

MEDIA GUIDE

# WPBL

2027



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# 2027 WPBL Media Guide

## Contributors

*As a collaboration between the WPBL Media Department and some of the best journalists in the business, the WPBL would like to thank the following for helping make this guide happen.*

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The WPBL Content Delivery Team



# In Memoriam

*Contributed by Squirt Davis*

Bo F. Bunyan, the baseball man,  
Led the Western Pioneer Baseball League with a plan,  
His love for the game was known far and wide,  
But fate had a different route for him to abide.

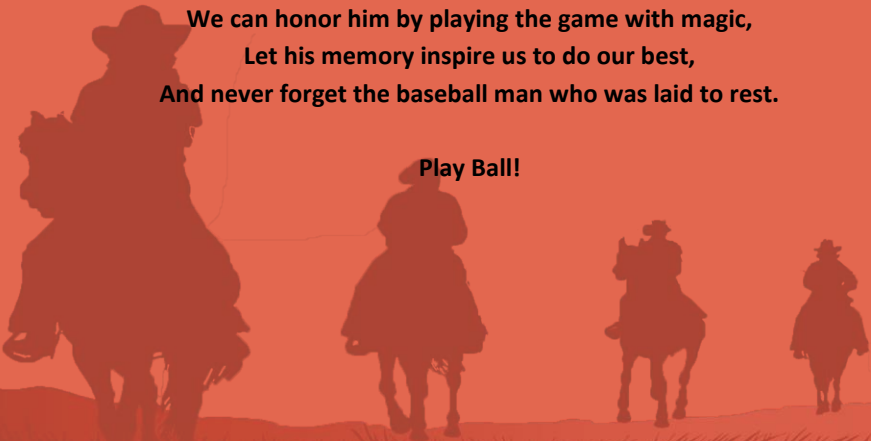
One day, he set out on a balloon ride,  
To explore the skies and take in the sights,  
Little did he know, danger was lurking nearby,  
As the air force saw his balloon up high.

Mistaken for a Chinese spy balloon,  
Bo's fate was sealed way too soon,  
The air force attacked without any remorse,  
Leaving behind nothing but a tragic force.

Bo may be gone, but not forgotten,  
His passion for baseball lives on in the league he'd run often,  
May his spirit soar high in the heavens above,  
And his love for the game forever live on

Though his death was unexpected and tragic,  
We can honor him by playing the game with magic,  
Let his memory inspire us to do our best,  
And never forget the baseball man who was laid to rest.

**Play Ball!**



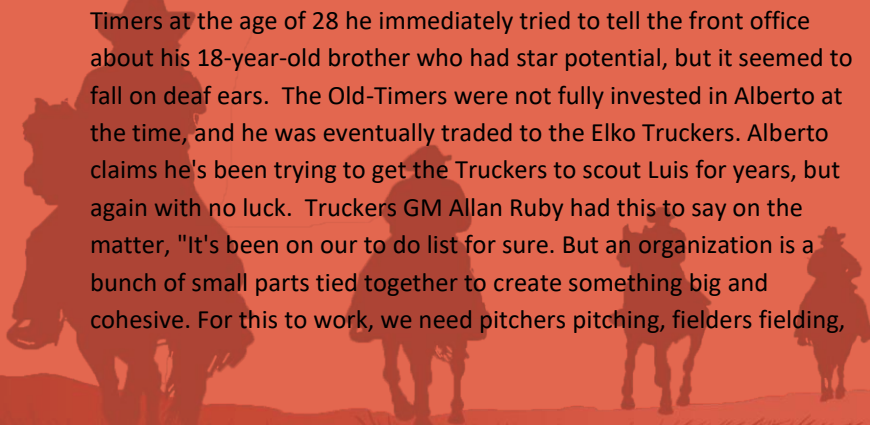
# A New Star Emerges

## *The Story of How Luis Herrera Became the WPBL's Next Big Thing*

*Contributed by Mitch Isosceles*

Throughout the first 6 years of the WPBL, we've had a few players that arrived out of nowhere and instantly created a buzz that reverberated throughout the entire Northwest United States. The most notable were Victor Patterson and Fernando Jimenez. Both players came to the WPBL as unknowns, but their intrigue and potential led to bidding wars and big-time contracts despite never stepping onto a WPBL field. This year we have a similar story in that of Luis Herrera. He just recently signed an 8-year contract for \$7,243,175, which includes 7 years in which he'll be making 968,000. Let's investigate how Herrera managed to land one of the most lucrative contracts in WPBL history despite the fact that no one knew who he was 6 months ago:

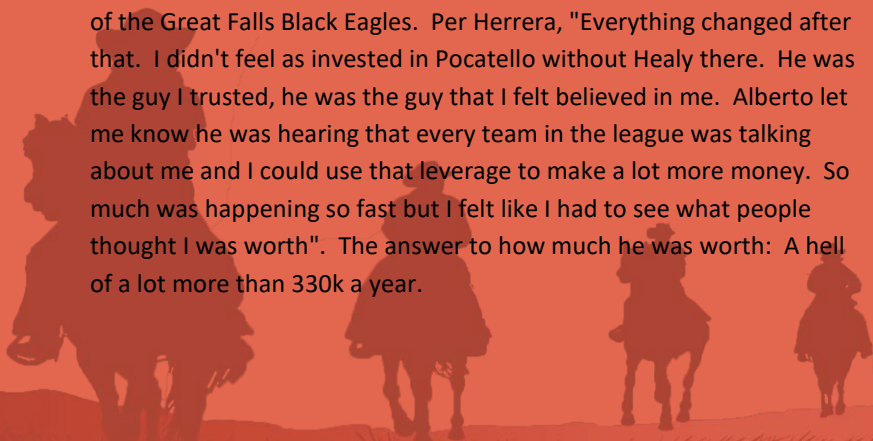
Luis has finally been discovered for one reason and one reason only: his older brother Alberto. The brothers grew up together in the Dominican Republic, and despite a ten-year difference in age they were always close. When I sat down with Alberto he talked about their instant bond over baseball, "As soon as Luis could walk he was following me to my little league games. He was obsessed with baseball before he was out of diapers. I always knew one day he was going to be a star". When Alberto was signed by the Pocatello Old-Timers at the age of 28 he immediately tried to tell the front office about his 18-year-old brother who had star potential, but it seemed to fall on deaf ears. The Old-Timers were not fully invested in Alberto at the time, and he was eventually traded to the Elko Truckers. Alberto claims he's been trying to get the Truckers to scout Luis for years, but again with no luck. Truckers GM Allan Ruby had this to say on the matter, "It's been on our to do list for sure. But an organization is a bunch of small parts tied together to create something big and cohesive. For this to work, we need pitchers pitching, fielders fielding,



managers managing, and scouts scouting. Alberto gave us a lead, and we took it into consideration, but the scouting department has a process with these things, and it's something I've learned to trust. No disrespect to Alberto, he's a valued member of the organization. but if we let players decide, the league would be full of brothers and cousins. This scenario is tough though, Luis is a talent."

The big break came in mid-September. Pocatello Old-Timers scouting director Mike Healy was in the Dominican on a scouting assignment to evaluate a pitching prospect that ultimately proved to be not worth his time. On a whim, manager Erik Borchardt advised Healy to check out Herrera based on a vague memory of Alberto advocating for his potential back in 2021. Healy instantly knew he had found something special. Healy and Herrera developed an immediate connection as Healy spoke about bringing him to Pocatello and turning him into a franchise player for the Old-Timers. Herrera stated "I was so excited. I've been waiting for this moment my whole life and I finally had an opportunity to go play in the same league as my older brother. I trusted Mike Healy and Pocatello made a generous offer, I was ready to accept."

The story didn't end there though, everything fell apart when the duo returned to the United States. As the Pocatello front office wrote up the contract, Mike Healy was busy making deals of his own. Before Herrera was able to sign an agreed upon 330k a year contract with the Old-Timers, Mike Healy unexpectedly left to become the Assistant GM of the Great Falls Black Eagles. Per Herrera, "Everything changed after that. I didn't feel as invested in Pocatello without Healy there. He was the guy I trusted, he was the guy that I felt believed in me. Alberto let me know he was hearing that every team in the league was talking about me and I could use that leverage to make a lot more money. So much was happening so fast but I felt like I had to see what people thought I was worth". The answer to how much he was worth: A hell of a lot more than 330k a year.



A bidding war ensued that included half the league throwing their hats in the ring. The contest quickly got out of a certain team's price range, but Luis and his agent put on a master-class in free agent negotiation. Herrera emerged with possibly the most lucrative contract in WPBL history and the closest thing we've seen to a 7-figure long-term deal when he signed with the Astoria Fighting Chinooks. Herrera had this to say on the process, "Initially I felt devastated when Mike Healy left the Old-Timers and briefly considered heading back home to the Dominican. Thank God my brother was able to talk some sense into me and make sure I understood the buzz throughout the league. This contract is a blessing for myself and my family and I'm so excited to be a part of the Fighting Chinooks. I know they've struggled some in recent years, but this team is stacked with young talent and it's clear that success is coming soon. Jimmy Johnson and I talked in-depth about his vision of the future and my role in it and I just knew it was where I wanted to play. When you pair that with financial investment the organization was willing to make to get me here, it's a dream come true"

Despite the roller coaster of emotions, this offseason was certainly a best-case scenario for Luis Herrera. There will clearly be a lot of eyes on this young player each and every season as will be highly scrutinized by management, fans, and the media who will analyze if he's living up to his salary. Regardless, he's made his money and his life has just become a lot more comfortable. The real pressure is on Astoria and Jimmy Johnson. This contract could go one of two ways: Either Herrera lives up to his potential and he becomes a cornerstone of a Chinook dynasty or he underperforms and is a financial burden to the team's rebuild as Astoria will inevitably be looking for the money to sign all of their young stars to longer-term contracts. GM Jimmy Johnson has long been vocal about his desire for a franchise CF and he obviously was willing to take the gamble on Herrera. He had this to say about Herrera, "Luis is a great guy, a real hard working soul. He never checks out, either working out or learning from the coaches and vets from dawn till dusk. We've been able to draft a great team, don't get me wrong, but we've been looking for that one true franchise bat. Luis

delivers that for us. Elite defense at a premium position, elite on-base skills that will suit our park perfectly, and a can-do attitude up there with the likes of our vets. He's the leadoff hitter of the future, and we'd pay any price to get a guy of Luis's caliber at the top of our lineup 9 times out of 10. Everything's an investment, but none have felt as sure as this one."

