

PLAYball

Written by

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And

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"All I ever said was that you can draw more people with a losing team plus bread and circuses, than with a losing team and a long, still silence."

- BILL VEECK

EXT. WRIGLEY FIELD CHICAGO - DAY

We are in the final inning of the last game of a LONG and GRUELING season. It's a pressure cooker. The sun BAKES down on a heavily perspiring Cardinal pitcher.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

So, two are out, a runner on third.
Cubbies, down by a run. This is
the last gasp for the Cubs this
season.

The runner takes a lead off of third base.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Franklin is set. He peers over at
the runner. Here's the pitch ...
STEEEEEERIKE THREE! And, Bradley
goes down looking.

INT. OWNERS BOX AT WRIGLEY - DAY

A man in his 40's BILL DEBARTOLO, is in jeans that look like he lives in them and a faded Cubs T-shirt. He sinks into his chair, obviously dejected. Sitting next to him are a boy and a girl, both about 12 years old. The boy, EDDIE GAEDDEL, with freckles and braces, he wears a Cubs cap. The girl, TATUM, has her laptop open, pretty and a tom boy, she also wears a Cubs cap, backwards, with her ponytail DANGLING behind. Others, all adults, in the box, get up and file out, glum like a funeral. Each either tapping Bill on the head or shoulder, or saying, "I'm sorry," or "wait till next year."

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

That's your ballgame, as the Cubs
lose for the 90th time this season,
2 to 1, to the Cards. Franklin
earns his 42nd save.

BILL

I think I lead the league in "wait
until next years."

ANNOUNCER 2 (V.O.)

It has to be tough for Bill
DeBartolo the long time and much
loved owner of this team. But
really Len, things don't look any
better heading into next season.

As Cardinal players congratulate each other on the field,
fans file out of Wrigley Field.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

You're right Bob. This club is not very good, as their record shows. They really haven't been since Bill's best friend and team G. M. Herman Gaedel died. None of the G. M.'s he's hired since had the savvy of Gaedel.

ANNOUNCER 2 (V.O.)

The way I see it Len, five of the starting position players will be gone to free agency next year. So this will be a very young team, heading into 2013.

Bill turns to Eddie.

BILL

Do you think we should have pinch hit for Bradley?

EDDIE

No, I think Foxy did the right thing. They've only faced each other once and that was back in oh-2 when Bradley was with Cleveland and Franklin was with the M's. I think the bigger picture is that this team isn't hungry. They're all comfortable with their multi-million dollar contracts and no one wants to work hard anymore.

BILL

That's exactly what your dad would have said. I wish he was still around.

EDDIE

(Saddened)

Yeah, me too Uncle Bill.

Bill puts his arm around Eddie.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Now statistically, Bradley is a career two-seventy-five hitter --

TATUM

Two-seventy-four, now!

EDDIE

-- and his lifetime on-base percentage is well above 800. On the bench we got Gathy and Jojo and neither are close to Bradley in on-base percentage.

TATUM

Plus, Bradley's batting average increases to five-twenty-four when he's facing a pitcher for the second time, during day games, in the month of October, when the game is tied or if his team is behind by two or less runs.

Both Bill and Eddie stare wide-eyed at Tatum.

TATUM (CONT'D)

What you should have done was pinch hit Reynolds, he's batting a thousand lifetime versus Franklin. FOXY would know that if he ever looked at the stats!

Bill looks back at Eddie.

BILL

That's why I like having you here Eddie, it reminds me of when your dad and I were kids. We would sit out there in the bleachers and try to out manage Zimmer. Hit and run? Pitch out? Steal a base? Your dad always knew exactly what they were going to do. He knew how to run a baseball team ... I still think it is the curse of the billy goat that keeps us from winning the World Series, your dad didn't believe in that, though ... You know Eddie, you really are a lot like him.

EXT. WRIGLEY FIELD CHICAGO - DAY

Among the fans leaving are three beer chugging frat boys, dressed in the Cub swag. The one in the middle, shorter than the other two has a cap from the 1908 Cubs, the last Cubs team to win a World Series and a T-shirt that screams -- No Lights At Wrigley!

