



# From the Bullpen

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## Prologue

I was planning on putting out a *Bullpen* this week, in part to praise Buser for his extraordinary work in re: *The Crimson Chirper* last week, but also to pass along a few thoughts and to help fill in during an "off" week, but then U-Bob called and asked for some air time. It was a no-brainer to give U-Baldo the feature spot for this week—when comic genius is volunteered, you make room for it—and U-Bob did not disappoint. I only feel bad that Screech, a man of great, if dry-as-the-Sonora-desert-wit himself, has such a tough act to follow. That said, I have no doubt that my new neighbor in our rough-cut, rustic environs—call him Lewis, me Clark—has the requisite cerebellar gunpowder to match up nicely with U-Bob in his upcoming edition of BUTTERFLY BLESSINGS. Let us wait together with collective, bated breath.

Although Underbelly received top billing for the week, and richly deserved same, I decided to add a few thoughts of my own hereinbelow, since: (1) I will be on vacation for the next week, and without an outlet for expression on these matters; (2) I just finished reading *Clemente* and am dying to share my thoughts on this wonderful book; and (3) I can. So accept it or not, here we go with

## SKIP'S EXTRA INNINGS

### The All-Star Game

Because I was in Denver for a deposition on Tuesday afternoon of this week, I only saw the first two innings of the All-Star game from the airport bar, and then the last two frames at home in the wee hours of the morning after my weather-delayed flight. From what I saw, and from what I read about it on Wednesday, it appears that the game will go down as one of the best-ever mid-season classics. A few thoughts about the game:

- ◇ I wish the National League would win one of these things—they have great young talent, but are caught on the schneid.
- ◇ It was great to see so many of the current Hall of Fame members at Yankee Stadium for the big sendoff.

- ◇ Wade Boggs looked a whole lot better in a Red Sox uniform than he does in a suit and a baseball hat.
- ◇ I'm actually beginning to like Gary Carter.
- ◇ Ernie Banks looks the same today as when he gave me a warm, soul-brother handshake at Cal's 2131 pre-party.
- ◇ It was great NOT to see Bonds or Clemens or Rice in the company of these fine men.

### **The Freak**

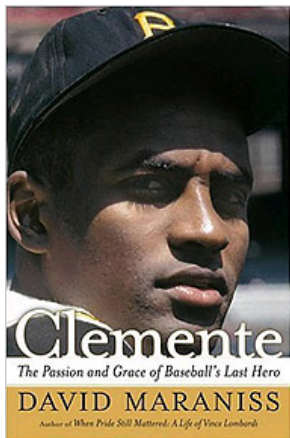
Did anyone else read the illuminating Tom Verducci article on Tim Lincecum in the July 7, 2008 edition of *SI*? Great stuff. Here is a [link](#) to the article, if you haven't read it but want to do so. Loved the part about Rick Peterson (former Mets pitching coach who has worked with the American Sports Medicine Institute in Birmingham, Alabama since 1993) predicting shoulder woes for Mark Prior as early as 2003 because of his flawed pitching mechanics.

I did a double-take when I realized that Verducci made reference to an outing of Lincecum in Washington in June that we witnessed on our Trip. While I of course knew that Timmy pitched well and got the win against the punchless Nationals, I didn't appreciate the level of his mastery at that game. According to Verducci, Lincecum only missed the strike zone 28 times in pitching to 25 batters, and was throwing 97 mph four-seamers to every part of the strike zone. I also loved Aaron Boone's quoted comment about Lincecum: "*I thought I'd have more problems with his delivery, but it wasn't as deceptive as I thought.*" Looking back at the box score, I see that Boone went 0-for-4 with one strikeout. Yeah, he sure didn't have any problems with Lincecum's delivery, did he?

We will all watch with increased interest to see if Lincecum's superlative mechanics (per his dad) lead to a long, productive and injury-free pitching career. I won't be betting against it.

### **BOOK REVIEW:**

#### ***CLEMENTE: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero***



I just finished reading David Maraniss' superb biography about "*El Magnifico*" Roberto Clemente, published in 2006 by Simon & Schuster, and which made the *New York Times* Best Seller List. This 354-page work is well-researched and adeptly organized, Maraniss' graceful telling of the Clemente story making this an easy and worthwhile read.

