

Ground rules: Shearn can tend a mound as well as pitch on it

Alan Robinson
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PITTSBURGH — There probably isn't a major league groundskeeper who hasn't thought to himself after seeing a struggling pitcher labor through an inning, "He's so bad, I could pitch better than that."

Cincinnati Reds pitcher Tom Shearn might be the only major leaguer who watches the grounds crew pull out the tarp, line the batter's box, groom the mound or drag the infield and thinks, "Hey, I do that better than they do."

Shearn, who won his first career major league start Sunday after 11 years in the minors, might be a big league first: from the grounds crew to game-winner.

An outdoors lover who enjoys being around ballfields all year, Shearn has worked since 2000 as a groundskeeper for the Triple-A Round Rock Express when his own season ended. Fields must be tended to when games aren't being played, so there's work to be done nearly 12 months a year.

"Shearny knows how to pick up a shovel, so somebody must have raised him right," Texas Rangers grounds director Dennis Klein said Thursday.

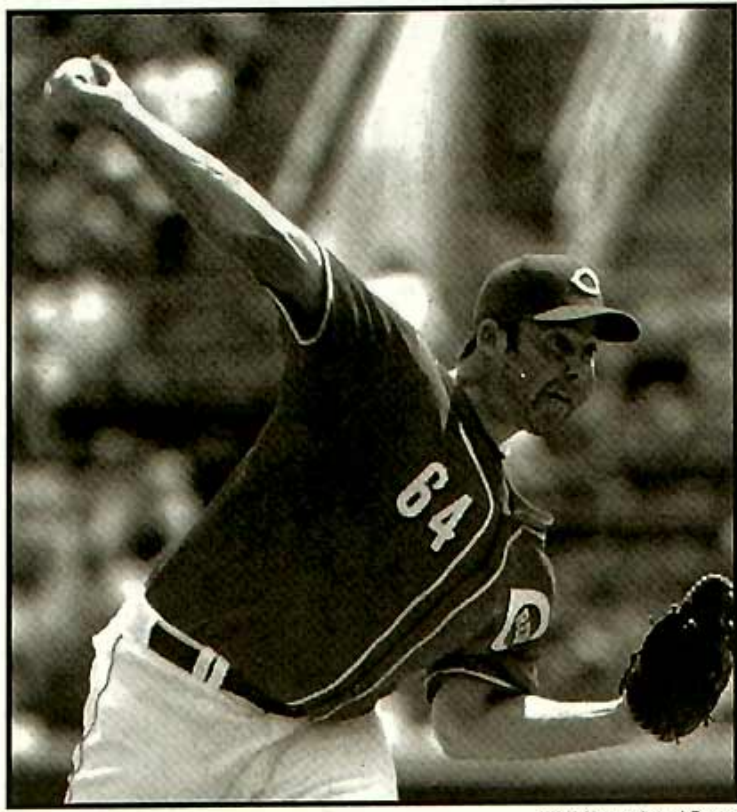
While pitching at Triple-A Louisville this season, Shearn lived briefly behind the outfield wall in a camping trailer owned by Bats groundskeeper Tom Nielsen. Shearn was known to pick up a rake or a shovel as the field was being worked on the morning of a game.

"Tom had a camper out there and I said, 'Do you mind if I stay in that, if it's not being used?'" Shearn said. "He said, 'Go ahead.' I was only there for 10 days. But I had to get out of there so fast last weekend, I didn't have time to pay him. I still owe Tom some money."

So goes the life of an aging pitcher who has toiled in pro ball since he was a teenager and, with an infant daughter, was looking to save money.

Only Shearn no longer fits that career minor leaguer profile. Called up hastily to make a spot start against Florida on Sunday, two days before his 30th birthday, the right-hander limited the Marlins to four hits and three runs in seven innings for a 9-3 victory.

The performance earned



Cincinnati Reds pitcher Tom Shearn throws against the Florida Marlins in a game on Aug. 26.

Shearn (1-0) another start tonight in St. Louis, where he will oppose the Cardinals' Anthony Reyes (2-13). After previously pitching in the minors since 1996 without a call-up, that 1-0 is something Shearn long wondered if he'd ever see after his name.

