



Gulf Coast Hardball



Roush-López Gulf Coast Chapter

July 2023
Vol. 1, Issue 4

Tampa/St. Petersburg, Florida

A SABR day at the ballyard in Lakeland

By Sam Dolson

June 4 brought with it a top SABR benefit – the perk of gathering to talk baseball.

In this case, it was a meet-up with members of the Roush-López Gulf Coast Chapter and the Central Florida chapter. It was at Joker Marchant Stadium in Lakeland, for a Sunday game between the Flying Tigers and the Jupiter Hammerheads.

Jim and Pam Bard and the Central Florida crew were fun hosts. Trivia questions came quick, opinions were batted about and the food and drink were plentiful.

The Bards shared with our Gulf Coast crew the story of their group's efforts toward last fall's unveiling of a Florida Historical Marker at Kelly Field in Daytona Beach, where Jackie Robinson began training with the Montreal Royals in 1946.

For the record, a 4-2 decision went to the home team. Messy Jupiter defense helped the Flying Tigers to three runs in the first two innings. But an exception was leftfielder Renny Hidalgo, who made two acrobatic catches, one of which sent him sprawling into the seats along the foul line.



The Roush-López chapter joined Central Florida members at Joker Marchant Stadium.

Select talent

Tampa Bay area once again sends players to top of draft

By Sam Dolson

Is Heading into the 2023 MLB Draft, the preview of SS Arjun Nimmala of Strawberry Crest High School began:

“The area in and around Tampa has long been a hotbed in terms of producing premium high school draft talent, and this year is no different.”

On the first night of the proceedings – concurrent with baseball's All-Star break for the first time this year – events proved that analysis spot-on.

First chosen from the Pinellas-Hillsborough region was 3B Brock Wilken, a 2020 graduate of Bloomingdale High School in Valrico selected from Wake Forest by Milwaukee. Two picks later Nimmala went to Toronto, the sixth shortstop taken overall but the first non-collegian at that position.

Also including college players, a Tampa Bay-area product has gone in Round 1 or 2 in eight of the past 10 years. Among the 15 players in that group are Kyle Tucker, Bo Bichette, Pete Alonso and Shane McClellan, all named to 2023 All-Star Game rosters.

Nimmala, the 17-year-old is the son of im-



Strawberry Crest shortstop Arjun Nimmala

migrant parents from India. If his performance matches the Blue Jays' projections, he will be the first player of such descent to play in the major leagues. Nimmala also is the first player drafted from Strawberry Crest in the 14-year history of the eastern Hillsborough County school.

see **DRAFT**, last page

Hitters stay in launch mode

By Ken Clawson

It was said once that Rod Carew had a different stance for each pitcher. Not completely true, but he did have several different stances he employed to be the hitter that he was. Hold on to that thought ...

As the hitting strategy based around “launch angle” gets discussed, some announcers and color analysts spin a negative connotation on the term. Launch angle is a measurement and is determined by using the ground as the x-axis and the swing path as the y-axis. It can be positive (upswing) or negative (downswing).

A search for optimum launch angle likely will produce a variety of ranges between 10 and 30 degrees. The line-drive range is said to be between 10 and 25

see **LAUNCH**, next page

July meeting: Local baseball author Rick Vaughn

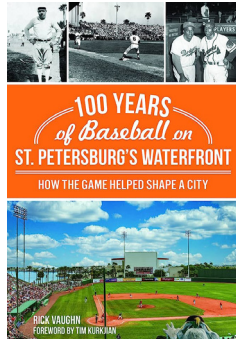


Rick Vaughn

Rick Vaughn will give a presentation at the Roush-López Gulf Coast Chapter's virtual gathering on Wednesday, July 12.

Vaughn directed public relations and communications for the Tampa Bay Rays franchise for 20 years, from 1996 to 2016.

He will speak about his book, *Baseball's 100 Years of Baseball on St. Petersburg's Waterfront* and about baseball in the Tampa Bay area.



Upcoming

CHAPTER MEETINGS FOR

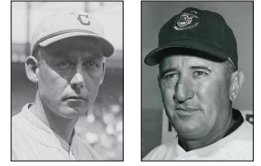
2023: Aug 16, Sep 13, Oct 4, Nov 15, Dec. 13.

For upcoming meeting info, email admarkfl@gmail.com or visit sabrroushlopez.com.

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

Aug 3 / *Ballpark Figures* interview series with Shakeia Taylor, featuring Jay Jaffe (virtual)

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



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Celebrating our national game in the historic Tampa Bay area.

Roush-López Gulf Coast Chapter

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LAUNCH, from previous page

degrees. Between 15 and 30 degrees and slightly above is a home run angle. But there's a catch: The pitcher has something to say about all of this.

