

How to own a baseball team

Aging gracefully in the Bush League.

by Conn Nugent

Every morning, May through October, twelve grown men from the hills and cities of Massachusetts open their newspapers to the sports page and check on their big-league baseball teams. They share this vice with millions. What sets them apart is that their teams are, in fact, *their teams*. These men are workers turned magnates, franchise owners of the Bush Baseball League, Inc. I am one of them.

My friends and I have purchased the services of the finest athletes in the American League, and have marshaled them under our own banners in a federation with a life of its own. The players are owned by, and work for, the Yankees and Royals and Red Sox and the rest of the American League. They are also owned by, and work for, the Dandelions and Darrelicts and Tomahawks and the rest of the Bush League. The ballplayers have yet to be informed, but *they are playing the game for us*.

Here's how. In April, each Bush League franchise pledges fifty dollars and uses it to assemble a team. Drawing from current American League rosters, we auction off players' contracts to the highest bidder. Our rosters bear scant resemblance to those of the big clubs: a typical Bush League team might feature three Yankees, four Rangers, two Angels, and maybe an exceptional Blue Jay.

Team performances are measured by seven indices derived from statistics published each week in the Sporting News. All data are current. Unlike the action in commercial board games, nothing in our league is hypothetical. We don't take the career statistics of Tommy John and the career statistics of Otto Velez and run through some fraudulent arithmetic simulation. We

look at what Tommy and Otto are really doing out there, right now. *They are playing the game for us*.

At the end of the regular season, the franchise that accumulates the most points from the seven categories is declared the winner. The winner receives 60 percent of the league treasury and a year's lease on a large, vulgar trophy. Second place means 25 percent of the treasury, third place 15. Everyone wins vulgar little trophies.

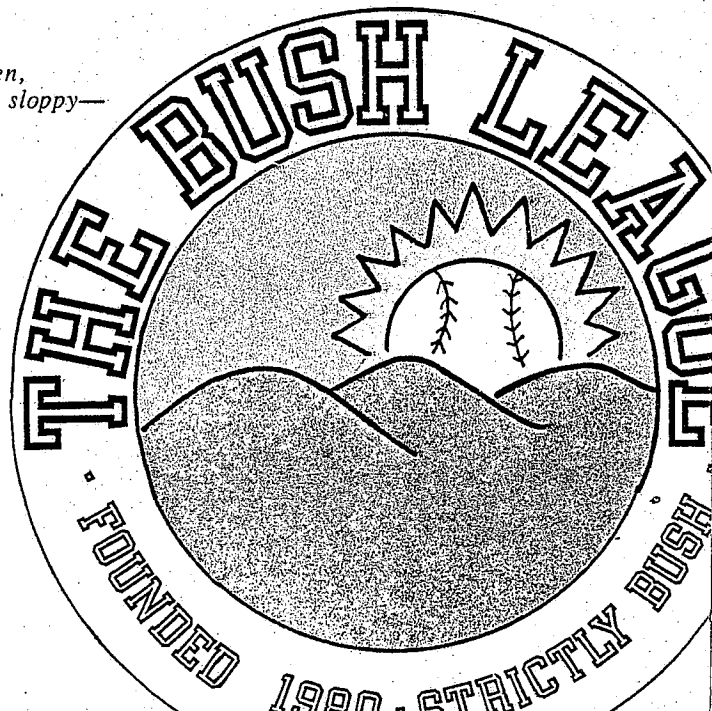
The Bush League is limited to American League players. National Leaguers are controlled by an organization of New York teams called the Rotisserie League, after an undistinguished Manhattan restaurant where this whole business started in the winter of 1979-80. True to historic parallel, the Rotisserie League is populist baseball's senior circuit—by about two months. The Rotiserians deserve all the credit; if that's the word, for devising the basics of the game.

*The league logo is blue, green, yellow, white, and a little bit sloppy—
"strictly bush."*

Each league has elevated a particular fanatic to the position of league secretary. It is the job of the league secretary to create the climate of a pennant race. He is expected to buy the Sporting News, lift the players' statistical performances from their better-known teams, subject them to some additional calculator work, and reassemble them under the headings of their Bush or Rotisserie rosters. He then computes the official standings, and mails them to franchise owners.

