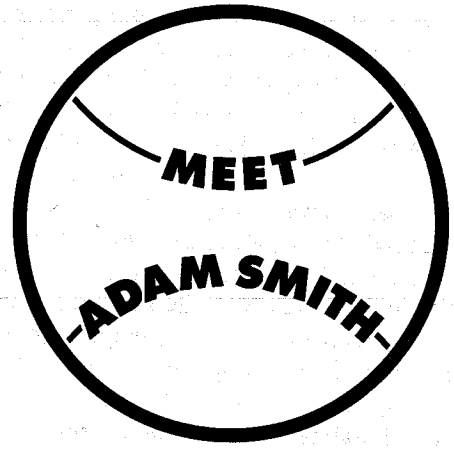
CHAPTER 4



You've been avoiding me.

Not at all. I always look forward to this part. I don't have to worry about my grammar.

The first thing I want to know is why you've cleaned up your act on relief pitching and not on steals.

Was that an insult?

We don't have space for insults. I wouldn't say I've cleaned up my act at all, frankly—but it might be best to bench you for a while, if that's the way you're going to be.

Me? That was meant to be a meatball! You said—when you agreed to let me question you again—don't start out with the hard stuff.

Well, maybe I better hit some fungoes first.

Rotisserie baseball is a peculiar business that spends a constant amount of money each April on a fluctuating product that doesn't get delivered until October. But at the end the books have to balance.

That's a fungo?

Shut up. The amount spent on players overall is the amount they are worth overall. Each player's contribution is the amount he is worth.

This is what he turns out to earn and therefore should have cost. It's his correct, as opposed to actual or market, price.

And I thought I didn't like the last *chapter.*

Shush, will you? Like the market prices, the sum of his correct prices equals the overall budget.

You're right.

The problem is, some people reading this book know too much; others (I hope) don't know anything, and for their sake I'd like to synthesize everything that has been said so far, but as soon as I start I realize some very basic things haven't been said. What we need is a one-page summary of rookie errors.

Without the bullshit.

Think you can do it?

Number one, they spend too much on starting pitching.

Two, they spend too much on good hitters who have no speed.

Three, they don't spend enough on relief pitchers and hitters who have speed.

Four, they overspend in the early rounds and run out of money.

Five, they go to sleep at the switch once the season's started.

Six, they don't go to sleep at the switch. They make one trade and it's like crack. Those are the ones my partner and I look for.

That's about it. What did I leave out?

I'm not sure. I'm wondering ... Are we certain these assumptions about the new leagues are still valid? Let's look at the ten highest prices in Appendix A for starters and relievers in the AL last year:

		AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
1	CLEMENS	40	45	5
2	SABERHAGEN	36	8	–28
3	LANGSTON	35	–3	–38
4	STEWART	28	39	11
5	RYAN	28	25	–3
6	MOORE	28	–2	–30
7	BLYLEVEN	25	–5	–30
8	FINLEY	23	32	9
9	GUBICZA	23	–3	–26
10	STIEB	22	28	6
	AVERAGE	28.8	16.4	–12.4

		AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
1	ECKERSLEY	35	52	17
2	RUSSELL	32	4	–28
3	PLESAC	30	12	–18
4	D. JONES	29	37	8
5	M. DAVIS	29	–7	–36
6	SCHOOLER	22	23	1
7	THIGPEN	22	47	25
8	OLSON	22	32	11
9	REARDON	21	19	–2
10	HARVEY	20	19	–1
	AVERAGE	26.2	23.8	–2.4

Even with you standing on your head to help starters earn more money, they take a beating as usual.

Standing on my head?

You flip-flopped the denominators for the third time.

Second time. Yes, I'd say the rookie leagues are getting more cautious about starting pitching, but they still don't shell out enough money for relievers. The ten most coveted starters should go for around $25, the ten best relievers for more than $30.

Even though these relievers don't get their money back?

They almost do, despite Russell and Mark Davis. The ten most expensive players of any type don't get their money back as a group. If in some league they do, the league is ripe for a takeover by you and your partner.

We're always looking.

Let's see what happens in the next tax bracket:

	AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
11 WELCH	22	34	12
12 BOSIO	22	3	–19
13 SWINDELL	20	2	–18
14 MCCASKILL	17	13	–4
15 GORDON	16	3	–13
16 HIGUERA	15	10	–5
17 CANDIOTTI	15	14	–1
18 KEY	15	10	–5
19 BALLARD	15	–9	–24
20 BROWN	12	11	–1
AVERAGE	16.8	9.1	–7.7

	AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
11 HENKE	18	29	11
12 RIGHETTI	17	20	3
13 L. SMITH	16	4	–12
14 MONTGOMERY	13	26	13
15 HENNEMAN	13	22	9
16 AGUILERA	11	27	16
17 CRIM	10	10	1
18 WARD	8	15	7
19 HONEYCUTT	7	12	5
20 MURPHY	6	–13	–19
AVERAGE	12.0	15.2	3.2

More than in the previous chart, the rookies' inexperience is beginning to show. They haven't even got through the 14 closers, or possible closers, before their prices for relievers start to sag. With the exception of Lee Smith, Henke through Aguilera are weak efforts.

But, compared to prior years, the start-up leagues are hardly being slaphappy about the second echelon of starting pitchers. Gordon, I submit, would have gone for $25 not long ago. It's not a bad group, either; notice there's only one minus pitcher. In the first ten, there were four.

	AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
21 BANKHEAD	12	–7	–19
22 ABBOTT	11	–6	–17
23 ANDERSON	11	–1	–12
24 P. PEREZ	11	4	–7
25 BLACK	9	19	10
26 HOLMAN	9	6	–3
27 TANANA	9	–9	–18
28 STOTTLEMYRE	9	–3	–12
29 S. DAVIS	8	–3	–11
30 HAWKINS	8	–13	–21
AVERAGE	9.5	–1.3	–10.8

	AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
21 GUETTERMAN	6	15	9
22 FARR	6	25	19
23 BERENGUER	5	6	1
24 WILLIAMSON	5	18	13
25 ACKER	5	1	–4
26 WELLS	5	24	19
27 FRASER	5	9	4
28 EICHORN	4	9	5
29 CADARET	4	–2	–6
30 MCCLURE	3	1	–2
AVERAGE	4.8	10.6	5.8

Seven out of ten starters in the red.

And only one big winner, Black. This $8 to $12 range of market prices is not yielding good results. But the $3 to $6 range for relievers is doing fine.

You've got a pair of ringers in there: Farr and Wells.

Bought as relievers. If people had known Wells would start, I bet they would have paid more for him, and he probably would have earned less.

