In Gary Benz's latest, he puts his writing talents on full display, penning a short story for us. The tale starts with Gary watching the Tribe game over a friends house with some guys. Next came a harmless bet, fueled by a couple of Bud Lights and the general male testosterone generated by a group of fellas watching a ball game. The story is about the path that harmless wager takes Gary on.

This is not a true story, but it could be.

While watching Sportscenter the other night, I noticed that Russell Branyan hit a home run to help the San Diego Padres to a victory. It reminded me of the time I got the chance to pitch Branyan, former part time infielder, part time outfielder but mostly full time strike out king, formerly of the Cleveland Indians and now a host of other major league teams. Looking back, I remember that there was a lot of pressure on me to strike Branyan out. I would have lost my house (and, perhaps, my family) had I failed. But more on that in a moment.

This story really starts well before Branyan joined the Indians as a regular in around the 2000 season. It actually started with Richie Sexson, Branyan's twin brother of a different mother.

During the 1999 season, Sexson made a relatively decent splash with the Tribe. He had something like 31 home runs and 116 RBI, but he struck out a bunch, too. And he didn't just strike out. He did so in a big way. This was great. Baseball needed a new Dave "King Kong" Kingman (1816 strikeouts in 6677 career at bats). We all were growing weary of sluggers who could also hit for average, as if that's a bad thing. I'm not sure, though, that others paid much

attention to the strike outs and I heard not one comparison between Sexson and King Kong. But with the Tribe playing well and Sexson going deep often enough, all seemed well on the corner of Ontario and Carnegie. But another playoff failure and 1999 soon became 2000 and the Tribe was struggling-playing with the kind of mediocre indifference usually reserved for a Jimmy Buffet album. Like his teammates Sexson stopped hitting home runs and his strikeouts became more obvious. My 8-year-old began to notice. Unknown to me at the time, my journey had officially begun.

I still remember the night. I was over a buddy's house watching the Tribe. Sexson was up and before I could even lick the foam off a newly poured Bud Light, the count was 0-2. Disgusted, I made the boast for the first time-"This guy is awful. Hell, even I could strike him out." As idle guy-talk goes, this wasn't that unusual of a statement. Later, following Sexson's third strike out of the game I even added: "I guarantee if you gave me 10 chances, I could strike him out. I'd even bet my house on it." Again, being guys and being half-drunk, no one got more than a little chuckle out of this.

But this stuck with me. Pretty soon, I was saying it every time Sexson breezed through another at bat without advancing a runner. Regrettably, though, Sexson was traded and I lost a foil. Interestingly, it was to Milwaukee, whose dubious past includes the Sexon historical precedent-Gorman Thomas (1339 strikeouts in 4677 career at bats, 268 home runs, a .225 lifetime batting average). He was now Milwaukee's problem. I remember checking at the time and he was leading the National League in strikeouts and was near the leaders in home runs, too. Gorman Thomas lives! (Interesting side note: Gorman Thomas played for the Indians, too, striking out 98 times in 371 at bats, but with 17 home runs.) (Interesting side note II: Sexson is back in the American League, with Seattle, and still striking out at a furious pace. He had 167 strikes outs in 2005 and 154 more in 2006)

And then along came Branyan. Now Branyan is no Sexson Not by a long shot. Whereas you could only run, say, two or three Chrysler Town and Country Mini Vans through Sexson's swing, you can squeeze an extra three or four of them suckers through Branyan's. But I will give Branyan his due on two counts

though-first, when he does connect which, to the dismay of every franchise who's gambled on him isn't nearly often enough, the ball goes a long way, a real long way. Second, he's creative. When he's completely frustrated (which, surprisingly to me was not as often as one would think) he'd try to lay down a bunt. It worked once so of course, being nearly completely out of his element, he's tried it six or seven times since without even a hint of success. Oh, well. But what he lacks as a polished hitter, he more then makes up for in his lack of fielding skills. He is equally inept in the outfield as the infield. I once saw him play 3rd base at the beginning of the game and left field later in that same game. Made an error at each position. One more pratfall and it could have been a bad Adam Sandler movie, which itself is kind of redundant anyway. In General Manager speak, he's what they call a 4-tool guy. He can't hit, he can't catch, he can't throw, and he can't run. It takes a real eye for talent to scout out someone so incomplete.