Pitches are evaluated according to a vertical approach angle. If the LA and the VAA are relatively matched with each other and the batter is on time, the bat can have 4 to 8 inches in the plane in which to keep the bat head through the ball. That is optimal for the hitter. When those two angles do not match well, advantage pitcher.

It's interesting that a launch angle of 25 degrees or greater is considered a fly-ball angle because if the swing is a bit early and the bat strikes the ball on the bottom side, a "swinging bunt" occurs or (worse) a weak grounder. High fastballs with a high spin rate only drop about 3 degrees, so even a 15-degree launch angle is suboptimal. Hence, a higher strike zone with higher spin-rate pitches contributes to the increased strikeout rate of hitters.

Back to Carew. He struck out 29 times against Nolan Ryan in 109 plate appearances, fourth most of all hitters in Ryan's career. Carew said he made adjustments in his career to deal with Ryan. Although it was below his career average of .328, his .301 average against Ryan was stellar. The point is

Carew likely changed his stance to adjust his launch angle against various types of pitchers. Long before it became accepted science.

A top-end hitter likely would need three grooved launch-angle swings to have no holes. For the high fastball, a relatively low angle is optimal. For mid-to-low pitches without a severe downward VAA, the line drive/power type angle works. For low pitches with a tall pitcher down-planing or a breaking ball dropping at a sharp angle, a swing with a negative down angle is required to hit through the top of the ball much like a golf swing in order to drive the ball.

Another factor becomes evident from a story I once heard Hall of Famer Joe Sewell tell. Sewell's strikeout rate was among the lowest in MLB history.

When he was with the Yankees for the last three years of his career (1931-1933), he heard reporters giving it to Babe Ruth about how much he struck out. Ruth told them he could hit like Joe Sewell.

He got into the box using Sewell's stance and grip, and lashed line drives all over the field. Later, one reporter asked Ruth why he didn't hit like that all the time. The Babe quickly responded that he didn't want to get paid like Sewell. Big-league hitters swing to get paid.

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.SABRRoushlopez.com

Founded in 1971, the Society for American Baseball Research now has membership exceeding 7,000.

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover: Lakeland FSL game, courtesy Sam Dolson; Arjun Nimmala, courtesy 813preps.com. **Page 2:** Rick Vaughn, courtesy Respect 90; Vaughn book, courtesy History Press. **Page 3:** Willie Mays card, courtesy Sam Dolson; Leerhsen book, courtesy Simon & Shuster. **Page 4:** Brock Wilken, courtesy Wake Forest.

TAMPA CARD SHOW BY THE BAY

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Trivia Quiz for July

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 upcoming quiz – three Rays questions and one each from the other categories.

Answers for these questions are on the following page.

Question 1 – Rays trivia

Which two teams did the Rays bump off to win the American League playoffs in 2008?

Question 3 – General Baseball trivia

Which member of the 400-homer club was on first base when Hank Aaron slugged his 715th round-tripper?

Question 4 – Rays trivia

Which player from the 2008 AL champion Rays also played for the 2007 WS-winning Red Sox and the 2009 WS-winning Yankees?

Question 5 – HOF trivia

Which Hall of Fame left-hander led his league in ERA a record nine times?

Question 7 – Rays trivia

In 2002, which Devil Rays outfielder became the first player in franchise history to collect a hit in an All-Star Game?



IN THE CARDS

by Sam Dolson

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 a peek at how personal preferences shape each person's collection.

A GREAT THING about collecting? We all choose what we chase. Don't care for parallels, refractors or 1-of-whatevers ... just ignore 'em. I do. Everybody can dictate what matters most to them.

That comes into play when I consider condition. Generally, I'll grab something dinged around the corners or even creased, so long as it's fairly well centered. That fits my eye. But I'll ignore it all for a story.

I pulled my first Willie Mays card from a pack at age 5. Mom would take me down our Bronx block to what we called the candy store. Seeing the card now jolts my memory. I picture the cracks in the sidewalk below the front stoop. I see the revolving comic book rack just inside the door.

You could find some graded, perfect, slabbed version of that card and offer me a straight swap. It's not happening. The one I've already got is mint in my book.

Pictured: Card # 50, Willie Mays, from 1968 Topps.



