

Dice Baseball Fever

It obsesses its fans, threatens marriages and sends grown men and women off into a fantasy world for hours on end. It's called APBA baseball, and it's both a game and a cult for well over 100,000 baseball addicts around the country. Danny Kaye plays and so does David Eisenhower, whose APBA sessions helped him get through the final days of the Nixon Administration. "It's like revisiting a moment early in my youth," Eisenhower explains, and he adds ruefully that his wife, Julie Nixon Eisenhower, "feels crowded out" by it.

Developed by a frustrated baseball player named J. Richard Seitz, APBA (for American Professional Baseball Association, a club Seitz belonged to as a child) consists of a game board, dice and a series of player cards and charts that use the batting, fielding and pitching records of real-life major-league teams and players to re-create game situations. The APBA player, known as the manager, can play alone, face-to-face against another manager or against a play-by-mail opponent. Today, Seitz sells an estimated 20,000 sets annually—by mail order only, at \$13.50 a set—and an additional 100,000 people are on the mailing list for new player cards, which are statistically updated each season.

The phenomenal success of APBA (pronounced ap-bah) has produced a cult of closet Ty Cobbs who are happily hitting grand slams at home, managing

their teams to pennant victories and furiously negotiating trades—and swapping cards—at the end of each season. It has also spawned a serious rival—Strat-O-Matic Baseball—whose fans insist their game is cluttered with fewer charts and allows more managerial decision-making, including variables for left- and right-handed pitching and a fatigue factor after a pitcher has gone into late innings. In response to the success of Strat-O-Matic, APBA has just issued a "master game," which is sold only to those who have played the original version more than eight months.

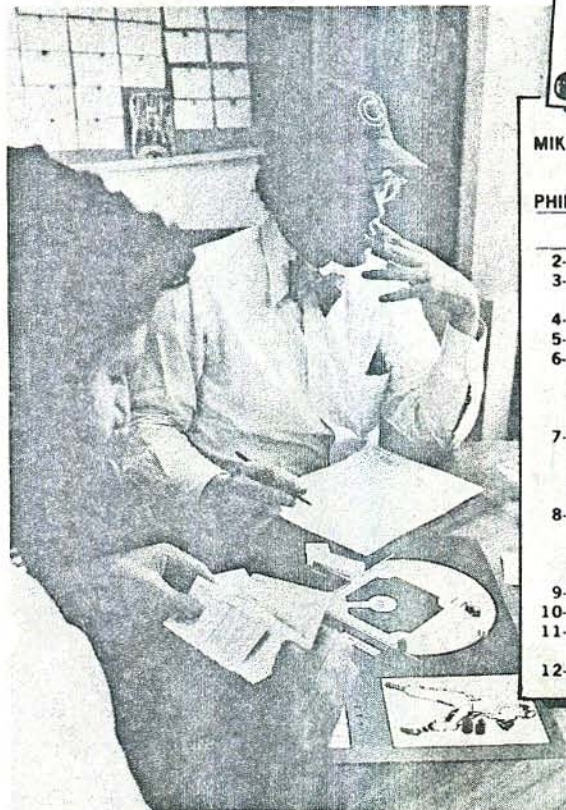
Craze: The loyalty of the fans to their game—devotees usually play one or the other, not both—goes far beyond their table-top stadiums. APBA fans hold national conventions and tournaments, the last of which drew 500 participants. They also compete in scores of play-by-mail leagues and issue excruciatingly detailed newsletters, complete with league information, hints on how to grade pitchers and other players and trivia columns (Who holds the record for the most strike-outs on a modern pitcher's card? Answer: Dick Radatz, Boston Red Sox, 1963). The craze has created a lucrative market for early sets that are no longer available. The value of a first 1951 APBA game can go as high as \$1,500, while the 1961 set, including Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle on the Yankees, is worth about \$125.

APBA and Strat-O-Matic are played in much the same way. The manager selects his line-up, rolls the dice and reads directions corresponding to the numbers on a series of charts (APBA) or on the players' cards (Strat-O-Matic). The cards and charts take into account the strength of the pitcher and various base-runner situations (e.g., runners on first and third) and even detail assists, errors and injuries. The strategy comes in the use of sacrifices, pinch hitters and playing the infield in or deep. Seitz keeps secret the mathematical formula by which he translates the players' actual statistical performances into the ratings for APBA, but the variables he has recently incorporated in the master game include runner speeds and whether a player hits to all fields.