For the inaugural season, at least, the Bush League owners hardly needed the official stats. Most kept track on their own. They opened the newsstands to get morning box scores. They bought the late editions for results from the West Coast. They kept files.

Owners tied up telephones. They





blathered to fellow owners or called big-league front offices to check on the reserve status of their disabled shortstop. They talked about their teams incessantly, and became unpopular in certain circles.

At home, for example. Stephen Kulik, who bosses the Stevedores, recalls the first sign of trouble with his wife, Suzanne.

St.: Suzy! Toby Harrah hit a grand slam last night for the Stevedores!

Su.: [watering plants] Uh-huh.

St.: Hey. It sounds like you don't care.

Su.: [making eye contact] I don't.

Darrell's roommate had her bags packed halfway through June. My wife let me silently compute box scores over morning coffee, but I had to take the archives and the chatter and the 25 baseball cards to the office. Social occasions came to be engineered so that no more than two Bush Leaguers were invited to any function.

In general, we owners were underappreciated. Nonfans would adopt half-smiles and patronizing attitudes. Even addicts had trouble understanding how we could subordinate old loyalties (to the Red Sox, mostly) in favor of some metaphysical construct. At the Midsummer Bush League Outing—an Angels' game at Fenway Park—none of our grandstand neighbors could grasp why we rooted for different players on both teams.

Through it all, we were happy. We spoke the language of joggers and veteran Bolsheviks.

Best thing that's ever happened.

This has changed my life.

I can't wait to get out of bed in the morning.

God, but I love it.

Our enthusiasm did spawn some excesses. It is true that I embezzled grocery money for a T-shirt and a satin jacket with the colors (purple and black) and logo (a celestial slugger) of my mediocre Connstellations. But try to understand. The issue is . . . control. Where once slouched a slavish fan, dependent on the judgment and money of others, there now stands a Jeffersonian squire with his own team and destiny.

He can trade players, place them on reserve, waive them. He can dress them in uniforms of his choice and field them in a stadium of his own design. Men Bite Dog.

Some characteristics of Bush League owners: *Sex:* Male. *Ages:* 28 to 36. *Ethnic backgrounds:* Irish, Polish, German, Jewish, Anglo-Saxon, French-Canadian, unknown. *Professions:* Alwin (Alcoholics) works in a family-planning center. Jan (Batjans) drives a truck. Paul (co-owner, Batjans) works for the Attorney General. Conn (Connstellations) runs a small charitable foundation. Dan (Dandelions) writes and publishes. Darrell (Darrelicts) is a plumber. Norman (Norman Invasions) is a graduate student. Steve and Brad (co-owners, Norman Invasions) help weatherize low-income housing. Stephen (Stevedores) runs an energy office for Hampshire County. Tom (TomaHawks) manages a grocery store. His partner, Ned, builds houses.

Tom's store is the Corners Grocery, Worthington, Massachusetts (population 950). There was a time when descriptions of such towns required the words "nestled" and "sleepy." Nestled in the Berkshire foothills lies the sleepy hamlet of Worthington.

Tom matches the town. Quiet, cheerful, unintrusive. He has always had a modest reputation as a baseball fan—the local trophies stand on his meat counter—and so last spring, while cleaving some chops, he was invited to Bush League membership by Dan, owner of one of four Worthington franchises.

Tom mulled it over, persuaded Ned to go in with him on the fifty-dollar pledge, and agreed to join. In so doing, he established the Corners Grocery meat department as the hive of the league. Owners began to gather there for conversational reinforcement, for the balm of a shared mania. Soon, half the town was aware of the whole slightly embarrassing affair.

Tom was drawn to the Bush League because it was Dan who asked him. Dan

is everyone's favorite owner. Dan eats baseball for lunch. He has published one book about the game, is preparing another, and has written a variety of articles about players and fans. He has two seats from Briggs Stadium on his patio. He owns (and wears) a complete Washington Senators uniform, warm-up jacket included.

Although Dan is a taxpaying Worthingtonian, he is also a New York expatriate whose work has kept him in touch with Manhattan high life. He was an automatic choice of his city friends for one of the original Rotisserie League franchises. He was the only non-New Yorker among the Rotisserie founders, and he is the only person to own teams in both leagues.

