



Opening Pitch

I met new chapter member Ed Denta recently, and we quickly bonded over the phrase: “Love the game.”

We all do, of course. But there’s so many ways it comes into play.

Check out Michelle Taylor’s story the Savannah Bananas trip to Tampa. Man, I’m sorry I missed that experience.

With MLB’s new rules in place for 2023, there’s a lot of talk about new and old. Tradition and modernization. It can polarize in a hurry. But it doesn’t have to.

That’s the game’s greatness. It can be enjoyed on so many levels.

My favorite in-person games in recent years involve being with a young fan. One was a WBC game in March. The common thread: Steady banter on all levels.

Paraphrasing historian John Thorn in Ken Burns’ *Baseball*: I’m never worried about the game’s future; its inherent greatness wins out.

Now, back to the Bananas. Think John McGraw foresaw a pitcher on stilts? Think Lou Piniella ever considered managing against one?

No matter. It was chaos, sure. It also was love of the game.

Sam Dolson



On-field dance breaks? Just one example of things not seen at a ballpark before the Savannah Bananas visit.

BananaBall Makes A Splash

Tampa trip offers full view of Savannah team’s diamond circus

By Michelle Taylor

The rain was falling, the wind was gusting, a tornado watch was in effect, but George M. Steinbrenner Field was filled to capacity on April 29, and the fans weren’t seeking shelter in the concourse – they were dancing in their seats. The Savannah Bananas were in town on their 33-city tour, that night facing the Major League Baseball Players Alumni Association. It was the Bananas’ second straight sellout night in Tampa, just like

Wildly Popular

All 2023 games in Savannah, Ga., are sold out. Every one.



they’ve sold out every ballpark across the country, and all season at their home park.

“I’m glad we got a rain delay,” my son said. This wasn’t teenage sarcasm. The rain-delay antics were as much a spectacle as the game itself – the tarp was first a

slip-and-slide like the scene from Bull Durham (but with a giant banana and a monkey inflatable thrown in), then the stage for a Spike Ball game, then a dance floor with the Bananas’ break-dancing coach spinning in the puddles. Like a three-ring (four-base?) circus, there was almost too much to see: a banana king with a glittering gold cloak, the giant Banana (“Split,” their mascot) dancing on the dugouts, the umpire twerking, the Banana

see **BANANAS**, next page

Double fun for a coach – two debuts in one day

By Ken Clawson

Is there another high school coach who had two former pitchers make their first MLB starts on the same day, with both recording the “W” – and against their respective crosstown rivals?

I coached Nick Masset during the 1997 and ’98 seasons at Pinellas Park HS. I coached Tyler Clippard in 2000 at Palm Harbor University HS. The Rangers drafted Masset in the



Nick Masset and Tyler Clippard in 2007

8th round in 2000, and the Yankees drafted Clippard in the 9th round in 2003.

Nick reached the big leagues in 2006, pitching in relief for Texas, but was traded in the offseason to the White Sox.

In 2007, Tyler’s callup was for a start, May 20 at Shea Stadium against the Mets.

It was the first Sunday of interleague play.

see **DEBUTS**, last page

May meeting: SABR author Justin Mckinney

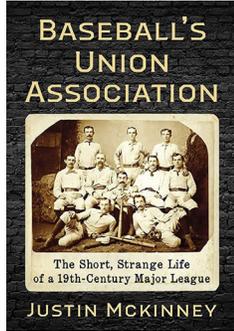


Justin Mckinney

Author Justin Mckinney will be the speaker for the Roush-López Gulf Coast Chapter's gathering on Wednesday, May 10.

Mckinney, a researcher from Alberta, Canada, will speak to the group about his most recent book, *Baseball's Union Association: The Short, Strange Life of a 19th-Century Major League*.

In April, Mckinney was named one of three winners of the 2023 SABR Baseball Research Awards.



Upcoming CHAPTER MEETINGS FOR 2023: Jun 7, Jul 12, Aug 9, Sep 13, Oct 4, Nov 15, Dec. 13.

