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Guest Columnist

Anonymous

Ballhawking Prankology 101: The Plant

By Anonymous
July 28, 2011

Inception of the Plan

If you are reading this, it means everything went to plan, which makes us quite happy. You see, this could be historical. This may well be the first "ballhawking prank" in recorded history. As I write this, the first annual MyGameBalls.com Ballhawkfest is still two days away. But, right now, sitting in a locker at Camden Yards rests a special baseball. An official Rawlings Mexican



League ("Federacion Mexicana de Beisbol A.C." or "FeMeBe") baseball with a pungent recycled-tire'esque odor and beautiful alternating green and red seams.

The Plan: plant this baseball into Zack Hample's legendary 5,200+ baseball collection.

The Accomplices: Todd Cook, Avi Miller and Baltimore Orioles starting pitcher Jeremy Guthrie.

The idea has been brewing in the recesses of my grey matter for some time now. It has evolved...or mutated. But the base concept was always the same: plant a baseball in Zack Hample's baseball collection via the services of a Major League baseball player.

A bit of background. While it is not my day job, I make wood baseball bats. I've also made one (very uncomfortable but essentially functional) baseball glove. For more than a year, I have tinkered with the idea of trying to make a baseball. But it is a complicated beast (see *The Baseball* by Zack Hample) and all of my plans remain at the "drawing board" stage. My original concept was to make a black leather baseball and get former-Major Leaguer and current Mariners bullpen catcher, Jason Phillips, to toss it up to Zack at a game. The idea kept coming back to me because (a) I was curious whether such a baseball would "count" in his collection and, (b) assuming the answer to the previous question was "yes," I was amused by the idea of the first ever Cook & Son Baseball being included in Zack's legendary collection.

The problem, however, is that I have no clue how to actually make a baseball...or at least I haven't figured it out yet.

Therefore, as time has passed, I switched my focus to a case of extremely rank-smelling Mexican League baseballs that I purchased in 2010 at my local Rawlings factory outlet store. I finally decided to put the plan into action last weekend when we celebrated my son Kellan's first birthday at Camden Yards.

I have seen Jeremy Guthrie hanging out down the LF foul line during BP in the past and have struck up a mini-conversation or two with him. He's an extremely accessible player and he knows and frequently interacts with Zack at games. Plus, he continually gives Zack grief for not writing about him in *The Baseball* so he could use that angle ("Giving you this unique baseball better get me some space in your next book!") when delivering the baseball to Zack. It was not difficult to realize that Guthrie was the ideal candidate to play the MLB player-role in this plan.

My plan was to find Guthrie during BP, explain the plan, ask him to hold onto the ball, use it to play catch with a teammate (so it was officially used by Major Leaguers and therefore worthy of

inclusion in Zack's collection), and then toss it up to Zack at Ballhawkfest the following weekend. Simple enough, right? When 20 or so friends (including Baltimore's own Avi Miller) and family members met at our hotel before the game to eat some birthday cake, I decided to let Avi in on the plan. He loved it and was certain that Guthrie would gladly jump on board with the plan.

But then there was a problem: the birthday cake eating ran a bit long and Tim, Kellan and I completely missed Guthrie during BP. So I shelved the plan, at least for a little while.

A couple innings into the game, Avi and Zevi visited our group in section 7. After I told Avi that I did not get a chance to give the baseball to Guthrie, Avi offered to join in the caper and use his considerable Orioles skills to make the handoff to Guthrie and persuade him to join the prank during the ensuing week. I happily handed the Mexican League baseball (still wrapped in its original protective plastic baggy) to Avi.

Over the next twenty-four hours, Avi and I exchanged texts regarding strategy for Avi's discussions with Guthrie. Monday night, July 18th, Avi called to inform me that the Eagle had landed in Guthrie's possession, so to speak. We discussed further strategy regarding how this should play out...including how we should reveal the prank to Zack (hint: we decided on writing this article).

