

From the Bullpen

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2006 Season

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Gentlemen:

This issue of *From the Bullpen* comes to you from my remote port this week in Cleveland, Ohio, where I am holed up not only on a business assignment, but also engaging in a partial reenactment of our epic 1994 HSL Trip, which included a memorable visit to the Flats (too bad they didn't have Jager Bombs in those days) and was supposed to include a side junket to the NFL Hall of Fame in Canton (which had to be scrapped in '94 on account of B.T.'s unrelenting brain ache induced by the previous eve's activities). I am keeping my eye out for the young filly who so cruelly dusted our man Itchie ("Ooooooh!! You can have him!!"), as well as for the offspring of Rich Rollins. I digress here, but did you know that Rich Rawlins was one of the members of the one-year Seattle Pilots, made famous by Jim Bouton in his classic *Ball Four*? I know this only because I am re-reading this madcap diary of the baseball world as it was unveiled in 1970.

I further digress, but let me share with you here a telling excerpt from *Ball Four* that presaged some of our very disturbing recent distractions to our national pastime.

I guess it wasn't too good for my elbow. When I got through pitching, it felt like somebody had set fire to it. I'll treat it with aspirin, a couple every four hours or so.

I've tried a lot of other things through the years -- like Butazolidin, which is what they give to horses. And D.M.S.O. -- dimethyl sulfoxide. Whitey Ford used that for a while. You rub it on with a plastic glove and then as soon as it gets on your arm, you can taste it in your mouth. It's not available anymore, though. Word is it can blind you. I've also taken shots -- Novocaine, cortisone and Xylocaine. Baseball players will take anything. If you had a pill that would guarantee a pitcher twenty wins but it might take five years off his life, he'd take it.

From pp. 48-49. More later from *Ball Four* after I have finished re-reading it.

Now on to company business. Here are the standings through 15 weeks of the season:

WEEK 15 STANDINGS

1.	Reds	6479.50
2.	Wahoos	6428.75
3.	Skipjacks	6324.75
4.	Cubs*	6304.50
5.	Bombers	6216.75
6.	Bears	6201.75
7.	Redbirds	6111.00
8.	Chiefs	5850.75
9.	Tigers	5818.75
10.	Blues	5774.75
11.	Tribe	5425.75
12.	Senators	5337.00

FTB: GUEST AUTHOR ASSIGNMENTS

First of all, thanks to all of you who have contributed your thoughts already in guest writings to *From the Bullpen*, including Screech's marvelous recent contribution. Funny, funny stuff. Screech and Underbelly both need to apply for employment with David Letterman, as their material beats most of what his crew is putting out these days.

Here are the assignments for those of you who have not yet made your contributions this season:

July 26	Tricko
August 9	Stretch
August 23	SloPay
September 6	Possum

Also, as the season winds down, I ask U-Bob to provide more of his always entertaining commentary on September 20, 2006, for the final guest issue during the regular season. I think all of us would love to hear Bob's comments about Britt Hume, as well as the Travails of Bob in making the move out of his residence to a new dwelling. Bob?

THE SUMMER GAME

I wish now to commend to all of you one of the best, most intelligent baseball books you will ever read, Roger Angell's *The Summer Game*, which I recently finished. This wonderful book, published by the University of Nebraska Press, is a collection of Angell's best writings on baseball between 1962 and 1971, most of which appeared initially in *The New Yorker* magazine. I can say with a high degree of confidence that you won't find better baseball prose anywhere.

This is a book to be savored, read over the course of weeks or months, not days. Most of the time that I was reading Angell's writings, I felt myself sporting a silly grin on my face, often

accompanied by goose pimples on my arms whenever Angell struck a particularly harmonious chord in my baseball soul.

As with many first-rate literary works, one has to invest some time and effort to complete this seminal piece, as many of the words that Angell employs are not within the average baseball fan's common parlance. By way of example, but not by way of dissuasion from reading this book, you will find the following words in this book that many of your high school English teachers may not have pounded into your thick skulls, even though several of you had repeated opportunities for such learning:

cognominal
juvenescence
senectuous
sans-culottes
baldachin
escarpment
obduracy
panjandrum
vivified

Funny thing is, even though I had to consult Noah Webster on several of these, Mr. Angell uses these words with such flair and adeptness that I had a sense of their meaning even before consulting my dictionary.

One of my favorite features of the book is Angell's poetic naming of the sections and chapters of the book. Have a look:

Rustle of Spring
The Old Folks behind Home
Farewell
A Tale of Three Cities
Taverns in the Town
West of the Bronx
A Terrific Strain
The Flowering and Subsequent Deflowering of New England
A Little Noise at Twilight
Days and Nights with the Unbored
The Baltimore Vermeers
Part of a Season: Bay and Back Bay
Some Pirates and Lesser Men
The Interior Stadium

If the Pulitzer people ever awarded a prize for chapter and section naming, Angell would be a shoo-in for the crown.

