

8/29/94

BERNIE MIKLASZ COMMENTARY

Strat-O Addiction Has Easy Cure: Let's Play Two

The addiction is satisfied late at night; after the wife and kid are fast asleep. The family room is all mine, and there is no witness except the dog, who has no interest in my clandestine activities.

I reach into the bottom drawer of the desk, where I have stashed the paraphernalia of my obsession. I am flushed with guilt.

I know that this is bad for me. I am 35 years old; it is time to grow up, act responsibly. A few years ago I stopped, cold turkey, and tried to be a more productive member of society.

And now the habit grips me again, the fever worse than before. I am weak. I surrender . . .

I roll the dice.

It is the first inning of the 1967 American League season. April 10, New York Yankees at the Washing-

ton Senators, Pete Richert pitching to Horace Clarke, who grounds out to Ed Brinkman.

Strat-O-Matic baseball has taken control of my soul. I guess this is how I am dealing with the baseball strike. Have mercy.

I am determined to replay that classic '67 AL pennant race, every inning, paying careful attention to honor the real details — injuries, trades, pitching matchups — that affected the outcome. I have a complete set of the actual box scores from '67, plus a list of player transactions. I am a sick man.

This project will require several years of admittedly silly behavior: sneaking in a couple of late-night games, every day when possible, trying hard not to let my hobby intrude on family time or work.

I vow to roll the dice until I reach late September of '67 and see if history will recreate itself on a strategy board game. On Sept. 18, Minnesota, Boston and Detroit were tied for first place with 85-66 records. Chicago (85-67) was in fourth place, a half-game out. Awesome.

Hey, '67 was fantastic for other reasons. I was still a kid, largely innocent. Bad things were coming a year later. The murders of Dr. Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, the Tet Offensive in Vietnam.

Life — and baseball — seemed more simple in '67. It was a time of grass fields and no designated hitter. Both leagues had a single, 10-team division — winner take all, no gimmicky playoffs.

That '67 AL season featured 116 doubleheaders. And dominant pitching: 365 complete games, 153 shut-outs, an overall league earned-run average of 3.23. The collective batting average was .236. Despite a .225 team batting mark, Chicago spent 89 days in first place before fading late. Teams had to manufacture runs, and I like that challenge.

The pennant wasn't decided until 7:42 p.m. on Oct. 1, the last game of the regular season. That's the moment Detroit's Dick McAuliffe hit into a 4-6-3 double play, eliminating the Tigers, who needed a doubleheader sweep of visiting California to finish in a tie with Boston. Earlier at Fenway Park, Carl Yastrzemski, Jim Lonborg and first-place Boston knocked out Minnesota.

Sorry. This is what a Roto Geek does: bores others with details. But we Strat-O-Heads are nerds, too. And I am not alone. Bob Costas loves Strat-O; he and Bryant Gumbel used to play at the NBC studios. The ESPN guys sneak in Strat-O games between "SportsCenter" shows.

Baltimore Orioles broadcaster Jon Miller tells a story of beating Cal Ripken Jr. in a Strat-O game during a team flight. Young Ripken was so upset that he took the box score to his father, Cal Sr., who reviewed Junior's managerial mistakes.

I do not feel so ashamed, knowing that so many share this mania. After I confessed my Strat-O infatuation on KMOX, Belleville's John McTernan sent a comforting letter.

"Glad to see you come out of the closet," McTernan wrote. "A lot of us are out here, it's just that we are not as obnoxious and overbearing as the Roto Geeks. I'm 40 and have been playing since 1965 . . . let us know how your '67 Replay comes out."

Really? Well, in my 1967 Opener, the Yankees won 2-1, with Mel Stottlemyre and Dooley Womack combining on a five-hitter.

Help!

Is there a 12-Step program for Strat-O-Matic?