberspace being inundated with unfiltered information, I felt a growing cynicism about nearly everything I read. There was a time when I thought that major league beat writers were gods, and trusted columnists were supergods, but now everyone was filling my brain with what I could only describe as noise.

I began writing about this cynicism and advising readers to be careful about what they could trust. To this day, this passage—which has appeared in the *Baseball Forecaster*—captures my thoughts:

(News information) is the element many fantasy leaguers rely on most since it is the most accessible. However, it is also the element that provides the most noise. Players, management and the media have absolute control over what we are allowed to know. Factors such as hidden injuries, messy divorces and clubhouse unrest are routinely kept from us, while we are fed red herrings and media spam. We will never know the entire truth.

Quite often, all you are reading is just other people's opinions... a manager who believes that a player has what it takes to be a regular or a team physician whose diagnosis is that a player is healthy enough to play. These words from experts have some element of truth but cannot be wholly relied upon to provide an accurate expectation of future events. As such, developing an appropriate cynicism for what you read is often helpful.

For instance, if a player is struggling for no apparent reason and there are denials about health issues, don't dismiss the possibility that an injury does exist. There are often motives for such news to be withheld from the public. And so, as long as we do not know all the facts, we cannot dismiss the possibility that any one fact is true, no matter how often the media assures it, deplores it, or ignores it. Don't believe everything you read; use your own judgment. If your observations conflict with what is being reported, that's powerful insight that should not be ignored.

Also, remember that nothing lasts forever in major league baseball. Reality is fluid. One decision begets a series of events that lead to other decisions. Any reported action can easily be reversed based on subsequent events. My favorite examples are announcements of a team's new bullpen closer. Those are about the shortest realities known to man.

We need the media to provide us context for our

analyses, and the real news they provide is valuable intelligence. But separating the news from the noise is difficult. In most cases, the only thing you can trust is how that player actually performs.

The core question was: Whom can we trust? It was tough enough with the major media, but with the rise of fantasy news and analysis sites, and soon the blogosphere, the noise level amped up. I didn't have an answer, but I did start to gravitate to several sources that appeared to be the most grounded. Or, at least, entertaining.

### Two other web-preneurs

Sometimes a site was hatched from no more than a fishing expedition posted on the rec.sport.baseball.fantasy newsgroup. John Mosey created his self-named website and started doling out smart commentary and pointed opinions with little fear about who he might piss off. "Smart, snark and fearless" was a flammable combination, but he was a great read. A note in his bio—"Mosey is known to freebase statistics in his spare time"—put him on my radar. But John was up front that he was "not some sort of baseball expert. I'm just a guy with a website." Still, he rubbed some people the wrong way.

Once, John defended me after someone posted one of my subscriber-only articles in a public forum. He wrote, "Ron, himself, is not an asshole, but he does depend on this stuff for a living. Besides being a Mets fan, he's a good guy." Lots of people did think John was an asshole, but I found his self-ignited online flame wars just fun to read. Even though he was a Brewers fan.

Subject: Re: What would you want in a fantasy baseball site?  
Date: Wed, 23 Oct 1996 13:22:12 -0400  
From: Don Sargent <don.sargent@template.com>  
Organization: Template Software, Inc.  
Newsgroups: rec.sport.baseball.fantasy  
References: 1

---

John Thomas Mosey wrote:  
>  
> I'm looking to open an ultimate type fantasy baseball site. What kind of  
> things would you want to see in it. Obviously links, but what kind of  
> extras? Chat rooms? bbs boards? let me know?  
>  
> John  
>  
> --

Player evaluations! Player evaluations! Player evaluations!

In the Spring you should have evaluation/predictions of the entire auction pool. During the season you should have something like John Hunt's Hit List, but make it more extensive. You should also have a drop list.

If you had a continuously updated version of say, Benson's Roto Annual, I would visit your site daily...

John Mosey started his fantasy baseball commentary career by asking people what they wanted in a site

Trace Wood put forth his honest credentials at *longgandhi.com*. It was incredibly refreshing, not a typical reflection of how most of the Internet's nouveau riche planted a stake in Fantasy Expertland:

"Unlike a lot of baseball analysts out there, I've never interned with Bill James or worked as a statistical analyst for any baseball teams. I've never worked in any capacity for any front office, major or minor league, not even as a scout. Still, I'd like to think I know baseball pretty well. I watch about 100 games a year, read a half dozen periodicals and a dozen baseball books a year, and I've been writing professionally for

## The Long Gandhi

Spreading the Gospel of Baseball

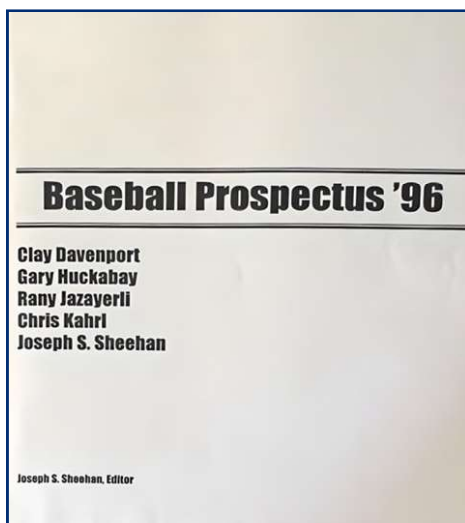


about five years. To date, no one has ever called me a complete idiot concerning any baseball topic, although there is the possibility they may have thought that and were just being polite."

Basically, "Read me. Don't read me. I'm not here to prove anything but I've got some chops if you give me a chance." And he was a great writer.

## The Koto Times

Thursday, May 11, 2000  
Vol I, no 132  
More Than Just The Facts



If you wanted to read about fantasy baseball, there was no shortage of options





## Chapter 16: The REBEL League

### Billy Sample, auctioneer—the full story

Billy Sample was a fringe outfielder who played mostly for the Texas Rangers in an MLB career that stretched from 1979 to 1986. His peak season was 1983 when he hit 12 home runs and stole 44 bases while hitting .274. Bill James called it a “decent season” in the 1984 *Baseball Abstract*; no other year came remotely close. He was out of baseball two years later.

By all accounts, Billy Sample was a nice guy and accomplished many things during his career, but one thing he was not.

He was not a Rotisserie auctioneer.

With the 14 owners and several partners assembled around the first Tout Wars-NL draft table, Sample walked up to the front of the room. He was impeccably groomed, clad in a black and white print shirt and black slacks. He nursed a small mixed drink. Sample eyed the speaker’s podium; it seemed daunting. He rejected it and opted to run the auction free-style. Clutching the microphone, he wandered into the center of the “U” and glanced around the room.

He had no idea what he was doing.

The first player was tossed: Larry Walker. The Rockies’ outfielder was the 1997 National League Most Valuable Player, coming off a season in which he led the league with 49 home runs, 130 RBIs and a .366 batting average. The opener on Walker was \$10. As the bid was called out, Sample stood there with a slight smirk. He sipped his drink and told us a story about a conversation he had with Walker at the All-Star Game. After completing his story, he fell silent.

We waited. About 10 interminable seconds passed. Finally, he said: “So, does anyone out here want to bid on Walker?”

“\$20!” shouted a voice from the other side of the table. Sample spun around. “Who said that?” he asked. The bidder raised his hand. “Okay, we have a \$20 bid on Larry Walker.”

There was more silence as all eyes fell on the auctioneer. The air was thick with anticipation; we were convinced another story was coming.

“\$30!” shouted the original bidder. Sample spun

around again. The bidder raised his hand. Then slowly, others began edging Walker’s price up on their own, dollar by dollar, as if to keep Sample from talking. As the price tag crept into the low \$40s, Sample leaned against the podium and watched. At \$42, there was silence.

“Billy, you should count down—going once, going twice—when the bidding stops like this.” I don’t recall who said it—it might have been me—but the group had already tired of the lack of direction this auctioneer

was providing.

“Going once. Going twice.”

“\$43.”

Sample once again stalled. “Going once!” cried an owner in desperation.

“Going once!” repeated the former major league outfielder.

“\$44!” yelled local reporter Steve Zipay from *Newsday*.

Sample was once again thrown off his game. But this time he was hearing the audible grumbling from the masses. “Going once!” he shouted. He paused; he scanned the room. “Going twice! Sold!” Zipay purchased the first player in Tout Wars-NL history.

Irwin got up from his seat and went to the podium where Sample was still leaning in, fondling his drink.

They exchanged some whispers

and Sample nodded. We were all grateful for the intervention, but it didn’t help. Barry Bonds and Greg Maddux were next out of the gate, both players getting bid into the \$40s. It was another 10 minutes we’d never get back.

After half an hour, we had successfully auctioned off a grand total of eight players. At the rate we were going, we were on pace to finish the active roster phase of the draft by about 10:00 AM the following morning.

That was enough. It was time for a relief pitcher.

But Ann Liguori had already left and only a few extra industry folk remained in the room. Thankfully, Peter Hershberg and Joshua Stylman of *rotoball.com* stepped in. Sample grabbed his drink and left the area, along with a few of the onlookers. The proceedings ran smoothly after that.



**Billy Sample: Former fringe OF. Nice guy. Impeccably turned out. Just not a fantasy auctioneer**

## Others who remembered that first Tout Wars draft

**Art McGee:** “I remember that it was probably the only element of glamour in my Rotisserie career. Don’t be too hard on Billy Sample! I remember that after he finished auctioneering, I left the draft table for a few minutes to chat with him and thought he was a really nice guy.”

**Mat Olkin:** “I remember Sample, but my recollection of his performance is quite different—I remember thinking he was rather good. Maybe I thought he was better than he was, and I admit I may have been biased, probably for a couple of reasons: 1) He impressed me as reasonably thoughtful and articulate, for an ex-jock; and 2) At one point in the auction, he called me ‘Mr. Olkin,’ and I sat for a moment thinking about how cool it was that I’d just been addressed so respectfully by a guy who’d hit .292 in 1979. I guess he had me at ‘Mr. Olkin.’”

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Alex Patton</b><br>Baseball<br>Snapshots<br><b>Peter Kroutzer</b><br>ESPN's<br>Ask Rotman<br><b>Irwin Zwillig</b><br>Lenny Melnick<br>Pennant Chase<br>Fantasy Baseball<br><b>Ron Shandler</b><br>Baseball HQ<br><b>John Coleman</b><br>Sandlot Shrink<br><b>Kelth Law</b><br>Baseball<br>Prospectus<br><b>Art McGee</b><br>Valuation expert<br><b>Larry Labadini</b><br><b>Al Chaby</b><br>Fantasy Baseball<br>Scouting Report<br><b>John Zaleski</b><br>Ultimate Fantasy<br>Sports | <b>New York's Official All Star Cafe presents</b><br><h1>TOUT WARS</h1> <h2>1998</h2> <b>Battle of the Experts</b><br><b>www.toutwars.com</b><br> <b>March 28, 1998, 2:00 pm</b><br>Live Draft at the Official All Star Cafe<br>1540 Broadway in Times Square, New York | <b>Mat Olkin</b><br>STATS, Inc.<br>Fantasy Advisor<br><b>Jim Callis</b><br>STATS, Inc.<br><b>Steve Moyer</b><br>Pro Sports<br>Xchange<br><b>John Sickels</b><br>STATS Minor<br>League Notebook<br><b>Steve Zipay</b><br>Newsday<br><b>Jonathan Mayo</b><br>New York Post<br><b>Bill Kulik</b><br>Forever Baseball<br><b>Mike Vogel</b><br>USA Sports<br><b>Greg Faulkner</b><br>The Owner's Box<br><b>Rick Wilton</b><br>Baseball HQ<br><b>Jim Drossel</b><br>Fantasy baseball<br>writer |
|---|---|--|

To announce Tout Wars, we placed this ad in *Baseball Weekly*

## Chapter 17: AfterMath

*“The Secret of My Crappy Pitching Staff” was a wildly popular column, but I did summarize certain sections for the book. Here is the full version of two key sections:*

### WINS

Predicting wins is an incredible shot in the dark. Even the pitchers in the upper echelon of major league hurlers hurt us when we attempt to project how many games they will win each year. To wit, a hurler who always goes for over \$20 in roto drafts...

| Year... Wins  | Year... Wins  |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1992 ..... 18 | 1995 ..... 10 |
| 1993 ..... 11 | 1996 ..... 10 |
| 1994 ..... 9  | 1997 ..... 21 |

This pitcher earned back that \$20-plus investment four times during these six years. And even if Roger Clemens has an off-year in 1998, we'll likely be throwing those 1999 roto dollars at the hope of yet another rebound.

It takes five events for a pitcher to notch a single “W”:  
He must pitch well, allowing few runs to score.

His team's offense must score more runs than he gives up.

His team's defense must successfully convert his batted balls into outs.

His bullpen must hold any lead he leaves the game with.

His manager must leave him in the game for at least 5 innings, and after that, cannot pull him if his team is still behind.

...and of these five events, four of them are entirely out of his control. Yet we continue to place value on our roto hurlers based upon their ability to win games.

### SAVES

Big roto dollars chase the scarce commodity of saves every year. But unless your pitcher has a name like Hoffman, Wohlers or Rivera, you're likely chasing the fickle whims of a major league field manager.

It takes six events for a pitcher to notch a single save...

1. His team's starting pitcher and middle relievers must pitch well.
  2. His team offense must score more runs than allowed.
  3. It must be a relatively close game.
  4. His manager must put him on the mound in a save situation.
  5. He must pitch well.
  6. His manager must allow him to finish the game.
- ...and of these six events, five of them are entirely out

of his control.

In reality, the only thing we're throwing our roto dollars at is Event #4. We don't care whether the pitcher is any good; we only care that he's going to be given the ball in the 9th. So, pitchers like Matt Karchner go for \$19 and Heathcliff Slocumb go for \$11, even though neither has any business being on a mound with a game on the line. But we're not paying for their skills; we're paying for their role. And that could change tomorrow.

### ERA

No matter how good we perceive a pitcher to be, we all know his ERA might fluctuate by a run or more each season. Yet, year after year, those hurlers who post even one exceptional campaign or offer even the remote promise of a low ERA will garner inflated draft day bids. Why else did we bid up these pitchers...?

