

Fantasy Baseball
by
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At last, spring training has arrived. I anticipate a great baseball season. But the reason I am fired up this year is not for reasons traditionally associated with America's pastime. You see, I am part of that new breed of baseball enthusiast. I have accidentally become the ultimate baseball rebel whose cause has proliferated in virtual reality. I am a free agent fan. However I need to give you a little background first:

I was one of those kids that went through a lot of stick bubble gum trying in vain to collect every Topps baseball card in existence. The name of every player was etched in my little baseball brain. I can still remember the starting lineups of many teams from yesteryear.

But as I grew older, baseball changed. Free agency and greed began eroding my endearing loyalty. Then something occurred where I finally went snap, crackle, pop.

When the Florida Marlins purchased the 1997 World Series, I threw in the towel. After that nauseating experience, I knew the small market teams including our beloved Pirates would never field a competitive team again. Pittsburgh would forever be minor league cannon fodder for the big-city teams that could afford to play the money game.

Last spring under the gloomy expectations of a dismal weak-hitting Pirate lineup, I couldn't even listen to the Pirates on the radio. Then a friend asked me to play fantasy league baseball over the Internet. He assured me that this was an oasis where I would quench my baseball despair.

As you might expect, I loyally sprinkled my team with Pittsburgh Pirates. Since fantasy league baseball makes use of actual daily player statistics, my Pirate-laced team was in the fantasy league cellar by the end of May. Despite pleas for sanity from my fellow league members, I was going to faithfully go down with members of my sinking team. After all, I could never dream of rooting against the Buccos. And I considered my fellow league members who disassociated themselves from the Pirates to be self-seeking traitors.

But then nice guy Al Martin complained that he wasn't a platoon player. Al began to irritate me. He became a clubhouse distraction on my fantasy team. I stuck by him but he wasn't sticking by me. He was having a miserable year and he wanted to be traded. So I cut Al from my team. Strangely, I found that I derived a certain level of satisfaction from that move. Unconsciously, I was hitting baseball back.

Suddenly my team was doing better without Al. So I skillfully cut Pirate after Pirate, replacing them with big-city major league players and my fantasy league statistics began

to soar. My team moved up in the ranks of the fantasy league as my loyalty shifted to my own virtual cunning and guile.

My team became competitive and I started to have fun. Then the unthinkable began to happen. I started rooting against the Pirates when my fantasy league players began to play against them. I actually started listening to Pirate games again only this time I was rooting for my pitcher on the opposite team to beat them.

My fellow league members were astonished at what a cruel, ruthless participant I had become. I cut any player that didn't produce in a heartbeat, especially a Pirate. By the end of September I was miraculously clinging to first place. I wanted to finish first so I could win the ultimate prize, an ESPN t-shirt.

I no longer gave a hoot about reality league baseball. It was in a sick and sorry state. Major League Baseball didn't really have to play those phony reality games. I just needed the statistics to feed my fantasy league frenzy. The owners and the players didn't care about my loyalty to them over the years. Now it was my turn to only care about my fantasy league team.

In the end, I won my t-shirt. It was worth more to me than any reality World Series. Baseball created a monster. Until baseball gets fixed, I'll be staying away from the stadium, silently rebelling on my computer as the ultimate fantasy league fan.



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