



BAD TO BEST, BRETT TO BASEBALL, BETTING TO BUD

By Kerry Schmidt 07-20-2008

For once, there is/was a lot going on this past week. Some good stuff. Or not.

I gotta start with “What’s wrong with this story?”

I know the economy is terrible, the dollar is down, et al, but, oh God how can this happen?

Baseball is as America as apple pie. And Bud beer is as American as sports.

Anheuser-Busch has been the NO. 1 spender of sports advertising for the last 20 plus years. In

2007, they spent \$218 million. Sports accounts for two-thirds of Bud’s overall marketing.

And their Super Bowl half-time commercials always rank at the top, often better than the game!

So what happens when we woke up last week and found the Bud had been sold to a Belgium company! Hell, some of our newest sports stadiums and race tracks are bigger than Belgium, I think.

Bud is America’s beer. Bud is sports. Bud has league and/or team sponsorships in NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL (who), NASCAR and the PGA.

But showing that nothing is sacred anymore, for \$52 BILLION, InBev gobbled up our national brew! How could this happen?

Last time I heard anything about Belgium, they were being gobbled up by the Germans some 60 years ago. At least Germany is synonymous with beer.

And according to Tom Pirko of Bevmark, a beverage consulting firm, InBev is known for their cost and price cutting. “It is InBev’s modus operandi,” he said. He also adds that they focus on belt tightening, and thus predicts the company sports spending will be slashed “a third or more.” Note: I guess if we stop drinking beer, our belts will also tighten.

“We won’t notice much the rest of this year, but starting next year, we will see major changes” he says.

No more Bud for car # 24. No more Clydesdale horses. No more “This Buds for you,” and so on. I mean, we might as well get rid of hot dogs at baseball games, for God’s sake.

Remember the old saying, “Buy American, buy Bud?” How does “Buy Belgian, buy Bud” strike you? Yea, like a strike out.

Oh well, just shows that the almighty dollar runs EVERYTHING!

So, what is Belgium about? Well now, BUD beer, I guess.

I hope we boycott BUD.

Let’s move on to betting. Gambling.

America has been waging war for several years on the on-line, off-shore gambling places.

With the British Open this week, and the fact that Britain allows gambling, Lee Trevino, the old, great and very funny golf pro has this to say about that.

“Many dollars will be bet on the Open, and all of the winnings are taxed by the British government.”

“We gamble billions of dollars on all sports and stuff in this country, and the Internal Revenue Service doesn’t get a dime. Instead, they spend millions trying to catch these people.”

Hey, Lee, we can no longer claim America is smart.

Rep Jim A. McDermott, D-WA, is trying to change this loss of revenue. He simply wants to legalize – AND TAX – on-line gambling.

PriceWaterhouseCoppers, the giant accounting firm, said that based on their research, this would generate approximately \$40 BILLION for our government over a 10-year span.

This, instead of spending about 40 mil every year trying to stop a huge revenue source.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

No wonder our great country is no longer the almighty economic giant it once was. It has an overgrown case of stupid.

Wanna bet that bill by McDermott will pass?

The greatest time of the year is rapidly coming upon us. Yes, FOOTBALL is near! Yea!!!!

Most NFL teams will open training camps in a couple of weeks. So what are all the sports pundits saying about this season, who will win, whatever?

Nothing really.

All anyone is talking about is Brett Favre.

Will he play? Will he stay (with the Packers) or will he go, to Tampa or Minnesota or wherever? Early last week, Favre said he may “call their (Packers’ management) bluff,” meaning to show up at training camp and see if he is the penciled in starter or Aaron Rodgers is or what.

Also last week, the Pack filed “illegal tampering” charges against the Vikings, saying that Vikings’ offensive coordinator Darrell Befell had discussions with Favre that would violate league rules.

The Vikes are a perfect match for Favre. They have a great running game with last year’s rookie of the year, Adrian McPherson, good offensive and defensive line and a so-so secondary. But their really weak point is their passing game. They have some good receivers, but no decent QB. Big problem for GB. Vikes are in their same – NFC North – division.

GB’s options are the same. Release him, try to trade him or let him come to camp and they say he will have to compete for the starting job. Favre says he wants to be the guaranteed starter.

My position has not changed from last week.

I think he should keep his word and retire. I know that he leaves a young team that made it to the NFC Championship game last year, and is a solid contender this year, he loves the game, and, yes, he can still play.

But Favre will be 39 in a month or so, and, as I mentioned last week, what about Rodgers? This will be his 4th and final year of a \$40 million contract. Do you keep him on the bench for Favre’s last (maybe) year and pay him 10 mil to carry a clip board or pay Favre 14 mill to do that.

He has really put the Pack in a tough package.

I hate to see his image even dented.

He may love the game, but it is time. Don’t put his team in the same situation Montana did with the Niners.