On the eve of the 2027 season, we sit in an interesting spot for Herrera. His local and national popularity is still unknown. While his arrival made a splash on the league's front offices and scouts, he's still an enigma to the fans. They don't know how good he'll look on the field. They don't know his personality. They don't know if he's worth the money. Truthfully, they don't know anything about him. They want to though...everyone does. As we get ready for this new season, we're all about to find out.





# Rogue Deere

## *Rumors Abound as Another Trucker Suffers at the Hands of His Lawn Equipment*

*Contributed by Alfred Igloo*

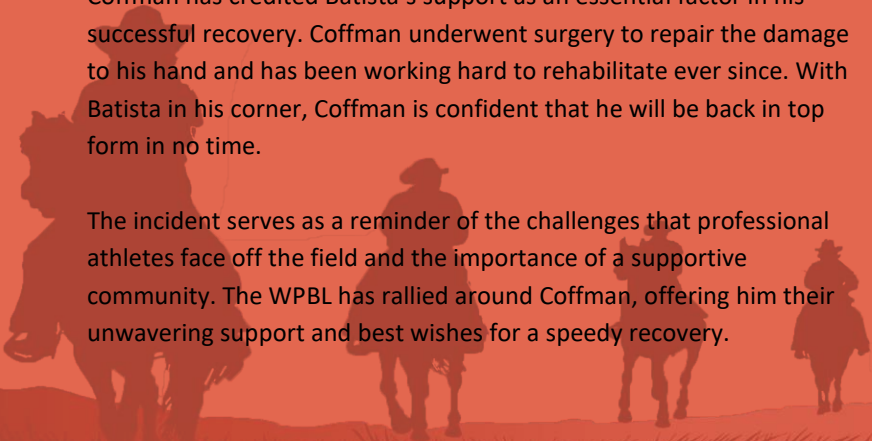
Catcher Nick Coffman of the Elko Truckers has overcome a major obstacle in his career after experiencing a tragic accident off the field. Coffman was mowing the lawn at his home when his left hand got caught in the lawnmower blade, resulting in several fingers being chopped off.

The incident could have been career-ending for Coffman, who is a right handed catcher in the league. However, he showed resilience in the face of adversity and refused to let the accident derail his career. Coffman found solace and support from a fellow baseball player, Moises Batista, who had also suffered a similar injury in the past. Batista, who plays for the Pocatello Old-Timers, was quick to comfort Coffman and offer words of encouragement.

Batista's experience with the same injury gave Coffman hope that he could still bounce back and return to the field. The two shared their experiences and talked about the challenges and obstacles they had overcome throughout their careers.

Coffman has credited Batista's support as an essential factor in his successful recovery. Coffman underwent surgery to repair the damage to his hand and has been working hard to rehabilitate ever since. With Batista in his corner, Coffman is confident that he will be back in top form in no time.

The incident serves as a reminder of the challenges that professional athletes face off the field and the importance of a supportive community. The WPBL has rallied around Coffman, offering him their unwavering support and best wishes for a speedy recovery.



Coffman's determination and resilience are a true testament to the strength and character of professional athletes. We wish him all the best in his recovery and look forward to seeing him back on the mound soon.



# Spitballin' With Salas

*Contributed by Richard Salas*

*During the offseason, Richard Salas hosted a very successful, 12-part podcast series titled "Spitballin' with Salas." This podcast provided WPBL fans an inside look into the minds of some of the most renowned players in the league during the dog days of the offseason. It caught fire and hit #3 on the top sports podcasts charts in December. In preparation for the 2027 season, each episode will be summarized here. The podcast format featured 2-3 players from each team, and they discussed varying topics for about an hour.*

*\*NOTE: The Elko episode occurred BEFORE the second lawn mowing accident with C Nick Coffman.*

## **Episode 1: Elko Truckers**

Players Interviewed: LF Brian Sicard, CF/RF Ashton Hamby

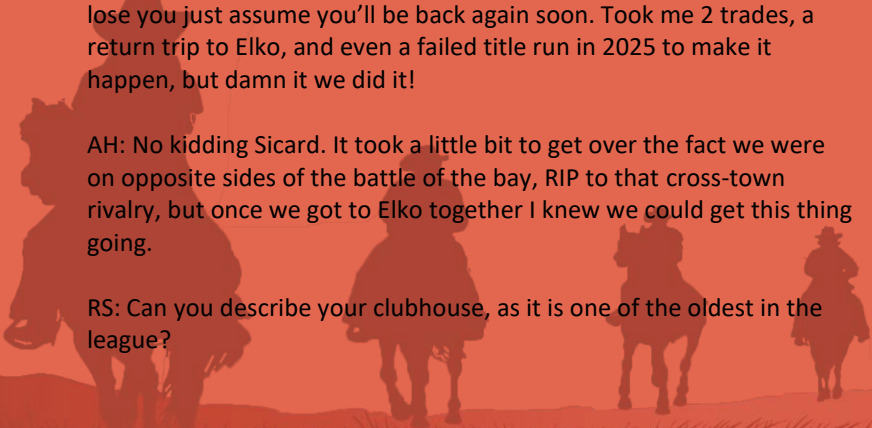
*This episode was high spirited and laid back as it came not long after the Elko championship run. The players talked getting over the championship hump, Randy BBQ's ridiculous weight lifting routine, Joe Watt's mastery of the pickleball court, and Sean Worth's injury history leading to him being the best golfer on the team*

RS: You two have been mainstays in the league for a while. Can you tell me how it feels to capture that first title?

BS: It feels good! I'm no spring chicken and I know my days are numbered. After being so close in my first season with Elko, when you lose you just assume you'll be back again soon. Took me 2 trades, a return trip to Elko, and even a failed title run in 2025 to make it happen, but damn it we did it!

AH: No kidding Sicard. It took a little bit to get over the fact we were on opposite sides of the battle of the bay, RIP to that cross-town rivalry, but once we got to Elko together I knew we could get this thing going.

RS: Can you describe your clubhouse, as it is one of the oldest in the league?



AH: Man, I get the sense that people around the league think we just play baseball, complain about taxes or landscaping or whatever, then head home. It's not the case at all. Are we professional? Of course. We bring the effort, But it's a long season and we aren't afraid of a little fun.

BS: Ha! Ain't that the truth. Are we going out to the clubs a ton? No, a lot of us do have wives and kids and all that. But there's a lot of traveling and a lot of time spent together. We get out on the golf course when we can and even play some really good practical jokes on each other.

RS: Who gets pranked the most you think?

AH and BS simultaneously: Randy.

BS: It's not even close. The best one was when we really convinced him the only bed available on a certain road trip was some top bunk. He climbed up and the whole thing collapsed. We're lucky he's as durable as a bear.

RS: Any closing thoughts heading into the 2027 season?

AH: A lot of people think we have peaked and its downhill from here. Gary Johnson, Randy BBQ, Sterling Snell, Josh Hall, Matt Vasbinder. These are young, hungry dudes.

BS: Yeah! Not to mention, we have some left in the tank too!

AH: I do. Not sure about your Sicard. If you steal more bases than get caught this year, I will stop calling you old

## **Episode 2: Pocatello Old-Timers**

Players Interviewed: C Kyle Kulzer, SS Fernando Jimenez

*Salas had a great interview with perennial all-star Kyle Kulzer and MVP hopeful Fernando Jimenez. They covered serious topics such as Pocatello's title hopes in 2027 and how King Kong could return to form.*



*They also discussed Chris Ponder's weird breakfast (peanut butter on a jalapeno bagel), Jaden Richardson's unstoppable jump shot during pickup games, and how Victor Melendez and Moises Bautista had a cooking contest to see who could make the best dinner entree. Melendez's seafood Paella edged out Bautista's surf and turf enchiladas.*

RS: Fernando, if willing, care to discuss 2026? And how do you plan to get back on track to your high level of play in 2027?

FJ: Just sticking to the script. I've been working with my coaches and fixing some things mechanically that should lead to a more repeatable swing.

KK: My man has got it. Fernando is the hardest working man I know, and we work in a field full of hard working men. 2027 MVP is right here. Book it!

RS: Is it true that Ponder and 1B Danny Rivera have some sort of season long competition going?