CUBS FAN #1
 Freakin' Cubs! The last game of
 the season always T's me off.

CUBS FAN #2
 You always get your moneys worth
 here. When the Cubs play at home,
 you always get to see the bottom of
 the ninth.

CUBS FAN #3
 Wait til next year.

EXT. 5 STAR HOTEL, ORLANDO - DAY

SUPER: "TWO MONTHS LATER"

People mingle around. Expensive cars, Limos and Towne Cars
 litter the driveway.

INT. 5 STAR HOTEL, ORLANDO - DAY

A sign in the lobby reads --

WELCOME TO MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL'S WINTER MEETINGS

INT. 5 STAR HOTEL, ORLANDO - DAY

A LARGE hotel meeting room. The conversation is DEAFENING.
 32 men, all dressed nicely, sit around a large table. Some
 talk with each other, some yell on cell phones, others bark
 orders at assistants.

BILL
 (on his cell phone and
 dressed down in jeans and
 a T-shirt)
 Let me get this straight, he wants
 40 million a year for 10 years?
 (beat)
 You must have me confused with the
 Yankees! Call me when you have a
 reasonable offer.

Bill turns to a gentleman seated behind him, GRAYSON, Bill's
 manservant and right hand man. Grayson dresses more like
 Bill than the others in the room. Bill sets down his phone
 and it rings again.

BILL (CONT'D)
 You know Grayson, winter is my
 second favorite season.

GRAYSON
 What's your favorite?

BILL
 (with a big smile)
 Baseball season.

Bill answers his phone.

BILL (CONT'D)
 What?!? That Freakin'
 Steinbrenner! ... Well, I won't
 match that. Let him go to the
 Bronx. The media will eat him
 alive and Hal will end up firing
 him quicker than George fired
 Billy.

He hangs up.

BILL (CONT'D)
 (to Grayson)
 Whitey is taking the Yankee job.
 Do you believe that guy? I gave
 him a job when no one else would
 and this is how he repays me.

GRAYSON
 Who you going to get to run the
 team now?

BILL
 Who? Me, of course.

GRAYSON
 You? You're a fan, you're not
 Whitey and you're certainly not
 Herman. You don't know how to
 manage a ball club.

BILL
 I can't do any worse than the last
 few guys I had running this team.
 Besides, I know how to put butts in
 the seats and the most beautiful
 thing in the world is a ballpark
 filled with people.

GRAYSON

The problem is that you always pay way too much for free agents and you don't sink enough money into the farm. Herman always cultivated talent from the minors.

BILL

That was five years ago, baseball is different now, besides I pay for players that people want to see.

GRAYSON

People want to see winners. Why don't you ask Eddie what he thinks?

BILL

Eddie??? He's just a kid. True, he knows a lot about baseball, but he doesn't know how to run a team.

GRAYSON

He'll know if there is someone out there qualified to run this team.

With the SMACK of a gavel, the Commissioner of Baseball calls the meeting to order.

SUPER: "FEBRUARY 2013"

INT. EDDIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

LILY, Eddie's overprotective mom, is in the kitchen. She juggles the phone while making dinner. Eddie is in the family room watching Sportscenter.

BILL

(heard on the phone)

Lily, I have a crazy idea. I want Eddie to join the team and take the job Herman used to have.

LILY

One day Bill, but not until he finishes college.

BILL

No, I mean now.

LILY
G. M. of the Cubs?!? Why? Wait a
minute, No!

INT. BILL'S OFFICE AT WRIGLEY - NIGHT

BILL
Well, not manage the day to day
operations, I just want him to make
baseball decisions like Herman did.
You know, evaluate talent, tell me
who to keep and who to get rid of --

INT. EDDIE'S HOUSE/BILL'S OFFICE AT WRIGLEY - CONTINUOUS

LILY
-- No!