You may recognize Maraniss' name as the author of what I think may be the best sports biography of all-time, *When Pride Still Mattered*, the artistic and monumental unveiling of the life and times of Vince Lombardi. Perhaps because *Pride* was such a glorious read that I savored to the very last drop, I had extremely high expectations for *Clemente*. I wouldn't say that the book disappointed me, but I will

say that *Clemente* is a half-notch below *Pride* on the scale of great sports biographies. What the heck. Looking at Rembrandt's second-best painting is still pretty good stuff.

If you plan on reading *Clemente*, stop here. If it's not on your radar screen or if it's not realistic that you'll likely get to it in this lifetime, read on, as I would like to share with you a few of the highlights.

Clemente was the first major league superstar from Latin America. He was born on August 18, 1934, in the rural barrio of San Anton, in the Carolina region of Puerto Rico, about twelve miles to the south and east of San Juan. His parents were Melchor and Luisa Clemente. The household included four siblings and two step-siblings. The Clemente home served as a restaurant of sorts for the sugarcane workers in the area. Clemente's father Melchor worked as a sugarcane cutter.

According to Maraniss, young Roberto Clemente was pensive and intelligent, and had his own way of doing things. He was not one who could be rushed, and wanted to know how and why. His most common phrase was, "Momentito, momentito," when he was interrupted or asked to do something. He said this so often that one of his cousins started calling him "Momen," and this stuck as Clemente's nickname throughout his boyhood.

Clemente was obsessed with baseball from a very early age. Baseball was the primary team sport on the island, having reached Puerto Rico from Cuba even before the Marines stormed the island in July 1898. Roberto's brother Matino was reputed to be the best ballplayer in the family, but came along before the integration of professional baseball, and had his career cut short by service in the Korean War. Young Clemente followed Winter League baseball in Puerto Rico religiously, in a place where the loyalties were divided between the San Juan Senadores (Senators) and the Santurce Cangrejeros (Crabbers). Although Negro League legend Josh Gibson played for Santurce in the early years, followed by Roy Campanella and other stars, Clemente grew up rooting for the Senadores, and he worshipped their graceful outfielder, Monty Irvin.

When the 1952 Winter League season began on October 15th, Clemente found himself playing for the Cangrejeros, who signed him for \$40 a week. Clemente was barely 18 years old and still in high school at that time. Less than a month later, the Brooklyn Dodgers held a tryout at Sixto Escobar Stadium, and on hand for the tryouts was one of the top scouts for the Brooklyn Dodgers, Al Campanis. In his official Dodger scouting report, Campanis ranked Clemente highly and reported that he had all the tools and "likes to play." Campanis later called him the best free agent athlete he had ever seen.

After the Dodgers eventually signed Clemente to a contract, they sent him to their Triple A club in Montreal for the 1954 baseball season, to the place where Jackie Robinson once played to prepare for his breaking of the color barrier. Clemente frequently sat the bench that season while lesser athletes, such as Don "Popeye" Zimmer, played. Evidently the Dodgers wanted to season Clemente slowly, and without exposing his talents to the outside world in fear of losing him to the Rule 5 draft. Unfortunately for the Dodgers, this is just what happened.

## The Mahatma Gets a Steal

On November 22, 1954, representatives of the sixteen major league teams gathered at the Biltmore Hotel in New York for what was formerly known as the Major-Minor League Rule 5 Selection Meeting. This was the annual draft of minor league players who had not been protected by the big league clubs, with the order of selection for two rounds of the draft running from worst record to best. The worst record in baseball in 1953 belonged to the lowly Pittsburgh Pirates, or as *Life* magazine called them, *The Boy Buffoons of Baseball*. The Pirates were under the general management at that time of one of the most revered baseball men of the first half of the twentieth century, the "Mahatma," Branch Rickey, former sponsor of Jackie Robinson and architect of the Gashouse Gang in St. Louis and the Boys of Summer at Ebbets Field. However, when he came to the Pirates in 1950, after four decades of involvement in baseball management, many people thought that the game had passed him by. Still, many people believed that he was just what the Buccos needed to rebuild the franchise to its glory days in the early years of baseball. As recounted in *Clemente*, Red Smith, the dean of New York sportswriters, called Rickey "A giant among pygmies." As Maraniss described Rickey:

