

game room

Subway series? It's a dream come true for card-table baseball fans

By Roger Verhulst

A FEW YEARS ago, in what was demonstrably an attack of sun-baked wistfulness, I amused myself in one of these columns by imagining what it might be like if the Cubs and the White Sox were to meet in a World Series. It was a pleasant fancy—and it lasted just about 30 seconds before withering in the harsh light of reality.

But this year, things are a bit different; a crosstown series could become reality! So—a bit prematurely, perhaps—I updated my "Strat-o-Matic Baseball" (Strat-o-Matic Game Co., \$8) with Cub and Sox lineups as current as possible and took a look into the future.

This version of card-table baseball, keyed to the most recent major-league season, leaves virtually no statistic unturned. Individual player cards (20 a team) reflect the athlete's performance: hitting, fielding, and pitching.

THE FREQUENCY of strikeouts and extra-base hits is incorporated on an individual basis, as is the player's record against right- and left-handed pitching; throwing strength and accuracy have been established for outfielders, and a fatigue factor applies to pitchers; base-stealing potential and bunting ability have also been computed.

All this information has been reduced to an assortment of figures and charts, so a simple dice throw will provide the statistically probable result of almost any imaginable situation. Learning to deal with the

charts may take a bit of time and study; but once mastered, the charts allow play to proceed considerably more briskly than it ordinarily does at the ball park.

What makes all this fascinating is the high degree of realism built into the game—coupled with extent to which you, as manager, control the action.

Let's suppose, for example, that the Cubs are hosting the Sox in the third game of the '77 series. It's the bottom of the sixth, with the Sox ahead 3 to 1. Wilbur Wood is on the mound; with one out and runners on second and third, Steve Swisher is due up.

AS THE CUB manager, you may choose to let Steve bat—or you may lift him for a pinch hitter. Either way, you decide if the batter will hit away or attempt a squeeze bunt.

Meanwhile, the Sox manager has some decisions to make. Francisco Barrios is available to relieve Wood; do you bring him in? An intentional pass would set up the double play. And what about the infield—should you pull it in or play at normal depth?

THE CHOICES ARE made, play proceeds, and the results are learned. But whatever happens, both managers immediately face new choices based on the new situation.

Over an extended number of games—the World Series, for instance, or even an entire season—other factors come into play. A pitching rotation must be established, and injury may remove a player from the lineup for up to 15 games.

"Strat-o-Matic Baseball" comes with play-

er cards for two teams picked at random, plus a coupon with which to order six more teams of your choice at no extra cost. Be aware, however, that because player cards are based on last season there will be a few notable gaps in Chicago rosters: Bobby Murcer is missing, for example, and so is Richie Zisk.

To remedy the situation you may prefer to order the Deluxe Edition, which includes 480 players and so provides the opportunity to reflect most of the post-season trades.

Then there's "Dodeca Baseball" (Dodeca, Inc., \$8.95). This simplified and depersonalized game dispenses with real-life players and teams, allowing you to create your own from scratch—or from the current major-league averages, if you insist.

Equipment provided includes a ring-bound scorebook and six improbable-looking 12-sided dice, dodecahedrons, which are used to determine the outcome of all plays.

WHAT'S MOST attractive about "Dodeca" is the prospect of creating your own league—developing stats on fictionalized players and teams, then following the results of an entire season's contests. Simple to play, it's a pleasant way to spend those evenings when Cubs and Sox are idle.

Which brings us back to the prospect of a crosstown World Series. Yes, I've got an idea of what would happen if our two teams got together this fall. But don't think for a moment I'm going to tell.

If October brings Civil War to Chicago, I'm going to be safely away from the sidelines.