Well before the season got under way, Dan realized that the Rotisserie League was a wonderful idea. But with National Leaguers only, it was insufficient. The Bush League really began the day Dan decided that life would be insupportable without an American League analogue to his National League Dan Druffs. I was commissioned to organize eastern Massachusetts franchises, with Dan taking care of the west. Thus the meeting with Tom and the formation of the rest of the Bush League.

Dan cherished the fondest hopes for his first-born team, the Druffs. Their miserably low standing in the Rotisserie League was ashes in his mouth. Of necessity, he came to rely on his second child. The Bush League may have been a penny-ante version of the Rotisserie (\$50 a team, against \$250—The Sticks versus Gotham); but a Dandelion success became vital to Dan's self-esteem.

And the Dandelions were a success. They finished a strong second last year, largely owing to Dan's management. No one traded more or better than Dan. No one used the disabled lists, reserve lists, and waiver wires more astutely. Every day Dan could tell you how the Dandelions were doing in every category, thanks to a wrinkled running tally he kept in his wallet. Not a box score went untabulated.

Still, second place is not first place, and a Bush League pennant was needed



HARVARD Magazine Travel Planner

If you're planning a vacation, we'd like to help. Listed below are advertisers offering free booklets and brochures. Simply check the travel information you would like, circle the corresponding numbers on the accompanying travel-planner card, and return it to us.

1. ABACO INN/Bahama Out Islands

Our ten very private cottage rooms are nestled among coconut palms along a ridge of sand dunes overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. We'll help you escape the rigors of 20th-century urban life and enjoy our warm, leisurely, "away from it all" atmosphere.

2. AIR AFRIQUE

Please rush me more information on meetings and convention facilities, luxurious hotel accommodations, and Air Afrique's luxury transatlantic service to Dakar, Senegal and Abidjan, Ivory Coast, and the rest of West Africa. It's only 7 hours away.

3. CHINA SIGHTSEEING

China tours—led by China experts. Educational tours, sightseeing tours, student budget tours, with 14 or more days in China. Visit Peking, Shanghai, Nanking, Hangchow, Wu-hsi, Soochow, Sian, Canton, and Hong Kong.

4. COPLEY PLAZA HOTEL

Boston's Grand Dame is devoted to unobtrusive service, tasteful detail. Home of the Café Plaza, serving fine Continental cuisine; the convivial Copley's Restaurant and Bar; and the Plaza Bar, reminiscent of a British officer's club.

5. ECHO: The Wilderness Co.

Experience the grandeur and excitement of wilderness river trips. ECHO has built a reputation for running high-quality, socially rewarding trips. Send for our catalogue of outings in the West, Alaska, and around the world.

6. HOLIDAY YACHT CHARTERS

Specializes in yachting vacations around the world. Go first-class on charter in Caribbean, Mediterranean, New England, or plan expedition to the Arctic. Send for brochure that gives complete details.

7. ITALIA ADAGIO

Experience the best of Italy, unexplored by mass tourism. Leisurely tours of central and northern Italy, created and conducted by the American painter Frieda Yamins, whose second home is in Florence. Superb accommodations—gourmet dining!

8. LINDBLAD/SWIRE CRUISES, LTD.

This summer, cruise in Indonesian waters seldom seen by cruise ships. Sail with the M.S. Lindblad *Explorer* to islands of Australasia, Indonesia, Coral Sea, China coast, or Antarctica. Write for more information.

9. MAUPINTOUR

Maupintour's Africa. In-depth wildlife viewing, best hotels, most desired lodges, most meals, limited size. East Africa's wildlife in 8 famous Kenya game reserves. Air-safari flightseeing. South Africa's Johannesburg, Cape Town, Victoria Falls.

10. MERCEDES-BENZ

Offers a "Guide to European Delivery" booklet at no cost. Discover money-saving facts about European delivery of a Mercedes-Benz automobile.

11. QUESTERS TOURS

Please send free Directory of World-Wide Nature Tours describing tours to Amazon, Peru, Patagonia, Galápagos, Hawaii, Alaska, Death Valley, Everglades, Ladakh, Sri Lanka, Iceland, Scotland, Greece, Australia, New Zealand, and many more. Expert naturalist leaders.

