

The Wrigley whiff: Sosa's home runs come with a price

By Rick Morrissey
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

CHICAGO — It's a picture-perfect Sunday at Wrigley Field, the wind blowing out, clouds moseying across a blue sky and Sammy Sosa stepping to the plate. We're all here for the same thing.

Sosa digs in hard with his right foot to anchor his stance, jumps out of the box, takes a few wicked practice cuts and then steps back in to face Colorado pitcher Joe Kennedy in the first inning.

There are any number of possibilities, but let's face it, there are only two that are worthy of the man: The home run or the strikeout — the Herculean show of strength or the Greek tragedy. They're a package deal with Sammy the Showman. For every one home run, there are about four strikeouts that range in aesthetic value from ugly to breathtaking.

"I don't like (strikeouts) because when you strike out, you don't have a chance. I remember Hank Aaron saying that in his whole career he never struck out 100 times in a season."

Dusty Baker
Chicago Cubs manager

So you wait for two options. You wait for the Sosa hop after he hits the ball, the hop that tells you he knows he has hit it hard enough for a home run. And you wait for the slow walk back to the dugout after a Sosa strikeout, the walk of atonement, the walk that tells you he has been very naughty.

Big swing by Sosa early in the count against Kennedy. Big miss by Sosa. Big guttural "oooooh" from a crowd braced for something magnificent. Instead, Sosa walks. Big deal. That's not going to cut it on the emotion meter, but it will do for a team starving for baserunners.

Sosa had struck out three times Saturday, giving him 2,002 for his career and elevating him to a place among the strikeout gods. He joins Reggie Jackson (2,597) and Andres Galarraga as the only players in major-league history to have 2,000 or more strikeouts. He also homered Saturday to give him 547 career home runs, one fewer than Mike Schmidt, who is ninth all-time. This is the Essential Sosa.

And that's why we're here Sunday. To either get chills from a homer or windburn from a strikeout.

Sosa would prefer that his 2,002 strikeouts tiptoe away. He's a proud man. But the strikeouts are as much of

what he is as the home runs. He always has wanted to be bigger than life. You don't go from being a guy who steals 36 bases in a season to a guy who hits 66 home runs without making a conscious effort.

He doesn't like to discuss his shortcomings, but he wouldn't be the home-run hitter he is if he didn't make those huge hacks at the ball. He's not the only one striking out, just the most obvious. Few players seem willing to shorten their swing with two strikes these days.

"I don't know if they know how," Cubs manager Dusty Baker says. "And there's no penalty. Back in our day, you struck out too much, there was somebody just as good (who) was going to take your job because he didn't strike out as much."

Yeah, but that's everybody else. There's an entertainment value to Sosa that isn't there with anybody else, not even Barry Bonds, who, by the way, has struck out only 1,393 times in his career.

Power hitters receive absolution for their strikeouts because that's part of what they do, the big lugs. But Baker believes we've gone soft on strikeouts as a society. Then again, Corey Patterson leads the Cubs in strikeouts and hasn't lost his No. 2 spot in the batting order. He looked positively ill while whiffing three times Sunday.

"I don't like (strikeouts) because when you strike out, you don't have a chance," Baker said. "I remember Hank Aaron saying that in his whole career he never struck out 100 times in a season. And he was in an era when they had Koufax, Drysdale, Marichal, Gibson, Fergie, Seaver, Koonsman. They had some strikeout dudes."

Sosa grounds out in the third. Boring, dude.

In the seventh inning, Sosa lets two fastballs go by for strikes. Very un-Sammy-like. Here comes a juicy pitch from reliever Tim Lincecum, and you're sure that big home-run swing will follow. But the ball tails away from Sosa, and he has to lunge at strike three. Not your classic tomadic swing from Sammy, but the walk of atonement doesn't care about the quality of the strikeout.

Sosa ends up striking out twice in a game delayed three times by rain. Patterson gets a measure of redemption by knocking in the winning run in the 13th for a 5-4 Cubs victory.

Afterward, Sosa's strikeout count is off limits for discussion.

"I don't want to talk about that," he says.

