



Vagrant League

Fantasy Baseball



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First half Analysis

Parity – It's Not Just A Funny Word

Barry Greenberg

Team Owner

With the season now almost one half completed, it is a good time to assess how the league as well as the individual teams are doing. First though, lets get some historical perspective. Since the league expanded to twelve teams in 2000, the team that was leading in mid-June has won the championship at least four of the five years, with my only doubt arising because I do not have the records for 2000.

Furthermore, it appears that once a team takes the lead by or before early June, the lead has not been relinquished, although there have been examples of teams briefly tying the ultimate winner, or at least coming quite close, before the champion seals the deal.

This year, that historical trend will not mean much. That is because this is the year of parity. As of June 21, there were an incredible ten teams within 22.5 points of first place. The top five or six teams have moved within points of each other for the last month, with the positions constantly changing. There have been some days where

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Rotisserie Baseball

25 Years Later!

Chris Oliva

Owner

It was 25 years ago, this past April, that Daniel Okrent and 10 other baseball fanatics -- two former University of Michigan history professors among them -- gathered in the dining room of a New York City apartment to hold the first Rotisserie baseball draft.

Okrent, a native of Detroit, is an author of several books, a former columnist for Esquire magazine, and has served as managing editor at Life magazine and editor-at-large for Time Inc., among various other career achievements.

"It really did begin just as, 'Hey, guys, this could be fun,' " said Okrent.

But what began as Okrent's idle scribbling on an airplane in November 1979 has become so much more.

Rotisserie baseball gave birth to fantasy baseball, which paved the way for today's fantasy sports craze. All of which makes Okrent a founding father of a phenomenon that has changed the way the American public views sports.

Fantasy sports gaming has grown into a billion-dollar industry -- it's second only to pornography as an Internet moneymaker -- and one in which more than 15 million U.S. adults participated last year, according to a recent survey by the Fantasy Sports Trade Association.

Those fantasy players, on average, compete in 2 1/2 leagues per sport -- at a cost of more than \$150 per team -- and, according to the FSTA, they spend 37 minutes a day "just thinking about" their teams.

In March 2005, Yahoo! unveiled its newest promotion, offering the winner of one of its invitation-only fantasy baseball leagues a front-office position with the San Francisco Giants. From the more than 20,000 entries

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Parity

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the top five teams are within six or less points of one another. As of the week of June 28th, the Mutts hold first place, although the Barbarryans were the first place holder for the prior three weeks. That there has been a change in first place so late in June shows that the historical trend will not be repeated.

Every one of the top ten teams still has a legitimate shot at winning, or at least notching a high money spot. Gaps of 22.5 points in June have been overcome; just last year Eight Men Out were over 30 points down at this time, but finished a mere three points out of first place.

And if to demonstrate the point about the tenuous nature of first place, the June 24 daily stats showed that the Mutts had taken over first place, and the lead between 1st and 10th places had shrunk to eighteen points. On June 25, Comfortably Numb took over the top spot, with the Mutts again regaining first the following day.

Why we have such parity this year is anyone's guess, but I believe it to be caused by the excessive amount of injuries. Every week it seems like a stud starter is headed to the DL. Schmidt, Wood, Prior, Sheets, Beckett, Hudson, Perez, etc. Closing has become a hazardous job, just look at Gagne and Benitez. And if the closer can avoid a major injury, he is just as likely to lose his job outright like Dan Kolb or Danny Graves. Nor have position players seemed to have done any better. The Reds have already sent two of their starters to the minors, and its only June.

Why the increase in injuries? Again, anyone's guess is welcome, but mine is that steroid use was as rampant as rumored, and players who formerly used the juice to avoid injuries and decrease healing time are now getting injured. That would explain the freakish amount of ligament type injuries this season. Why else would ligaments tear off the bone? I am no doctor, but who knows?

Or perhaps the parity is just a result of the obvious; a salary cap in a veteran fantasy league where everyone generally knows how to play this game.

Having said that, lets look at the individual teams. This list is in position order, starting with first place, as of June 28, and is NOT meant to suggest a final order of finish.

Mutts This team was my post draft favorite to win this year. For the first few weeks, it did look like the Mutts might run away with it. Then, Craig sends out an e-mail proclaiming himself the 2005 champion, and promptly thereafter begins a slide out of first. Oops, jinxed!! Maybe, but injuries to Jim Thome, Ben Sheets and Jeff Bagwell also had something to do with the slide. Still, there is plenty of talent here and an aggressive owner willing to trade for need, so expect the Mutts to stay in the running for the championship.