12. TRAVEL HEADQUARTERS

China—four itineraries visiting Peking, Sian, Kwei-lin, plus other cities. Continuing medical-education seminars available. Cruising—select from 18 North American continuing medical-education cruises on the M.S. *Sagafford*. Category I accreditation and tax-deductibility.

13. UNIVERSITY TRAVEL

Japan, Its Museums, Gardens, and Shrines. October 11-28, 1981. Tokyo, Kyoto, Matsue, Kurashiki, Miyajima, Osaka. Open to Harvard/Radcliffe alumni, their families, and friends.

14. VALLEY FORGE COUNTRY

Valley Forge country—relive the nation's founding at Valley Forge National Park. Then find excitement in nearby Philadelphia, Dutch country, and at 48 attractions detailed in our package of free, colorful brochures.

to recoup Dan's big losses in the high-rolling Rotisserie circuit.

So it was particularly troublesome that between Dan and the redemption of a Bush championship stood Jan, of the dread Batjans. The Batjans were not popular. They were consistent winners, which didn't help. They grabbed first place early in May and never looked back. No one likes runaways. And the Batjans were managed from the heart of eastern Massachusetts—Medford, actually—which nettled the proud Worthington men. They took to reading box scores for hints of a Batjan collapse the way financiers used to scan newspapers to see if FDR were dying.

A big part of the Batjan image problem was Jan himself. Jan is the pitcher on my municipal softball team. A serious kind of pitcher. When he wins, he is gratified but stoical. When he loses, the strain can show. Umpires are abused. Trash barrels are toppled. Incompetent teammates (me, for instance) are let off with ten-second stares that pack enough disappointment to reach right field on one hop. Jan is also a likable fellow, in a gruff kind of way. And he knows his baseball. Boy, does he know his baseball. So he seemed a natural for the Bush League, and I asked him to sign on when things were getting started last spring.

A week before the inaugural player auction, Jan boasted to a mutual friend that he would come back from the draft with a pennant-winning team and change from his fifty dollars. Damned if he didn't.

It was at the 1980 auction—in Worthington, at Dan's house—that Jan the city boy made his first appearance among the hilltowners. He arrived late, of course. Long, untrimmed beard, ponytail, dark glasses. Hardly a word outside perfunctory introductions. Then he stuffed a chaw of tobacco in his mouth and for the next four hours spat unsightly wads into a half-pint chocolate-milk carton.

He was a great bidder. Most of the rest of us, trapped by adrenaline and emotion, spent too much of our fifty dollars too soon, leaving little for bench strength. Jan stayed his hand, giving out only a contemptuous snort now and then when a mediocre player went for big money (Bump Wills for seven dollars). Then, when we were depleted, he threw around the cash, mercilessly outbidding the field and fashioning an entire roster of less-than-superstar regulars. Balance, sheer balance. Good power
(continued on page 70)

HARVARD TRAVEL PLANNER, P.O. BOX 2533, CLINTON, IOWA 52735

Puzzles

What's in a name?

by Leonard Marcus

Fill in the names of these musical and literary figures:

1. Johann Sebastian _____
2. Giovanni Battista _____
3. Jean Baptiste _____
4. Alexander Porfirevich _____
5. Alexander Sergeyevech _____
6. Sergey Alexandrovich _____
7. Sergey Vassilievich _____
8. Ivan Sergeyevech _____
9. Sergey Sergeyevech _____
10. Ernst Theodor Wilhelm
(later changed the Wilhelm to
Amadeus) _____
11. Wilhelm Richard _____
12. Edward William _____
13. Edward Estlin _____
14. Thomas Edward _____
15. Thomas Stearns _____
16. Edward Kennedy _____
17. Edvard Hagerup _____
18. David Herbert _____
19. Pearl _____ Grey
20. Sigmund Alexis _____
21. Ringgold Wilmer _____
22. Leon Bismark _____
23. Hector Hugh _____
24. John Birks _____
25. Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco _____

The answers to these puzzles will be published in the next issue.

Answer to January-February Harv-A-Crostic

(P.G.) Wodehouse, (The) Plot That Thickened

One of the first things a chronicler has to learn . . . is when to ease up and take a breather. Aristotle was all for sticking to pity and horror without a break, but he was wrong. It is a mistake to curdle the reader's blood all the time.

