

Just Win, Baby

Talking about sports so you don't have to

by Sean Beaudoin

CINDERELLA IS DEAD. OR AT LEAST UNDRESSED. As the big dance winds down in a glut of failed brackets and Vitale blather, the NFL prepares for the Ponzi scheme that is its draft. Hockey continues to be played in places like Nashville, while the NBA drives the lane of another endless regular season. It's a great time to loathe sports. Unless you're a fan, in which case March to June is the unquestionably the most compelling time of the year. But no amount of synergy marketing from the other leagues comes close to providing the level of beauty, joy, and tradition that is the baseball season. As sliders pound into oiled webbing and batters hone themselves for another sun-drenched opening day, you don't have to be Kevin Costner gazing out over rows of swaying corn to get a little choked up.

THE BOYS OF APRIL. As they trot onto the field for the first game of the 2009 season, every single player in baseball will have a huge scarlet A burned onto their chest, that A standing for *Anabolic*. Somehow **Roger Clemens'** DNA showed up on **Brian McNamee's** needle, as conclusive a piece of evidence as you'd need for most capitol murder cases, while some fans, a suspicious number

of them Texas congressman, are still getting in front of cameras and mumbling things like “Roger is a fine man and a patriot.” It’s a bad look. Even Clemens’ venal lawyer, **Rusty Hardin**, owner of the worst coiff since **Kim Il Jung**, seems unable to stuff much passion into his bleats of innocence. Meanwhile, **Alex Rodriguez** looked into Katie Couric’s soul and denied doping with a smile so pure it suggested he’d been grown in a saline vat at the same secret lab that has **Ted Williams’** head on ice. Which worked for a while. Until someone leaked test results MLB management had known about for years, collapsing the market for player earnestness more than a fortune tied up in derivatives ever could.

Meanwhile, not a single team is lining up to sign **Barry Bonds’** mighty maple bat. Even at forty-four you’d have to like taking a look at him as DH if you’re any AL GM who didn’t make last year’s post-season. Or didn’t already get a kibosh memo from **Bud Selig**. Especially now that childhood pal **Greg Anderson** (the chemical thumb in the muscle dyke that was once the Giants clubhouse) has again chosen jail over testifying. Barry’s legal saga has been shelved for another year, so why not give him a minor league invite? Collusion is an ugly word, but it’s gaining momentum in important circles, especially those no longer burdened with the toxic counsel of **Gene Orza**. You toss in A-Rod’s cyst (Roger Clemens had a mysterious cyst, too) and even light-hitting shortstops are colored with the Winstrol brush. Every denial is henceforth an admission, because no amount of testing will ever be enough. Augmentation is with us like the infield fly rule: odd, inscrutable, and part of the fabric of the game. And thirty years from now Greg Anderson will still be reading *In The Belly Of The Beast* while someone taps out a mournful tune on the bars of his federal cell.

YOU MUST TALK ABOUT STEROIDS, EVEN WHEN YOU'D GIVE JUST

ABOUT ANYTHING NOT TO: For some reason there are certain players everyone assumes are clean: **Chipper Jones, Derek Jeter, Albert Pujols**. But why? Because they seem like stand-up guys and don't blow off the press? Because their body types aren't suspect? Pujols is a monster, even if he doesn't look ready to spring off the top rope in a leopard Speedo and bodyslam **Jimmy Snuka**. **Eric Gagne**, Pujols' polar opposite, was built like a walking Krispy Kreme the year he set the record with 84 consecutive saves. The juice didn't help Gagne much, but it did keep his arm from falling off. The beneficial effects of doping are clearly different for every player. **Jose Canseco** built himself into a runway model. **Marvin Bernard** upgraded from a career Single-A prospect into a Giant's utility player with a fat three-year contract. The payoff-vs-risk factor is really the only one that should be considered, whether it's stealing, embezzling, or laying the groundwork for your coming octuplets.

