

# Rotisserie Leagues Are Here to Stay

By Richard Zitrin  
Special to The Chronicle

A little more than midway through the first baseball season of the new decade, pundits and scribes are telling America to get back to basics: Forget megabuck contracts, drug wars, fantasy leagues; just sit back and enjoy the game.

Sure, an average fan would love never to hear the phrase "drug rehab" again. No tears would be shed if the local club's star outfielder signed a long-term deal without demanding more than Rickey Henderson, Will Clark and Jose Canseco combined.

But give up fantasy leagues? Weren't these leagues spawned precisely so fans could regain a little control over the game they loved — even if their games were imaginary?

If any part of the country doesn't need imaginary baseball teams, you'd think it would be here in the Bay Area — home to both of last season's major-league champions. With the A's back on top and the Giants back on track, Bay Area fans are again seeing the best baseball in the land. And they're showing their appreciation by turning out to the ballpark in record numbers.

Perhaps intoxicated by this recent success, the local baseball establishment and beat writers have taken to bashing fantasy leagues. Similar rumblings can be heard clear across the country.

Fantasy and rotisserie leagues are already a thing of the past, goes the argument, part of the "me-firstism" of the '80s, games foruppies to play on their PCs at nighttime.

The leagues get tagged for everything from promoting gambling and infatuation with meaningless statistics to breaking up marriages. "Now I know how Dr. Frankenstein must have felt," writes Sports Illustrated's Steve Huff, a founding father of the original Rotisserie League.

## COMMENTARY

### Criticism Is Sour Grapes

Yet if you ask the fans who play the game, most will say it just ain't so. "The beat writers' criticisms are just sour grapes," says Harry Fuller, founder of one of the Bay Area's oldest fantasy leagues. Fuller, a news director who recently went from Channel 7 to Channel 5, may not be the most objective critic of the print media. But he makes a good point: Fantasy leagues helped persuade baseball and the media to give fans better information.

"Sophisticated fans know more than writers and other 'experts' knew just a few years ago," Fuller said.

But the fantasy leagues emphasize simple numbers, the kind that anyone can easily get out of daily boxscores.

Steve Kaus, a San Francisco lawyer who admits that he might

be a prototypical rotisserie-league owner, says he's strongly against the "statistical dissection" of everything in the game. And Matt Gaines, a 16-year-old high school junior, makes it clear that although he's involved with three fantasy franchises — his own rotisserie league, a team in the computerized Bill James Fantasy League and his father's longtime team — he is "not a stats nerd."

### Leagues Continue to Grow

An entire cottage industry is taking the gamble that, with new blood like Gaines, fantasy leagues will move beyond yuppiedom and continue to grow. There were 81 fantasy-league classified ads in the Sporting News' spring-training issue last March: 29 for stat services, 28 for computer leagues, 11 for how-to-draft books, and another dozen for newsletters, magazines and computerized scouting reports.

Moreover, fantasy leagues have begun to gain a foothold in the

general public consciousness. sip columns trumpet trades and celebrities. Tank McNamara about fantasy leagues from comics page. Now the advert world has picked up the beat. latest radio ad, a national pl company features an Amer businessman and his Japa counterpart developing a rela ship long distance, finding l ball in common, and then tra players in a fantasy league — before they close the big merg

For a few, the thrill is g One longtime owner who insist anonymity is suffering from fa sy burnout: "I can't enjoy wa ing a game anymore unless i volve my players. Then, if i don't do well, I'm left with n ing."

Fuller, Kaus and Gaines agree. Kaus will continue to j fantasy ball, while the "trend come and go. But he has it in spective: He's an A's fan first rotisserie second. Fuller also no problem with divided loy He claims that until he formed fantasy team, the last team he ly loved was the St. Louis Bro

## Ex-Syracuse Center Eyes Cal, Santa Clara

Richard Manning, a 6-foot-10 center who recently received his release from Syracuse, is expected to visit Cal, Santa Clara and Washington in the next several weeks and choose one of those colleges to attend this fall.

Manning, a sixth man at Syracuse last season as a sophomore, was rated among the nation's top 50 high school basketball prospects while at Center High in Sacramento. But he played sparingly for Syr-

acuse this season and decided to transfer. He received his release from Syracuse earlier this month.

Brian Katz, who is acting as intermediary to the three schools of interest, says he does not expect Manning to have difficulty getting admitted to any of the three.

As a transfer, Manning would have to sit out this season before regaining eligibility in the 1991-92 season.

— Jake Curtis

### Waking Up to Box Scores

But Gaines seems to be gling divided loyalties. He roots the Giants "if they're good." W they are going bad, "so long they're losing, why not (root) one of my pitchers?" Isn't this c fusing? Not to Gaines. "Fant leagues are great," he says. " wonderful to get up in the mo ing and read the boxscores!"

Sounds like an idea with a ture.

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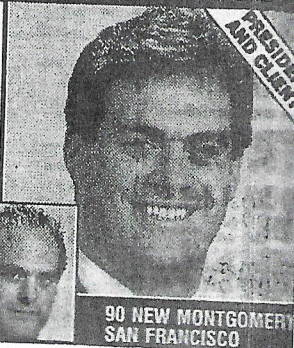
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