No one hit the jackpot with this third echelon of relievers; not one of them turned into a closer. On the other hand, only one out of ten was in the red.

Isn't that in part because of the way you price them?

No! Look, first you say I'm cleaning up my act, now you're saying I still haven't—which is it?

Me? I think your new denominators are great. I was just throwing you a meatball—take it easy.

How about the fourth echelon?

	AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
31 TAPANI	8	11	3
32 MORRIS	8	5	–3
33 BODDICKER	7	19	12
34 MILACKI	7	–6	–13
35 FARRELL	7	–2	–9
36 CERUTTI	7	–5	–12
37 HANSON	7	27	21
38 KING	6	18	12
39 SANDERSON	5	13	8
40 WEST	5	–9	–14
AVERAGE	6.6	7.1	0.5

	AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
31 OROSCO	3	2	–1
32 PLUNK	3	7	5
33 LAMP	2	–3	–5
34 M. JACKSON	2	2	0
35 NELSON	2	19	17
36 HARRIS	2	4	2
37 BAILES	2	–7	–9
38 B. JONES	2	15	13
39 CANDELARIA	2	7	6
40 ROGERS	1	18	17
AVERAGE	2.1	6.4	4.3

The fourth group of starters takes a significant jump in earnings over the third group; it comes damn close to equalling the second group. The overall progression of earnings for each group of ten, rounded off:

STARTERS—$16, $9, ($1), $7.
RELIEVERS—$24, $15, $11, $6.

In other words, that fellow in your league who said you can't predict middle relievers had his head wedged.

I wouldn't put it that strongly—

Because you have to deal with him.

Essentially. The other very important point is that the middle relievers (from the middle of round two on) don't just bring nice profits, they outearn starters right up to and practically through this fourth round. It takes a surge by Hanson, King and Sanderson to finally win a round for the starters.

And now the relievers are into the crapshoot.

Aren't the starters, too, really—$5 or under? Eighty pitchers have been taken, there are 28 to go.

	AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
41 M. PEREZ	5	3	–2
42 MCDONALD	5	21	16
43 DOPSON	5	2	–3
44 LEARY	4	3	–1
45 HARNISCH	4	–1	–5
46 NAVARRO	4	–2	–6
47 J. A. ROBINSON	4	–14	–18
48 R. JOHNSON	3	11	8
49 HOUGH	3	3	0
50 WITT	3	14	11
AVERAGE	3.9	4.0	0.1

	AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
41 PALL	1	8	7
42 WAYNE	1	1	0
43 MCCULLERS	1	5	4
44 REED	1	–3	–4
45 HILLEGAS	1	3	2
46 KILGUS	1	–3	–4
47 GUANTE	1	0	–1
48 RADINSKY	1	1	0
49 J. M. ROBINSON	1	4	3
50 AQUINO	1	6	5
AVERAGE	1.0	2.2	1.2

The crapshoot looks better for starters. At least there's something there. One thing that's misleading about your minuses is that you can ditch somebody like Tiger Robinson.

No question. The crapshoot is the place to look for starters; that's my point. There aren't nearly as many good middle relievers as we like to think. There should be bidding wars for Gene Nelson, but there never are.

Let's see the last eight.

The last eight are more like 40; the four start-up leagues bought around 140 different pitchers between them last April, and because of the expanded rosters, they still missed some productive pitchers, such as Jerry Don Gleaton. But only 13 more pitchers have an average salary of more than $1 (McDowell's average is 1.25):

	AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
101 R. SMITH	3	–11	–14
102 FLANAGAN	3	–2	–5
103 JOHNSON	3	8	5
104 SWIFT	3	19	16
105 FILER	3	–2	–5
106 M. WITT	2	4	2
107 AUGUST	2	–2	–4

	AVG SAL	EARNED 1990	+/–
108 PARKER	2	3	1
109 CARY	2	1	–1
110 M. YOUNG	2	7	6
111 TIBBS	2	–3	–5
112 HIBBARD	2	21	20
113 MCDOWELL	1	12	11
AVERAGE	2.1	4.2	2.1

Suppose—between the crapshoot and your reserve list—you get all 13 of these pitchers: What kind of team are you going to have?

Not a very good one. The dollars don't lie. The total worth of what you see here is $55. The average pitching staff is worth $78.

However, the salaries of these 13 pitchers add up to $28; you've got to spend more money than *that* on your pitching.

Although do you realize that, two years ago, a team spent $9 for its pitchers—the Arizona Groaners in the Hart-Quale League—and won?

Pisses me off. We tried that one year and finished eighth. How'd they do last year?

Let me see ...

Fifth. This time spent over half their budget—$133—on pitching. What hubris.

You say your dollars don't lie, right?

I hope not. They're not supposed to.

But there's no way the third group of relievers—the Guetterman-to-McClure group—wins you a pennant, and it's supposed to earn $106. If no one trades with you, you're screwed.

That's what happened to us.

Are you sure that group can't stand by itself? It looks to me like it can.

No way. You've got ERA and ratio locked up, but you're hurting in wins and *saves*. That's the trouble with middle relievers.

Plus you lose your ERA and ratio when you don't get your innings.

I've got them in Lotus; I'll add them up.

IP	H	ER	BB	W	S	ERA	RTO
975	891	343	349	69	26	3.17	11.44

Twenty-five innings short, thanks to McClure. Between April and October, with something like 150 new pitchers to choose from, I'm sure we can find 25 innings somewhere. Now—plug this staff into the hypothetical final standings of the Hi-Top Baseball League ...

Second in ERA, 11 points. Second in ratio, 11 points. Fifth in wins, eight points. Ninth in saves, four points. A total of 34 points: 68 points would put them in a tie for second.

And since these ten middle relievers only cost $48, it's reasonable to expect the $212 offense to account for more than 34 points.

You do have Farr and Wells, of course.

I don't care if they're Wells Fargo—$106 is $106! It's because they became starters that this team is weak in saves. You know what the problem is? Gene Nelson gives middle relievers a bad rep. Owners don't have enough faith that they'll luck into wins and saves, but it's Gene Nelson who defies the odds.

Here's the American League last year, broken down by starting and relief pitchers; any pitcher who started even one game is classified as a starter.

		IP	W	S	ERA	RTO	W+S	IP/W+S	W+S/#P
ALL P	(268)	20182	1133	637	3.92	12.28	1770	11.4	6.6
SP	(153)	16002	920	58	4.03	12.36	978	16.4	6.4
RP	(115)	4179	213	579	3.46	11.96	792	5.3	6.9

Anything stand out?

