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Extra Bases

Wiretap | Feature Pieces | Feature Articles | Featured Columnists | Team Columns | Past Polls

Home > News > Featured Columnists > Extra Bases

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7th Aug. 2005
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Julio -- The Picture Of Absurdity

Authorred by Bob Souza - 14th August, 2005 - 7:34 pm



He turns 47 in about a week. Think about that one. Forty-seven! The man will be getting his AARP enrollment forms in the mail before long. He's beginning to smell his well-deserved Taco Bell senior discounts. His golden years will apparently have little resemblance to any of ours.

Where's the difference?

The remarkable Julio Franco can still bust a major league fastball. No joke. And he proved it once again with a 429-foot detonation against Arizona, driving in 4 runs and helping the Braves to a 9-5 victory.

"He hit the daylights out of that home run," Chipper Jones quipped. "You forget how strong that man is because he doesn't go out and try and hit home runs, a lot of tape-measure shots... man, he let the big dog eat on that one. He got it all."

Okay -- so who let the dog out?

"He obviously has some good hand-eye coordination," said 43-year-old youngster and Arizona manager Bob Melvin. "I'm past amazed. I think the whole league is. When he has the inkling, he can pull one like he did today. Yesterday I said to him, 'Do you ever stop?' He just smiled."

He has a lot to smile about.

Franco has been playing in the big leagues since 1982. Many of today's baseball fans weren't even on the planet then. His best year may have been with the White Sox in strike-shortened 1994, when he belted 20 home runs, had 98 RBIs and a .319 average. In 20 seasons before this one, he had a career average of .300.

He posted a terrific year for Texas in 1991, when he batted .341, managed 15 homers, 78 RBIs, and

Current Featured Columns

Sheffield Can't Handle The Truth
For a guy who doesn't trust reporters, Gary Sheffield sure can't stop talking to them. This Monday, in an article that will appear in New York Magazine, Sheffield gives his state-of-the-union address on who the real leader of the Yankees is, and it isn't Derek Jeter or Alex Rodriguez. Graham Flashner. 7th August, 2005.

Call To The Bullpen Was Wrong
Several weeks ago, I wrote that Rafael Palmeiro was a Hall of Famer. This was based on his 3,000 hits and nearly 600 homers over his long career. Fast-forward to August and I have to issue an apology. Paul Falewicz. 1st August, 2005.

Chicago's Steve Zizzou Versus Boston's Hamlet
With the Red Sox curse now over, sights our set on the Cubs' curse. Maybe it is because of the beer, bricks and ivy, but you just don't see people in Chicago marching down Sheffield trailed by the tears of their 97 seasons of despair. They are figures of tragicomedy like the lovable Steve Zizzou. Christopher Reina. 27th July, 2005.

Sibling Rivalry
Both the Cubs and Red Sox have had their share of heartaches, both have incredibly passionate fan bases that span the country, both have bitter divisional rivals, both play their home games in historic ballparks, and both have had to deal with so-called "curses". Dennis Hobein. 10th June, 2005.

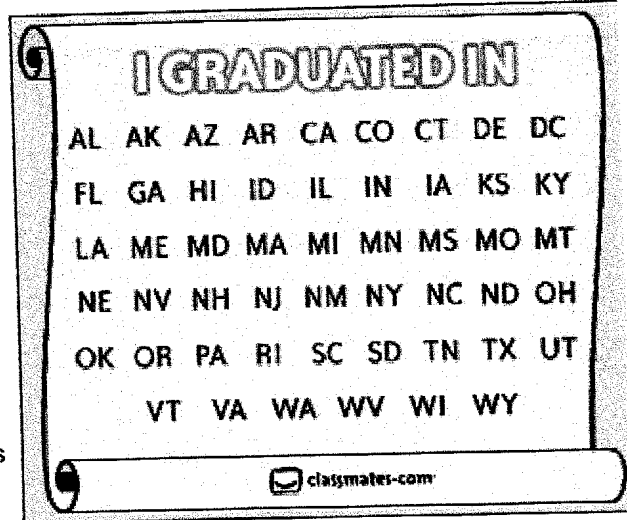
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tossed in 36 stolen bases. Try this: Over eighty-three hundred career at-bats – with eight different teams. That’s a lot of pine tar, brother.

1991 was also the same year Julio became an American citizen, became a devout Christian, and shared the locker room with the now infamous Rafael Palmeiro. Could it be a little fountain of youth got passed around? (wink)

Born in the Dominican Republic way back in the stone age, circa 1958, Franco began his career with the Phillies in 1982. In his early years, he was known as a huge defensive liability, but a prolific hitter with an unusual knock-kneed stance. The Braves salvaged his vocation by pulling him from the Mexican League scrap heap in 2001.



“He might be almost 47, but he sure doesn’t look it and he sure doesn’t play like it,” remarked Braves second baseman Pete Orr. The marvel has 9 homers and 37 RBIs this year in only 178 at-bats. He is batting a robust .292 as a part time player.

So what’s the big secret, the story he’s sticking to like glue?

“Avoid fried foods, which angry up the blood,” Julio said. He skips large meals, instead doing seven or more small ones a day. “Eat, eat, eat,” he said. “I’m constantly eating. “If your stomach disputes you, lie down and pacify it with cool thoughts.”

Finally. A sensible way to live.

Any homer Franco hits now will make him the oldest player in history to do so. At this rate, it looks like he’s liable to have plenty more years to get it done. He’s the oldest to ever hit a grand slam, the oldest to ever hit a pinch-hit homer, oldest in the post-season, etc. Big surprise.

He also seems to be a lock to catch Phil Niekro and Hoyt Wilhelm, who played at age 48. Minnie Minoso’s 57 could be a bit out of reach – we’ll know within ten years or so. For now, he’s just looking for the next big fly.

“Those are records that mean a lot because you stayed in the game for a long time, but I want to play until I’m 50 and I know I’m going to hit another one,” Julio chortled.

Eh? Did he really say 50?

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