



League News *December 2001*

www.brassball.org

2001 Free Agency in the Books

2001 Free Agency was completed in record time this year. Aided greatly by a new procedure we were able to get done in just a shade over a week. Obviously, much was spent. Some contracts raised eyebrows and some players went for deals that had other managers cryin' "why didn't I bid a little more on that guy!" Shawon Dunston and Mike Morgan have made it to F contracts. That's SIX major league contracts apiece so far. With Morgan only on a one-year deal now with Columbus, next off-season will see Mike go for a G contract. Also believed to be a record was the amount of Type A and B compensation players that left for new homes. In total there were 15 tagged as comp players and 11 will have new residences in 2002. The breakdown...

	Former Team	2002 Home
Brian Giles	Minnesota	Ocala
Rich Aurilia	Morris	Cook County
Phil Nevin	Ocala	Brooklyn
Mike Sweeney	Box City	La Crosse
Carlos Delgado	Cook County	Gem City
Richie Sexson	North Georgia	Toledo
Darin Erstad	Brooklyn	Box City
Jorge Posada	Minnesota	Fleetwood
Jason Schmidt	Charlevoix	Iowa
Charles Johnson	Springfield	Hessville
Kelvim Escobar	Columbus	Morris

Other interesting lists...

Most signings

Minnesota	17
Springfield	17
Charlevoix	13
Columbus	13

Glen Allen 12

Least signings

Santa Barbara 3
Racine 4
Bloomington 5
Cook County 5
Brooklyn 5

Largest percentage of Free Agency dollars spent

Bloomington 99.9
Morris 99.7
Cook County 99.2
Gem City 99.1
Toledo 98.8

Least percentage of Free Agency dollars spent

Metropolis 7.9
Santa Barbara 23.1
Plaza 25.3
Box City 52.7
Glen Allen 53.9

Six players whose agents are enjoying a larger cut than expected:

Dustin Hermanson	La Crosse	3yr 11M
Kevin Brown	Stanley	4yr 11.6M
Darin Erstad	Box City	5yr 14.001M
Roger Clemens	Cook County	2yr 12.8M
Curt Schilling	Morris	1yr 10.6M
Jeff Reboulet	Fleetwood	1yr 805K

Six players whose agents were told, "You're fired":

David Justice	Box City	2yr 1.501M
Dante Bichette	Glen Allen	1yr 700K
BJ Surhoff	Hessville	1yr 622K
JT Snow	Plaza	2yr 750K
Brad Fullmer	Charlevoix	3yr 3M
Jeff Kent	Stanley	3yr 6.7M

Five largest contracts inked (total dollars):

Matt Morris	Minnesota	\$14,200,000
Darin Erstad	Box City	14,001,000
Phil Nevin	Brooklyn	13,500,000
Brian Giles	Ocala	13,320,000
Mike Sweeney	La Crosse	13,000,000

Five players who are wondering why they even bothered filing:

Keith Osik	Plaza	\$200,000
John Mabry	Plaza	200,000
Mark Petkovsek	Metropolis	205,000
Tom Prince	Metropolis	205,000
Enrique Wilson	Metropolis	205,000

Four teams that I think have to be grinnin' after Free Agency:

Stanley Sioux. Rick Helling and all important closer Antonio Alfonseca were kept with reasonable contracts. But more importantly Paul added Kevin Brown, Ryan Klesko, Jeff Kent and Jeff Cirillo to his squad. The Brown deal may be a little hefty, but the Sioux are no doubt poised for a run at a title.

Gem City Wolfpack. Dave landed the second best available closer in Jason Istringhausen (after Keith Foulke). He also added heavy hitting Carlos Delgado. Plus he nabbed Reggie Sanders and Albie Lopez with management attractive offers. The 'Pack look set on getting back to the post season in 2002.

Charlevoix Tigers. Al put 5 potential starters on the Tiger dole at practically bargain basement rates: Frank Thomas, Mark Loretta, Brad Fullmer, Rusty Greer and Jesus Sanchez. While this won't put a pennant immediately into the Tigers' view, it should provide a solid foundation to build and trade from in the future.

Brooklyn Bulldogs. No team in 2001 had to shake their head more in the off-season than the Bulldogs. They had a winning record, but managed to finish in last place in the ultra-competitive AL West. Robert did not sulk. While he did lose Darin Erstad to Box City he managed to secure three solid lineup additions with Phil Nevin, Matt Lawton and Jeff Conine. He also netted the best second tier pitcher available in Kevin Appier. To top it off he kept useful reliever Jose Paniagua around on the cheap. The Bulldogs just might make the final push to the playoffs in 2002.