Branyan's big break came at the expense of a real pro, Travis Fryman. Fryman was everything Branyan is not-a gold glove infielder with a decent batting eye. Fryman hurt his elbow in spring training and had to go on the DL. Branyan would thus start the season as the third baseman for a World Series hopeful-Good God! I was at opening day. I remember leaning over to a buddy of mine from out of town and telling him about the fire and ice that is Branyan. True to his roots his line for the day looked like this: 1-4, with 1 RBI. Looking back, that would be a season highlight. In his next game, he struck out twice and the floodgates opened.

One game turned into 10 and Fryman wasn't coming back anytime soon. My impatience with Branyan grew by the second. It became especially intense each time Charlie Manuel trotted Branyan back out there. They say that the surest sign of insanity is continuing to do the same thing in the same way but hoping for a different result. I now understand much better why Manuel did the things he does. I also understand why he eventually got fired by the Indians.

Branyan was on a Sexson-like pace-25 home runs, 100+ RBI, a robust .230 average, and the league lead in strikeouts. By the 20th game, I was telling anyone who would listen, which included the 3-year old next door, that I could strike out Branyan. At first, I used the 10-chance barometer I developed with the Sexson. But Branyan had a worse batting eye than Sexson (!) and I lowered it to 5 chances. After all, Branyan had yet to have an at bat that season in which he did not swing at the first pitch. Every pitcher in the league knew it. He might as well have walked to the plate with an 0-1 count. All you had to be was within the same zip code as home plate with your first pitch and you automatically had Branyan down in the count. Truth be told, in my heart I felt I could strike Branyan out with 1 chance. But owing to the fact that I had never actually pitched before and Branyan was a major leaguer, I kept that thought, thankfully, to myself.

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It was a dark and stormy night. I had been invited to sit in a loge for an insignificant Tuesday night affair, Indians vs. Angels. As the skies opened and the unfortunate below us scattered for cover, we sat comfortably drinking imported beer from a bottle, barking orders to the dessert-cart lady, and waiting to see if anyone from the grounds crew would get accidentally rolled up in the tarp. As the highlights from some previous game danced across the monitors located in each corner of the loge, the talk turned to the Indians unfortunate history from, say, 1960-1994, that we all were forced to endure as a result of an undercapitalized and spiritually bankrupt franchise. I casually mentioned that what irked me most about Branyan was that his presence confirmed in my mind that we not only could not

forget our past, that this was the surest sign that we were doomed to repeat it.

That little observation started a rather spirited discussion on the relative merits of other equally bad players. Lou Klimchok (669 career at-bats, 71 strikeouts, .232 batting average) comes to mind, as does Lou Camille (151 career at bats, 23 strikeouts, .146 batting average). Eventually, though, the conversation turned back to Branyan. It was then that I spoke one sentence too many. "Heck, I'd be willing to bet my house against one of Branyan's paychecks that I could strike him out. Just give me 5 chances." Unlike before, I at least got a bigger laugh this time. But a gentleman leaned in from the next loge to ask "Are you serious?" Dead silence in the loge. "Is this guy seriously asking if I'm serious," I wondered to myself. A few pregnant and uncomfortable moments later and with the dubious gentleman ignored, we resumed our banter. He leaned in again. "Hey. Are you serious?" Again, dead silence. I had to answer. With a flash of brilliance came my reply: "What do you mean?" "I mean," said the man, "Are you serious?" "What's the difference if I was, you're not his brother, are you?" "No," the man chuckled, "I'm not his brother." "Well then," I said, as if I had just gotten the better of him, "what's the big deal, it's not like it's ever going to happen." It was the kind of statement that, when made, you know will immediately come back to haunt you. "Don't be so sure. I think I could get it arranged."

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"How did I get here?" I wondered as I kicked away some dirt from around the pitching mound at Jacobs Field. Sixty-feet, six inches away, digging-in in the right-hand batter's box was the bane of my existence, Russell Branyan. Fortunately, for my protection and I'm sure for liability reasons, the batting practice fence in front of the mound was put in place. If you've ever arrived for a game during batting practice, you'll see this fence. It stands about 10 feet in front of the mound and looks like the pitch-back your dad bought you as a kid to keep you from throwing the ball against the garage and busting out the siding for, like, the 10th time. The only difference is that this fence has the upper right-hand corner missing so that you can throw a ball to a batter. Its purpose is to keep the pitcher relatively safe and unharmed during BP. Relatively because, from time to time, a particularly hard hit ball might find a way to squeak through the meshing. I'm sure everyone associated with the Tribe, from the owners on down to the ground crew, figured that Branyan had a real shot at killing me with a ball back up the middle. This was such a stupid and obvious risk on their part that I'm sure they had the meshing reinforced. At least I hope they did, although I could see no visible signs of that.