*He was cool and manipulative in his transactions, meticulous with his records, formal and pompous in his speech, stingy with his money, always curious and innovative, brutally sharp in his assessments, and interested equally in a player's psychological disposition and his ability to learn an elusive hook slide.*

One of the Mahatma's favorite sayings was that "Luck is the residue of design." Never did that saying ring more true than with the Mahatma's selection of *El Magnifico* in the November 1954 draft, who was the ultimate coup in his broader game plan of plucking talented young players from other teams.

## Mays and Clemente

Before suiting up for the Pirates in the spring of 1955, Clemente played in the same outfield as Willie Mays for the '54 Winter League Santurce Crabbers that were managed by Herman Franks, which also featured the scrappy young Zim at short. The batboy for that team did okay for himself as well, a gangly 16-year-old named Orlando Cepeda. The Crabbers ran away with the Winter League pennant with Mays hitting .395 and Clemente .344. The team that Zimmer called the greatest Winter League team ever assembled ended the season in mid-February by winning the Caribbean World Series, which was held in Caracas, Venezuela that year.

Clemente's career with the Pirates began modestly enough, as in 1955, his rookie season, he batted .255 with 5 home runs and 47 RBIs in 124 games with the parent club. As he matured and improved, so did the fortunes of the Pirates. In 1960, a year in which Clemente batted .314 and batted in 94 runs, the Pirates returned to the World Series for the first time since 1927, when they were demolished by the New York Yankees and its Murderer's Row of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Bob Meusel and Tony Lazzari. In 1960, it was again the Yankees who faced the Pirates in the Fall Classic, but this time the Yankee sluggers were Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris, Yogi Berra and Moose Skowron.

## The 1960 Fall Classic

The bookies rated the Pirates as 13-10 underdogs against the powerful Yankees, who had won their last 15 games of the regular season. Nevertheless, the feisty Pirates were not intimidated by them, as evidenced by this classic quote from their scrappy third baseman, Don Hoak:

*We'll fight 'em until our teeth fall out, and then we'll grab 'em with our gums.*

The 1960 Series could easily be a book in and of itself, but the upshot of it is that in the three games that the Yankees won in this Series, they outscored the Pirates by a composite score of 38-3, including a 12-0 pounding in Game 6. Despite these demoralizing numbers, the Pirates hung with the Yankees in the see-saw Game 7 at Forbes Field until Bill Maze-roski hit the most famous home run in World Series history off Ralph Terry in the bottom half of the 9th inning, propelling Clemente and the Pirates to victory.

To share all of Maraniss' rich passages from *Clemente*, I would have to have Linda almost regurgitate the entire book, so I will pick out just a couple of my favorites:

*More than simply another talented athlete, he was an incandescent figure who had willed himself to become a symbol of Puerto Rico and all of Latin America, leading the way for the waves of Spanish-speaking baseball players coming North to the majors. (p. 5)*

*The mythic aspects of baseball usually draw on clichés of the innocent past, the nostalgia for how things were. Fields of green. Fathers and sons. But Clemente's myth arcs the other way, to the future, not to the past, to what people hope they can become. His memory is kept alive as a symbol of action and passion, not of reflection and longing. He broke racial and language barriers and achieved greatness and died a hero. That word can be used indiscriminately in the world of sports, but the classic definition is of someone who gives his life in the service of others, and that is exactly what Clemente did. (p. 353)*

## The Tragic Plane Crash

Maraniss concludes his book with the tragic but fascinating story of Clemente's death in a plane crash on New Year's Eve in 1972, and it is here that Maraniss best shows his acuity at weaving together contemporary events to place *El Magnifico's* death in proper context. On December 23 of that year, a great temblor, registered 6.5 on the Richter scale, flattened 350 square blocks of urban Managua, Nicaragua, its capital city. For decades, Nicaragua had been under the control of the powerful Somoza family, the last in the line being Anastasia Somoza Debayle, who took power in 1967. This Somoza went to prep school on Long Island and in Washington, D.C., spoke fluent English, and was a member of the U.S. Military Academy, Class of 1946. He was also a close personal friend of one Richard Milhous Nixon, as was Howard Hughes, who was living in exile in Managua at the invitation of Somoza.