Dues Reminder

I still need \$15 dues from a good number of you. Please get a check in the mail to me before January 1st. So far I have dues from the following managers: Metropolis, Stanley, Cook County, Columbus, Box City, Racine, Santa Barbara, Brooklyn, Iowa, Charlevoix and La Crosse.

Corey on the New Roster Format

Reprinted here is Corey's explanation of the new roster format. With the new salary system rosters needed to take on a more informative look. Corey explains it all for you here.

With the end of the free agency comes the beginning of a new roster format. With the payment of salaries changing to a yearly format, the roster file had to be adjusted to reflect this change. Hopefully, this spreadsheet proves to be useful while not overly complicated.

When looking over your new roster, do not focus on the Balance (carried forward) for 2002. I determined this number shortly after the salary proposal passed. Any transactions that occurred from that point forward

were applied to the spreadsheet. With the rosters still existing under the old system, I was able to verify my procedures for handling trades, signings, etc. against the existing bank accounts.

All contracts that extended past this season were reimbursed for their remaining years with one exception. All paid contracts were not reimbursed. These contracts are color-coded red with \$0 (\$ -) associated with them. As per the constitution, if a "paid" player were selected off another team in the draft, the team selecting him would not have to take on the cost of the contract. The team would only have to pay the \$50K draft fee.

To verify that all conversions were correct, I created another spreadsheet to crosscheck the numbers. I have included this file in this mailing. The main values for each team in this spreadsheet are the bank account at the end of free agency (taken from Mark's Final free agency document) and the bank account verified against the end of free agency amount. The fact that these numbers match shows that each team was converted correctly. (Unless a player's contract was spread out incorrectly.) Let me know if you notice any errors.

In an attempt to keep a simple roster sheet like before, I added another tab that has the teams listed with their players. Your team's current bank account is also listed. This will allow you to quickly look over an opponent's team or find trade possibilities. This will also print the rosters in 1/2 the amount of pages.

Under the division tabs, four new columns were added for each team to track the salaries and bank account for their players and team. These columns are important in determining your team's future. If you leave yourself close to \$0 in a future year, you will not be able to sign any players to initial or free agent contracts. Needless to say, this would be bad.

One key number to keep your eye on for your team is your Money in Bank amount. If you start getting close to \$5,000,000 for a future year, you may want to dump salary or limit your spending. It will be very hard to fill holes on your team in a future year if you have limited monetary resources. Additionally, you will not be allowed to enter negative territory at anytime in a Money in Bank column.

You will also notice that I have added a misc (miscellaneous) tab. This lists who has what roles in the league and also the new contract costs.

BRASSball.org taken over by ESPN?

No, but there are some really neat things going on over at the league site. First, Andy put up "BRASSball Classic." This section of the site sees past league newsletters, articles and other tidbits posted for those of you longing for the day when teams only received 17 million per off-season to sign players and 8 teams made it to the league playoffs.

Recently added was “Hot Stove Heaters.” Here you can find out how the off-season has treated your favorite BRASSball squad so far. The Heaters are written by Joal. Heckuva job guys!

Also back are the polls that Brian had started on the former site. The wonderful poll question of the moment is “Which Free Agent will be most sought after in 2002?” To my chagrin Andruw Jones leads. Lucky me. Why doesn’t anybody believe me when I say all eyes should be focused on Reboulet? Breakout year is coming I tell you.

Trades and Roster Stuff

17. Stanley trades Scott Hatteberg, Kevin Young and \$1,000,000 to Plaza for Eddie Guardado.
18. Box City trades Ray Lankford, David Justice and Abraham Nunez to Cook County for Britt Reames, Wes Anderson and Tony Blanco.
19. Minnesota trades Deivi Cruz to Charlevoix for Doug Creek.
20. Charlevoix trades Javier Cardona to Cook County for Darren Oliver.
21. Cook County trades Chan Ho Park and Julio Lugo to Gem City for Jeff Bagwell, Desi Relaford and Pat Rapp.
22. Toledo trades Gary Sheffield, Steve Kline and Toledo’s 2002 5th round draft choice to Cook County for Edgar Martinez, Roberto Hernandez, Pat Rapp and Cook County’s 2003 1st round draft choice.
23. Santa Barbara trades Orlando Hernandez to Morris for \$1,000,000.
24. Minnesota trades Mike Williams, Ryan Ludwick and Minnesota’s 2003 1st round draft choice to Toledo for Trevor Hoffman and Scott Linebrink.
25. Ocala trades Jeremy Giambi and Matt Wise to Columbus for Aaron Fultz, Xavier Nady and Columbus’s 2003 1st round draft choice.
26. Glen Allen trades John Flaherty to Brooklyn for Brooklyn's 2002 5th round draft choice.
27. Georgia trades Ruben Quevedo and Georgia’s 2002 2nd round draft choice to Springfield for Todd Walker and Springfield’s 2002 5th round draft choice.
28. Santa Barbara trades Javy Lopez and \$750,000 to Brooklyn for Ben Petrick.
29. Toledo trades Wilton Guerrero, Mike Stanton and Metropolis' 2002 5th round draft choice to Brooklyn for Steve Woodard, Brooklyn's 2002 4th round draft choice and Brooklyn's 2003 4th round draft choice.

