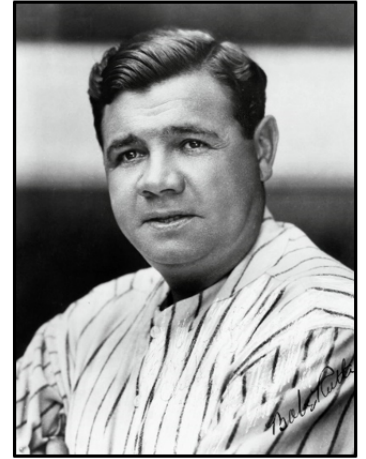




Babe Ruth

7-time World Series Champion
Career Batting Average: .342
Career Home Runs: 714
Career Pitching Record: 94-46
Career ERA: 2.28
1st in All-Time slugging percentage: .690
1st in All-Time OPS: 1.164



2019 Campaign

Edition No. 6

April 12, 2019

Lads:

Thanks again to each and every one of you for taking the time and making the effort to get to The Draft two Sundays ago for our nearly unfathomable 35th Hot Stove League season. Once again, it was a fantastic day, and so very good to spend time with the twelve of you.

Per usual, there were lots of great lines uttered at The Draft, but the hands-down winner was Stretch's plaintive question to Shamu:

"So were you doing a lot of running before, Chuck?"

which was in response to Sir Charles' curious explanation for undergoing his upcoming hip replacement surgery. The slight tone of incredulity coming from the mouth of Stretch is probably what made it such a great line. Delivery is everything.

Anyway, without further ado, I provide you with my almost-annual April assessment of The Draft, customarily known as

SKIPPER'S PICKS 'N' PANS

MONARCHS:

- Strength(s):** Peachy Infield (**IF**) with Freeman and Donaldson at the corners, Machado at short and Sanchez behind the plate.
- Weakness(es):** Other than the Fish, the **Monarchs'** Outfield (**OF**) is like Screech as a young teen: suspect.
- Best in Show:** Jose Berrios in the 5th was flippin' brilliant.
- Most Senior Moment:** Selecting the metastatic Machado in the 3rd was just wrong.
- Predicted Order of Finish:** **4th**
- Skipper Sez:** Heavy was the head that wore the crown.

CHIEFS:

- Strength(s):** Starting pitching (Sale, Kluber, Greinke, Severino and Gray) is solid gold.
- Weakness(es):** **OF.** Sure, Mookie will get him some points, but the rest of this band of idiots is as disgusting as Seaworthy (B.T.'s mustache) after a bowl of clam chowder.
- Best in Show:** If he's healthy, picking Corey Seager in the 5th was most astute, and will be a dagger through my heart all season.
- Most Senior Moment:** Chris Sale in the 2nd round. After a career year, it was foolhardy to expect a repeat. His current 0-3 record and 9.00 ERA attests to that.
- Predicted Order of Finish:** **6th**
- Skipper Sez:** If pitching is everything, the **Chiefs** may be better than 6th, but it looks like a down year for this once proud champion.

REDBIRDS:

- Strength(s):** **CF** (Yelich and Pham) and catcher (Realmuto).
- Weakness(es):** Other than Syndi, Jim Ed's starting pitching staff is, like his favorite hunting vest, full of holes.
- Best in Show:** The aforementioned Syndergaard in the 3rd was real nice.

Most Senior Moment:	Snapping up Acuna Matata in the 2nd was, like too many of his deer hunter shots, premature.
Predicted Order of Finish:	8th
Skipper Sez:	While they're off to a hot start, this will not be the year of the Redbird.
WAHOOS:	
Strength(s):	SP. With Scherzer and Nola at the front end of the rotation, PAwesome's pitching will be top drawer.
Weakness(es):	OF. With Castellanos, "Finding" Nimmo and Ahhh-Choo as his starters, there's only one way to describe this outfield: <i>They suck.</i>
Best in Show:	The <i>Story</i> of this team is Trevor at short, a terrific 2nd round pick.
Most Senior Moment:	Joey Votto in the 4th. What year is it, anyway, 2008? Next year, think <i>Veto</i> , not Votto.
Predicted Order of Finish:	3rd
Skipper Sez:	While PAwesome picked a pretty forgettable team on Draft Day, we all know he will devote 23/7 to coaching these boys up, even if it means another year of BIF mismanagement.
BEARS:	
Strength(s):	Starting IF is impressive, with Bregman, Baez and Rizzo going 1, 2, 3 in SloPay's draft order.
Weakness(es):	OF. See comments about Wahoos' OF above. Ditto.
Best in Show:	Getting Ben Zobrist in the 23rd round was a beautiful thing. The dude can rake.
Most Senior Moment:	Wasting a 5th round pick on the Chris Brown-ish (of <i>he slept wrong on his eye fame</i>) David Dahl was ridiculous. The dude is always hurt, most recently with a "core" injury, whatever that is.
Predicted Order of Finish:	5th
Skipper Sez:	Pitching staff is too suspect for this team to move up from its 5th place finish last year, although SloPay will work the waiver wire like no other. His recent pickup of

