



Now that we're back to real baseball, something I've only seen three times in the last two weeks because I went on vacation and was too busy to actually sit down and watch a game, life seems to be back to normal. Naturally, the last game I watched before vacation was the only game that the Indians lost to the Orioles and the first game I watched when I got back from vacation was Chris Perez's blown save last Sunday. Needless to say, my fan morale is not high given that they went 6-2 in my absence.

Notice how I said "real baseball" because the All-Star Game and its festivities are a joke. This year's event was about as enjoyable as watching looped highlights of David Dellucci at bats. The break from the regular season gave columnists and media members a chance to blow up any and all things remotely resembling storylines into major front page stories. The Matt Cain starting over RA Dickey story. The Billy Butler not in the Home Run Derby story. Robinson Cano getting booed like he kicked everybody in Kansas City's dog story. As a baseball fan, the entire week was an embarrassment.

I used to love watching the Home Run Derby. It was an event that I specifically made sure I could tune in for. Watching very large men smash a small white ball very far distances made for good TV. Hoping that the kids on the field catching outs would collide into each other and leave bodies lying all over the outfield. I'm 25. The Home Run Derby stopped being fun to watch 12 or 13 years ago.

With the exception of Josh Hamilton's prolific performance at Yankee Stadium, which was on in the background at the bar I was at so I watched, the Home Run Derby has just become lame. Chris Berman and his ridiculous commentary and stupid puns make the event more unwatchable than the concept itself. It's glorified batting practice. I watch batting practice all the

time because I get to the park early to get my spot on the Porch. It's nothing special.

Now, they let the team captains pick the participants. I'm fine with that. As far as I'm concerned, the players should pick the All-Star teams anyway. Why give the fans the opportunity to vote in players who don't belong there? The world population is full of idiots who are lucky they can successfully navigate through life without the help of a helmet. Yet, they're determining who starts in a game with World Series implications. Right...makes perfect sense.

Anyway, back to the Derby. Robinson Cano, team captain for the American League, was chastised by an entire city of bandwagon fans who haven't given a shit about their team since George Brett still wore a uniform because he didn't pick Billy Butler. Butler has 90 career home runs. In 775 games. Some of the guys in the Derby hit 90 home runs in two years and the vast majority of them will have no problem getting 90 home runs in three years. Billy Butler has 90 home runs in about 4 ³/₄ seasons. Yes, he belongs in the Derby. Chris Berman makes enough of a mockery out of the event, we can at least allow deserving players to hit.

Naturally, while this "battle" was being waged between people exaggerating things into news stories and fans with nothing better to do, sights were turned to the fact that Matt Cain was starting over RA Dickey. Cain, who has a perfect game to his name this season, entered the break 9-3 with a 2.62 ERA. Dickey, who put together one of the most incredible runs ever by a knuckleball pitcher, hit the break at 12-1 with a 2.40 ERA. From May 27 to June 18, Dickey went on a six-start run that would make even Bob Feller give a compliment. Dickey went 48.2 innings, giving up ONE earned run, striking out 63 hitters, and walking five. Again, he predominantly throws knuckleballs, one of the hardest pitches to command and control. Oh, yeah, two of those starts were complete game one-hitters.

Why did Matt Cain start over RA Dickey? Because the Giants didn't want All-Star starting catcher Buster Posey to have to catch the knuckleballer. Really? Not to say that Cain wasn't deserving of starting, but compared to Dickey, he wasn't close. I understand that managers, especially RETIRED ones like Tony LaRussa, have to defer to the respective teams when they have requests for their players at the All-Star Game. I also understand that the All-Star Game is supposed to be for the fans.

The decision was made, yet this story dragged on for three entire days up until first pitch. In a very imperfect game like Major League Baseball, this is hardly the most egregious thing that has happened this year, or even this week. You could go around and around in circles with

people who understand both sides. Luckily, Robbie Cano got booed so badly that the Cain/Dickey thing kind of went to the backburner.

The game itself, which I didn't watch except for when Asdrubal Cabrera was up, was a letdown. The NL won 8-0 and blew up Verlander in the first inning. Happy to see Verlander get knocked around, but he'll probably go 8-1 with a 1.45 ERA in the second half regardless.

It's good to have real baseball back now. More importantly than all this ASG garbage is that guys like Jason Kipnis, Michael Brantley, Carlos Santana, Shin-Soo Choo and the pitchers got some extra rest. The MLB season is so long and there aren't many off days. The Indians really need all hands on deck to erase this three-game deficit and put themselves in position for an exciting September and October.

In the new collective bargaining agreement, the players union was able to work a provision in there that made the All-Star break four days, presumably for the players who go to the event and don't get a chance to relax. So, unlike in years past when games resumed on Thursday, everybody starts on Friday now. It gave all the players a chance to get with family, spend time with their kids, possibly take a small vacation, and just refocus and get revitalized for the second half.

Now, the fun really starts.