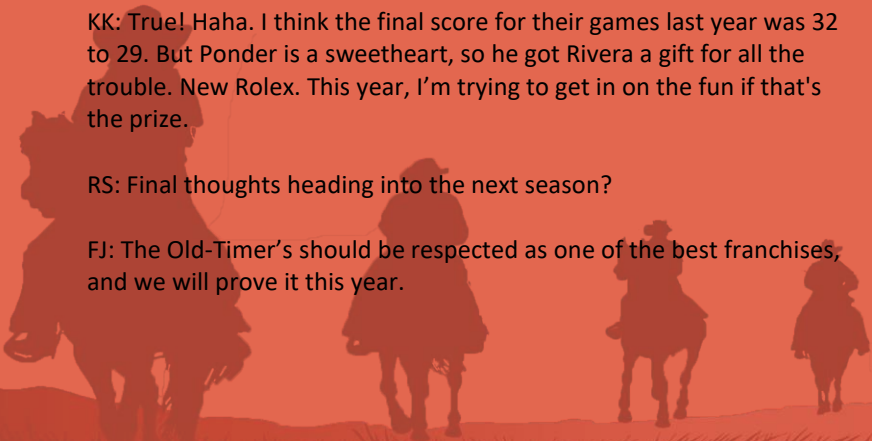
KK: Those dudes are crazy. They're always arm wrestling, or seeing who can run to the center field fence faster, playing chess, or even seeing who could jump rope the longest.

FJ: Seems Ponder always wins at the end, which is par for the course. Last year, they even wanted to see who could sketch a flower better. They picked some judges and everything. Ponder is legit on the pad. Rivera's looked like something my six-year-old drew.

KK: True! Haha. I think the final score for their games last year was 32 to 29. But Ponder is a sweetheart, so he got Rivera a gift for all the trouble. New Rolex. This year, I'm trying to get in on the fun if that's the prize.

RS: Final thoughts heading into the next season?

FJ: The Old-Timer's should be respected as one of the best franchises, and we will prove it this year.



KK: After some years in the WPBL, I think we've adjusted to all the ups and downs in a long season. I think Gillette taught us, you gotta play good enough baseball in the regular season to make the playoffs, then the rest is just peaking at the right time.

FJ: Exactly, I'm hoping to make it back to that title series.

### **Episode 3: Astoria Fighting Chinooks**

Players Interviewed: SP Gabe Castaneda, LF Joram van der Wal, and RP Tyler Benfield

*This episode highlighted 3 young guys who represent the core of Astoria. They talked about how they got some of the older veterans into COD, How Gabe introduced skeptical Joram to sushi and raw oysters, and how Tyler still models so much of his approach to being a reliever to things he learned from his time with Sean Rahm.*

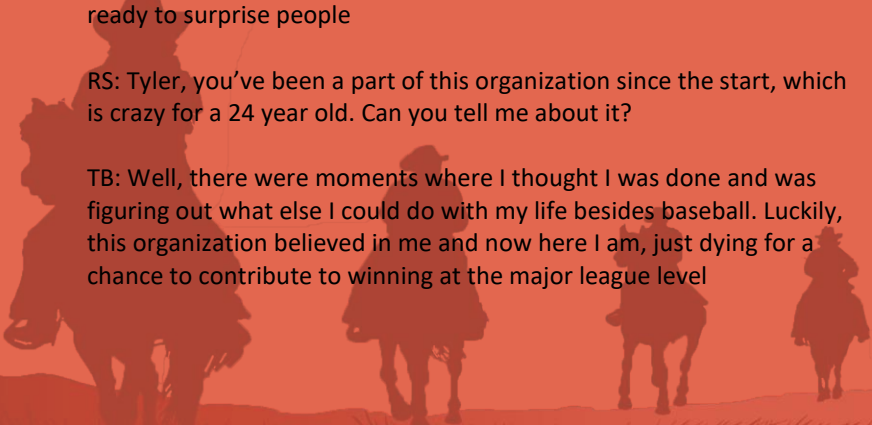
RS: A lot has been said about the process of building something long term in Astoria. Can you speak to it?

JV: It's no secret we haven't won a ton of games these last few years. But when I look around the clubhouse, I see a growing culture based on hard work and skill. We have young guys coming in via draft or trade or whatever with pedigree and a willingness to put in the long hours

GC: Exactly. Nobody likes losing, especially everyone here in this booth right now. But it's our firm belief that our losing is behind us and we're ready to surprise people

RS: Tyler, you've been a part of this organization since the start, which is crazy for a 24 year old. Can you tell me about it?

TB: Well, there were moments where I thought I was done and was figuring out what else I could do with my life besides baseball. Luckily, this organization believed in me and now here I am, just dying for a chance to contribute to winning at the major league level



RS: What's the clubhouse like, seeing as it's composed of mostly guys under 30?

TB: We play a lot of baseball, just like every other team. We also play a decent amount of video games.

JV: I RAAAAAAAAAKE when it comes to FIFA. I think I made more than my baseball salary off Josh Richardson playing FIFA. I'll pick some trash team, he'll pick Spain or Brazil or some other stacked team, and I'll still kill him!

GC: We also like cards. Learned that from Josh Richardson too. He's a grouchy old dude, but he's our grouchy old dude, and we love him

RS: Final Thoughts for next season?

JV: Improvement.

GC: Exactly

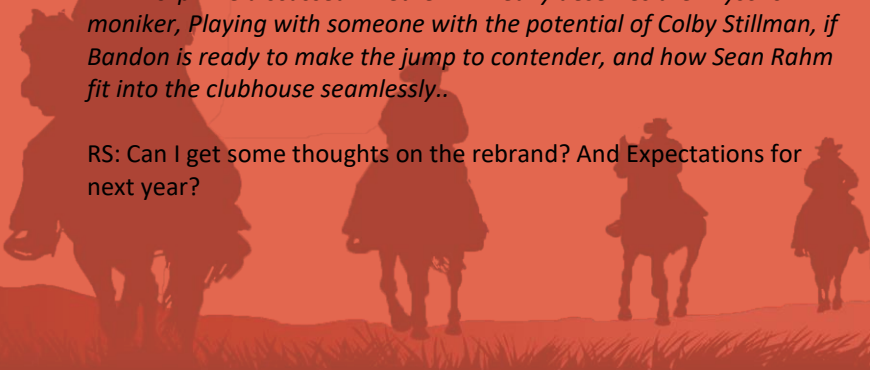
TB: We may not be "Compete for a division title" good yet. But we're planning to get better every day and be a tough out for any team on any night.

## Episode 4: Bandon Barons

Players Interviewed: SP Jim Thorp and 1B Dana Krynski

*Although SP/DH Colby Stillman was unavailable for the podcast due to scheduling conflicts( fan tour across Japan and South Korea), we had an amazingly frank conversation with up and coming Dana Krynski and Jim Thorp. We discussed whether Jim really deserves the "Psycho" moniker, Playing with someone with the potential of Colby Stillman, if Bandon is ready to make the jump to contender, and how Sean Rahm fit into the clubhouse seamlessly..*

RS: Can I get some thoughts on the rebrand? And Expectations for next year?



JT: Love love love it. I think it was about time we got a little more.... How can I say this, intimidating? Show the league we're contenders to be feared.

DK (laughing): The new look vibes perfectly with Jim. As you can see, he can be a little intense. But the look fits the vibe of the team, and Jim really has us all believing 2027 is going to be our year

JT: Damn Right it is!

DK: Jim has been in Bandon since the start of the WPBL. We want to get him a ring before his old ass hangs them up. Part of us is worried he may never retire unless he gets one. The last thing we want is a crabby, 50-year-old Thorp crawling through the clubhouse

RS: Some are saying you should even be counted as the favorites next season. Is there truth in that?

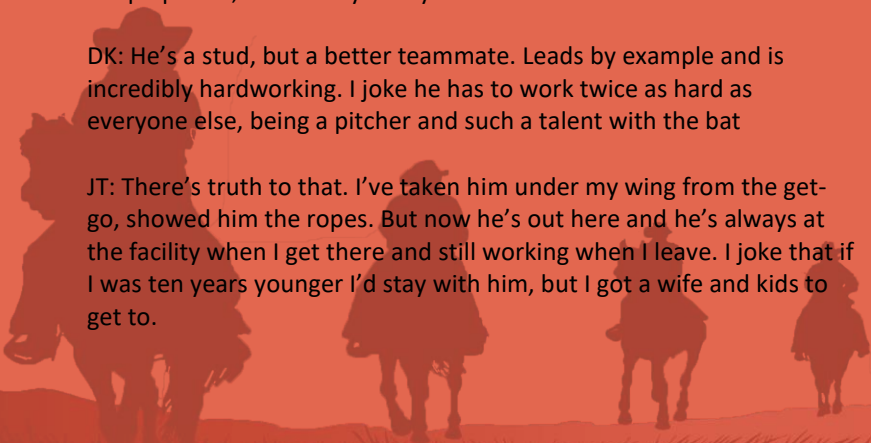
JT: Well, we haven't proven shit yet so I don't think we should be favorites. At the same time, I don't really care because it all comes down to what happens on the field. And I'm ready to prove some stuff!

DK: We really feel, with our additions, we have plus players at every position. I think our lineup has top offense potential, while our pitching remains top notch. And with a budding superstar like Colby holding it all down, it really inspires confidence in all of us.

RS: Stillman is a huge fan favorite, and only 25 years old. Before we wrap up here, what can you say about him?

DK: He's a stud, but a better teammate. Leads by example and is incredibly hardworking. I joke he has to work twice as hard as everyone else, being a pitcher and such a talent with the bat

JT: There's truth to that. I've taken him under my wing from the get-go, showed him the ropes. But now he's out here and he's always at the facility when I get there and still working when I leave. I joke that if I was ten years younger I'd stay with him, but I got a wife and kids to get to.





## Episode 5: Walla Walla Wallabies

Players Interviewed: SS Frank Reetz, LF Gumball Washington

*We got a good conversation going with the youngins' out of Walla Walla. The under 25ers talk Frank's first all-star game appearance, how Gumball wants the all-time steals record, Sistrunk and Wolverton's friendly but sometimes intensely fiery relationship, and John Bumiller's obsession with everything Elon Musk or Tesla-related.*

RS: Frank, There are so many good young players in the league, sometimes people forget to say your name when naming up and coming players in the WPBL, despite you hitting for a ~ .720 ops in your first 2 full seasons at the major level.