some guy named Nick Margevicius is proof positive of that.

BUMS:

- Strength(s):** Starting **IF** with Chappie, Schoop, Merrifield and Smoak could be sneaky good.
- Weakness(es):** Other than J.D. in left, the **Bums'** outfielders are, well, *bums*.
- Best in Show:** Mattie Chapman in the 5th was prescient. Magpie really mowed my grass on that one.
- Most Senior Moment:** An aging Verlander in the 2nd round may prove to be unfortunate. Magpie will have to hope that he is a Warrior like Chelsea, and not an anti-Warrior like himself.
- Predicted Order of Finish:** **1st**
- Skipper Sez:** I can't exactly put my finger on why, but I just think this is a very good team, solid up and down.

BLUES:

- Strength(s):** Deep starting pitching, above average infield.
- Weakness(es):** **OF** is far from spectacular, and the **Blues** are thin at Relief Pitcher.
- Best in Show:** Kyle Freeland in the 14th was a head turner. Can't believe he was still available that late.
- Most Senior Moment:** Reynaldo "Rocket Fuel" Lopez in the 13th was regrettable, as evidenced by his current 12.15 ERA.
- Predicted Order of Finish:** **9th**
- Skipper Sez:** Man Walking Dead's squad drops two positions from 2018. Sorry, Stretch.

SKIPJACKS:

- Strength(s):** Starting **IF** is serviceable, with Gurriel, Altuve, Segura and Turner.
- Weakness(es):** **OF** (Dickerson, Blackmon and Conforto) is patchier than the top of Itchie's ever-more glistening pate.
- Best in Show:** I love Walker Buehler in the 4th. A steal.

Most Senior Moment: Charlie Blackmon in the 3rd. Just as every one of his former bosses once said of Itchie, "His future is in the past."

Predicted Order of Finish: **12th**

Skipper Sez: Don't be mad, Itchie. Just because you're retired and have 50 hours a week to devote to the Hot Stove League, doesn't mean that you're good at it.

SENATORS:

Strength(s): **OF.** With Harper, Haniger, Soler and Meadows, this one is a no-brainer.

Weakness(es): Hard to see any, but let's go with third base, staffed by Longoria and Brian Anderson.

Best in Show: Many to choose from, but let's go with Austin Meadows in the 15th. Woo-woo.

Most Senior Moment: 7th round. Okay, maybe Craig Kimbrel is destined to pitch in Japan this year.

Predicted Order of Finish: **7th**

Skipper Sez: Just like the Jeffersons, the **Senators** are "movin' on up."

CUBS:

Strength(s): Starting infield (Ramirez, Lindor, Rendon) is fabulous.

Weakness(es): Starting **OF** (Upton, Benintendi, and Polanco) is very un-Snicklerish.

Best in Show: Nelson Cruz in the 11th was at least petty larceny. The guy could hit 30 home runs in a body cast.

Most Senior Moment: Waiting until the 8th round to draft a starting pitcher, and then picking David Price as your ace, was ridiculous. Doesn't Shamu know that pitching is everything in this league?

Predicted Order of Finish: **10th**

Skipper Sez: A new hip will get him back to running his usual 50-60 miles a week, but it won't do anything for the placement of this team. You're staying put, Shamu.

TIGERS:

- Strength(s):** Starting pitching is super deep (Snell, Kershaw, Hendricks, Lester, Arrieta, Roark), but not at the expense of a strong infield.
- Weakness(es):** Other than the Judge in right field, the **OF** is nothing to brag about.
- Best in Show:** Blake Snell in the 4th was a bargain.
- Most Senior Moment:** Kris Bryant in the 2nd was probably a tad early, and the guy may be damaged goods.
- Predicted Order of Finish:** **2nd**
- Skipper Sez:** I really, really like this team. No kiss of death intended, Big Guy.

