



SPORTS. SOMETIMES THEY'RE JUST PLAIN FUNNY

By Kerry Schmidt 07-18-2004

Sports, taken so seriously by so many, has many funny sides to them if you are not so serious.

Since this is baseball season – yawn – this column will focus on some of the less renowned, but very entertaining aspects of the game. Whether quotes or actions, you gotta love em.

Two players alone could take up this entire space, but let's start with others.

John Kruk, now an announcer for ESPN, was known as

The Krukster" back in his playing days with the Phillies.

The All-Star Kruk was overweight and smoked like a chimney. In the locker room after a game, on a special kids promotion, one little girl saw him smoking and asked how an athlete could smoke.

"Sweetie," he replied, "we're not athletes, we're baseball players."

My other favorite Kruk moment came in an All-Star game. Randy Johnson was pitching and the first delivery to Kruk was a 98 mph strike. Kruk stepped out of the batters box, stared at Johnson, quickly jumped back in, swung the bat twice before Johnson could pitch again, and walked back to the dugout. "Hell, I couldn't hit that, so why waste time." Steve Lyons of the Chicago White Sox had his moments. Once, he slid into first trying to beat the throw, and accumulated a good amount of infield dirt in his britches. Not caring where he was, he undid his pants and they promptly fell down to his ankles. Women in the stands quickly pulled out dollar bills and started waving them.

Jose Canseco, the first steroid king back in the 80's, could hit home runs, but not much else. Playing right field, a fly ball was hit pretty deep. He backed up routinely to the warning track, reached up with his glove, and the ball promptly hit him square on top of his head and bounced 10 feet into the stands for a home run.

Former Mets manager Bobby Valentine got tossed by the umpire – not an unusual occurrence for Bobby. He went into the clubhouse, donned a Groucho Marx mask and came back to the dugout. He was tossed again.

Al, "The Mad Hungarian" Robowski, a pitcher for the Braves, virtually before every pitch, would walk off the mound, his back to home plate, and begin screaming at himself and thumping like a gorilla. He then would slam the ball into his glove and jump to the mound, glaring in at the hitter. More entertaining than the game.

Gaylord Perry, an All-Star pitcher and the ultimate inventor of the infamous spitball, spent time with eight or nine teams, so one day he came to the mound with a special jersey – bearing the names of every team he played for.

There are many more, but two players stand out so far they take the rest of this space. Speaking of space, there's Bill "Spaceman" Lee. When you read on, you will know why the nickname.

His catcher came to the mound once because Spaceman threw the wrong pitch. His catcher asked him what he was thinking. Spacey replied, "the 'cosmic snowball' theory."



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

In a few million years, the sun burns out and the earth is one giant snowball. When that happens, it won't matter if I get this guy out or not."

The media once asked him about mandatory drug testing. He said, "I've believed in it all along. All through the 60's, I tested everything there was."

Another time, questioned by his manager about his behavior, he said, "You have a right and a left hemisphere in your brain. The right tells the left what to do and (vice versa).

Therefore, only left-handers (as Lee was) are in their right minds."

Lee, who pitched from 1969-1982, once summed up his game. "All you have to do is sit on your ass and chew tobacco and nod at the stupid things the manager says."

Other Lee stories abound, but time sends me to the other all time goofball, Jimmy Piersall.

Now in fairness, Jimmy had a mental breakdown and was hospitalized for a time.

He once hit a homer, dropped his drawers and ran backwards around the bases.

He played 17 seasons, and while in Cleveland, he would go sit on top of the outfield fence and when the fans would say the men in white coats were coming, he'd yell back.

One time in Yankee Stadium, he got kicked out of the game. He promptly raced out to second base, did jumping jacks, then he ran out to the outfield monuments and sat down.

Among his other antics, he climbed the screen behind home plate and spread his arms like an airplane; he dropped his bat and imitated a pitcher's motion; left the batters box once and ran to first to whisper to his runner there.

And in the minors, when he was called out on strikes, he pulled out a water pistol and sprayed home plate, saying, "maybe now you can see it.

These are just a few moments on the lighter side of the game.

So remember, when you watch your team, it is just a game, one waiting to be made fun of.