June 4 / Gathering with Central Florida chapter for Lakeland Flying Tigers-Jupiter Hammerheads game at Joker Marchant Stadium / 1 p.m.

July 5-9 / 51st SABR convention in Chicago

July 20-23 / Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference in Detroit

Sept 29-Oct 1 / Women In Baseball Conference in Rockville, Ill.



Gulf Coast Hardball
Vol 1, Issue 2
Celebrating our national game in the historic Tampa Bay area.

Roush-López Gulf Coast Chapter
Co-chairs:
Mark Drucker
Thomas Holmes
Newsletter editor:
Sam Dolson

This chapter is named for Edd Roush (HOF class of 1962), a longtime resident of Florida's west coast and the grandfather of founding member Susan Dellinger; and Al López (HOF class of 1977), the godfather of the game in Tampa and its surrounding areas. It was established in 2020.



Find us on the web at www.SABRrouslopez.com

BANANAS, from previous page

Pep Band playing at home plate.

The ringmaster, owner Jesse Cole, in a yellow tuxedo, seemed to be everywhere, on the field, in the dugout, in the stands. He dreamed this team into being when he was sleeping on an air mattress in a dingy duplex – now his team has turned to gold (or yellow).

When the tarp came off, it was time for Banana Ball – in Cole's words, that's baseball without the "boring" parts. Or, you might say, baseball modified to thrive in this world of digitally scarred attention spans.

Some of the rules: The team that scores the most runs each inning gets a point, except in the ninth, when every run counts for a point – so every inning offers the chance for a walk-off. Batters can steal first, no matter the count. Walks are sprints – the batter doesn't have to stop at first, and the fielding team can't go after him until all nine players have touched the ball. Batters who step out are called for a strike. If a fan catches a foul ball, the batter is out, so when the ball sails into the stands, the ump and players stand at rapt attention waiting to see if the fan can make the play.

It's zany and frenetic – baseball purists might

scoff, but you can't deny that it's a-peeling (sorry). The Bananas have 5.8 million followers on TikTok, far more than the Yankees (1.1 million) and Rays (341,000).

The MLBPA team, managed by Lou Piniella, included Nick Swisher, Matt Joyce, Health Bell, Bronson Arroyo, Andrew Miller, Luke Gregerson, Brian Tollberg, Michael Morse, Brett Tomko and Lance Niekro. Before the game, the gang lined up for a Rockettes-style kick line.

Some game highlights:

Swisher's leadoff double off Kyle the Cowboy; Joyce with a true Banana Ball strikeout – a called strike three when he stepped out; ten-year-old Brody catching a foul ball to help the Bananas; DR Meadows' trick catches in centerfield – a leaping backflip and a diving cartwheel; Dakota Stilts pitching on (you guessed it) stilts; Eric Jones' homer that ended in a Bananas bowling ball celebration; Largo's Dan Oberst with another Bananas homer; Arroyo pitching for MLBPA and then coaching third while singing and playing guitar; and 76-year-old Bill "Spaceman" Lee with a Bananas relief appearance.

With eight straight walk-off innings, the Bananas won 8-0. And the fans went bananas (of course).

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover: Savannah Bananas infield dance, courtesy The Savannah Bananas; Nick Masset, from 2007 team pictures; Tyler Clippard, from 2007 Topps baseball card. **Page 2:** Justin Mckinney, courtesy Justin Mckinney; ; cover of *Baseball's Union Association*, courtesy McFarland publishing; Edd Roush and Al López, public domain. **Page 3:** Roberto Clemente card, from Mark Drucker. **Page 4:** Glove, ball and laptop, by Sam Dolson.

Tampa Bay Sportscard Show
May 20th & 21st, 2023

Hilton - Carillon Park
950 Lake Carillon Drive, St. Petersburg, FL 33716
SR 688 (Ulmerton Road)

Saturday
10AM - 4PM

Sunday
9AM - 3PM

Future Show Dates:

June 3+4 ~ July 15+16 ~ Aug. 12+13 ~ Sept. 2+3 ~

Trivia Quiz

At each monthly meeting of the Roush-López Gulf Coast Chapter, Steve Nadel works with SABR trivia guru Mike Caraglino to present a trivia quiz tailored to this group.

