

# Table-top hardball

## Strat-O-Magicians lay it all on the line

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Wade Boggs, Dwight Gooden, Ricky Henderson, Don Mattingly, and other baseball greats made appearances in San Francisco recently — well, sort of.

Actually, Boggs and Co. were in The City in name only. The Table Baseball Association (TBA) made a stop in the Bay Area, with the players represented by statistical data in the popular tabletop baseball game, Strat-O-Matic.

Competitors in a Strat-O-Matic tournament converged on San Francisco from far away places such as Minnesota and Utah to match wits.

It all began with a draft of baseball's best on Friday night, followed by an 18-game regular season completed on Saturday, and finally the playoffs and championship on Sunday.

The TBA has been in existence for nearly two years, and has conducted tournaments in Los Angeles, New York, Boston, and other big-league cities.

John Kreuz, from Glenview, Ill., has been playing S-O-M for 23 years. In real life he's a Certified Financial Planner. For fun he's owner of the TBA and dons the cap of tournament director 20 weeks a year.

"I do it because I enjoy the

game," he said. "I've been playing since a lot of people weren't, and have always hoped for a national organization like this one. When I had a chance to assume the helm I took it."

More than 500 players have participated in the nationwide tournaments, raising nearly \$10,000 in prize money. The tournaments normally attract between 30 and 50 players.

Kreuz feels the best is yet to come.

"It is my hope and intention that within three years we'll have our first 100-player tournament," he said.

Thus, the future is bright for the TBA. But there would be no TBA if it was not for Strat-O-Matic.

S-O-M baseball was introduced in 1962 and has since become the best selling tabletop baseball game in the country. The game publishes new statistical card sets for each season. The cards reflect realistically the players' pitching, hitting, running, fielding and other abilities. The New York-based game company was created and still is owned by Harold Richman.

"I was a frustrated athlete," said Richman, who began creating S-O-M baseball when he was 11. "It was my way to satisfy that urge."

Cooperation between S-O-M and TBA is beneficial to both parties.

"John is getting our official backing," Richman said. "He is very qualified and a very honest man. He's a good person for this."

Kreuz feels his company will grow with the seal of approval from Richman.

"A tournament schedule and a letter from S-O-M will be included in the new card sets," Kreuz said. "We can help each other."

There are more than just tournament leagues of S-O-M in the United States. Some leagues send instructions to opponents and play the games via mail, while others play in face-to-face leagues.

Paul Widener is commissioner of a 12-player face-to-face league in Yuba City.

"We draft our own teams and play a 128-game schedule," Widener said. "Our highlights this year featured a no-hitter by (the Mets') Sid Fernandez and one-hitter by (the White Sox') Joe Cowley."

The next TBA tournament in California will be in San Diego the third week of January.

So if you're an armchair manager and find yourself second-guessing the moves of the likes of Davey Johnson and John McNamara, S-O-M might be the medicine you've been looking for.