MORE ON BARRY, AND THEN LET'S LAY HIM TO REST:

In San Francisco terms, Bonds pere et fils are the closest thing we have to royalty. Except maybe **Gavin** and **Whatever That Blonde's Name Is**. But there's the problem of fitting Barry for his tiara. Was his cranial gerrymandering a result of **Victor Conte's** HGH suppository regimen, or just the product of worldwide adulation? Either way, credible reports put Barry going from a 7 1/8th to a 7 1/2 hat size over the course of a single offseason. So say that you, a Sports Fan With An Opinion, come down solidly in the **Barry Lamar Bonds Is As Guilty As Fuck** camp. He shot the stuff. He drank it. He thumbed in and puckered back every rude

Bulgarian spansule Greg Anderson could scrape off the internet, along with his flaxseed oil and kneecap cream. Even with righteous certitude on your side (Delete his steals! Asterisk the bastard!) do you really care about this three year investigation? How much money is it worth to prove Barry's quads swelled five times like the Grinch's knurled heart? We'll never get a true accounting of the millions the feds have spent poking through garbage while Barry swatted seventy-three bombs skulking in the peaks high above Whoville. But would that money have been better spent, say, on body armor for the 1st Marines Division? Or on an investigation into **Bernie Madoff's** unusual rates of return?

Bonds' persona, and the rampant dislike it has long inspired across all of baseball and the sporting press is what has led us here. Of course, being the son of the misunderstood and mercurial **Bobby Bonds** didn't help. But some heroes are inviolable, as they should be. Rack up thirty-something splash hits? Let's not be bothered with logic or the sticky business of reappraisal. After all, toking Humbolt Purple is performance enhancing if it allows you to unclench for a while on that long eastern road swing. Advil is performance enhancing if you're an aging base stealer with a pair of bad hammies. Cortisone is a steroid, and crank was gobbled for decades in clubhouses like fast-actin' Tinactin. You want to wipe out **Nolan Ryan's** records, too? Or **Lenny Dykstra's**? How about the thousands of minor leaguers who juiced, but never even made it to the bigs? *Just Win, Baby* says it's the deeds that count. Parsing who swallowed what is a fool's game. Over the last ten years, every single team in the league had at least two or three guys so ramped with testosterone they looked like a belted tube sock crammed full of pudding. So what? Should Bonds be vilified for being a *successful* steroid user? Every era has it's own relative sleaze, whether it's the

Black Sock scandal or the White Sox's coke bust. A fake and self-serving outrage aimed at our most recent opportunists is a colossal time waster. Even **George W. Bush** knew the score back when he was GM of the Rangers. And if the grinning marionette that was Young George knew, up in the owner's box swilling can after can of his favorite frost-brewed performance enhancer, then the lowliest finger-sniffing laundry boy had to have known as well. Should we now put an asterisk next to George's .001 batting average over the last eight years?

The bottom line is, someone needs to sign Barry. Like today. Give the man a chance, if only for the pleasure of watching that ludicrous torso turn on one last howling inside fastball. And to see if his flaxseed knees can still run out a soft comebacker.

ALL THAT SAID, this year's Giants and A's both look like they have the potential for a brand of excitement and competitiveness the bay area hasn't sniffed in years. Which brings us to the weekly predictions of Just Win, Baby insider **Danny Tarot**:

1. **Buster Posey** is called up and is spectacular. He never goes back down.
2. **Eric Chavez** gives more ammunition to West Grand diehards who still can't swallow Chavvy getting a six year deal while **Miguel Tejada** was allowed to walk.
3. **Travis Ishikawa** is a revelation at first and the position is locked in solid for the first time since **Will Clark**.
5. **Randy Johnson** wins 12 games, takes a swing at someone in the dugout, and sets a record for plunking random Padres in a single season.

6. **Nomar** starts off hot and then fades as the ghost of **Bobby Crosby's** upside either haunts or rescues the A's.

Next issue: *Why NOT signing Manny may have been the first harbinger of doom for the Giants, plus Danny Tarot's much beloved A-Week-Into-The-Season MLB playoff predictions.*