Such sophisticated strategy is not what all table-top baseball fans necessarily want. Jack Marshall, director of development at the Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, plays because "it's a blast to be able to pitch a 1-0 shutout in twenty minutes." The appeal for David Eisenhower is "part make-believe, part genius of the game. The sights, sounds and smells of the ball park come alive. Some people think it's childish and immature. Maybe it is, but it's too complicated to be just a children's game."

Turf: Daniel Okrent, an editor for *Harcourt Brace Jovanovich* in New York, says that "it makes life worth living." He and literary agent David Obst are renting a house in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., this week to play the horses all day and Strat-O-Matic all night. And each year, Norm Paschal, a Delta Air Lines official in Atlanta, heads to the APBA factory in Lancaster, Pa., on the day the new player cards come out. Paschal then rushes home to try out the new teams on his own table-top stadium, complete with green artificial turf.

The most involved baseball nut is probably Hollis McLoughlin, administrative assistant to Rep. Millicent Fenwick of New Jersey. For years, he managed an APBA dream squad, made up of favorite players from all teams. Before and after important games, McLoughlin would write fictitious press releases and news stories about the team. In the off season, when he considered trades to strengthen his line-up, he would write the front offices of the real-life teams that held the contract of the player he wanted to trade and ask them if, hypothetically, they



Tony Rollo—Newsweek

STRAT-O-MATIC Baseball

MIKE SCHMIDT thirdbase:2 stealing:A
running 1-14

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

1	2	3
2- flyball (rf) B	2- flyball (lf) B	2- strikeout
3- groundball (ss) A++	3- groundball plus injury (3b) B	3- groundball (ss) A++
4- WALK	4- groundball (3b) B	4- groundball (ss) B
5- WALK	5- SINGLE*	5- strikeout
6- DOUBLE** 1-8	6- WALK 1-15	6- strikeout
SINGLE** 9-20	7- WALK	7- strikeout
7- TRIPLE 1-5	8- strikeout	8- strikeout
SINGLE** 6-20	9- strikeout 16-20	9- strikeout
8- HOMERUN 1-9	10- flyball (cf) B	10- flyball (cf) B
DOUBLE 10-20	11- WALK	11- WALK
9- HOMERUN	12- WALK	12- WALK
10- HOMERUN		
11- groundball (ss) A++		
12- flyball (lf) A		



IF YOU PLAY
APBA
HONK 3 TIMES

Strat-O-Matic fanatics Obst (left) and Okrent, a sample card, and an APBA bumper sticker: "It makes life worth living"

would make the move he was considering. Most teams responded, and he abided by their decision. In a further touch of realism, before every game, he would play a recording of the national anthem.

—MARY ALICE KELLOGG with CHRISTOPHER MA in Washington

'Displaced Homemakers'

Three months ago, the job picture looked bleak for 52-year-old Shirley Lawson. Widowed for the second time, the Berkeley, Calif., housewife was barely able to get by on a pittance from baby-sitting and delivering advertising circulars. "I was too young for social security," she says. "I had no recent work experience and no one would hire me." But with the help of an experimental program for women like her, Lawson now plans to go into business for herself—advising other recently widowed women on their finances.

Lawson is lucky. There are between 3 million and 7 million "displaced homemakers" in this country—women who have been housewives and find themselves out of a job at middle age through divorce or widowhood, or in need of work because their husbands are unemployed. Across the country, women's groups have campaigned to get legislators to help the displaced homemaker, and now California, Maryland and Florida have passed bills to do so (similar legislation is drafted or pending in seventeen other states).

Skills: Most state bills call for a pilot center like the one in Alameda County, Calif., where women are given career advice, assertiveness training and guidance in evaluating their past experiences. "Women develop managerial skills while they're married," says Laurie Shields, national coordinator for the Alliance for Displaced Homemakers. "But somehow we think of this as only housework when we should see it as a job." The women themselves also underestimate their experience. "I had slipped into an attitude that there wouldn't be too much more for me," says Carolyn Briggs, 49, who is divorced. "Now I feel good about myself and have become very clear about what I want."

