

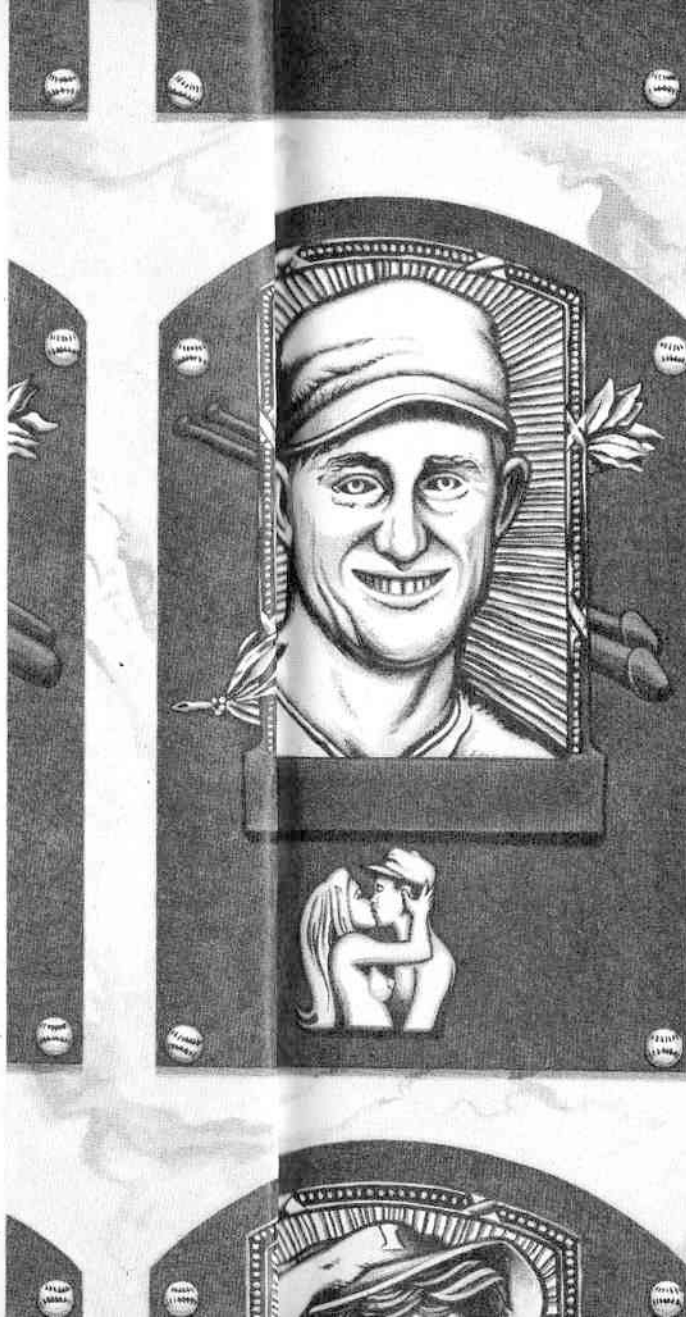
It's not how well
they played the game, but how
they played around

BY HARIETTE SUROVELL

Ever since 1970, when Jim Bouton published his sensational best-seller *Ball Four*, with its references to "beaver-shooting," hotel parties with airline stewardesses and other sexual practices of baseball players, fans have been curious about sex in the Major Leagues. Last October, I journeyed to St. Louis and Kansas City to attend five of the seven games of the "Show Me" World Series. I assumed that by talking to players and sportswriters, I might be able to garner some updated anecdotes that will never appear in the sports pages. At first, the players bashfully avoided talking to me. But by the seventh game a couple of Royals

BASEBALL'S SEX HALL OF FAME

ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL REOTT



seemed to get a kick out of giving interviews to the "girl reporter from the sex magazine."

Here's what I discovered: Baseball players, like most other Americans, have grown more conservative in this politically conservative era. Major league teams are full of faithfully married men and more than a few born-again Christians. The extensive publicity allotted to cocaine use among baseball players has made all professional athletes ultra-cautious. Some even hesitate to be photographed smoking cigarettes. Since baseball is the most all-American sport, baseball players try to project an apple-pie image.

But that's only one side of the coin. Because for every devoted family man there is a wild and crazy partier. This is partly attributable to the nature of the game—months spent on the road, three-to-four-day stopovers in each city. As *Dallas Morning News* sportswriter Randy Galloway says, "This is the only business where there are so many opportunities to mix and mingle."

Then, consider the ballplayers themselves. Our major leaguers are famous, usually young and handsome, possessing incredible vitality, superhuman stamina, superb coordination, colossal charisma and millions of dollars. In interviews, most reveal themselves to be nice, simple guys. Scrawny, pink-haired rock stars and bored narcissistic movie idols look like wimps when compared to ballplayers. The inimitable Reggie Jackson summed up the situation when he told me, "Guys who are good physical specimens are more than adequate sexual mates. As an athlete, you play hard and you swing hard."

