

We can't all be sports "authorities" Butch Maier



"You just don't know. You just...don't...know!"

—Chicago Bear Head Coach Mike Ditka to the press

In Rob Reiner's enjoyable film, *When Harry Met Sally*, Carrie Fisher explains to her husband, Bruno Kirby, that everyone mistakenly think that they have "good taste" and "a sense of humor." I uphold this truth and one more to be self-evident: everyone also thinks that they can be a sports authority, or rather, can make sporting decisions more sound than the decisions of athletes, coaches, executives, and referees who make a living doing it.

The classic example is the "armchair quarterback," the person who sits comfortably in the family room Lazyboy recliner and shouts at images of athletes and administrators on the television set who's plans do not conform to that person's own strategies.

Have any of you been witness to this sort of ranting and raving while trying to watch a weekend football game? You know the guy who insists that, if he were San Francisco Quarterback Joe Montana, Jerry Rice would get the call every down. Time-out, here. If HE were Joe Mon-

tana, and tried to throw to Rice every play, he would strain one of his "gut muscles" that he develops from curling 12-ouncers every couple of pretzels.

You see, the armchair quarterback is no Joe Montana, but has confused childhood memories of Nerf football in the backyard with the real gridiron. Montana is a veteran pro football quarterback, probably headed for the Hall of Fame. And a number of the plays he calls have been pre-organized by George Seifert. So Armchair Bob is not only harping on Montana, but the 49er coaching staff. Armchair dismisses this, though, thinking that he is in the know.

As non-participants, we can't do that.

"People at home don't understand X's and O's," says Eric Pappas, a sports enthusiast and first-year Guilford football player. "You [should] hold people like [Montana] in awe. When you are just watching on television, you miss a lot. There are things you just don't see."

Such as complex coverage assignments, field conditions, and your basic mood swings. Still, Pappas has his educated opinions.

"Now there are certain players—take [Philadelphia Phillie Catcher] Darren Daulton. He usually hits .200. Then he gets it up to .260 and wants to renegotiate his

contract (and ends up getting over \$1 million). Then he's hitting .200 again. People like that, I can [fuss] about."

And another thing...

"In 1989, Michigan trailed Notre Dame by five points with four minutes to go and some time-outs left," Pappas recalls. "[Michigan Head Coach Bo] Schembechler decided to go for an onside kick—where there's a good chance you won't get the ball back. Well, Notre Dame recovered and later had a fourth and one in Michigan territory. If they were on their own 20, they'd hafta punt. But since they weren't, they went for it, made it, and won the game."

The accusations we as spectators throw at trained professionals are mostly self-confidence builders. If he's wrong, then I'm right and feel better about myself. Criticizing others then becomes an attention-getter and a crowd-pleaser. "Yeah, isn't Jimmy Roberts on the late SportsCenter the worst?" "Uh-huh, remember when he messed up that line and..."

This train-of-thought is further reinforced by a recently-aired soft drink commercial, which shows a person having difficulty pouring the advertised soft drink from a bottle into a glass. The acting director asks the pourer, former Major League umpire Ron

Luciano, "Are you blind, or just stupid?" To which Luciano responds matter-of-factly, "I've been told both." Luciano's response opens the door for unlimited put-downs, since umpires seem to readily accept it.

Yes, athletes make mistakes—every game. And so do coaches and officials, too. But aren't we all people who err, who stray from the straight and narrow path?

What if those who we bemoan were given a chance to have free reign to observe our lives as we do theirs? Would we be any more blameless than they?

Athletes' lives are splashed on our television sets, in our newspapers, and in the latest unauthorized biography by Kitty Kelley. And we hide at home just waiting to devour their regrets and spit them back out.

If the tables were turned, with the athletes in plain view of our lives, I wonder if they'd have as much fun laughing at us.

"Oh, to curb the tongue

You know, weapons can be verbal."

—Kim Hill, "Words"

Pittsburgh's three game sweep cures 48 hour pennant fever

Butch Maier
Sports Editor

During my twelve years of following the Pittsburgh Pirates, I have endured some horrible teams full of mediocre big-contract players and numerous club overhauls. Now that my team sits above the baseball world, I appreciate the view. Likewise, the New York Mets enjoyed that same view over the past five seasons. With a chance to personally observe the fading Mets from Pittsburgh's perch atop the National League East, it seemed almost natural for me to--in my excitement--catch pennant fever.

