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# From the Bullpen

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Brethren:

Here's your reminder that this coming **Saturday, December 7, 2002**, we will gather to pay honor and tribute to our current and four-time HSL champion, Brother John "Itchie" Thielen. The celebration will begin at the **Ernst house at 7:00 p.m.**, where cold beverages and tasty hors d'oeuvres will be served, and those who have any passing interest in same may view the Big 12 championship game on our 13-inch LDTV (low-definition television) screen. From then and there, we will go wherever the winds blow.

In terms of an anticipated roll call, I am informed that Brother Stretch will not be able to make the trek from Kansas City, and that Magpie is doubtful because of prior, subsequent or contemporary commitments. Possum has issued his usual noncommittal response, once again assuring me/us that he desires greatly to be here (yada, yada, yada) and will do his level best to attend (yak, yak, yak). But of course, Possum cannot absolutely guarantee (ho-hum) that the

B.T., as the purveyor of the **Skipjacks'** championship wearing apparel, will be in attendance, as will Screech, barring any emergency root canals. U-Bob has feigned interest personally and on behalf of the puppet **Pirates** regime, but we'll believe they are coming when we see them walk through the door, and not before. Tirebiter has a kitchen pass and a brand new pair of drinkin' boots. Big Guy, our league memory bank, will be there with bells on and topper stories to tell. Shamu\*, with a promise of free food, free booze, and free wearing apparel, even if not mesh, will most assuredly make the trip.

So there you go. See you on Saturday night.

## HALL OF FAME VOTE

I just saw in the Kansas City paper this weekend that the new ballots are out for the Hall of Fame's Class of 2003. Appearing on the list for the first time will be Eddie Murray, Lee Smith, Ryne Sandberg, Fernando Valenzuela, Tony Pena, Brett Butler, and Darryl Kile. Gary "Kid" Carter is the top

Bridges' social calendar will enable his attendance (whatever). Mouse has been annoyingly silent on the whole issue.

carryover from last year's class, in which only Ozzie Smith was voted into the Hall.

As a warm-up to Saturday night's get-together, to prepare for this topic of debate, let's see everybody go to our website and post a message as to which of these eight individuals *you* would vote for if you were on the selection committee. Although usually there are only one or two, and rarely three, new members picked by the selection committee, you are at liberty to vote for any, all, or none of these individuals. However, please be prepared to defend your selections and/or omissions. And no rubbernecking, Shamu\*. We want to know what *you* think, not your neighbor.

## **STILL ANGRY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS**

After sitting motionless on my bookshelf for quite some period of time, I finally picked up and started reading Bob Gibson's 1994 "autobiography" titled *Stranger to the Game*. So far, I am about half-way through it, and it is a very interesting read, in large part because of Gibson's recounting of his childhood in Omaha. However, while some of his invective in telling his life's tale might have been designed to sensationalize matters to sell copy, the clear undercurrent of the book is that Gibson felt and still feels that he has been continually wronged because he is black, and an outspoken black man at that. If you read the book, which I commend to you, you will have to make your own judgment on this, but from the outside looking in, it is hard to see how the progression of his major league baseball

In any case, a couple of the more interesting tidbits of information from this book are as follows:

- ♦ Gibson's father died when he was a very tender age, and he was more or less raised by his older brother, Josh, who was a Creighton University graduate and a leading coach and father figure to many young black athletes in North Omaha.

- ♦ In addition to Gibson, Gale Sayers, Roger Sayers, Bob Boozer, Ron Boone, Marlin Briscoe, and Johnnycakes Rogers are all alumni of Josh Gibson's North Omaha sports programs.

- ♦ Gibson lived many years in the Logan Fontenelle housing project in North Omaha, back when it was almost new and a pretty nice place to live. The projects at that time were integrated, and he played youth sports with white boys, Indians and other children of his own race.

- ♦ Gibson played on a touring black baseball team known as the Omaha Monarchs in his youth, which traveled all around Nebraska and Iowa playing local, small-town teams.

- ♦ Gibson was known more for his basketball playing in high school and college, as he started for Omaha Technical High for three years on the basketball team but was not allowed to play baseball, according to him, because it was reserved

career was really hampered because of his color. Certainly he was subjected to things in the Jim Crow south in the '50s and early '60s which should never be tolerated in a civilized society, but it seems as if he was always treated pretty darn fairly by the St. Louis Cardinals organization.

for the white boys. When he was a senior in high school, his Omaha Tech team got beat by Fremont 40-39 in the semifinal game of the state high school playoffs in Lincoln, a loss which he blamed on biased officiating against a team with an all-black starting five.

- ♦ Gibson went to Creighton University primarily to play basketball, although he also played baseball and high-jumped for the track team. He was a three-year starter on the basketball team, and when he finished his college career in 1957, he was the all-time leading scorer for Creighton University. He also was the first member of the CU Sports Hall of Fame.

- ♦ When the Harlem Globetrotters came to Omaha after Gibson had completed his college career, he was invited to play for the opposing team, as was customary in those days. (In those days, the opposing team really tried to beat the Globetrotters.) Gibson's fourth-quarter performance was so spectacular that he was invited to play on the real Globetrotters' team, and spent several months touring with the 'Trotters and playing with Meadowlark Lemon. However, after one season with the 'Trotters, the St. Louis Cardinals organization decided that it was too big of an off-season distraction for him, and offered to pay him the same \$4,000 that the Globetrotters paid him if only he would not play for Abe Saperstein's touring team.