A Royals infielder cheerfully admitted, "Baseball players are very sexy. The uniforms are a lot tighter than they were years back. When the

guys walk into the dugout you can turn your binoculars on us and take your pick. We spit and grab our rears and our crotches and it turns people on."

For those baseball players wishing to "play hard and swing hard" there are unlimited opportunities. Bouton briefly alluded to "Baseball Annies"—professional baseball groupies. Some of these ladies are singularly obsessed and follow the teams from city to city. Others wait for the guys to arrive in their home town and camp out in their hotel lobbies. Reportedly, one group of women who were Annies from adolescence to middle age were demoted from players to coaches to scouts to umpires with the passing years. Usherettes at ballparks are also notorious for dating players.

But not all of the fervent females are official "Annies." Some are just lovestruck college kids, office workers or professionals who are seized with creative inspiration—revealing a bare breast to be autographed, shooting a paper airplane containing a lascivious invitation and phone number down to the bullpen. In fact, a computer programmer girlfriend of mine once boasted of spending an evening with an east coast pitcher she met in a New York disco. By treating her to no less than seven consecutive acts of sexual intercourse, he lived up to his nickname, "The Iron Spike." During the "Show Me" series, the wife of Cardinals outfielder Andy Van Slyke complained on the radio that a woman in the bleachers kept flashing her husband during the game, causing him to lose his concentration. A St. Louis television sports producer who has partied with the players confided, "Girls will do things with baseball players they would never do with regular guys. I've shared girls with the guys, watched them perform

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public sex acts in local bars."

The first player I encountered was "Mr October," Reggie Jackson. I was sipping champagne in the quiet bar of his hotel on the night of my arrival in St. Louis, grateful for an escape from the drunken, rampaging fans who swarmed the streets. Reggie kindly agreed to give me an interview on the field the following day. We chatted on the astroturf, surrounded by television cameramen and fellow reporters. Because Reggie is an established sex symbol, I felt comfortable asking him direct questions about his sex life.

"I'm active sexually, but not as much as people think," Reggie declared. "Great athletes can't abuse their bodies too much. If I'm only dating one girl I have more sex than if I'm sleeping around. Quality athletes can't do anything excessive—smoking, drinking, staying out late, and making love. So if I have to choose one indulgence, I choose women. When I'm in great physical shape, I crave sex more. My sexual sense is keener when I'm in training. During baseball season, I've never been out later than 2:30 A.M. As a conscientious athlete, I date only one or two people at a time and always end up in my own bed."

I headed up to the pressbox, where I encountered a nationally famous sportswriter. He offered up the opinion that "most ballplayers don't know anything about women at all. In high school, they've been set apart from the other boys and it's difficult for them to meet girls. So their ideas about women are fixed at an early age. The notion that they could meet

a woman who is their equal never occurs to them. For many of the guys, the female sportswriters they come in contact with are the first complicated, self-sufficient women they have ever met."

During the second half of the eighth inning, the sportswriters rushed down to the Interview Room, where managers and selected players answered post-game questions from the press. From there, most reporters segued on to the clubhouse (my press pass didn't allow me access). Finally, there was a soiree at a nearby hotel where the sportswriters socialized over cocktails.

It was here that I met Roger Angell, the renowned *New Yorker* baseball buff. He observed that "sex and baseball players go together—and there is equal action for managers and coaches. Mickey Mantle was famous for making love in three different time zones on the same day. There was a story going around that a well-known Yankee base-stealer once ended up with his wife and girlfriend staying in the same hotel when he was on the road. He became so exhausted going from room to room that the Yankees announced the next day he would be unable to play. Mo Berg—the Major League catcher who worked for the Secret Service during World War II—was truly unique. He was baseball's premiere intellectual—the only guy I ever saw who came into the pressbox with the *Times Literary Supplement* in his pocket. His intellectual powers—including his knowledge of nine languages—were as appealing to women as his athletic abilities."

Sports Illustrated's Ron Fimrite joined our conversation, and made the educated guess that "98.7 percent of ballplayers screw on the road." He also provided a perspective on the ballplayer's confidantes—the sportswriters. "Police writers end up with the mentality of cops," Fimrite quipped, "and sportswriters end up with the mentality of athletes. No matter how college-educated they are, they end up using 'fuck' in every sentence, and calling women 'broads.'"

Peter Gammons of the *Boston Globe* remarked that "Things have really changed in the last 10 years. In the past, ballplayers were just athletes—they drove Chevys and Dodges. Now that all the money has come in they're sex symbols who drive Mercedes."