Sure, the ratio of the relievers isn't that much better, but the ERA is a lot better. That's because some bozo comes on in relief, gives up a double, and the earned runs against your starting pitcher jump from three to six.

Too true. However, look at the total of wins *and* saves each group acquires. The total by relief pitchers is only 20 percent less than the starters and spot starters get.

Give the 58 saves in the SP line to the RP's, since only relief pitchers get saves, and they're almost even. Amazing.

Furthermore, look at how many innings a starter or spot starter must toil to get a win or a save (16.4). In a third of the amount of exposure (every 5.3 innings), a relief pitcher gets a win or a save.

Finally, the number of these pure relievers—from the sublime (Thiggy) to the ridiculous (Kevin Hickey)—adds up to only 115 pitchers out of the grand total of 268 in the league last year. A full-time relief pitcher is going to earn and luck into more wins and saves (6.9) than the starters and swing men (6.4).

On to point two?

Why not?

What was it?

Rookies overspend on the lead-legs hitters.

Right. Relievers have a chance of being four-category players; starters have no chance. Fast hitters have a chance; slow hitters have no chance. The top ten earners in each league have been shown earlier, but let's boil it down to the ten best earners in the majors last year:

		$			$
1	HENDERSON	60	6	SANDBERG	44
2	ECKERSLEY	52	7	GANT	42
3	BONDS	50	8	FIELDER	42
4	THIGPEN	47	9	CANSECO	40
5	CLEMENS	45	10	STEWART	39

Seven of these players get steals or saves. There are no weirdos here; they're just your basic, sensational, four-category players. There are two three-category players, Clemens and Stewart, and it's extremely rare to see a two-category player like Cecil Fielder break the top ten. In fact, I don't think anyone else has done it since I've been ranking them.

Kevin Mitchell. He earned $45 in 1989. Of course, now you say he earned $46.

Which only proves that he was a three-category player. Mitchell hit—what—.295 in 1989?

.291.

And the league hit, uh—do you remember?

.246.

There you go.

I noticed you said in the Gruber comment that he was a four-category player.

So?

Gruber hit .274 last year. Cecil hit .277.

We don't have space for nitpicking. Throw me another meatball.

Are you sure you didn't tweak your numbers a little so Rickey would come out like he's Babe Ruth? How come Bonds is $10 less? I didn't understand what you were saying in the masochist chapter, but I could tell you were being defensive.

I was saying, Rickey is Babe Ruth. Bonds is Hornsby.

	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA	$HR	$RBI	$SB	$BA	$TOT
AL AVG PL	371	9	45	7	.261	4	5	3	0	13
HENDERSON	489	28	61	65	.325	12	7	30	10	60

	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA	$HR	$RBI	$SB	$BA	$TOT
NL AVG PL	367	10	46	11	.268	4	5	4	0	13
BONDS	519	33	114	52	.301	14	13	17	6	50

If you switch them into each other's league, Bonds is almost Ruth:

	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA	$HR	$RBI	$SB	$BA	$TOT
AL AVG PL	371	9	45	7	.261	4	5	3	0	13
BONDS	519	33	114	52	.301	15	14	24	6	59

	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA	$HR	$RBI	$SB	$BA	$TOT
NL AVG PL	367	10	46	11	.268	4	5	4	0	13
HENDERSON	489	28	61	65	.325	12	7	21	9	49

Without stealing one more base, Bonds gets a $7 raise for his $SB; without stealing one less, Henderson gets docked $9.

Is there that big a difference in the league standings, though? Aren't stolen bases sort of like saves versus wins? Even though they're more scarce, they spread out more than home runs?

More than home runs, yes; but not more in the American League than the National League. Anyway, didn't you see in the Dave Parker comment what Rickey was worth just for his hitting? Bill James hates stolen bases, yet Rickey had more Runs Created than Fielder.

Is Runs Created a category?

Let me ask you this. Does $23 for Alex Cole seem too high?

Nope.

Then Rickey's not. What was point three?

I think we've done it.

Point four?

The neophytes shoot their wads in the early rounds. That I know for a fact.

Here's where a good pricing system kicks in. This is what I mean by "the books have to balance."

In real baseball, it's arguable that the superstars have no ceiling on what they're worth. If Will Clark is the best you can buy at first base, why not spend until you get him? Even if he's only five percent better than Mark Grace, why settle for the second-best first baseman? You want the best nine-man lineup. It's hard to put a price on finishing first, and there's no salary cap.

In Rotisserie baseball, there *is* a salary cap and you have a 23-man lineup. If Clark is five percent better than Grace, he's five percent better, no more.

In the auction, rather than chase a player until you get him, you chase him until he reaches his par value—whatever you think it is—then sit back and relax. The teams that keep pursuing aren't pursuing profits, which is what victory is based on. They are hell-bent on losses.

What's Clark's par value for this season?

$38.

How did you reach that figure? Why not $37 or $39?

Because I want the hitting side of the auction to be nice and simple. I've got exact prices for every first baseman and all the hitters. They add up.

To what? What do they add up to?

$1820 in the National League. $2184 in the American League.

How come?

Because the average hitter is worth $13. Multiply it by 140 hitters or 168 hitters and that's what the hitting in total is worth.

So hitting adds up to 70 percent of the game? I guess you've been saying that all along, but it's only now dawned on me.

In my scheme it does. And the market doesn't really disagree; not about Will Clark. Owners gladly spend $45 for him, or they used to. When they did that, they were saying he was about four times better than the average hitter. Unless he has an MVP year, he's going to be about three times better. My knowledge of this, and the market's ignorance of this, is my edge.

I see that $38 is about three times more than $13. But four times more would be $52, wouldn't it?

Four times more than my average hitter. But if the market refuses to accept my 70 percent hitting proposition, it doesn't accept that the average hitter is worth $13. The average player—hitter and pitcher—is obviously worth $11.3 (260/23). Forty-five dollars is about four times that.

Leaving prices out of it for the moment, I've taken the trouble to create a statistical profile of the average hitter. It's data, not speculation. The stats Will Clark is likely to get simply aren't four times better than this data. If the market is willing to overpay for Will Clark, it has no choice but to underpay for someone else.

So you're not bummed when some other team gets Clark?

Bummed? I'm cheered up. As soon as the bidding goes past $38 on him, I start looking for other places to spend my money, and I *know* that I'm going to find them. The hitters will come my way. Not necessarily Grace, and it may not even be a first baseman, but if the market consistently goes past my prices—which are extremely optimistic for the best players—the competition is going to run out of money while there is still plenty of hitting left.

You don't think Clark can earn more than $38?