Book Review

Bio's nuanced look at Cobb goes beyond broadstrokes

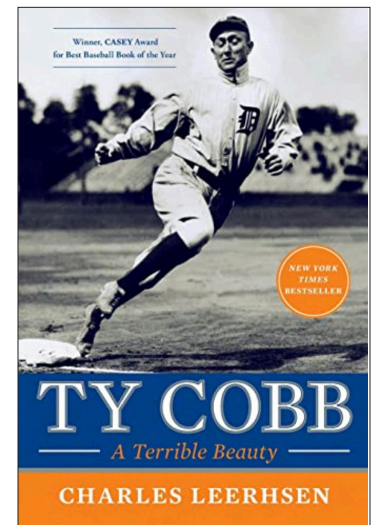
By Thomas Holmes

In his 2015 book, *Ty Cobb, A Terrible Beauty*, award-winning author Charles Leerhsen challenges what you know and what you think you know about one of the greatest hitters in baseball history.

This biography questions the man and his motives. Cobb also could be the most misunderstood player in baseball history. His life is, to this day, wrapped in hearsay. Was he a racist? Was he a bigot? These are common traits used to describe him. But are they true?

Cultural Ty Cobb is a villain. Folklore paints a picture of Cobb as an angry, gun-carrying racist who sharpened his spikes. Is this true? Where did this information come from? These stories have been embedded into baseball history.

Much of today's understanding about Cobb extends from



the movie, Cobb, the adaptation of Al Stump's ghost-writing assignment for the final two years of the Hall of Famer's life. In this book, Leerhsen compares Stump's Cobb to his own research. Fallacies and exaggerations are explored from Cobb's childhood, minor league years, time with the Detroit Tigers, and his post-baseball years.

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.



Pete Alonso 1B

Tampa Plant / 28 / drafted 2016 (Rd 2) from UF
NL All-Star was second in HR and sixth in RBI at the break; competed in his fourth career HR Derby



Addison Barger 3B

Tampa King / 23 / drafted 2018 (Rd 6) from HS
Back at Buffalo (AAA/Intl) after a rehab time; some Jays observers projecting a late-summer call-up



Bo Bichette SS

St. Pete Lakewood / 25 / drafted 2016 (Rd 2) from HS
AL All-Star reached the break with most hits (122) and third-best avg. (.317) in his league



Jeff Hakanson P

Tampa Jesuit / 24 / drafted 2020 (Rd 5) from UCF
Promoted July 6 from Charleston (A/CAR) to Bowling Green (A+/SAL); 5Ks in 2 IP in debut



Tayden Hall C

Steinbrenner / 20 / drafted 2022 (Rd 9) from St Col of Fla
Son of one-time Rays C Toby Hall has .772 OPS in first pro season at Carolina (A/CAR), including a rehab stint



Travis MacGregor P

East Lake / 25 / drafted 2016 (Rd 2) from HS
One step from majors at Indianapolis with 5-0 record (1.91 ERA) as starter/reliever in AA and AAA



Shane McClanahan P

USF / 26 / drafted 2018 (Rd 1) from college
Out with “mid-back tightness” through All-Star Break, but expected back shortly after games resume



Lance McCullers Jr. P

Tampa Jesuit / 29 / drafted 2012 (Rd 1) from HS
Will miss remainder of 2023 season after forearm surgery that was announced June 14



Gabriel Rincones Jr. OF

Tampa Plant, SPC / 22 / drafted 2022 (Rd 3) from FAU
Promoted June 13 from Clearwater (A/FSL) to Jersey Shore (A+/SAL); overall 2023 OPS is .811



Freddy Tarnok P

Riverview / 24 / drafted 2017 (Rd 3) from HS
Pitching well (1.83 ERA, 1.17 WHIP) at AAA Las Vegas since early-season injury rehab

DRAFT, from first page

“I can’t put into words how excited I am,” he said on ESPN’s live coverage of the draft.

The lanky, 6-foot-1 athlete hit .479 and slugged .904 and was named Florida’s Gatorade Player of the Year.

In selecting Wilken, the Brewers eyed his power bat. The 6-foot-4 slugger finished three seasons with the Demon Deacons as the career ACC home run leader with 71.

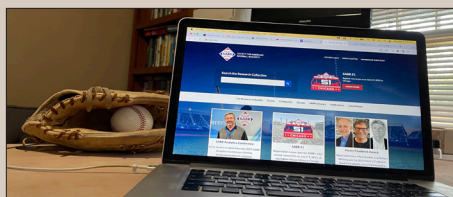


Brock Wilken

Also notable in the region was the Rays’ first selection (No. 19): SS Brayden Taylor from TCU. Coming between Wilken and Nimmala, the pick gave the Tampa Bay area a run of three players from the left side of the infield.

And just up the road from the Pinellas/Hillsborough area, SS Aidan Mitchell of New Port Richey Mitchell went with the 27th pick to Philadelphia.

Trivia Answers: 1. Chicago White Sox and Boston Red Sox, 3. Darrell Evans, 4. Eric Hinske, 5. Lefty Grove, 7. Randy Winn



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.