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| A. Waspish wit | J. Prolegomenon | S. Hoarder |
| B. Oculi | K. Leaf fringed | T. Iota |
| C. Dagobas | L. Ordain | U. Crofts |
| D. Enstatite | M. Troll | V. Kess |
| E. Hanobukten | N. Thwaite | W. Earth |
| F. Ostiary | O. Hall's Creek | X. Nab |
| G. Umwhile | P. Ashlar | Y. Eater |
| H. Stocker | Q. Trottoir | Z. Death hath |
| I. Eburine | R. Twist | |

Yankees vs. Royals

by David M. Bloom and
Jeffrey Bergen

The following box score of the Yankees vs. Royals game of August 21, 1979, appeared in the Chicago Tribune. It is self-contradictory, however: Stanley could not have scored three runs if the inning-by-inning line score is correct. Assuming that there are no errors other than the attribution to Stanley of one or more runs actually scored by other(s), determine whether Stanley scored once or twice. (He must have scored at least once, since he homered.)

New York		Kansas City	
ab	r h bi	ab	r h bi
Rndph 2b	4 1 2 0	Wilson lf	4 1 2 0
Murcer cf	2 0 0 0	McRae dh	3 0 2 0
Piniella lf	4 1 1 1	GBrett 1b	3 0 0 0
ReJcksn rf	3 0 0 0	Otis cf	3 0 1 1
Chmbls 1b	3 1 1 0	Cowens rf	4 0 0 0
Netties 3b	4 0 0 0	FWhite 2b	4 1 2 0
RWhite dh	4 0 1 2	Wathan c	3 0 1 0
Dent ss	1 0 0 0	LaCock ph	1 0 0 0
Brown pr	0 0 0 0	UWshgt ss	4 0 1 1
Stanley ss	1 3 1 3	Terrell 3b	3 0 0 0
Gulden c	2 0 0 0		
Randle ph	1 0 0 0		
Nairon c	1 0 0 0		
Total	30 6 6 6	Total	32 2 9 2
New York	000 001 005-6		
Kansas City	100 000 100-2		

E—Cowens. DP—New York 3, Kansas City 3. LOB—New York 3, Kansas City 6. 2B—McRae 2, FWhite, 3B—Randolph. HR—Stanley (2). SB—Wilson 2, Randolph.

	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
New York						
John	7	8	2	2	2	0
Gossage W.2-2	2	1	0	0	1	2
Kansas City						
Splittrff L.12-13	9	6	6	5	4	0

HBP—By Splittrff (Murcer, Chambliss). WP—Gossage. T—2:21. A—38,514.

HOW TO OWN A BASEBALL TEAM

(continued from page 56)

and good pitching and adequate speed.

When he had bid for, and won, the last Batjan, Jan left. A brief goodbye and he was gone. He left behind a carton of evil droppings, as well as envy and admiration and a fear at the heart that we yokels had been done in.

Jan re-emerged in November, when he and his partner, the startlingly pleasant and well-groomed Paul, traveled west to claim their prizes at the First Bush League Awards Gala and Constitutional Convention. There, by the chili and the Rolling Rock, they stood their emblems of achievement: our four-tiered perpetual trophy and a high stack of 250 one-dollar bills, secured in a pink ribbon.

We plot our separate comebacks. I have the form sheets. I have the lifetime statistical profiles. Already I know which players on my team are staying for the upcoming season and which players I want in the April draft. I will be cool, and maybe even a little surly.

The Bush League points the way toward ameliorating two chronic problems of the larger society. One is that old chestnut, powerlessness. The other is that half-conscious American xenophobia which puts off people in less favored countries.

Imagine the usefulness of decentralized citizen units getting together, throwing in some spare cash, and "owning" various parts of the planet. Imagine the ingenious mix of cultures and economies that would result by combining, say, the Argentine pampas with the Ruhr Valley. You could root them on, adopt native costumes. Try the Sahara plus Osaka. Just as any Bush League owner—formerly a provincial Red Sox fan—acquires cosmopolitanism by buying a Seattle Mariner or a California Angel, so, too, could these new owners develop true global perspectives.

The tricky part would be getting some standards published every week in the Sporting News. □

In the time he is able to spare from his duties as secretary of the Bush League, Inc., Conn Nugent directs the Vingo Trust, a charitable foundation in Cambridge. He graduated from Harvard College in 1968 and from the Law School in 1973.