Pedro Martinez (\$42)—yet only one sub-3.40 ERA in the past four years.

Brad Radke (\$18)—yet the only time he ever posted a sub-4.00 ERA was during the second half of 1997.

Jaret Wright (\$16)—yet only 90 IP of major league experience with a 4.38 ERA.

Scott Erickson (\$11)—yet only one sub-4.80 ERA in the last five years.

Rick Reed (\$19)—yet only two sub-4.00 ERAs in parts of nine seasons.

Al Leiter (\$14)—yet only one ERA under 3.64 in four major league seasons.

Dustin Hermanson (\$14)—yet the only time he ever posted a sub-3.50 ERA was during his first 72 IP of 1997.

Bobby Jones (\$14)—yet the only times he posted a sub-4.00 ERA was in 1994 and the first half of 1997.

Three things need to happen for a pitcher to post a low ERA...

He must pitch well, allowing few batters to reach base and few runners to score.

His team's defense must successfully convert his batted balls into outs.

His team's bullpen must strand those runners they inherit.

...and of these three things, two are entirely out of his control.

While defensive lapses may not greatly impact an ERA (given a kind official scorer), a poor bullpen can wreak havoc with a pitcher's numbers.

### WHIP

Oddly enough, the one category that most people pay the least attention to (go ahead, 'fess up) is the one that is the best evaluator of some element of a pitcher's



skill. But WHIP is far from perfect. WHIP measures the number of baserunners a pitcher allows. This, however, is only half of the story. The other half—the baserunners who end up scoring—are the ones that win and lose ballgames. Some pitchers allow many baserunners but have an uncanny knack for stranding them. Others allow few baserunners, but once they're aboard, it's just a short trek home. WHIP does not distinguish between these two skill sets.

WHIP also does not distinguish between its component parts. Is a pitcher's inflated ratio due to a lack of control and high walk numbers? Or is a high WHIP due to an excess of batted balls finding their way through a porous defense? These are two very different deficiencies in a pitcher's skill set.

So, there we are... Four statistical categories and not one is an accurate and complete measure of any real pitching skill. But the Rotisserie gods force us to use these categories to place value on our pitchers. I rebelled. I drafted both of my Tout Wars pitching staffs without looking at one projection of wins, saves, ERA or WHIP.

*Then, a little bit later, this part:*

There's no question that I own a high-risk group, but the real risk I take is that Lou Piniella and Tom Kelly and Mike Hargrove all will see these pitchers' superior skills at some point. Granted, this can be a major leap of faith. But in these days of expansion-diluted pitching staffs, we need to find some faith somewhere. What better place than in pure raw skill?

And I also see the upside... For several years, I kept hyping the potential of the following pitcher...

|      | ERA  | K/BB | K/9 | HR% |
|------|------|------|-----|-----|
| 1992 | 4.50 | 1.8  | 8.1 | 11  |
| 1993 | 5.33 | 2.0  | 8.1 | 12  |
| 1994 | 5.12 | 2.5  | 8.0 | 13  |

Then finally, he took those same underlying skills and transitioned from a thrower into a pitcher...

|      | ERA  | K/BB | K/9 | HR% |
|------|------|------|-----|-----|
| 1995 | 3.44 | 3.3  | 6.5 | 9   |
| 1996 | 3.50 | 3.1  | 6.1 | 12  |
| 1997 | 2.97 | 3.5  | 6.6 | 9   |

...and while he was an easy \$1 pickup going into 1995, you'd be hard-pressed to pay less than \$25 these days for Denny Neagle. Now check out the following stats...

|      | ERA  | K/BB | K/9 | HR% |
|------|------|------|-----|-----|
| 1995 | 6.11 | 2.1  | 4.5 | 12  |
| 1996 | 5.70 | 2.7  | 7.3 | 15  |
| 1997 | 5.28 | 3.9  | 7.6 | 11  |

...and you'll know why I wasn't too disappointed to grab Jose Lima for a buck for my NL team. That's how it all works.

## More insight behind the 60-HR McGwire projection

*As it turned out, pitching was not the only thing I nailed in 1998. There was also this little tidbit in the Baseball Forecaster:*

**MARK MCGWIRE**

**PROJ: 60 HR, 133 RBI, .282**

This projection line is completely computer-generated with no outside adjustment of any kind. Can he really surpass Maris? In his favor: expansion pitchers. Not in his favor: age, health history, power trend.

Nobody had ever dared to publish a home run projection with a "6" at the front of a two-digit number, but I saw it as a time to be bold. There was more than

enough in McGwire's skills metrics to support it. The only variable I was placing a bet on was his health. Readers noticed. I was particularly tickled by this September email from one of my subscribers:

"Congratulations on the McGwire forecast.

When Mark hit #60 this past weekend, I took out the *Forecaster* and there it was in print—McGwire predicted for 60 HRs! And throughout the season in the projection updates, there you were continuing to predict a baseline of over 60 HRs. So congrats for both the keenly honed predictive engine that generates your numbers and having the confidence to place them in public without fudging or backtracking."

It was not about confidence or courage. My McGwire projection revealed another important truth about the whole idea of projective accuracy.

Even if someone could legitimately proclaim that they had the world's best projection system, their measure was calculated over a pool of perhaps 1,000 players. That population was comprised of hundreds of under-projected players, offset by hundreds of over-projected players, and perhaps a few dozen that came in within a reasonable range of par. The aggregation of all that data was what netted out to some purported measure of "accuracy." It was nice to know in a vacuum, I suppose, but unless you were drafting a team of 1,000 players, it was not remotely actionable.

When we play this game, we get only 23 roster spots—23 chances—to get it right. So, we must take a more targeted approach. Roster construction has to

be a balanced portfolio of solid, consistent players, peppered with a measured handful of educated risks. The risky players were the ones who often won or lost leagues. In fact, we'd come to learn that the secret of fantasy league success was simple: stock your roster with more overachievers than underachievers.

However, each published player projection had to land on a fixed stat line, typically representing some mean expectation, so the numbers were always tempered. That was not helpful when trying to identify potential standouts. My goal was to help

identify players whose skills metrics supported more than what the other forecasters were publishing, and sometimes it required me to goose their numbers a bit. With McGwire, the rest of the world was projecting 55 homers; I projected 60. It wasn't random; it was supported by data. But

rather than providing readers with a hedged number that avoided the risk, I embraced the risk.

In the reality of 1998, my projection was still quite a way short of the 70 homers McGwire actually hit. But my numbers were ahead of the field, which was more important for fantasy purposes. Shandler had basically told everyone to go an extra buck on Draft Day. The numbers themselves were almost irrelevant; all that mattered was how the projection affected bidding behavior. Admittedly, my higher-risk approach yielded many big losers too, but it was the embracing of the risk that won leagues. It was never about projective superiority.

This was early evidence that managing the marketplace was far more powerful than nailing the aggregate accuracy of the entire player pool's numbers. It was why I rejected any effort to have my projections included in anyone else's Accuracy Olympics.

### **My all-lefties-over-30 experiment**

In the National League, I decided to try something new. Running some numbers revealed a slight edge in overall productivity for left-handers over right-handers,

both on the hitting and pitching side. I also noted that players over 30 tended to be undervalued at previous drafts—most everyone went bid-crazy for shiny new rookies. So, I had the idea to draft all left-handed players over 30.

This significantly limited my draft pool—I was

targeting a list of only 40 hitters and 20 pitchers. I had to expand my search to switch-hitters to find even one shortstop (Walt Weiss). When it came to closers, there were only two southpaws—Billy Wagner and John Rocker—but when the bidding for Wagner crossed \$40, I had to hold my nose and roster the hate-mongering miscreant for \$27. Nobody said this was going to be easy. But was a fun exercise overall, even though it was really just a shot in the dark.

And pretty much a disaster from start to finish. Those statistical edges I had identified? Impossible to take advantage of over 23 roster spots. I should have known.

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**... even if someone could legitimately proclaim that they had the world's best projection system.... unless you were drafting a team of 1,000 players, it was not remotely actionable.... We get only 23 roster spots to get it right**

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## Chapter 18: Davids and Goliaths

### More from the first FSPA conference

*You'll note, in the advertisement for the conference, to the right, the LABR draft was the 'featured' attraction. That's why we all thought, as the industry's leading experts, we'd be called upon to help establish the core of the first trade association. But no, apparently, we were just the talent.*

*Here was the full program schedule for the first FSPA conference, which didn't know if it was a consumer or business event:*

#### Thursday

**6 pm:** Awards banquet

(with presenter Goose Gossage)

#### Friday

**9 am:** Legal implications of fantasy games

**10 am:** Free vs. Pay Fantasy Games: Their impact on the industry

**11 am:** Players Associations and the need for licensing in the industry

**Noon:** Lunch

**2 pm:** Rotisserie Q&A. Analyzing the Rookie crop.

**3 pm:** Sleepers and Busts

**5 pm:** Drinks and LABR Draft

#### Saturday

**9 am:** Growth of the fantasy industry

**10 am:** Fantasy league software & technology; how to improve your business

**11 am:** Benefits of joining an industry association

**Noon:** Lunch

**2 pm:** Rotisserie Q&A. Top 20 Questions

**3 pm:** Winning strategies; pitching vs. hitting in a Rotisserie draft

**5 pm:** Drinks and LABR Draft

### John Zaleski

The FSPA board was composed exclusively of reps from big companies, except for John Zaleski. John ran Ultimate Fantasy Sports, but as a solo operator. It was curious how he could be in this inner circle, until we found out that Carl Foster's connection to the fantasy baseball community was that he played Zaleski's game, and they did some radio



**Executive Director**  
**Carl Foster**  
USFANS/USFANTASY411

#### Founding Board Members

**Rick Wolf**  
CBS SportsLine

**Christina Schellhardt**  
The Sporting News

**Scott Higgins**  
EA Sports

**Steve Byrd**  
STATS, Inc.

**Charlie Wiegert**  
CDM Sports

**Lynn Busby**  
USA TODAY/Baseball Weekly

**Brandon Funston/  
Jim McGee**  
ESPN Internet Ventures

**Greg Ambrosius**  
Krause Publications  
Fantasy Sports Magazine

**Mark Grommesh**  
Prime Sports/FOX

**John Zaleski**  
Ultimate Fantasy Sports

**Larry McAllister**  
**James Serra**  
Fantasy Insights

together.

But as the FSPA evolved, John began to see the separation of the factions within the association. As it became more and more apparent that *Baseball Weekly's* only involvement in the FSPA was for their own self-interest, he wrote me, "Don't you really believe that, if Sportsline and ESPN and Prime Sports and you and I and everyone else pooled our collective marketplace reach that we could come close to tapping the audience that *BW* is holding over our heads? I certainly do, and if we followed that path, we'd certainly be sending a strong message to them. They should be chasing us, not the other way around."

I agreed and responded, taking great pains to choose the right words: "Why are we always sucking up to an organization that doesn't give a rat's ass about the FSPA?"

My comment generated crickets. It was a sound I was used to.

The original manuscript of the book included about 1,500 more words, containing the full text of the LABR and Tout experts' complaints about the FSPA along with my long missive defending the association.

There were a few interesting tidbits, but it was pretty boring to read, so I decided to cut it from the outtakes. (It must have been really bad to not even merit inclusion in the outtakes.) Instead..... THIS!





## Chapter 19: Esprit de Corps

### Embracing change

Much of my baseball writing to that point focused on trying to find the optimal gaming experience for my followers. Rotisserie was great, but so were sim games and salary cap games and any mutant hybrid that enhanced the experience. One of Tout Wars' best features was that we could use it as a laboratory to try new things, so I was always looking for something new to enhance that experience.

From a piece I wrote for *USA Today*:

I'm all for tradition, but I don't like wearing it as an anchor. I prefer to mix in a little innovation and embrace the new adventures that change brings. That is one of the founding philosophies of Tout Wars. Part of the charter of these exhibitions was to be a testing ground for new ideas. And we have been somewhat pioneers in that regard.

We were the first experts league to embrace the 5x5 game, back when 4x4 was still the acknowledged industry standard. While the \$100 Free Agent Acquisition Budget was a part of Tout from the beginning, being able to make \$0 bids was a new wrinkle that stuck. Tout introduced the Vickrey Method for free agent bidding, where winning bids cost one dollar more than the second highest bid. This was based on a successful economic theory that won William Vickrey a Nobel Prize. We were heretics when we dared to change a core stat category, replacing batting average with OBP. Then we stepped over the line even more when we made FAAB dollars a marketable commodity in trade talks.

None of these rules were fully new when Tout Wars adopted them, but neither were they fully tested on a public stage. They are all now a regular part of our constitution. None of these changes came without spirited debate between groups of Touts. With all this discussion, the core argument seemed to come down to "tradition versus innovation." You can say, "Don't fix what ain't broke," which would be quite reasonable. Or you could say, "Routine breeds boredom" and that would be equally valid.

Given Tout's charter, we try to be pro-active rather than reactive to the changing fantasy industry landscape, so a regular refreshing of the rules seems like something

good to do. At worst, we may find that a rule doesn't work and roll it back, which is what we did this year with a Vickrey modification we tried. At best, we find a way to enhance the gaming experience, which is the underlying goal.

Change is good.

### Computers in Moyer's basement

*Steve was concerned about space limitations, but there was one other thing that needed to be addressed. Tout had an unwritten rule regarding computers at the draft table. So, I had to reach out to the newbies. Remember—this was 2001.*

COMPUTERS AT THE DRAFT! This issue has come

up a few times in the past week. From LABR's first season in 1994, there has always been an understanding that computers were not a part of an experts draft. As the industry's leading analysts, we did not need to rely on outside help. And for the past seven years, you'll find that those

original LABR groundbreakers never come to the table with a laptop.

While this was an unwritten understanding, it has relaxed somewhat as the years have passed. At LABR and Tout Wars last year, one or two people did bring laptops, but solely for storing their draft list or tracking their players and money. This is now accepted. The one thing we still do not allow is any type of draft software, or any custom system or spreadsheets that recommend picks, track inflation, keep running statistical totals, project standings, or the like.