TRIBE:

- Strength(s):** **OF** is above average, with Hoskins, Springer and Gallo.
- Weakness(es):** Starting pitching is a huge question mark, with Underbelly inexplicably waiting until round 7 to draft a starting pitcher.
- Best in Show:** Give me a moment here. Okay, let's go with Fernando Tatis, Jr. in the 23rd. The guy could be lights out, but it may be a year early.
- Most Senior Moment:** Waiting until round 7 to draft starting pitching.
- Predicted Order of Finish:** **11th**
- Skipper Sez:** Underbelly's charges are off to a hot start, but they will prove to be a flash in the pan.

BOMBERS:

- Strength(s):** Starting pitching. Paxton, Strasburg, Darvish and Bumgarner are a Formidable Four.
- Weakness(es):** **IF**. Although Bellinger is off to a rip-snorting start, the rest of the **Bombers'** infield is forgettable.
- Best in Show:** Kris Davis in the 3rd was the touch of Midas.
- Most Senior Moment:** Yasiel in the 6th. You have to love the guy's spirit, but he's just not that great, and he's on a horrible team.
- Predicted Order of Finish:** **League Bowels**
- Skipper Sez:** Sorry, Mouse, I'd like to say it ain't so, but it is.

The above and foregoing is in good fun, and I hope that there are no hard feelings. Remember, it's the next generation who are the "snowflakes," not our rugged regime.

OPENING DAY IN OAKLAND

In year 17 of our journey, and with Brother Stretch in tow for the third year in a row, the Ernst lads experienced Opening Day this season in Oakland, where the Athletics hosted the Angels. Our junket actually began in Las Vegas on the Wednesday evening before Opening Day, where the Ernst "yoots" were introduced to yet another vice by their loving dad: Blackjack. Unfortunately, Itchie was nowhere in sight, so the lads couldn't see firsthand just what a sickness this gambling thing can evolve into.

Although Oakland Alameda Coliseum isn't situated in the prettiest of neighborhoods--potentially the understatement of the year--once inside, it was a great place to be on Opening Day, as much as any other ballpark.

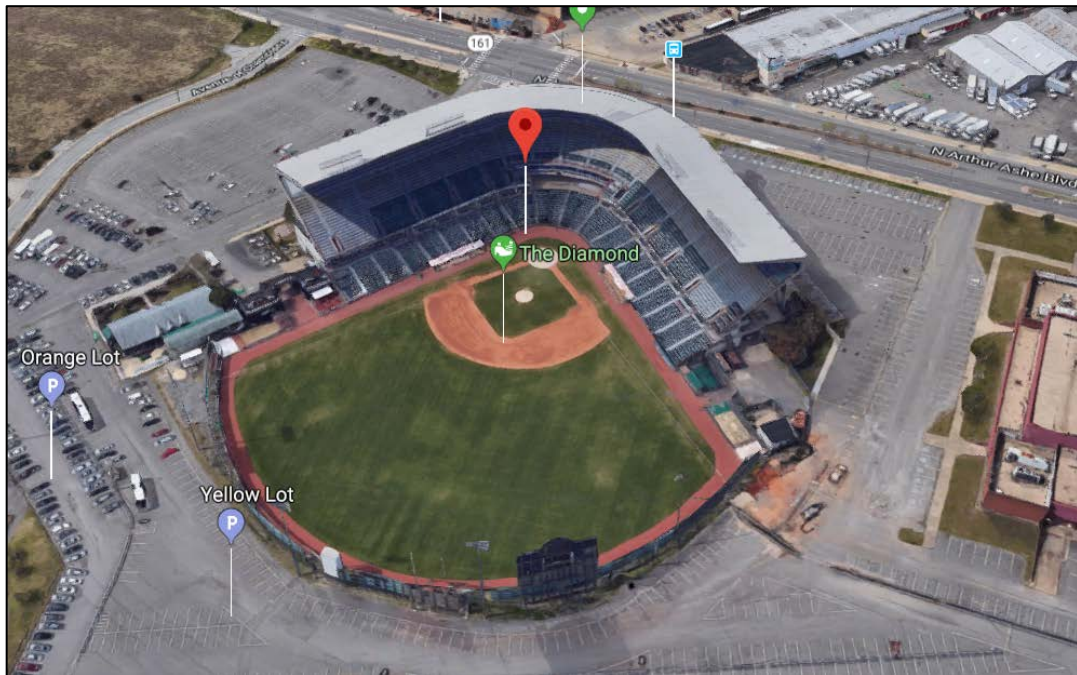
On the Thursday afternoon Opening Day game, we saw an efficient Mike Fiers no-hit the Angels for 4-1/3 of his six innings, leading the Athletics to the 4-0 whitewashing of the Halos, in a crisp 2-hour 18-minute game. We also got to see home runs by the *enfuego* Kris Davis and the less hot Marcus Semien.