Steve reports that Mike is a multi-time trivia event winner at past SABR gatherings.

The nine questions that are included at each meeting break down into three primary categories: Tampa Bay Rays trivia, Hall

of Fame trivia and General Baseball trivia.

Typically, Steve presents the trivia questions at a point near the beginning of the proceedings. After talks and chapter business are conducted, the answers are revealed.

Presented here are five questions from the quiz that was given at the previous meeting.

Answers for these questions are on the following page.

• Question #1 – Rays Trivia
What Tampa native matched Frank Chance (1906 Cubs) for most managing wins in a season (116)?

• Question #4 – Rays Trivia
Which Tampa Bay Rays skipper lost the most games in a season with 106?

• Question #5 – Hall of Fame Trivia
What slugger led the National League in Homers 8 times. More times than anyone else?

• Question #7 – Rays Trivia
Who is the first Rays pitcher to strike out 200 batters in a season?

• Question #9 – General Baseball Trivia
Who was the first batter with 50 HRs in a season in the Divisional Era (1969-present)?



IN THE CARDS

by Mark Drucker

In each month's edition, a Roush/López Chapter member will spotlight a single or a pack or a set to celebrate collecting.

This month brings us to "Oddballs," the catch-all moniker for sets that go beyond the large-checklist template and hold great charm.

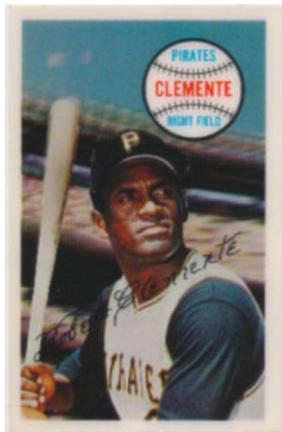
THE CARD HOBBY

has changed drastically since COVID-19 hit in 2020, with collectors young and old returning in a big way. Still, from T-cards to super refractors, there are deals to be had.

Today's tip is on nabbing vintage stars cheap. Topps' 1950s to 1970s sets can cost a mint (no pun intended). A 1963 Mickey Mantle runs from \$400 (VG) to \$1,000 (EX+). But a '63 Post Mantle card ranges from \$50-\$75 (VG) to \$150-\$200 (EX+). Still too pricey? A '70 Topps Roberto Clemente lists at \$60 (VG) to \$150 (EX+). You can get the '70 Kellogg's issue for \$30 (VG) to \$65 (EX+). Look to Oddballs for better prices and value.

For me collecting's beauty is in the hunt. Finding legends for less is a noble, satisfying quest. Happy collecting.

Pictured: From the inaugural Kellogg's 3D set in 1970, card No. 27, Roberto Clemente.



Name Search

K	A	L	M	A	L	A	R	K	E	Y	R	V	C	S
V	L	L	O	Y	D	G	N	O	D	O	M	Q	R	O
B	O	N	S	E	R	R	C	X	U	U	N	L	I	S
S	M	W	W	G	S	I	M	M	O	N	S	B	S	A
C	A	B	Y	M	N	F	T	A	T	G	E	A	P	Q
O	R	U	T	H	E	F	B	Y	X	A	A	I	V	P
C	B	L	U	E	R	E	A	S	Y	J	V	N	N	L
H	F	D	E	N	O	Y	N	H	G	H	E	E	L	A
R	W	O	O	D	G	B	C	V	L	A	R	S	E	N
A	X	B	J	E	T	E	R	Q	A	N	V	L	G	K
N	B	W	R	R	G	N	O	B	V	M	O	B	G	K
E	E	T	E	S	C	C	F	R	I	S	C	H	G	N
A	L	U	P	O	C	W	T	A	N	W	Y	R	E	J
F	L	E	O	N	A	R	D	M	E	R	J	Z	A	X
M	I	Z	E	L	L	N	N	M	A	B	A	N	K	S

The grid above, once again sent in by Mark Drucker, contains 28 baseball names. The challenge: Time yourself to see how long it takes to find them.