When the great earthquake hit, the reclusive Hughes was evacuated to England by his Mormon henchmen, while Somoza's sons engaged in some spectacular profiteering by seizing goods that were being shipped to Managua through various relief efforts around the globe, including two shipments that were the direct product of Roberto and Vera Clemente's tireless relief efforts in Puerto Rico. Because of his concern for the Nicaraguan people and his anger about the Somoza's detention of the relief goods, Clemente decided that he needed to accompany the shipment of goods to Nicaragua, knowing that his reputation in Latin America would prevent further thievery by the Somozas.

In his haste to chaperone the goods to Managua, Clemente rented a cargo plane and crew which were both unfit for service. The DC-7 craft which he rented was badly in need of mechanical work, and had not even been flown since being purchased by its shady owner/operator, Arthur Rivera, who was facing 66 transport violations with the FAA. The pilot hired by Rivera had his own problems, facing multiple FAA violations and having had only a couple of hours of sleep in the several days leading up to New Year's Eve. The load that was placed on the craft was unbalanced and overweight. The co-pilot was wholly unqualified on a DC-7. The die was cast.

Before leaving for Managua, Clemente had asked Orlando Cepeda and Manny Sanguillen and several other people to accompany him with the transport, but none of the people asked, save one, were able to go. The cargo plane left San Juan several hours late, in the early darkness of the evening, and even as the pilot was trying to get the bird off the ground, there were ominous noises coming from the engines. The craft dropped off of the radar screen being watched nervously by the air traffic controller, and plunged into the cold Atlantic Ocean, approximately a mile to the north and east of the San Juan airport.

All of the occupants of the DC-7 (four) were killed on impact, and despite extraordinary recovery efforts by the Coast Guard and many private companies and individuals, the body of *El Magnifico* was never found, and of his clothing and personal effects, only his treasured briefcase and a solitary sock was located.

The great Clemente was dead, only three months after getting his 3000th hit in his final at-bat. The Baseball Writers' Association took the extraordinary step of waiving the five-year requirement for an HOF vote, and Clemente was inducted in the Hall with more than 90% of the writers voting in the affirmative. And even though Tricky Dick was busy with his own personal problems—like trying to find out just how deeply Charles Colson and John Mitchell were tied into the Watergate break-in—he met with a contingency of Pirates players at the White House during the first week of January 1973 and paid a glowing tribute to the great Pirate right fielder. Whether Nixon understood that his pal Somoza was at least indirectly responsible for Clemente's death is something that Nixon apparently was not asked about at the celebration.

Clemente was 38 years old when his life was cut short. He probably would have played another two or three years if not for the tragic plane crash. Even though his natural career span was cut short, Clemente still painted a full canvas of Hall of Fame credentials: 18 seasons as a Pirate; the team record for most games played (2433), eclipsing the sturdy and steady Flying Dutchman (which led Clemente to joke, "Not bad for a hypochondriac"); a lifetime batting average of .317, ranking him 61st all-time; a regular season NL MVP

(1966); a World Series MVP (1971); two World Series titles (1960 and 1971); and something of which he was immensely proud, 12 consecutive Gold Glove awards, an unequivocal recognition of his status as the greatest right fielder of all time, he of the cannon arm.

Above all, Clemente was a proud, dignified man, unable to accept anything less than recognition as an equal in a time when many Americans still did not consider persons of color as equals. He had a tempestuous relationship with the press, and a sometimes touchy relationship with his managers, but in the end, Clemente commanded respect and admiration from all. As one of his fellow countrymen said of him, "What burned in the cheeks of Roberto Clemente was 'the fire of dignity.'"

### **MY BERMUDA TRIANGLE**

First things first, let me make it clear that I love my job. Other than being a baseball player, announcer or writer, or Scott Krause, I can't imagine anything I would rather be doing to make a buck in support of my family. I get to handle interesting cases, all of which are different, deal with interesting people, I have nice clients, generally speaking, and I get to cross-examine prevaricating plaintiffs. Not much to complain about.