Why is it this way? It's not that we're a bunch of stodgy 40-somethings trying to put the screws to the uppity Gen-Xers. It comes down to what Tout Wars is trying to accomplish:

1) Our league has to resemble the typical Rotisserie League as much as possible. Fewer than 20 percent of fantasy leaguers use a computer at the draft, and only a fraction of those users have draft software.

2) The validity of our player values relies on all owners competing on a level playing field. The advantage offered to those using draft software could put that validity into question.

This is all not to say that you cannot use a laptop. Feel

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**... We were heretics when we dared to change a core stat category, replacing batting average with OBP. Then we stepped over the line even more when we made FAAB dollars a marketable commodity in trade talks**

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free to use one strictly for personal record-keeping. But recognize that you will be in the minority and will open yourself up to extreme levels of taunting and ridicule by the stodgy 40-somethings.

Within a few years, all of that would be thrown out the window, but for Moyer's basement, there would be no computers. There were barely enough electrical outlets to keep the place lit.

### Moyer's basement scouting report

For 2001, the group decided to hire a Tout outsider to wear the multiple hats of commissioner, SWAT and web columnist. Two weeks before the basement draft, I sent him a note to get him up to speed on who the Touts were and their draft tendencies. It was intended to be a heads-up on writing a draft review column for the ToutWars.com website. I told him that these "scouting reports" were only my impressions, and that I appreciated him keeping them under wraps. None of the Touts knew about the document before the draft, and none ever found out... until now. An excerpt:

"Steve Moyer does not use formalized player values; he plays this game from the gut and loves trying to find gold in \$1 players. If he could draft a \$23 team, he'd do it... Mat Olkin likes young players and could come out of the draft with half his team having less than two years of MLB experience... Rick Pike (AllStar Stats) will likely load up on a sizable core of \$30 players and backfill late. This makes him a major player in the first hour and a non-entity during the middle 2-3 hours... Mike Bikales and Dan Gottfried play in leagues much more cutthroat than this one. Watch them—they've finished in 2nd place in both years they've participated; in the first year, they were a fill-in when we had a no-show, so they weren't even prepared, and still finished 2nd.

John Coleman will also load up on stars and backfill later on. He's a FAAB madman, putting in low \$ bids for dozens of players and turning over much of his roster in the process... Peter Kreutzer has his own valuation system that often contradicts common wisdom on some players. He'll come out of the draft feeling good about his roster but has only contended once in four tries... Gene McCaffrey may try to take the LIMA Plan

to unheard of limits. He comes from the national challenge school, so some of his perspectives also run in opposition to the field... Greg Scalf (Fantasy Baseball Central) runs a URL portal website; he is only recently starting to show that he can play with the big boys. He's finished 8th, 11th, 7th and tied for 2nd in the AL last year - but could have won it if he managed his roster better.

This year's newcomers have a lot to prove. These include Grey, Mosey, Brown, Cox, Leibowitz, etc. In talking with these guys, I get the impression that they will be aggressive—they want desperately not to embarrass themselves. Mosey has announced that he will be trying some type of unique strategy, so watch him. Guys like Blengino and Bonavita are unproven; their expertise in other games may put them at a disadvantage. Callis was in Tout in 1998 and finished 10th. I'm willing to bet that the newcomer who fares best will be Lawr Michaels."

In retrospect, I didn't give the rookies a lot of respect at the beginning. We had positioned Tout to be a league consisting of the best of the best, and I had no way to know whether any of these guys could even play. Honestly, I was more interested in the traffic their respective websites would bring us.

### More about deforestation

Peter Kreutzer's *Fantasy Baseball Guide* magazine "grew into an industry showcase for talented independent baseball writers." There are a couple of the *Guide*'s "Meet The Experts" pages on the next page.

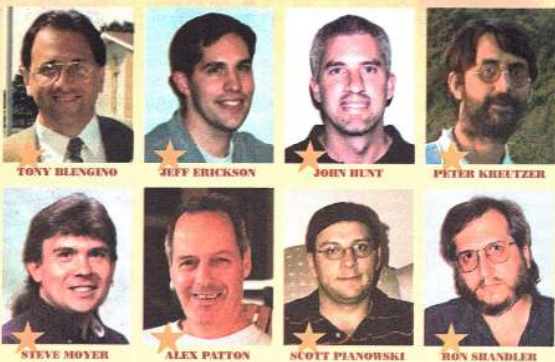
Peter's introduction to the 2001 edition included an interesting quote: "Steve Moyer has great faith in the value of the head shot, which is why you'll discover what all these experts look like on the Meet the Experts page."

I laughed when I read that, because I remembered Steve telling me the main reason he kept going back to LABR was getting his photo in *Baseball Weekly*.





# 2001



**Tony Blengino** is the author of "Future Stars", an excellent annual analysis of the short and long-term future of hundreds of minor league baseball prospects. He has developed a number of analytical tools that directly address the issues that make the statistical analysis and forecasting of young player performance so difficult.

**Jeff Erickson** was one of the three founders of RotoNews, in January 1997. He has participated in fantasy leagues for 15 years, and been a speaker for the last two years at the Fantasy Baseball Symposium at the Arizona Fall League. His Closers in Waiting is a recurring feature in this magazine.

**John Hunt** has been imparting roto wisdom in Baseball Weekly since 1993. In 1994 he founded the Leagues of Alternative Baseball Reality (LABR), the most visible and influential of roto drafts, which

are held every March. John also writes fantasy baseball and basketball columns for RotoNewsDirect.

**Peter Kreutzer** (aka Rotoman) is a columnist at mlb.com. He started playing fantasy baseball in 1982. He has written about fantasy baseball and spring training for ESPN.com and baseballprospectus.com. He has his own website, [www.askrotoman.com](http://www.askrotoman.com), and is the editor-in-chief of this magazine.

**Jonathan Mayo** is an editor and writer for [majorleaguebaseball.com](http://majorleaguebaseball.com) and the first sanctioned fantasy columnist for Major League Baseball's official website. He is uncomfortable with the idea of experts.

**Steve Moyer** writes the weekly RotoNews baseball column, "Baseball Outsider." He was a long-time employee and columnist at STATS, Inc., and won the LABR NL in 1996. He joined Broadband

Sports in 1998. He's been playing fantasy baseball since 1988 and is the senior editor of this magazine.

**Alex Patton** has had six books about Rotisserie Baseball published. His popular drafting and analysis software is actually easy and fun to use. Updates for his widely-used Patton's prices and player evaluations can be found at his website, [www.alexpatton.com](http://www.alexpatton.com).

**Scott Pianowski** has been writing for RotoNews for three years. Before that he was a writer for The Guru's Fantasy Football Report and The Fantasy Football Insider.

**Ron Shandler** is the brains behind the award-winning website [www.baseballhq.com](http://www.baseballhq.com), and the brand new, [www.rotoblog.com](http://www.rotoblog.com). He invented the famed LIMA Plan, a low-cost approach to putting together a winning pitching staff, and has been applying sabermetric principles to fantasy baseball since 1986.

# 2006

## MEET THE EXPERTS

7th ANNUAL EDITION THE GUIDE 2006

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|---|--|--|--|
| <p><b>ALIS PETER:</b><br/>A pioneer of fantasy baseball analysis and the author of six books about the game. <a href="http://AlisPeter.com">AlisPeter.com</a> is a meeting place for advanced roto players. <a href="http://RotoRank.com">RotoRank.com</a> is a unique cooperative approach to player news and discussion.</p>                                    | <p><b>ROD FOGLE:</b><br/>A long time Cubs season ticket holder and commissioner for 11th of the Chicago Hot Stove League. Rick represents USA State in Toot Vars, finishing 2nd, 4th and 5th the past three years. USA State (<a href="http://www.usastate.com">www.usastate.com</a>) is one of the leading stat services for fantasy sports in the country.</p>   | <p><b>RON SHANDLER:</b><br/>First to develop sabermetric applications for fantasy league play. His Baseball Forecaster is in its 20th year of publication. His website, <a href="http://BaseballForecaster.com">BaseballForecaster.com</a>, has won FIFTH "Best Fantasy Baseball Online Content" award three times. Ron and his staff were advisors to the St. Louis Cardinals in 2004 and 2005.</p>   | <p><b>LARRY MICHAELS:</b><br/>CREATIVEMAGNETS.com, Inc., founder and the Fantasy Sports Daily editor. Fantasy writer for John Benson, MSN, and CBS Sportsline.com. Covers the A's for the STATS Scouting Notebook, a statistics/drafting covering the Athletics and Giants for mlb.com. Toot Vars AL champion in 2001.</p>   |
| <p><b>JASON GREY:</b><br/>The founder and publisher of Mastersball.com, a site for daily fantasy baseball analysis, and a weekly columnist for Slalom and mlb.com. He won back-to-back titles in Toot Vars in 2002-2003. He is also a statistician for Major League Baseball Advanced Media, serving the Arizona Diamondbacks.</p>                                | <p><b>ROD LEBOWITZ:</b><br/>Rotohaven.com merged with Mastersball.com in 2002. His work has appeared in numerous fantasy magazines and he has appeared on multiple radio programs. Rod is the author of the Diamond Exchange and he creates the annual player projections at Mastersball.com. He is a frequent expert league participant, especially including Toot Vars NL, in which he has finished 3rd, 5th and 3rd the last three years.</p>   | <p><b>MATTHEW BERRY:</b><br/>The Talented Mr. Roto has been nominated five times by the Fantasy Sports Writers Association for his work on <a href="http://www.talentedmrroto.com">www.talentedmrroto.com</a>. He is the official fantasy expert for ESPN's "TODD PICK" makes weekly appearances on ESPN NEWS and ESPN Radio and last year wrote the daily fantasy blog for mlb.com. In his spare time, he hates Mike Hampton.</p>   | <p><b>CORY SCHWARTZ:</b><br/>The Director of Stats for mlb.com, the official website of Major League Baseball, and co-host of the Fantasy 411 radio and web TV shows. He made his Toot Vars debut in 2004, finishing third out of 12 teams, and won the Fantasy 411 Linsner League and the mlb.com Office Fantasy League.</p>  |
| <p><b>STEVE MOYER:</b><br/>The president of Baseball Info Solutions, a new data provider and publisher of the Bill James Handbook. He's worked in the baseball industry since 1981, with STATS, Inc., Baseball's Sports, and Roto. Check out Baseball Info Solutions at <a href="http://baseballinfosolutions.com">baseballinfosolutions.com</a>.</p>             | <p><b>DOUG DENNIS:</b><br/>Editor of BaseballHQ.com since 1999. Advisor to the St. Louis Cardinals in 2004 and 2005. Wrote Tip Sheet and Statlog Fantasy for Baseball Weekly in 2003 and 2004. Contributor to a number of baseball books, including the 2004 and 2005 Baseball Forecaster. Meet Doug at the First Pitch Forum in Tampa, Florida in March (<a href="http://www.firstpitchforum.com">www.firstpitchforum.com</a>).</p>   | <p><b>TRAC WOOD:</b><br/>Trace is on the SABR Scouting Committee and has been a contributor to the Bill James Handbook since its inception. For the last five years he has worked for mlb.com covering the Orioles and now the Nationals, as well as written the Pirates and Expos/Nationals major and minor league scouting reports for the STATS Scouting Notebook. Since 2001 he's won three expert league titles including AL Toot Vars in 2004 and was named FIFTH Fantasy Baseball Writer of the Year last year.</p>   | <p><b>BRIAN WALSH:</b><br/>He writes baseball and football columns for CREATIVE SPORTS, a weekly baseball piece for Sports Illustrated, and is a contributor to The Fantasy Baseball and Football Guide. A recent St. Louis Cardinal for more than 20 years, he is co-owner of <a href="http://www.thecardinals.com">www.thecardinals.com</a>, now affiliated with Statcast.com and his content is regularly syndicated via Yahoo.com and FOXSports.com. A graduate of the University of Nebraska with a degree in mathematics, Brian has looked himself into believing that fantasy sports is actually a practical application of his educational training.</p> |
| <p><b>GENE MCCAFFREY:</b><br/>The author of Wise Guy Baseball, an annual analysis of "challenge" fantasy games. He and John Moline won the Toot Vars NL championship in 2003. He has been a Fantasy Baseball Guide contributor since 2001. For information about his book call 800-483-3793.</p>  | <p><b>ROD BLACKBURN:</b><br/>A freelance writer and the principal of Pen-Ultimate Toronto-based writing and editing. He is the Editor in Chief of CREATIVE-SPORTS.com and its daily e-newsletter, the Fantasy Sports Daily. He also writes a weekly baseball column, Soles Up, and a biweekly baseball column, Three in the Key. This is his second season working on the Fantasy Baseball Guide, and he's also written for <a href="http://RotoWire.com">RotoWire.com</a>. Write him at <a href="mailto:rblackburn@simpson.ca">rblackburn@simpson.ca</a>.</p> | <p><b>PETER KREUTZER:</b><br/>Has been the editor-in-chief and lead writer of the Fantasy Baseball Guide and the Fantasy Football Guide since 2000. His Ask Rotoman column has been published since 1998, presently at <a href="http://askrotoman.com">askrotoman.com</a> and <a href="http://PettitAndDubs.com">PettitAndDubs.com</a>.</p>  | <p><b>JOHN WELLS:</b><br/>He is a Contributor to Village Baseball. With partner Gene McCaffrey, John has been successful in past Expert League contests, including titles in both LABR and Toot Vars. Lives in Fort Collins, CO with wife Dale and son Joe.</p>  |
| <p><b>JASON PUNEL:</b><br/>As a personal hobby grew into mania, there was really only one option: make it a career. Most Draft Central's latest innovation is real-time drafting. Now users can choose to draft casually over a few days or experience the intense action of a live draft with pick times as short as 30 seconds.</p>                             | <p><b>MIKE FEIGER:</b><br/>Started playing in his first roto league in 1984, and since then has contributed player comments and other articles to <a href="http://AlisPeter.com">AlisPeter.com</a>, and has helped assemble the player database for <a href="http://PettitAndDubs.com">PettitAndDubs.com</a>. Mike writes and edits legal work for a publishing company in order to support his baseball habit.</p>  | <p><b>TODD ZOLA:</b><br/>A member of the Mastersball team since its inception in 1997, he specializes in the science of player valuation and his research is a centerpiece of past and present Mastersball projects. Research he has begun to explore projection theory. His work has been showcased on Slalom and mlb.com and he has been a frequent guest on XM radio's Fantasy Focus. Todd plays in the XL and Mixed Toot Vars expert leagues, and founded the Mixed Toot Vars Expert League. His new endeavor, The Triple Crown Championship League is a unique head to head set-up which will feature teams of industry insiders.</p> | <p><b>JEFF WELLS:</b><br/>He's been playing roto since an average of three leagues per year since 1988 and averaged better than a victory per year. He's recently been playing in numerous expert leagues, and won the Shandler's XL in 2004. He's been an avid subscriber for about 15 years.</p>   |
| <p><b>LENN RUBINSTEIN:</b><br/>Made his debut as a Fantasy Expert in mlb.com's 2004 draft. His seasonal review debut came on ESPN's "Dean Job." He has hosted "Rapid Sports Update," a recurring guest on ESPN Radio's "War" and "The King" shows. He's also contributed to The Fantasy Sports TV and <a href="http://www.creativeve.com">creativeve.com</a>.</p> | <p><b>ERIC AMBERG:</b><br/>Editor of Fantasy Sports Magazine since 1993 and the founder of the National Fantasy Baseball Championship, the industry's premiere high-stakes contest (<a href="http://www.fantasybaseballchampionship.com">www.fantasybaseballchampionship.com</a>). Greg is also the president of the Fantasy Sports Trade Association, which now boasts 176 corporate members.</p>   | <p><b>LARRY SCHWARTZ:</b><br/>Larry is a contributor for the Statlog Sports (<a href="http://www.statlogsports.com">www.statlogsports.com</a>), and has represented them in the FIFTH expert league and Toot Vars. In 2002, he won a "Triple Crown" of sorts, by winning the FIFTH NL Toot Vars Mixed, and the CDM Diamond Challenge overall championship. He became the first person to ever win the Diamond Challenge twice.</p>   | <p><b>SAUL WELLS:</b><br/>Sam is a sports columnist for The Wall Street Journal. He's the author of Fantasyland, a book about Roseanne Baseball, to be published by Viking in February, 2006. See <a href="http://www.fantasylandbook.com">www.fantasylandbook.com</a>. He lives in New York City.</p>   |
|   |  | <p><b>BARRY ROSENBLUM:</b><br/>Establishing a new level of dominance by winning both his leagues last year. Three wins in five years in his primary league, truly defining the team name Dynasty, even though some small-minded officials object to it.</p>  |  |