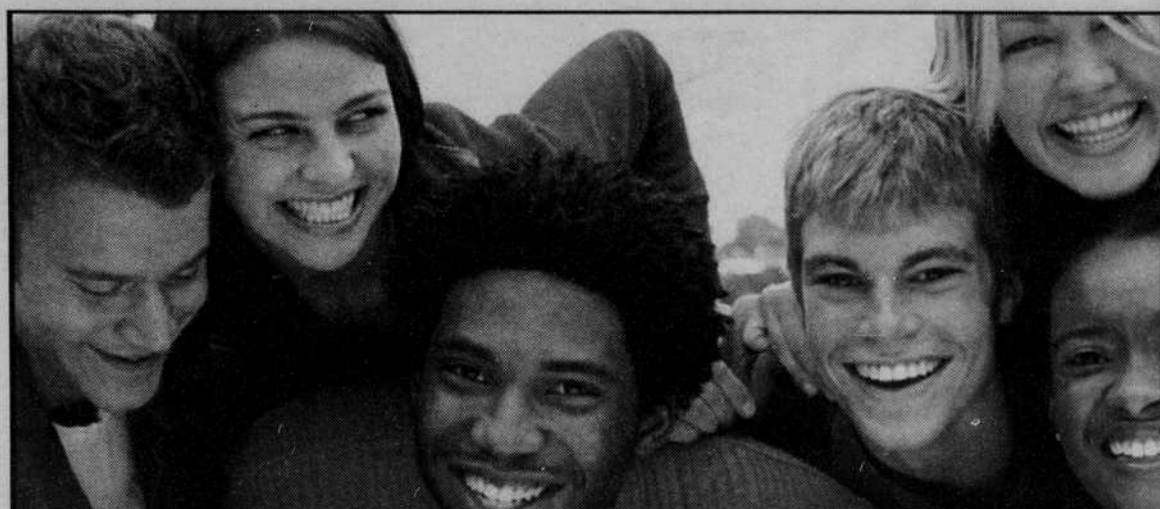
He's at 2,004 now. Somewhere, Mr. October is getting nervous.

© 2004, Chicago Tribune. Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

WE BUY
YOUR COMPUTERS,
DESKTOPS OR LAPTOPS
(WORKING OR NOT, PARTS ALSO)
FURNITURE, TV, DVD, VHS
FOR TOP DOLLAR!

We will pick it up! Call us.
Make some money now!

Jackpot 688-8569 or 543-3055
2699 Roosevelt Blvd.



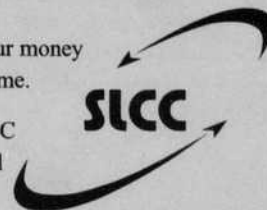
Graduating Seniors Consolidate Your Student Loans Today and save more each month!

Did you know you will pay more in interest when you consolidate eligible student loans through the Federal Direct Consolidation Program compared to when you consolidate with the Student Loan Consolidation Center (SLCC)?

It's true. You don't have to pay more in interest because SLCC offers some of the best borrower benefits in the industry.

By consolidating with SLCC you can keep more of your money each month and reduce your interest rate at the same time.

If you are graduating this year please call the SLCC toll-free number today at 800-864-7053 and we will help you PAY LESS now.



www.slccloans.com

HAS A CONVERSATION REALLY HAPPENED?

Race isn't biological.
But that doesn't mean it isn't real.



RACE

the power of an illusion

A nationwide release of a three-part documentary series by California Newsreel

View each provocative episode and then engage in facilitated dialogue within a safe and supportive space.

Tues. April 27th 6:30-8:30pm Ben Linder Rm EMU
EPISODE I - The Difference Between Us

Tues. May 4th 6:30-8:30pm Ben Linder Rm (EMU)
EPISODE II - The Story We Tell

Hasn't race always been with us? Explore the roots of the race concept, the 19th century science that legitimized it, and how it gained such a hold over our minds.

Tues. May 11th 6:30-8:30pm Ben Linder Rm(EMU)
EPISODE III - The House We Live In

Race may be a biological myth, but racism still gives different groups vastly different life chances. Forty years after the Civil Rights movement, the playing field is still not level, and "colorblind" policies only perpetuate inequality.

ALL levels of interest are welcome.

LET'S ENGAGE IT.

VISIT THE COMPANION WEB SITE @ www.pbs.org/race

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

BRT
with
Oregon
Teams

For more information contact
the BRT at 346-1159 or
email kmcjic@darkwing.uoregon.edu

1st Annual



May 22nd & 23rd
on the Clackamas River
14 miles past Estcada

University Challenge

- 5 person paddle teams register at event
- Equipment test drives
- BBQ and live music

oregonrivergames.com



We've got sports

24/7

at www.dailymerald.com