"I just tried to go out year by year and throw up numbers and get my shot here," Shearn said. "It's nice to get up here finally and see what I can do."

The difference between Shearn and other major leaguers is that he knows how to groom a field as well as play on it.

Shearn and Klein became friends when both were at Round Rock, which was Houston's Double-A farm club at the time and now is a Triple-A team co-owned by Hall of Famer Nolan Ryan. Each explained his craft to the other.

Klein showed Shearn the tricks of building a mound and mowing the grass, and Shearn taught Klein how to catch a curveball and a cutter.

"I'd show him a few things and he'd say, 'So, that's how mounds are done,'" Klein said. "He got to see the other end of the spectrum. All of a sudden he knew what went on behind the scenes. When we'd talk about how to make the mound slope right, Tom had an understanding of it."

As Shearn sat out the 2003 season following Tommy John surgery, he helped Klein tend to the field before the two went to the bullpen for throwing sessions.

"I always liked to hang out with the grounds crew," Shearn said. "I enjoy being outdoors and working on the fields."

Klein, his friend, got a firsthand look at how difficult it is to be a player.

"I'd never played baseball,

and I got to see it from his end," Klein said. "We used to throw the ball around in the outfield, and that turned into me catching him in full pads in the bullpen. He'd throw curveballs and I'd get drilled and cut fastballs that nearly broke my thumb."

Klein worked full-time on the grounds crew during that injury layoff, though he wouldn't go on the field during games because he often knew the opposing players. Shearn's wife, Kelli, still works at Round Rock inputting computer data for the stadium video board.

Klein became the first of the two career minor leaguers to get a major league promotion when he was hired last offseason by Texas. He called Shearn and said, "Now you've got to get up here."

Shearn got his call last Saturday, and Klein was among the first people to learn the news. The next day, Klein watched the Rangers' game from the umpires room so he could also monitor Shearn's major league debut.

If they ever make a movie about Shearn's saga, maybe they'll call it Well-Groomed Field of Dreams.

"It was definitely worth it, all the years in the minor leagues, all the bus trips and all the early morning flights," Shearn said. "If they sent me down again, I'd go down and still have a smile on my face. I'm enjoying coming out early and looking at all the new ballparks and all the places I haven't been. This is what I worked for my whole life."

When Shearn is done pitching, Klein thinks his friend has another career in baseball.

"I told him, 'Hey, man, when you're in my job you can stay in the game until you're 60,'" Klein said.

Ogden comeback stuns Orem

Neil K. Warner
DAILY HERALD

Comeback kids they are not.

When the Ogden Raptors have trailed late in the game this year it's been safe to update the standings. Go ahead and get a jump on the traffic. Game over.

Ogden entered Thursday night's game against Orem with a record of 0-34 when trailing after seven innings.

So what are the odds Ogden would score three runs in the ninth inning and then beat the Orem Owlz in extra innings?

Orem Owlz mascot Hootz would fly first.

Soar, Hootz soar. Ogden stunned Orem with three runs in the top of the ninth and followed with a pair of runs in the 11th inning to beat the Owlz, 5-3.

Ogden's Elian Herrera led off the 11th inning with a solo home run that proved to be the difference in the game. The Raptors tacked on another run and then turned the game over to closer Johnny Caraballo, who pitched a scoreless 11th to complete the win.

Orem had a chance to put the game away in the ninth before the Raptors came back with three improbable runs to tie the game.

The trouble started when Orem reliever Ryan Brasier hit Travis Vetter with a

pitch. Jaime Ortiz doubled in a run to breakup the shutout. Brasier retired Elian Herrera and then walked Justin Fuller before Jovani Rosario chopped a ground ball to first baseman Efrén Navarro that looked like it would end the

game. But when Navarro flipped the ball to Brasier at first the timing was off and it got past Brasier, allowing a run to score and allowing the tying run to reach third. Erik Kanaby tied the game with an infield single.

Orem called on Brian Chambers to close out the inning. Chambers got Matthew Wallach to fly out to end the inning and send the game to extra innings, where the Raptors finally prevailed.

