





we ♥

Boy, do we ever. To some cities it's just another sport, just another diversion—yeah, we're looking at you ... every other city in the country—but to us, baseball is a freakin' obsession, a *religion*. We've got the Cardinals, and we wouldn't be half the baseball hotbed we are without them, but our reputation for elevating the national pastime to near-mythical status goes way beyond just the birds on the bat. So with that as our starting point, we set out to answer one simple question:

Why is St. Louis such a great baseball town?

Edited by Matthew Halverson



CONTRARIAN



FOUL BALL

As Busch Stadium again begins to bustle, a long-standing mystery once more demands reflection: Why does Joe Sixpack still care? During the past two to three decades, Major League Baseball has increasingly shunned “the common man,” and nowadays, the stink of betrayal taints the fragrance of ballpark franks. Year upon year, fewer and fewer games air free on TV, and a nosebleed seat at Busch today costs more than twice the minimum wage. In all likelihood, dinner for two at Tony’s would run less than a visit to the stadium. A family of five, moreover, would almost have to swing a second mortgage to finance seeing bats swing from behind home plate. Concessionaires, meanwhile, have all but traded peanuts, popcorn and Cracker Jacks for croquettes, foie gras and vol-au-vents. The RBI’s been sent to the minors by ROI; the national pastime has become a rich man’s game. All of baseball, in short, has been Steinbrennered. It seems tragically apt that next year marks the 20th anniversary of the death of the Cardinals’ beloved Gussie Busch, who always maintained a common touch despite his wealth. For some former fans, socioeconomically, the boys of summer long ago Caseyed at the bat.

—Bryan A. Hollerbach

Because We’ve Got the Best Blog

¿CÓMO SE DICE “ADDICTION” EN ESPAÑOL?

Viva El Birdos (vivaelbirdos.com) wasn’t created to appease grammar geeks in any language, but it’s nonetheless gained a national following. While those who know a little Spanish may look askance at the blog’s name, it’s actually a reference to our World Series-winning ’67 team, dubbed “El Birdos” by then-first baseman Orlando Cepeda.

We talked to three of the big guns in VEB’s blogging lineup—founder Larry Borowsky, Tim McCullough and Aaron Schafer—for a glimpse into the lives of baseball’s most analytical fans. —Margaret Bauer



LARRY BOROWSKY (A.K.A. LBOROS)

- Borowsky grew up in St. Louis, but currently lives just minutes from Coors Field in Denver. (His kids, ages 3 and 5, “know of the Rockies”—but like the Cardinals.)
- When he’s not blogging about baseball, Borowsky writes “interpretive text”—i.e., those tiny captions by exhibits—for history museums.
- Borowsky tracks the birds on the bat by laptop, subscribing to MLB.com’s online TV/radio package, reading numerous baseball blogs and checking STLtoday.
- Since VEB hit big in 2006, he’s written about baseball for The Wall Street Journal Online, MSNBC’s Slate Magazine and The Hardball Times, an online baseball magazine.
- On the game: “I know sometimes they win and sometimes they lose, and I’m the same person no matter what. I don’t get carried away with it the way I used to.”

TIM McCULLOUGH (A.K.A. AZRUAVATAR)

- A typical week in this SIUE electrical engineering graduate student’s life: Contributing to Viva El Birdos and Future Redbirds (a minor league baseball blog), teaching two labs and writing his thesis—and reading a book a week just for fun.
- “He’s a giant bank of computers somewhere—I don’t think he’s real,” says a fellow blogger.
- The name azruavatar? “Wish it was a bit less nerdy,” says McCullough: It comes from a character in Magic: The Gathering.
- Human or cyborg, the kid’s no fantasy baseball guru: “I played last year, and I was awful. I placed last in the league.”
- On Cardinals fandom: “They call it baseball heaven for a reason in St. Louis—I think that kind of spontaneous sense of community, it’s really amazing.”

AARON SCHAFER (A.K.A. THE RED BARON)

- Reducing this Jefferson County sales rep down to bullet points isn’t easy. “I’m sort of a bludgeoner, essentially,” he says. “I carry a giant club made of verbiage.”
- Schafer learned stats from his grandfather, who played minor league ball after WWII “until he tore up his hip as a switchman for the railroad.”
- The Red Baron? “It’s relatively close to my own name, has red in it for the team and picks up the Peanuts reference”—to Snoopy, the WWI Flying Ace.
- How he tracks the game: “I have the MLB Extra Innings thing through DirecTV.”
- His philosophy: “To me, baseball is your friend. Every night, whatever you’re doing, you turn on the radio, and there’s a baseball game. It’s woven into the fabric of your life. It’s a comforting thing.”

