



Some old stuff, some new stuff and some old new stuff.

By Kerry Schmidt 02-25-2007

As I have said, we are now in the darkest of times for sports. Football is over. The world has come to an end.

Some old stuff. For over 100 years, MLB opened their training camps this past week. So, for all you baseball purists, spring hopes spring eternal. Every team has a chance, except maybe the Cubbies, and they already are saying wait 'til next year.

So imagine all the hundreds of media that must get stories out of men stretching, spitting tobacco or sunflower seeds and putting icy-hot is another player's jock strap.

But there is one new – old stuff. The Japanese have once again invaded the US, this time in Boston.

And this time it was not done in secret. In fact, we paid them just over 100 million bucks to do so.

I'm referring to the Red Sox's signing of Japanese 26-year old super star pitcher, Daisuke Matsuzaka (His first name is pronounced "Dice-ke," so immediately his American nickname is Dice K, as in strikeouts, where he was very prolific.

But I will get to the "Dice K" later on. First I want to dwell on the absurd; the old, same oh, same oh.

Usually each year at spring training, the bored media mainly just hangs around and bellies up to the pig trough for all the free food and beverages. Then after they are half soused, they write some trivial stuff that no one really gives a damn about.

Not this year. It's back to the future for these "Cave Men" Gieco Guys.

I went to ESPN's and Sports Illustrated's web sites, among others, and, you know how when you type in what you want and it lists, for example, "1 of 885 hits."

Well, there is all the new stuff – new players on different teams, new managers, et al. But you would never know about any of "all that other stuff" unless you searched deeply into the net.

Once I saw Wednesday's USA/TODAY, from the front page to three full feature articles, what you got was Barry Bonds and steroids!

Wow, there is something we have never heard about before!

In fact, I Googled Bonds and steroids, and it told me there were 1,165, 387 hits. Yes, over one million stories on Bonds and his steroid issues.

Nothing new at all, except that he is out in the open at spring training, so, let's go talk to Barry about Steroids. Barry/Steroids. BS.

Regardless of what your beliefs and feelings are on this issue, does the "beating a dead horse" cliché come to mind?

When baseball is mentioned, about all we hear of is Bonds' roids.

A picture in the paper showed over 100 media vultures gathered around Bonds last week in Scottsdale, AZ.

And hardly a single question did not involve steroids. Yes, granted, there are all the old speculations on him, but the key word here is old. Who the hell cares about stories that have been told and retold for several years?



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Yes sireeeee, folks. These media types sure give us original stuff. Real scoops!

One account said that in 17 minutes, Bonds was asked over 100 questions on the steroid issue, from his alleged usage to the potential grand jury investigation on whether he committed perjury.

Not a single question on the health of the knee injury that had plagued him the last two seasons. Not a question on his assault of Hank Aaron's home run record.

The often surly Bonds was actually in a jubilant, light-hearted mood.

He and new pitcher for the Giants, Barry Zito, he of the \$126 million contract, showed up in T-shirts that Bonds had made up for the occasion.

On the back of each black shirt, emblazoned in Giants' bright orange, had the words, "Don't ask me... ask Barry." And each shirt had a big arrow on it, one pointing to the right, the other to the left. So, with Zito standing to the left of Bonds (As seen from behind), the arrow on Zito's shirt is pointing to Barry, and with Barry on the right, the arrow points to Zito.

He said he had planned this for some time. I like it.

Bring some humor to what the press thinks is life and death.

As reporters fell all over themselves with the questions, he simply said, "Let them investigate. Sic They've been doing it this long. I'm not concerned about it at all."

He added, "It's you guys talking. It's just media conversation. The same stuff, over and over. So, I'm not concerned about it. I'll leave it up to you guys to make those decisions."

Then when actual baseball talk was mentioned, mainly about his breaking of Hank Aaron's home run record, before he could answer the whens, hows, what would it mean, etc, he immediately was hit with the talk of the record being "tainted." And before he even had a chance to comment on that question, another intelligent reporter asked him if he thought Commissioner Bud Selig and Hank Aaron would be there. Shaking his head, he simply said, "Ask them."

Bonds ended the news conference when reporters continued to harp on the ongoing investigation. He said, "If you ever have any baseball questions, I'll answer them."

Now why would he end that? I mean, he (and the rest of us) has only heard this stuff 10 million times.

