

Hook, Line and Sinker

With Tony Hooker

One of my favorite harbingers of spring is set to occur in the next few weeks.

It's not the first red breasted robin at the bird feeder that has me feeling warm thoughts of sunny days.

That's right folks, pitchers and catchers will begin to report to spring training in less than three weeks!

The Oakland's A's will be the first, with their battery mates set to check in on February 11. Terry Harbin's Indians will zoom in the next day on the twelfth, and my Cardinals and Gilbert N's White Sox and those old baby bears will all report on February 13.

It's hard to believe, but baseball, which makes a gazillion dollars a year, appears to be headed toward labor strife if they can't get their act together. The issue, as near as I can tell is teams' hesitance to pay long term deals to aging veterans as a "lifetime achievement" award of sorts. Baseball has always been the most statistically driven sport, and today's MLB teams hire squads of numbers geeks to pore over the analytics and trends to find any sort of competitive advantage.

The one thing that stands clear is that player's production tends to decline beginning around age 30. Of course, for many superstars, a slow decline means that the team will still receive better than average production for several years than they would have gotten without the star. Paul Goldschmidt, whom the Cardinals traded for this past off season, is a

perfect case in point. Goldschmidt's WAR (wins against replacement) last season was better than any other Cardinal's despite having fallen from 6.8 to 5.4 since 2015. For those who don't follow the numbers, WAR basically means that the D'backs were likely to win 6 more games with Goldy on the field than with any other player at his position. Winning games is important, right?

What it all boils down to is the fact that the players are generally underpaid for their first few years in the big leagues, compared to the mountains of cash that they generate for their teams. As long as they received the big money deals later in their careers, they were willing to take less up front. Of course less is a rather relative term, since for 2019, the minimum salary a big leaguer can earn is \$555,000.

There's no way around it. A half million dollars is a lot of cash, and that's for anyone who walks onto the field as part of a MLB team. The average salary for 2018 was \$4.52 million.

How could they possibly complain about that, right? Wrong. In 2017, MLB generated \$10 billion dollars in revenue, which set a record for the fifteenth straight year, according to MLB.com.

All of this cash came in despite MLB attendance dropping by 4 percent in 2018, compared to the previous season. As anyone can attest, going to a big league ball game can be an expensive proposition. A couple of tickets, a couple of hot

dogs, a couple of beers and you've racked up a couple of hundred dollars in spending for the day.

So there you have it. Millionaires doing battle with billionaires, and the sentimental old schmucks like myself come out the losers. I'm the guy who still tries to keep a scorebook when he goes to games. I'm the guy who can wax poetic at the sharp contrast between the deep green of the outfield grass and the crisp white paint of the foul lines. I'm the guy who marvels at the amazing symmetry of the infield dirt, and whose eyes well up at the sound of the stadium vendors hawking their wares, thinking back to the days of my youth when I would spend a day at the ball park with my dad or my Uncle Bill, the encyclopedia of baseball facts and figures.

I hope that the powers that be come up with an amiable solution before they damage the game that I love. Because I'm sure I'm not the only sentimental softy who fondly remembers a day at the ball park. Interactive viewing experiences and games played in other countries and advanced analytics and everything are all great, but they can't compare to the sound of a wood bat making solid contact. They can't compare to those rare moments when a foul ball is heading toward your seat. They can't compare to 40,000 people singing "Take me out to the Ballgame" in unison. They just can't, can they?

WEEKLY SPORTS WRAP-UP

Dance
After a one year absence, the Villa Grove Devilettes advanced to the final day of the IHSA class 1A competitive dance competition. The team, whose school enrollment is 833 fewer students than eventual winner Joliet Catholic Academy, was in eighth place before a couple of mishaps slipped them back to 12th at the end of the competition.

VGJH boys' basketball
Coming in as the 4th seed, the Villa Grove seventh graders defeated 5 seed Arcola 46-43, knocked off 1 seed Milford 32-16 and dispatched third seed and tourney host Bismarck Henning 46-35 to win the 7-2A regional. Layne Rund poured in 30 points and Brady Clodfelder added 10 to help the team advance to the St Mathew Sectional game. They will face Lexington, the winner of the Blue Ridge regional, for a chance to advance to the state tournament at Bartonville Limestone on February 2nd.

Boys' basketball
Finish third at LOVC tourney

Cage Tigers
Jake Eversole had 15 points and 10 assists to lead VGJH to a 71-68 win over Pal-Hut on January 22. Jared Stevens and Will Wilson chipped in 12 points each to help the Hawks' cause.

Fall to Titans
Jared Stevens tallied 15 points, Will Wilson and Evan Wilson each chipped in 14, and Jake Eversole added 12, but it wasn't enough as VGJH dropped a 72-66 decision to Tri-County on January 25. Evan Wilson and Logan Nohren pulled down 7 rebounds to lead the way on the glass.

Bust Broncos
Jared Stevens hit for 13 points, Kane Davison tallied 11 points and Jake Ever-

sole added 10 as the Hawks crushed Cerro Gordo Bement 59-34 to take 3rd place at the final LOVC basketball tournament. Stevens and Eversole each handed out 4 assists, Eversole pilfered 6 steals, and Stevens snatched 5 to help the VGJH cause. Eversole also grabbed 8 rebounds to complete a well-rounded performance.

