

It never rains in the Strat-O-Dome

By GUS DALLAS

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THE METS beat the Pirates 12 to 1 in tomorrow's Shea Stadium opener (you read it right, Pal: tomorrow's opener).

The highlight was a grand slam homer by a pitcher who never hit a home run in his major-league career.

This is not a prediction. It's your own neck if you bet it.

The game was played on a desk top at the Daily News, using a board game with result charts and player statistic cards. Batting and fielding results and hits and outs are determined by dice rolls and readings from tables printed on each player's card, based on the previous season record.

A run for Bobby

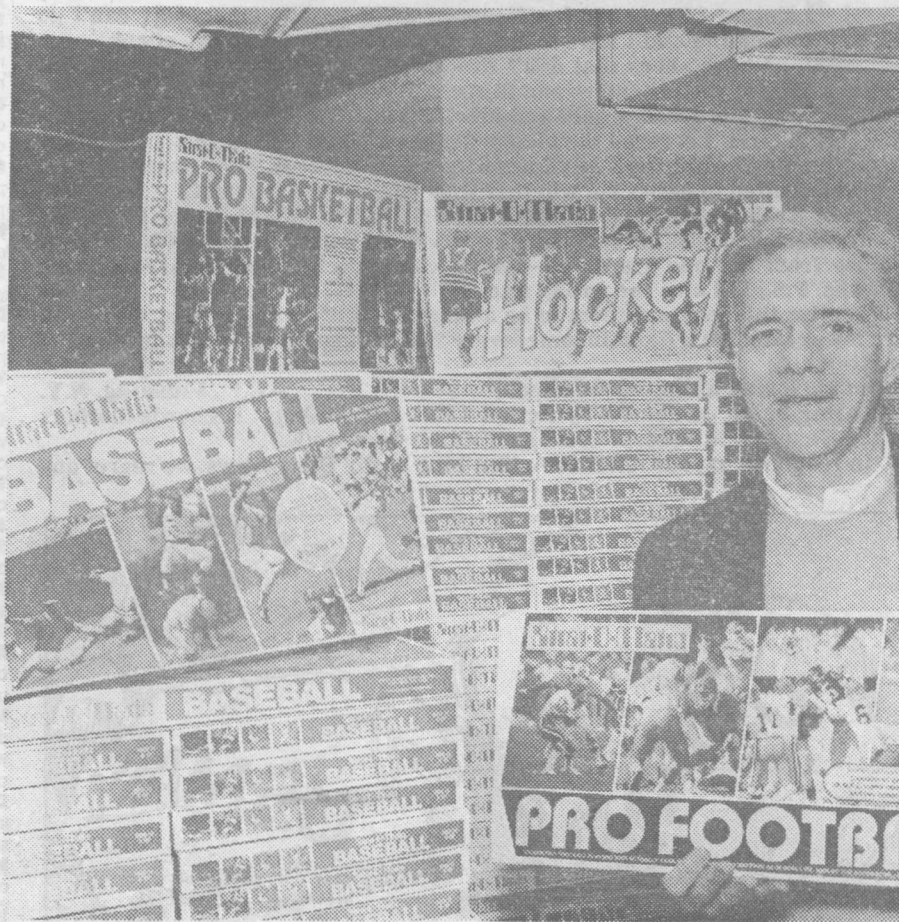
The box score was Mets: 12 runs, 15 hits, and no errors; Pirates: one run, three hits, and no errors. The bases-loaded homer was bashed by Mets pitcher Bobby Ojeda—who has never hit a home run in his 212 games.

The board game, Strat-O-Matic, is published by Hal Richman of Glen Head, L.I. It includes cards for every team in the Major Leagues. He and three other baseball fanatics update the cards every year for an automatic repeat business: Old customers buy the new cards every year.

Richman invented the game at the age of 11, about 30 years ago, after he got fed up with a baseball board game that decided batting results with a spinning arrow.

When the arrow stopped on a black line, fights erupted with his pals over which side of the line the arrow was mostly on. Worse, young Hal had started following player averages in the newspapers—and the spinner rarely matched their performances.

He compiled a game based on real statistics, using dice instead of spinners, and took it to summer camp. "It



GAME INVENTOR Hal Richman with some of his products. **DENNIS CARUSO** DAILY NEWS

statistics that did the trick. Richman also manufactures football, basketball, and hockey games that use real players and real teams, with result cards also pegged to past-season performances. There is also a computerized baseball game.

A trivial defeat

His record is five hits and one error. He struck out with a baseball trivia game he marketed "just six months after Trivial Pursuit brought out their

from an office at 46 Railroad Plaza, Glen Head, N.Y., 11545. Game boxes run roughly from \$30 to \$36.

Fans meet 26 times a year in tabletop tournaments around the country, competing to get into a World Series held at year's end. A local meet is scheduled for June 8-10 at the Norway Hall next to the shipping office. Another is set for Long Island on Aug. 24-26, but a site has not yet been chosen.

"Any bright 9-year-old who can do math" can play the simple version, he

super-smart kids. His youngest customer is 6 years old, he said.

Some rabid customers identify so completely with team managers that they tear up a player's card if they get mad at him, Richman said.

Nothing in the rules says you can't change the rules of your own game; so when former Atlanta Braves Pitcher Rick Mahler, now with the Cincinnati Reds, played with Braves team mates, he added pizzazz to Richman's injury chart, which can bench players for up to 15 games. Mahler added a terrorist attack that kills everyone in the bullpen.

Telling the story, Richman laughed. "I see why Mahler kills the bull pen; he's a starter!"

Richman marketed his first boxed game in 1961. It was a mythical All-Star game with cards for 80 Big League players. His customers demanded the real teams.

"I didn't have the money, so in 1962 I boxed a game with every player on the top four teams," he said. Letters shot back demanding *all* the teams.

So, seeking to rescue a sinking enterprise, he asked his father, Irving, for \$5,000 to add the teams. His father, an insurance broker, asked him to join the firm.

Roll of the dice

Richman bet everything on a dice roll. He told his father, "If the game takes off, I'll pay back the loan, but if it doesn't, I'll go into the business with you."

The version including all the American and National League players came out in April 1963, and fell into a slump. It looked as if he would start selling insurance, until schools let out in June and youngsters' orders descended like locusts.

Richman escaped the insurance business. But then his dad retired, and went to work for him. The old man is 97 now, "and he assembled