Of course he can. He probably won't. I don't think he'll earn $38, to tell you the truth. I think he'll earn in the low thirties, and I'm willing to take a slight loss on him for two reasons. First, I have to spend all of my money, and Clark is a relatively safe place for a good chunk of it. Second, I don't want other teams getting Clark for less than $38, making safer investments.

You're enforcing prices?

Exactly. It has to be done now. Overspending in the early rounds used to be automatic. A fellow named Dave Tolley wrote his thesis at MIT on auction prices. He generated all sorts of graphs showing the same player coming up in different rounds in different auctions, and the price kept nosediving with each round.

They let him write a thesis on that?

Well, you know, the professor probably was hoping to get something he could use out of it. And in the past he would have; now the danger is just the opposite.

Like what happened to that team in the Assenmacher comment?

Yes, the new Rotisserie hell: not running out of money, running out of players to spend it on. Let's quickly look at the Legal Baseball League in more detail. The first round of their auction last year:

		PAID	EARNED	+/–
1	DANNY JACKSON	10	4	–6
2	NICK ESASKY	25	–1	–26
3	TIM BELCHER	16	9	–7
4	JAY HOWELL	24	22	–2
5	DARRYL STRAWBERRY	36	35	–1
6	TODD WORRELL	11	0	–11
7	MARK GRACE	26	26	0
8	MIKE PAGLIARULO	6	6	0
9	MATT WILLIAMS	26	32	6
10	BRETT BUTLER	21	31	10
	TOTAL	201	164	–37

Remove Esasky and Worrell and the first round *breaks even.* Unheard of. Whoever nominated Belcher didn't want him, but he sure wanted to see more than $16 removed from the table. Strawberry, Grace, Williams and Butler—each one of them would have gone for $5 more, minimum, in the past.

Round 11:

		PAID	EARNED	+/–
101	MIKE MORGAN	7	8	1
102	LLOYD McCLENDON	11	–1	–12
103	DENNIS COOK	2	5	3
104	KEN OBERKFELL	1	–1	–2
105	RAFAEL RAMIREZ	6	7	1
106	KEITH MILLER	5	6	1
107	TOM O'MALLEY	1	1	0
108	LUIS SALAZAR	12	10	–2
109	DENNIS RASMUSSEN	1	–5	–6
110	FRANK DIPINO	4	–1	–5
	TOTAL	50	29	–21

More than two teams, I'll bet, were waiting for the 102nd player, McClendon. Someone nominated Rasmussen to fill someone else's pitching slot, and it backfired, probably because that someone, along with at least one other someone, was waiting for DiPino, who earned $13 the year before.

Overall they get 58 cents back on their dollar—worse, much worse than the first round!

As I said in last year's book, there's not a whole lot you can do about it. After the first four players of the American Dreams' draft—Puckett $38, Dave Henderson $22, Sierra $42, Rickey Henderson $59—you could see hell on the horizon.

On the horizon? It's right in front of you. Except for Rickey, you hotshots paid through the nose for turkeys!

They weren't turkeys, but let's keep going: Phelps $12, Russell $36, Mark Davis $36, Mattingly $38, Pleasc $38. Now they're turkeys.

But they didn't look like turkeys then. Everyone is nominating players to get rid of money, and it's really not getting rid of enough money. The next player, Aguilera, went for $19. Now it was Moose Factory's turn to nominate. I looked at my partner, Dollar Bill Berensmann; he pointed to a player we had the topper rights to; we decided to nominate someone we *did* want and got Doug Jones for $32.

Bully for you. I saw in the AL Pitcher Z section where you nearly traded yourself into oblivion.

I don't deny it. What I'm saying is, if you have a list of prices that you think are reasonable, that you know add up—exact prices for hitters, general vicinity prices for pitchers—and the auction doesn't go past those prices, don't wait around: get in there. It's much better to spend $35 for a $30 player than $15 for a $10 player.

Why?

Why? Because $30 players are *better.*

They both lose the same don't they?

Not so—the $10 player is bringing you 67 cents on your dollar, the $30 player 85 cents.

By the end of the first two rounds, Moose Factory had spent $103 on four players: Puckett and Doug Jones, Moseby $18, Fisk $15. Bill and I had the feeling that we were doing just fine, and as it turns out, these four players earned exactly $103.

A $260 team finishes sixth-and-a-half.

You don't get profits in the early rounds. You either get them in the endgame—or you already have them.

We talking freeze lists?

We are. Moose Factory supposedly had $70 in profits wrapped up in seven frozen players. So our $260 team—the break-even team that we

were buying in the draft—was in fact going to be a $330 team. To safely spend $103 on the first four players was all we wanted; we weren't greedy.

Then you got greedy?

Not in the draft; later on in trades. We came out of the draft in good shape. The trouble was, another team went into the draft with a better freeze list and came out in better shape. Hugh Sweeney of the Wssox was carrying out a two-year plan.

Sweeney? The guy in the Crabhouse League? You lost to that clown?

And how. When I was tooting the league's horn about how competitive it was last year, I neglected to say the Wssox led wire to wire. They had merrily bid what it took to get Canseco and Winfield in 1989, and now here was their 1990 freeze list:

WSSOX	1990 SALARY	1989 EARNED	PROJ. PROFIT
FRANCO	29	33	4
BROWNE	6	19	13
WORTHINGTON	4	13	9
LANSFORD	25	34	9
KELLY	11	30	19
WINFIELD	6	20*	14
CANSECO	43	45*	2
WELCH	15	18	3
GORDON	10	14	4
OLSON	16	34	18
10 PLAYERS	165	260	95

One way to analyze a freeze list is simply to say players will repeat what they did the year before. They won't, of course, but on the whole you can say they will. If something is obviously wrong about this approach, then pencil in an estimate. The asterisks for Winfield and Canseco mean those salaries are estimates.

So the Wssox have ten players going into the draft who should bring them almost $100 in profits. Seems like a pretty nice freeze list, and it is, but the only way to tell how nice is to make this calculation for the entire league. Your underpriced players aren't underpriced enough if they aren't as underpriced as everyone else's.

Here is my analysis of the potential freeze lists in the American Dreams last year. Trades and surprise drops of players altered the final

freeze lists, but this gives a good idea of how to calculate the inflation factor.

	PLAYERS FROZEN	1990 SALARY	1989 EARNED	PROJ. PROFIT	GROSS PROJ.$	SCALED PROJ.$
WSSOX	10	165	260	95	355	298
MOOSE FACTORY	7	54	124	70	330	277
TOONERS	7	47	116	69	329	277
BAGS	9	106	162	56	316	266
NABOBS	9	62	115	53	313	263
PALUKAS	5	85	135	50	310	261
VEECKS	5	56	105	49	309	260
NOVA	5	51	92	41	301	253
HACKERS	7	86	125	39	299	251
BB GUNS	8	80	119	39	299	251
AMAROS	8	113	144	31	291	245
RALPH BRANCAS	0	0	0	0	260	219
FREEZE LIST	80	905	1497	592	3712	3120
AUCTION	196	2215	1623	–592		

I follow this up through projected profits. What's that other stuff? Also what happened to the Ralph Brancas?