Comfortably Numb Jim in his first year back took a big risk and bought Barry Bonds, hoping for at least one half a season. It remains unclear when and if Bonds will return, but C-Numb has done well this year, with a big part of that success being Derrek Lee doing his best Barry Bonds impersonation. This is a good team but, in an ordinary year not a championship team, a description also fitting for about nine other teams this year. If the pitching can continue to be above average, Lee continues on a tear, and Bonds does soon come back, this squad also has as good a shot at winning as any other team. There would be something prophetic about a team named Comfortably Numb winning in the year Pink Floyd reunites for the first time in twenty years.

Barbarryans That a team with only three starting pitchers and an anemic offense is anywhere close to first, starkly demonstrates the level of parity we have. Still, the Barbarryans also have as good a shot at winning as any other team. They have a big advantage in that they have fairly large leads in three categories: WHIP, ERA, and Ks. For the immediate future at least, they do not have to worry about an erosion of their 'base', and can look to pick up points elsewhere, while most other teams have more vulnerabilities. They can also benefit by the earlier than expected return of a healthy Mark Prior. Finally, Todd Helton has to hit better than .250; after all he is a career .334 hitter. That is, unless the rumors of him being on the 'juice' are also true.

Arms & Hammers That the 'deer meat carrying' injury allegedly sustained by Clint Barmes was not the oddest injury of the year is further evidence of how wacky the year has been. (That award probably goes to Carlos Zambrano, who suffered from 'internet elbow'). Of more concern to A&H is how they will make up for the lost offense of Barmes. Beyond that problem, this squad heavily relies on

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1991 Roto Studs

Names From The Past

Ed Feldman

Owner

As it is the 15th year of existence for the Vagrant League Fantasy Baseball (VLFB) Association, I thought it would be interesting to see who the rotisserie studs were 15 years ago. I was amazed to find that there are 5 players from the list that are still active although there is only one that is possibly still at the top of his game. Check out the below.

Batting Average (AVG)

| Player | Team | POS | AVG |
|---------------|------|-----|------|
| 1 T Pendleton | ATL | 3B | .319 |
| 2 H Morris | CIN | 1B | .318 |
| 3 T Gwynn | SD | OF | .317 |
| 4 W McGee | SF | OF | .312 |
| 5 F Jose | STL | OF | .305 |

Wins (W)

| Player | Team | POS | W |
|---------------|------|-----|----|
| 1 T Glavine* | ATL | P | 20 |
| 1 J Smiley | PIT | P | 20 |
| 3 S Avery | ATL | P | 18 |
| 4 R Martinez | LAD | P | 17 |
| 5 2 tied with | | | 16 |

Home Runs (HR)

| Player | Team | POS | HR |
|--------------|------|-----|----|
| 1 H Johnson | NYM | 3B | 38 |
| 2 M Williams | SF | 3B | 34 |
| 3 R Gant | ATL | OF | 32 |
| 4 A Dawson | CHC | OF | 31 |
| 4 F McGriff | SD | 1B | 31 |

Saves (SV)

| Player | Team | POS | SV |
|--------------|------|-----|----|
| 1 L Smith | STL | P | 47 |
| 2 R Dibble | CIN | P | 31 |
| 3 J Franco* | NYM | P | 30 |
| 3 M Williams | PHI | P | 30 |
| 5 D Righetti | SF | P | 24 |

Runs Batted In (RBI)

| Player | Team | POS | RBI |
|-------------|------|-----|-----|
| 1 H Johnson | NYM | 3B | 117 |
| 2 B Bonds* | PIT | OF | 116 |
| 2 W Clark | SF | 1B | 116 |
| 4 F McGriff | SD | 1B | 106 |
| 5 R Gant | ATL | OF | 105 |

Earned Run Avg (ERA)

| Player | Team | POS | ERA |
|--------------|------|-----|------|
| 1 D Martinez | MON | P | 2.39 |
| 2 J Rijo | CIN | P | 2.51 |
| 3 T Glavine* | ATL | P | 2.55 |
| 4 T Belcher | LAD | P | 2.62 |
| 5 P Harnisch | HOU | P | 2.70 |

