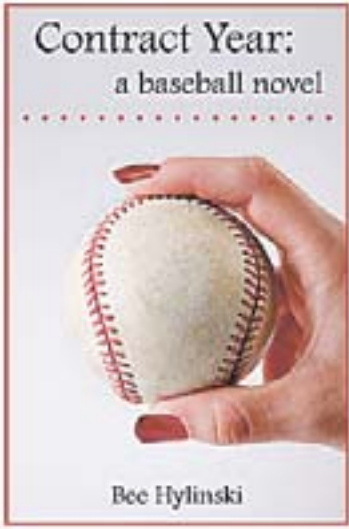


Local Authors

# Baseball Novel a Swing and a Miss

By Lou Fancher



team traded cities and became tagged with "Oakland" instead of "Kansas City," the someday author was worshipping at the mound of major league pitchers like Art Ditmar and Catfish Hunter.

It's no wonder that after attending a writing workshop in which she wrote what became chapter 10 of her debut novel, Hylinski's protagonist is major league baseball pitcher Larry Gordon.

Young Gordon presents himself as more heel than hero. In his contract year, with his professional future balled up in a 9-inch, cowhide circumference, Gordon is facing a personal shut-out. He's found Gina Green, a pediatrician and the perfect companion, but managed to stray at every opportunity. Gina has picked him off base, throwing him out of her life's game. And Gordon's managed

to latch onto an all-forgiving buddy, Rick Wycliffe, who overlooks Gordon's philandering foibles while offering friendly "get a clue" advice. Finally, Gordon's in a slump or rather, riding a rocket-like emotional apparatus sending his ERA shooting up or lurching down in unpredictable alternation. His agent is worried, his friend's advice is falling on deaf ears and Gina is gone.

Life happens, meaning a head blow knocks Rick into the hospital, Gina agrees to a probationary relationship, his parents appear to provide unreserved moral support at important games, and Gordon finds his arm and a new agent at key moments.

Sound too good to be true? Well, it is. As much as one admires the marvelous feat it is to write a book, "Contract Year" attempts to stretch a short story character into novel form.

Within three chapters, we know Gordon has an insufferable urge to give alley cats a bad reputation by straying like one. His confessionals, looping repeatedly like an electronic rock beat, dull the senses by the third or fourth iteration.

Still, there's a fascination at play: will a layer of depth be revealed? Will Gloria, an educated, emotionally intelligent woman step out of the box and not return to accept another unreliable pitch from Gordon? Or darker thoughts: Wycliffe will die and Gordon will be jolted into revelation. Gordon will fail to score as a free agent and will sink forever into the bottles of beer he consumes, endlessly, in great detail, throughout the book.

This is a book about professional athletes and with so many real-life stories involving fallen angels, it's not

a stretch to imagine a grimly satisfying synopsis. And maybe it's taking the whole thing too seriously, but is it ok for a wandering, self-indulgent, sexually immature guy who can throw a ball at 90-plus miles per hour to get off scott free?

Ironically, "Contract Year" strides to a finish on a narrow track of clichés some will find comforting and others will define as frustratingly simplistic. While I can't recommend the book – there is a long list of baseball books I can – I did read to the end, respecting Hylinski's capable writing and hoping for depth and purpose. For those who love the game, it's your call: perhaps any read involving a ball and a bat is satisfying. For me? I'm heading through the tunnel to do my cheering within hitting distance of the Bay Area's Oakland A's.

## A Field Day of their Own

Submitted by Stewart Bowers

Volunteer emergency communicators from Lamorinda's K6ORI amateur radio group gathered June 22 at Moraga Commons to participate in Amateur Radio Relay League's annual Field Day. Part contest, part emergency preparedness drill, Field Day attracts some 35,000 participants throughout North America. K6ORI spoke with contestants in Hawaii and Washington, D.C. as well as in Oregon, Washington and California. To learn more about serving Lamorinda communities through amateur radio, visit [groupspaces.com/K6ORI](http://groupspaces.com/K6ORI).



"Can you hear me now?" K6ORI members Eric Dausman, call sign KD7DNM, left and Wesley Ayers, KI6IQS, are ready to make Field Day contacts.