FR: That might be true, but I understand I'm young and will have to put in the work continually to get the recognition

GW: Don't listen to him. Frank's a stud. He had an unfortunate year with the glove last year, but I've seen him do things in practice that some other fielders can only dream of. That SS out in Kennewick is a shoo-in for gold glove every year, and rightfully so. But I'm telling you, don't be surprised when Frank's hat is in the ring this year.

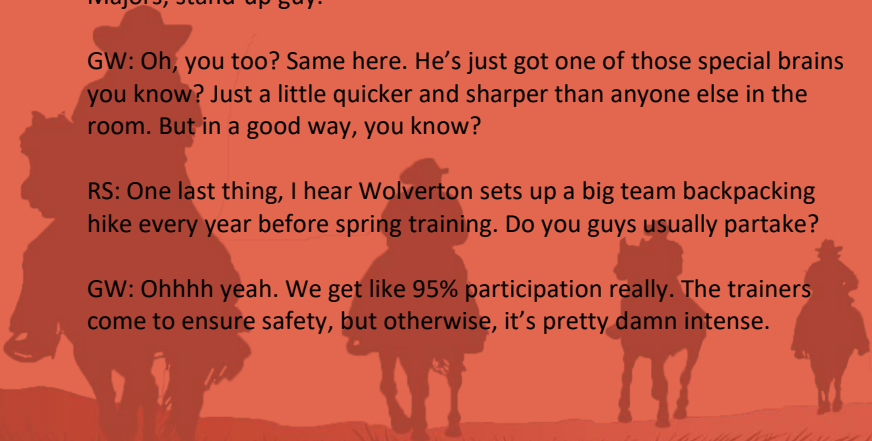
RS: How's it working with John Wolverton? 2-time MVP

FR: I was pretty scared of him at first. he's not the most talkative by any means, but over time I realize he's always willing to give tips when asked. Not just about baseball either. He's the one who actually helped me set up my retirement accounts when I made it to the Majors, stand-up guy.

GW: Oh, you too? Same here. He's just got one of those special brains you know? Just a little quicker and sharper than anyone else in the room. But in a good way, you know?

RS: One last thing, I hear Wolverton sets up a big team backpacking hike every year before spring training. Do you guys usually partake?

GW: Ohhhh yeah. We get like 95% participation really. The trainers come to ensure safety, but otherwise, it's pretty damn intense.



FR: Last year we did one through Mt. Rainier. Beautiful. Wolverton even buys all the gear for any young guys, especially on smaller contracts. It gets coooooold. I shared a tent with Gumball and we had to cuddle for warmth one of the nights

GW: Dude! We said we weren't supposed to talk about that.

FR: Ha! It's alright man. It's a real character building trip though, and really leads to more camaraderie going into the season.

GW: I think we might be going somewhere a little more south this year. There are rumblings he's got Yosemite in mind, and that we're going to hike Half Dome or something. If so, I'm stopping at the bottom of the rock. I hate heights.

RS: Thoughts on next season?

GW: Playoffs for sure.

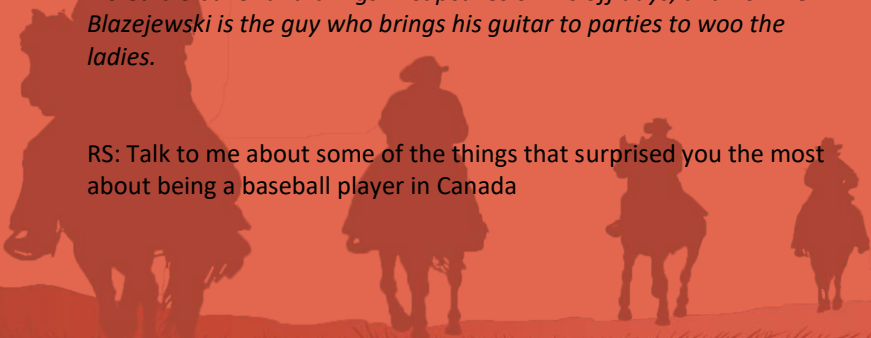
FR: Without a doubt. We owe it to the older guys. With the expansion and the new format, there's no way we shouldn't be in the mix. And I don't know about you, but if I were on the other team, Wolverton and Sistrunk would be the last thing I would want to see in the postseason.

## Episode 6: Victoria Geese

Players: 2B Frank Vitela and Closer Ross Blanchette

*On This episode, members of our only WPBL international team discuss the best places for poutine in Victoria, the challenge of travel as a Geese, the highly competitive Coastal division, how Manny Gaona is an incredible baker and brings in cupcakes on his off days, and how Kevin Blazejewski is the guy who brings his guitar to parties to woo the ladies.*

RS: Talk to me about some of the things that surprised you the most about being a baseball player in Canada



RB: For me, it's just their love for the game. After starting my career in Elko, a trucker town in Nevada, a coastal Canadian city seems like it would be the opposite. I guess I assumed their fandom for baseball would be less too? Boy was I wrong. These fans love their Geese and I've felt the love since day 1.

FV: I don't have anything to compare it to like Ross did, since I've been with the organization since the start, but as a player coming from Venezuela, I feel like any city was going to be foreign to me. Surprisingly, Victoria felt like home to me faster than I ever thought.

RB: Poutine helps that. Frank loves his fries!

FV(Laughing): Hey Man! That's my "steal bases" fuel. Don't diet shame me!

RS: I've heard stuff about Victoria having a top notch coaching staff. Thoughts?

RB: It's kind of our best kept secret, but I'll talk. Matt Gyasi, our pitching coach, is LEGIT. We have started to call him Sensei of the waves. He's a huge old man, 6'5" and 235, but he's a walking box of pitching knowledge and life wisdom. He's always comparing pitching to surfing, which he always reminds us is not as good as it is back home in southern California.

FV: Tell him his motto!

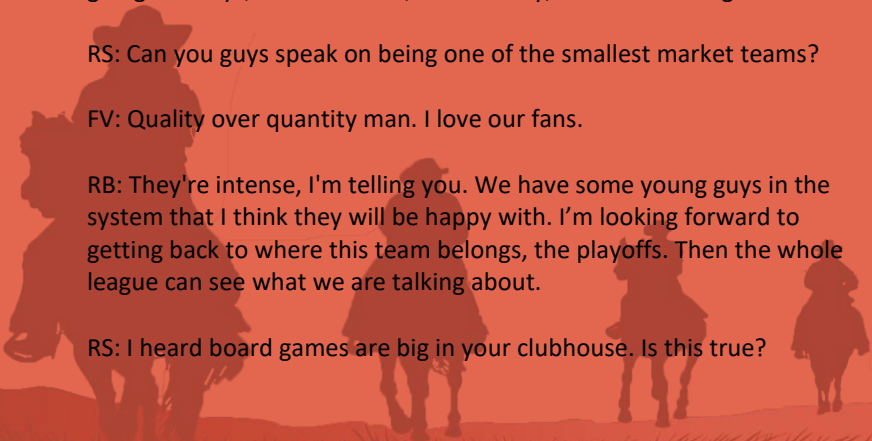
RB: Dude is super serene. He's got this Matthew McConaughey vibe going and says, "Ball or Strike, don't worry, it will all be alright"

RS: Can you guys speak on being one of the smallest market teams?

FV: Quality over quantity man. I love our fans.

RB: They're intense, I'm telling you. We have some young guys in the system that I think they will be happy with. I'm looking forward to getting back to where this team belongs, the playoffs. Then the whole league can see what we are talking about.

RS: I heard board games are big in your clubhouse. Is this true?



RB: Man like you wouldn't believe.

FV: IT actually started with Hoffman always wanting to play Catan. We still play that, but we have so many different things going now.

RB: Not odd to see 6 or 7 different games going on at once on the team bus, especially when stopped at customs trying to get home.

FV: They're going to kill me, but I'm even getting a D&D campaign going with Ken Williams and Manny Gaona. First time I'll be a dungeon master, super excited.

## Episode 7: Lake Tahoe Mustangs

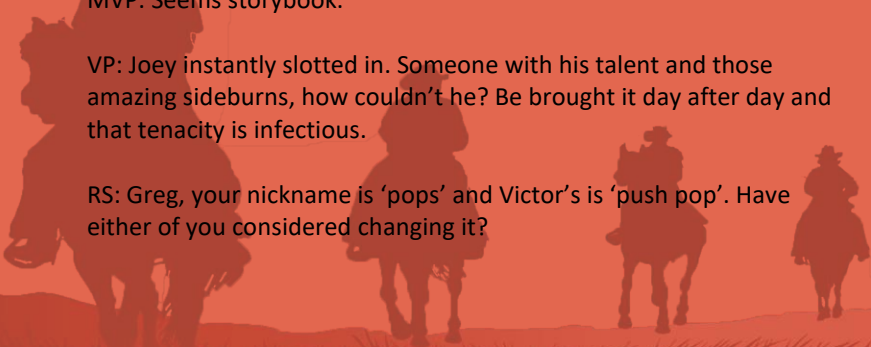
Players: RF Joey Hoffman, SPs Victor Patterson and Greg Herfurth  
*This insightful episode was Hoffman's first podcast appearance since winning his first MVP. We discussed that, along with what makes Lake Tahoe the most consistently good team in the WPBL, whether Ruben Galaviz really eats 4 Reese's peanut butter cups before every game, and how manager Ryan Hollister is an avid back country snow shoe-er.*

RS: Joey Hoffman, can you just break down your first year in Lake Tahoe?

