



The moon was full, the ouzo was fine, and the cries of "Let's mambo! Or Mizourka! Or some damn thing!" rang across the Mediterranean sand. I was engaged in a dancing frenzy with a one armed Greek fisherwoman who was wearing a diaphanous white dress, when a filthy, ill-shorn, unemployed deck-hand garrotted me from behind.

"Four months scrubbing decks on a tramp steamer, but I have ferreted you out. Now you are mine!"

With effort, I freed myself, and thrust him to the beach. "Sir, you are bereft. Stand away, or I will summon a constable. The local authorities make short shrift of febrile vagabonds such as yourself."

"Ha! You invoke the police? I possess writs and documents! You may recall a lost weekend in Atlantic City, I'm sure. I bought your markers, you pig. You come with me and write, damnit, or you go with Fat Tony Scalerno to God knows where."

"You think to feed me to the Mob? Say hello to being bouillibaisse, you weasel." And with that I grabbed him by the soiled lapels, and dragged him, squirming and screaming, down the beach, where I pitched him into the sea.

Amidst his flailing and gasping, he proved verbose. "You have been ungenerous to me, but I will offer you this. In the event of my untimely death, my high powered Miami attorney has been instructed to take the proper steps, particularly in regard to my debtors. And, as an adjunct, I might point out that I cannot swim."

With a furious oath, I waded into the pulsing waters and rescued the worthless, yet providentially recently bathed Editor from the surf. Within an hour we were on a plane home.

My beloved editor over-indulged in airline cocktails and fell asleep, snoring intolerably.

The Great American Game should be an unrelenting war of nerves.

Ty Cobb

Hello. Much has happened since we last talked, or as Mrs. Baseball incorrectly puts it, I lectured. Major League Baseball, after a season ending strike, has suffered a 30% attendance decline this year, the bad P.R. in the press is of epic proportions, and ABC and NBC, the two other partners in The Baseball Network, have thrown up their hands and said they refuse to deal with these cretins ever again, which means five or six years. The U.S. Senate is poised to strip MLB, Inc. of its monopoly-free status, and the Office of the Commissioner of Baseball is now being used as the storeroom for old Curt Flood legal files. The time of games is encroaching on three bloody hours, and it's possible we may yet have a strike or lock-out this season. All these months of this, and the owners insist that they "aren't ready to negotiate." Yeah, neither was Tojo fifty years ago.

MLB, Inc. is committing suicide, on a spectacular scale. You may say to yourself, "This is not my beautiful game. How did we get here?" Not an easy question. Let's look at the record.

Bud Selig, acting commissioner, and his cabal of retrograde stooges have fought tooth and talon to preserve the status quo in labor relations, which resulted, predictably, in the disastrous lockout of '94. But baseball was in peril before that.

Alert readers will note that I said "baseball", and not merely MLB, Inc. Yes, the game itself is losing interest at an alarming rate, and there is darn little anyone can do about it. Make no mistake, the game will never die, or even come close, but it will never approach being the National Pastime ever again.

Which is sad and symptomatic. The casual baseball fan is virtually extinct. For the most part, you are either a big fan, or you don't give a shit. If you talk to a non-fan, the mantra is inevitably, unalterably the same;

It's boring
It's too slow.
There's not enough action.

My reaction to this used to be a patient explanation, or, ahem, "lecture", about how they were confusing motion with action, the beauty of the dynamics of the game, the aesthetics of the proportions of the field, the grand traditions, and so on. Then, when their eyes begin to glaze over, I excuse myself and walk away muttering.

I have no numbers to back this up, but it seems to me that most really big baseball fans are old, or at least, getting there. This is because baseball demands attention over a nine inning or 162 game span. You need a certain amount of maturity to deal with this game. (Not something Mr. Baseball has a great deal of, so go figure.)

This was not always so. Forty years ago, kids played baseball, period. If you happened to watch the Extreme Games on ESPN recently, you saw where the focus of today's sporting youth is; Rock climbing. Moto-cross. Wind-surfing. In-line skating. Insane skateboarding. Parachuting off large rocks. And so on.

For these folks, instant gratification is just way too slow. Team sports, with their lessons in teamwork and camaraderie are deemed clumsy and unnecessary.

But that's okay. Everybody grows old. Unless you crush yourself like a noxious insect jumping of a large rock.

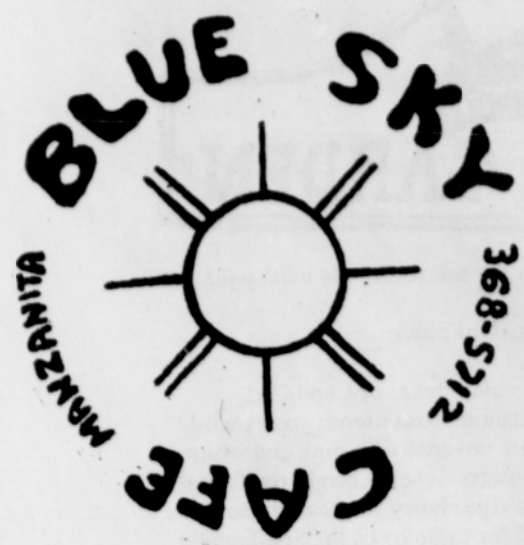
R.I.P. Mick.

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And now.....

The Quiz

- 1) What 3000 hit slugger was so consistent that he had the same number of hits on the road as he had at home?
A) Honus Wagner
B) Stan Musial
C) Rod Carew
D) George Brett
- 2) Name the only player with 20+ pinch-hit taters.
A) Cliff Johnson
B) Rusty Staub
C) Frenchy Bordagaray
D) Merv Rettenmund
- 3) Any small child knows Babe Ruth pitched and played the field in game 4 of the 1918 World Series. But one other player has done this in a series. Name him.
A) Jim Kaat
B) Vic Raschi
C) Todd Worrell
D) Hooks Dauss
- 4) One NL MVP finished second in scoring nationally in his college basketball career. Who is this guy?
A) Bob Gibson
B) Marty Marion
C) Jim Konstanty
D) Dick Groat
- 5) What speed merchant stole 38 consecutive bases in 1975?
A) Mickey Rivers
B) Cesar Cedeno
C) Davey Lopes
D) Joe Morgan



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Answers:

1. B
2. A
3. C
4. D
5. C

A cynic is a person searching for an honest man with a stolen lantern.
Edgar A. Shoaff

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