You notice I am not even commenting on the what he did/did not do. I don't care. I am simply stating how sick and tired I am of hearing the same OLD crap being rehashed again. Find something new to talk about, for God's sake!

Now on to the new/old stuff. Japan's second invasion.

Dice-K formally became a member of the Red Sox on December 13, 2006, when he signed a \$52 million contract.

Too bad he couldn't have gotten it done five days earlier. December 7 would have been a fitting day.

Along with the \$52 million contract, the Sox had to pay \$51.1 million to his former team, the Seibu Lions of the Japanese Pacific League. Hmmmm, a Japanese guy coming from the Pacific to invade America. Verrrrrrrry interesting.

The bidding for Dice-K came down to the Sox versus the Yankees, but somehow it was ruled by baseball that the Sox would get him. This despite that George Steinbrenner allegedly offered a zillion bucks as some kind of a bribe. Georgie? A bribe? Nah.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Dicey has been a real phenom in Japan. He started in the Japanese majors at 18, and over eight years he amassed a 108-60 record with a 2.95 ERA with 1,355 strikeouts in 1,402 innings and 204 games.

His fastball ranges from 145 to 154 kilometers per hour (hey, he ain't American). To Americanize him, that comes out to 90-96 mph.

He is said to also have a good splitter, changeup, slider, curveball and cutter (whatever the heck that is). And, he supposedly throws all of them from the same motion. In addition, he is working on a "gryoball." No I have absolutely no idea what that is. Nor apparently does he, since he says he does not throw one and that the pitch is really a myth.

The point here is that he is supposed to be pretty good.

Now, if you think there were a bunch of media around Bonds, imagine what throngs surrounded Dice. And cameras. Man, do the Nippons love cameras. It was said that over 30 TV cameras were present, as well as some 65 photographers, each of whom had 3-4 cameras.

I have never seen a nation of people so obsessed with cameras and pictures.

They were allowed into the locker room, and over 30 Japanese reporters immediately raced over to Dice-K's locker and began to take pictures. Many pictures. They made sure they got close ups of what clothes he wore to the ball park. They even took shots of his underwear. BANZI, baby.

And his sun glasses. Many more pics.

The next day, in the Japanese papers, which, according to the Japanese press, had a record number of readers, you got all the juicy details of: how many times he stretched and how; how fast he jogged in the outfield; was the grass here different than in Japan. And they meticulously counted the number of sit-ups he did. True! And a big argument ensued. Most said he did 25, but others said it was 26, thus he did one more than the American players. Thus the excited reporters asked how many he did, he said he didn't count. Then the happy reporters smiled and bowed and said "ah so" about 15 times.

Dice man does not speak any English, so he travels with his own interpreter.

One of the most important questions he was asked concerned his athletic supporter, AKA, jock strap. That's right. They wanted to know if he brought his own from Japan or if he used the American jewel holder models.

Dice enthralled the Japanese press when he told them he was not wearing a jock strap that day. You would have thought he had given a solemn message from Buddha. The press chanted and bowed and laughed and seemed to feel that their day was now complete as the holy one had just delivered them to the promised land.

In Japan, Matsuzaka is as near to an immortal as any human can get.

You can go to a Japanese sports web site (try Nippon Suatzo.com). I have no idea what they said about Dicey, since I could not read it, but I called my deceased father's wife, Kyoko, who is Japanese, and found out the readers learned what time he got up, when and how he brushed his teeth, what toothpaste did he use and, well, you get the idea.

One story covering his day from the time he awoke to when practice was over had over 20,000 words written. (This column is about 1700 words).



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Dickey seems to be taking it all in stride. I know I would if they gave me \$52 million. I wonder how much Sake that could buy.

And speaking of alcohol intake, Matsuzaka quickly ran afoul of MLB's standards that no player can endorse any alcoholic drink. In Japan, there is an ad showing him guzzling a cold Asahi beer. The ad will not run in America, but will be a big winner in Japan.

Especially if Dice K can produce a lot of K's for the Sox.

So, baseball is off to a rousing start. Bonds and steroids and the newest Japanese invasion. YAWN!

But if you must have some football, you can this weekend.

IF you have the NFL network, or go to NFL.com/combine, you can watch the combine workouts. Over 30 hours of air time, which started last Thursday can be your fix until draft day.

See how incredibly interesting sports can be this time of year.

Drink heavily.