

From the Bullpen

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Boys,

I'm bored. From my perspective as a sports spectator, it's the worst time of year. We are more than two months away from the start of spring training, college football is over, the Husker basketball team blows, I can't stand to watch pro basketball, and I could care less about hockey. By the way, is the NHL still on strike or did they finally get that important matter resolved? And does anybody really care?

Anyway, to help with the boredom during this sports dry spell, let's talk a little baseball.

- **I cannot believe that Houston didn't try harder to resign Roger Clemens, and that the Rocket now has the opportunity to sign with the Yankees or the Red Sox. I truly hope that he doesn't hang on too long, but he was absolutely great last year, and if healthy in 2006, he should be capable of winning 15 games for any team that can provide him with decent run support. Wouldn't it be great to see him finish out his career in Bean Town, where it all started back in 1985?

- **Johnny Damon in Yankee pinstripes? Anathema. Since Johnny will have to shave his beard and cut his flowing locks to play for George, I was a bit surprised to read of this free agent signing. On the other hand, for \$40-some-million bucks, I guess most of us would be willing to pay a visit to the barber. Except Magpie, whose flat-topped dignity is not for sale at any price.

- **I still can't believe Bartolo Colon won the Cy Young. While he won 21 games for the hyper-offensive Angels, he had only 2 complete games and nary a shutout. He had to have one of the higher ERAs among Cy Young award winners with his middling 3.48 ERA last year, and his 157 strikeouts in more than 200 innings are nothing to boast about. The night I saw him pitch in Anaheim this summer, he couldn't have got Truman Capote out. The only thing about Colon that impresses me is his gargantuan hat size.

- **Now that Sosa and Palmeiro have been dropped by the Orioles, will there be any other major league team desperate enough to pick them up? I personally think that Palmeiro is toast, but it wouldn't surprise me if some idiot was willing

to give Sosa another try. But unless he's on the juice, I don't see him hitting many more home runs.

**How about all the money that the Dodgers are spending in the free agent market this off-season. With the additions of Garciaparra and Furcal, and the additions by subtraction of Jim Tracy and Milton Bradley, the trolley Dodgers might be poised to return to their days of glory from years past.

**Although I haven't seen it in print yet, somebody told me that Leo Mazzone has been lured away from his job as the Braves' pitching coach. I was stunned to learn of this, as I thought that he and Bobby Cox was a package deal who would both coach together until one of them keeled over dead. This is a huge loss for Atlanta, and I predict that their string of Eastern Division titles may be nearing an end.

There's a wonderful chapter (13: The Pope of Pitching) on Mazzone in the Roger Kahn baseball book that I am just now finishing up, *The Head Game*, which is extremely complimentary of Mazzone and makes one appreciate just what a talented pitching coach he is. Even so, Mazzone didn't have a clue as to what happened to Mark Wohlers, whose career turned on a dime after three outstanding seasons in a row netted 97 saves for the Braves, and during which Wohlers used his 100 mph fastball to whiff 282 batters in 211 innings. During Wohlers' rehab stint in the minors, there was a time when he gave up 38 walks and 28 runs in 12 innings. After Mazzone was asked one too many times if he knew what went wrong with Wohlers, he responded testily that, "If I knew what the fuck went wrong, I would have fixed it." Good point, Leo.

Although not necessarily as riveting as some of Kahn's other baseball books, I still recommend *The Head Game* as good baseball reading for these dreary winter months.

SCHEDULES, PLEASE

There are a number of important dates that each of you need to enter into your busy schedules. So, Tirebiter, get out your Blackberry; Magpie, turn on your Clio; Mouse, open up your latest high-tech gadget; U-Bob, get out your crayon and butcher paper and write these down; and Scott, pretend like you have never heard any of these dates before, and we will call you again on the day-of to remind you:

EVENT	DATE -- TIME	PLACE
Winter Meeting	Saturday, February 25, 2006, 7:00 p.m.	Tirebiter's new rumpus room
The Draft	Saturday, March 25, 2006, 1:00 p.m.	PHEB Washington Room
HSL Trip (tent.)	June 16-18, 2006	St. Louis

Please advise immediately if March 25 does not work for you for Draft Day, and we will try to find a substitute for you. Itchie, you will have to scrap your plan to see Brokeback Mountain for the twelfth time that afternoon. Priorities, son, priorities.

Regarding The Trip, several of you have suggested St. Louis as the venue, and in looking at the Cardinals' schedule, June 16-18 seems like a good possibility. Please advise as to how many of you would be able to make it to St. Louis on this particular weekend in June. Flights on Southwest are dirt cheap. Maybe we can even track down U-Bob's lost wallet from our last trip to St. Louis in 1999.

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE

As mentioned above, I'm bored, so my mind has been racing around wildly to cover many different topics, probably much like U-Bob as he hoses down the screens at Art FX at 3 a.m. Here are a few of my recent random ideations:

- ** Someday I want to travel to Zimbabwe. Not that there's anything specific that I want to see there, but I love the way that the name "Zim-**BOB**'-way" rolls off the tongue. Ditto with Istanbul. I would love to be able to tell people, in a low guttural voice, "Tomorrow I fly to **Is-tan-BULL**'." Don't laugh. You've all had similar thoughts, and so don't even think about denying it.
- ** Along these same lines, there's nothing more fun than ambling into a Mediterranean restaurant and ordering up a dish of "babbaganush." Rolls off the tongue like few other menu items. Doesn't taste bad, either.

R.I.P., ROD DEDEAUX

I just saw in this morning's paper that Rod Dedeaux, the fine old gentleman who coached the University of Southern California baseball team for many years, passed away at the ripe old age of 90. According to my baseball almanac, Dedeaux was born on February 17, 1915, in New Orleans, Louisiana, and was 20 years old when he broke into the big leagues in 1935 with the Brooklyn Dodgers. On his major league career, which totaled 4 at-bats, one hit and one RBI, Dedeaux was quoted as saying, "I had a cup of coffee with no sugar in it."

Recently, a good friend of mine got a chance to sit next to Coach Dedeaux at the last couple of College World Series, and remarked repeatedly about what a fine, amiable, humble gentleman he was. If there is a heaven, there has to be an Ebbets Field, so let's hope that Coach Dedeaux has found his way there.

That's it for the first issue of *From the Bullpen* of 2006. Back at you soon.

Skipper