JH: Just crazy man. '25 wasn't the best year for me. Met with some people with Victoria and, credit to them, we had a heart to heart and they got me to Lake Tahoe. Everything was an adjustment, new teammates, new city, hell I was even playing a new position. But in a weird way, all this change led to me to focus on baseball like I never did before. That, along with a very supporting team, led to my first MVP. Seems storybook.

VP: Joey instantly slotted in. Someone with his talent and those amazing sideburns, how couldn't he? Be brought it day after day and that tenacity is infectious.

RS: Greg, your nickname is 'pops' and Victor's is 'push pop'. Have either of you considered changing it?



GH: Man I was a little worried at first. But me and Victor hit it off so it's turned more into a clubhouse joke.

VP: Yeah, we're in the pen together a lot so a lot of the coaches and the other players just reference both of us as "Triple P."

RS: You two (nodding at Triple P) and Danny Schumacher comprise one of, if not the best, starting rotation in the league. How's that like, knowing there's 3 guys who are aces?

VP: I think the best part of it is, we constantly are learning from each other. Mental aspects, mechanics, scouting, whatever, we're always talking.

GH: I say, as a pitcher, especially a starter, your other starters comprise your foxhole. We have some dogs in ours.

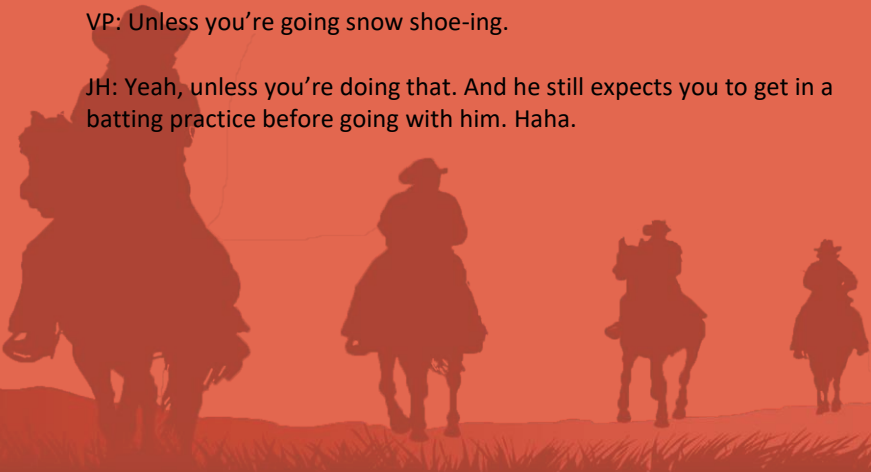
VP: I think the craziest thing is, Greg and Danny aren't even at the top of the games yet! I see them every day and every time they get a little better. This is the type of rotation people will be talking about for years to come

RS: 4 playoff appearances, going for your third in a row this year. What does that say about the Mustangs culture?

JH: Just strive for excellence at all times. Winning is expected here. Ryan[Manager] is from Pennsylvania, so naturally he's a big Bill Belichick fan. Keeps a poster of him in his office to keep him motivated I guess. No days off around these parts

VP: Unless you're going snow shoe-ing.

JH: Yeah, unless you're doing that. And he still expects you to get in a batting practice before going with him. Haha.



## Episode 8: Kennewick Tri-City Atoms

Players: SS Tetsuya Honda and 3B Rafael Trujillo

*This episode we dive deep on the defense first approach out in Kennewick, if 2026 was a fluke, how many gold gloves can Honda win in his career, following Taylor Simkins ascent to #1 prospect, and if Kunihide Tanaka is as big of a My Hero Academia fan as rumored.*

RS: That 2026 team surprised everyone, and you guys have much of the same core. Does that raise your expectations for next season?

RT: You know, we just work hard and let the results speak for themselves. Will we break our own record? I don't know. I do know that most of our guys are going to bring the same effort this year as we did day in and day out last year.

TH: We didn't win the title. This year, we could win less games but win the title, and it will make this season much better than last.

RT: Exactly.

RS: Tetsuya, you turned in one of the best defensive season a SS can. What's your approach to accomplishing something like that?

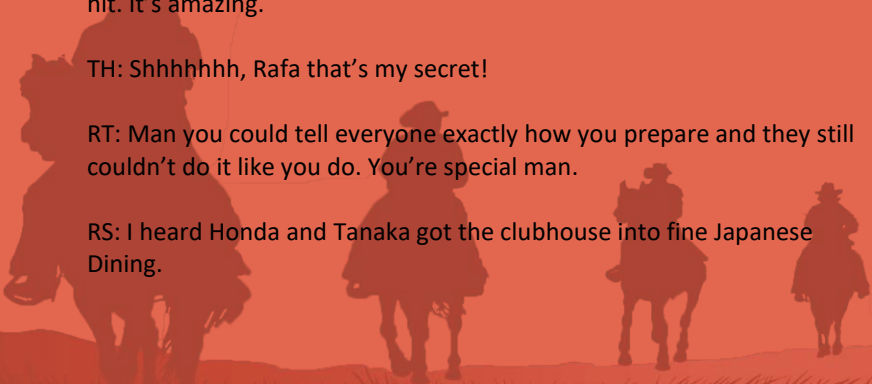
TH: Just 1 play at a time. I bring focus and energy every time, and it pays off.

RT: He's also the smartest guy I've ever met. He's like doing some insane astro-calculus while he's on the field while the rest of us are still in algebra. He has extensive notes and a photographic memory. Then he utilizes it all to almost know where the ball is going before it's hit. It's amazing.

TH: Shhhhhhh, Rafa that's my secret!

RT: Man you could tell everyone exactly how you prepare and they still couldn't do it like you do. You're special man.

RS: I heard Honda and Tanaka got the clubhouse into fine Japanese Dining.



TH: Hahaha we tried. Can't just eat meat and potatoes all the time.

RT: You have no idea. I thought I liked sushi, but they showed us the real stuff. Last week they took some of us to a... uhhh... oh-may.....

TH: Omakase my friend.

RT: Omakase! So good. Expensive, but good. It's like an 18-piece sushi meal made right in front of you. I was eating fish I had never even heard of before. They also showed us Ramen, Japanese Curry, Takoyaki, man the list goes on!

TH: Next offseason I'm even taking some guys home with me to Japan to show them around.

RT: No way, I'm definitely going!

TH: Yes, you're the first one I talked to remember?

RT: wait, did we plan this that one sake night??? Okay, it's coming back now.

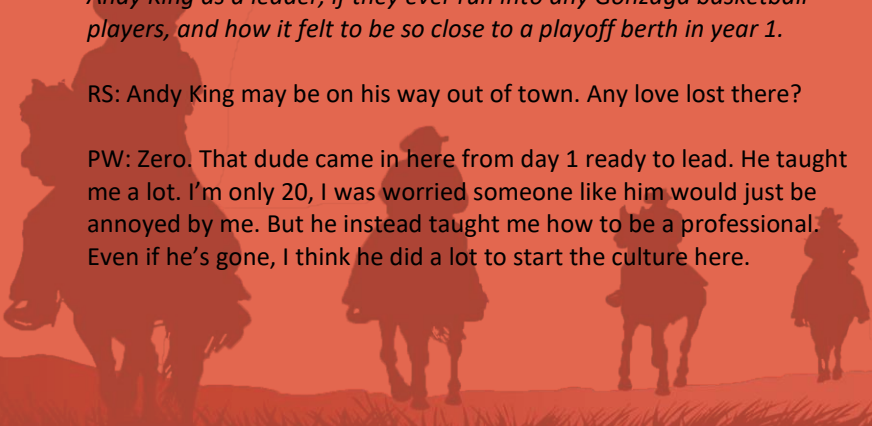
## **Episode 9: Coeur d'Alene Striking Miners**

Players: LF Jamie Knechtges and 1B Pat Weirich

*This episode dives into the ins and outs of being a part of an expansion team, living in Idaho, having fun on the lake of Coeur d'Alene, and how it feels to be labeled the "other" team in Idaho. We also discussed C Andy King as a leader, if they ever run into any Gonzaga basketball players, and how it felt to be so close to a playoff berth in year 1.*

RS: Andy King may be on his way out of town. Any love lost there?

PW: Zero. That dude came in here from day 1 ready to lead. He taught me a lot. I'm only 20, I was worried someone like him would just be annoyed by me. But he instead taught me how to be a professional. Even if he's gone, I think he did a lot to start the culture here.



JK: Without a doubt. I know our pitchers won't be looking forward to pitching to him if he does leave.

RS: How did it feel to be in the playoff race until almost the end last year?

JK: Bittersweet. Obviously, we would have rather made it. But I think it was a big developing moment too. So many young guys and 1st time WPBLers got to feel that stress down the stretch. That will help in the long run.

PW: Yup. Some of those games down the stretch had a playoff atmosphere, which is almost as good as making the playoffs, almost.

RS: Are we thinking playoffs this year?

JK: In the current format, anything is possible. I think what Kennewick did last year showed all these young scrappy teams that you can become better than the sum of your parts.

RS: I hear James Kiser got a hole in one last year on that island green at the golf resort. Any truth?