New team, no freezes. The next column after projected profits is simply profits added onto par, which is $260. The team with the least promising freeze list, the Amaros, comes out to $291. If everyone hangs onto their freeze-list profits during the draft, the league as a whole is supposedly worth $3712. It's not; it's worth $3120, so all teams are scaled down to that.

Notice that the Brancas, without committing any sin other than joining this league, get scaled down practically below the Mendoza line.

So when you tell a new team they're starting with $260, just like everyone else, it's a lie.

Absolutely.

What I thought.

The $592 projected profit for the league as a whole is more than an exaggeration, it's an illusion. The league as a whole breaks even. The $592 is the estimated profit of the frozen players, and if true, the players bought in the draft *must lose $592.*

Because they're stiffs?

Because they're going to be overpaid. The freeze list analysis shows 80 players earning $1497 and being paid $905. By pure fluke, the average player is being paid $11.3 (905/80), which is what the average player is supposed to be paid (260/23). But this frozen average player earns a phenomenal $18.7 (1497/80). In other words, he's only being paid 60 percent of what he earns. He's being cheated.

The free agents reap the rewards. In the auction, 196 players will earn $1623 ($3120 minus $1497)—and be paid a grand total of $2215 to do this. Each player costs $11.3 (2215/196) and earns $8.3 (1623/196). Each player is being overpaid by 36 percent.

So is 1.36 your inflation factor?

In theory, yes.

Well, that just blows your prices right off the map, doesn't it? I mean, if you were going to pay $38 for Will Clark, but you have an inflation factor of 1.36, then you should pay $52. Do you realize that?

I do. Yep. That's why I didn't mind paying $38 for Kirby Puckett.

You dirty dog. What good are your prices if that's what inflation does to them?

Inflation does not inflate what Kirby will earn, only his price. If I spend $51 on him and he only earns $38, I take a $13 beating. If I spend $38 on him and the bugger only earns $24, I take a $14 beating.

Hey, you deserved it. You don't pay any attention to your prices.

I do! If somebody had bid $39 I would have stopped. Well, I would have stopped at $42, because that's what I had written down, but I was only enforcing prices. Freeze lists have a powerful effect on the auction, but they *don't* change what players are worth. I supposedly had $70 of profits going into the draft (Brian Harper for $3, Mike Devereaux for $4, Chuck Finley for $10, to name three). But if I willingly kiss off $10 each on Puckett and Doug Jones—you see what happens. I'm heading back to the center.

I also don't really believe I have $70. I know that Harper, Devereaux and Finley together are going to disappoint me a bit. Keepers generally have had excellent years the year before, so as a group they never do as well. And indeed, my actual profits in my freeze list, calculated after the season, turned out to be $54; Sweeney's were $70.

Anyone do better?

I haven't totaled the others up. I do notice, however, a strong similarity between the order of teams ranked by freeze lists above and the pecking order in the hypothetical final standings that were shown in the Pitcher Z section. A couple of teams went up, a couple down, everyone else stayed pretty much in place.

There's no question freeze lists are crucial. They can weigh more heavily than the draft for some teams. For leagues as a whole, though, the impact is always less than expected. As a rule, frozen players earn about 20 percent less than they did the year before. Instead of $1497, a better working figure for the potential profits in my league's freeze lists would have been $1198. That would make the worth of the auction talent $1922 ($3120 minus $1198). The inflation ratio becomes 1.15 ($2215/$1922): much lower. If I think Kirby's going to have a $38 year (and I did), I can go to $44 on him.

I feel like I'm floating in mid-air all of a sudden. Kirby's $38, he's $52, he's $44.

He's $38. My Patton Guess for Kirby last year was $38. It doesn't matter that I was quite mistaken. That was my prediction. Then I make my predictions, exact dollar predictions, for every other available hitter—skipping the total scrubs—and add it all up, and now I have a pretty good idea of how much hitting is available.

Pitchers I put in ranges. The reason I'm vague about pitchers isn't so much that they are harder to predict, although they are. I'm vague because there are so many pitchers to chose from; by having them grouped in ranges ($5–$10, $10–$20, whatever looks coherent on my pitching page), I can see how many others there are who have just as much promise. There are only nine slots to fill—there's no hurry. In fact, the danger is they'll be filled before you know it. The choice of $1 pitchers at the end is clearly going to be bigger and more promising than the choice of $1 hitters.

That's why we chase hitters. And that's why we chase them too far. The purpose of exact hitters' prices is to have an exact place where the foot hits the brakes. The number I write down is as far as I'm going to go and no further.

So why did you write down $42 for Kirby?

Because I'm a careful guy. Because I do want profits. As best I could tell, the inflation factor for Kirby turned his predicted $38 value into a $44 market price. But that's the break-even point and I'm trying to do better.

There's nothing mysterious about inflation. It's the same in the auction as anywhere else: too much money for too few goods. A $52 inflation tag on Kirby says the freeze lists have scarfed up most of the talent in the American League already. A $42 tag says a lot of talent has been scarfed up, but there's a lot available still besides Kirby.

That makes sense to me now. But it's kind of slipped off the brain pan how you figured Kirby's inflated price was $44 instead of $38. Sorry. Is there—you know—a formula?

Sure.

inflation factor = known cost of available players divided by estimated worth of available players

multiply factor times what you estimate each player will be worth

That's all?

Yes, but it's a lot. The known cost of available players is simply the amount of money teams have to spend. That part's a cinch.

Should they budget a certain amount to hitting and a certain amount to pitching?

You mean, $182 for hitters, $78 for pitchers?

Uh-huh. If the average team is going to be worth that in the end, like you say, is it a good idea to cut your money up that way at the beginning?

No, not necessarily.

First of all, freeze lists usually throw things out of whack. If you already have Grade A pitchers for Grade B, often Grade C, prices, there's no need to go after the Grade A pitchers in the draft.

Second and more important, the league—the closed system—is forced into these proportions, but teams aren't closed systems, and market prices don't necessarily agree with this profound insight of mine. They generally don't. Most leagues spend much more than 30 percent of their money on pitching. All I can say is, I'd like to be in those leagues.

I am; it's great.