Some names belong to Hall of Famers. Some names don't come with much fame at all.

Included is a former first-

round draft pick from St. Petersburg Gibbs High School, as well as a little-known mid-'80s infielder for the Phillies with a career OPS of .864 in his 22 career at-bats.

The full roster of names for this month's search appears on the next page.

Local Player Spotlights

Historical research makes up a big part of the “R” in SABR for the Roush-López Gulf Coast Chapter, sure.

But we’ll also have our eyes on current games, specifically following the exploits of players with any connection to the

Tampa Bay area.

Watch this space each month for a glance at who is doing what at ballparks big and small. We’ll track All-Stars, journeymen, prospects and amateurs. MLB, MiLB, collegians and high schoolers.

If they come through Tampa, St. Pete or Clearwater, if they’re from Hillsborough County or Pinellas County, then they’re already authoring their own chapters in the story of hardball around these parts.



Franco Aléman P

Tampa Alonso / 22 / drafted (Rd 10) 2021 from UF
27 Ks in 17 IP for Lake County in High-A Midwest Lg



Pete Alonso 1B

Tampa Plant / 28 / drafted 2016 from UF
Among NL home run leaders as '23 nears quarter mark



Jacob Barnes P

St. Petersburg / 33 / drafted (Rd 14) 2011 from FGCU
Awaiting MLB return; has 1 S for AAA Round Rock



Bo Bichette SS

St. Petersburg Lakewood / 25 / drafted 2016 from HS
Slashing .321/.360/.525 for Jays; among AL hits leaders



Julian Bosnic P

Tampa Berk Prep / 23 / drafted (Rd 14) 2022 from S Car
Has 1.93 ERA, 3 S for FSL Bradenton in 1st pro season



Shane McClanahan P

USF / 25 / drafted (Rd 1) 2018 from college
First MLB starter to reach 7 W for red-hot Rays



Peter Strzelecki P

USF / 28 / undrafted FA 2018 from college
Collected 13 K (2 BB) in steady pen use for Brewers



Tyler Vogel P

Dunedin / 22 / drafted (Rd 12) 2022 from JU
Has 3 W and 2 S in 9 relief outings for Single-A San Jose

DEBUTS, from first page

It was the same day Nick started for the first time, at Wrigley Field against the Cubs.

The results:

White Sox 10, Cubs 6: Masset (WP) 5.2 IP, 3 H, 2 R, 2 ER, 3 BB, 3 K.

Yankees 6, Mets 2: Clippard (WP) 6 IP, 3 H, 1R, 1 ER, 3 BB, 6 K.

In Chicago, Juan Uribe had a two-run single in the fourth and Jermaine Dye homered in the third to stake Nick to an early lead. Eventually, the White Sox locked up the win for him with seven

runs in the seventh inning.

In New York, Tyler gave up a solo homer to David Wright in the second. But in the fourth, a two-run double by Johnny Damon and a two-run homer from Derek Jeter put Tyler in control.

Because they were interleague games, both pitchers batted (as visitors in NL parks). Both had sacrifice bunts and Clippard also had a double.

Actually, what I am most proud of as their former coach who emphasized working on this seemingly lost art: They both got the bunt down.

Trivia Answers

1. Lou Piniella
4. Hal McRae
5. Mike Schmidt
7. Scott Kazmir
9. George Foster

Name Search List

Alomar, Baines, Bancroft, Banks, Bell, Blue, Bonser, Cochrane, Crisp, Frisch, Glavine, Griffey, Henderson, Jeter, Larsen, Legg, Leonard, Lloyd, Malarkey, Mays, Mizell, Odom, Plank, Ruth, Seaver, Simmons, Wood, Young



Like to write (and love the game)?

With this newsletter, the Roush-López Gulf Coast Chapter hopes to promote the acts of researching and writing about the National Game. Contact the editor – chapter member Sam Dolson – with questions, suggestions and/or story ideas. Send an email to samdolson@yahoo.com.