



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CUBS BROADCASTER

by *Len Kasper*

Before you even ask, I'll answer the question: No, I won't switch jobs with you! It's funny how many people have come up to me over the years and said I have his or her dream job. It is extremely flattering, to say the least, and I never take my position for granted. For a kid from a small Michigan town who dreamed of being a big league announcer, this has been the opportunity of a lifetime and it is truly an honor to call Cubs games with Bob Brenly for all the great Cubs fans around the country.

When I was asked to write a piece for this annual, I thought it would be interesting to lay out what a typical game day is like for me and most other broadcasters. Some people are surprised when they learn my "work" day doesn't begin 10 minutes before the first pitch. It is a little more involved than that.

As a starting point, I pretty much do some sort of

baseball "work" 365 days a year. Yes, even on Christmas and New Year's Day I am online checking out any interesting notes regarding the Cubs, or, for that matter, any other team. For me, the luxury of this job is that the subject—baseball—is a consuming passion of mine. If I weren't in baseball, I'd still follow it on a day-to-day basis.

My daily pregame routine actually has similarities to my non-game-day ritual, at least in the morning. The first thing I do is fire up my laptop and open my daily website bookmarks. That folder covers more than a dozen sites, including all the Chicago sports sections, *MLB.com*, *ESPN.com*, and others. First, I find out what's happening with the Cubs and that day's opponent (I read many articles on each opponent during that particular series from their local newspapers), then I look for any other interesting MLB articles. I keep a folder on my computer that allows me to save interesting stories on various

teams, so, when I do my series prep, I can go back and catch up on each club.

Anyone who has worked with me can tell you I'm rather anal about my prep work, but I've actually streamlined things as time has moved on. One particular thing I've maintained for many years is an extensive player file system, which I save on my computer. Instead of explaining what that means, here is an example of one player file I've compiled:

**BRUNTLETT, ERIC, IF/OF, R...(3.29.78)...PHI...[Hou/Phi]...a/Hou/p2008... 9th/Hou/Stanford/2000... b/Lafayette, IN...has a degree in economics f/Stanford...can play anywhere on the diamond...2003: (Hou) had 0 W in 56 ML PAs (7 in 6 PAs in 2004...his W totals have gone up every yr-thru 2008)... 2005: (Hou) started the G/E 4-6-3 DP in G4 of the 2005 NLCS vs StL as Hou held on 2-1 (if the Astros don't turn it, the tying R scores f/3rd)...came in as a def replacement in the 9th...2008: (Phi) in G3 of the WS vs TB, led off the B9th in a 4-4 tie and was HBP...then went to 2B on a WP and advanced to 3B on a throwing E by C Dioner Navarro on the same play...eventually scored the G/E R on a Carlos Ruiz IF single...in G5, as a PR, scored the GW R in the B7th as Phi wrapped up its WS title.*

I won't bore you by explaining all the confusing abbreviations and shortcuts I use. I've adapted the system to fit my needs over the years and it's a good way to keep what I believe is the most important information on each player in a fairly manageable capsule. It definitely requires a lot of time and research to gather all this info, but with the incredible reach of the Internet, there are so many great ways to find this stuff. In my opinion, for what I do, if I don't bring these details to our broadcasts, I'm not doing my job properly. Fortunately, it's something I love to do. The grunt work involved in this job is basically finding interesting stories and details on major league baseball players. Not a bad way to make a living!

Now, back to my game-day routine. After I've gone through all the daily news and notes, I finalize my "team" pages for that day's game. Here's part of one opponent's page from a Cubs series vs. the Giants in 2008:

SF
*****STORYLINES*****
***4/17-28-worst 4 rec in MLB...R 22-27-6th-best in NL*
***L 5 straight (7 R combined)*
***ALL-STARS: Tim Lincecum and Brian Wilson*
***Turned a TP vs SD on 5/30-Castillo-Durham-Bowker (5-4-3)-T8th in a 3-3 tie (SD W 7-3 in 13 inn)...apparently the TP ball got lost as their bullpen catcher, who didn't realize he had the ball, ended up using it to play catch and it got mixed in w/all the other practice balls...2nd TP in the majors this yr (Cle's Asdrubal Cabrera turned an unassisted TP on 5/12)*
***NO BARRY BONDS-THE ALL-TIME CAREER HR LEADER WAS A GIANT FOR 15 YRS-F/1993-2007...HIT 58% OF HIS REC 762 HRs W/SF. There's also a change @ the top of the organizational chart-on Oct 1, Bill Neukom is taking over for the retiring Peter Magowan as the Giants' managing general partner w/Ex VP/COO Larry*

