

Introduction

The baseball clubhouse once was the ultimate sanctuary, the place where players, coaches and managers truly could roam the room with nary an inhibition.

This was a place where anything could be said to anybody at any time with little chance of anyone outside its walls ever knowing what was being said or done.

This was a place where no one was ever truly surprised to see teammates – dragging from their debauchery of the night before – quietly drinking coffee by the urn or popping amphetamines as if they were so many M&Ms.

This was – and still is – a place that often has been its own United Nations, a place shared by whites, blacks, Latinos, Asians and an occasional Aussie whose only common characteristics are playing a game better than nearly everyone else on the planet, earning millions of dollars for playing that game and, well, belching.

Ballplayers, like so many of us, enjoy a good burp. Most of us try to do so quietly. Not ballplayers. For many of them, belching can become an art form. They relish in burping louder and longer than any of their teammates, and they do so with impunity inside the walls of the alpha male clubhouse.

For generations, the clubhouse has been the ultimate frat house, where the party is interrupted only by something as banal as a ballgame that needed to be played.

“We used to have a lot of fun in the clubhouse,” Hall of Fame second baseman Bill Mazeroski once said of the Pirates’ old digs at Pittsburgh’s already-ancient Forbes Field.

“Did you know,” Mazeroski said, “we used to sing all the time?”
Sing? Like songs?

“Yes. Country songs. We all liked them.”

Everybody?

“Yes.”

Even the Great Clemente?

“Oh, yes,” Mazeroski said, “even Clemente.”

Of course, this was back in the 1950s and ’60s, when such activities – who knew Roberto Clemente, the greatest player ever to emerge from Puerto Rico, could belt out a little Tex Ritter? – rarely were chronicled by the attending media.

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Back then, the term “sports journalism” was an oxymoron.

That all changed shortly after Mazerowski retired as a player in 1972 – right around the time the nation was first learning of a break-in at an office complex in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

The 1972 burglary at the Watergate eventually brought down the White House, leading to Richard Nixon’s resignation in 1974 and spawning a generation of journalists who wanted to be the next Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein – the two dogged reporters responsible for helping bring down Tricky Dick and his corrupt administration.

The new age of journalism brought with it not only a revamped look at how the media covered the news but also in how the media viewed the sporting world and the athletes they once shielded.

While Jim Bouton’s 1970 groundbreaking book *Ball Four* shocked baseball’s mostly staid establishment by exposing the shenanigans of the clubhouse, the post-Watergate media pushed for more than what could be found in black-and-white boxscores.

After *Ball Four* and Watergate, the media – already a fixture, albeit a mostly benign one, inside the clubhouse – became more aggressive and soon became weeds in what was once the ballplayers’ Eden.

“They’re vultures, all vultures,” former major league catcher Rick Sweet said of modern-day sports writers whose careers have been built on watching and reporting everything they see. The operative word here being “everything.”

Sweet said he once found a sports writer hiding in a bathroom stall inside the clubhouse at New York’s Shea Stadium – apparently wanting to listen in on some conversations, although no one knew for sure just how much inside poop that writer picked up from listening to players take, well, an inside poop.

Sweet, a baseball lifer, has mellowed over his career, which started as a player in 1975 and continued as a minor league manager well into the new millennium.

Sweet is a real-life version of Crash Davis, the fictional catcher in the movie “Bull Durham” who depending on the scene could be either the story’s protagonist or antagonist.

Sweet, like Kevin Costner’s Crash Davis, is part-optimist, part-cynic, part-humorist, part-philosopher. He is full-time wise to the ways of baseball, knowing that the game can be a microcosm of life in the real world.

He knows nobody is perfect, that errors are made. Somebody wins, somebody loses. And then you do it all over the next day.

“Everything in baseball is written in pencil,” Sweet would say often in his season-plus as the Class AA Harrisburg Senators’ manager during the 1998 and ’99 seasons.

CLIPPINGS

“And everything,” Sweet said, “is written with a big eraser.”

Only one problem there. Sports writers today rarely use erasers. They scribble down everything onto notepads and into iPads, eventually recycling that information into game stories, features, columns and, thanks to the advent of the Internet, those ubiquitous blogs and tweets.

Nearly everything is kept, from scraps of paper to old, yellowed newspaper clips to even older, more yellowed boxscores of games long forgotten by their participants. With the Internet – thank you, Al Gore – everything today, from feat to faux pas, is only a couple of mouse clicks away, having already been preserved for posterity in cyberspace.

The 2012 book *One Patch of Grass* took a peek into the sacred clubhouse on Harrisburg’s historic City Island and into the lives of the Hall of Famers, all-stars, no-stars, wanna-bes and never-weres who since 1890 have summered on a 63-acre parcel of land in the middle of Pennsylvania’s Susquehanna River.

One Patch of Grass examined the astounding, if relatively anonymous, life of Spottswood Poles, the wonderfully talented, Hall of Fame-caliber outfielder who had been born black in an era when only whites were allowed to play in the major leagues.

There also were stories of the magnificent Vladimir Guerrero, Ryan Zimmerman and Stephen Strasburg – three uber-prospects who fast-tracked their way to the major leagues – as well as tales on the Sisyphean struggles of Curtis Pride and Jamey Carroll to not only reach the majors but to stay there for more than a decade.

Clippings isn’t like that.

Mostly because this a book devoid of, well, stories.

Clippings is a companion piece for *One Patch of Grass*, a chance to augment the free-flowing history presented in that book with notes, quotes and an occasional anecdote that could not be squeezed into the first book. Basically, it’s a slice of cold pizza in the morning and, really, who doesn’t like a slice of cold pizza in the morning?

Harrisburg has been blessed over the years to have ballplayers, managers and coaches who have been conversational, controversial and crusty. Sometimes all at once.

Dave Trembley, the Senators’ first manager during their rebirth in 1987, saw himself as a teacher both for the players and the fans, educating the former on how to play the game and the latter on how to watch it.

Jim Tracy, the incarnation of Norman Vincent Peale with a fungo bat during his lone season managing the 100-win Senators in 1993, was just as likely to talk about family and fishing as he was about hitting and pitching.

Then there was Doug Sisson, the manager of Harrisburg’s 1999 championship team who was a writer’s best friend by filling notepads with

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unfiltered thoughts, unwavering opinions and an occasional unworldly rant or two.

Really, who else can get himself hired for a job that he would quit in a huff, lobby hard to win back the same job a week later and then be summarily fired from the same job that he had so badly wanted, quit and then wanted again? All within 22 months.

Sisson's lengthy list of deeds and d'ohs over his season-plus on City Island filled enough notepads to take up two Hammermill paper boxes.

His words earned their own chapter in this book.

Then there have been the players – past and present – who would share their thoughts on everything from being chased by autograph hounds to being tempted by performance-enhancing drugs to being able to stretch their last dollar on a meager minor league salary that makes flipping pizzas back home look like an upward career move.

Their thoughts really are no different today than those of players back in Bill Mazerowski's days or in 1987 when Dave Trembley's Senators returned to City Island after a 35-year hiatus.

Some of the musings in *Clippings* may make you laugh.

Others may make you cringe, especially when you learn just how little minor leaguers are paid compared to their major league brethren.

There are thoughts that go beyond the game – from onetime pitching prospect Joey Eischen talking of quitting baseball and spending more time with his family to career minor leaguer Hassan Pena talking about fleeing Cuba for America not to play a boys' game but to live a life free of one man's tyranny.

Hopefully, all of the thoughts in *Clippings* – from the profound to the profane – will make you think about the lives of the men who play and coach the game, as well as how their outlooks on life may not be all that different from your own.