BILL
I'll pay him a million a year and
I'll pay for the tutor so he can
stay current in his school work.
It will be his college fund.

LILY
Bill, it's not about money, he's a
kid! It's ridiculous. No.

BILL
Look, you know how smart Eddie is.
You know how much he loves baseball
and the Cubs. And you know what
this team means to the city. When
Herman and I were his age we would
have loved this opportunity.

LILY
It sounds like another one of your
boneheaded promotions, like nickel
beer night, or Sham-wow night, or
Tommy Lasorda bobble-stomach night.

BILL
Hey, nickel beer night was
successful! ... just a bad idea.
You're right about Sham-wow night,
but Lasorda bobble-stomach night
was great, the fans loved it! I
even think Tommy found it funny.

LILY

I'll give you that, but you are talking about a kid here. He can't handle the pressure of those decisions or the media. Really, why am I even talking to you about this, no!

BILL

Why don't we ask Eddie what he thinks?

LILY

Because Eddie will say YES! Bill, this conversation is over.

She hangs up the phone.

INT. EDDIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

EDDIE

(from the family room)
I'll say yes to what, mom?

LILY

Oh it's just your Uncle Bill with another one of his crazy promotion ideas.

EDDIE

You mean like Slurpee Brain Freeze Night?

SUPER: "FEBRUARY 21, 2013"

EXT. SPRING TRAINING MESA ARIZONA - DAY

Bill and Grayson look on from the stands as the Cubs partake in Spring Training drills. WGN announcers LEN and BOB broadcast their show live from the field.

BOB

Another exciting season begins today in Arizona.

LEN

Exciting that is unless you are the Cubs.

BOB

Well, it is hard to get excited about this team. They didn't make any personnel moves in the off season.

LEN

Unless you count G. M. Whitey Jones bolting to New York for a healthy payday.

BOB

Right Len. This team looks a lot like last years, a bunch of tired old overpaid veterans and some never-was players. There are a few promising young players in the minors like Bristo, Holiday and Tates. But they are still a few years away. Each will start out the season in double A.

LEN

How about team leader Bubba Troy? He'll be coming back from a devastating knee injury that ended his season before it really got started last year.

BOB

What could have really helped them was being able to sign the very popular free agent Johnny, The Monster, Montrose but, news today that the Yankees were willing to swallow The Monster's 40-million dollar a year asking price, leaves the Cubbies without that one solid superstar free agent acquisition.

An older looking baseball player in a jersey that may have fit a few years ago, but is accentuating his beer belly, sits down next to Bob and Len.

LEN

Well, joining us now is Cubs Skipper Joe Fox. Welcome Foxy, how is this years team shaping up?

JOE FOX, known as FOXY, is as cranky as they come. A career baseball guy with his cheek permanently puffed out due to it always being full of chewing tobacco. He spits whenever he talks.

FOXY

WHAT KIND OF A QUESTION IS THAT
LEN? IT'S EARLY YET, A LITTLE BUTT-
KICKING AND MAYBE ADD A FREE AGENT
OR TWO, AND WITH A LITTLE LUCK WE
COULD BE CONTENDERS.

Grayson looks at Bill who looks dejected.

GRAYSON

You going to sit here and listen to
this?

BILL

They're wrong. I put together a
good team, I paid them good money,
they're going to perform!

GRAYSON

Poorly, just like they did last
year.

BILL

No, we just need a few more
pieces... Foxy's right, they'll
gel. PLUS, I've got some great
ideas about ways to get more butts
in the seats this year. Listen to
this, SNUGGIE night! We get 50
thousand Snuggies to pass out to
the fans. We'll set a world record
for the most people in one location
wearing Snuggies!

GRAYSON

Lame.

BILL

How about this? You know what a
problem it is getting people to day
games? This season, all day games
start at 4:05. People will leave
work early to get to the games, and
they don't have to miss a whole day
of work!

GRAYSON

You're going to kill day games at
Wrigley? Are you insane? You'd be
putting a knife in the back of
Tradition!