The growth in the number of experts appearing in the *Fantasy Baseball Guide* mirrored the growth in the fantasy baseball industry. In 2001, editor Peter Kreutzer mustered eight of us, including himself (that's me lower right, in what I call "my Unabomber picture"). Jeff, Peter, Alex, Scott and I are still going. Just five years later, there were 25 of us. The reproduction here is hard to read, many of those 2006 experts are still active today as fantasy writers: Gene McCaffrey, formerly of *Wise Guy Baseball* and now at *The Athletic*; Doug Dennis of BaseballHQ; Todd Zola of Mastersball, ESPN, Rotowire and Sirius XM; Matthew Berry, formerly of TheTalentedMrRoto.com and ESPN now with NBC Sports; and me (top of the third column). But with the more recent editions of the *Guide* sporting upwards of three dozen experts, the days of headshots are long gone.



## Chapter 20: Welcome to McLean

### The BW hotel debacle

There were a few more details to share, but let's start with the relevant artifact:



I saw that letter as an opportunity

After I heard back from all the LABRites with their intentions of whether to pay or not, I wrote the group again. I was angry. I pulled out my soapbox.

“Some of us have ponied up; some of us haven’t. By us paying, it gets this secretary out of hot water, but this has no effect on John. I see this gaffe as a chance for us to change the precedent. If you run an event, you should pay for the costs. BW has gotten off scot-free for seven years. I keep thinking back to that day in Orlando in 1997 when we each had to cough up \$20 to pay for the travel expenses of BW’s photographer. I think back to all those years when BW wouldn’t pick up the tab for even a single meal. Those were years that LABR would not even have had a venue for the draft had they not rode the coattails of a conference—without even paying a penny towards the facility they were using. Heck, I pay for Hunt and Olkin to come to First Pitch Arizona each year! That’s how you do business.

“We can continue to enable them to use us, or we can change the culture, demand something for the use of our insights, likenesses and time. They are not inclined to cover even some of our travel expenses, but there are other things they could do for us. Some free ad space may be a non-starter, but at minimum, restore our contact information to our mug shots in the Leviathan. There are options. But for us to pay our own way to this thing without getting something in return makes no sense.

“I’m willing to draft up a letter to Ivory, but it would have much more impact if we all signed it, or at least most of us. I’ll be tactful and present the argument along with proposed options. I welcome input from any of you who have something to say as well. Let me know if you’re interested in joining me on this.”

The rabble-rouser had spoken. But within an hour, LABR’s great peacekeeper responded. Here was Rick Wolf’s message to the group, along with my takes (in parentheses):

“First let me say that I agree with Ron in principle. But here are a couple of personal thoughts: We are John’s home league. John could just invite 24 friends and keep LABR intact with a different set of “experts.” This is my home league now too. I wouldn’t expect my League Manager to pay for my hotel if we had a draft event.”

(I was glad that there was such camaraderie that people considered LABR their home league.

But BW was still using us in some small way to sell newspapers. We were providing them content for free. In addition, Sportsline was paying Rick’s way, as did ESPN for Eric Karabell and MLB.com for Jonathan Mayo. For those of us running small businesses, this was not an insignificant expense.)

“LABR is not a marketable commodity. There is no quantifiable evidence that LABR drives readership for any *Baseball Weekly* issue. Fantasy Baseball drives the circulation. I thought LABR was a powerful brand and sponsored a live LABR draft event for SportsLine. We spent more than \$10,000 on a Tampa event in 1998. The R.O.I sucked and Sportsline gave me crap about it

for four years! BW doesn’t owe us anything.”

(Nice try, but you can’t use a failed live event as a litmus test for LABR’s marketability. Experts drafts are not spectator events. We learned that from the meager fan turnout to LABR in 1996

and 1997. Nobody willfully sits through an auction for six hours unless they are participating in the bidding. But that takes nothing away from the interest in the leagues as a post-draft source of bidding benchmarks and strategy insights. That’s the valuable content we’re providing for free.)

### The full version of the email establishing the XFL

*In the book, I tagged this section as The League of Elitists, but until you read this letter, you can’t grasp just how full of ourselves we had become. Okay—Myself.*

TO: John Hunt, Greg Ambrosius, Steve Moyer, Mat Olkin, John Coleman, Gene McCaffrey, Peter Kreutzer, Alex Patton, Irwin Zwilling, Lenny Melnick

Pardon this intrusion on your busy schedules, but I have some bitching to do, and want to throw out an idea for your consideration. Earlier this season, in LABR, I was approached with a trade offer... I give Eric Owens and Eric Gagne, he gives a struggling 3Bman to replace my DLed Phil Nevin (who was due back from the DL) and a starting pitcher with a 4.50 ERA and lousy peripherals.

We’ve been playing together in these experts leagues for a long time, but this was the first time I had ever been insulted by a trade offer. We all have respect for each other and our levels of knowledge, but even our initial lowball offers are within a certain range of acceptability. I don’t want to have to deal with trash

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## Experts drafts are not spectator events ... Nobody willfully sits through an auction for six hours unless they are participating in the bidding

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competitors like this.

But it's LABR and I'll forge onward. This type of offer could just as well have come from Tout Wars or any of a dozen other purported "experts" leagues, given the way things have evolved over the past few years. Thinking about having to deal with this lower level of competitor, I realized how diluted these "experts leagues" have become.

Half of LABR is stocked with regular guys and representatives from large organizations that are obligated to have a presence, but many of these people have no business being in an "experts" league. With all due respect to CDM, their challenge game winners can hardly be considered Rotisserie experts (although Josh Paley did hold his own last year). It's all business, I know, but it dilutes the perception of what it takes to be an "expert."

Tout Wars is not much better. In its drive to legitimize itself by casting a large net for promotional sources (read: owners), it too has become diluted with just about anyone owning a web presence. It has been a valiant ride, and it has succeeded to some extent, but again, is it composed of 25 experts? Hardly.

There are several other "experts" leagues cluttering up the landscape these days. There was a web site last winter that decided to get itself on the map by sponsoring an "experts league," and so it recruited anyone who had been rejected by LABR or Tout Wars. And Greg, with all due respect to the efforts of FSPA, rounding up anyone who shows up to Las Vegas can't really be considered an "experts" league either.

The fact is, there are very few real experts in this industry, people who add to the intelligence library rather than just rehash noise that has already been chewed up by others. I'm sorry, but just because you are employed as a staff writer for a media company does not make you an expert. I know some of you started that way, but you've paid some dues. The current crop of "experts" has done nothing to prove themselves other

than getting hired.

I send this note to you guys because, when it comes to the real experts, I think we are it, give or take maybe a few others. Who else has really done anything? Who else can really be considered the core of the real competitors in these experts leagues?

And so, I thought, for the sake of my sanity in this

industry, I really need to get back into a league with just guys like you. Of course, the thought of adding yet another league to my plate turns my stomach, but there has to be a way to reclaim the challenge, and camaraderie, and pure fun we had in the 1990s. How about a league that is very low maintenance, a format that retains the elements we love about this game and even adds a few that LABR and Tout don't contain but does not take away from everything

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**There are very few real experts in this industry, people who add to the intelligence library rather than just rehash noise that has already been chewed up by others. ... Just because you're employed as a staff writer for a media company doesn't make you an expert. ... The current crop of "experts" has done nothing to prove themselves other than getting hired**

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else that we do.

This league would be for us, so it would be unencumbered by the scheduling needs of *Baseball Weekly*, or the need to promote itself like Tout Wars, or any pull from any outside source. We could put it up on the web, or not. If nobody follows it, so be it.

### **Drafting naked, a redux**

Back in 1997 at LABR, I challenged the experts to "draft naked," that is, sit down at the table with no prep materials whatsoever. They balked. When I launched the XFL, I set rules to limit the draft prep materials to major league depth charts only. The 12 of us found these drafts exhilarating because they are the ultimate test of our knowledge and challenged us to approach the draft in an entirely different way.

It required a major commitment and effort. It required a higher level of decision-making, perhaps even a higher level of consciousness. But if you wanted to take on the challenge, the first thing you had to do is give up your laptop. And magazines. And any papers with numbers on them, really.



## Chapter 21: The Sincerest Form of Flattery

### Lessons about pricing

My last corporate job was as the marketing director for a newsletter publishing company. Their anchor publication was targeted to building contractors and provided *desperately needed leads* on future projects all over the country. The company was originally a “mom and pop” operation that had been around for decades, but I came on board several years after they had been sold to a corporate player.

When the original owners sold out, a subscription was priced at \$157 per year. The new owner saw money left on the table and increased the price by huge leaps over the next four years. By the time I arrived, the rate was \$458, and they had become massively profitable. As long as you produced a product that people need (as opposed to want), you have lots of room to price up. Drug companies obviously know that.

I’ll admit that I found it illogical and amazing that I was able to charge \$99 a year for baseball information, but there was clearly a market for it. (I know. I pinched myself every morning.) Like the contractor newsletter, Baseball HQ also provided *desperately needed leads* on future baseball performance, and readers recognized the value of the quality content.

Websites new to the pay model looked at our rate and realized I had left them a ton of available real estate under \$99. So, new sites planted their stakes anywhere from \$29 to \$59. It was easy to undercut Baseball HQ and position themselves as lower cost options. But there were two key realities about pay-for-access information:

1. The distance between FREE and \$1 was thousands of miles farther than the distance between \$49 and \$99. It took an Act of God to get someone to open their wallet at all, but once it was opened, you could charge just about anything you damn well pleased as long as you had quality content. If you wanted to charge \$39, you could have easily charged \$49. If you planned to charge \$59, you could have easily charged \$69 or \$79. The higher the price point, the less the price sensitivity. Many of those new sites were forgoing easy profit.

2. The lower you set that price point, the more people you needed to convince to open their wallets for you to turn a profit. To make \$1000, I only needed to convince 10 people to defy that Act of God; a \$49

service had to convince twice as many. Just math.

*Here are two more stories about intellectual property transgressors:*

### The Carl Cooper incident

Carl (not his real name) ordered what he thought was a 3-month subscription to Baseball HQ and received a confirmation email from us. Apparently, he must have clicked the wrong button and the order came through as an annual subscription with auto-renewal. So, he called up Lynda, our incredibly thick-skinned superstar customer service rep, and vomited out a deluge of obscenities that would have made the *The Aristocrats* a PG movie.

A month after Lynda corrected the error, I received an email from Carl (whose real name was Walt) threatening to accuse us of credit card fraud and stating that he was going to flood all the industry message boards with the truth about how horrible a company I ran. We had corrected the issue; he was just a troll, so I ignored him.

All while this was going on, our good friend was racking up mega-minutes of usage on the site, combing through our archives of statistical analysis essays and downloading years of data. I would not have even considered looking at his usage if not for a casual visit I made to the Rotojunkie Bullpen. There I saw that Carl Cooper (also not his real last name) had just been brought on board as their new “Statistical Analyst.”

So, I reached out to Rotojunkie’s Bob Kohm and informed him of what was happening. Naturally, he didn’t know Cooper (whose real last name was Cook) from anything other than his posts in the Bullpen. They had vetted him and agreed to let him write for the site. Although Carl had yet to cross the lines of plagiarism, Bob acknowledged that the situation might call for a brief chat with their new writer.

One week later, Bob wrote me. Apparently, Cooper had begun flooding Rotojunkie’s private messaging system with anti-Shandler venom and pressuring Bob to come out against me. “I’m starting to get the sense that there is something behind this other than an ego exercise from a guy with a surfeit of time,” Bob wrote.

