

# Talkin' Ruben, Rickey and Eric

We were sitting around the office, talking baseball, and it went something like this . . .

**MIKE BERARDINO** — So Jim, do you think there's any realistic possibility that Paul Molitor is gonna catch Joe DiMaggio? Or for that matter, that Lou Piniella can keep his job past Labor Day?

**JIM SUROWIECKI** — I'd be surprised if Molitor could keep it going long enough to pass Mr. Coffee, not merely because the record is so inherently impressive, but because of the amazing amount of media attention he has faced and is going to face if he keeps going. And anyway, I'm worried that if he does break the record, people will say it's tainted because of the so-called rabbit ball or because he played DH through the whole streak.

**MIKE** — Well put, Mr. Vocabulary, but you forgot about Sweet Lou. If anyone out there had forgotten what an absolute jerk George Steinbrenner is, Mr. Overreaction has reminded them of that fact these past few weeks.

**JIM** — To be honest, the whole Steinbrenner-Piniella affair bores me, and it's especially annoying because it diverts attention from what the Yankees are doing on the field. I'm much more interested in talking about Mattingly and Henderson, actually more interested in talking about Danny Pasqua and when he's going to get the respect he deserves.

**MIKE** — Okay, why is Rickey Henderson being such a little baby, or should I say a Chris Brown? The Yankees need his bat and speed at the top of the lineup, and if Georgie wants to can somebody so badly, it should be his malingering outfielder and not his patience-of-a-saint manager.

**JIM** — I couldn't disagree more about Henderson. He's been the consistently best player in the American League over the last four years, and I don't see that we have any reason to disbelieve him when he says that he is too hurt to play.

**MIKE** — Enough about the Yankees — the Tigers and the Blue Jays have a dandy race going in the AL East, and I love Tom Henke, the Canadian Goose.

**JIM** — Like you, I love the Blue

## Diamond Discussion Sports Junkies

Jay outfield's stunning combination of speed, power and defensive prowess, but there are some interesting sidelights in Detroit. Larry Herndon, whom Bill James described as having had six off seasons out of seven, is hitting .333 as a platoon player, and rookie Matt Nokes has made Lance Parrish easily forgettable.

**MIKE** — It should be said that though the Red Sox are out of the race this year, their early exit has enabled them to play young kids like Ellis Burks, Mike Greenwell and Sam Horn, setting them up for a great future. Okay, is Joe Niekro really just a nice guy who likes to keep his fingernails neatly manicured, or he is a mealy-mouthed cheater?

**JIM** — I agree about the Sox, not just because the three rookies you mentioned are truly exciting offensive players, but because the absolutely astounding pair of Boggs and Evans look like they'll be around forever. As for Niekro, cheating has been a part of the game since Alexander Cartwright laid down the first base line, but there are rules, and if you get caught, you pay the price.

**MIKE** — One guy who apparently doesn't need to cheat to win is Dave Stewart — and I'm not talking about Annie Lennox's dorky sidekick. This Dave Stewart pitches for the surprising Oakland A's and he's making the Dodgers, Rangers and Phillies look bad for giving up on him.

**JIM** — Incidentally, Dave Stewart's a good friend of Roy Firestone, but to get back to the topic, I like the A's and I like Luis Polonia, but the Twins are going to be tough to take, and one of the reasons is Greg Gagne. The Twins got no middle-infield production last year, and Gagne's .272 batting average and 23 doubles this year are more than enough to carry his glove.

**MIKE** — When you talk about the Twins, you have to mention Frank Viola, the sweet-throwing lefty whose ERA is almost two full runs below

Minnesota's team mark. But I like the Royals to win the West and the reason — along with Saberhagen and Leibbrandt and the awesome Danny Tartabull — is Kevin Seitzer, who is so much better than that overpublicized hobbyist Bo Jackson.

**JIM** — Seitzer is truly great, but he's just one of a number of tremendous young stars in the AL West, including not just Canseco and Joyner, but Pete Incaviglia and my favorite, the scintillating 21-year-old Ruben Sierra, who is an extra-base madman with tremendous power. Then there's Ivan Calderon, who was traded straight up for Scott Bradley and has responded by hitting .296 with walks and 21 dingers to boot.

**MIKE** — Let's move on to the National League, where the Mets are getting healthy and making a serious run at Whitey's Cards, who are getting career years from Jackie Clark (the walking machine) and Terry Pendleton. By the way, whether his bat is corked or not, Howard Johnson is easily the Mets' MVP.

**JIM** — You gotta believe the Mets are going take the Cards now that Aggie and Fernandez are back and Roger the Dodger is throwing strikes out of the pen. Hojo has had a marvelous season, and the fact that the Mets can't find a place for Dave Magadan, the next Wade Boggs, must be some kind of tribute to Rafael Santana.

**MIKE** — The Mets' last three games this season are in St. Louis, so the advantage has to be with the wimpy, built-for-speed Astroturfers. The Phillies have stormed back into the picture on the wings of pitching ace Shane Rawley and the irrepressible Bedrock, but once again, it may prove to be a case of too little, too late.

