

Hot Dogs, Apple Pie, Mom and Fantasy Baseball?

By Barry J. Hicks
Capital Times Staff Writer

For two straight years, Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa captivated a nation in pursuit of a seemingly unreachable single-season home run record.

While most baseball fans were excited to see these players make a run at a 37-year-old record, owners of teams with names like Hudock's Hustlers and Franchise Pierce were downright ecstatic for other reasons.

It wasn't the race for 61 or 70 home runs that had these guys jumping up and down in front of their television sets, it was the fact that they were winning the home run category in their respective fantasy baseball leagues week in and week out.

Fantasy baseball, or rotisserie baseball as it is sometimes called, has been around for years.

Until recently, leagues usually formed between groups of friends or co-workers who were interested in putting their baseball knowledge to the test.

But, with the growth in popularity of the Internet, involvement in fantasy baseball is at an all-time high.

In a July 27, 1998 article in *Business Week*, Ronald Grover estimates that over 400,000 people are involved in Internet fantasy baseball leagues.

This fact, combined with the thousands of fantasy baseball leagues outside of the Internet, shows that fantasy baseball has found a home in American sports society.

Fantasy baseball is a game in which the owners/competitors form teams by picking Major League Baseball players, and compete against each other using the players' actual statistics.

The 2000 pre-season edition of Tuff Stuff's Fantasy Baseball Guide gives a summary of what most fantasy baseball leagues' rules look like.

A league is usually made up of 10 to 14 teams. Each team has an owner who will draft actual Major League Baseball players to their team. Team owners must use the players in their real-life positions.

The draft is set up like an actual Major League Baseball draft. The order each team will pick in respective rounds is decided by a random drawing of numbers.

For example, Bill Hudock, owner of Hudock's Hustlers, might get the fifth pick in round one and the seventh pick in round two.

There are 24 rounds in the draft. Each team drafts twenty-four players: five starting pitchers, three relief pitchers, and two players for each of the remaining positions. Each team has three starting pitchers, two relief pitchers, and one player at each of the other positions.

A designated hitter also starts but can be any player at any position. The rest of the team spends the week on the bench. The rankings of each player are given in a different section of Tuff Stuff's Fantasy Baseball Guide based on previous years' statistics and pre-season predictions.

Scoring is done like this: There are five hitting categories and five pitching categories: batting average, runs scored, home runs, runs batted in, stolen bases, wins, strikeouts, earned run average, saves, and WHIP (walks + hits/innings pitched.)

Every week, each team plays against the rest of the league. For example, if there are 12 teams in a league, and Hudock's Hustlers finish first in runs scored, they will get 14 points for that category.

If Franchise Pierce finishes second in that category, they will get 11 points. The third place team will get 10 points, and it goes down the line.

Since scoring is done for each category, a balanced team of speed, power, and pitching is very important. A score of 95 usually wins the week.

With two weeks left in a long baseball season, the teams with the four highest scores earn play-off spots.

The fourth team plays the first and the second team plays the third. The winners of those matchups compete for the league championship and a money prize, depending on the league's rules.

So what is it about fantasy baseball that makes it so popular? Jeffrey Kamys, president of Dr. Stats Fantasy Sports, has been in the Internet fantasy baseball business for the last four years and has thousands of users.

"With players' salaries skyrocketing, fans still look for a way that they can associate themselves with the game and the players. Fantasy Sports allows fans to feel like they are part of the game. The strategic elements of picking and choosing players provides fantasy team owners a level of involvement and competitiveness that

takes the game to a new level," Kamys said.

Owners are not forced to stick to the player rankings in their fantasy guides. Gut instinct and baseball knowledge go a long way on draft day and throughout the long baseball season as well.

Timely free-agent pickups and smart trades can take a last place team to a first place team by the end of the year.

James Pierce, a non-Internet fantasy commissioner and a team owner, has been running a league for the past three years. There are 12 teams in his league and he keeps track of every team's statistics at no charge.

"The biggest reason I run the league is to keep me involved in baseball. When I was younger, I looked forward to the baseball

season so much, but in recent years I've found myself losing interest. By running a league, you're on top of everything," Pierce stated.

