*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Brewers’ success inspires memories of polyester pants, transistor radio**

I was a newly married 18-year-old college student, fresh off the farm and working at my first job that didn’t involve milking cows.

I donned my uniform of an orange shirt and brown pants — and reluctantly went to the brand new Hardee’s at Wisconsin highways 16 and 157 next to Kmart in La Crosse. Both Hardee’s and Kmart are long-gone today.

My reluctance had nothing to do with the duties of the shift before me but with what was about to happen at Baltimore’s Memorial Stadium.

It was Sunday, Oct. 3, 1982 — the last day of the baseball season. The Baltimore Orioles and the Milwaukee Brewers were tied for first place. A postseason berth was at stake.

The Brewers had a three-game lead heading into the four-game series, so I never gave that Sunday-afternoon shift a second thought earlier in the week. One victory and the Brewers would be American League East Division champions.

But fate did not smile kindly upon either the Brewers or my schedule; Baltimore easily won the first three games. It was down to the winner-take-all white-knuckle last game. There were no wild-card teams back then.

I optimistically asked the manager if he was a Brewers fan. He told me he was. I said it was really too bad that we needed to work that day with the whole season on the line. So perhaps it might be possible that we could turn on a radio in the back room just to listen to the game. We could make sure it was turned down low.

“No,” he said.

Some Brewers fan.

But I had a backup plan. In the pocket of my polyester pants was a transistor AM radio, slightly larger than a pack of cigarettes, which I covered with the tail of my uniform shirt. I approached the manager a few minutes later with a large push broom in my hand. I said I had noticed some unsightly trash and dirt in our nice new parking lot and drive-up area. I sure would be happy to clean it so no one else needed to.

“Good idea,” he said before turning his attention back to the intricacies of the chain broiler.

I slipped out the back door, pulled out the radio and tuned into the game. The radio was old and pretty beat-up, but had enough power left in its 9-volt battery to do the job — though I needed to sometimes turn the right way to get a signal.

I started sweeping the driveway, stopping to contort my body when the reception faded. But I could no longer hear Bob Uecker and Dwayne Mosley.

I couldn’t stand it any longer. I pulled the radio out of my pocket and held it up against my ear. I heard The Kid hit a home run in the first inning.

A car heading through the drive-up honked its horn and the passengers gave a thumbs-up. I pumped my fist and brandished my broom. I could have been fired on the spot. I didn’t care.

The Brewers added another run in the second and Mr. MVP Robin Yount followed with his second solo shot of the game in the third, putting the Brewers up, 3-0. I wanted to listen longer but knew I was pushing my luck and the battery, so I headed inside.

Business was not brisk so I was sent home early. I was able to catch the end of the game when the Brewers scored five runs in the top of the ninth to lock down a 10-2 victory and a playoff berth.

These past few weeks watching, listening and celebrating the Brewers as they enter the playoffs for the second straight season have been fun. It made me think of that magical Sunday afternoon in 1982 when I celebrated with an old transistor radio in the parking lot of a fast-food restaurant.

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