Baer being promoted to team President (MLB must approve the moves in Aug). Magowan-got this ballpark built w/ private funds, kept the team f/moving to St. Petersburg, FL when he bought the team 1993 and helped bring Barry Bonds to SF around that same time as a free agent
***2007: 71-91, 5th in NL West. Worst record since 1996 and 1st last-place finish since 1985.*
***Celebrating 50th anniversary in SF(p1, guide)*

This is not a page I would completely fill out the day of the game. It's a year-round process, as I said earlier, and I tend to add and subtract notes as I go. I usually begin preparing for each series a few days before. So let's say the Cubs are in San Diego on a Tuesday. That day I'll probably be doing some prep for the Dodgers series, which starts on Friday. And by Friday, I will be working on the Astros, who come to Wrigley Field the following Monday.

Once the team pages are filled out, I'm essentially all set to pack my work bag for the ballpark. My goal each day is to show up at the park ready to do the game. I do utilize the game notes compiled by each club's media relations department, the MLB stats packs, and the information I am able to get around the batting cage and in the clubhouses. But, the way I look at it, if I get a flat tire on the way to the park or if for some other reason can't do all the prep at the ballpark I normally do, I want to feel like I can walk into the booth and do the game if I have to.

For 1:20 starts at Wrigley Field, I like to get to the park between 9:30 and 9:45 at the latest. MLB mandates that clubhouses open 3 hours and 30 minutes prior to the first pitch, so that means 9:50 is a time etched in the brain of every reporter and broadcaster who works at Wrigley. The first thing I do at the park is stop by the Cubs' media relations office. Peter Chase, Jason Carr, Dani Holmes, and the gang have already



Len and his partner, Bob Brenly, have become a good broadcast team and popular among Cubs fans.



Len looks on as TV talk show host Phil Donahue sings "Take Me Out To The Ballgame," a Wrigley Field tradition, in the 7th inning on May 15, 2008.

been there for at least a couple hours busily preparing that day's notes and stats. I like to grab whatever they have available at that hour. The stats pack is a key for me because it helps me fill out my lineups.

Then I make the trek up to the broadcast booth. One thing I love about working at Wrigley is that I get a mini workout every day. Walking up and down the many ramps several times a day might not replace a full workout, but it beats not getting any exercise at all. Having said that, the only time I take the elevator is usually when I first arrive at the park. I'm normally anxious to get my day at the park started, so that's the fastest way up. It also cuts down on the perspiration on those hot August afternoons.

Once I'm in the booth, I turn on the laptop and take out my scorecards, pens, and media guides to get everything situated where I like it. I get my player and team files dialed up on the computer and all the important websites I might peruse before and during the broadcast. Then I grab my clipboard and stats pack and head down to the clubhouse.

My first priority is to find out if either team has posted a lineup. I think any broadcaster will tell you the most important bit of info we all need is the lineup. It's the fulcrum of not only our scorecard, but of the whole day. I come to the park equipped with many fun notes about the players, but they don't have a place to go until I know who is in the lineup and where they are batting. Also, the lineup (more than any other thing on a daily basis) gives broadcasters and reporters a jumping off point to ask the manager, coaches, and players questions about that day's match-up. For instance, if an everyday player is not in the lineup, that's a note to ask the manager

about. If a certain reliever is not listed in the bullpen section, that's a red flag. If the lineup itself doesn't come out until, say, after 11 a.m. for a 1:20 start, many times that is an indication there is an injury and the manager is waiting to see if a player is healthy enough to play.

Aside from the lineup, I like to check in with Lou Piniella at some point just to see what's happening that day. Many times Ron Santo and Cory Provus are in Lou's office to record the manager's radio show and I might pop my head in just to say hello and ask a couple questions I've been pondering. He also normally does a pregame session with all the media and I like to sit in on that, just in case some news comes out that I might want to use during our broadcast. The Cubs' beat writers have all been very gracious over the years in allowing me to participate in those sessions. I respect the job they have to do and try to stay out of their way, but I hope/think they respect my pregame preparation as well.

Lou is as good as any manager I've been around in answering the "why" questions. Some managers don't like to hear, "Why did you do this?" or, "Why do you like to do that?" To some, it's a second-guess. But the way I see it, I'm trying to learn about the game every day and I love to ask those questions, not as a second-guess, but simply to, first, explain to our viewers what the thought process might have been and, second, better anticipate that sort of situation in the future so I can then think of potential options. That is where having a partner like Bob Brenly is so valuable. Bob is as good as any analyst in the game and one thing he can do that not every analyst can is speak from experience about the options a manager might have in a particular situation. And it's amazing how often he is right on the money in terms of what Lou might be thinking.