Santa Barbara – Signed Geoff Blum to a 3-year unrestricted (U) contract.

Springfield – Signed Chris Richard to a 3-year unrestricted (U) contract.

Guest Authors

We have a few articles below to fill the newsletter out. Andy, Lenny, Paul and Jim Clark are our contributors this month. As always these can be found on the league website, usually before they appear here. They are at the end.

Upcoming League Deadlines

January 15th Deadline to release or re-sign amateurs. Any Amateur who is re-signed may not be cut until AFTER the draft.

January 25th Deadline for submitting articles for the next issue.

Next Issue of “League News”

I'm not sure yet ☺ The new schedule will be out. I do know that. And no, I haven't been waiting to officially release the schedule because of the contraction rumors swirling around Metropolis and another unnamed team.

Metropolis Avengers Top 10 Prospects

[Index of Top 10 Prospects for all 24 BRASSball Teams](#)

By Jim Callis

1. Juan Cruz, rhp

Age: 20. **B-T:** R-R. **Ht.:** 6-2. **Wt.:** 155. **Acquired:** Trade with Gem City, 2001

Background: Acquired in a draft day deal with division rival Gem City, Cruz rocketed through the Avenger system in 2001.

Strengths: Cruz has the highest ceiling among all Avenger pitchers, with dominating fastball that sits in the mid-90s, a power slider and a good changeup. When his fastball is moving, he can be near unhittable.

Weaknesses: Cruz demonstrated good control this season, and if he's able to maintain it he should be a regular 15-17 game winner. He is thin, so there is some concern about his longterm durability, though he hasn't had a serious injury yet.

The Future: While it's easy to compare lanky Dominicans to Cook Couty ace Pedro Martinez, Cruz certainly looks the part, not only in stature but also in stuff.

2. Aramis Ramirez, 3b

Age: 23. **B-T:** R-R. **Ht.:** 6-1. **Wt.:** 220. **Acquired:** Trade with Stanley, January 2000.

Background: After a difficult year in his first season in the organization, Ramirez reestablished why he is considered the third basemen of the future in Metropolis. He dominated at AAA Gotham City and looks every bit the part of a middle of the order slugger.

Strengths: Ramirez has good power and great bat control for a power hitter. While he did strikeout 100 times at Gotham City, managers across the league say he'll be able to cut that down as he gets a bit more experience. He hits for power, average and should improve his eye as he matures.

Weaknesses: He's not a great fielder now, but he has all the skills to play a good third base. He'll never steal a lot of bases, though no one will hold that against him.

The Future: Ramirez should be the opening day starter for Metropolis and they expect him to be in the middle of the order for the next decade. There might not be a better third base prospect in the game.

3. Wilson Betemit, ss

Age: 19. **B-T:** B-R. **Ht.:** 6-2. **Wt.:** 170. **Acquired:** First round, 2001.

Background: Betemit was a bit of a surprise pick, as fellow SS Rafael Furcal topped this list a year ago. Betemit appears to have past him, in part due to Furcal's injury troubles in 2001.

Strengths: Betemit is a switch hitter with uncommon power and athleticism for a middle infielder. His baseball skills are obvious to even the casual observer, and he had no trouble with a midseason promotion to AA. His hands and arm strength at SS are top notch, though he did committ his share of errors, likely to inexperience and exuberance.

Weaknesses: The control of the strike zone continues to be the one major flaw in Betemit's game. If he's able to discipline himself by working the count, Betemit could develop an offensive game not unlike that of Barry Larkin during his best years. Even if he doesn't master the strikezone, his raw power, batspeed and reflexes should allow him to be well above average for the position.

The Future: Furcal's injury has put the shortstop job back up for grabs, and Betemit isn't going to let it go without a fight. If he continues to grow, it is not impossible that he could slide to third base or even the outfield, assuming Furcal returns to his prior form.

