

I had one of those little insights the other night when I was playing Jeff. I started Andy Van Hekken, who walks just about everything he sees on the left side of the plate. Jeff's shortstop was Ramon Vazquez, who is about a six OB against left handers. Naturally, Vazquez had two walks in three trips to the plate – and when Van Hekken became dotted with Vazquez coming to bat, I left Van Hekken in just for spite to get the out when Jeff rolled on the hitter's card. We had fun and laughed about it.

When I pitched Leiter the next game and realized that Vazquez was still in the lineup, I immediately started giving Jeff a hard time. It turned out that his right-handed backup was limited and in danger of going over. That's when it hit me.

We long ago abandoned that "noble" wording in the constitution about paying attention to the percentage of pitchers that each batter faces and trying to keep it close (and rightly so, by the way – we play to win). I own Vazquez in winterball, and I can guarantee you that he won't start against a single lefty all year (Van Hekken is in my minor league system, so I won't be tempted there). Especially in the AL, we like to score 15 runs a game and congratulate ourselves on what a team we have set up.

That's where we differ from both Strat and real life.

I've never re-played a season on the computer, although I hope to one of these days when I'm all rich and famous and have none of these trivial things holding me back like a job, a family, or a life in general. I've looked at the program, though. HAL pulls a fast one every couple of days and takes a player who might be getting to an overused point and declares him injured (probably with flu-like symptoms – sound familiar?) so that Mike Benjamin or Joe McEwing will start at first base against Greg Maddux.

Likewise, some sabemagician with nothing better to do may alert the manager that Brandon Inge has a .600 average when batting against Pedro Martinez on natural grass at night following a loss when there's a full moon out on a Tuesday. Or sometimes a manager just decides to start someone on a hunch.

Since they operate on foresight and we manage while looking at the rear-view mirror that is a strat card complete with various statistics that show us how to maximize their uses, we absolutely should have more offense and less realism, especially in a face-to-face dice league where we can react and take action one batter at a time.

While my computer leagues do a good job of restricting this somewhat by using a salary cap and having another team in each league to further dilute the talent, the same principle applies. I like to think I can usually outsmart a HAL program into an extra run or so advantage that I wouldn't have if I was playing face to face with another manager. Again, I am playing as best as I can to my advantage.

In real life, Van Hekken only faced one or two lefties each game. No one knew in advance that he was going to walk all of them. And if Ramon Vazquez reached base twice against him, I would have ridiculed the manager that DIDN'T start him against Al Leiter the next day...unless he was unavailable due to flu-like symptoms.