K6ORI Club president Stewart Bowers, WB6FBB (left, sunglasses) works the 40 meter amateur band while Todd Gritzer takes notes. Gritzer is studying for his Technician class amateur radio license this summer. Photos Cathy Dausman

## Miramonte Public Speaking Places in Top 10 Schools at National Championships

Submitted by Kristin Plant



Back row, from left: Kristen Plant, Connor Meckfessel, Charles Correll, Bennett Stehr, Daniel Galarza, Bryan Wang, and Sandra Maguire. Front row: Daniel Ginsburg, Ethan Miles, Mathison Young, and Jonathan Zhou. Photo Kristen Plant

Nine of Miramonte's best and brightest competitive public speakers won top honors at this year's National Forensic League (NFL) tournament held in Birmingham, Ala., June 16-21.

Each spring, thousands of students across the country compete in local speech and debate

tournaments to earn the privilege of qualifying for NFL Nationals, the largest academic competition in the world. Head coach and teacher Kristin Plant, who was also honored with her first Diamond Award for her achievements as a coach, had high expectations for this year's group after the Matadors had enjoyed great suc-

cess at the California High School Speech Association's State Championships in April, and the team did not disappoint.

Incoming sophomores Jonathan Zhou and Daniel Ginsburg advanced to the elimination rounds of Public Forum debate on the topic "Resolved: The benefits of American drone strikes against foreign targets outweigh the harms." Another incoming sophomore, Bryan Wang, finished in the top 20 in supplemental event, Extemporaneous Commentary, where students analyze the issues of the day in the style of television news-anchors. Daniel Galarza, an incoming senior, represented well on the theatrical side of the competition, with his dramatic interpretations of literature, and incoming senior and team co-president, Ethan Miles, advanced to elimination rounds in international extemporaneous speaking.

Most notably, Miramonte's continued success in Congressional debate makes it the premier high school for Congressional debate in the country. Graduated senior, and this year's state champion in the event, Charles Correll, earned 14th in the Senate, and incoming senior Bennett Stehr placed 11th. Incoming senior Connor Meckfessel placed in the top five in the House of Representatives for the second year in a row! Retired teacher and hall of fame coach, Sandra Maguire, continues to serve the program as an assistant coach focusing on Congressional debate. Maguire joined Plant and the students

on stage at the awards ceremony to accept the Senator Karl E. Mundt Congressional Trophy. This marks the third time Miramonte has won this prestigious award recognizing ongoing excellence in this form of debate where students author and debate legislation in a format similar to our elected legislators. Stehr and Meckfessel, the Congress co-captains, can't wait to share all that learned at Nationals with the rest of the team.

Thanks to the Matadors achievements in both speech and debate events, Miramonte was honored as a School of Outstanding Distinction, an award given to the top 10 schools at the national championships! Less than 20 percent of American high schools offer public speaking programs, but Miramonte Public Speaking is thriving after 30 years. Indeed, over 180 students signed up for the class next year, so Plant's colleague Franck Reyherme – who, like Plant, graduated from Miramonte having enjoyed success as a competitive public speaker – will help teach a class next year.

"I'm so excited that seven of our national competitors will return to lead the team next year," says Plant. "Whether students focus on building communication skills in the classroom, or test their talents in competition, Miramonte Public Speaking allows them to speak their truth and to gain invaluable life skills."

## Catch a Glimpse of Musical Magic this Summer



Orinda Idol performers at last year's Fourth of July celebration.

Photo Ohlen Alexander

Lamorinda Idol 2013 Finalists will be performing at a series of summer performances leading up to the Lamorinda Idol Finals scheduled Sept. 8. Check out these talented kids as they perform as soloists and groups at a variety of venues on the following dates: July 4 from 9 to 11:30 a.m. the Lamorinda Idol float will feature former winners and some of this year's finalists during the Lamorinda 4th of July Parade; July 16, singers will take the stage at 6:15 p.m. following the EFO jazz band performance at the Orinda Community Park during the Orinda Arts Council Arts in Bloom festival; July 28 at 2:45 Lamorinda Idol singers will perform at the Lafayette Reservoir Stage Concert as well as on Aug. 24 from 2:45 to 5 p.m. during the Orinda Theatre Square Concert. For a full schedule of performances, visit [www.orindaartscouncil.org](http://www.orindaartscouncil.org). J. Wake

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