4. Antonio Armas, Jr., rhp

Age: 23. **B-T:** B-R. **Ht.:** 6-2. **Wt.:** 205. **Acquired:** Fourth round, 1999.

Background: Since he was selected by the Avengers in their first ever draft, Armas has done nothing to disappoint his employers. In the three years since his selection, he has filled out his frame and improved in nearly every aspect of the game. This might be a reflection of his being the son of former outfielder Tony Armas. Antonio Jr. clearly has the baseball instincts and skills to follow in his father's footsteps.

Strengths: His fastball is heavy and has good late movement. When coupled with a deceptive delivery that hides the ball from hitters, Armas regularly racks up big strikeout totals. His slider is good and improving, and a solid changeup gives him three major league pitches. His delivery looks smooth and natural, which should help keep him healthy as he puts innings on his arm.

Weaknesses: Armas' main struggles to this point have been against left handed hitters. While his hard slider is tough on righties, lefties appear to see the ball better and get consistently good swings off of Armas. His control has also been spotty, as he walked about four hitters per game this year.

The Future: In most organizations, Armas would be a crown jewel and future ace. With Juan Cruz exploding in the last year, Armas will be able to develop outside the spotlight. If he's able to spot his fastball against lefties and reduce his walks by one a game he has the potential to be a second ace in Metropolis.

5. Josh Hamilton, of

Age: 19. **B-T:** L-L. **Ht.:** 6-4. **Wt.:** 200. **Acquired:** First round, 2000.

Background: Josh Hamilton had a disasterous 2001, as a mysterious injury sidelined him for nearly the entire season. When he did play, he was overmatched at AA, though it was in very few plate appearances. It's tough drop a talent like Hamilton to the fifth spot in the organization, and he could still prove to be the best of the bunch.

Strengths: He hits. He hits for tremendous power. He fields. He has a cannon for an arm. He even steals bases. What else do you want? When Hamilton plays, he is always the best player on the field. His power is probably his best skill, though his outfield arm will be among the best in the league once he makes it to Metropolis, too. Oh, to top it off he works hard to improve and is well liked by his teammates.

Weaknesses: Staying healthy. All Hamilton seems to need is the at bats to figure out professional pitching. His injury this year is most harmful for the lost development time, as it isn't believed to linger into next year. Hamilton could also be more patient at the plate, though when hitting comes so easy to you, it must be hard to lay off a pitch just off the plate.

The Future: Assuming Hamilton returns to health, he is still slated to be the center fielder in Metropolis whenever he proves he's ready. They have him penciled in the third spot in the order and expect nothing less than all-star games, MVP candidacies and division titles. That's quite a list, but it's not out of the question.

6. Rafael Furcal, ss

Age: 21. **B-T:** B-R. **Ht.:** 5019. **Wt.:** 165. **Acquired:** First round, 2000.

Background: A year ago Furcal was one of the top prospects in the game. An injury plagued year has dimmed his

star, though he still remains one of the most promising and exciting young players in the league.

Strengths: Furcal can do it all except hit the long-ball. His defensive range and throwing arm are unquestioned, and his speed on the bases makes him a game changing threat. Unlike many young speedsters, Furcal seems to know how to get on base, making him even more dangerous. He's a switch hitter who produces much better from the left side. He showed good plate discipline in years past, but he was less selective in 2001. He shows great basestealing skills in reading pitchers and getting jumps, which makes his speed even more dangerous.

Weaknesses: Furcal's plate discipline is the big question for him right now. If he recovers the eye he had in 1999 and 2000 he'll be just fine. If he swings as wildly as he did before being injured this season, it could slow his development as a hitter. As a smart player with great hand-eye coordination, most believe he'll have little trouble working the count when healthy.

The Future: If his shoulder is healthy, he will fight Betemit for the title of shortstop of the future in Metropolis. Furcal will have the early edge, as he is more advanced, but the Avengers won't hesitate to give the job to Betemit should he outperform his rival in the next few years.

7. Carlos Pena, 1b

Age: 22. **B-T:** L-L. **Ht.:** 6-2. **Wt.:** 210. **Acquired:** Trade with Columbus, December 2000.

Background: Pena was a relatively quiet addition for Metropolis before the 2001 draft. In an organization with so much talent, he simply went about his business and overcame an early season slump to force his way into the top 10.

Strengths: No one tool for Pena sticks out, which can be a blessing and a curse. He's a solid player in all aspects, he'll hit for good average and good power, take his walks and plays a very good first base. He won't steal bases, but few first basemen do.