Oh, and there may have been a few beers consumed before, during and after the game. All in all a fantastic day at the ballpark with the Ernst boys and our Beloved McBlunder.



A DIAMOND IN RICHMOND

During work travels this past week, I had a chance to catch an Eastern League contest between the Richmond Flying Squirrels, an affiliate of the San Francisco Giants, and the Bowie Baysox, a farm club of the Orioles, at a ballpark simply named "*The Diamond*." Pictured below, The Diamond was built in 1984 for the Richmond Braves, and is located about three miles outside of downtown Richmond, right along Interstate 95.



Constructed of tons and tons of exposed concrete, both from a distance and up close The Diamond looks more like a NASCAR venue or a college football stadium than a minor league

baseball park. But no matter, it was still a darned good place to watch a game on a beautiful Tuesday evening in 75° spring weather in Richmond.

For nine bucks I was able to purchase the cheapest ticket in the house, General Admission, and with The Diamond only about 25% full, I was able to sit wherever I darned well pleased--the ushers being not nearly so militant as at some other venues I have known and loved. My initial seat of choice was in the family section up in the top tier, which allowed me to scout out the lay of the land for more optimal seating. Amidst a throng of excited and excitable youths who screamed and danced at the antics of the Richmond club's dancing dinosaur and its heroic Flying Squirrel mascot, Nutzy, I quickly realized that I was in the wrong zip code and soon moved down to a comfy and ideal spot just outside the third base bag, about ten rows back, and, with a nod to B.T., on the aisle. Plenty of room to spread about, not a single "Turk potential" to be concerned about. From this premier vantage point, I was able to watch an excellent brand of ball being played by these two AA clubs.

The starting third baseman for the Baysox was a strapping young stud by the name of Jonah Arenado, which my iPhone soon confirmed to be the 23-year-old younger brother of Nolan. Several batters later, young Preston Palmeiro stepped to the plate, and his appearance on the Jumbotron was all I needed to see to know that he was within the first degree of consanguinity of former Oriole great Rafael Palmeiro.



Later, when looking up young Palmeiro's statistical track record, I happened upon an internet article from last year which said that Rafael was making a comeback at the ripe old age of 53, and that he and his other, older son Patrick were playing on the same team together, the Cleburne Railroaders.



In the article, Rafael dispelled rumors that he was trying to make it back to the Major Leagues to “reset” the five-year clock on Hall of Fame eligibility. If that really was his goal, good luck with that. Aside from the fact that no 53-year-old has ever made a Major League roster on his own merits, I would think that any Major League team would avoid Rafael like the plague, given his previous and very public bold-faced lie about not ever using PEDs.

But I digress. There were some great baseball names on these two rosters (i.e., Brock Stassi, Gio Brusa, Hamlet Marte, Logan Webb, Hunter Harvey, Zach Pop, Jay Flaa, Rylan Bannon) and several former Major Leaguers on each of the coaching staffs, including Richmond Manager Willie Harris and Pitching Coach Glenn Dishman. The weather was perfect, the beer was cold, the peanuts were salty, and for about 7 innings (I confess, I left in the top of the 8th), if Kevin Costner had been sitting next to me at the game, I am quite sure I would have asked him that essential *Field of Dreams* question: “Is this heaven?” Well, actually, I didn’t need to, because I already knew the answer: *Heaven on earth*.

JOE LOUIS SAID

At a recent mediation, after our mediator came back into the room and told us that one of the plaintiff’s attorneys in the other room had been boasting and bragging about wanting to take the case to trial and stir up the jury to hand out a seven-figure verdict--which was reportedly said to be not uncommon in this lawyer’s practice--one of the elder statesmen in the room responded with what is perhaps the most quotable line ever uttered by Joe Louis:

“If you got to say you is, you ain’t.”

So true.

* * * * *

That's it for this issue, gentlemen. Keep the faith.

Skipper