Runs (R)

| Player | Team | POS | R |
|--------------|------|-----|-----|
| 1 B Butler | LAD | OF | 112 |
| 2 H Johnson | NYM | 3B | 108 |
| 3 R Sandberg | CHC | 2B | 104 |
| 4 B Bonilla | PIT | OF | 102 |
| 5 R Gant | ATL | OF | 101 |

Hits & Walks Ratio (RATIO)

| Player | Team | POS | ERA |
|--------|----------------------------|-----|-----|
| 1 | Stats Not Available | | |
| 2 | | | |
| 3 | | | |
| 4 | | | |
| 5 | | | |

Stolen Bases (SB)

| Player | Team | POS | SB |
|---------------|------|-----|----|
| 1 M Grissom* | MON | OF | 76 |
| 2 O Nixon | ATL | OF | 72 |
| 3 D DeShields | MON | 2B | 56 |
| 4 R Lankford | STL | OF | 44 |
| 5 B Bonds* | PIT | OF | 43 |

Strikeouts (SO)

| Player | Team | POS | SO |
|--------------|------|-----|-----|
| 1 D Cone | NYM | P | 241 |
| 2 G Maddux* | CHC | P | 198 |
| 3 T Glavine* | ATL | P | 192 |
| 4 P Harnisch | HOU | P | 172 |
| 4 J Rijo | CIN | P | 172 |

* Active Player

Bonds of course is the one that might still be good although his DL stint this year has raised the question of can he come back and still be great if he does? By the end of the season we should know the answer. I was actually surprised to see Hojo led the league in both homers and rbi's and was second in runs scored. How were the Mets not good in 1991 (or were they)?

Seeing Glavine and Maddux on the list reminds me of why the Braves were so good for so long. Of the active players Maddux is currently performing the best. Of course by the time the Mets got Glavine we wish he was already retired. And speaking of retired, I hope that after this season we can remove the asterisk from Franco's name. If anyone should be retired, it's him. Hard to believe that he thinks he can contribute on the field; guess he has no hobbies.



WEBSITE LINKS

[Vagrant League Fantasy Baseball](#) (Our home page)

[USAStats](#)

[Major League Baseball](#)

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

TRADING DEADLINE

TIME: AUGUST 9TH, NOON

There is no trading after this deadline until the season is over.

SEPTEMBER EXPANSION

TIME: SEPTEMBER 6TH ROSTER MOVES OR LATER

Beginning with the September 6th moves you can expand your roster from 23 players to 24. The extra player can be either a hitter or pitcher.



The Publisher's Request

Fella's, I like putting the newsletter together but it would be nice to get a couple more of you to write something once in a while. I know people are busy but if Barry and I are the only one's to write articles then the newsletter may get canceled. The next issue is in August, please consider writing something, it does not have to long. This gives you six to eight weeks to think of a topic.



Parity

Ken Griffey Jr. and Cliff Floyd for much of their offense, a recipe for injury induced disaster. Lastly, the pitching is now being carried by Chris Carpenter and Brett Myers. While they are quality hurlers, they can't both be expected to continue to contend for the Cy Young all year. My guess is that A&H will soon begin to struggle.

Marauders Since the week of May 16th, the Marauders have been no lower than 4th in the intra-weekly results, and have now moved into a money slot. That is what you would call a positive trend. It looks like the league's newest franchise has figured things out. Or perhaps jettisoning the two-owner concept has allowed the Marauder's front office greater clarity in operation. This is a sneakily good team getting excellent performances out of Tony Clark and Bill Hall. An improvement in the pitching, particularly Jason Schmidt, and this team will still be in the money come October.

DoubleD The hitters have for the most part held up their end of the bargain, while the pitching has flopped. The starting pitchers have been atrocious, while the closers, Gagne and Lyon are hurt. While a recent trade of the under performing Brad Wilkerson for Andy Pettitte may help somewhat, DoubleD must hope that the arsonists comprising the starting staff get themselves under control. Compared to some other teams, they need more to go right for them to be successful in the second half.

Master Blasters Another prime example in the parity argument. Besides Glaus, Wright, and Abreu, what has propelled this team to a whisker of first place? (at least as of June 21) Injuries have hurt, Chipper and Craig Wilson are currently DL'd (Wilson with a suspicious sounding injury: ligament ripped from the sheath). Their pitching, other than saves is solid, and should be enough to allow them to hang around.