Execution of the Plan

On Monday, July 18, 2011, Avi was back at Camden Yards to root on his Orioles (as they were getting pummeled by the Boston Red Sox). But before the game, he had to attend to some pranking business. As Guthrie ran into the Orioles' dugout after BP, Avi called out to Guthrie. When their eyes met, Avi yelled that he had something for him and Guthrie opened his glove as if to say, "Toss it!"

Avi obliged and the baseball made its way to its final pre-toss up destination - Guthrie's Major League hands. His glove to be specific. Avi explained the plan. Guthrie shot Avi a smile as if to say, "Count me in!" As I mentioned, Guthrie still feels bitter about not getting written up in "*The Baseball*," so he seemed happy to get his chance to get in on the Hample-prank.

Avi mentioned that Guthrie could scuff the ball up to make it seem more legitimate. "Don't worry," Mr. Guthrie responded, "we'll play catch with it." Finally, Avi explained that "The Plant" should go down on Saturday, July 23rd - Ballhawkfest 2011 - even though Guthrie would probably see Zack on Friday the 22nd. On Wednesday, July 20th, Avi checked in with Guthrie again. "Game on," was the word from Guthrie. The Plant was officially set to go down at Ballhawkfest.

And then came the big day. All the MyGameBalls.com'ers met up outside of the CF gate. Avi procured some tickets for me and Tim (Thanks, sir!), and when the gates opened, everyone (except me, Tim and Jona) raced to LF. Tim and I hung out in the shady foul territory down the 3B line and never saw Guthrie all day. But Avi was on the scene. As he made his way to LF, Guthrie was close to the foul line. The two accomplices made eye contact. With a smile, Guthrie secretly flashed his glove and the FeMeBe baseball nestled inside of it.

A few minutes later, Guthrie called out Zack's name and Avi watched the exchange take place. It is safe to say that Zack was shocked. He immediately took a picture of his unique Rawlings baseball.

Guthrie, meanwhile, played it cool as a cucumber. He gave no explanation for his gift.

Soon, Avi found his way to us in foul territory and announced that The Plant had worked. The ball was in Hample's hands and he had no clue about how it had found its way to him.

Post-Op Debriefing

The aftermath of The Plant has gone just how we had envisioned it. First, as recounted on Zack's Ballhawkfest game entry, a debate ensued about whether Zack should count it in his collection. At the end of the day, it was decided that it counted. We had officially planted baseball number 5,272 into Zack Hample's legendary collection - maybe me and Avi should be added to "The List"...you think?

Hopefully this reveal will not change the official score. For the record, I still think it should count. It was used by a Major Leaguer (a very cool one at that) and it was tossed up at a Major League stadium (an outstanding one at that). It just happens to have a more unique backstory than the other 5,271 baseballs that preceded it...or most of them at least.

After the "does it count" debate, there was a great moment at the back of section 86. Avi and I

were standing about 10 feet from each other and Zack came and showed us his new FeMeBe baseball. He pointed out the logo, "It's a Mexican League baseball!" I got a little nervous when Avi asked, "Where did Guthrie get it?" But there was no reason for Zack to question Avi's seemingly innocent question.

The Baseball got a lot of love and attention in Zack's blog entry (LINK: <http://snaggingbaseballs.mblogs.com/2011/07/25/72311-at-camden-yards/>). (Although, it would have been interesting to see if it had any invisible ink markings!)

Interestingly, some commenters mentioned snagging FeMeBe baseballs at minor league games in the past or using them for their own batting practice.

I think what made me the happiest about The Plant was when I checked in at Zack's personal website and found the FeMeBe baseball had found a place among the top "weird" baseballs (LINK: http://www.zackhample.com/baseball_collection/photos/weird.htm) that Zack has ever snagged, along with the description "Mexican League?!?!?!?! This one was tossed to me by Orioles pitcher Jeremy Guthrie on 7/23/11 at Camden Yards. (How do you say "weird" in Spanish?)"

Ahh....success.

And that, my friends, is what we call "The Plant."

Who is teaching "Ballhawking Prankology 102"? Let's hear your story...

SPECIAL THANKS TO JEREMY GUTHRIE AND AVI MILLER.

Anonymous is a contributing columnist to myGameBalls.com.

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