Girls' basketball
Scuttle Pirates
Aliya Holloman poured in 27 points as the Blue Devils defeated Cumberland 48-26 on January 21. Kyleigh Block added 10 for VGJH.

Herd Buffaloes
Holloman hit for 30 points in less than 3 quarters of play as VGJH defeated Georgetown Ridge Farm 55-16 on January 22.

Finish Third at LOVC tourney
Unsaddle Riders
Aliya Holloman poured in

26 points as the Blue Devils defeated Arcola 62-50 to take third place in the LOVC tournament. The game, which had been postponed due to inclement weather, was the third of four in four days for VGJH. Jordyn Ray chipped in 15 points and Kyleigh Block added 12 for Villa Grove Heritage.

Cage Panthers
Kyleigh Block scored 11 of her 19 points in the first quarter to guide VGJH to a 57-34 win over Oblong on January 24. Aliya Holloman chipped in 14 points to help the cause. Madi Burwell added 7 points, and 8 rebounds, and Jordyn Ray contributed 4 assists and 3 steals. Samantha Campbell came off the bench to add 5 points and 6 rebounds, and seniors Kaylee Knell and Ashley Fulk splashed 4th quarter three pointers to help the Blue Devils keep the Panthers at bay.

VGJH: Weekend of Winning



It was a winning weekend for VGJH, as the seventh grade boy's basketball team won the IESA regional tournament at Bismarck, and the girls volleyball team took the title of the Georgetown tourney. Photos courtesy of Villa Grove Schools.

Wind farms support local communities.

The Harvest Ridge Wind Farm will provide more than **\$1 million to the Shiloh, Heritage, and Villa Grove school districts** in tax payments within the first year.

The districts will receive more than **\$25 million** from the wind farm over the next 30 years.

The estimated tax revenues from the Harvest Ridge Wind Farm are based on the proposed project size of 200 MW, the location of the turbines, and the last year's levee rates of each of the taxing districts.

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2018-19 VILLA GROVE/HERITAGE HAWKS BOYS BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Score	Record
Nov 19-24	@CGB tourney (3rd)		3-1
Nov 27	@ Uni High	W 70-32	4-1
Nov 30	@ Schlarman	W 62-38	5-1
Dec 04	Westville	W 67-37	6-1
Dec 08	@ Sullivan OV	W 67-30	7-1
Dec 11	Tuscola	L 48-52	7-2
Dec 14	@ Arthur OC	W 74-60	8-2
Dec 18	@ STM	L 55-76	8-3
Dec 27-29	BSN Tourney	CHAMPS	13-3
Jan 04	LSA	L 62-64	13-4
Jan 08	@ SJO	L 52-58	13-5
Jan 11	Cerro Gordo	W 64-43	14-5
Jan 12	@ Judah Christian ppd		
Jan 15	Chrisman	W 63-29	15-5
Jan 19-26	@ LOVC tourney	3rd place	17-6
Feb 01	@ Oblong		
Feb 05	Tri-County		
Feb 08	Hut-Pal		
Feb 09	Arcola		
Feb 12	@ Cumberland		
Feb 15	Martinsville		
Feb 18-22	@ IHSA regionals		

HEAD COACH Corey White

2018-19 VILLA GROVE/HERITAGE Blue Devils GIRLS BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Score	Record
Nov 11-16	@Falcon/Bunny Classic (2nd)		3-1
Nov 20	Tuscola	L 35-39	3-2
Nov 26	@ Westville	W 62-36	4-2
Nov 27	Salt Fork	W 55-49	5-2
Nov 29	Uni High	W 60-32	6-2
Dec 03	@ Judah	W 59-45	7-2
Dec 05	ALAH	W 58-47	8-2
Dec 11	@ Unity	W 47-39	9-2
Dec 13	Cerro Gordo	W 65-41	10-2
Dec 27-29	@ Bismrk trny	4th Place	12-5
Jan 03	Arcola	W 56-29	13-5
Jan 08	@ Chrisman	W 65-36	14-5
Jan 10	@ Hut-Pal	W 56-25	15-5
Jan 12-19	@ LOVC trny	3rd Place	17-6
Jan 21	@ Cmbrind	W 48-26	18-6
Jan 22	@ GRF	W 55-16	19-6
Jan 24	Oblong	W 57-33	20-6
Jan 28	Tri County (sr night)		
Jan 31	@ Martinsville		
Feb 04-08	@ IHSA Regional		

HEAD COACH Dan Sappenfield

2018-19 Villa Grove Devilettes Schedule

Dec 15	Villa Grove Competition	1st in IDTA
Jan 05	Charleston Competition	2nd in IDTA
Jan 12	Clinton Competition	postponed
Jan 19	IHSA Sectionals	1st place
Jan 25-26	IHSA State Finals	12th place
Feb 02	Tuscola Competition	
Feb 09	IDTA State Finals (must qualify)	

HEAD COACH Sarah Bouton

HERITAGE

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