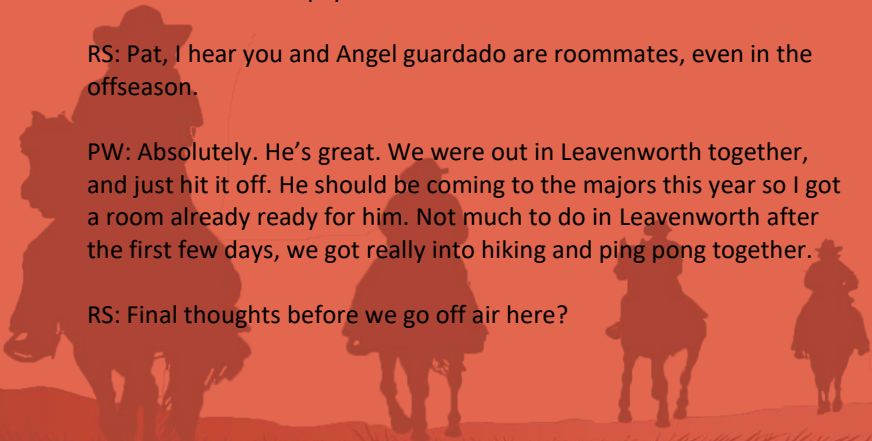
JK: Yeah man, I was there with him. Pitchers are always the best golfers, it's so annoying. I think it was a 6-iron? Seemed like he skulled it and got lucky, but don't tell him I said that.

PW(Laughing): it was 100% lucky! Dude's strength is his short game. But he definitely did it. He facetimed me from the parking lot so excited and a little tipsy to tell me.

RS: Pat, I hear you and Angel Guardado are roommates, even in the offseason.

PW: Absolutely. He's great. We were out in Leavenworth together, and just hit it off. He should be coming to the majors this year so I got a room already ready for him. Not much to do in Leavenworth after the first few days, we got really into hiking and ping pong together.

RS: Final thoughts before we go off air here?





JK: Just that we're building something special here. Look at our young guys, like Pat and Angel, Paul Youse. They're hungry and have something to prove.

## Episode 10: Gillette Bison

Players: LF Marcus Ortiz and C Kevin Cucumber

*This episode was a banger, diving deep into their playoff run, being the first WPBL team to head to Wyoming, Being in a division with Pocatello and Elko, how fast is Ricardo Suarez for real, and how Nick Crespo moved from Walla Walla to Gillette with one box of clothes and his Toyota Celica*

RS: I can't help but look at your season last year and call that first round upset of Pocatello special. How was that?

MO: Great. Very assuring. Yes, our record wasn't very good. But we were at a disadvantage as an expansion team. We were dealing with things that are just afterthoughts to other teams. I felt us peaking down the stretch at the right time.

KC: That game 7 is like, a top 5 memory for life for me. For sure

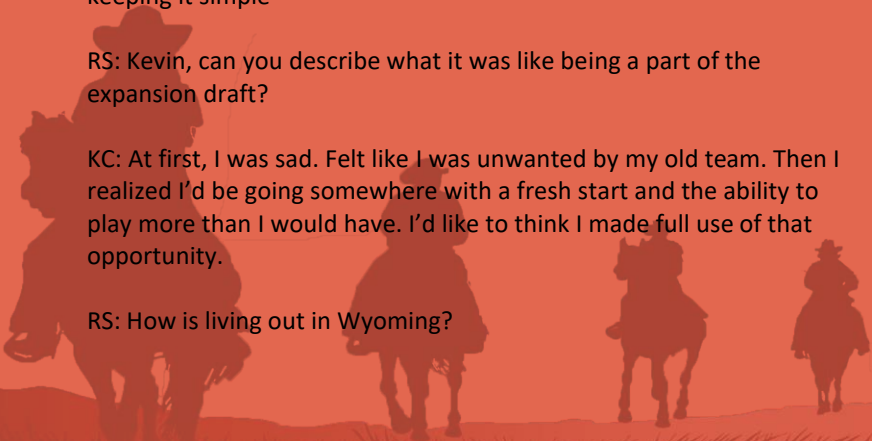
RS: Marcus, you have catapulted yourself into star territory, and ran away with the ROY award. What are you planning for the encore?

MO: More of the same really. I want to hit the ball and win games. Just keeping it simple

RS: Kevin, can you describe what it was like being a part of the expansion draft?

KC: At first, I was sad. Felt like I was unwanted by my old team. Then I realized I'd be going somewhere with a fresh start and the ability to play more than I would have. I'd like to think I made full use of that opportunity.

RS: How is living out in Wyoming?



MO: I think people get the wrong idea about it. Like we're some remote place and live like Amish people or something. This is a fun town and there is always something to do. Couple weeks ago we got together and watched the local indoor football team play. Met the guys after, it was really fun.

KC: Don't forget about that time we went to that amateur wrestling match! The whole team went. It was a blast. Now we're all kind of hooked on wrestling.

MO: Hosting a big WrestleMania party at my house and everything!

RS: Any thoughts on the discussion of best teammate?

MO: I vote for Crespo [Nick]. He's a hunter, and he brings in tons of venison jerky for all the guys.

KC: That's a good one. But I have to go with Jon Traber. He's just a walking, talking good time. Real give the shirt off his back type of guy.

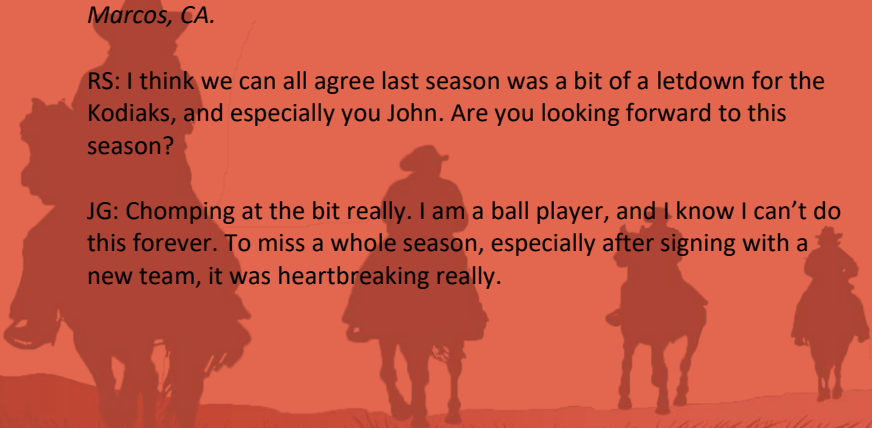
## **Episode 11: Crescent City Kodiaks**

Players: LF Bryan Elbert and RP John Good

*Touching base with the only California team, this episode covers varying topics: the confusing nature of taxes as Californians, the beauty of Red Wood trees, John Good's road to recovery leading to a hopeful bounce back in 2027, how Bam Boozled has one of the best names in sports, and Chris Mistretta's love for his hometown of San Marcos, CA.*

RS: I think we can all agree last season was a bit of a letdown for the Kodiaks, and especially you John. Are you looking forward to this season?

JG: Chomping at the bit really. I am a ball player, and I know I can't do this forever. To miss a whole season, especially after signing with a new team, it was heartbreaking really.



BE: (Reaches over and puts a hand on John's shoulder, very reassuringly)

JG: Sorry, need to compose myself. It was tough, man. mentally, physically, emotionally. Luckily guys like Bryan here and Chris Mistretta and countless others were huge in still making me feel like I was a part of the team throughout all the rehab. I am ready to come back in 2027 and show the town what I can bring to the table.

RS: What was the vibe in the clubhouse, underperforming a little after making the playoffs in '25?

BE: You would think it would be worse, but it's baseball. There's winners and losers. Luckily we have coaches like our Hitting Coach, Chris Eagleton, who are so easygoing and always help you get better, no matter what. Even out of the playoff race, we had guys working on getting better and I think that's a sign of the sort of team we are.

RS: I just got news of the Sandy Gonzalez trade. Think that affects your chances to compete next year?

JG: I mean, probably? Never like losing anyone the caliber of Sandy.

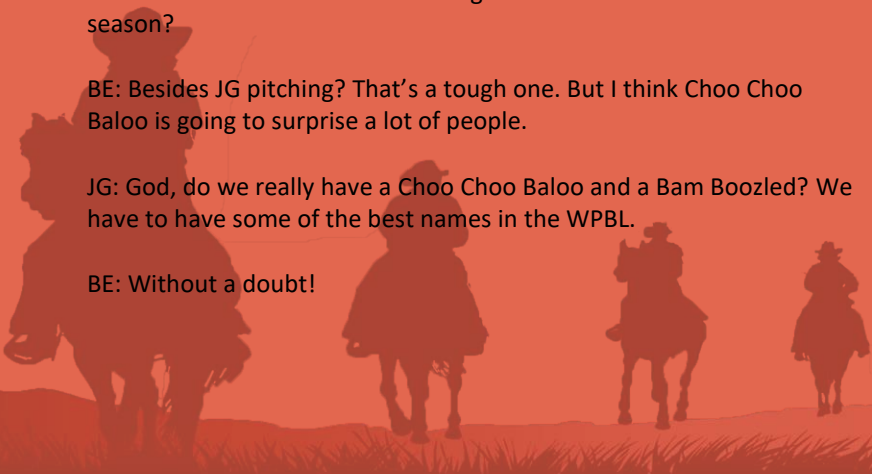
BE: Sandy is a good dude and did his best while here in Crescent City. But it just wasn't working out for whatever reason. Sometimes, it's just better for both sides to go separate ways. I wish him the best in Bandon. I hope he can get me on Bandon Dunes for a tee time sometime though

RS: What should CCK fans be looking forward to the most for next season?

BE: Besides JG pitching? That's a tough one. But I think Choo Choo Baloo is going to surprise a lot of people.

JG: God, do we really have a Choo Choo Baloo and a Bam Boozled? We have to have some of the best names in the WPBL.

BE: Without a doubt!



JG: I've spent a lot of time with Ben Costa too. He is a stud. If he's controlling that fast ball, psh, watch out.

