



CON: Shut up! I'm trying to enjoy the real ballgames.

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I'm going to put this as delicately as possible.

JUST ... SHUT ... UP.

Shut up. I don't want to hear about your fantasy teams. I don't want to hear how you shrewdly traded Tom Browning in late April for Frank Thomas, Robbie Alomar and the rights to Ken Griffey III. I don't want to hear how you drafted Dan Marino while the doctors were still cutting his umbilical cord. I don't want to hear how you made the semifinals in your fantasy football league, won the championship in your rotisserie baseball league, made the Final Four in your fantasy basketball league, reached the inner sanctum in your World Cup hooligans league and just added Akebono to your first-place fantasy sumo team.

Just shut up. You may relish all that nonsense, but you want to know something? I don't care. And neither does anyone else.

Brace yourself, but people who aren't in fantasy leagues _ i.e., people who still have a well-rounded life _ are about as interested in your team's exploits as they are in your pathetic attempts to get a date. I would rather spend half an hour trapped in an elevator with Pat O'Brien than hear you guys drone on.

This fantasy league nonsense didn't seem that bad when it first started, but it has got way out of hand. It has gone beyond being an interesting little hobby. It has become a way of life for you people. It's a real sickness. But at least there are cures for malaria.

I know this is hard for some of you to comprehend, but there was a time when people spent their free time actually playing real games. You know, like out in the fresh air? And if that wasn't possible, they played board games to simulate the real thing. Strat-O-Matic, Statis-Pro and the granddaddy of them all _ APBA. These games made you the manager or the head coach and challenged your imagination and knowledge. Do I bring in a lefty? Do I bunt? Do I blitz?

Now that was something to sink your teeth into. But no one could care less about the actual game anymore. Strategy? Knowledge? Forget it. Now everyone wants to play owner. Frankly, I don't see the appeal. If I wanted to play owner, I would dress in cheap Hawaiian shirts, double-cross the taxpayers and move to New Orleans.

Calm down, calm down _ I can hear you screaming how playing in a fantasy league heightens your interest and knowledge of the real game. That you have to pay close attention to the boxscores or lose money.

But do you really think just scanning the boxscores makes you appreciate the game? No way. They might as well be printed in Fortran for all you guys get out of them. You see someone go 4 for 5 twice and you're ready to write him into your lineup ahead of Cal Ripken. You listen to Mel Kiper blather on TV for four minutes and decide Garrison Hearst is better than Gale Sayers. You read some bogus story in a baseball weekly and wonder why Tony Tarasco isn't already in the Hall of Fame.

Beam back down to Earth for a minute. Sports are more than just a series of numbers printed in agate type. There are the emotions, personalities and drama of the games. There are tradition and history. There's defense. But then again, you wouldn't know anything about that.

Fantasy leagues are just another revolting sign of this era's fascination with the almighty dollar. The problem with you goons is you can enjoy the game only if there's money on the line _ money that's hard to come by now that mom has cut off your allowance.

Enough, though. Never mind me. I'm just going to stay in the real world, keeping track of real teams and cheering for real players for no better reason than I like them and I like their team. It's old-fashioned, I know, but I like it.

You go ahead though. Set down your collected works of Stephen King, put on your Spock ears and play your little fantasy games. Just keep them to yourself.

Oh, and one final bit of advice.

Get a life.

(Jim Caple is a sports reporter for the St. Paul Pioneer Press.
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