There are at least a score of passages from this book that I would love to share with you here, but being fully aware of the attention spans that I am dealing with, allow me to include just a few:

October 1969

*(after the Miracle Mets topped the Baltimore Orioles
in the deciding Game 5 of the World Series by a score of 5-3)*

Later, in his quiet office, Earl Weaver was asked by a reporter if he hadn't thought that the Orioles would hold on to their late lead in the last game and thus bring the Series back to Baltimore and maybe win it there. Weaver took a sip of beer and smiled and said, "No, that's what you can never do in baseball. You can't sit on a lead and run a few plays into the line and just kill the clock. You've got to throw the ball over the goddam plate and give the other man a chance. That's why baseball is the greatest game of them all." (p. 233.)

October 1966

(Orioles/Dodgers World Series)

[B]ut this knowledge should not keep anyone from remembering how close the Series still looked early on that final afternoon. If Drysdale could win, if the Dodgers could stop drowning in two feet of water, Koufax would pitch the next game, and only members of the Flat Earth Society are prepared to bet that Koufax can lose two Series games in a row. Then the Series would move back to Los Angeles, surely at no worse than even odds. This quick, close, yet one-sided Series was so mystifying that in the early innings on Sunday the representatives of the magazine Sport, which awards a sports car each year to the outstanding player in the Series, were helplessly asking for nominees in the press rows. The most sensible suggestion, assuming a Baltimore victory that day, was to permit each of the Orioles to drive it for a week and to donate the safety belt to Willie Davis. (p. 153-154.)

The Interior Stadium

This inner game -- baseball in the mind -- has no season, but it is best played in the winter, without the distraction of other baseball news. . . . With luck, we may even penetrate some of its mysteries. One of those mysteries is its vividness -- the absolutely distinct inner vision we retain of that hitter, that eager base-runner, of however long ago. . . . And, back across the river again, Carl Hubbell. My own great pitcher, a southpaw, tall and elegant. Hub pitching: the loose motion; two slow, formal bows from the waist, glove and hands held almost in front of his face as he pivots, the long right leg (in long, peculiar pants) striding; and the ball, angling oddly, shooting past the batter. Hubbell walks gravely back to the bench, his pitching arm, as always, turned the wrong way around, with the palm out. Screwballer. (p. 292-294.)

The bottom line on this review is that if you haven't yet treated yourself to the pleasure of turning the pages of *The Summer Game*, it's high time that you favor your baseball soul with this masterpiece from the Rembrandt of baseball literature.

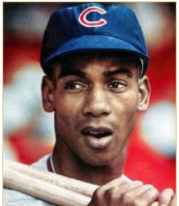
BALLPARK REDUX

There is no boastful intent in my reporting that with our visit to Busch II, I have now had the great good fortune of seeing baseball games in 47 different major league venues. Rather, I mention this merely to address my qualifications for commenting on the rightful place of our great game's newest green cathedral among the holy constellation of emerald gems. After our first night's game in St. Louis, I have to confess that my first perception of Busch II was impaired by the memory of sitting in the Turkish sauna section with Brother Itchie, to include the disturbing sight of the girthy Cardinal fan feloniously gnawing on a super-sized and supremely unappetizing-looking turkey extremity. Nasty with a capital N. However, after spending the evening of the second game in the sublime second tier seats behind home plate, my impression of the current St. Louis ball field improved dramatically. As you will be able to see if you click over to [Skipper's Ballpark Rankings](#), I now have Busch II ranked No. 9 out of the 30 current fields, which to my way of thinking is high praise.

"SHORT" STOPS (Can you name the "shortstop" pictured by each entry? Names posted below.)



This from my baseball trivia calendar: On May 2, 1954, Stan Musial became the first player in Major League history to hit five home runs on the same day in a doubleheader split with the Giants. In the *Truth is Stranger than Fiction* Department, in attendance to watch Musial's heroic feat that day was a young Nate Colbert, then eight years old, who in 1972 became the second and only other player to smash out a quint of yardballs in the same day. Remarkable.



Also from my trivia calendar, when David Aardsma made his Major League debut on April 6, 2004, he supplanted Henry Aaron in the baseball encyclopedia as the first player included in the alphabetical listing of MLB players in that tome, ending Aaron's fifty-year reign.



Loved Screech's comments about the Home Run Derby, but only wish he had followed through with some equally sharp commentary on the celebrity softball game. As celebrity sporting events go, it is about as shameless as they come, but at least we now know that both Jimmy Kimmel and Gary Carter have absolutely nothing better to do with their free time.



And by the way, yes, Screech, I *do* get paid to attend major and minor league baseball games all across this glorious land of ours. Next week I plan to get paid for seeing a minor league game of some sort in the northeast part of the Buckeye state, if the stars are aligned and the creek don't rise (to borrow from one of B.T.'s mixed metaphors). If this pans out, I will report back.

And that, my friends, will do it for this week's edition of *From the Bullpen*. Enjoy the rest of your week, and as always, be careful out there.

Skipper

Shortstop names:

Robin Yount

Ernie Banks

Phil Rizzuto

Joe Tinker