But even good jobs have their moments. My most recent downer work experience came during my trip Wednesday and yesterday to Olympia, Washington, for a deposition of a radiologist, set for 6 p.m. on Wednesday night, July 16. Because it wasn't a critical deposition as far as my client in the lawsuit is concerned, I offered the deposition up to one of our litigation associates, thinking it would give him a chance to see the Northwest and would save me a trip away from home during a busy week. This was still the game plan until a week or two ago when a conflict prevented my associate from going, putting me back into the equation.

Because our family vacation to Seattle is set to begin tomorrow morning, I thought about simply staying over in the Emerald City for a couple of extra nights to save on the travel wear-and-tear, but I decided that it would be better to have two adults helping manage our four kids on the trip to Seattle. I also like being married to my wife, and this certainly influenced my decision to fly back yesterday instead of staying over. It was a bad decision.

### **Northwest—Worst Care In The Air**

The set-up for the bad trip was a new policy from one of my insurance company clients, which now requires us to go through their hand-picked travel agent to make all of our travel arrangements, including hotels, rental vehicles and airlines. Although I begged her not to do so, the kindly travel agent from Birmingham, Alabama, put me on Northwest Airlines for the flights to and from Seattle, which airline I consider to provide the "worst care in the air"; put me with Thrifty Rental Car for my vehicle instead of my dependable Hertz Gold Club; and housed me in the lovely Clarion Hotel at the Sea-Tac Airport, instead of a Marriot Courtyard, a Hyatt or a Hilton. Thus, the genesis of my Bermuda triangle experience.

The fun began with my flight from Omaha to Minneapolis on Wednesday morning. Although the flight itself was uneventful, to my immediate right sat Pungent Man, who apparently had not bathed for quite some time. To my immediate left was not just a crying

baby, but a screeching, eardrum-piercing screeching, baby. And directly behind me sat Howard Sprague and Emmett the fix-it man, engaged in a forty minute colloquy with Uncle Joe and Minnie Pearl (actual names Floyd and Bernice) about the latter's upcoming nine-day trip to Alaska, to include 20 to 25 frets about connections and transfers and details (Itchie would have been in his element). Hot, uncomfortable, wedged into the smallest envelope of space that would contain my body and caught between Stinky, Screechy and the Cornball Quartet, I pondered to myself where in the world I would *less* like to be at that moment on the plane, and there were not many: (1) cleaning out a port-a-potty by hand; (2) walking a mine-packed road in Kabul in 117° heat; (3) Sector 51 on a hazy afternoon; and (4) last place in the Hot Stove League. Ah, yes, the joys and glamour of work travel.

Fortunately, my flight to Minneapolis was fairly short and the ensuing flight to Seattle was passable. But then, I was soon to encounter the second leg of the triangle, Thrifty Rental Car.

### **The Blue Chip Club**

Since the insurance company is now making me use Thrifty instead of Hertz Gold to rent my cars, we at least decided to join the so-called Blue Chip Club, which should more appropriately be named the Cow Chip Club. Thrifty is apparently trying to mimic Hertz Gold and offer a no-wait car rental feature to its business travelers, but somebody evidently forgot to send the memo to the Seattle branch. There I found an entire staff of Thrifty workers, decked out smartly in white and blue, who had absolutely no understanding of their job duties. If you picked eight random people of any age off the streets of Cairo or Beirut or Hamburg, gave them no training whatsoever and didn't even tell them what their jobs consisted of, they could have met or exceeded the accomplishments of the dynamic Thrifty staff at the Sea-Tac Airport—which was to check my ID, watch me initial and sign the rental contract, and to see to it that my vehicle was washed and had me in it in 50 minutes or less. Fifty damn minutes it took for them to get me from the counter of the Blue Chip Club and into my vehicle. Of course, there were two other customers present, and I only counted nine Thrifty employees who were visible, so the challenges which faced these people were mastodonic. Complete incompetence aside, somebody did do a great job of training the Blue Chippers to smile and nod, and I've never had more "Have a nice days" tossed at me in such a short time span. If you're looking for good investments, I wouldn't look for Thrifty's stock to skyrocket up anytime soon.