Potter's Pub, one of the start-up leagues in Appendix A, spent $1030 on pitchers last year. Try-County, another one, spent $865. These are the same pitchers, basically. Does one group earn $165 more than another?

Potter's Pub is insane. Forty percent of their money on pitching? Where'd you say they were located?

Not so fast. A market-driven valuation system would say Potter's Pub pitchers do earn $1065 because they cost $1065. Whatever the market says pitching is worth, it is worth.

Let them say that. I'm going to buy cheap hitting in Potter's Pub and clean their clocks.

But doesn't that answer your question? You buy whatever is cheap. There's no such thing as a *team* budget.

Hell, I know that. I was just throwing you a meatball.

I appreciate it, because we've just covered points five and six.

Which were? Now I've forgotten them.

You think I remember? They were your points.

I think they had to do with managing your team after the draft.

Right—trades.

Trades, waivers, ups and downs: the part of the game we get 90 percent of our enjoyment from and which counts for about 2 percent.

You're such a fatalist. I'm sure it counts 10 percent.

And the draft itself is a hell of lot more than 10 percent of the year's quota of thrills, but you know what I mean. We've covered all this.

Except for one thing. I used to have no problems buying a lopsided team. Just get value, I said, wherever you found it.

"Know the value of players' performances," you said. "In a room that's a little hazy about this, you're going to kick ass." It's true.

I'm glad I helped you finally. I've been getting the impression you and your partner have finally finished first?

Damn straight. Of course, we had to find some real hazy rooms.

Of course. The thing is, this game does keep evolving, and it's not always so simple anymore to smooth out a lopsided team. It's fine to buy surplus value in the draft, not so fine to be stuck with it and have it become excess value.

Really, the learning curve in this game is shocking. There used to be lulls that could you count on *somewhere* in the draft—

Bermuda triangles—

Bermuda triangles, where you could really clean up. I don't see them anymore. It's not easy to buy a surplus of anything, even if you want to, because nothing is cheap.

The more skilled everyone gets at the game, the more it becomes a game of luck?

Who said that?

You did, last year.

I thought so.

By luck, you mean predicting.

No, I mean luck. Dave Justice and Cecil Fielder. But also: Moose Factory, enforcing prices in the first round, buying Puckett for $38; the Tooners, enforcing prices in the first round, buying Mattingly for $38.

You don't think you can predict what's going to happen? That's why you refuse to do it?

Please. Let's not start up with that.

I want to talk about predictions.

Time to go now. No more room.

My partner said—when he heard I was coming over here—if you don't do anything else, make sure Patton makes some predictions this year.

I've made plenty of predictions.

He means something systematic. Something we can hold you to. Everyone else is doing it. Why shouldn't you?

Why isn't your guess as good as mine?

That's what we want to find out.

Suppose I don't want to?

Then my partner says I gotta start calling you names. Come on ... I fed you all those meatballs. Stand in the box.

During all those player comments, I felt like I *was* standing in the box.

Is that right? Seemed to me, whenever you were at a loss for words, you looked up someone else's prediction and made fun of it.

Now you're making me mad.

How many bases did you *predict Jefferies would steal?*

Okay, okay—fair enough. I'm taking the bait. It's not fair, but I'm taking it.

Before I do, though, I want to say I could have been much harder on the forecasters. Especially Bill James.

I said somewhere else that the prediction business is a can't-win proposition, but it's actually the other way around. Who ever bothers to check up on these people afterward?

One of the annuals before the 1989 season was something called the *The Baseball Superstats.* Linear weights, defensive differentials, park factors—heady stuff. After reading how to evaluate teams in a chapter titled "The Superiority of the Superstat Method," we're told the Tigers' record will be 88–74. Their record turned out to be 59–103. The Orioles will be 65–97; they turned out to be 87–75. The Cubs will be 75–87; turned out to be 93–69. Cincinnati will be 87–75; turned out to be 75–87.

That's all right; they made some good predictions, too. One is dead on: the Brewers are going to be 81–81 and are 81–81. In the next chapter, called "Interpreting The Prediction Results," we're told how come they know this. The club will be "in a mediocre class by itself in the game's perennial powerhouse division." The A's will win the AL West, another good prediction. How come? They "seem poised to dominate baseball's softest division ... they are not so much a juggernaut as the big fish in the small AL West pond." The AL West will be 551–583; turned out to be 587–546.

One year later, the forces behind these supersillystats, Steve Mann and Ken Mallin, turn up again, this time authoring *The Sporting News Rotisserie and Fantasy Baseball League Guide.* Is there one word of apology for their mistaken appraisal of the entire league?

Maybe their new publisher told them not to.

Maybe. But we digress. Bill James is such a more interesting case history. First of all, we've heard of him. Second of all, he *pretends* to look back.

In the special baseball issue of *The Sporting News* last year, James projects the five best players at each position in each league.

I sort of remember it.

Needless to say, your memory will be refreshed soon, but first a Jamesian sampler:

"Every year, there are going to be eight or 10 players who have seasons which are out of line with what they have done in the past ... The system doesn't know anything about ballpark effects. A guy like Kal Daniels probably isn't going to hit nearly as well in Dodger Stadium as he did in Riverfront Stadium ... Minor league stats, if properly adjusted for park effects and the quality of competition, will project major league batting performance exactly as well as previous major league performance ... Roberto Kelly hit .302 last year and Jerome Walton hit

.293, but we know, because we have studied their minor league performances, that Walton is actually a little better hitter than that, Kelly probably isn't quite that good ... Are we going to be wrong on some of these projections? Sure, a few of them ... Put these projections aside until next October. Check them out, and you'll discover that seven out of 10 times we were right on the money."

This is going to be fun. How many times was he wrong?

Bill takes care of that for us. He grades himself.

"The way I evaluate predictions is by similarity scores," he writes in this year's Stats Inc. book. "Similarity scores compare seasons on a scale of zero to a thousand; if two players had identical stats in a season, the score would be 1000 ... We didn't score any 1000s, but we came remarkably close a number of times."

He shows us Rick Dempsey's projected and actual 1990 stats, and they are remarkably close. The similarity score is 980.

He tells us the next two best matches were Ozzie Smith (971) and Kent Hrbek (974). To me, they look just as remarkably close. "A few other players we hit pretty good include B. J. Surhoff, Jose Lind, Jody Reed, Julio Franco, Tony Pena and Dale Murphy."

To save us the trouble of looking them up, he shows the projected and actual stats of all these players.

Still remarkably close?

You bet. I'll show you Dale Murphy on the assumption he was the one who was hit the least good.

DALE MURPHY	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA
PROJECTED	527	23	76	4	.245
ACTUAL	563	24	83	9	.245

By the way, Bill projects doubles and triples, too, and he's off by a total of two doubles.