My mind was racing and and I had more perspiration dripping down my forehead than LeBron James after a double overtime game. The last few weeks had been

such a whirlwind, I really hadn't had time to get nervous until now which, when you think about it, was pretty unfortunate timing. It turns out that the gentleman in the next loge was "T-Bone" Hayes, an agent of sorts from some outfit called STC Entertaiment. T-Bone struck me as the kind of guy who never really got much done by himself, but always seemed to know someone who knew someone who knew someone who knew how to get something done. T-Bone also struck me as the kind of guy who was just this side of legitimate, although I had no evidence to back that up. After jawing back and forth a bit in the loge, I gave him my cell number (after much prodding from my drunken loge mates) and said that I would wait for his call. I never expected to hear from him again, particularly if he didn't call me immediately the next day.

Well, my assessment wasn't all that accurate. T-Bone did not call me the next day. Or the next few days after that, either. In fact, a few days after that, I was talking to my buddies about what had happened and joked that I only wish this cat had called. "What I wouldn't give to finally prove my point," I said, punctuating each word with a thrust of my index finger. We all agreed that would be pretty cool and then cracked open another Bud Light.

That night, while watching Branyan strike out once again, the phone rang. It was T-Bone. Here was the deal: Two weeks from next Thursday, an off day for the Tribe, he could arrange it so that I could pitch to Branyan. I'd get five attempts to strike him out. If I do, I'd get one of Branyan's weekly paychecks. If I lose, Branyan gets my house.

Stop the tape and think about this for a moment. First of all, it's a grossly uneven bet. Branyan was not exactly making the big bucks yet, even in baseball terms. For calculation purposes, I assumed Branyan was making a half million a year. This was extremely generous but gave me a ballpark. (Interesting side note: His salary at the time was $219,000. His salary with San Diego is $1 million. Timing, as always, was not my specialty) Assuming further that he draws a paycheck only during the season (about 28 weeks I guessed), that would make each check around 18 grand. On the other hand, although I'm not rich, I live in a pretty decent house. It's probably worth about $400,000 unfurnished (although don't tell that to the County Recorder who thinks, for tax purposes, that it's worth about $250,000, mainly because I never bothered to get a building permit when I refinished the basement). Even assuming that I got to keep the furnishings (except that large screen TV that I

could barely get into the basement and wasn't likely to be able to get it back out), this was still a pretty one-sided bet from a financial standpoint. Throw in the fact that I've never pitched coupled with the fact that Branyan has been playing baseball (albeit poorly, no doubt) since, what, he was 8, taking this bet would make me just slightly dumber than the guy who greenlighted the Mark Cuban reality show.

So I made a counter offer. I thought Branyan should have to put up his entire salary, or at least half. But as T-Bone explained, in that shady sort of way that seems to make sense when you feel particularly vulnerable, this already was a grossly uneven bet in my favor. First of all, think of the publicity. And from publicity flows opportunity. Before I knew it, folks would be lining up to pay me all kinds of money for personal appearances, endorsements, what have you, and that's if I lost. But think if I won. The money would increase exponentially. Now think about it from Branyan's point of view. If he wins, well, everyone expects that and all he gets out of it is a house in the suburbs, which he'll just have to turn around and sell and pay the commission on it anyway. On the other hand, if he loses, his career is probably over before it ever really gets started. If he can't get a hit, every time, from some rubber-armed geek from the

suburbs whose never even pitched before, let alone pitched competitively, how could he ever live it down? So you see, T-Bone said, it's amazing that Branyan would ever agree to it.

Apparently, though, someone sold Branyan on the idea that it would be fun and a good way to raise money for his charity. (I wondered: did he really have a favorite charity and if so, why?) Where would this money come from, you ask? T-Bone continued (which is when I understood his motivation), that this event would be the climax of the FanFest Weekend, which his firm was promoting. Basically, FanFest was a money-grab for the hard-up and the has-been celebrities who would gladly sign their name for an unsuspecting 8-year-old as long as his suspecting 35-year-old dad ponied up 10 bucks. All the usual suspects would be there, I imagined. Pete Rose. Luis Tiant. The cast from "Full House" probably. Maybe two of the surviving members of the Pips. How would I know? Admission was $6.50 for adults, $4.00 for kids. T-Bone said that this exhibition would truly make this weekend unique. By the way, he could also charge an extra 2 bucks. And don't forget about the broadcast rights. Maybe Branyan would agree to put up two weeks of his salary, he'd see.