Weaknesses: Pena started very slowly while he battled a few nagging injuries. While his first half disappointed many, he showed his true skills once he got healthy. He didn't seem to get into too many bad habits during his slump, which is a great sign for a young player. As long as he stays patient and plays to his strengths he should be a solid first baseman in the fifth or sixth slot for the Avengers.

The Future: He'll probably get a full season in AAA Gotham City, especially with Pat Burrell in front of him. Don't be surprised, however, if Pena pushes Burrell to LF or DH when he's ready for the majors.

8. Nick Johnson, 1b

Age: 22. **B-T:** L-L. **Ht.:** 6-3. **Wt.:** 224. **Acquired:** Trade with Ocala, 2000.

Background: Getting Johnson cost the Avengers the top pick in the 2000 draft, a high price indeed. When you factor in the injury he was recovering from, it was a gamble...but a gamble that could pay off big time.

Strengths: Johnson has great bat speed and an even better judgement of the strike zone. He showed he was healthy this season, and put up solid numbers across the board. He's one of the best pure hitters in the minors, and has developing power. His defense around first also draws raves, and he's received extra tips from former Brassballer Don Mattingly on his defense.

Weaknesses: He needs to prove he can stay healthy for a full season. He gets hit by a lot of pitches, which might contribute to his injury history. His batting average fell some this season, but that was probably a result of the lost year in 2000. Scouts keep saying that he'll develop his power as he matures, but it still isn't there. If it doesn't come, he'll be Mark Grace. If it does come, he could be Carlos Delgado. That's a big difference.

The Future: The Avengers are deep everywhere, but nowhere more so than at 1B/DH. Burrell and Jack Cust could get moved to the OF, but Johnson still needs to beat out Carlos Pena for the job at first. If his power comes, the job is Johnson's. If it doesn't, he could be trade bait to fill in a hole at catcher or on the mound.

9. Pat Burrell, 1b/of

Age: 25. **B-T:** R-R. **Ht.:** 6-4. **Wt.:** 255. **Acquired:** Trade with Gem City, 1999.

Background: Pat Burrell was the first player the Avengers acquired in their monumental rebuilding process. He was the main piece of a trade that sent Ivan Rodriguez to Gem City, and the Avengers were completely torn apart for young talent only a few months later. He hasn't really lived up to those early expectations, but he's still a big part of the team's future.

Strengths: Power hitting. That's what Burrell brings to the table. He has the skills to be a good average hitter, but he hasn't done so in the high minors. He seems to swing and miss at too many pitches to have a good average. Burrell was recently moved to the OF, and the early results haven't been great, but he's a hard worker who wants to improve.

Weaknesses: He draws his walks, but also strikes out a ton. Management doesn't seem too concerned by the K's, but if they impede his development they could prevent him from being the middle of the lineup slugger he could be. His defense in left is passable, which should be good enough if he hits as is expected.

The Future: Burrell needs to produce if he wants to be a big part of the next good (or the first ever) good Avengers team. He and Hamilton have the most raw offensive ability, but some feel that Burrell has stalled in the last two years, and that he's in danger of being merely good, and not the MVP candidate he could be.

10. Jason Marquis, rhp

Age: 23. **B-T:** L-R. **Ht.:** 6-1. **Wt.:** 185. **Acquired:** Holdover from Channel Island.

Background: Marquis wasn't the most hyped of Avengers prospects coming into the season, but a solid year in AAA has placed him in the middle of a rotation fight for next year. He has been in the organization since the beginning, and it appears that the patience he was shown might be paying off. He displaces some bigger names at this spot, with Jack Cust and Vernon Wells being pushed out of the top ten.

Strengths: A hard, boring fastball that routinely hits 95 and a great, if unpredictable, curve give Marquis two above average pitches that make him very tough when his control is solid. He's also a good athlete that has stayed healthy during his career.

Weaknesses: Like many young starters, Marquis control can hurt him, but he appears to be figuring it out. He has thrown a lot of pitches, limiting his innings per start. If he's able to cut a walk or two off his starts, he'll not only be more effective, but he'll be in the game longer, making him a better pitcher in two ways.

The Future: At this point the Avengers would like to see Marquis stay in the rotation. The only way he'll be moved to the bullpen is if other pitchers, who might not adapt as well to relief work, are able to pass him by. Right now he slots behind Cruz and Armas as the third starter in a young Avenger rotation, though the spring draft could add several more pitchers to the organization and force a rethinking of that plan.

Rest of the Best:

11. Jack Cust, 1b/of
12. Jose Ortiz, if
13. Michael Restovich, of
14. Luke Prokopec, rhp
15. Vernon Wells, of

Trading and Building for the Future

Trading is usually a big part of any Strat-o-matic league. Some people will make a deal on the drop of the hat, while others are more reluctant. But even the most ardent believers in building through the draft have to make some trades eventually.

