

The Mel Hall Chronicles

Part I - The History

My second year in the league (1988, I think) I had a lousy team, and I drafted Mel Hall in the 8th or 10th round just because he was there and I thought he might be a full time player. All I really knew about him was that he had been reprimanded for wearing three pair of batting gloves in his back pockets with the fingers sticking out so he could "wave bye-bye to the opposing players" during his home run trot. It seemed strange to me at the time since I didn't think of him as being one that hit much of any homers.

He didn't have all that good a card, something like a 30 - 32, but he went on about a 15 game hitting streak and was the lone star on a team of underachievers. Somewhere around the 40 game mark I was at Richard's house getting no-hit by Dwight Gooden through 5 when I decided Mel had been hot with the green-and-yellow dice combination. I then declared that Mel Hall stepped out of the batter's box and requested that his "personal" dice be used.

If he had only struck out, the history of our league would have been different.

Mel rolled the 2-10 homer, then doubled on his next at-bat when I repeated the stunt. I was all full of myself by that point and I don't think he made an out the rest of the night. I still didn't win, but I drove Richard nuts. Over the next several series I'd play around with it from time to time, but the turning point was at Sunny Jahn's house. I was down by one run to a pitcher who slaughtered righties and Mel Hall was up with a man on third and two outs. I was expecting either an intentional walk or a new pitcher, but Sunny just quietly stared, so I rolled and got a walk. Sunny immediately started celebrating since he had been scared to death I was going to use Mel Hall's Personal Dice!

Well, I figured that if I was going to alter someone's managerial moves based on what set of dice I was using, I had something good going. So I retired the dice from rolling for anyone but Mel Hall and played it up for all it was worth. It's not like he really hit .350 or anything, but any hit at all was immediately credited to the dice by whomever I was playing and the legend grew.

I kept Mel on my 15 man roster, and he had a much better card the next year - but with a strikeout or double play or something like that on the 2-10. I was a little concerned, but I refused to change just as a matter of principle. As it turned out, the dice weren't stuck on that number and seemed to torch the one column to match his new card. I remember a strat-o-thon at Pat Jennings' condo as I was playing Jami among a crowd with at least four of 5 games going on. I rolled and Jami celebrated - Someone asked why, and Jami yelled out

“Mel Hall got injured!” All the other managers in the house stood up and cheered.

Part II - The Departure

All good things come to an end, and I released Mel that next year. I had considered drafting him in a late round of the draft, but Richard beat me to him and Mel Hall was now a Tiger. The first time we played, Richard was eager to use the magic against me, but I made a big deal of talking to Mel and giving him instructions. Sure enough, he choked in every situation just like I told him to. With two outs and no one on in the late innings of the close game, I told Mel that I appreciated all he had done for me and he had my permission to reach base as long as he didn't score. Richard rolled a double. Cal Ripken followed with an open single, and Richard was rolling on something like a 16 for the score when I called out “Careful, Melvin” and the die landed on a 20. Richard immediately yanked him from the lineup and I don't know if he played a game the rest of the year, but he didn't face me again.

Part III - The Reunion

A year or so later, I had what I expected to be a contending team, and I just didn't need another left-handed outfielder, so I was not at all planning on drafting Mel back. I had him as an emergency pick in the fifth round if he was still there, but the other areas in the draft progressed well and the spot was filled. Around the sixth or seventh, the tension started to build and a couple guys started asking when I was going to take him. I had some other priorities, so I really wasn't going to, much as it pained me. Finally, around the tenth round, Pat Jennings came over, sat down, and said, “John, let's face it. No one else is going to draft him, we're all waiting on you.”

I finally took him in the 11th round and played Randy that afternoon, not even being armed with the dice. Mel went three-for-four in the first game and I thought Randy was going to be physically ill.

Part IV - The Autograph

After moving to Texas, I went to see the Houston Astros winter caravan when it passed through town. I was about to get Jesse Barfield's autograph when some reporter lady kept trying to talk to him, and he had just joked to someone that they wished they looked this good. Then he joked around and said, “Well, at least I'm not as ugly as Mel Hall. That dude has to be the ugliest man alive.”

In any other situation I would have taken offense to the slight on Willie McGee, but the wheels started turning. I explained that a bunch of my baseball buddies and I had this Mel Hall thing going, and I asked him if he'd write on the picture, “At least I'm not as ugly as Mel Hall” when he signed it. He broke out

laughing and started to, but he caught himself and said that he really wanted to, but he was afraid that it would get back somehow, and he just couldn't. I told him I understood, and then he got an evil twinkle in his eye and asked my name. He started writing on a picture, but hid the writing from me. Then he covered it up and signed another one. He handed me the first one, then quickly handed me the second and said the first was for fun and the second was for being a good sport, and he stood and shook my hand.

I gave the normal one to Pat Jennings a few years back, but I still have the one that says, "To John, a Mel Hall lookalike."

Part V - The Legacy

When I started looking over the draft, it occurred to me that I needed to see if any personal dice would be appropriate, since a few folks had asked what I was going to do now that Mel Hall had retired. Toby was the only major leaguer with the name, but I traded my second round pick once I realized he wouldn't be there. Since my wife is one of those multitudes of women with a crush on Brad Ausmus, I considered giving him the sissy purple ones she made me buy some years back, but I didn't really act on anything.

My new dice were shockingly cold at the start of the year, except for my backup centerfielder, who was hitting .370 while the rest of the team was floundering. Once I found my old dice and started doing a little better, I would try to use those useless red and black things once in a while, but they were cold...except when that one outfielder was batting. I started quietly experimenting during games, but was hesitant to say anything out loud until I was playing Richard. Sure enough, he was 3 for 3 with those dice, all off the pitcher's card and the only out was the time I used the normal dice.

So now the personal dice torch has been passed to Jason Tyner. Richard even substituted pitchers to face Mark McGwire with the bases loaded rather than minus 15 in the clutch Tyner. It worked for him, too. Different dice of course, as Mel's can be found on display in Cooperstown.