



# I Love My Dingy Poppers

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I was having dinner the other night with a fairly attractive young woman. She had short, reddish-brown hair, and pointy glasses, and pointy breasts for that matter. Very perky. And while I may have wanted, badly, to have sex with her, I was having trouble looking her in the eye. I couldn't concentrate on what she was saying. Not that it was terribly interesting, but my main concern was the television mounted in the corner behind our table. I was watching Juan Uribe and Frank Thomas. They play second and first base, respectively, on my fantasy team. In reality they play for the Chicago White Sox. But in my reality they play for the Dingy Poppers, the team I manage.

I love the Dingy Poppers. I'm in love with my guys. Uribe, and Abreu, Burnitz, and Schmidt, and I'm kind of uncomfortable with Octavio Dotel, but I love him anyway.

Some might say I'm obsessed. But what's so obsessive about lying awake at night, thinking about the accomplishments of your players that evening, wallowing in the two hits, one run, and two RBIs of a Jose Guillen? Or Jack Wilson? Who would've thought Jack Wilson would be having such a good season? And what's so obsessive about spending most of my day at work checking my team's statistics. Looking at the splits to see if Juan Uribe is hitting any better at home than he is on the road. He's been in a slump, and someone told me I should drop him from my team, and that really offended me, and now I'm mad at that person, and I'm going to hold a grudge against him in real life. Because, really, Juan Uribe wasn't in a slump; he just doesn't hit very well on the road.

The person who offended me is named Tom. He has a team too. He's in second place, and he thinks his team is so good, and maybe it is, but I won't admit that to him. I won't admit anyone's team is good. Except my own.

"You know, I would have so much more time if it wasn't for one thing," Tom was saying at dinner the other night. We were eating at a sports bar, because we always have to go to sports bars so we can monitor our players. Andy was there too. He's in first place in our league, but I won't tell him his team is good either.

"What's that?" I asked Tom.

"Fantasy baseball," he said.

And we all laughed, because we knew exactly what he was talking about. The time spent just staring. Just looking at our teams with no particular purpose. Not making trades, or picking people up off free agency, or posting a message on the fantasy league message board. Just looking at the team, checking who has the most homeruns, the most runs, the most hits, the best K per 9 innings. The best BB to K ratio, even though there isn't even a category for that stat. I like to

know. And I'm very proud when my players have more BBs than Ks. Frank Thomas has a lot more BBs than Ks, and for that I've gained a newfound respect for him.

After eating with the attractive girl, named Joanna, we went back to her house. Not bad. Going back to the house. Who knows what could happen? Maybe we'll have sex. She's single and I'm single, and why not?

On the way over I was getting nervous. But it wasn't because of the prospect of some kind of relations with this attractive woman.

I was worried about my team!

It was Sunday night, the last night of the fantasy week, and I hadn't seen Uribe or Thomas get any hits on the TV in the restaurant. I started to wonder if I might lose my match-up for the first time in three weeks. Just the thought of it made me sick.

The story of this fantasy baseball season is an interesting one. Maybe not to anyone else, but to me it's a sense of real inspiration. I spent most of the first month of the season in last place. Me, in the last place? I have three fantasy championship rings. One in each of the three major sports. Then there was a debacle in the latest basketball season where I didn't even make the playoffs, and now to be in last place in the baseball league, where I was defending a title, was unbearable.

But you don't win three fantasy championships out of luck. Well, sometimes you do, but I wouldn't even admit that to myself, much less anyone else. I made a bunch of moves, made a couple blockbuster trades, and resurrected my team. I shot from 12th place all the way up to 4th in a matter of three weeks. I credit myself for the turnaround, because if nothing else fantasy sports are all about self-aggrandizement and personal congratulation.

I benched the guys who weren't performing, and cut the guys who really sucked, and I think it sent a message to the rest of the team. I actually believe my coaching has an affect on real players. When I threaten to bench them they play that much harder. When I trade someone the guys know any one of them could be next. I run a tight ship. I don't put up with any crap. Some of the other managers think I'm too tough on my players, but it's been successful so far, so why should I ease up?

Joanna took me up to her bedroom, and her bed was covered with dirty laundry, and she was yapping on and on about the repairs that some contractors were doing on her house, showing me the bathroom, and the shelving, and the crooked countertops, and even

though she showed me the tattoo on the small of her back (are there any girls left who don't have one there?) I started to realize I had more than one fantasy going in my head.

Nothing was going to happen, and in that case I wanted to get home so I could find out what happened with my team, hoping like hell I didn't lose, getting anxious, and trying to calculate what kind of stats my opponent would have to put up to overtake me.

She dropped me off, and I hurried into my house, and went straight to the computer. I had to get online, and the damn dialup connection was taking forever. Come on!

When I finally signed on, Tom instant messaged me right away to let me know I had won. Just barely. 10-9. I was relieved, but slightly pissed I hadn't won by a bigger margin.

Fucking Kevin Millwood, pitcher for the Philadelphia Phillies, and starter for the Dingy Poppers. He pitched like shit against his former team, the Atlanta Braves. He always sucks against Atlanta and if it wasn't for his bad outing I would've won in a blowout. He's a head case, Millwood. I'm going to have to have a talk with him. Going to have to tell him if he doesn't get it together, I'll trade his ass.

I'm still the hottest team in the league, though. That makes me really happy. Provides me an inner peace I don't find anywhere else. A solace from the cruel, consequential world. I like to look at my record, and admire those Ws, one stacked on top of the other. Then Tom had the nerve to tell me he's the hottest team, because he's in second place and he has Vlad Guerrero, and Guerrero had so many RBIs last week, and fuck him, I'm still pissed because of what he said about Juan Uribe.

I thought about trying to trade him Millwood, because he needs pitching, but I don't know if I want to give him any after what he said, wrongly, about Uribe and his team being the hottest, and besides, he won't want Millwood after his last pitiful outing.

So instead I just went to bed with a smile on my face, proud of my team, and dreamt about the Dingy Poppers.