"All of these similarity scores," he then tells us, "are over 950."

He gives us the rest of the scale, describing each bracket. For instance, in the 800–849 bracket, "the seasons have significant similarities, but also important differences."

Then he gives us the grand tally. "There were 382 projections printed in the book last year. Of those 382, an astonishing 47 scored at 950 or above, and essentially one half (49%) scored at 900 or better. The median was 898." He gives the complete data:

950+	900–949	850–899	800–849	750–799	700–799	below 700
47	140	83	45	14	8	45

What's he told us so far?

I'm not sure ... Something's missing.

"Having shown you the best projections," Bill writes next, "I am honor bound now to acquaint you with the worst. The system of similarity scores, however, is not as good at calibrating *difference* as it is *similarity:* how 'different' two things are is harder to say than how similar."

This is vintage Bill James; he makes an excellent observation.

But there's still something missing.

You're damn right. "The lowest similarity score is for Rob Richie, a Detroit prospect whom we projected to hit .289 with 14 homers, 66 RBI. Instead, he joined Jehovah's Witnesses, quit baseball and spent his summer harassing shut-ins or whatever they do."

Forget the jokes, what was his similarity score?

"The similarity was scored at 115." (*I* didn't say that.)

He give any other low similarity scores?

"The lowest similarity score for a player projected to play 100 games who did play 100 games was Don Mattingly, at 665."

Six-sixty-five?

Six-sixty-five. "He was followed by Jerome Walton (802), Pete O'Brien (812), Dwight Smith (816), and Oddibe McDowell (834), all of whom, I am perversely proud to say, were on my Fantasy League team for a good part of the summer."

No shit?

No—wait—you're falling for it.

What did I miss?

You just missed what's missing. He's just told us the middle ground of this fancy scale of his—and it's Pete O'Brien!

PETE O'BRIEN	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA
PROJECTED	518	15	65	1	.263
ACTUAL	366	5	27	0	.224

Remember the description of the 800–849 bracket? Where are the significant similarities? What differences aren't important? Stolen bases? In that case, here's Oddibe:

ODDIBE MCDOWELL	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA
PROJECTED	550	16	59	36	.255
ACTUAL	305	7	25	13	.243

Here it must be batting averages.

Right.

This is a joke.

But because Bill's so confounded clever, I doubt many of the thousands of Stats Inc. readers so much as blink.

Remember what the medium was (898)? Well, *who* is 898? We have Dale Murphy on one side at around 950 and Oddibe on the other at 834. I want an example of Mr. 898, but Bill doesn't want me to see it because something tells me he looks more like Oddibe than Dale Murphy. Meantime, what grade does he give himself?

"71% of the players were projected with an accuracy of 850 or better"—seven out of ten, as luck would have it—"but if you leave out the guys who were projected to play but didn't—Jeff Richardson—it's well over 80%. I'm amazed that we did that well."

He's amazed seven out of ten scored better than Oddibe McDowell?

Seems like it.

That 49 percent that scored 900 or better—do you think that's more accurate?

How can we tell? It's Bill's dark secret what the 900–949 range is. I'll give you his description: "the seasons are truly similar."

But he doesn't list one example?

Nope. He points out that overachievers like Ron Gant (735), Darren Daulton (789), and Rickey Henderson (800) pull down his grade. He excuses "a few clinkers"—Eric Anthony (777), Joey Belle (688) and Scott Coolbaugh (733)—on the grounds of insufficient playing time, as if their performances had nothing to do with that.

Score him yourself.

What?

Score him yourself. In Patton $.

I don't think Bill would *like* that. He might scoff. He might say what the hell are Patton $?

So what? All your formulas do is roll the four categories into one. If they're wrong, they're the same amount wrong for the actual and projected stats. Do it.

You think so?

Do it. If you don't have much space, just do it.

I'll tell you what. I'll tally all 85 players James selected for the *Sporting News* article, you vouch for it, and we'll show one position. Who do want?

Corner basemen.

That's one position?

If you wouldn't argue so much we could show them all.

PROJECTED 1990 STATS BY BILL JAMES

1B	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA	PROJ. $	ACTUAL $	+/–	%OFF
WILL CLARK	578	29	106	9	.313	36	27	9	33%
EDDIE MURRAY	557	23	80	2	.269	20	36	–16	–44%
ANDRES GALARRAGA	553	20	81	11	.278	23	20	3	15%
GLENN DAVIS	577	30	91	3	.256	22	18	4	22%
MARK GRACE	521	11	72	12	.311	24	26	–2	–8%

3B	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA	PROJ. $	ACTUAL $	+/–	%OFF
HOWARD JOHNSON	559	27	82	33	.254	29	27	2	7%
BOBBY BONILLA	562	18	84	6	.283	22	31	–9	–29%
TIM WALLACH	563	17	81	3	.256	16	28	–12	–43%
TERRY PENDLETON	554	7	69	10	.258	13	6	7	117%
CHRIS SABO	478	9	50	43	.270	24	27	–3	–11%

So these are his National League projections for last year. "Projected $" is the worth of his projected stats in Patton $. "Actual $" is the worth of the actual 1990 stats in Patton $. Under "+/–" is the raw difference,

how many dollars he was over or under the target. The last column is the percentage that he missed by.

How do we interpret it? Is getting within $9, or 33 percent, on Will Clark a good call or not? What's "right on the money"?

Not Clark. He was saying he'd have a good year, and he didn't.

But he was saying Clark was coming back to earth in 1990; he was more cautious than the market.

I don't like Bonilla either, but I'll give him Bonilla. Let's make 30 percent the dividing line.

Then he's right in 16 cases out of 40.

Wait a minute. For a little guy like Ozzie Smith ($9 projected, $14 earned, 36 percent off), maybe that's harsh. Try within $5.

Five dollars one way or the other? He's right in 20 cases out of 40.

Sometimes he's right for the wrong reasons, like Sabo.

Hey, it doesn't matter. A buck's a buck.

I agree. Most of these projections look sensible to me.

And by his standards, for sure, seven out of ten come in at 850 or better. The only one I'm sure doesn't have an 850 similarity score is Pendleton.

You're positive that Pendleton (6, 58, 7, .230) is as off as Oddibe?

No, I'm not sure. He might score himself 10-out-of-10 here. Let's see the American League.

