

# Dennis Taylor



## 'The Nickel Beer Night Incident'

**L**et's emphasize at the outset that I do not necessarily endorse strangulation as an appropriate means of dealing with every little problem. Latrell Sprewell, Bobby Knight, Albert DeSalvo . . . they were way out of line.

But all these years later, I steadfastly maintain that my ex-roommate, Jay, *had it coming* when I tried to pop the eyeballs out of his pompous, arrogant, annoying skull in what became known around our house as "The Nickel Beer Night Incident."

Jay, Rich and I were fanatical players of Strat-O-Matic Baseball, an amazing game that utilizes dice, flip-cards and intricate charts representing every major-league player to make any random schmoo feel like Casey Stengel. And act like Earl Weaver.

With too much time on our hands, each of us chose a few teams — one of mine was the world champion '71 Pirates — and created a league. A furious pennant race ensued.

Late in the season my Pirates swooned badly, and, frankly, clubhouse morale wasn't what it needed to be: My mood darkened every time Willie Stargell struck out, each time Dave Giusti blew a save.

The long summer culminated one arid Saturday when Rich ambled through the door with a case of Coors and chirped, "Tonight will be Nickel Beer Night — everybody grab a mug!" It was an imaginative way of suggesting that the three of us consume in mass quantity while playing the game, which, honestly, seemed like a good idea at the time.

But as the the moon rose in the sky and the beer cans piled up, things began to go badly. My Pirates were swept in a three-game series by Rich's Red

# Taylor

From page C1

Sox. Then, they blew the first two games against Jay's Dodgers. Midway through the final game of the evening, I was feeling a wee bit ... tense.

With Rich observing sleepily from the Barcalounger, and Hondo, our German shepherd, begging corn chips, I sat beside Jay at the coffee table, rolling the dice. Again, I was losing, and Jay, a legendary taunter, was needling relentlessly. Each time the fortunes of the game would frown, he'd gaze upon me with his smarmiest Bugs Bunny smile, cluck his tongue, and say, "Oh, I am *sooooo* sorry."

Late in the game, my Pirates rallied, closing the gap to one run!

We loaded the bases with nobody out! We had Roberto Clemente, a .341 hitter, at the plate! He lined into a triple play!

"Oh," Jay cooed again through entirely too many teeth, "I am *soooo* sorry."

Several quiet seconds passed. I stared at the fateful dice roll and considered tearing the cardboard likeness of Roberto Clemente into a thousand pieces.

I decided to tear Jay into a thousand pieces instead.

Corn chips, cards and Coors cans flew as I seized Jay's spindly neck and attempted to fuse his Adam's apple with cervical vertebrae No. 7. Rich and Hondo piled on. For several seconds, the four of us were a screaming, growling, snarling tangle

of rage, rolling across the hardwood floor.

Eventually, miraculously, order was restored.

Rich immediately anointed himself "Commissioner of the League" and, as his first act, ejected both Jay and me (plus several players from each team). We were ordered to sit in opposite corners of the room and observe as he finished our game for us, playing Strat-O-Matic solitaire.

Rich also fined us \$5 apiece. Which he spent the following weekend on beer. Which Jay and I were permitted to sip only in moderation.

*Dennis Taylor is a Herald staff writer. He can be reached at 646-4344 or via e-mail at [dtaylor@montereyherald.com](mailto:dtaylor@montereyherald.com).*