This was silly and stupid and made no sense at all. Naturally I agreed. Now I'd have a little over two weeks to get myself into good enough shape to pitch to Branyan 5 times. When the opportunity of a lifetime presents itself, two weeks seems like hardly enough time to get ready.

So now I find myself on the mound, kicking away some dirt with my (donated) cleats and trying to block out the fact that Jacobs Field was at least half full and the place was surrounded by what seemed like every available television camera from the Mason-Dixon line north and the Mississippi River east had a crew. Incidentally, while my timing isn't always the best, T-Bone had a knack. For networks starved for programming, this little carnival sideshow was like a fresh bucket of blood in a pool full of sharks. A fight had ensued between both Fox and ESPN over who had the rights to the broadcast since they both had contracts with Major League Baseball. Eventually, ESPN won the dispute, agreed to pay an extra $1,000,000 for the rights and was planning on turning this into a several-week reality show. You know, thee I would be eating dinner with my family. There'd I'd be, practicing my pitching. There I am, sleeping. But given the tight time frames and my utter lack of on-camera charisma, they settled for tabling the reality show and simply broadcasting the event, the better to make a decision

afterward.

I was a little disappointed that the crowd wasn't bigger and surprised that it was that big. By my estimation, even without a rights fee, STC was clearing at least 100 grand (they settled on $10 extra per head). And T-Bone was right. There had been a great deal of publicity. I was the toast of all the sports talk shows, local and national. Not exactly Live with Regis and Whomever, but still kind of cool. And boy did the endorsements flow. Well, one did. Fittingly, Dick's Sporting Goods agreed to provide me with pants, cleats, a mitt and a jersey (emblazoned, naturally with Dick's across the top, except for the fact that the jersey was a bit too big and the "'s" kept folding under the "k").

As I began my warm-up tosses (both the catcher and the ump had been recruited from some Independent league. Major League Baseball was taking a "wait and see" approach, as baseball commissioner Bud Selig likes to say about most things.) I gestured toward home plate with my mitt, as I've seen a thousand other pitchers do without any discernable explanation. But if anything was surely true, it was that I could still feel an

incredible soreness in my shoulder. I was right. Two weeks was not enough time to get ready. There's only so much throwing one can do at any given time without making your arm fall off. In that time, though, I was able to learn a crude curve ball and a change-up, along with my heater. Of course, my "heater" coasted in at about 70 mph making my change-up look that much slower. Usually, the curve ball fell about 2 feet short of the plate. I tried to learn a split finger pitch, by the way, but it kept landing about 10 feet from the mound. I then realized that my waning arm strength pretty much caused all of my pitches to fall off by the time they got to the mound, giving them the same effect as a splitter anyway.

"Play ball", the rent-an-ump yelled and my heart lept. Stepping off the mound to collect myself, I tucked the mitt under my left shoulder and began to rub up the baseball. What could it hurt? I glanced around and could see signs dotting the landscape. In right field were the "FirstEnergy" and "OfficeMax" signs, which likely would get some air time as Branyan sailed a few pitches over the right centerfield wall. As I slowly turned toward the mound, I glimpsed the crude homemade sign from my kids, "Go get'em Dad". As the p.a. announcer bellowed "Now coming to bat, Russell

Branyan" I could feel a surge of support from the crowd. It could just have been the brat I had a few hours ago, but either way this gave me just the confidence I needed as I sailed the first pitch about 10 feet above everything and it landed, on a fly, against the backstop. Amazingly, this was the first first-pitch that Branyan had failed to swing at all season.

I improved dramatically with the second pitch, but only in the sense that it didn't reach the backstop. On the other hand, it didn't quite reach the plate either, landing about 6 feet short. Branyan, as disciplined as he's ever been, failed to offer at that pitch as well. 2-0 was the count and the hoots from crowd were growing. I stepped off the mound and again tucked my glove under my left shoulder. This time I began rotating my right arm as if to stretch it out a bit more. I was stalling and realizing that, perhaps, I was now the biggest jackass on the planet, save for the guy who actually makes those Jackass movies. I regained my position on the mound and took my windup. This time, it was a perfect pitch, but only in the sense that it registered about 60 mph on the radar gun, was right down the middle, and Branyan crushed it into the picnic area in centerfield, about 435 feet away. One at-bat in the books, four more to go, but at least I proved to myself that I could pitch to a major leaguer,

even if that wasn't the point of this impending disaster.