Stay tuned.

Storied Yankee Stadium, at 85 years of age, hosted last week’s All-Star game.

Prior to the game, 49 of the greatest Hall-of-Famers were lined up at their old positions. What a moment.

I have always hated the Yankees, but the stadium is a museum. The odd, horse-shoe shape, as well as countless great moments, many other than baseball – see Joe Louis’s first-round KO of Max Schmeling, and to see it torn down after this year is sad.

One funny irony of the All-Star game. A Boston Red Sox player was the MVP in Yankee Stadium. That’s akin to, say, well, Brett Favre playing for another team, especially their arch rival.

The game set several records for time, KO’s, most number of really ugly players, along with a lot of boring stuff.

But since it was the end for “The Stadium,” it was OK.

I’ll finish with a bad-to-best story of the starting center fielder for the AL in the game, Josh Hamilton of the Texas Rangers.

Many of you may know his story.



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He was the overall No. 1 draft choice in 1999, by Tampa Bay.

He came out of Raleigh's Athens Drive H.S. (Raleigh, NC) with a blazing 97-mph fastball and, as many pro scouts cooed, the best, most powerful swing they ever saw. Within the next 12 months, as Rangers GM remembered, "It's amazing how many pro scouts (said), he's the best player they've ever seen."

Red Sox first baseman, Sean Casey, says, "I saw him in batting practice in spring training (back in 2000). He was hitting balls farther than anyone I had ever seen. I asked who he was." Hamilton was then just 18-years old.

Many said he could be one of the greatest players to ever play the game.

He was the kid who kissed his grandmother before every HS game and had never even had a sip of alcohol.

That changed. Immensely.

After a 2001 car accident where his car was rear-ended by a dump truck, he, at 19, suffered a lower back injury that would sideline him for a couple of months and, "gave me a lot of free time."

He spent that time at a crowd from a tattoo parlor. Bad move!

First thing he knew, he was "drinking Jack Daniels, smoking crack cocaine and taking every type of pill and drug I could get a hold of."

More injuries gave him more time off to hang with the wrong crowd.

For three years, he says, "I was never straight, don't remember much." He got 26 tattoos, many of which he did not remember getting.

He blew all of his \$4 million sign on bonus on drugs and alcohol.

In March of 2004, he was suspended for a year. More failed drug tests, and more suspensions.

His wife (he had two children during this time) threw him out of their house and his parents virtually gave up on him.

He hit rock bottom in late summer of 2005, when he awoke from a crack binge in a trailer with a half dozen drugged out strangers.

He had no place to go, so he finally went to his grandmother's house on October 5, 2005, and lay on her doorstep, looking for food. His once powerful body - 6'4", 235, had shrunk to about 180 pounds. He vowed that he would never use drugs again, and he has not done so for, as he said before the All-Star game, "33 months, two weeks and four days! But who's counting?"

He became a born-again Christian, and found mentors who helped him 24/7

Even today, Jimmy Noran, brother of former Reds manager, is his constant companion. He travels with Hamilton on the road, sleeps in a hotel room next to him, never gives him more than \$20 for his pocket.

He speaks openly of his "demons," and he talks to young kids on the evils of "doing what I did."

He laughs when opponent's fans yell chants at him, and says, "They can't even curse well."

He does not go out with his teammates on the road, to have a few beers, as many MLB players do on the road, but just with Noran. His teammates love him and understand why he has to do it his way.

After being sober for 8 months, in 2006 MLB let him back in. He originally signed with Cincinnati, then via trades, ended up with Texas in 2007.

He has torn the league up ever since.

In the home run derby at the All-Star game, he hit a record 28 HR in the first round. Many say that some of them went over 500 feet.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

At press time, he has 21 HR's (6th), 95 RBI (1st by 25 over No.2), is second in total bases and is batting .312.

His family is back, his life is on track, and he is, while happy, mostly he says he is blessed, because the demons are always knocking on the door, but he knows he has them beaten. "They'll always be there," he said, but that door is locked." He no longer has the sweat-soaked dreams. Being so open and honest about his problems, along with his great play and mighty HR's, he is a fan favorite, even on the road. Players love him.

He says he tried to get the tattoos off, but it was too painful, and decided to let them remain, as a reminder of "my stupidity and damaging (to his family) behavior."

Coaches say that had he not missed 3 ½ years, he would have over 250 HR's and well on his way to the Hall-of-Fame. But at barely 26, he may very well get there.

He says he knows he won't go to hell, "because I've already been there."

Always laughing, never denying an autograph or interview, his story is truly a bad to best one.

He added, that his success is important, not for him, but because it shows others that they can also come back. "The more successful I am, the more people will listen."

No matter which team you root for, or player, you have to love and respect Josh Hamilton. He did what so few have been able to do. Fall from the top to the bottom, then climb back to the top.