There are probably as many different schools of thought on trading as there are Strat players. Some

people say you should always trade for youth, while others say you should always get the best player in the deal. My philosophy is that it completely depends on the situation.

You need to look at the situation your team is in - are you going to contend this year, are you a year away, are you three years away, etc. And how many holes do you have? Regardless of when you expect to contend, you still have to field a team for the current season, so you need to take that into consideration as well.

Let's start with a team that's trying to win this year. If you are serious about making a title run, you have to go all out. In a league with 24 or more teams, you do not have the chance often enough to let it slip by. The first thing to do is make an honest evaluation of your team and see where you can improve. Then look around the league and see who might be available that you can use. The best place to start is with the rebuilding teams. They probably have some "one-year wonder" players that they are willing to trade.

You should make trades where you get quality for quantity. You need players that can help you win this season and are better than what you have. You need to look at every trade to see if it gets you closer to the championship this year.

Now let's look at a team that's rebuilding. You need to decide when you think you can contend. Is it next year, two years, or even longer. Then go through your rosters and decide which players you think will be able to help you win at that point. These are the players you want to keep.

Now go through your roster and take the players that have value now, but who probably won't when you are ready to win. These are players who are coming off their career years. Their value will never be higher, so now is the time to trade them. A contending team will be happy to give you good young prospects or draft picks in return.

You also need to make sure you can field a team this season. It's very hard to rebuild when you have to use all your draft picks just to fill holes. There are some people who say that you should never trade a superstar for a package, and generally I agree. But there are times when you should, and this is one of those times.

If you have an older star you can deal him and get four or five players in return to fill your holes and provide some good future potential. This then allows you to draft the best available players rather than just picking to fill holes. You now have a good base to build on rather than wasting a year just trying to field a team.

For the mechanics of actually making trades, you see a lot of people just send out general e-mails listing players that are available. This sometimes works, but it's not that effective because you are just sitting back and waiting for people to come to you. If you are serious about making a trade, you need to scout the other teams and decide who you want, and then make an offer that you think will fit their needs. Managers value players differently, so there's a good chance your first offer will be rejected, but the other manager will probably come back with a counter offer of some sort, unless he considers the player an untouchable. And once you start talking, you might find that other players are available that you didn't think would be.

If you are looking to trade a player, shop around. You really want to get a good idea of his value before closing a deal. If you take the first offer that comes along, you might regret it later.

To sum up, the key to trading is to make deals that will improve your team for the season you expect to contend. And if that is this year, then don't be afraid to go for broke. You don't know when you

will get another chance.

Stanley Stationary Free Agency happenings and Analysis

Stanley ND, AP

Edited version compliments of the Stanley USA Today.
Stanley, ND:

The defending NL Central champion Stanley Sioux went into free agency attempting to put together a squad that could go the next level. While 103 wins and a trip to the NLCS were no small accomplishment, the Sioux are striving to the next level. A trade for John Burkett was consummated prior to free agency, leaving Stanley with two strong starters in the upcoming season. This also allowed multiple strategies in free agency.

Following is the analysis of what happened to the Sioux during free agency.

Day 1:

The magic email arrives from draft HQ. Just whom could the Sioux sign right away and for whom would they have to wait. Answer - they'd have to wait on everyone! Not a single number 1 bid to be found. Fans gasped. Was this how tight fisted ownership was going to follow through? Management preaches patience. Apparently there were rumors that a substantial number of #2 and #3 bids abound. Day 1 saw potential target Curt Schilling go to Morris for a 1 year, 10.6m contract (just who is this guys agent anyhow - last go around he negotiated 3 years at over 11.0m/season... both contracts far and away the most money spent in Brassball during Stanley's existence). Mike Sweeney and Mike Cameron go off the board.

Day 2:

Starts early in the day. North Dakota native Rick Helling is lured by a 4 year/5.0m contract to move to the Minnesota Mudcats. After pitching the Sioux's only no hitter in history, how could management let him get away? Despite signs of arm fatigue, management steps up and spends 5.0m to keep a Sioux fan favorite. On the down side, some of the top tier free agents slip by. Matt Morris stayed in Minnesota. Brian Giles went to Brassball champions Ocala (gasp). Sought after SS Rich Aurilia went to the powerful Cook County Maulers. Phil Nevin went to the Brooklyn Bulldogs. With the Sioux needing a third baseman, rumors abound that owner Paul Weltz nearly choked on a left over turkey bone when he found out he missed Nevin by a small dollar amount. Another Sioux favorite won't sign in Stanley this season. Darrin Erstad was lured toward big money to Box City. Alas, at the end of the day the Sioux find another potential ace. Albeit a risky venture, the Sioux sign Kevin Brown for 4 years at 11.6m.