Orem scored first when Anel De Los Santos delivered an RBI single in the third. The Owlz added a pair of insurance runs in the fourth,

compliments of the big fly. Jay Brossman got a hold of a Bobby Blevins pitch and deposited it over the left-field fence to give Orem a 2-0 lead. One out later, Julio Perez mashed a solo homer to dead center to give the Owlz a 3-0 lead.

Ogden tried to rally off Orem starter Jordan Walden in the sixth, no easy task since Walden has given up just one run or less in six of his past seven starts.

Jovanny Rosario started off the inning with a single. Kanaby followed with a single to left. Walden then struck out Wallach before Alex Garabedian singled to load the bases. Walden then fanned Austin Gallagher and then sat down Vetter to end the threat.

Walden gave up eight hits through seven innings, but didn't factor in the decision.

The loss extended Orem's losing streak to five games. The Owlz are now 0-7 in extra-inning games.

The two teams continue their three-game series tonight in Orem. First pitch is set for 7 p.m.

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OGDEN 5
OREM 3

Aaron still reigns in Milwaukee

Chris Jenkins
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MILWAUKEE — In Milwaukee, at least, Hank Aaron remains baseball's home run king. Aaron received that esteemed — if now outdated — introduction as he and several other members of the 1957 Milwaukee Braves came to Miller Park on Thursday for a 50-year reunion of their World Series victory.

While Aaron wasn't willing to hit the road to follow Barry Bonds' pursuit of his career home run record earlier this month, he was thrilled to travel back to Milwaukee to reunite with his former teammates.

"I am very much enjoying this," Aaron said. "As I mentioned before, some of these guys I haven't seen for a long time and I wanted to see them."

Aaron originally said his reluctance to go see Bonds break his record in person was because he was getting older — he's 73 — and simply didn't like to travel.

But on Thursday, Aaron said that by not following Bonds around the country, he also could avoid answering questions about whether he suspected that Bonds' achievements came with the help of performance-enhancing drugs — and whether that would taint the record.

"I guess I kind of stayed out of that, really," Aaron said.

"Because I didn't want to get involved. For seven or eight years, I went through a thing where people were talking about all of the other things."

"If I had decided that I was going to go and follow Barry, or do anything like that, then people were going to start talking about steroids, and I didn't want to get into that. I didn't want to, didn't have to, so I kind of avoided it."

Feeling he needed to do something to acknowledge Bonds breaking the record, Aaron recorded a short video tribute that was played on the scoreboard after Bonds hit his record-breaking 756th home run Aug. 7 — a solution that, at least in Aaron's mind, was the best way to bring closure to the situation.

"I thought it was," Aaron said. "I certainly wasn't going to fly to San Francisco or fly to Chicago or anywhere else to be with anybody. I didn't think I had to. Because I wasn't prepared to answer all these questions that people were going to have."

Aaron said that no matter how he reacted publicly to Bonds breaking the record, he was "damned if you do, damned if you don't."

But above all, he didn't want people to think he was resentful.

"That's not true," Aaron said. "I've said many times, records are made to be broken."

Wolverines face SUU

DAILY HERALD

After a week of preparation following its final exhibition game, Utah Valley State will take to the field in its season opener to battle in-state foe Southern Utah today at Wolverine Field.

Kickoff is slated for 4 p.m.

"We're excited for our game with Southern Utah," UVSC coach Brent Anderson said. "We've been working hard on our formations, tactics and fitness in practice. Hopefully, we have learned some lessons from our preseason games that will help us against Southern Utah."

The Wolverines and Thunderbirds face off for the fourth consecutive season. UVSC will be looking to maintain its perfect record against SUU as the Wolverines have won the previous three games.

The game will be the season opener for both teams. The Wolverines have a 3-0-0 record against the Thunderbirds, including a thrilling, come-from-behind overtime win last season. All of the previous three games have been close, with UVSC winning each by just one goal.

After today's game, Utah Valley State will begin a four-game road swing when the Wolverines head to Albuquerque, N.M., to take on New Mexico and Long Island.