Futurians Its always good to see the commissioner competitive, so he can be expected to remain interested in the league through the end of the season. With Scott Rolen back in action and Mark Loretta expected back in mid July, this squad can expect a boost. However, they also need Mark Mulder and Carlos Zambrano to break out their current funk if they are to regain the high position they enjoyed earlier this year. Check out the nice year that Reggie Sanders is quietly having; he is possibly a 30/30 guy.

Eight Men Out As of June 28, Eight Men Out is the most statistically balanced team, with only a four point differential between its hitting and pitching totals. Furthermore, they are the only team with only one category where they rank in either the top or bottom two teams in that category. Almost by definition then, this is a mediocre team. Furthermore, the players have been relatively healthy, with Kerry Wood being the only significant injury. The players have also generally performed reasonably as expected, except Mike Lowell who has been in a horrific slump. Given that most other teams have suffered more injuries, chances are that the injury bug will also catch up to this team.

Red Storm At the beginning of June, Red Storm exploded and appeared unstoppable. Carlos Lee was on fire, Mike Cameron had just come off the DL with a vengeance, and it looked like Carlos Beltran was finally going to go on a tear. Since then though, they have cooled considerably and have fallen from their early June peak of just four points out of first. However, they have a superior offense that can again light it up, and enough quality hurlers to contribute in the pitching categories to move back into contention, assuming Oliver Perez remembers how to pitch like he did last year and he stops kicking the laundry cart.

KrackerJacks Miles, Valentin, Sledge, Vidro, all on the DL at the same time. Ouch. It looks like Frank's streak of improving his final finish each season will be broken. It doesn't look like there is enough talent here to overcome all the injuries to the KJ's hitters.

Shus Crew No one circles the wagons better then the Buffalo Bills... uh, I meant Shus Crew. While Ron has started to make some good trades in his annual come from behind drive, he probably has too much ground to make up, and too little talent to contend this year. He should actually consider taking the unusual step of releasing Eric Milton, a high priced player, as soon as he is able to. How bad is Milton and his 7.70 ERA? In nine of his last ten starts, he has allowed at least four earned runs in each, and has failed to go seven innings in all but one of those ten starts. Perhaps a perfect symbol for Shus Crew's season was Nomar Garciaparra grimacing in pain on the ground after tearing his groin ligament off the bone.



25 Years Later

received, a dozen owners will be chosen to play in a league beginning next month. At season's end, the winner will be offered a job as special assistant for baseball operations, supposedly helping Giants GM Brian Sabean evaluate players and prepare for the amateur draft.

For the original Rotisserie champions, the grand prize was considerably less lucrative, though just as glorious, said Glen Waggoner, who teamed with Peter Gethers to lead the "Getherswag Goners" to the inaugural title in 1980. Their reward, aside from the first-place winnings in a league with a \$250 entry fee, was the Wigge Cup, named in honor of Larry Wigge, who compiled the baseball statistics for the Sporting News. And instead of celebratory champagne, it was a bottle of Yoo-Hoo ceremoniously poured over their heads as they stood -- wearing tuxedos -- in the bathtub of fellow owner Cork Smith's Manhattan apartment.

"It was delightful," said Waggoner, then a Columbia University administrator and now a deputy editor for ESPN The Magazine. "And the key is to pour it slowly so you can really appreciate it."

He and the others certainly can appreciate how times have changed.

Okrent's version in 1980 was considerably more elaborate -- yet there wasn't much debate over the basic rules, "because they were brought down from the mountain by Moses Okrent," Waggoner said, chuckling.

Okrent's rules have stood the test of time: Of the estimated 7 million adults playing fantasy baseball this year, most still will use Okrent's stone tablets.

The draft itself was a raucous all-day affair, and Waggoner, one of the few outsiders in the room, jokingly remembers feeling "great fear and trembling" for the first few hours.

"I was in such awe -- these people were just names to me," he said. "Piles of paper, wisecracks going back and forth from people who knew each other -- the most personal and scurrilous attacks -- and I'm thinking, 'What if they turn on me?' Everybody also seemed to know so much more about baseball than I did -- until that time I fancied that I knew quite a lot."

Still, he knew enough to select Mets reliever Neil Allen for \$2, and Allen's 22 saves that season would prove vital to the Goners' pennant win.