Day 3:

With Jeff Reboulet making his big move from Metropolis to Fleetwood today, all bets were off with other free agents :) Moyer was another starter off the board who goes to Cook County. Sexson goes to Toledo on a 5 year, 12.5m deal. Sioux did manage to pick up a 4th OF with a 3 year, 2.1m deal that was not matched by Brooklyn.

Day 4:

Activity Day for the Sioux! Looking for a possible long-term first baseman, the Sioux offer Frank Thomas

a 4 year, 4.5m deal. Charlevoix decided it would be wise to match the offer, so the Sioux look elsewhere. Jeff Kent surprisingly becomes available so Stanley spends 6.7m over a 3 year period. Minnesota pipes in on another Sioux RFA - this time for Antonio Alfonseca. Without a true Strat closer signed and most other closers off the board, the Sioux match the Mudcat offer. Looking for additional bullpen help Stanley pursued Jose Paniagua. Brooklyn decided the price was right so they matched the 2 year offer of 850k.

Day 5:

Analysts and fans alike were beginning to wonder if the Sioux had forgotten about their true needs at 3B, and OF or DH. Today would be the day the coffers were nearly drained. Jeff Cirillo became available, so the Sioux signed him to a 3 year, 6.8m deal. In addition, late surprise Ryan Klesko decided to join the Sioux for a 3 year, 8.0m deal. Rumor has it Ryan wanted more money or a 4th year, but decided it was getting late in free agency as most other 1B/DH types had found homes. Tony Batista, Steve Reed, and Paul Bako had contract offers pulled back by the now nearly broke Stanley management.

Day 6:

After spending 3 years with the Sioux, it was time to say good bye to Bubba Trammel. Bubba joined Georgia for the next 3 years at 3.6m. Left handed hitting catcher Jorge Fabregas was added for depth at a reasonable 275k.

Day 7-9:

With no funds left and no open contracts, it was back to the drawing board for the Sioux. What would the new salary structure look like? Were there any holes to fill? Were there any excesses on the roster?

Post free agency:

Finding no room for 4 catchers, the Sioux traded Scott Hatteberg and 1B/DH Kevin Young along with 1.0m cash considerations to the Plaza Lions for Eddie Guardado. Eddie provided the Sioux with another LH reliever beyond Armando Almanza.

Mets End of Season Report

Last year the Mets fought their way to the World Series but succumbed to the Champion Parcelmen from Box City. This year Glen Allen sought to return to the playoffs and come home with the trophy. They again won the National League East, but lost to the NL Champ Ocala in an exciting seven game series that was won by the Ocelots in extra innings. The Ocelots proceeded to win the World Series. Losing to the Camps two years in a row may be a consolation that the Mets are doing better than other teams in the league, but the hunger pains linger for the sweet taste of victory.

With the free agent season officially upon us, it may be a good time to take a moment to revisit the Mets season before looking forward. The Glen Allen Writers Association have voted Matt Lawton and Ryan Klesko co-Most Valuable Players! Matt rebounded from a down year to bat .312 with an OBP of .424, scoring a team leading 103 runs, 171 hits, 54 doubles and 28/34 stolen bases, and second on the team with 104 walks while playing a solid right field. Ryan batted .297, .424 OBP, .521 slugging, scoring 98 runs with 38 doubles, while leading the team in walks with 110 and second on the team in homers with 23 and RBI with 83, stealing 25/33 bases. Klesko shared first base and left field playing admirably in either position and in many games manned both spots to juggle the batting order and /or improve the defense. Unfortunately for Glen Allen, both men are unrestricted free agents, they will each be offered contracts, but may command higher salaries elsewhere.

Honorable mention must be given to the team's catchers. All season long the pitchers appreciated their efforts behind the plate, in addition to what they did while at bat. Brook Fordyce finished with .313 average and 14 homers, 45 runs and 92 hits, and John Flaherty .277, 96 hits 13 doubles and 9 homers with

46 RBI. Combined 94 RBI, 23 home runs, 22 doubles, 188 hits and 83 runs looks like the statistics of an all-stat catcher if it came from one body.