Once the troll realized that we were all on to him, he started missing deadlines and eventually stopped contributing altogether. And then he was gone.

## RotoMachine

I am including these bozos just to show that I wasn't the only one drawing posers. I first received this email from Jeff Erickson: "Not sure if you've ever heard of a website called RotoMachine.com. We stumbled across the site today—they were blatantly ripping off a bunch of our content. You may wish to check to see if they did the same with you."

They hadn't. Then I received an email from Bob Kohm, telling me that the Bullpen forums had been plagued by some guy pimping RotoMachine under a fake email address. Bob asked the guy to remove the links to the site because "I didn't want anybody to say that we're supporting a plagiarist." Then he told me that another RotoMachine guy was doing the same thing in the Tout Wars forum. He just wanted to give me a heads-up.

I don't remember what I ended up doing, but it was oddly comforting that the jerkdom extended beyond the pages of Baseball HQ.

## More on Will Carroll

On August 12, 2003, the noted injuries expert Will Carroll wrote something as astounding as it was off topic, having nothing to do with injuries:

"Pete Rose and Major League Baseball have reached an agreement that would allow him to return to baseball in 2004, and includes no admission of wrongdoing by Rose, *Baseball Prospectus* has learned. According to several sources, Rose signed the agreement after a series of pre-season meetings between Rose, Hall of Fame member Mike Schmidt, and at different times, high-level representatives of Major League Baseball, including Bob DuPuy, Major League Baseball's Chief Operating Officer, and Allan H. "Bud" Selig, Commissioner of Major League Baseball.

"The agreement includes removal of Rose from baseball's permanently ineligible list. This would allow Rose to appear on ballots for baseball's Hall of Fame, which bars such banned players from consideration. The agreement allows Rose to be employed by a team in the 2004 season, as long as that position does not

involve the day-to-day operations. That employment restriction would be removed after a year, allowing Rose to return to managing a team as early as the 2005 season if a position is offered to him.

"A spokesman for Major League Baseball denied this report. *Baseball Prospectus* stands by its story."

The specificity of the agreement's conditions added to its air of believability. Will then hit the media circuit, digging in on a story that no other journalist could

source or confirm. Peter Gammons, Rob Neyer and ESPN all said he got it wrong. Will continued to defend, saying the "evidence is both compelling and correct," and that those other writers "agree on most of the points of the story, but differ mostly on the issue of the admission and the actual signing of the deal."

The backlash put *BP* in the crosshairs and opened the floodgates to criticism. Three months later, with Rose still *persona non-grata*, Will remained steadfast in his support for the story. He did, however,

note this in an interview:

"We'd have to be blithering morons to put ourselves so far out there without rock-solid evidence. It's a failing of me as a journalist that I didn't do some simple things at the very start, when the story was falling into my lap, that would have made this easier, but live and learn. I'm not a professional journalist any more than I'm an orthopedic surgeon."

Others chastised *BP* for never retracting the piece, but even as late as 2007 (as far as I can tell), Will was still digging in his heels. He explained that Rose probably did his own self in. The alleged agreement included no admission of wrongdoing, but then Rose admitted to gambling in his autobiography, at which point MLB retracted their offer. That sounds like it could be legit, but it didn't get any media play that I'm aware of. So, take it for what it's worth.

Anyway, Pete Rose was not reinstated. The media's shrinking news cycles and readers' short attention spans probably saved Will from exile. If *BP*'s goal in all this was just some publicity, they certainly succeeded, though it didn't help their credibility.



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**Rose probably did his own self in.  
The alleged agreement included no  
admission of wrongdoing, but then  
Rose admitted to gambling  
in his autobiography,  
and MLB retracted their offer.**

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## Chapter 22: Realityland

### More about Sam Walker's first Roanoke visit

The morning after Opening Day, Sam wrote me: "Is it supposed to be this agonizing? After watching Brad Radke give up 11 hits last night and seeing Jacque Jones swing at every first pitch while striking out four times, I wanted to hurl myself down the stairs. I think I need a shrink. Any advice?"

I wrote him down from the ledge, threw out my patented "Exercise excruciating patience" mantra and advised him not to look at the standings until Memorial Day. After I pressed SEND, I took a second and realized that this would likely be the beginning of a loooong process. I could be peppered with these emails all season. Worse, it could be upwards of two years before we'd actually see the book, so Sam might be writing about anything during that time. From then on, I tried to make sure I didn't write or say anything that could be misconstrued or used against me. That's not as easy as you may think.

On May 15, Sam came to Roanoke to see my "office, archives, first Forecasters, databases and some of my memorabilia collections." For the record, this photo shows my office as he saw it. My house was on a mountain, and while the office was in the basement, five tall windows overlooked a lush valley. Remember that fact when you read that I worked in a "dim basement bunker." I'll admit the office was messy; maybe I was a book hoarder too. And yes, it was a basement, but definitely not a dim bunker. (For years after, Sam was pissed off that I kept chastising him for that line. All the more reason to include it here, yet again. Hi Sam!)

The Roanoke visit consisted of coffee at Mill Mountain Roasters, a visit to watch Justina's softball game, dinner at Mac and Bob's, and a Salem Avalanche ballgame in the evening, ).



This is my office, which Sam Walker described in *Fantasyland* as 'a dim basement bunker.' Note the windows, which overlook a lush valley



Part of Sam's visit was a Salem Avalanche game, joined by a pair of my Baseball HQ writers. In front: Scott Monroe, Sam, me; in back: Phil Hertz

### The book title

Up until this point, Sam's book did not have a title. He said the working title was *Fantasyland*, but he thought they could do better. I responded:

"Well.... Fantasyland does make me think more of Disney than drafting, but if you're fishing for alternatives, I can toss out a whole bunch, depending on what you're looking for. And I sent him a "brief" list of possibilities:

- *Fantasyball* (too close to *Moneyball*?)
- *Draft Day*
- *Reality Ball*
- *Fantasyball Realities*
- *\$260: Where Fantasy Baseball Meets Reality*
- *Crickets: The Sound of Fantasy Dollars*
- *Drafting Bonds*
- *Dealing Ponson*
- *Tout Wars: The Evolution of Fantasy Baseball*
- *WHIP and the End Game: Fantasy's Impact on America's Pastime*
- *Beyond Bragging Rights*
- *Inside the Fantasy*
- *Hitters and Bidders*
- *Fantasy Magnates*
- *Fandom and Fantasy*

- *Legitimizing Fantasy Baseball*
- *Validating the Fantasy*
- *The Constitution of Fantasy Baseball*
- *The Fantasyball Charter*
- *Fantasifying the National Pastime*
- *The New Fandom*
- *Saturdays Before Opening Day*
- *The Mainstreaming of Fantasy Baseball*
- *The Rise of Non-Allegiant Fandom*
- *America's Fantasy Pastime*
- *Sleepers in the End Game*

I can self-brainstorm with the best of them. I wrote, "Mix, match, fold, spindle, mutilate... maybe something's here, maybe not."

You can see that many of these titles assumed that this would be a serious academic work. Sam came back with: "Thanks for the stream of consciousness.



“Sleepers in the End Game” has a nice cryptic ring to it, but I don’t think it would ever get past the boys at Viking. Too close to “Catcher in the Rye,” probably.” Yes, a story about erratic behavior and antisocial attitudes would hit far too close to home for the title of a book on fantasy baseball. Still, when I mentioned “Sleepers in the End Game” in a column, it garnered some buzz among readers. But it went nowhere.

The full book title turned out to be *Fantasyland: A Season on Baseball’s Lunatic Fringe*. For all the effort we had been making to legitimize what we did, classifying us as residing on the lunatic fringe was a low blow. Many of the Touts, and serious fantasy leaguers, inundated Viking Press with complaints. Didn’t they realize they were insulting the people who represented the prime audience for the book? When the paperback came out six months later, the tagline was changed to *A Sportswriter’s Obsessive Bid to Win the World’s Most Ruthless Fantasy Baseball League*. A little long, but a bit more fitting.

### The book flap

The Touts didn’t get a true sense of what the book was going to be about until November 2005—18 months after the auction—when Sam sent us a working draft of the book flap copy:

“A few months before the 2004 baseball season, Sam Walker was a happily married sportswriter with a weekly column at a major newspaper. He wore a tie to work, kept up with friends, and showered on a frequent basis.

“But by the time the season was over, Walker had spent tens of thousands of dollars, traveled some nineteen-thousand miles, interrogated nearly two hundred major-league ballplayers, missed three weddings and a funeral and ignored a fire raging in the building next door to his apartment. He’d become a caffeine-addled insomniac with back spasms willing to do anything that might help him attain one increasingly elusive goal: winning his fantasy baseball league.”

Aside from the revelation that he actually showered frequently, we now had a sense of the direction he had taken. It was official; the Touts were characters in a story rather than just parties to a social experiment.

### Speculating on Fantasyland, the movie

Over beers at First Pitch Arizona, a bunch of us started speculating about who would play each character. The consensus picks (*I really hated to cut these photos*):



- Steven Tyler as Lawr Michaels



- Paul Giamatti as Joe Sheehan



- Christian Slater as Matthew Berry



- and Wilford Brimley as Rick Wilton
- There were *many* beers.

### The details about the troubling release forms

Given that our motivation for participating was strictly for the publicity and we were not getting compensated in any other way, it seemed that we were giving up far too many rights. If we signed the release, we would potentially...

1. Give up our rights to write about the 2008 Tout season on our own websites.
2. Give up ancillary publishing and gaming rights—

that was our business.

3. Open up our families and friends to filming without limitation.
4. Permit any type of juxtaposition of events or taking things out of context for dramatic gain.
5. Permit any type of unfavorable depiction, without recourse.
6. Indemnify the filmmakers forever.

We independent writers would have to make our own decision about the contract, but I could not imagine ESPN or MLB signing these rights away so their employees could participate in the film. Had we received the release two months earlier, we could have gone through a negotiating process to get the document to a more acceptable comfort level. With only a week until shooting began, I could not imagine that we would have the time or resources to get this fixed.

I talked to Stephen and came away convinced he had no clue what he was getting into. Tout's lawyer, Glenn Colton, talked to him as well, and came away feeling a bit more positive. He felt that Stephen's intentions were honorable, and the problem was just in the form's wording. Glenn's firm had an attorney with experience in film contracts and the producers were willing to let him propose the necessary changes, capping the legal fees at \$10,000.

Three days later, Glenn presented us with a series of modifications and two versions of the form. One version was a stripped-down contract for those who might be caught on screen incidentally, like in a group scene at the draft. The other was for the Touts who'd agree to be characters in the film. The producers stated that it was important that at least nine of the Touts signed the second form, though they hoped everyone would agree.

In the agreed-upon revision, Concerns 1 and 2 above were eliminated. For Concern 3, the release stated that nobody would be obligated to make their wives or children appear in the film. In an email to me, Stephen added "although we hope for the participation of Sam's wife, your family, and Lawr's and Matthew's." That was a clear indication of where the plot was headed.

They would not budge on Concern 4.

For Concern 5, they agreed to remove the clause stating that they had the right to portray us negatively but replaced it with "the producer will use good faith efforts to portray you accurately." That was better but still left the door wide open. We attempted to have them change the word "accurately" to "fairly", but their financier threatened to walk if that revision was made.

We couldn't push any further.

Concern 6 was a non-starter.

Glenn's firm did well for us under the circumstances, moving the bar from "unacceptable" to "palatable."

## Casting call

The producers involved us at the start of the process, asking us to help them find the film's "star." That showed good faith. I offered to post a "casting call" on Baseball HQ and Stephen (Palgon, the writer-director) thought it was a great idea. Lawr posted this on his site as well:

### **"Fantasyland: The Documentary" Casting Call ENTRY DEADLINE: JANUARY 4**

WANTED: Looking for one person with the fantasy savvy, obsession and determination to compete in TOUT WARS as part of a feature film fantasy baseball documentary, inspired by Sam Walker's book Fantasyland.

The 2008 Tout Wars season is going to be filmed as part of a feature film documentary, produced by Wonderland Sound and Vision, and Sound Pictures. They are looking for one person to take over where Sam Walker left off. You will compete against the Tout Wars American League experts and have your entire season captured on film.

They are looking for someone who is a fantasy baseball veteran, is obsessed with the game and has followed Tout Wars. Someone interested in not just playing by the numbers but wants to go out and talk to scouts, players and general managers to help in their decision making. Someone between the ages of 30-50 who will be willing to provide complete access into their life during the fantasy baseball season. There will be some travel involved, including attending spring training. You must be available for the Tout Wars draft in New York City the weekend of March 21-23. If you are interested and available for this experience, please respond to the following questions and send them here by January 4, 2008.

Your name

Where are you located?

How many years have you been playing fantasy baseball?

What attracted you to fantasy baseball?

How does fantasy baseball dominate your life? Give us a sense of the number of hours you spend playing, along with stories that illustrate your obsession in action.

What was your greatest fantasy baseball trade?

What was a decision that will haunt you forever?

What do you know about Tout Wars and what would

it mean to you to be able to compete in this league?

How does fantasy baseball affect your home life?

Your work life?

Which person in Tout Wars would you be most excited to compete against and beat?

How do you think you would do if given a chance to compete in Tout?

Have you read the book *Fantasyland* by Sam Walker?

What did you think of how Sam Walker played fantasy baseball (contacting players, scouts, etc)?

Please tell us about your life outside fantasy baseball: job, relationship, etc.

A day after this was posted, I received word that Stephen was getting dozens of responses and things were moving along well. Oddly enough, Lawr and I were getting applications too; a handful of candidates figured that greasing our skids could only help. They were wrong.

### More about what happened after the draft

After the draft, I took one of the producers aside and asked him a question I had been wondering about. “What if Jed’s team is done by Memorial Day? It happens to the best of us.” They already had contingency plans for that. First, they chose Jed because they felt he’d have a sense of humor about the whole thing, and even if he was dead last, he’d keep trying. In addition, they were hoping to strengthen their relationship with each of us so that they could tap into our stories in case the Jed story fizzled. So, that was their plan.

