

Daily Dose: What the hell is a “buzzball”?

Sep 4, 2003

In one way you have to admire The Genius. There he was yesterday, sitting at a table, holding a press conference in a game that his team absolutely coughed up. The Cardinals had blown a six run lead, had abused their “ace” pitcher by throwing him into the fire in a relief stint just two days after throwing 112 pitches in another loss, and The Genius was trying to think of ways to change the subject.

He went with the “mean Cubs pitchers are throwing at my players” angle. I don’t admire his argument or the reasons behind it, but you have to admire the sheer “what the hell?” way he just threw it out there to see if the media would bite.

Of course, they did.

“It’s dangerous, and nobody takes it. When you see a lot of buzzballs, everybody has a problem with that. If we throw a lot of balls up and in, Dusty is going to be upset. Whoever does it, it’s a problem and not acceptable.

“Whoever the pitcher is, and even if we do it, that’s always a bad issue for any team that has to deal with it. The up-and-in ball has bothered me ever since I managed. Always. We have never tolerated a pitch up and in. Never.”²³⁵

What the hell is a buzzball?

The real reason that The Genius is mad is that Kerry Wood punked Matt Morris repeatedly on Tuesday night. Morris kept trying to bunt, and Kerry kept zipping pitches up and in to make it tough for Matt to bunt. Given that Kerry’s control from time to time is shaky, it was dangerous. But you notice that Tony didn’t have Morris try and retaliate against Kerry. First, Morris would have gotten tossed and the Cardinals couldn’t afford that. Second, Kerry was liable to put Morris on the permanent DL in the resulting scrum.

“If you can find any pitcher of mine I have ever had that

235 This was typical Genius bullshit. Nobody threw at more hitters than the LaRussa Cardinals. But when a team pitched them inside he threw a tantrum every time.

says differently, I'll give you whatever you want that I can afford. It's too scary. That's a real dangerous shot, and no one tolerates it. It can be corrected by just getting the ball down."

Oh, so it's OK to drill a guy in the leg. Well, then it must be OK when Kerry drills Fernando Vina repeatedly in the knee. Heck, Fernando swings at most of those, anyway.

The Genius then said that somebody told him Kerry enjoys hitting guys. "I'll tell Dusty who told me, and he can go to that guy and straighten it out if he wants to. He says [Wood] likes to hit people because he likes to scare them."

Yeah. That's kind of the point.

Who was the greatest pitcher in Cardinals' history?

A guy named Bob Gibson who used to plunk guys in the head if they even thought about getting a hit off of him. That's what makes this whole thing just that much more absurd.

This is The Genius' way of warning the Cubs not to do it again. But he knows that today's starter, Shawn Estes, can't hit anything he throws at. Remember last year when he somehow missed Roger Clemens' ass? So the point is moot. Tony acts tough and then doesn't have to worry about it. But since Estes will likely only be around for an inning or two, it'd be nice to see The Farns come in and plunk somebody and give them the Paul Wilson Treatment.

Speaking of Estes, just why the hell is he starting today? I know it's "his turn", but sometimes the music stops and there aren't enough chairs. Today there should be chair left for Shawn.

Alas, given that Juan Cruz is needed to start tomorrow night in Milwaukee, what were the other alternatives? Felix Sanchez? Uh...no. Todd Wellemeyer...he's had his moments and he can't be worse than Estes. But we'll see plenty of Wellemeyer today, anyway. How about Sergio

Meat Tray?

OK, as long as this is the last time we see Shawn, I can live with it. I guess.

Oh hell, no I can't.

Yesterday's Cubs game was one of the best in recent memory. Given the stakes and the opponent and the fact that it was the fourth game in three days between the teams, it might have been the biggest win in these parts since the Wild Card game in 1998. Every championship season has a win that you look back on as the tipping point. In 1984 it was the Sandberg-Sutter game.²³⁶ In 1989 it was the ten run rally in the last three innings against the Astros. In 1998 it was three Friday sequence in which Brant Brown had three walk off homers.

In 2003 it was the Moises Alou five for five game. You'll be telling the grandkids about that one.

Think of all the stuff that happened.

- Danny Haren got drilled in the hand by Matt Clement. Matt Clement got drilled in the leg by Danny Harren. The subsequent argument between The Genius and Dusty was a lip reader's dream.
- Ramon Martinez got thrown out at home by Albert Pujols and it wasn't Wendell Kim's fault. What were the odds?
- Felix Sanchez made his MLB debut a memorable one by serving up a grand slam to Albert Pujols.
- Jeff Fassero came in and threw gas all over the lead.
- E-Ramis hit a game turning homer to stop the bleeding.
- Moises hit one to continue the hope.
- Alex Gonzalez continued to eat the Cardinals for lunch with a homer to make it 7-5.
- Fernando Vina tripled to lead off the eighth and the Cardinals didn't advance him one foot.
- Woody Williams began throwing up in the bullpen. I mean, started throwing in the bullpen.
- Woody came in, fresh off a 112 pitch performance on Monday and had nothing. He gave up the lead with a

236 The Dave Owen Game. All Sandberg did was tie it twice with homers with the Cubs an out away from defeat both times. Dave Owen won it. Give him his due.

triple to Mark Grudzielanek and the game with a single to, who else, Moises.

- Regular Joe came in and finished things off by striking out the most evil of the Evil Satanic Red Fowl, Jim Edmonds.

A good time was had by all.