Pierce charges each owner a \$50 entry fee and \$1 for each free-agent pickup or trade. By the end of the season, the league's pot is usually around \$650.

The winner of the league collects half of that money. The runner-up receives one fourth and the other two playoff teams receive one-eighth each.

"It seems like a lot of time and money to spend on fantasy baseball, but the money isn't even the reason for joining a league. I would say that bragging rights and money are equally important. I also think that fantasy is a way

for athletes to get back into the game. Any good athlete lives for that adrenaline rush and for the competition. It's a part of them. This is another way to focus on that need for competition, since we all don't get out there and play sports as much as we used to," Pierce commented.

Whether it be a way for athletes to get back into the game, or just a way for fans to test their baseball knowledge, fantasy baseball is making a huge impact in America.

So the next time you see a guy hitting himself in the head and complaining about a guy named Omar Daal or Dave Burba getting rocked the night before, and you are thinking, "Who cares?" maybe now you'll understand why he's so upset.

Ice Hockey Gaining In Popularity

North American Precip Syndicate

Ice hockey, and the National Hockey League in particular, is scoring with the public.

The NHL expanded once again this season, adding a franchise in Atlanta and two more teams are scheduled to join the league next year. In addition, NHL games have returned to network television and major advertisers have come on board.

For example, the former player hockey fans know as "the great one"-Wayne Gretzky-has announced he will become acting commissioner of the Bud Light Bubble Boys Hockey League.

Bubble Boys are fictional three-inch characters based on the classic table hockey game and are seen in a series of commercials for Anheuser-Busch's Bud Light beer.

Throughout the 1999 season the Bubble Boys tried to join the National Hockey League but have been rejected because of their stature.

Out of frustration, the Bubble Boys have created their own league to challenge the NHL. In their first major coup, they have signed Gretzky as the league's commissioner.

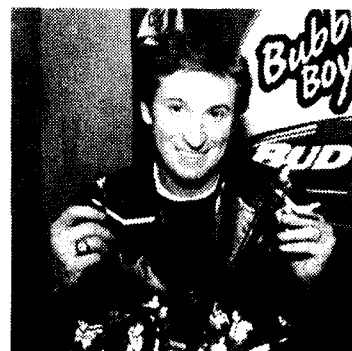
Gretzky-his tongue planted firmly in his cheek-said, "When the Bubble Boys approached me to be commissioner I thought it would be disloyal to the NHL. But they convinced me since

I'm out of a job, the position of commissioner would look good on my resume. Besides my wife Janet likes the idea of getting me out of the house."

Bud Light is sponsoring Bubble Boy table top hockey tournaments during the period leading up to the NHL Stanley Cup Play-Offs. Local finalists in each market will advance to the Stanley Cup Finals to compete for the National Bubble Boys Championship trophy and an opportunity to play against Wayne Gretzky.

The Bubble Boy campaign was created by Fusion Idea Lab, Chicago, Ill. Bud Light also sponsors the Bud Light NHL All-star Most Valuable Player Award.

Anheuser-Busch, Inc. is the world's largest brewer with more than 47 percent of the U.S. beer market.



The Bud Light Bubble Boys-table-top hockey figures-are challenging the NHL with a league of their own.



Oopsters Win Championship

The Oopsters, representing Penn State Harrisburg defeated DYG, representing Penn State Schuylkill 70 to 61 to win the Capital College Intramural Basketball championship.

The game was played at Penn State Schuylkill on Thursday, March 23 with a near capacity crowd in attendance.

Following the game, PSSL hosted PSH with a pizza party and a time of fellowship.

Bud Smitley, Coordinator of Recreation/Athletics at PSH, said, "everyone had a great time, and the score of the game didn't really seem to matter. But, I still am glad we won."

Members of the Oopsters were Mike Bordon, Allen Wolfe, Mike Pohronecny, Amodon Balde, Adam Valcano, Adam LeVan, Todd Davis, Dennis Fernandez, John Flickinger, Paul Uhl, and Travis Eckert.

This concludes the 1999-2000 Capital College Intramural Championship games, with Penn State Harrisburg winning the softball and basketball titles and Penn State Schuylkill winning the Touch Football title.

The games will continue in 2000-2001.