I'd like to report that things got better with the second at-bat, but that would hardly be true. Branyan did revert back to form, however, swinging at my first pitch. Unfortunately for me, however, it was another 60 mph fast ball that had been equally crushed, this time to the upper deck in right field. I had thrown exactly four pitches and Branyan had crushed the only two that were anywhere close to the plate. From the mound I could see two distinct things: that Branyan was now wearing the kind of self-assured smirk that Michael Jordan used to get when playing the Cavs and that my wife was now beginning to cry. I'd like to say it was because she felt bad for me, but I knew better. Seeing those two pitches sail out of the ballpark brought over her the overwhelming sense that she would have to pack up her belongings and find a new house, and a good divorce lawyer, too.

Branyan wasn't able to homer in either of the next two at-bats, but it wasn't like he got cheated either. He slammed a 3-0 fastball (67 mph) off the left field wall and sent a screamer back at me on a 3-0 curve. The mesh held, which was kind of unfortunate because an injury at

that point was just the excuse I needed to get out of this with any sense of pride intact. Four at-bats and I hadn't even thrown a strike, or at least a pitch that got past him that wasn't otherwise 10 feet high, six feet short or 8 feet outside. I was pretty beaten and Branyan and everyone else, for that matter, could tell.

I would like to think that in this last at bat I would be overcome with the kind of strength experienced by the Grinch when he realized he had a heart. But truth be told, I was tired. Worse yet, my arm was killing me and only about a case of Ben Gay and a permanent vacation from ever pitching again would help. As I began the windup for the first pitch of the final at bat, I just hoped that I could throw one strike as I now lowered my expectations considerably. Branyan, on the other hand, was as playful as can be, joking with the cameramen and the crowd and even calling his shots. So when he swung and missed at my first pitch, I was pretty certain that I was being toyed with, a thought that was confirmed when he took a major cut at my next offering, only to foul it directly behind home plate, about 80 rows up. Before I even realized that it was now 0-2, I sent the next pitch to the backstop. As I began to collect myself, I noticed the count on the scoreboard, 1-2. I was ahead in the count and one pitch from the greatest victory in the history of

mankind, in my mind at least. Branyan didn't look overly concerned. But then again, he strikes out more than a copier salesman at the Holiday Inn bar in Des Moines, so it wasn't like this was uncharted territory, technically speaking. But the authority with which he had hit my pitches in the previous at bats at least told me that the idea of being embarrassed by me is not something he relished, either. Even he was bright enough to realize that there was a downside for him in all of this as well.

At this point, I could just jump ahead and tell you how it all came out. The other option, of course, is to take you pitch by pitch, which would inevitably end in either dramatic victory or agonizing defeat. I'll spare you both and meet you halfway between. My next two pitches sailed high and wide as well and it was now 3-2. With 5 pitches, this was now the longest at bat. I still had a chance.

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T-Bone was right. Irrespective of the outcome, my life had changed. Although it was now 8 months afterward, it was like yesterday to me. I could still feel the semi-sticky

surface of those new balls that had been rubbed down in Delaware River mud. The noise from the crowd during that last at bat still bounced around inside my head like a bb in a 50-gallon drum. I can see the odd combination of anxiety and hope being worn on my wife's face and the unbridled cheering of my three kids. And it was just like the movies. Everything was in slow motion, from the bead of sweat dripping down my left temple, to the hole Branyan was digging in the batter's box with the toes of his right foot. Even before this whole thing started, I really had planned on selling the house anyway, hoping for something a little closer to work. So the thought of losing the house, per se, wasn't much of an issue. It was the thought of losing the equity that was killing me. And T-Bone was right about another thing as well-the money was now coming in by the boatload. Commercial endorsements, mostly, and publishers. Most of the commercials were of the local variety, but there were some national ones as well. Knowing how ridiculous all of this was made it much easier for me to accept the money. We are a society that thrives on instant celebrity and why not enjoy my time in the sun, like Paris Hilton. As for books, well, this was real through-the-looking-glass kind of stuff and people wanted to know the story, I was assured. Given the size of the advances being offered, that apparently was true and affording a new home was no longer a problem. Having

to sit down and write all this out, well, that would be a problem. On the other hand, I was no more ill-prepared for a career as a writer than, say, a career as a pitcher.