On the other hand, many guys are much more strait-laced these days. A large percentage come out of college from the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

"I've been in Triple A and Double A clubhouses," Gammons reminisced. "I've heard incredible orgies being described, but I think a lot of it is just talk. There's probably more action in the Minor Leagues. That's where the guys get their wildness out of their systems—and where, in the end, they find their wives."

"Certain teams have been especially notorious—the Astros in the 60s, the Angels in the mid-70s, the Rangers in the 70s and the Oakland A's. Minnesota's John Butcher and Kirby Puckett are two modern-day legends. They go to the Video Jukebox in Minneapolis almost every night to meet girls. Danny Cox and Kurt Kepshire of the Cards are called the Possum Brothers because they sleep by day and run by night. But many of the wild and crazy guys have calmed down. Jim Rice is married. Frank Tanana was a playboy when

he was a bachelor—and now he's as straight a family man as you could find. Kirk Gibson of the Tigers dated Morgan Fairchild, and now he's getting married. Even George Brett has become . . . more concerned with taking care of himself.

"Still, for guys who party, groupies and usherettes can be big trouble. This year when the Bluejays were on the road, three different players' wives had notes slipped under their doors by usherettes. All the notes read, 'You may have the furs and the diamonds, but I've got your man.'"

A young Missouri sportswriter confided that Mark Bailey of the Astros finds it "difficult to play in Montreal." Bailey describes the groupie scene there as being "the craziest, most exhausting of them all."

After the fifth game, I drove to Kansas City with two *Kansas City Times* photographers. By now, word had gotten out among the players that I was writing this story. During breaks in their batting practice, they would grin at me. Being a die-hard fan myself, my head raced when I approached outfielder Willie Wilson. But in spite of the fact that he is a superstar, Willie was warm, friendly and down-to-earth.

"Even though I'm married, groupies still try to get into my hotel room," he admitted. "But I try to be cordial while I'm rejecting them. They pass you notes and tell you just what they want. But this is not a wild team—almost everyone is married."

Robin Monsky, an assistant P.R. director for the Royals, recalled a 1982 parade for the Cards. "The guys were in semi pick-up trucks that opened in the back. Players were sitting there with their wives, but they kept getting handed slips of paper with names and numbers on them."

At the party after the sixth game, a Toronto sportswriter compared being on the road with the teams to

⑥ *The two were famous for their "closet routine." One of them would hide in a closet and watch his partner in the act of lovemaking.* ●

"a daycare center." "A lot of wives come on trips now," he told me. "The teams use more charters and can take their families along. Times have really changed. Ten years ago, the wives of a certain National League team that includes one all-star traveled with their husbands for the first time. The players told the hotel switchboard operators not to put through any calls—because they had been expecting so many from lady friends."

I was told the most outrageous anecdotes at the final cocktail party. A young Florida writer recounted the time a Toronto Bluejays pitcher, after throwing a winning opening game, allowed a groupie into his room. Then he kicked her out, half-dressed. She pounded on his door (bare breasts exposed) until a security guard removed her.

He told me how two well-known Angels pitchers traditionally roomed together on the road. The two were famous for their "closet routine." One of them would hide in a closet and watch his partner in the act of lovemaking. If the girl overheard him breathing—or laughing—he would join in.

This sportswriter assured me that "players get into everything—two on ones, three on ones—but they really have to trust you to tell you about it." After all, Bouton was reviled for violating the baseball clubhouse motto: "What you see here, what you say here, let it stay here."

A California writer described how three women followed a player out to Oakland and stayed in the same hotel with him and his wife. The player

told his wife he "had a headache and had to see his trainer." When he returned at 6 A.M., angry words were exchanged.

A humorous conclusion to the evening occurred when I encountered a lanky, beer-guzzling Texas sportswriter. With a devilish grin, and a priceless drawl, he told me the wildest stories of all.

"There was a Major League pitcher who always carried a briefcase. In it, was a datebook, cologne, and an extra tie. He looked like your average well-dressed Madison Avenue businessman except for one thing—in this briefcase he also carried a 14" black dildo that he called 'Big Luther.' It used about five batteries. I told him, 'If you turned that thing on, it would sound like a jackhammer.'"

The Texas writer also said that he "wanted it on record" that "the best-hung pitcher in the Major Leagues was a white guy. He was a member of the Rangers. The other players gave him a tape-recorder to keep under his bed. I heard a tape once. Those women actually started barking like dogs."

The next morning, I caught an early flight back to New York. Contemplating the results of my interviews, I concluded that baseball players might well be America's biggest sex symbols. Could it be that the expressions "balling," "swinging," "heavy hitter," "hitting on someone" and "playing the field" were inspired by the antics of our beloved Major Leaguers? ■

Hariette Surovell is a frequent contributor to Forum.