

From the Bullpen

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Dear boys,

This week's ruminations on baseball and life come to you from Cabo San Lucas, where my lovely bride of fifteen years and I are enjoying a few days of R&R *sans* children. Since it has been more than a decade since our last adult beach vacation together, it took a while to get used to the idea of lounging all day under a cabana with nothing to do but read, relax, and tip the bartender and waiters. Like about ten minutes.

My wife insists that the three S's commonly associated with a Cabo vacation are Sun, Sand and Cervasa, but when I pointed out that cervasa begins with a C, she quickly modified it to Sun, Sand and Seafood. So now I know.

One of the best parts about any beach vacation is the chance to catch up on reading. Among the library of books I packed for this trip were two baseball books, *Foul Ball: My Life and Hard Times Trying to Save an Old Ballpark*, by Jim Bouton; and the classic *Summer Game* by Roger Angell of *The New Yorker*.

Angell's book is a must-read for any true baseball fan with romance in his soul. The prose is both eloquent and image-provoking, but it pays to have a dictionary nearby when you read it.

Foul Ball is also well worth reading, but it will never be a classic baseball tome. Rather, it is a well-written and entertaining tale of Jim Bouton's attempt to buy and refurbish one of the country's oldest and most historic minor league fields, Wahconah Park in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The book begins in 2001, when Bouton and his two partners are attempting to offer an alternative plan to razing Wahconah Park and building a brand-new \$18.5 million ballpark to house a Class A minor league baseball team, a plan put together by the politicians, the lawyers, and the financial movers and shakers of Pittsfield, but voted down by the general public. It should probably be required reading for Poly Sci 101, since it is a primer on how politics, power and money can prevail over imminent good sense. *Foul Ball* is currently available in softcover at your local bookstore, but if you're too cheap or too lazy to buy and read the book, you can probably get the gist of the story by going to www.foulball.com.

After reading Bouton's book, I definitely want to take a trip to Pittsfield, Mass., and the nearby Berkshire Mountains, listening to James Taylor's *Sweet Baby James* all along the way.

Sounds like a beautiful area, and if they haven't torn it down in the next few years, I definitely want to take a walk inside Wahconah Park. I also want to see the recently-discovered "Broken Window Bylaw," in which the inhabitants of the town of Pittsfield voted in 1791 to ban the playing of baseball within eighty yards of a new Town Hall to protect against the breaking of windows. Some baseball historians believe that this bylaw gives Pittsfield bragging rights as the earliest-known place where baseball was played, beating Cooperstown's bogus 1839 claim by almost half a century.

I also learned from Bouton's book that there is an alternative Baseball Hall of Fame of sorts located in the public library in Pasadena, California, known as *The Baseball Reliquary: The Shrine of the Eternals*. Its enshrinees include Jim Bouton (presumably because of *Ball Four*), Moe Berg, Dock Ellis, Bill Lee, Curt Flood, Pam Postema, and Bill Veeck, among others. Quirky, but something we all need to see.

The last kernel I will leave you from Bouton's book is a saying of Bouton's old Yankee pitching coach, Johnny Sain (of *Spahn and Sain* and *two days of rain* fame), describing how a starting pitcher feels after winning a tough ballgame:

"The cool of the evening."

In Sain's view, the mound victor can sit back and relax, knowing he has accomplished something and doesn't have to go back out there on the mound again for a few more days. To Sain, this felt like "the cool of the evening." Perfect.

TOP TENS

I'm not quite sure why -- it probably has something to do with approaching fifty and the human tendency to become increasingly nostalgic and melancholy as we grow longer in the tooth -- but I have been on a kick lately to write out lists of my Top Ten favorite this, that and the others, as well as a few bottom tens. You have previously seen published in this organ my Top Ten List of Favorite Ballparks (actually, my ranking of all thirty current parks and a few of the retired ones), my Top Ten Favorite Baseball Books, and my Top Ten Baseball Movies. If nothing else, these are good vehicles to keep my sometimes infertile mind popping and firing on all cylinders. It's also a good way to preserve great memories, and a way to provoke thoughtful and enjoyable discourse around the old Hot Stove. A couple of the lists I have been working on in my spare time are:

Favorite Cities
Favorite College Campuses
Favorite Actors
Least Favorite Actors
Favorite Movies
Favorite Movie Lines
Favorite Athletes

Favorite Sporting Events Attended
Favorite Music

I'll try to share these from time to time on this website, but only if there is interest and input from the rest of the league. For starters, I'll list a Top Ten that I just recently completed on this trip, which is my:

Top Ten Baseball Thrills

10. My first trips to Fenway Park, Wrigley Field and Yankee Stadium.
9. Witnessing (being present at) an Unassisted Triple Play (John Valentin, Fenway Park, July 8, 1994).
8. Mike Witt's Perfect Game (September 30, 1984, Arlington Stadium).
7. Visiting 46 major league ballparks.
6. 1991 World Series game (Twins vs. Braves).
5. 1998 All-Star game (Coors Field).
4. Twenty-one Hot Stove League trips (24 ballparks and 20 cities) with the boys.
3. Cal Ripken's 2131 with Scott (September 6, 1995).
2. Seeing Joltin' Joe Ernst knock one over the fence at Zorinsky Park; watching his brother Will take the mound and strike out the side with pure gas.
1. Cooperstown with Joe and Will (and the Thielen boys) with Yankee Stadium on the side in 2005.

There you have it. More great baseball memories than any one individual should be lucky enough to experience.

SPRING BASEBALL

I am looking forward with great anticipation to catching a game or two of Cactus League baseball early next month, when I will be down in the Phoenix area for the annual DRI Med Mal seminar. While I will not be able to stick around and see one of the early rounds of the

World Baseball Series to be played in Phoenix the following week, I intend to catch at least a couple of spring games. Can't wait.

SHORT STOPS

- ** Whale watching is overrated.
- ** Some people should not be allowed to wear thongs.
- ** If you have not yet seen it, I highly recommend the movie *I Walk the Line*, about the life and times of Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash. If Joaquin Phoenix does not get an Oscar for this one, something's wrong.

UPDATING OF ALL-TIME LEADER LISTS

You can now see an updated All-Time Leaders List on our website, updated through the end of last season. The only addition from last year was the pitching performance of Chris Carpenter, whose 633 pitching points for the **Redbirds** last season moves him up to No. 19 on the All-Time Pitching list.

That's all for this week.

Skipper