### **The Clarion**

The third leg of my triangle was the exquisite Clarion Hotel at the Sea-Tac Airport. Eighty bucks a night. The best way that I can describe this seedy joint would be to call it a low-budget youth hostel. Dirty, disorganized, and run by unkempt 19-21 year-olds. The only good thing that came out of my stay here is that the restaurant closed at 10, too late for me after my evening deposition, and forced me to find safe and edible food elsewhere in the area.



## Another Dimension

With a 7 a.m. flight to catch on Northwest, I woke up at the Clarion at 5 a.m. yesterday morning, pleased that room had not been broken into and that I had not been killed or mugged. After getting to the airport and boarding my flight, it was only a matter of moments before our cheerful first officer informed us that there were mechanical problems on the plane and that they would let us know within ten minutes whether the plane could be repaired or whether they would have to put us on another plane. He didn't. For the next hour and a half, we received conflicting and confusing reports from the cockpit and from the flight attendants, at one point being told that we would be moved to another plane, and at another point being told that the repairs would be made, and quickly, and then we were eventually all ushered off the plane, and soon figured out that nobody affiliated with this airline had any idea whatsoever how the 300+ passengers would get from Seattle to their final destinations.

I have never before seen so many confused employees of one company all together at the same time. No, wait a minute, there was that visit to Thrifty the afternoon before. Anyway, the incompetence of the Northwest Airlines people associated with that flight was absolutely staggering. I actually had flight attendants asking me if I knew whether the repairs might be made and what time the plane might be leaving, apparently because it looked like I might have some knowledge about this subject. There is no question about why this crummy company is in bankruptcy, or was in bankruptcy, and will be in bankruptcy again, I assure you.

Eventually, and only through self-help measures, I was able to book a new flight home from Seattle on United through Denver, and my trip which was set to begin at 7 a.m. and to get me into Omaha at about 1 in the afternoon, finally ended when the United plane's wheels touched down at about 10:00 last night. My visit to the Bermuda triangle of incompetence, Northwest Airlines, Thrifty Rental Car, and the Clarion Hotel, left me feeling like I was in another dimension. With our family vacation to Seattle and British Columbia beginning tomorrow morning, I can only hope that I have taken the travel hit for the team during these past two days.

Not that my time at the airports the last few days was completely worthless. I finished *Clemente*, and got further along with *Heart of the Order*. I billed 30 to 40 hours of time. I got to do some great people-watching. There was this guy at the Minneapolis airport who looked like someone that I knew from television or the movies, but I couldn't place him. It bugged me to no end until I finally realized late last night that he had to be the lovechild of Woody Allen and Michael Caine, because he had exactly half of each of their features. Get that image fixed in your mind's eye.

## The Name Game, Revisited

Following up on U-Bob's hilarious schtick about bad names, I give you Exhibit A below as to why parents need to be careful about choosing their children's names.



**All-American:** Leonard Lipschitz, 52, of the Bronx went with the patriotic look in donning his flag-inspired outfit. By Robert Deutsch, USA TODAY

While the main problem with Leonard is his surname and not his first name, there comes a time when the family name needs to be changed, for the good of all involved. I am pretty sure that if Leonard Lipschitz had been named Larry Lipscomb or Larry Lips, he wouldn't have the need as a 52-year-old, to do this to himself.

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Did anyone see the player's poll in the July 7 edition of *Sports Illustrated*, providing their take on "Who has the best raw power in baseball?" While Ryan Howard was no surprise with a 31% vote total, the second highest numbers went to Wily Mo Pena of the Nationals, who out-tallied A-Rod, Vladdy and Prince Fielder. If Pena has such power, why the heck

does it so seldom show itself in terms of home runs and RBIs? A little food for thought to end this edition.

Because of the aforementioned family vacation, I will be out of the office until July 28, and will have infrequent access to a computer. However, rest assured that Linda will pester Screech to whatever extent is necessary to insure the posting of his *Butterfly Blessings* next week.

Best regards.

Skipper