I sent a post-mortem to the Touts right after draft weekend, minus Sam and Jed. It was a mental manifesto; perhaps more appropriately, a paranoia proclamation. Given the issues we already had to deal with, I had serious second thoughts about agreeing to do the film. *(In the book, I summarized the following*

*with, “Essentially, I advised the Touts to keep their guards up.” The full missive was a bit more pointed...)*

“I still believe this project could benefit us, collectively and individually. But I think we need to exert as much control as we can over what happens from this point forward because, until now, the control has been in their hands. This is what I am suggesting. Feel free to discuss:

1. If you have not signed the release yet, you are in a position of power. They already shot the draft—the only time in the project that they’ll have all of us together—so they have to accommodate you or risk putting that footage in jeopardy. Push this as far as you need to.

2. Please be cognizant of everything you say that could be misconstrued, or reflect badly on any individual, the

league, or the industry. Sometimes it’s tough to avoid being taken in by the cameras, particularly for those of us who are not routinely filmed, but we need to make that

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**‘If you have not signed the release yet,  
you are in a position of power.’**

---

extra effort.

3. Decide how much access you are willing to give them ahead of time. My suggestion is they get one shot at each of us; each subsequent interaction puts us in danger of having to recall things we might have said in prior meetings. Contradictory statements become fair game for them to twist on film.

4. Understand that the filmmakers will be pulling some strings; Jed won’t exactly be a puppet but I’m sure there will be some tugging. So be careful with your interactions with him.

5. Perhaps most important... Let’s keep each other in the loop regarding the filmmakers’ communication with you. If they need more drama, it is not beyond their reach to pit us against each other—heck, they were already doing that in their pre-draft interviews—but if we keep communication open, we can avoid getting punked.

Yes, I’m a cynic and maybe this all comes off sounding paranoid, but I’m just trying to protect the reputation of the league, and each of you as well.



## Chapter 23: Cardinal Rules

### More posts from the message board

Jeff Luhnnow posted: “I’ve compiled a list of moves our fans are clamoring for. I think we should come up with “our” list of moves to improve the Cardinals chances of winning. Please comment on these and help me prioritize them.

- Get Simontacchi off this team.
- Bat Renteria or Edmonds in the two hole.
- Use Izzy in higher leverage situations.
- Use 11 pitchers, not 12.
- Bring Haren up and insert him in the rotation.
- Send Carpenter down to AAA until he proves he’s ready.
- Stop playing Marlon in left.
- Send So Taguchi back to Memphis.
- Bring up Gall, Porter and Witt.
- Send Hart back to Memphis.
- Send Cody McCay back to Memphis.

After much spirited discussion, Jeff posted: “Okay, here are our priorities for short-term improvements. I am going to figure out a way to get these to Walt and Tony:

- More important innings for Izzy.
- Simo out, Haren in.
- Better lineup optimization.
- Restructure bench with help from AAA.
- Better platooning at 2B and LF.

Doug (Dennis) chimed in: “I can’t imagine anyone telling Tony what to do with his lineup card (even though it is sub-optimal). It’s kinda like telling someone that his wife isn’t pretty—it won’t go over very well. I’d hate for it to be adversarial right off the bat.”

On May 24, Doug asked, “Is it useful to see our one-offs on the various waiver players (the few that we actually like a little) or is it largely a waste of time?” Jeff responded, “Yes, the feedback on the waiver players is great and I hope it continues. We probably won’t make any waiver claims because there is no obvious player that we want to replace right now. The (amateur) draft is consuming all of our time anyway, so I expect that you will hear less and less from us until it’s over.”

That was Jeff Luhnnow’s final post to the private message board. In fact, from May 16 to August 6, there were 17 thread-starters and he responded to just the one above. Deric and Doug consistently posted



**Cardinals’ head of scouting and drafting Jeff Luhnnow was active with the HQ team for a while, but stopped participating in late May**

questions that went unanswered, covering waiver claims, Curtis Leskanic, and the catching situation.

Doug noted that we had moved into first place on June 10 and nobody responded. The amateur draft came and went. Doug opened another thread at the All-Star Break, and nobody responded. Deric and Doug wrote up a comprehensive analysis of Matt Kinney on August 6 and then the board went quiet.

### Other excerpts from my August columns on the St. Louis trip:

It’s been six months since I announced our relationship with the Cardinals. During that time, many of you have asked how things have been going. Well, I could respond by simply saying, “Look at the standings.” But that wouldn’t be fair, or accurate. After all, Tony LaRussa deserves at least some of the credit.

The fact is, I’m not quite sure how things have been going. Our group has been corresponding with Jeff Luhnnow and his assistant, Mark Johnson, via e-mail and message board on a fairly consistent basis. We have been doing everything from regular analyses of players on the waiver wire to legwork for the amateur draft. However, for the most part, the communication has been one way. Exactly how much impact our contributions have had thus far is unclear. To a great extent, it doesn’t seem like we’ve really had

management's ear.

\* \* \*

The Cards took a completely different approach from other clubs, hiring a business analyst who was a "baseball nut" (owner Bill DeWitt's words) instead of an already established baseball analyst. While it remains to be seen whether this approach will work, I think it has prolonged the process of getting up to speed. There has been effort expended on validating, proving, and re-learning established research findings in order to build their own confidence in the tools. I'd imagine that such an exercise was not undertaken (with Bill James) in Boston.

\* \* \*

Doug: "I think that (the Luhnow group) is searching for an area that they can have value added to

the GM team... the selling high/buying low is hard for them. For instance, to see that Tony Womack cannot be expected to keep up his first half performance. Of course, Mark and Jeff see that and agree, but the others (in the front office) do not (yet)."

\* \* \*

Major league clubs have a long history of player evaluation that relies more on a hard gut than on hard data. So, while Jeff's hiring was fully supported by upper management, his presence has been met with as much curiosity as respect. What does this guy do? What could he possibly bring to the table? When you are a curiosity, the answers to these questions typically come from interactions with the curious.

One of the Cards' broadcasters was wandering through the labyrinth of Busch's front office area when he stumbled onto Mark Johnson, Jeff's assistant. As Mark described to him what he was doing, the broadcaster realized that he, too, had an important research project. This long-timer was convinced that the Cards won more often in games in which their pitcher got a hit. His line of thinking was that, when a pitcher gives up a hit to the opposing pitcher, it demoralizes him and makes him lose his composure. His fanaticism about this revelation was matched only by his fervor for Mark to take on the research project. Mark shared with us the details of this encounter in bemusement. "It's just one of those projects that doesn't seem to ever rise up my list of priorities," he smiled.

\* \* \*

Jeff met with LaRussa back in March and shared some of the group's findings. Given his history of being one of the more progressive analytical managers, we'd expected him to be at least somewhat receptive. At

the meeting, Jeff presented some low-impact in-game tactical recommendations just to give LaRussa a sense of what was possible. They were all shot down with a litany of explanations.

Probably the most interesting was the recommendation that closer Jason Isringhausen be used in more than 1-inning stints. Despite the wealth of support data, LaRussa blew it off as being unfeasible. His explanation was that Isringhausen didn't like to sit in the dugout between innings; he was only effective

when he came in from the bullpen, got the job done and went home.

However, the perception now going through the front office is that, despite his dismissal of the idea, LaRussa has been using Izzy more often in multiple inning stints. It is being

viewed as a small victory. The reality, however, is not quite as striking.

| Year | Games | +1 IP | ct.   |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 2003 | 40    | 7     | 17.5% |
| 2004 | 54    | 10    | 18.5% |

Yes, it's all a process, but it appears that LaRussa still holds the edge.

\* \* \*

Tony Womack continued to be the topic of conversation when we met with the team's owner, Bill DeWitt, Jr., who was instrumental in bringing Jeff on board. DeWitt is very in tune with the numbers and is incredibly open about the potential this new level of analysis brings to his ballclub.

We partook in a spirited discussion about the surprising season Womack was having, reviewing his outward stats and talking about xBA, contact rates and the like. The numbers said Womack was batting about 25 points higher than his skills indicated he should have been. DeWitt concurred, but shifted the focus to Womack's value on the basepaths as a distraction to opposing pitchers. We countered with the negating effect that same distraction might have on the batter at the plate. We were talking the same language.

DeWitt then asked about our projections for several other players. He was interested to hear that we had projected a career year for Scott Rolen. We explained how the Cards' starting rotation had been successful more because of their avoidance of disaster rather than their exhibiting of dominating skill. In all, it was refreshing to be able to conduct a sabermetric conversation with the owner of a major league ballclub, and the feedback we got from the meeting was very positive.

# Chapter 24: Words

## So, what are readers looking for, anyway?

This was a reasonable question to ask. Why did fantasy leaguers come to us “experts”? The easy answer is that they looked to us for the data and analysis that helped them win their leagues. Many looked for direct advice to help them make sound decisions. But that’s not all they came for. Also...

1. Some of them secretly needed validation for their own decisions. They might not admit this, but I was cool with it, nonetheless.
2. Some of them used the experts as an extension of their ego needs. Not only did they believe they were experts themselves, but they also needed to prove that they were better than the “professional” experts. Many of them were obnoxious about it.
3. Some of them used the experts as scapegoats for their own bad decisions. One year, it drove me crazy when a bunch of loud people got on Matthew Berry for suggesting that Kei Igawa was more valuable than Daisuke Matsuzaka. Some lemmings actually followed that perceived advice and were irate afterward. But Matthew never said that. He said that Igawa in the 17th round was a better pick than Dice-K in the 3rd, which was a reasonable analysis that March. Too many people were not taking responsibility for their own decisions.

And that’s what happens. But the experts do not play the game for you. After a season writing for ESPN.com and doing a weekly chat, I was continually amazed how many people expected me to micro-manage their team and take me to task when things went wrong. Consider that, in these chats, I had about 30 seconds to assess, analyze and write a cogent response to questions like: “Bay or Victorino?” No context, no underlying goals, but you could be sure that whatever I wrote would eventually come back to haunt me from all those anonymous online monikers cruising for a flame war.

Fantasy football’s Lenny Pappano had a great point on the topic of taking responsibility:

“One of my favorite lines from any movie is in “A League of their Own” (Not, “There’s no crying in baseball.”). In this scene, Geena Davis’ character wants to quit the team because, as she says, playing baseball is “too hard.” The crusty manager played by Tom Hanks shoots back that “the hard is what makes it good. Otherwise, everyone would be doing it.”

“I feel the same way about fantasy. If you want to be

good, it’s hard. There are hours and hours of research, reading and reflection. Even if you use a service to help, you still have to sharpen your own thoughts and opinions. But the hard is what makes it good. The hard is what makes it fun. The hard is what gives you reason to gloat when you win. As for the part that everyone would be doing it if it weren’t hard—well, maybe that’s a little bit of the problem with fantasy football nowadays. Maybe “everyone” is doing it. And maybe they don’t want to do the hard part, they just want someone to hold their hand to a championship. They want the bragging rights without sweating to get there. That’s not how it works. Or, at least, that’s not how it should work.”

Regardless of their reasons for coming to us, there we were, exposed and vulnerable, shouldering the burden of having answers. Correct answers, even.

## Analyzing John Benson’s “insult”

Back in Chapter 14, I wrote about a conversation I had with Steve Moyer. I asked him what it was like to work for John Benson, and he responded with, “John says you’re not a baseball guy. You’re a marketing guy.” John was essentially questioning my qualifications for being a baseball expert.

I’ve given that statement a lot of thought over the years. Back in the 1990s, I knew that I had no future in this business if people didn’t perceive me as a baseball expert on some level. Selling that perception was, I suppose, marketing in itself.

My success in the industry up to that point was evidence that I was pulling off the charade, at least in John’s eyes. Perhaps that is what got under his skin.

I think his perspective could be best represented by the chart: to John, I was down there in the lower left—the epitome of “bad product, good marketing.” To him, I was no expert, and my success was undeserved. If his “superior” product couldn’t wipe the floors with me, where was the justice?

|                                 |      | MARKETING             |                       |
|---------------------------------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                                 |      | GOOD                  | BAD                   |
| P<br>R<br>O<br>D<br>U<br>C<br>T | GOOD | Deserved<br>success   | Undeserved<br>failure |
|                                 | BAD  | Undeserved<br>success | Deserved<br>failure   |



## Chapter 25: Sodom and Gomorrah

*In the original draft, I went into more detail on the unrelated events that drew me to the conclusion that fantasy baseball was being dumbed down.*

Sports Weekly's crossover to football was blamed on baseball's ongoing labor issues and economics. The labor situation was a cop-out; it would have been incredibly short-sighted to make a major business decision based on the possibility that baseball would disappear. As far as economics, well yes. The number of ad-supported pages dropped dramatically over the years as the industry moved online. But I believed that *Baseball Weekly* was remiss in not addressing the problem head-on.

The publication's structure and focus had remained essentially unchanged since its 1991 debut. They never modified their approach to meet the needs of a changing marketplace. They could have identified the types of content that readers still preferred in printed form. They could have upped their game, hiring top level writing talent, researchers and analysts looking for a larger platform, and graphics experts who could add some spark to their pages. Heck, it was how *USA Today* was founded. I always thought *BW*'s format had so much unrealized potential. Instead, they ceded dominance to the web by casting out a net to a different market segment while shortchanging the readers who had been with them from the beginning. They reduced their baseball content because, apparently, we would be equally satisfied with less.

Feel the love.