## **Episode 12: Great Falls Black Eagles**

Players: SP Manny Jamboree, SP Matt Hall, and SP David Carmona

*In the final episode of the series, Salas was able to get 3 up and coming starting pitchers from Great Falls to come on air and discuss rebuilding team culture from the ground up, what a playoff appearance in 2027 would mean to such a young team, how the team loves living so close to some amazing water falls, and how Pitching Coach Danny Pruneda has a special talent to get any power pitchers fastball to 100 MPH.*

RS: I know Great Falls has never been in the playoffs, and that even the previous iteration of the team went once. Is '27 the year?

MJ: Sure hope so. Looking at these 2 dudes, I really believe we have the pitching to do so.

DC: I think that third spot in the Mainland is ours for the taking.

MH: I can definitely see that. Plus, have you seen Aaron Jury? Freaking Tank. Home Run Machine. Glad we have him and don't have to pitch against him.

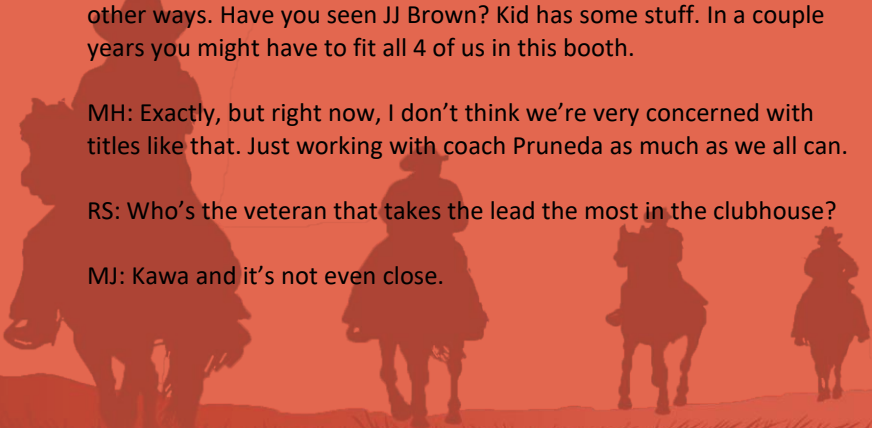
RS: Some pundits see a little bit of Lake Tahoe's big 3 in you 3. That you're the next best starting rotation.

DC: Hmmmm, maybe. But I think we are different and can be better in other ways. Have you seen JJ Brown? Kid has some stuff. In a couple years you might have to fit all 4 of us in this booth.

MH: Exactly, but right now, I don't think we're very concerned with titles like that. Just working with coach Pruneda as much as we all can.

RS: Who's the veteran that takes the lead the most in the clubhouse?

MJ: Kawa and it's not even close.



DC: He keeps things in order, make sure everyone gets enough rest, all that jazz.

MH: Yeah, we joke his super power is emotional intelligence. He'll know you're unhappy before you do. Solve your problem before you even have a chance to get sad.

RS: Which batter do you think is most likely to break out in '27?

MJ: My vote is Antonio Melero. His defense is always solid, but his swing is looking really refined this year.

DC: Dude, maybe. But Jury might be this year's Pete Freedom.

RS: Matt, can you break the tie for us?

MH: I gotta go with Jury. He's built different, just like his brother.

*This concludes the summary of the podcast series. Thank you for reading, and the team is looking forward to continuing to bring you top notch WPBL content!*



# Familiar Faces in New Places

*Contributed by Buster Spork*

Each year the WPBL sees a lot of movement in which players we all know and love end up in new cities. As the league continues to expand and we have more and more teams showing up, this can all get quite confusing! That's why Buster Spork is here to save the day again for the third year in the row. You want to keep up with the big names that have moved to new teams? I got your back. In no particular order, let's take a look at the top ten familiar places in new places.

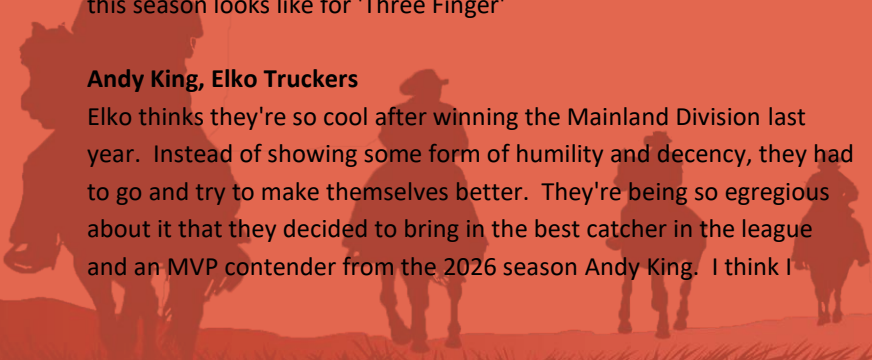
## **Nate Young, Coeur d'Alene Striking Miners**

'Schoolboy' is a 2-time all-star but hasn't been able to find a permanent home in the WPBL. After stints in Astoria, Warrenton, and Great Falls, he was hoping to find stability along with some financial security. The Miners have offered him a 4 year contract at 300k a year to give him just that.

Sandy Gonzalez, Bandon Barons: Coming off several seasons of success, Gonzalez signed a monster contract with CCK one year ago. He was looking to continue to be a top name in the league, but ultimately put up only slightly above average numbers as CCK struggled as a whole. The Kodiaks have gone into re-build mode and prioritized finding a way to get Sandy off their books. The Barons are putting together a championship contender and believe Sandy's off-year is not representative of his talent as a whole. A trade ensued that both teams believe will help them achieve their goals. We'll see what this season looks like for 'Three Finger'

## **Andy King, Elko Truckers**

Elko thinks they're so cool after winning the Mainland Division last year. Instead of showing some form of humility and decency, they had to go and try to make themselves better. They're being so egregious about it that they decided to bring in the best catcher in the league and an MVP contender from the 2026 season Andy King. I think I



speaking for all of us when I say "I hope Andy King is a complete and utter bust this year". Amiright guys?!?!

### **David Love, Pocatello Old-Timers**

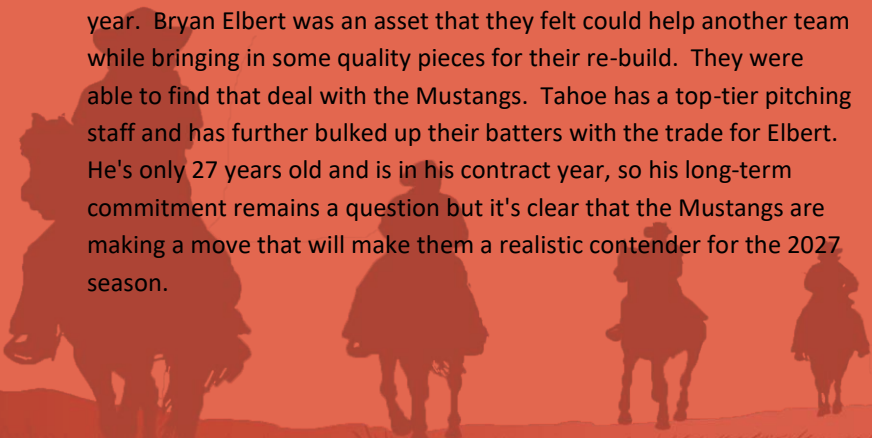
David Love felt he was coming into the off-season as the top free agent. He was looking for a loaded contract with a lot of years connected to it. After his recent play on the field, he felt it was justified. Ultimately no teams bit. At the age of 35 no one wanted to offer a long-term contract. In the end he agreed to terms with the Old-Timers. 500k over the next 2 years is similar to the price range he hoped for, but not the contract length. He'll be looking to prove himself in Pocatello as part of a championship team.

### **Ivan Angeles, Great Falls Black Eagles**

Despite only being 26, Angeles has been a staple of the Atoms starting rotation since the league started. During his 6 years with the Atoms he had 2 all-star appearances and was part of their championship run. More importantly, he remained relatively healthy as part of a pitching staff who are a bunch of pansies. You'd think the Atoms would want to reward him but instead they parted ways. Probably to find another fragile pitcher who will spend two-thirds of the season on the IL. Their loss is the Black Eagles gain as he looks to be an important piece of their starting rotation over the next 9 years.

### **Bryan Elbert, Lake Tahoe Mustangs**

As previously stated, CCK was looking to go into fire-sale mode this year. Bryan Elbert was an asset that they felt could help another team while bringing in some quality pieces for their re-build. They were able to find that deal with the Mustangs. Tahoe has a top-tier pitching staff and has further bulked up their batters with the trade for Elbert. He's only 27 years old and is in his contract year, so his long-term commitment remains a question but it's clear that the Mustangs are making a move that will make them a realistic contender for the 2027 season.



**Fred Poapst, Kennewick Atoms**

Fred Poapst entered the offseason knowing he had just given himself the opportunity to trick a team into giving him a fat paycheck. He's been in the league for the full 6 years and had one anomaly season that led to an all-star nod in 2024. He did okay last year and he knew he could find one sucker who would pay him for it. Unsurprisingly, it was Kennewick. It's difficult to overpay for a player who's on a one-year contract, but GM Konrad Hess found a way to do it. That's special.