Stricken all of the August 16-18 weekend with this sickness prevalent from August to October, I fought enough in my weakened state to take note of the phenomena played out before me: a three-game sweep of the Mets. What follows is a detailed account of my 48-hour bout with Pennant Fever.

FRIDAY 6:56 PM... On the Three Rivers Stadium carpet, the Mets' are taking in some casual fielding practice. The lull of the crowd overcomes any anxiety over a waning pennant race. Is this the calm before the storm?

7:34... Barry Bonds, the 1990 National League Most Valuable Player and current favorite to win the same award this season, is the last Pirate to leave the dugout. He stomps on second base on his way to left field and talks it up with center fielder Gary Redus. They both look at rightfielder Bobby Bonilla and chuckle. Bonilla ignores their ploy for attention.

Bonds is a well-sculptured athlete, able to hit for power or beat you with his speed on the basepaths. In the first inning, neither of those facets help him.

Bonds saunters to home plate, spits, and digs in. His left cleat smooths the dirt to the right of the plate and then twists

into its place at the back of the batter's box. Bonds glares to right field, envisioning yet another launch over the fence. He taps the plate twice. Then, with a slightly open stance, Bonds takes several practice swings as effortlessly as if he were toting a toothpick.

He takes a pitch for ball one. A big cut misses the second pitch. The third is knocked foul and out of play. Then a high heater by Sid Fernandez eludes Bonds, who strikes out swinging and throws his helmet off in disgust. Holding his bat over his head as if to snap it, Bonds flings it, too. His performance will not make the highlight shows tonight.

10:14... The storm is over: New York commits five errors and lose a laughter 8-2. That early evening fielding routine by the Mets proves to be futile.

SATURDAY 7:36 PM... After a 21-minute rain delay, Zane Smith throws the first pitch for a ball to Keith Miller. Smith looks remarkably like the "other brother Darryl" on "Newhart." 7:39... With one out, New York's Kevin Elster tags a pitch from Smith to deep left-centerfield. Bonds leaps up against the padded wall and snares the ball in his glove. In the game program, Bonds is quoted as saying, "Defense wins ballgames." His catch keeps the game scoreless for now. 7:55... Power-hitting Met Howard Johnson crushes a weak Smith delivery over the fence to give New York a 1-0 lead. Maybe Larry or Darryl should pitch to Johnson next time.

8:11... After striking out Pittsburgh-native John Wehner with Bonilla on third in the second inning, Met ace Doc Gooden needs only to retire part-time catcher Don "Sluggo" Slaught and his .232 average. Slaught promptly singles into right field as Gooden drops his head dejectedly.

8:24... In the third, Van Slyke singles home Orlando Merced to give the Pirates the lead. 9:32... Van Slyke scores Merced again, this time with a double, chasing Gooden from

the game. Doc used to own this Pittsburgh team, but that was when he had confidence in the Met offense. Now with Daaaa-rryl Strawberry in L.A., Gooden must take his occasional bruises from the Bucs.

9:39... The MVP watch continues: Bonds tags the first pitch thrown to him by Pete Schourek in the seventh to deep left field...but it's caught on the warning track. Bonds flips his helmet to First Base Coach Tommy Sandt, knowing he just missed a long ball, and finishes only one for eight in the series.

9:54... Fireballer Stan Belinda comes in from the bullpen to close out a 4-1 win for the Bucs in the ninth. He gets Mackey Sasser to fly out and then Kevin McReynolds singles. Johnson comes up... and goes down swinging. Hubie Brooks routinely grounds out to third to end the game.

"There's no place like home," Judy Garland cries on the centerfield score board. The Bucs have assured themselves of at least an edge in the weekend series, perhaps even a clean sweep.

SUNDAY 1:35 PM... Going into the contest, Pittsburgh holds a seven-game lead over the Cards and has a dozen games on the Mets.

That may shrink with Frank "Sweet Music" Viola on the hill for New York, though. However...

"Sweet Music" gets shelled. Redus, Van Slyke, and Bonilla all homer. Viola lasts less than four innings and the Mets look to be running on empty. The Pirates complete a three-game sweep and are sitting pretty going into the last six weeks of the season.

7:04... After arriving home in Charleston, West Virginia, I was feeling a lot better. A sweep by your team will do wonders for a case of Pennant Fever.