

Editorial

Home runs and the front page

There is no denying the importance of the latest events covering the front pages of our nation's newspapers. After all, shouldn't the latest news on "White House in Crisis" be made public to all? Who would think otherwise?

But like many, we're ecstatic Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa have successfully pushed the "Bill loves Monica" soap-opera-sex-saga to the inside pages of the papers for more than one day.

For the past who knows how long, all there was to see on the cover of the paper was the latest news update on the events inside the oval - sorry - oval office. Granted, certain events came along which jumped ahead of the Clinton scandal, but the next day it was right back to "so how many trips did Monica make to the White House for a little puff on the presidential cigar?"

Yet McGwire and Sosa have stood their ground and fought for their well-deserved coverage. Big Mac took the first honors with his 62nd home run, and well he should have. For a glorious three day respite, the St. Louis Cardinals' slugger led the news.

Then the Independent Council's office, under the divine leadership of Kenneth Starr, decided to spoil the parade by submitting the 36-box document describing in detail the leader of the free world's own version of sex, lies and mystery stains. All of which can be found on the web at caught@mypanisdown.com for those who have no life whatsoever - or at least little enough to read pornography laced with legalese.

But baseball's biggest hitters would not be denied. Sunday afternoon set the stage for Monday's papers after Chicago Cubs' home run king hit two blasts out of Wrigley Field to become the second man to hit 62 home runs in a single season.

Stop for a second and think about what has taken place here. Men playing a game has become more important than a woman playing with "El Presidente."

Funny thing happened on the way to Gallup, Inc., though. Clinton has managed to remain popular. He's our leader; things are going well; we'll back him as long as we can. But McGwire and Sosa are the real heroes. Not because they're overhyped athletes, but because they're good people.

McGwire kissed his son, Matt, after his 62nd. Later he said, "He didn't say anything. He didn't have to, I could see it in his eyes."

Sosa is simply happy to be where he's at. The guy used to take a milk carton, slice it in half and use it as a glove. He hasn't forgotten that. "God bless America. I love this country," he's said more times than Monica visited Bill.

Where else in the world can athletes who hit leather-covered balls over a fence with a wooden stick make more waves in the "important news" pool than a president who could soon be impeached for leaving his mark, so to speak, on a service-oriented intern? Thankfully enough, simple, basic and decent human beings can still push the filth off the front page in this country.

Amen, Sammy.

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Time slips filled out with crayons

by Crispin Sartwell

My daughter Emma is ten. She works full time.

The school year is longer this time around, and the school day too: 8:15 to 4:00. Last year she had recess once a day; now it's a half hour on Thursdays. She's at work more than I am.

Don't get me wrong: her school is excellent. But we have entered the era of educational overkill. There might be some excuse for this if quantity translated into quality, if our kids were likely to be significantly better-educated if they were barraged by more information or strapped for longer periods to their seats and told to be quiet.

But first of all, I doubt there is such a correlation. Emma can only sit still for so long and can absorb only so much American History, especially considering the eye-glazing mediocrity of the textbook, "America Will Be."

These days, more and more kids, especially boys, are diagnosed with attention deficit or hyperactivity "disorders." They can't sit still long enough to absorb their dose of Ritalin. But here's a theory: Maybe the problem isn't the boy but the institution. Maybe the problem isn't that they won't sit still but that they are being made to sit still for unnaturally long periods.

Some school systems have eliminated summer vacation, or are talking about it. Several have dumped recess entirely.

These developments suggest we have fundamentally misapprehended what childhood is. Childhood does not exist in order to pro-

duce useful adults. Childhood is not a barrier, something to be overcome in the quest to manufacture more and better lawyers or computer technicians. No less than adulthood or old age, childhood is a phase of life that exists for its own sake. In fact, if I had to choose, I would say adults exist for the sake of making children rather than the other way round.

Childhood is under attack from well-meaning fiends who think that every square foot of wall space and

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every second of television time should be plastered with improving messages or important lessons. Tell old Pharaoh: Let my babies go.

Children learn by playing. They learn by cuddling. They learn, for God's sake, even by vegging out in front of the tube. Let them relax a little. And if they're not learning all the time, that's alright too. A child who has forgotten how to relax is a miserable creature, even if she ends up being productive in the global economy of the twenty-first century. Emma loves to learn and is doing fine academically. But her day features almost eight hours of school and an hour of homework. She thinks it's too much, and I agree with her.

Childhood has become relent-

lessly goal-oriented. Everything is leading up to the SATs or something. But a life lived only for a goal is miserable and meaningless. What gets you to the goal — that is, your life — is just in the way. You'd like to get it over with.

If you achieve your goal you're satisfied for a moment. Then what? Find another goal, I suppose, and hop back on the hamster-wheel of life. And if you live only for goals and don't achieve them, your life is a failure. We inundate our children with the obviously false cliché that they can accomplish whatever they try to accomplish. But as we all know, failure is always a possibility, even for good people who try.

A truly worthwhile life is a life devoted to the process, a life immersed in the moment, though also moving in a certain direction. A life like that is worthwhile whatever the future brings. If you are so absorbed in a projected future that you never fully experience the present moment, you are lost.

So ease up. Let the children play. Heck, let the grown-ups play too: we're all working too hard. Here is my platform for radical education reform: Remove a month from the school year. Have two recesses every day. Start school at 10 so the kids can sleep in. Destroy all standardized testing.

For once, don't think about what your children will be doing in ten years. Think about what they're doing today.

Crispin Sartwell teaches communications for Penn State Harrisburg's humanities department

The Capital Times

Daniel A. Zehr

Matthew J. Bowman

Editors

Brad Moist
Assistant Editor

Christine Downs
Business Manager

Kim Glass
Photographer

Lauren Capitani
Layout

FRED
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Staff / Writers / Contributors