



## BIG BUCKS, BAD BUCKS: AND, GOOD STUFF TO BAD STUFF

By Kerry Schmidt April 12, 2009

MLB opened their 134<sup>th</sup> year of existence last week!

The National League was begun in 1876, and the American League joined the party in 1903.

In 2000, the Leagues officially became “Major League Baseball,” as the American and National Leagues, while still listed separately, are now one organization.

Geeze, who cares. Baseball has begun. Again. And, somewhere just before Christmas, the WS.

Obviously, baseball has changed dramatically since 1876!

Being simple minded and a bit off the wall, here is my summary of the major changes in MLB: Technology, steroids and BIG BUCKS.

Simple, really.

While researching the players roster for the Louisville Grays, circa 1876, most salaries listed were “undetermined.”

Only hint was OF/P, Jack Chapman.

His “estimated” salary was \$286 for the season.

MLB money has changed a bit since then!

According to MLB documents, salary for each player and team are reported.

A shocker: The Yankees have the highest payroll at \$201,449,189. And 63 cents.

The Florida Marlins bring up the rear with \$36,834,000.

To say that MLB is a business is like saying Jack Nicholson is a crazed skirt chaser.

Combine all 32 MLB teams, and you have a payroll of \$2,782,898,000!

Thus, several hundred steroid swingers combined make more than the GNP of many small countries.

The top 5 Yankees’ players make more than the total payroll of 23 other teams. A-Rod is tops at \$33 mil, not counting the 16.5 mil for his steroid bill and the operation to remove the lump of congealed steroids in his hip.

Thus, the Yanks haven’t gotten any bang for their bucks from him.

The two hot-shot newbies to the Bank of Steinbrenner, pitcher CC Sabathia and first baseman, Mark Teixeira, sucked big time on opening day.

Sabathia and his \$161 million gave up 6 runs before he was shown the door after just 4 1/3 innings. Loved his explanation: “I couldn’t get the fastball over the plate.”

Not quite true. He got it over the middle a few times and watched the ball disappear.

Teixeira? For \$20.6 million, he went hitless, 0-4, leaving 4 runners in scoring position.

His reaction? He laughed off the booing.

So, on opening day, the Yanks got a pitcher who gave up 6 runs in 4 plus innings and a hitter who was blanked. Gosh, I think that for \$341 million, they should have least tried.

As they all say, “screw ‘em, my contract is guaranteed.”

After four games, the Yanks and their 200+ mil contracts are 2-2, while the \$36 million Marlins are 4-0! Bang and no bang for the bucks.

More good MLB stuff.

In Toronto, opening day saw fans throwing empty alcohol bottles and other assorted goodies on the field. Must have thought it was a hockey game.

Thus, for games two and three, all alcohol was banned from the stadium.

But the worst part? The players’ clubhouses were also cleared of all booze! The players were very upset, and complained to their MLBPA.



# OFF THE WALL SPORTS

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I saw a picture in the paper of crew chief Ed Montague, my former brother-in-law, and he did not appear to be happy.

You know those Canucks. They love their beer.

You remember Sports Illustrated's April Fools joke back in 1985, when they wrote about Sid Finch, the "ole farm boy" who had a 100 plus fast ball and wicked curve.

Seems some media outlets are trying to pull another Sid Finch fast one on us.

Now they use the name of Stephen Strasburg. They say he is a 6' 5" gangly youngster, who has also has a 100 mph plus fastball and a wicked curve.

Sound familiar? Too good to be true?

Well, this one is for real!

Strasberg is a junior at San Diego State University. His fastball has been consistently clocked at 102 mph, and as one of many drooling scouts and agents add, "when he drops it down to mid 90's, the darn thing darts all over the place, really moves."

And yes, the same scouts, agents and his own pitching coach, Rod Filter, say "we put the super slow motion camera on his curve ball, and I swear it drops at least 8 inches just before it gets to the plate."

Hall-of-Famer Tony Gwynn, head coach as SDSU says "this guy is real. Or perhaps unreal, given what he can throw."

But he then laments, "The kid can't even go out to get a burger without being mobbed. They all want his autograph so they can sell it on eBay.

"It's been a strain," says Gwynn. "The kid is only 20 years old, and they treat him like a messiah. But in this game, they can build you up just so they can tear you down."

Some scouts and executives say his regular (98+ jumper) is "the best fast ball they've ever seen, and some go as far to anoint him as "the greatest collegiate pitcher of all time."

He is averaging nearly 2 KO's per inning and is 6-0 for SDSU, with an era of 1.39.

Gwynn does a good job of keeping him grounded.

"He's just an easy going kid, normal."

Like the time before a game, he just left the clubhouse, walked to one of the stadium hamburger stands, in full uniform, and orders a tri-tip sandwich. He pulls \$7 out of his pocket and buys it, saying, it's \$9 for the combo, but that's too much.

Then, with kids drooling and their fathers wearing T-shirts with his name on the back, he calmly goes back into the club house and eats.

Now he can't sign with an agent yet, but self proclaimed super agent Scott Buras is with a company that "advises" Strasburg, so most assume Buras will be his agent.

And, Buras, certainly seeing \$ signs for himself, says, "No draft pick has ever received more than a \$10.5 million bonus" (that was Mark Prior, 8 years ago, ironically called the best college pitcher ever, and is very good, but has missed the last two seasons due to injuries).

Boras' eyes light up again as he says, I've been watching the player draft for 35 years, and he's the best amateur player I've ever seen." Then he adds, "He's the real Sid Finch."

A more neutral George Karachigian, a White Sox scout, says, "You just don't see arms like this. I know I never have."