**JIM** — Then there's Wrigley Field and the irrepressible Andre Dawson, whose 41 dingers have to make him a serious candidate for MVP, although he's walked fewer than 30 times. If Shawon Dunston had played all year for the Cubs, Chicago might have been able to stay in the race.

**MIKE** — Let's not forget the Expos and Tim (104 ribbies) Wallach, who has rebounded from a mediocre 1986 to have his best season yet. Plus, Buck Rodgers is getting another

outstanding year from Tim Raines, the second-best all-around player in baseball behind Eric Davis.

**JIM** — What a marvelous place to segue into a discussion of Eric the Red. He has extraordinary power, even better speed, hits for average, walks, and throws, all with a flair that could make him the next Mays, or the next DiMaggio for that matter.

**MIKE** — I loved Don Sutton's line on how pitchers should try to slow Davis down: "They need to throw the Visine ball — it gets the Red out." No argument here, 'E' is the best thing to hit Cincinnati since a bubblegum-chewing kid with a crewcut named Rose showed up in the early 60s.

**JIM** — Midway through the season, what with Daniels, Jones, Davis, and Parker, the Reds might have had a legitimate claim to the best outfield in baseball. But as their pitching woes have increased, the bats have slowed down, whether by injury or age.

**MIKE** — And in the wake of the Reds mini-collapse (they never got far enough ahead to collapse), the Giants and Astros have neatly filled the void at the top of the West. You have to admire Al Rosen, the San Francisco GM who has beaten the Reds' Bill Bergesch to the punch by picking up Rick Reuschel and Don Robinson for the stretch run.

**JIM** — I think the best thing Rosen has done, by giving up only Mackey Sasser, Jeff Robinson and Scott Medvin, is avoid mortgaging the future for the present. Bergesch was undoubtedly afraid of that, and with young talent like he has, his fear may have been justified, but I doubt the Cincinnati fans are going to be satisfied with that explanation.

**MIKE** — Kurt Stillwell is a small price to pay for a pennant, which is exactly what getting Reuschel would have meant. Anyway, we've gotta wrap this monstrosity up now, so I'll just say look for the Cards and the Yanks in the Series, with the Pin-stripers winning it all.

**JIM** — One word about the Dodgers, and that word is boring, for they are so boring and their farm system has become so hopeless that they're enough to make a grown man (Tommy Lasorda) cry. Subway Series all the way, Mets in seven again. And when is Gregg Jefferies going to make it to Shea?

# Loss to Brazil bodes ill for U.S. in future basketball clashes

## Behind the Back Patton McDowell

Hey folks, I'm sorry, but how did we lose in basketball to Brazil in the Pan Am Games? A Brazilian named "Oscar" scores 46 points in the gold medal game? Does that mean he is in a class with Pele because he goes by only one name? Sure. As former Olympic coach Bob Knight says (with rising volume), "This guy plays no defense. He is definitely not playing for the team." That's nice, Bob, and thanks, but Oscar doesn't care.

(Don't tell Bob I said this, but you have to like a guy who admits his philosophy of basketball is, "Any shot is a good shot. Anytime." I think this guy has been on my team at Woollen many times.)

Indianapolis was not the only place U.S. amateur basketball teams hit the front rim and bounced out. The U.S. team claimed only the silver medal at the World University Games in Yugoslavia and at the Junior World Games in Italy.

Why the decline in the sport that America has ruled for so long? It certainly is not coaching. Mistakes were made, but if any coaches should be able to quickly groom a team, Crum, Mike Krzyzewski and Larry Brown should.

If you want to be downright pessimistic, our days of dominating international basketball competitions are over. We play with real amateurs. Most countries play with pros.

Players like Oscar make \$400,000 a year in the Italian and certain other lucrative European leagues, tax-free, plus their endorsement money at home.

Even the lesser lights are paid by their government, and have full-time national coaches who keep them organized year round.

Our players must enter international competition after a grueling year of school and practice under one coach, and then go through


a very short and intense training session, quite possibly with a coach who has an entirely different philosophy from the one they are used to. Not only must adjustments be made for the new coaches and teammates, but international rules can vary dramatically from those of the NCAA.

On top of all of these distractions, the players and coaches must compete with the knowledge that their fans at home fully expect nothing less than a gold medal.

Yes, Dr. Naismith, I will postpone panicking for at least another year, because I am confident of our Olympic chances in 1988. But definitely not overconfident. Georgetown coach John Thompson has basically the same fallible nucleus from the Pan Am games coming back for him, with the notable exception of UNC's J.R. Reid, and perhaps some other rising stars.

Thompson has the added dilemma of facing an Olympic session in Seoul that will not finish until early October. That is a lot of class to miss for anyone, and for an athlete who is on the borderline of being eligible for his school, his coach may very well discourage that little Korean field trip. Cancellations could really hurt the Olympic talent pool.

Yet, despite the short training period and the rapidly improving international field, coach Thompson should have a much more complete field of players to choose from next year. And one other thing. Mr. Oscar is not going to score 46 points against Thompson and his defense, or I will personally stop taking bad shots in Woollen. That's right — it's unlikely.



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