Okrent admitted as much the following year, when he wrote a feature story for Inside Sports magazine entitled "The Year George Foster Wasn't Worth \$36." Word spread quickly, thanks in large part to the owners' ties to the media and publishing trades, and stories in the New York Times and on the CBS Morning News brought more exposure.

The 1982 arrival of USA TODAY, a daily national newspaper that provided the all-important box scores, helped Rotisserie grow, too. By the spring of 1984, the original owners had published a how-to book about Rotisserie baseball and league newcomer Steve Wulf had written a feature on it for Sports Illustrated. The game was being played in press boxes and living rooms across the country.

Indeed, for fantasy sports, Okrent said, "the nuclear explosion came with the arrival of the Internet."

As the public began discovering the wonders of the Web in the mid-1990s, fantasy gamers discovered a quick and easy way to compile and disseminate league statistics. For Okrent, it had been a 20-mile weekly trip to find a copy of the Sporting News. By 1998, as Yahoo! and other providers were getting into the game, it required little more than the click of a button.

Okrent and the rest didn't create Rotisserie with the idea of turning a profit, but that doesn't mean they didn't try once they realized they had a potential gold mine at their fingertips. They trademarked the name, wrote a book and even toyed with the idea of a statistical service in the early years. But it was all in vain: Others simply changed the name to "fantasy" baseball and that was that.

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25 Years Later

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"I'm still looking for a business-school professor who would like to do a case study on this: 'It's 1981, so how do you make money off of this?'," Okrent said. "We made a little bit, which we divided 10 ways. We even hired a guy to try to exploit it -- on a full-time basis -- but nothing came of that. The thing is, you don't need anything besides statistics."

Even those will cost you now, though.

Of the original 11 Rotisserie owners, only Gethers and Rob Fleder, now an executive editor at Sports Illustrated, still compete in the original league. Okrent quit in 1996 -- ironically, he never won a championship -- but he has since joined a reconstituted league with a half-dozen of the other founders.

The "new" old league -- variously referred to by its members as Rotisserie Light, Slow-Pitch Rotisserie or the AARP League -- is less labor-intensive, with no trades allowed after the first week of the season.

"It gives you a reason to look at the box scores every day," Okrent said. "But it gives you no reason to have to talk to these other people."

He laughed. They do talk, of course, and regularly. Just last week, Waggoner attended a birthday celebration for Gethers and the two couldn't help but marvel that they had known each other for a quarter century, brought together by Rotisserie baseball.

Long after the Goners are gone, they'll be remembered, too. Last year, the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary added a definition for rotisserie: "of, relating to or being a sports league consisting of imaginary teams whose performance is based on the statistics of actual players."

"That is pretty damn cool," said Waggoner, who sent framed photocopies of the Webster's entry to all 11 original Rotisseries. "I've got to say, that makes me feel a little proud."

Excerpts from article written By John Niyo / The Detroit News



Contributors Needed

It's To Your Advantage

Barry Greenberg

Columnist

Contributions of articles from league members are needed to keep this publication going. An additional benefit in writing articles should also be noted.

When you write an article, you pay more attention to the league, your competition, and trends in preparing to write the article, at least if you do a good job. This will in turn make you more competitive in the league.

For example, look at Ed. By his own admission he was a league doormat for many years. Then in 2002, he started this publication, and has written the majority of the articles. Since that time, he has finished in the money two out of three years and is in contention this year. The other major contributor to each issue is myself. Since 2002, I have been in the money every year, winning once and second place once. Again, I am in contention this season.

Coincidence? Maybe. But writing the articles is fun and does give me insight into what is going on. If you all do not appreciate such an advantage, that's also fine by me.



Never has It Been So Close

Anonymous

Never has the VLFB been this close so late in the season. With almost three months gone there are still 10 teams that have a legitimate chance of coming in the money, even high money.

The reasons for this can be debated but I feel it is a combination of many bad injuries, the fairly high level of roto smarts for all owners and the four dollar tax.

For better or for worse the tax has done what it was supposed to do, reduce dumping to lessen the impact in the dump year as well as the following year for the team that dumped. There are many trade talks that I have been a privy to that end in "...I would do the trade if the guy was at his contract but when \$4 is added he is not worth trading for". Turns out the four dollar trade tax is analogous to revenue sharing in that helps maintain parity. This is a good thing.