PROJECTED 1990 STATS BY BILL JAMES

1B	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA	PROJ. $	ACT. $	+/–	%OFF
FRED MCGRIFF	550	39	102	8	.284	37	35	2	6%
DON MATTINGLY	615	25	111	1	.320	36	7	29	414%
MARK MCGWIRE	531	41	108	0	.271	33	27	6	22%
WALLY JOYNER	603	22	95	6	.284	28	10	18	180%
KENT HRBEK	468	22	79	2	.288	25	26	–1	–4%

3B	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA	PROJ. $	ACT. $	+/–	%OFF
WADE BOGGS	580	7	60	2	.340	25	18	7	39%
PAUL MOLITOR	576	10	56	27	.290	29	22	7	32%
CARNEY LANSFORD	571	12	63	20	.289	27	16	11	69%
GARY GAETTI	509	20	80	5	.253	20	14	6	43%
KEVIN SEITZER	599	8	65	15	.302	26	13	13	100%

Your reaction?

McGriff, McGwire, Hrbek—three out of ten, I give him. He probably gives himself Boggs, Molly and Gaetti besides.

The overall tally is 22 out of 45 hitters (counting five DH's) within 30 percent; 19 hitters within $5.

Giving him the benefit of all hitters who come within 30 percent or $5, he's right about 46 of the 85 players: 54 percent.

And these are the 85 top hitters, the all-stars; for the 392 he projected, he probably didn't come anywhere near that.

Which is not to say the projections are ridiculous; there isn't one here that I would quarrel with. But what is it that McGriff, McGwire and Hrbek have in common?

They did what they were meant to. They did what they usually do.

Exactly. Hitters aren't nearly as dependable as we like to think. They're just more dependable than pitchers, and even if they weren't, the three quantitative categories make them more dependable to us.

You do anything like this with Benson's projections?

No, but I did compare the two, and it's an epic battle. If Benson's stats for McReynolds were worth $27 and James's were worth $25, and McReynolds' actual stats were worth $23, I'd score a win for James. If Benson had Dawson at $21 and James had him at $20, I'd score a win for Benson, even though they both were a pretty long way from $36. If Benson predicted $8 for Sabo or James $20 for Huson, it was just one loss, no penalty. If they both predicted $9 for Berryhill, it was a tie.

I get it: not how close but who's closer. What did you get?

Final score: James wins 40, Benson wins 36, nine ties.

Again, this is just the 85 hitters that James included in his *Sporting News* piece. To test the overall validity of each forecaster, you'd have

to add up all of their forecasts, and my curiosity didn't extend that far. But, judging by the sample of 85, both forecasters use realistic formulas. They are much more correct for the group than they are for individuals.

The long and the short of it is, the projections Bill James makes are as good as anyone else's, maybe better. The claim that they are 70 percent reliable is wrong, by almost any definition of reliable. The Bill James definition is total sleight-of-hand, his self-grading system complete fakery.

The way he presents his grade—the swagger, the drum-rolling of evidence, and especially, at the crucial moment, the diversionary comment about his own team—has the stamp of genius.

He really had Pete O'Brien?

But I don't want to get sidetracked or anything. You ready to make your own predictions?

I guess so.

Want a smoke? Maybe a blindfold?

I'll make ten, all in the National League.

How come no AL?

Because I have enough trouble as it is in the American Dreams. Let's see—we'll have all ten of them be outfielders; my prediction of the best ten.

That way, if you get the prices wrong, you still might get the order right?

You never know.

First. The Straw Man. $41.

That was easy.

The hell it was. What about Barry Bonds? He might be the hardest top-dollar call in either league this year. He may have more talent than Rickey. His swing, his defense, his arm—since I've been watching baseball, the only one with more of a total package is Willie Mays.

Forget it. Nothing like the power.

That's true, but he's always drawn walks—anyway, we digress. What's Bonds made of? Do you know?

Uh-uh. Make your prediction.

Didn't think that would work. $38.

I'd bid him higher, because you simply don't let a player go at that price when there's still an upside, a big upside. Nevertheless, I'm predicting—he ain't made of much.

Ron Gant I like. Make him $40.

So these are out of order?

Like Henry Aaron said, "I hit 'em, you count 'em."

Vince Coleman ... We don't even know what league he's going to be in right now. The hell with it. $35.

$45 if he's in the AL.

You serious?

Yep. League differences are real. Also, if he plays in the AL, he'll want to show up Rickey. The interesting thing will be Rickey's reaction. I have the feeling Rickey's major-major running days are over.

He says he's going to go for his own record.

No, no, he's just spoofing us; Rickey does that. Next must be Eric Davis. $34.

In his comment, you said he'd earn $21.

That was a long time ago. I've changed my mind.

Kevin Mitchell, $35. Dangerous. Don't like to spend that much money on a slowpoke, and I'd back away if it looks like he's hurting in spring training, but he may be the best hitter in baseball right now.

How many do I have to go?

Four.

Kirk Gibson, $33. Take a flier.

Take a hike. He's in the AL.

Oh, right.

Okay—Tim Raines. No, scratch that.

Larry Walker, $33.

You really like him, don't you?

I'm not crazy about him, but I don't want the Patton Guesses to be exact replicas of the poopy old formulas. Also, a lot of the old standbys I have doubts about. Will Raines run? Will he be in the league? Does Daniels get traded now for a right-handed hitter?

Daniels is staying and he's going to outhit Strawberry.

My, my, my—aren't you the bold one all of a sudden?

But that was off the record. Don't publish that.

I wouldn't dream of it. Nails? Do we like him in the top ten?

Not me.

Me neither. Who else?
Want to finish this for me?

Only three to go. You can do it.

Tony Gwynn! Jeepers. $36.
Two—pant, pant.
Bobby Bonilla, $30, and, okay, Daniels, $32. There, I'm done.

Van Slyke? Dawson? Hayes? Justice?

Can't have everyone.

You don't like Justice?

I do, a lot. I just don't see him in the top ten.

Well, why don't you take Daniels out? Then you can put in Justice.

Okay, fine.

Or Van Slyke if you want.

Fine, Van Slyke.

So your top ten list is: Straw $41, Gant $40, Bonds $38, Gwynn $36, Coleman $35, Mitchell $35, Eric Davis $34, Walker $33, Bonilla $30 and Van Slyke—how much for Van Slyke?

Oh, $29.

Van Slyke, $29.

Good-bye now. Thanks a lot. Thanks for all your help.

Good-bye. See you next year. Send me a free copy?

Sure. Good-bye now. So long.

Yeah, so long. Good luck with your team.

Good luck with all of yours.

Phew. Glad he's gone.

My top ten—barring trades, absent injury, and all that: Straw $41, Gant $40, Bonds $38, Gwynn $36, Coleman $35, Mitchell $35, Eric Davis $34, Walker $33, Daniels $32, and Bonilla $30.
Like I said.