But as I sit back and wonder what might have been, my thoughts inevitably drift toward Branyan, the object of my scorn. I had let this silly kid's game and the overgrown kids who play it get to me one time too many. As for this little flight of fantasy, which he didn't even have to agree to, it had brought me more money than I had ever seen. What he took from it was never quite evident. I would say that his season wasn't the same afterward, but it would be really hard to tell given how his season had progressed to that point. If he was in a funk, who could tell. And if he eventually ended up back in the minors or out of baseball, it would be hard to point the finger at me. After all, he had his chances.

With the count 3-2, my next six pitches were all pretty much the same-mid 60s fastballs in the middle of the plate. The fact that he could only foul them off wasn't my fault. But what struck me the most was why he didn't even offer up at my last pitch. It never even crossed my mind that he would try to end this final at bat by drawing

a walk. Heck, if only for dramatic effect he should have been hacking at anything close. But as I snapped off that last pitch-a curve ball-I could see the deer-in-the-headlights panic flash across him. Clearly he had been looking, again, for my fastball. It was pretty much all I had thrown the whole afternoon and he had it timed for speed and location if his crushed fair balls and loud foul balls were any indication. But he was frozen, suspended in quick sand and he simply couldn't swing. As my weak curve crossed the plate, I could see the ump instinctively and simultaneously extend his left arm and turn, shouting "strike three." If Branyan was merely dazed by this turn of events, I was numb. My glove went flying and the crowd began to roar. My wife and kids ran on the field and tackled me in jubilation, probably at the prospect that we didn't have to move or, perhaps, that we'd have a little extra dough courtesy of Branyan to spend.

Lost in the commotion of the whirring cameras and the bright lights, Branyan walked slowly back to the dugout. He didn't hang his head in shame. It was simply the saunter that he had made a hundred other times after a strike out. I was in such utter disbelief that I didn't, couldn't move from the mound to shake his hand. It wasn't like he waited, though. He simply and casually

laid the bat in the bat rack and walked through the tunnel, no one trailing. As reporters swarmed the field, one could see their dilemma-which was the better story? Selfishly, I figured it was me and never was able to make my way that day over to Branyan and at least thank him. Given my on-going public criticism of his skills over the weeks leading up to this, a punch in the nose would not have been out of line at this point.

The papers were kind to Branyan and, to his credit, he made no excuses. He complimented me on my guts and my final pitch, saying something like "I've struck out before, I'll strike out again. It comes with the territory." And from all outward appearances, that appeared to be the truth. He continued to strike out at a record pace and continued to make errors in the field. I did run into Branyan a few weeks later, by the way and by chance. I was at Jacobs Field filming a commercial and Branyan was hanging around, taking one last look before heading to Cincinnati where he had been traded. He didn't exactly seek me out, but I was anxious to thank him and atone, at least, for my thoughtlessness that day. It turns out he was really a pretty good guy, and pretty bright, too. We struck up a conversation, mostly small talk. Like he had publicly, he privately refused to make any excuses and was really rather pleasant,

complimenting me again on my guts (What is it about ballplayers and guts? It's a guy thing, I guess, since "guts" is just such a cool word.)

As I continued on to film my commercial and Branyan walked on to the locker room, I thought about his look. He was fine. Really. He was relaxed and comfortable, as if none of this had ever really happened. I began to realize then what Branyan must have figured out early on--if he hadn't whiffed, he could never escape. Every day and in every town, Danny and Jo-Jo and the rest of the Morning Zoo Crew at "hot" 101 on your FM dial (not to mentioned the beer-bellied ex-high school pitcher--Rick from Brunswick, long time listener, first time caller---trying to relive some past glory) would hunt him down like an escaped felon offering to challenge him, too. Who could want to live a life like that? And while this may have had more than a bit of sideshow atmosphere, one couldn't deny its uniqueness and purity, something that could never be captured again. It's why I turned down the reality show that ESPN eventually did offer. Once and done seemed best.

Some things are just better done once and forgotten. Not

everything has to become a television series, or even a commercial. It was time for me to move on, too. And as I did, it occurred to me that when you finally get things figured out, having a hole in your swing or in your glove really isn't the worst thing in the world. It really doesn't even make the Top 10.