Fourteen women have participated in the Alameda program since May, and three have already found jobs. After researching her own divorce case, 59-year-old Margaret Heraldson decided to enter a law firm as a paralegal aide. Ritu Larson, 49, came to the center for advice after her 30-year marriage to a building contractor ended. "I couldn't even begin to write out a résumé," she remembers. Now, with the help of a self-awareness and assertiveness course, she is beginning a career helping senior citizens reclaim houses for communal living.

Alive and Funny

When Gail Parent was a young girl her mother once said to her, "Try not to be so funny—men would rather be romantic on a date than laughing all night." Her mother needn't have worried. Gail Parent is happily married and living in Hollywood—and one of the leading comedy writers in the business. Last week, CBS commissioned her to write a pilot for a sitcom based on her best-selling novel "Sheila Levine Is Dead and Living in New York," the semi-autobiographical saga of an overweight, 30-year-old wom-



Jim McHugh—Gyama

Gail Parent: Living Sheila Levine's fantasy

an whose major complaint is that "everything comes in pairs but Sheila Levine." MGM also recently signed Parent and a collaborator, Andrew White, to write a Tracy-Hepburn-style comedy about an elegant woman designer who owns a mediocre prizefighter as a tax shelter.

Gail Parent has been a female pioneer in writing TV comedy since 1967, when she first wrote sketches for "The Carol Burnett Show." But if CBS makes "Sheila Levine" a series, she will also make her acting debut in the title role. "Wouldn't it be ironic if they padded me out with pillows after all I've gone through to reduce," laughs the 110-pound writer, who shed 35 pounds after she wrote "Sheila Levine." Still, she is confident she can bring it off. "It's me,

it's absolutely my psyche," she says. "From 0 to 21, getting married was my orientation to life. For years after I was married I had 'single' nightmares—that I would look at my left hand and there was no wedding band on it."

Although her humor grew out of being a high-school "outie" who never got invited to the Valley Stream, N.Y., proms, Gail Parent at 36 is Sheila Levine's fantasy. She is married to Lair Parent, a TV producer for UCLA. She has two sons, 11 and 6. She lives in a white colonial house off the Sunset Strip, drives a 1965 Ford Mustang (even though her husband recently bought her a \$7,000 BMW) and earns \$150,000 a year for being funny. She spends her mornings in bed with a yellow legal pad, scribbling her third novel, about a 35-year-old woman who wants a child but not necessarily a husband. And she regularly visits Beverly Hills psychiatrist Martin Grotjahn, partly to discuss a theory of hers she is particularly proud of—that all present-day adults are emotionally 18 years old.

Troubles: Last year, after a long, successful collaboration with Kenny Solms on material for Carol Burnett, Mary Tyler Moore, Dick Van Dyke and dozens of specials, Parent wrote a 24-page outline pilot for a Norman Lear soap opera that became the groundwork for "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman." But aside from that, she has recently had her share of show-biz troubles. Her greatest disappointment was the disastrous movie version of "Sheila Levine" in 1975. "Lorelei," the musical remake of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," which she wrote with Solms, played for a respectable amount of time on Broadway, thanks to star Carol Channing, but was no great hit. The last Smothers Brothers TV show, which she co-wrote with Solms—and also produced—was canceled after thirteen weeks, and her most recent novel, "David Meyer Is a Mother," about an old-fashioned guy who wants to settle down, keep house and have a baby, received mixed reviews.

All of which makes Parent look forward to the "Sheila Levine" series. The pilot script will have Sheila mugged by two lady robbers. In mid-crime, one of the thieves pauses to comment on her victim's attire: "What? Hip-buggers in winter?" But if Parent is excited by the prospect of playing the chubby Sheila, she is still not entirely content with her new slim role in life. "This is the Jewish thing," she explains. "You can't be happy that you're thin now. You wish you were thin in high school."

—BETSY CARTER with MARTIN KASINDORF in Los Angeles