No. 15 Cougar spikers host No. 10 Wisconsin in tourney

DAILY HERALD

The No. 15 BYU women's volleyball team opens its 2007 season by hosting the BYU Molten Classic today and Saturday in the Smith Fieldhouse.

No. 10 Wisconsin highlights the four-team field, along with 2006 NCAA Tournament participants American and Northern Iowa.

"This is an important week for our program," said BYU head coach Jason Watson. "We get to open our home schedule with three nationally competitive programs. The challenge for our team will be to improve upon the lessons learnt last weekend."

The tournament begins at 4 p.m. today with American taking on Northern Iowa, followed by the featured match between BYU and Wisconsin at 7 p.m. The event will begin Friday at 4 p.m. with American taking on Northern Iowa before the featured match between the Badgers and Cougars at 7 p.m., which will be televised live on BYU-TV.

Saturday's action begins at 10 a.m. with Wisconsin facing Northern Iowa. BYU faces American at noon. In the evening, Wisconsin faces American at 4 p.m. and BYU takes on Northern Iowa at 7 p.m.

Live stats will be available for all six matches at BYUCougars.com.

BYU went 12-1 in the Smith Fieldhouse last year and set a new program attendance record with an average of 1,902 fans, 13th in the nation. The Cougars are now 460-82 (.849) all-time at home and 22-1 on Elaine Michaelis Court over the last two years. With a 995-274-5 all-time record in the 39-year recorded history of BYU wom-

BYU Molten Classic

When: Today, Saturday

Who: No. 15 BYU, No. 10 Wisconsin, American, Northern Iowa

Schedule: Today, American vs. Northern Iowa, 4 p.m.; Wisconsin vs. BYU, 7 p.m. Saturday, Wisconsin vs. Northern Iowa, 10 a.m.; BYU vs. American, Noon; Wisconsin vs. American, 4 p.m.; BYU vs. Northern Iowa, 7 p.m.

TV: Tonight, BYU vs. Wisconsin, 7 p.m. BYU-TV

averaging 5.5 kills per game, including 27 against GW, on .326 hitting. As a team, the Eagles are hitting .295 while holding opponents to a .113 offensive mark. American bests its opponents in every statistical category.

The Eagles' participation in the BYU Molten Classic marks the return of former BYU All-American setter Lauren Richards Evans to the Smith Fieldhouse. Evans finished her Cougar career in 2005 third all-time at BYU in career assist average (12.29) and total assists (4,056). She was hired as an assistant with the Eagles prior to the 2006 season.

Northern Iowa jumped out to a 2-1 start after claiming the UNI Invitational crown last weekend. The Panthers swept Western Michigan and Wright State to open the year before falling at Kentucky in five games. Two UNI players are averaging over three kills per game as junior middle blocker Ashton Stelken is posting 3.73 kpg and sophomore outside hitter Shannon Aschoff is right behind with 3.27 kpg. As a team, the Panthers are hitting .279 while holding opponents to a .141 offensive mark. UNI bests its opponents in every statistical category.

The Cougars began the season last weekend, winning the Hawkeye Challenge with a sweep of Marquette (30-23, 30-27, 30-22) on Friday and a five-game victory over Iowa on Saturday (21-30, 21-30, 30-19, 30-26, 15-13). Three Cougars received All-Tournament honors: Chelsea Goodman was named the tournament MVP, while Rachel Dyer and Bryn Porter were named to the all-tournament team.

en's volleyball, the Cougars are just five victories away from becoming the fourth program in volleyball history to post 1,000 wins.

Wisconsin is 3-0 in 2007 after claiming the InnTowner Invitational title last weekend with sweeps of UW-Milwaukee, Gardner-Webb and Syracuse. Sophomore outside hitter Britney Dolgner paces the Badgers with 4.88 kills per game while adding 2.12 digs per contest. The Badgers, who hit .271, are holding their opponents to a dismal .012 offensive efficiency while besting foes in every statistical category.

American is off to a 3-0 record after capturing the D.C. Volleyball Challenge Crown with sweeps of Georgetown and George Mason and a five-game come-from-behind victory over George Washington. Junior outside hitter Rubena Sukaj, a native of Albania, leads the Eagles

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