The overall team batting average was down from a season ago and most of the blame must go to the infielders. At third base two veterans battled injuries throughout the season and in one playoff game, Mike Stanley volunteered to man the hot corner after both were forced out of the game. Cal Ripken finished with 13 homers batting only .191 and Fernando Tatis .256, 15 HR and 100 K in 313 at bats and 17 errors to lead the team, combined they drove home 98 runs. Management was also disappointed in the significant decline of last years table setters: Vizquel, Velarde and Jackson. Vizquel played 161 games with only 3 errors at shortstop, but batted .240 causing him to be dropped to ninth in the order against left handed pitchers. Velarde also was dropped down in the order to take advantage of his slugging with 15 homers, but also his propensity to strike out, 112 K to lead the team. Damian Jackson, for all his speed learned the old rule that you cannot steal first base especially batting .236 and walking only 25 times. Ripken and Velarde each have another year under contract, but Omar is an unrestricted free agent who will be made an offer, but he may have played his last game for the Mets. Glen Allen has options on Tatis and Jackson, so they may return unless some team offers an exorbitant salary.

The pitchers did a solid job most of the year. The bullpen was especially effective lead by closer Bob Wickman (41 saves) and set up man Wayne Gomes (2.21 ERA and 3 saves). Starters Milton and Ritchie each had ERA under 5.00 to anchor the staff but third and fourth starters Trachsel (6.99) and Gardner (5.61) were not nearly as effective. The fifth spot was a juggling act of five others with Zito the winner. Barry will join the top of the rotation next year and allow some other clowns to be the fifth starter. Pitching coach Jimmy Key was already thinking about putting Ritchie between the two southpaws, followed by Trachsel. "Nice and balance so other teams will not be able to get too comfortable."

Hitting coach Eddie Kranepool is already excited about a couple of his pupils who will play significant roles next year. "Trot (Nixon) had a cup of coffee this year, but watch what he will do in a whole season. He will be one of our top four outfielders for sure. Albert Pujols should win the rookie of the year! Mark it down and come talk to me this time next year. He will be fun for our fans to watch with a bat in his hands. I'm not sure which position he will play, probably one of the top four outfielders or first base if Ryan does not return..."

Back to the free agent season, who will be added to the team and who will be lost, stay tuned for more excitement.

Met's Offseason First Month

Baseball players may get the winter months to recover from a long season, but the General Manager must work overtime. The Glen Allen Mets first order of business was to sign three key minor league players to major league contracts. Trot Nixon had a couple months this season to get a taste and was signed for four years to play either right or centerfield next year. Albert Pujols was signed for five years and will get an opportunity to play DH, LF, RF, 1B and 3B depending upon where he is needed. Albert is a hitting machine already at 21 years old. He hopes to settle in at third base after Cal Ripken retires, but will learn a great deal from the veteran. Barry Zito was impressive in two months last season and was signed for four years. Zito may turn out to be the ace of the staff with Milton, Ritchie and Trachsel. Young pitchers: Gary Glover, Mike MacDougal and Adrian Hernandez were all signed to minor league contracts. The Mets may be developing a wonderful pitching rotation for years to come.

The second phase is the annual free-agent process. The Mets submit bids on hundreds of players hoping to come home with the winning combination. Every team has holes to fill and areas where they hope to upgrade. Glen Allen likes to have a blend of youth and veterans to remain competitive in the NL East. "Met's fans do not like to hear management talk about rebuilding years. Our fans are very enthusiastic about their team and like to see playoff game as they have the last couple of years," GM Clark reported. "We have several of our key players that are on the market, fortunately none of our starting pitchers are free

agents until next year. Since I have already spent a chunk of our budget on the young guys, I can not outbid many of the teams in our league. I will not mortgage the future for next season."

With four quality starting pitchers, the Mets were looking for an inexpensive #5 and signed Bryan Rekar, who should contribute 140 inning in 24 starts. The bullpen added the arms of Bottalico, Timlin and Cook, but said good bye to Wayne Gomes, Lance Painter, Joey Hamilton and Mark Gardner. Closer Bob Wickman and lefty setup men Magnante, Venafro, McElroy and Heredia all were retained to form another solid relief staff to finish games for the starters.

Glen Allen added young catcher Ben Molina and traded John Flaherty to Brooklyn. They were able to resign Damian Jackson, Fernando Tatis, Eric Karros and brought back fan favorite Jose Vizciano and added Mike Lansing since Omar Vizquel moved out to Santa Barbara for a four-year contract. The Mets will surely miss him!

The bats of Dante Bichette and David Segui were added, but do not make up for the loses of Ryan Klesko and Matt Lawton.

Now to prepare for phase three the rookie draft, but must pause to wish all a HAPPY HOLIDAY season before returning to the trading table.