Last week at Petco Park (Padres' stadium), Strasburg pitched a 3 hitter over Cal State Irvine (ranked in top 10). Padres' right-hander Jake Peavy and Dodgers' CF Torii Hunter, who had an exhibition game scheduled afterwards, watched Strasburg, and Peavy just shook his head saying, "Unbelievable."

Let's just hope this smiling, regular Joe kid can keep away from the leeches that will try to surround him after this college season is over. Just maybe, Sid Finch will no longer be an April Fool's joke.



# OFF THE WALL SPORTS

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Well, March Madness is over.

Very few upsets, and North Carolina was clearly dominant. They won every tournament game by double figures, thus taking any real excitement out of the championship game.

But topping Carolina was the girls UCONN team. Not only did they match Carolina's double digit victories in the tournament, they went undefeated, 39-0, and every one of those 39 wins was by double digits.

Their average margin of victory in the tournament was 31 points!

With college hoops over, the NBA is nearing their playoffs. At press time, only 3 games remain for most teams.

The East has the real Beast this year in Cleveland, with LeBron James. They are on pace to set a home court season record (they are 38-1).

The second overall team is the Lakers, in the West. NOTE: Cleveland's only home loss was to the Lakers, who also beat Cleveland in L.A.

For years, the West has been dominant. But Cleveland has the top record.

Yet only three teams in the East are .600 or better. In the West, 8 teams are .600 or better.

Thus, pundits say, the West has had the toughest schedules, but if Cleveland keeps home court advantage until the end, James may truly be "King James."

Either way, the chances for a dream match-up for TV is ripe.

If the favored Lakers come out of the West, the media will have two great potential match-ups. A rematch from last year's title game with the Celtics – that rivalry goes back 30 years. Or perhaps even better, THE match-up between Kobe and King James, for all the gold. Could be a real exciting NBA finals this time around.

In the April 13 Sports Illustrated, they have a feature article on March Madness – at the high school level!

I won't go into detail, but it is a good, or bad, scary read.

Basically, what you have are a number of private schools that do recruit super players from all over the country to come play for their school.

Being privately funded schools, the same rules, apparently, do not apply.

And yes, the title game between the two winners of their own March Madness, they meet for the right to be crowned National Champions!

At the high school level.

The Findlay College Prep Pilots, (actually, Findlay Basketball) Prep, with an "enrollment" of 775 students, technically is not really a high school. In the Pilots unique "program," the players live together in a suburban Las Vegas mansion owned by wealthy Auto dealer Cliff Findlay (notice the name), a big UNLV booster. They often dine at fancy Vegas Strip restaurants. Oh, they do attend classes...at a neighboring Private School. So technically, Findlay Prep is not a "high school." Even after reading the story, I still can't understand quite how this happens, but it does, and the trend is about to explode.

Note. Some of Findlay Prep's own players got scholarships to UNLV. DUH!

Findlay Prep, like most of the other Uber-Private schools, travel as many air miles as some college teams. Findlay passed the 30,000 mile mark when they went to Bethesda, MD, to play perennial powerhouse Oak Hill of Virginia, for the "National High School Invitational" Championship.

Findlay Prep defeated Oak Hill, 74-66, capping a 33-0 season. Oak Hill finished 40-1.

Not bad for a "team" that has existed for only three years. Their record over that time is 65-1.

Now, not only do they recruit players, they can, and have, done so...in the middle of the season.



# OFF THE WALL SPORTS

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Prime example: Avery Bradley, who was the MVP in Findlay Preps' win over Oak Hill, transferred to Findlay from Bellarmine Prep, just a few weeks before the NHSI Tournament began.

Somehow, the "program" of the NHSI has not run afoul of NCAA rules, and, apparently, given the "escape clauses" on/of private schools – including some that are not really even "schools," all is legal, I guess.

Some high school coaches don't voice concerns, for fear of alienating powerful forces like ESPN and Nike. Likewise, the National Federation of State High School Associations – that darn name is so long they get mixed up even trying to go after the NHSI. They too do not wish to alienate the above, and other powerful promoters, et al.

Well, given the ever search for The Holy Grail of basketball, I guess this is what it is coming too. Hey, a team in Brazil's top soccer league is giving its players Viagra when they play at altitude, to improve their circulation.

Hmmmm, I know you can't touch or strike the ball with your hands, but an extended..... oh, never mind.

Unfortunately, by the time you read this, the HBO special of last night will be over. However, it will soon be sold in DVD and Blue-Ray format.

It is a 90 minute special on what just about everyone calls "The greatest fight of all time," the "Thrilla in Manila.

For you youngsters, on October 1, 1975, the third and final bout between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier.

Dr. Ferdie Pacheco, long-time trainer, handler of Ali, said, "It was the closest I've ever been to seeing somebody kill somebody."

As brutal as some of the Christian/Lions days, both fighters dealt, and took many savage blows. Frazier, in round 14, left eye closed and right eye nearly blind, absorbed "a beating of the head like I have never seen," said Pacheco. Ali landed one punch that knocked Frazier's mouth piece into the 7<sup>th</sup> row.

But Ali himself was badly damaged. "Out on his feet," Pacheco said.

Ali was about to quit, but Frazier's corner would not let him come out for the final round, even though Frazier, the incredible warrior, wanted to try.

Most admitted that if it had gone the full 15, Frazier may have suffered permanent, severe injuries. But had he come out of his corner, ready to go, Ali may well not have.

By far, the greatest heavyweight fight of all time.

For any Ali, Frazier or fight fan, this is a MUST see.

I happen to have a previously released DVD of the fight, but I surly will watch (last night's) updated version.

With some of my best single malt, of course.