**John Hofer, Bandon Barons**

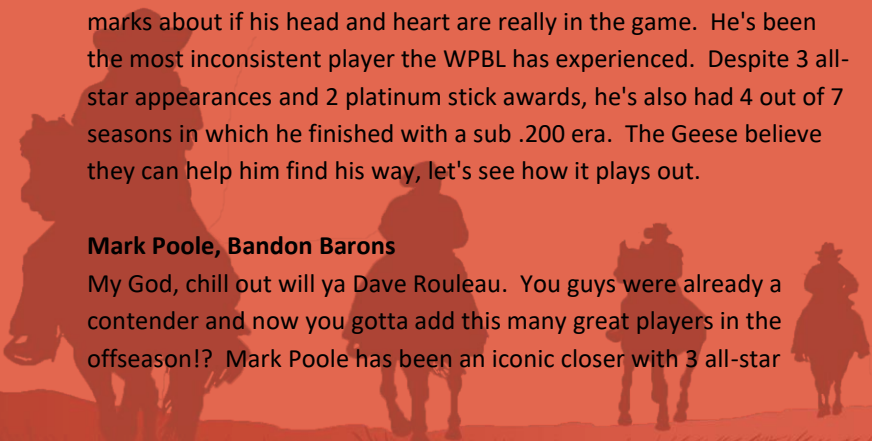
At the age of 25 and still with tremendous potential, the Chinooks cut ties with the player they had previously advertised as HOfer. Rumor has it that John was frustrated with the lack of success and impatient with the idea of a re-build despite so much potential down the road. He hooked up with Bandon and is ecstatic about their championship potential. The Barons are very excited to bring in Hofer and feel like they're establishing a team that should be favorites for the title this year.

**Dustin Duley, Victoria Geese**

Every year there is a team that falls in love with Dustin Duley. Most years there is a team that is disappointed that they did so. This year that team is the Victoria Geese. Victoria will be his 5th different team in 7 years. Duley has tremendous potential and clearly has the skillset to be a superstar in the league, but there continues to be question marks about if his head and heart are really in the game. He's been the most inconsistent player the WPBL has experienced. Despite 3 all-star appearances and 2 platinum stick awards, he's also had 4 out of 7 seasons in which he finished with a sub .200 era. The Geese believe they can help him find his way, let's see how it plays out.

**Mark Poole, Bandon Barons**

My God, chill out will ya Dave Rouleau. You guys were already a contender and now you gotta add this many great players in the offseason!?! Mark Poole has been an iconic closer with 3 all-star





awards and a pitcher of the year award in 2022. He continues to be extremely dangerous and has been a shut-down reliever throughout his career. Bandon had a great season last year and then spent their free agency making themselves significantly better, a bit obnoxious if you ask me. They're definitely the favorites heading into the 2027 season but one has to ask if the team is really ready for this level of pressure.

There you have it, the top ten familiar places in new places. Here's to another fantastic WPBL season.



# Preseason Predictions

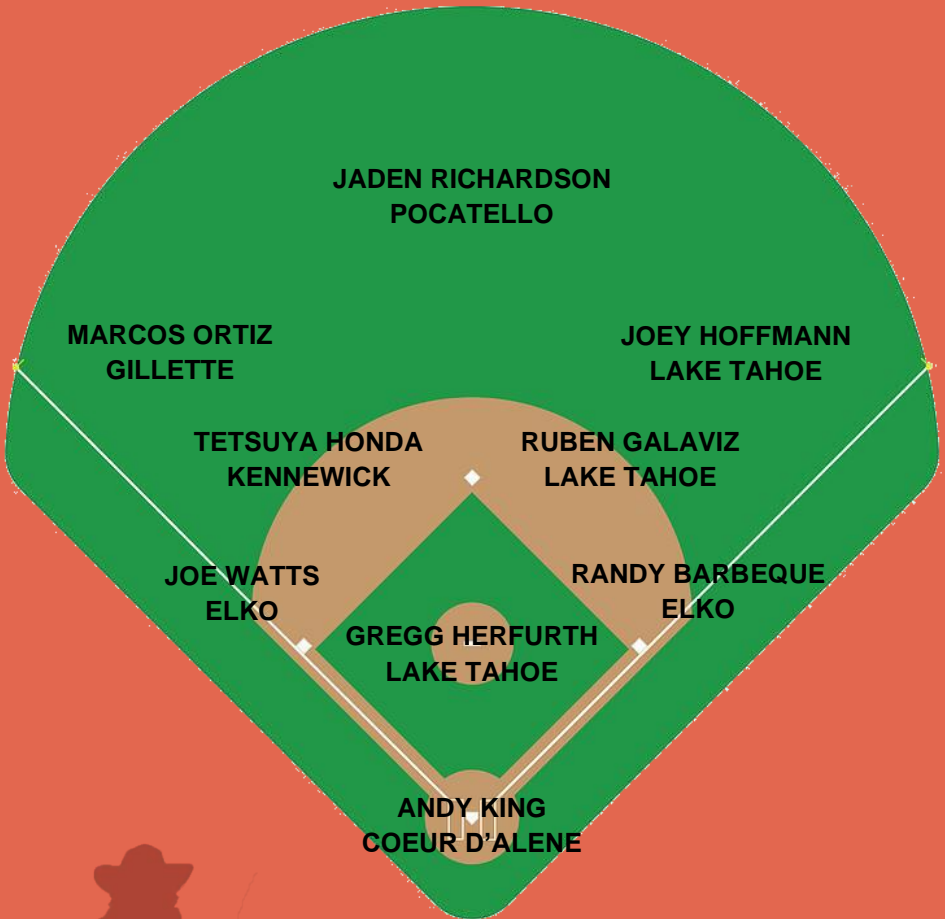
## Coastal Division

Team	Projected Record	2025 Record
Bandon	52-29	46-35
Lake Tahoe	46-36	50-31
Victoria	42-39	42-39
Kennewick	40-41	59-22
Crescent City	36-45	28-53
Astoria	32-49	27-54

## Mainland Division

Team	Projected Record	2025 Record
Pocatello	48-33	43-38
Elko	47-34	46-35
Great Falls	40-41	36-45
Gillette	39-42	38-44
Walla Walla	37-44	37-45
Coeur d'Alene	35-46	35-46

# Preseason All-WPBL Team



# Award Projections

## **MVP – Randy Barbeque - Elko**

The 2023 number one overall pick has been a top performer since making his debut. His 50 home runs already have him the top 20 all time, and his 8.8 WAR is near the top 50 despite only playing three seasons. He's won the Rookie of the Year, 2 Silver Sluggers, 2 Gold Gloves, 3 All Star Appearances, and after 2026 has a Championship Ring as well. But the star slugger has yet to shine as the best player in a single year and win the MVP. This will be the year that changes, as "The Donkey" will crush 20 home runs, bat over .300, and lead the Truckers on another deep playoff run.

## **Pitcher of the Year – Bryan Daniels - Pocatello**

In a league stacked with ace pitchers, Daniels stands head and shoulders above the rest as the most dominant and consistent starter in WPBL history. The 4-time All Star and 2-time Pitcher of the Year has never finished with less than 2.1 WAR and for five straight seasons has sported an ERA under 3.00. The 31-year-old Daniels has a great defense behind him, and combined with his 99mph fastball/cutter combo, he is easily capable of once again dominating WPBL hitters and walking away with more hardware.

## **Rookie of the Year – Aaron Jury – Great Falls**

A bold prediction considering Jury has never played above A Ball, but absolutely a possibility considering the talent Jury possesses. The #1 overall pick in this past season's draft, dominated the second half of the season in the Goya Beans Southwest Desert League, batting .405 and having an OPS+ of 173. He followed that up with a winter season in Hawaii slashing .300/.378/.473 and swiping 15 bags. Already 22 years old, Jury seems to be pro-ready and should have no trouble

adjusting to big league pitching if Great Falls decides to bring him up at the beginning of the season. If the Black Eagles decide to go the patient route with Jury, expect #1 overall prospect Taylor Simkins (Kennewick) to become the Rookie of the Year front runner.

### **Reliever of the Year – Juan Rodriguez - Pocatello**

Since becoming the Old Timers full time closer in 2024, Rodriguez has quietly become one of the best in the league. In the past 3 seasons he has compiled 72 saves with only 5 blown saves, an incredible 0.935 save percentage. To put that in perspective, over that same time frame Sean Rahms save percentage is 0.914, Alejandro Ferrer's is 0.821, Jeremy Wolfes is 0.898, and Ross Blanchette sports a 0.865. In fact, Rodriguez 72 saves over the past 3 seasons is 27 more than the next closest pitcher. While Pocatello's incredible success has given Rodriguez more opportunities than the average closer, it's impressive that he has not brought home any awards at the end of the season. 2027 will be the season Rodriguez finally gets his due and cements his name upon the ranks of WPBL's elite closers.



## 2027 WPBL Champion Prediction



# From the WPBL League Office

Over seven seasons, the WPBL has grown from the inkling of an idea to a multimillion-dollar business operation that has captured the hearts of fans across the world. And as the league has grown in this modern age, so has the media that follows it. From box scores in newspapers, podcasts, social media accounts, content creators, and beyond, fans are able to keep up with the WPBL on a daily basis year round.

The reach that these members of the media have by influencing fan bases and capturing new fans' attention is unmeasurable, but it is by far one of the most important factors that has contributed to league growth. While all members of the WPBL media are valued for both the entertainment they create, and the truth and honesty that they hold the league to, each season some media members take their craft further than any others. That is why, in recognition of their great work, the WPBL is happy to announce the creation of the Excellence in Media Award. This award, given every other year, is bestowed upon a member of the press who presents a piece of work that breaks down barriers and exemplifies the best that journalism has to offer.

The WPBL is happy to present the first ever Excellence in Media award to none other than Richard Salas, for his incredible work on "Spitballin' with Salas". The former Elko Beat Writer has put together an incredible career and earned a reputation as the best in the business. His twelve-part podcast series shed an entirely new light on the players of the WPBL, showing them as approachable, everyday guys who happen to enjoy playing baseball as a career.

Also in recognition of Mr. Salas lifetime of work in Journalism, the WPBL is happy to rename the award henceforth to the Richard Salas Excellence in Media Award. Congratulations to Mr. Salas and thank you for your years of service.



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