- ♦ After signing with the St. Louis Cardinals, Gibson spent parts of a couple

*In the 1965 game in Minnesota, I was catching and he came in to pitch the last inning. We had a 6-5 lead, and the first man up was Tony Oliva. It goes strike one, strike two, and I know what I want him to do next. Oliva's a great low fastball hitter, so I want him to come up with the ball. I think, should I just signal that, or should I go out and tell him so I won't second-guess myself? I went out and said, "Bob, a good fastball up and in. Not down and in, up and in." He just looked at me as if I wasn't there. I turned around and went behind the plate and called fastball. He threw it down and in. Double to left center. I said, Well, fuck it, I did what I had to do. He then proceeded to strike out the next three guys. One of them was Killebrew, who killed fastballs and had already homered against Maloney, who threw as hard as anybody in baseball. Gibson threw him nothing but fastballs. The last out was Joe Pepitone, and I'll never forget it. He threw Pepitone two fastballs, and Gibson's fastball sailed so much that after the second one, Pepitone turned to me and said, "Throw me that high slider again." I said, "Okay." Gibson throws another fastball and strikes*

of years playing for the Omaha AAA affiliate of the Cardinals, but a greater share of his AAA seasoning was with the Cardinals' AAA club in Rochester, which was considered a higher level than the Omaha club.

Gibson was definitely an "old-school" player, one who did not fraternize with players on other teams or even give his own teammates much of a glimpse into his mental pitching book. He was also fiercely independent and stubborn, as illustrated by this story from Joe Torre about the 1965 All-Star game.

*him out on three pitches.*

*After the game, he and I are the last two in the shower. I turn to him and say, "Great pitching." He's just soaping himself down like I'm not even in the damn shower. Wouldn't say a word. That's just the way he was.*

*When I was traded to the Cardinals four years later, he was the first one to welcome me.*

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## PITCHING DOMINATION

Randy Johnson's fifth Cy Young Award, and his fourth consecutive NL Cy, punctuates a phase of the Big Unit's career that is almost unparalleled in terms of dominance. Here are the Big Unit's pertinent statistics for the past six seasons:

Year	W	L	CG	SHO	SO	BB	ERA
1997	20	4	5	2	291	77	2.28
1998	19	11	10	6	329	86	3.28
1999	17	9	12	2	364	70	2.48
2000	19	7	8	3	347	76	2.64
2001	21	6	3	2	372	71	2.49
2002	24	5	8	4	334	71	2.32

2002 was perhaps Johnson's most complete year, as he won the National League pitching Triple Crown, leading the league in wins, strikeouts and ERA. In addition, he also led the National League in complete games and shutouts, becoming one of only ten pitchers who have led their respective leagues in all five major pitching

Johnson keeps getting better with age. He has now struck out 300 or more batters for five years in a row, and only he and Nolan Ryan have had six 300-strikeout seasons in their careers. From 1993 through 1997, when Randy Johnson was between the ages of 29 and 33, he posted a 75-20 won-loss record with 1182 strikeouts and 2.86 ERA. From 1998 to 2002, when Johnson was between 34 and 39 years of age, he had a 100-44 won-loss record, with 1746 strikeouts and a 2.63 ERA. An astounding run.

It would be hard to find any other pitcher who so dominated his league as Johnson has done over the course of the past six seasons. Sandy Koufax and Grover Cleveland Alexander both had absolutely incredible four-year stretches of dominance, but neither of them dominated for six consecutive years like the Big Unit.

## AMAZING FOUR-YEAR RUNS

categories in the same season.

The Big Unit was the first National Leaguer to win the pitching triple crown since Dwight Gooden did it with the Mets in 1985. In 1997, Randy Johnson finished second to Roger Clemens in wins (21-20), strikeouts (292-291), and ERA (2.05 to 2.28), in a season when Clemens won the pitching triple crown in the American League.

### **Sandy Koufax**

<b>Year</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>SHO</b>	<b>SO</b>	<b>ERA</b>
1963	25	5	11	306	1.88
1964	19	5	7	223	1.74
1965	26	8	8	382	2.04
1966	27	9	5	317	1.73

### **Grover Cleveland Alexander**

<b>Year</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>SHO</b>	<b>SO</b>	<b>ERA</b>
1914	27	15	6	214	2.38
1915	31	10	12	241	1.22
1916	33	12	16	167	1.55
1917	30	13	8	200	1.83

Although this article is aimed at giving Randy Johnson his due, it is hard not to sit up and take notice at the numbers that were posted by Koufax and Alexander during the above years. And while Koufax played on a couple of pretty solid (although light-hitting) Dodger teams during this time period, old Pete played on Phillie teams that were less than spectacular.

As I think about Koufax's reign of glory, which is touched upon in Gibson's book, I am also reminded that I wanted to mention the remarkable hitting year that Dodger Tommy Davis had in 1962 for the Los Angeles Dodgers, in which he knocked in a total of 153 runs, while playing in 163 games, with Frank "the Capital Punisher" Howard batting behind him. I only mention him because I was reminded by Gibson's book what an anomalous year it was for Davis, who was a fine hitter in his own right, but on balance had a pretty average career, finishing with 153 career home runs and 1052 career RBIs in 1999 games over eighteen years. In fact, his next highest RBI total for one season was

a mere 89 in 1969 and 1973. It was one of those off-the-chart years that you might compare to the season that Brady Anderson hit 50 home runs (1996), or the year that Charles' favorite player, Pete Vukovich, won the Cy Young award (1982) and had 18 wins. It's one of those things that makes baseball great.

That's it. Time to close up shop. See you on Saturday.

Skipper

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[Back to Top](#)  
[Home](#)

[Back to Archives](#)