At some point in the morning, I will touch base with our producer regarding game open topics and whether or not we need to conduct any pregame interviews. I usually run into Bob in the clubhouse or the dugout at some point as well, and we exchange answers to the lazy, but universal pregame question: "What's up?" I want to emphasize that while I am giving you a basic template of my personal game-day preparation, each broadcast is a team effort. Even though we generally don't have a formal production meeting with our crew at the park, we do make time to go over that day's match-up, storylines, and anything that might enhance our broadcast. And for home games, we usually talk about that day's seventh-inning stretch guest and what topics we may want to bring up during the bottom of the seventh interview.

The other big component in my prep is getting the players' take on things. Every broadcaster has a different philosophy regarding this topic. Mine is simple—I never want to interfere with a player's pregame routine, but in order for me to do my job, it's important to spend time each day in

the clubhouse and around the batting cage. Let me explain. First, as I said before, I like to learn about the game and why things happen and relay that info to the fans. So getting the players' thoughts is an important part of that. Over the course of time, you build professional relationships with players. And by being there everyday like clockwork, I believe you earn their trust. They know I have a good sense of judgment about what's okay to use on the air and what might be better termed "background" information—the kind of info that I might be able to use during a broadcast but won't quote the person who told me. An example might be a scouting report on an opposing pitcher or hitter.

I also believe it helps for me to be available to the players every day if they have questions or comments. Most ballplayers, and coaches, *love* to talk about the game, and as you build relationships, you find *yourself* getting asked questions: "What did you guys say about that strike three call in the eighth last night?"... "Did you think it was a strike?"... "Who's leading the league in innings pitched?"... "Could you send my mom a birthday wish today?"

But, there is a fine line regarding that connection with the players. I have learned that sometimes a healthy distance needs to be maintained. I have met players whom I consider friends and after some have retired, I've maintained contact. I think that's just natural in any business. But when it comes to doing my job, I can't let personal feelings creep into how I announce games. The key word is fairness—I've always tried to be even-handed when it comes to pointing out things I see. As a play-by-play announcer, I'm not obligated to give my opinion on every play or topic, even though I do have

opinions, which you will hear occasionally. My main job is to call the plays and set up Bob and let him analyze.

But the point is, I want to be as fair as I can in calling a game. I point out mistakes and bad plays, but I try to have a sense of decorum about it. That goes for both teams. I want the Cubs to win and you'll hear that excitement in my voice when something good happens for them, but my credibility as a broadcaster is important to me. The way I look at critical comments is this: You can't avoid them just because you're worried a player might be upset, but you can say them in a way that they don't come off as sarcastic or cheap shots. There have been times when I've said something critical and later gone back and thought, "You know, that didn't come out right," but those things can happen on any live television broadcast.

I am pretty sure there have been times when players I know very well haven't been thrilled with my comments or maybe my tone. I'd like to think that by being in the clubhouse every day, by showing them that I work hard, prepare well, and am not someone who is going to say critical things just to create a headline, I have earned that trust that I spoke of earlier. I can probably count on one hand the times a player, coach, or manager has asked me about something I've said on the air that could be construed as negative or over the line. And sometimes, what was actually said didn't match what was heard. Every broadcaster has heard this line before: "Hey, I heard you said..." to which the response is, "Wait a second, *you* heard it or someone else heard it?" That stuff just comes with the territory.

Just a few more words about my game-day prep—usually around two hours prior to the first pitch, I'll make the trek back upstairs to the booth where I'll finish up filling out my scorecard. Bob and I will then convene in the dining room for some lunch and then we're almost ready to broadcast a baseball game. The last step, which is honestly our least favorite part of the day, is applying our TV makeup to look good for the high definition cameras. And no, we don't have a makeup person on staff. So, if my makeup ever looks bad, you can blame me!

For a 1:20 start, we'll hit the air at 1:00, so around 12:50 we'll look at all the pregame elements and go over the format with our producer. At about 12:59, I'll look over my shoulder at the flags in center field to get a good idea of the all-important wind direction, clear my throat and then hit the air for what hopefully is a great broadcast, punctuated about three hours later with "Cubs win!" **MSP**

Len Kasper is entering his fifth season as the television play-by-play announcer for the Chicago Cubs. He, his wife Pam, and their son Leo live in the Chicago area year-round (yes, even when it snows).



Len & Bob tune up their guitars to prepare for the first "Len & Bob Bash," held in January 2007.