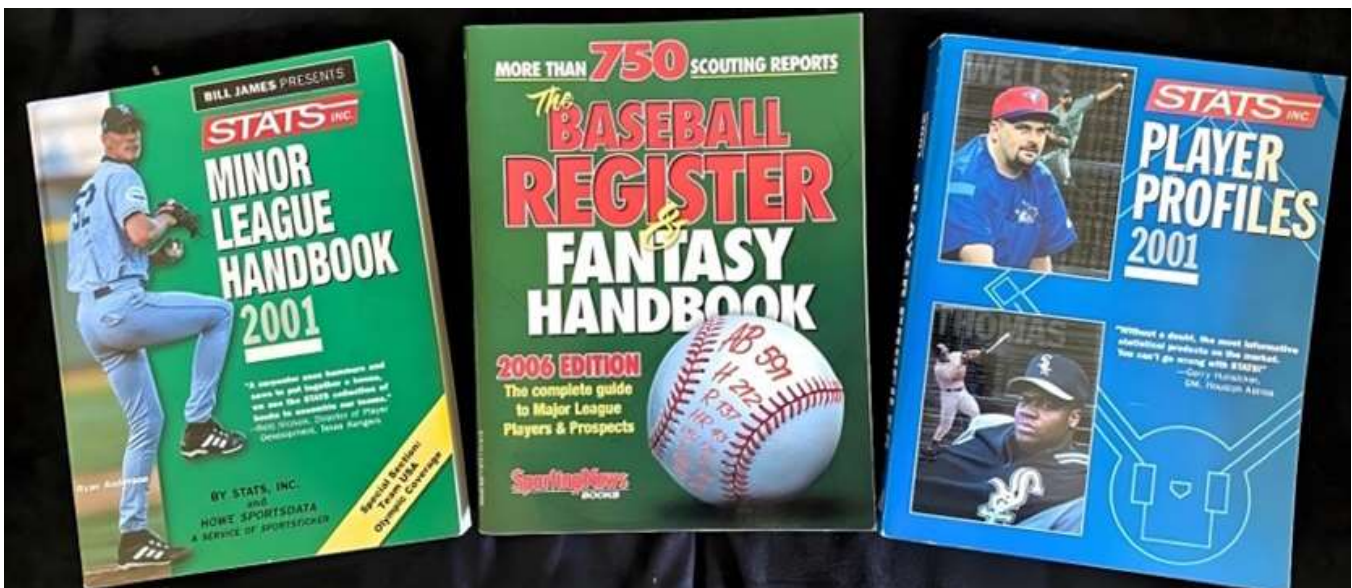
For about a decade, STATS Inc. had published a trio

of reference books that provided fantasy leaguers and saberfolks with all the numbers they needed—major league stats, minor league stats and in-depth situational stats. The decision to discontinue the *Minor League Handbook* and *Player Profiles* books was also based on economics; they rarely turned a profit. But these were particularly tough losses for us—they were the only sources for that data at the time—and the lush banquet of situational stats in *Player Profiles* was presented in a format that even today's online sources can't match. Supply and demand alone might have been enough to justify a price increase. I would have gladly paid it; I'd bet others might have too.

But STATS Inc. was yet another company that never fully embraced fantasy leaguers as a core audience. Yes, they ran Bill James' fantasy game, but ignored anyone who played another format, which was 99 percent of the rest of the industry. Would it have been a stretch for them to add a column of Rotisserie dollar values in their books?

In 2006, *The Sporting News* did make a half-assed attempt, publishing *The Baseball Register* and *Fantasy Handbook*. The massive 744-page tome was a wonderful reference tool, but the fantasy content consisted of four pages (four!) of end-of-season dollar values presented as "a good starting point for fantasy owners who are preparing 2006 fantasy rankings." It would be the only year the book was published. They, too, just didn't get it.

Feel the love.



The big companies produced a lush banquet of stats, but never fully embraced fantasy leaguers as a core audience

## In a perfect world

If the big companies *truly* embraced the core values of “fantasy,” they would not be giving us more brainless games with bigger payouts, they would be giving us more intelligent challenges with robust informational offerings. In a perfect world, we’d be seeing player stat lines during TV broadcasts that included Rotisserie values. We’d be seeing *Baseball Tonight* broadcasts informing us that Rich Aurilia’s O-for-14 skid has dropped him to 4th in the National League shortstop rankings. We’d be seeing the growth of new game formats that require more knowledge and skill, and the associated support information that provides true buy-in to these concepts. These would be incredibly “sticky” games that would create long-term communities of players.

Instead, we see the information sources we’ve trusted for years slowly continue to dry up. In their wake are games that are too simple and luck-based to create customers who hang around longer than the next random distraction. Providing a higher level of information is superfluous.

What does the word “fantasy” have to do with this? Once again, it all comes down to legitimacy. As long as we continue to define ourselves by a word whose core definition is something “not real” (no matter how many ways you want to twist it), we are going to be slave to those that live by “real” dollar signs.

## Swallowed up

The industry was consolidating in other areas as well. ESPN was one of several major media sites that began to dominate the commissioner service corner of the marketplace by the mid-2000s, leaving the independent stat service companies in their wake. Those services formed the backbone of the fantasy industry for nearly two decades, freeing us from yellow pads and hand calculators. Here is the 45-second summary of what happened to all those familiar

names:

I’ve already mentioned Bill Meyer’s USA Stats and Rich Pike’s AllStar Stats in passing. Along with John Wallwork’s Roti-Stats and Scott Wilderman’s TQ Stats, they were the big guys back in the 1990s. Meyer and Pike got involved with supporting Tout Wars, with Pike and Wilderman eventually becoming Touts themselves.

USA Stats grew through the acquisitions of two long-time industry icons. Jerry Heath sold his company to Meyer in 1996 because he “saw what was coming” and opened up WebCity CyberCafé in Virginia Beach. Then Wallwork sold Roti-Stats to Meyer in 1998 for a similar reason. Wallwork said he could “see that the Internet was going to make me a dinosaur.” Later, Meyer would acquire FastStats and Touch Tone Stats.

While USA Stats was bulking up, Commissioner.com launched as one of the first direct-to-web stat services. While offering a wide range of standard features, their most significant benefit was providing real-time stats. Nobody else did that and it gave them a huge advantage, driving explosive growth. They were sold to Sportsline.com in 1999, which in turn was sold to CBS in 2004.

More major media sites started offering these commissioner services, and led by RotoNews and Yahoo!, often for free. This took a huge toll on the long-timers. So, Meyer sold USA Stats to AllStar Stats in 2006. Then AllStar Stats, the last of the long-time stat services, was sold to CBS Sports in 2012.

Got all that?

In the end, the whole freakin’ industry was wiped out like the Dodgers in the 1966 World Series. Like the Jacobites at Culloden. Like the dinosaurs by the asteroid.

This was sad. The remaining industry players were organizations often far too big to offer customer service at the level to which we had all become accustomed. Just try to talk to a human! But the bigger loss was that these services only supported



USA Stats, AllStar Stats, Roti-Stats and TQ Stats were the big guys in the 1990s.

RotiStats was sold to USA Stats, then USA Stats was sold to AllStar Stats. Then AllStar Stats was sold to CBS Sports. TQ Stats, the first internet-only service, survived but eventually became part of CDM, which in turn was sold to Fanball. Recognizing a marketplace opportunity, former TQ owner Scott Wilderman formed OnRoto.com, which is still going. There will be a quiz at the end of this chapter

leagues with a narrow range of cookie-cutter rules that they alone determined. During a time when the internet was providing more and more of a user-customized experience, the ESPNs and CBSes and Yahoos were offering one-size-fits-all leagues. Whenever I tried to set up a league on these platforms, I felt straitjacketed. Rule sets are supposed to be malleable.

There was, actually, one survivor from the stat service wars. Sort of. TQ Stats was the first service run exclusively on the internet, beginning with email service in 1994.

By the mid-2000s it had become a part of CDM, which was sold to Fanball in 2006. But former TQ owner Scott Wilderman re-emerged to form OnRoto.com in 2008. He recognized the marketplace opportunity. Scott wrote:

“In the last 5-10 years, the fantasy sports stat service business has transformed from an industry encompassing a large number of small, specialized sites catering primarily to an audience of hard-core players into one involving a handful of very large, media-driven sites targeting the larger market of

casual players. This shift has created a gaping void of providers able to support specialized rules and scoring options required by old-school, long-time players.”

Music to my ears. OnRoto did not have the slick interface that the major media sites had, but it was by far the most customizable of any service. It also had real customer service, unlike the F.A.Q. rabbit holes

the larger sites provided. It eventually became the official stat service of Tout Wars after the others got swallowed up. Scott again:

“Our goal is to provide a platform for more sophisticated fantasy players—those who prefer

to play by their own rules because they’re after a fantasy experience that’s a whole lot different from the generic, standardized (and rather bland) version offered by the multi-media behemoths.”

If that all sounded like a plug, it is. While the major media companies succeeded in commoditizing stat-keeping, serious fantasy leaguers have always been drawn to more robust, customizable experiences. These days, that type of support is only offered by smaller companies, like OnRoto and Fantrax.

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**We see information sources we’ve trusted for years slowly dry up. In their wake, providing a higher level of information is superfluous.**

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## Chapter 26: The Best of Times

*More customer complaints and the responses I wish I could have sent*

"I don't know why your site does not provide coverage for 7x7 leagues. That's become the standard—everyone plays that way now."

Um, no. Not everybody. In fact, hardly anybody. Actually, virtually no other league plays that way. Get over yourself.

"Hey, I subscribed back in January but I never used the site. Can I get a refund?"

It's now December 2005. Your customer record says you subscribed in January 2003. Where have you been the past three years? And, no.

"Why didn't you answer my question in today's chat? Was it because it was submitted so early this morning? If so that's pretty LAME. Some of us do work for a living and don't get to sit in front of computers hour after hour. Sorry you couldn't be bothered."

FWIW, I am sympathetic to those who work for a living despite your thinking that I don't. But there were nearly 200 questions in queue today and I get an hour to respond. Do the math.

"I demand that you give me the early bird discount! I never received the notice!"

Six months ago, you demanded that we remove your email address from all promotional mailings, so this is on you. And no, you can't get a discount that expired two months ago.

"I will buy your product if you give me free shipping."

This is not a fucking flea market. Everyone else pays for shipping—you can too.

"I paid for your service and you disconnected my password and emailed me another password that does not work. You THIEVING FUCKERS stole my money. I know it wasn't a huge amount but you FUCKERS stole it nonetheless. FUCK OFF AND DIE !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Hi, Bill. Having a bad day? Do you have a beer in the fridge? Go ahead and grab it. I'll wait. During these stressful times, we often need to take a breath. Bad password? Yeah, shit happens sometimes. Be aware that we don't try to piss off customers on purpose. Maybe it was a mistake on our end. Maybe it was on yours. Who knows? But I have to tell you, those 44 exclamation points really made my day.

### After the sale

Two weeks after I signed, the deal was announced to the world. Here is the excerpted column I wrote to my readers:

#### A new beginning

Back in March, in the Q&A session at the First Pitch forum in Natick, MA, an attendee stood up and asked me: "With all the consolidation currently going on in the fantasy baseball industry, what will happen to Baseball HQ?"

The pointed inquiry drew a flurry of murmurs from the crowd. This question, the subject of endless rumors and speculation, was difficult for me to answer at the time. Today I can finally confirm the speculation. As reported this morning in the Wall Street Journal, we have been sold. On April 30, 2008, Shandler Enterprises, LLC officially became part of a company called Fantasy Sports Ventures, a serious and growing player in the fantasy sports information business.

FSV operates a huge network of owned and affiliated fantasy websites across multiple sports. Part of FSV's business is to aggregate web traffic and sell it to major advertisers, and they are doing a pretty good job of that... FSV's traffic is now among the top 10 of all sports sites on the internet. FSV also has strong ties to Gannett/USA Today, which recently became a minority shareholder in the company. That is one of the reasons you have been seeing HQ contributions in USA Today and Sports Weekly this year.

FSV has bought the entire Shandler Enterprises line—Baseball HQ, the Baseball Forecaster, the Minor League Baseball Analyst and the First Pitch Forum conference series. They plan to keep the line intact and keep the current business model so long as it continues to be profitable.

Until now, I have resisted all offers to sell Baseball HQ. I am very protective of what I have created over the past two-plus decades. As you probably can imagine, we are highly respected in the industry and so it should be no surprise to learn that I have been approached by potential suitors for several years. But while there was always the temptation to cash out and move on, where else can you do something for a living you absolutely love?

But times change, and as I started pushing 50, I began pondering my future. Is running Baseball HQ something I'd still want to be doing when I'm 60? Or 70? Or even 55? Owning my own business was always a dream of mine, going back to the 1980s when I kept getting fired from corporate jobs. Being able to write about baseball for a living, well, I still have to pinch myself every morning that I get to do this. But over the past



Even A's GM Billy Beane, played here by Brad Pitt, was delighted to hear that BaseballHQ had been sold.

**Just kidding.** This photo was cut from the book for reasons of space, but I like it because the *Moneyball* scene includes a copy of the *Forecaster* (red arrow)

three or four years, those two joys—running a business and writing about baseball— have started to veer off in different directions.

Long story short (and the long story will likely end up in my memoirs), running this business is not much fun anymore. Over the past few years, even while continually farming out tasks and bringing in new talent, the time commitment has grown exorbitant and the effort often mind-numbing. I spend far more time playing fireman and policeman these days than playing fantasy baseball.

So, this all had to stop before I got completely burned out. Frankly, it also had to stop before I became completely irrelevant. The growing time commitment of running the business meant I was spending less time breaking new ground in fanalytics. In the end, all the daily garbage has forced me to short-change subscribers like you. And, as Sam Walker accurately observed in *Fantasyland*, I was even starting to lose the fun in my writing.

So, I started listening to these potential suitors. In 2007, three companies approached me with formal acquisition offers. It's nice to have choices. And after careful consideration, I chose FSV.

#### **The good news, and the good news**

This careful consideration consisted of making sure that a sale was the right move not only for me, but for you as well. Here is why this is good news for you:

**1. You'll start getting a better, more creative and robust Baseball HQ.** FSV has grand plans to improve the website, including a complete makeover at some point to bring BaseballHQ.com into the 21st century of

web design. We will be adding video capabilities to the site. Eventually, you will have mobile access to our data. There will be more. Much more.

**2. Your investment will be better protected.** FSV has made a major investment in Baseball HQ so they are going to protect that investment. Bigger company, greater legal resources, larger policemen. Fair warning to those who have played fast and loose with our intellectual property in the past.

**3. You'll start getting a better, more creative and robust "me" again.** I am not going anywhere. In fact, I have signed a contract to continue to run the editorial end of the business for the next four years.

Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't at least acknowledge the potential downsides. There are really only two, and they are related:

**1. More people will find out about Baseball HQ.** You have already started to see our content appearing more often in other places. Last year it was ESPN.com and this year it is USA Today and Sports Weekly. As I wrote in an earlier column, "The truth is, if more people embrace our concepts, it will likely result in stronger and more enjoyable leagues. It is a far more enriching experience to compete against people with similar values than to participate in leagues where the balance of power is constantly skewed. Admit it; after a while, it's no fun to always be the shark.

**2. More of Baseball HQ will be free.** This was the most difficult part of the arrangement to come to terms with. But yes, more of our content will come out from behind the subscriber-only wall. I have been fighting the "information is supposed to be free" faction of the marketplace since the site's debut 12 years ago. So let me start by reaffirming this position as I have in the past—"NO, information has no more right to be free than a filet mignon at Morton's or a 911 GT3 at a Porsche dealership. Raw materials, effort, creativity and time have gone into producing that information, and the artisans who create our books and website deserve to be compensated just like any other premium product. Some people want the finest cuts of meat, the finest performing vehicles and the finest caliber of information and are willing to pay for the privilege of owning that type of quality, workmanship and exclusivity."

That is where I've always stood on this issue. And frankly, even with the sale, my position remains unchanged. With fantasy baseball information, as it is in all walks of life, you get what you pay for.

Even if we make more content available for free, there will still be tons of content only accessible to those willing to pay the premium. What's more, we will also continue to add new features to help maintain the value of your subscription, as we do every year. So, a subscription to BaseballHQ.com will still place

you among an elite group of fantasy leaguers who appreciate fanalytics. And the price tag will keep out the commoner riff-raff.

Those are really the only downsides.

However, I suspect some of you are probably left with the question: “Ron, what happens at the end of four years?”

What I decide to do at the end of my contract will depend on what the world looks like on May 1, 2012. The fantasy baseball industry is constantly evolving, and I will have to assess where I potentially fit in. At a minimum, I’d like to keep writing in some capacity, but I also need to maintain my relevancy. As for Baseball HQ in four years, I don’t know. I have stocked this organization with an incredible wealth of talent and a managerial structure that can well survive without me. In an ideal world, the HQ line lives on and I am but one columnist, emailing my weekly effort from a laptop somewhere in the South Pacific. Of course, in an ideal world, I would have anchored my Tout Wars pitching staff with someone other than Francisco Liriano.

So that’s about it. I am excited about entering this new stage in my career. I am confident I have made the correct decision, for all of us. There will be changes here, though not right away. But it’ll all be good, I promise.

## Taxi

I had written the following snippet a long time ago and tucked it away with the expectation that it would make a nice coda to the timeline. In the end, it didn’t really fit with the narrative. However, as the fantasy world was about to be upended in 2009, I still find it interesting that I had this encounter.

It was January 2009 and another FSTA conference had ended. I was standing outside the Bellagio hotel in Las Vegas, waiting for a cab. As the next taxi pulled up, a gentleman came up beside me and asked if I was going to the airport. I nodded. “Care to share a cab?” he asked, in a pleasing British accent. “Sure,” I said.

Once inside, he gave me his card. He worked for some company called Hubdub, but I didn’t really get what they were all about. I was tired and just wanted to get home.

Then he started telling me about this great idea he had been pitching at the conference. He wanted to offer fantasy games on a daily basis. Set your lineup before first pitch, cash in by the end of the night. I listened intently, all the while thinking to myself, “This is in direct opposition



**Nigel Eccles**

to everything that the UIGEA (The *Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act* of 2006) stands for. There is no way that this idea will fly.”

But I was a very good listener and gave him shallow encouragement for his “great new thing.” I knew he was fishing for investors, so I gave him my card to be polite. I tucked his into my wallet without looking.

Our ride to the airport was short, but I wished him well as we walked into the terminal.

Back home in my office, I gathered all the cards I had collected over the two-day conference and tossed them on my desk. Trash, trash, keep, trash, keep, trash... I got to the card from the Brit with the idea for daily fantasy and read the name.

“Nigel Eccles”

Not interested. Trash.

Nigel Eccles went on to create Fanduel, the first daily fantasy sports company. He also became very, very rich. I could have invested, but I didn’t think DFS had legs. I fully expected some politician to shut it down before it could even launch. The legal intrusion eventually took five years to occur, but that would have been more than enough time for me to pad my nest egg. I should learn not to trust my forecasting skills for industry trends I don’t believe in.



## Epilogue: What Then?

Here are some additions and expanded versions of some of the references in this chapter:

### The associations

In 2010, *Rotisserie League Baseball* editor F.X. Flinn and I forged a sponsorship agreement between the Society for American Baseball Research and Tout Wars, the first legitimate effort to try to find synergies between the two groups. SABR agreed to pick up all of Tout's expenses and provide trophies for the winners in exchange for the Touts promoting SABR to their customers. SABR held up their end of the deal; the Touts did not. That put a final nail in my hopes of finding common ground. I let my membership in SABR lapse shortly after that.

In 2017, I let my membership in the Fantasy Sports Trade Association lapse. *USAT* had cut me loose and I was a small operator again, so I could no longer justify the cost of dues; besides, they didn't serve any purpose for me anymore. I thought that maybe a Hall of Famer could at least get a free pass to their conference, but apparently, I was wrong. Until then, I still attended their conferences and participated in their experts league. I had a great run, from 2010 to 2017, that included one title, three 2nd-place finishes, a 3rd and two 5ths (and one 11th).

I am currently on the board of the Fantasy Sports Writers Association, which is kind of funny because I don't think I ever officially joined as a member. Regardless, my only involvement through 2021 was nominating, promoting and voting for new Hall of Fame inductees. When you see notes about the winners here, know that my fingers were on many of those candidates (not literally).

### More Cossack detail

**Nate Silver** gained national fame by taking his analytics to the political arena and forecasting the state-by-state results of the presidential elections with "deadly accuracy." Well, almost deadly—he missed on Indiana in '08. He is also the creator and Editor-in-Chief of the website *fivethirtyeight.com* and has written just about everywhere. Also plays poker professionally.

**Gary Huckabay** left *BP* in 2004. A 2023 piece in *The Athletic* on the history of *BP* noted that Huckabay has been battling health challenges in recent years.

**Will Carroll** won three FSWA writing awards for pieces on his coverage of baseball's steroid problems. He left *BP* in 2010 and then wrote for several content providers, including *Sports Illustrated*, *Bleacher Report*

and *FanDuel*. He's written a bunch of books and his "Under the Knife" column celebrated its 20th year in 2020.

**Kevin Goldstein** sold his *Prospect Report* to *Baseball America* in 2003 and wrote for them for three years before joining *Baseball Prospectus*. His work at *BP* helped land him the job of Pro Scouting Director with the Houston Astros in 2012, where he rose to the Special Assistant to the GM—Jeff Luhnow. (The *Bleacher Report* named him as the guy who suggested the whole sign-stealing fiasco. Who knows?) After the Astros cleaned house in 2020, Goldstein joined *Fangraphs* and then hooked on later with the Twins.

### More on Tout Warriors, past and present

After contributing to several publications like *Baseball Prospectus*, **Mat Olkin** left the fantasy industry in 2005 to consult for several MLB teams, including the Seattle Mariners and Toronto Blue Jays. Mat left baseball in 2010 and went back to practicing law.

**Trace Wood** retired from Tout Wars in 2008 and the XFL in 2021, though he ranked second overall in the XFL's lifetime standings. Trace received the 2004 FSWA Baseball Writer of the Year award, but he once told me, "It was never my goal to get as involved as I did in baseball. I always saw myself as a writer first, baseball fan second." So, it's no surprise that he had his first novel published in 2018, and currently has another in the works.

**Jason Grey** became an experts league superstar, winning three Tout and two LABR titles. In fact, he finished in 5th place or higher in eight of his 10 years in Tout Wars. In 2008, he started a four-year run writing for *ESPN.com*, but gave up the glory and stardom to become a scout for the Tampa Bay Rays.

**Larry Schechter** followed up his 2005-2007 Tout-Mixed victories with another trifecta, in Tout-NL from 2011 to 2013. To that, he added LABR titles in 2013, 2016 and 2020. He finally wrote a book, *Winning Fantasy Baseball*, in 2013 and asked me to write the Foreword. The last few lines of what I wrote:

"To be honest, as I read this book, there were some items I had to quibble with. Some of Larry's assertions conflict with concepts I've been using for the past three decades. Some of them have brought me titles. But then you have to look at Larry's track record of championships. It's better than mine, and in fact, better than any expert who currently plays or has ever played in Tout Wars. So, you simply can't dismiss anything he

says, even if it sounds counterintuitive. Because it's all about winning, and all Larry Schechter does is win."

While I remain in awe of Larry's success, my only regret is that I never got the chance to see him do stand-up comedy. I would have paid full price to see that.

### More on LABRites, past and present

Back in 1993, *USA Today* cut their freelance budget, and in doing so, cut ties with John Benson as their fantasy columnist. That opened the door for **John Hunt**. When they cut that budget again in 2006, Hunt was the freelancer who was shown the door. John then contributed to Matthew Berry's The Talented Mr. Roto site and went on to cover the Oregon State Beavers for Portland newspaper *The Oregonian* until June 2013. He's continued to freelance since. John won four LABR-NL titles in the league's first six years, and then never again.

John's departure from *Sports Weekly* left writer **Steve Gardner** to inherit the role. Steve has managed the leagues with John's same even-tempered approach, but with far less drama. He even accepted an invite to Tout Wars, something John never did, and has won Tout-NL twice. All these titles might have some wondering whether Steve inherited some of John Hunt's allegedly questionable gaming practices, but I'm pretty sure he's legit, for three reasons:

1. The free agent process has become more automated, minimizing the potential for abuse.
2. Steve was not commissioner for his Tout titles, so clearly has at least some chops.
3. Working for *USAT* allowed me to know Steve better than I had with John, and I can tell you that he is one of the industry's truly honorable gentlemen and one of its best community builders.

*Sports Weekly* used to be \$1 for 72 pages. It is now \$3 for 32 pages. Sadly, the content is also 56 percent less valuable. The annual "Leviathan" issue, though, remains a must-read.

**Greg Ambrosius** built the National Fantasy Baseball Championship into an industry powerhouse, hosting dozens of leagues with thousands of participants and awarding millions of dollars. He recently told me all

about his lake house and how that is going to take up his time in the summers; that meant he would be dropping out of the experts leagues. He was the only one who participated in every season of LABR, winning it just once.

Through the 1990s and 2000s, *Fantasy Sports* magazine became a trusted source for industry-specific news. I saved many articles that helped chronicle the industry's evolution; I include excerpts frequently in these pages and thank them for being such a trusted resource in this industry. But the public's informational needs changed over time. *Fantasy Sports* outlived most of Krause's baseball card publications, but the magazine published its last issue in 2010.

**Larry Labadini** used to sell insurance in Massachusetts. In 2014, his son Andrew was writing a profile piece for a Boston College class and reached out to me for more details about his father's nearly successful draft strategy. He said he'd send me a copy of the completed article, but I never received it.

### Early pioneers

**Jeff Barton** is still running Scoresheet Baseball. Perhaps most remarkable in today's competitive gaming climate is that people pay money to play his game and don't get cash prizes at the end—just a trophy or a certificate—and they are perfectly fine with it. That's not a novel concept; I don't go to a ballgame and expect to leave with more money than I came with. We pay to be entertained, whether it's in a movie theater or a fantasy competition.

*Bill James Fantasy Baseball* writer **Paul Siebel** died in 2012 at age 62. I just looked him up and found this out now. Yeah, we hadn't corresponded since the baseball strike killed his publications. Apparently, he was also an avid Scoresheet player; Jeff Barton even posted on his memorial page. Sad; he was a good guy.

**Charlie Wiegert** was the treasurer for the FSTA for 18 years. He worked for Fanball after they bought CDM, then bought CDM back when Fanball closed in 2011. CDM is now a part of the SportsHub Games Network. Charlie also does consulting work for the gaming industry.

## Page of Honor

### Halls of Fame

- Greg Ambrosius—FSTA 2001, FSWA 2010
- John Benson—FSTA 2002, FSWA 2018
- Matthew Berry—FSWA 2010, FSTA 2012
- Tristan Cockcroft—FSWA 2012
- Glenn Colton—FSTA 2013
- Jeff Erickson—FSWA 2014
- Jason Grey—FSWA 2015
- John Hunt—FSTA 2013, FSWA 2014
- Bill James—FSTA 2001
- Eric Karabell—FSWA 2010
- Peter Kreutzer—FSWA 2016
- Lenny Melnick—FSWA 2016
- Lawr Michaels—FSTA 2019, FSWA 2019
- Dan Okrent—FSTA 2000
- Alex Patton—FSWA 2015
- Ron Shandler—FSTA 2005, FSWA 2011
- Glenn Waggoner—FSTA 2000, FSWA 2013
- Rick Wilton—FSWA 2020
- Rick Wolf—FSTA 2011

### Experts League Titles (LABR, Tout Wars, XFL)

- Greg Ambrosius—2013
- Tristan Cockcroft—2002, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2014
- John Coleman—1999, 2000
- Glenn Colton/Rick Wolf—2002, 2003, 2007, 2014, 2018 (2), 2019, 2021
- Doug Dennis—2007, 2011, 2019, 2020
- Jeff Erickson—2007, 2021
- Steve Gardner—2010, 2011, 2014, 2015, 2017 (2), 2018, 2019, 2022
- Jason Grey—2002, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2010
- John Hunt—1994, 1996, 1997, 1999
- Peter Kreutzer/Alex Patton—2003
- Larry Labadini—1994
- Gene McCaffrey—1998, 2001
- Lenny Melnick—2014
- Lawr Michaels—2001, 2009
- Steve Moyer—1996, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017
- Mat Olkin—1999
- Larry Schechter—2005, 2006, 2007, 2011, 2012, 2013 (2), 2016, 2020
- Ron Shandler—1998 (2), 2000, 2001, 2021
- Brian Walton—2009
- Scott Wilderman—2003, 2006
- Trace Wood—2004, 2006, 2013
- Todd Zola—2016 (2)
- Irwin Zwilling/Lenny Melnick—1995, 1996, 2002
- Todd Zola—FSWA 2020