

BALL

a comedy in three parts

by Brent Englar

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*Ball combines elements of baseball, basketball, and football into a singular sporting experience. For detailed information about ball as played by members of the Professional League, including the official rulebook, please contact the playwright.*

## CHARACTERS

BJ CHOICE, 26: the greatest ballplayer in the world

SALLYANN (SAL) SHEA, 40: special analyst for TSE<sup>1</sup>

JOEY LEE, 29: analyst for TSE

YOUNG MAN (also: DALLAS OWNER; NEW YORK HEAD COACH;  
PHILADELPHIA OWNER; BALLPLAYER; TSE CEO)

OLD MAN (also: CLEVELAND GENERAL MANAGER; NEW YORK OWNER;  
CANADA PRESIDENT; BALTIMORE OWNER)

YOUNG WOMAN (also: INTERN; MIAMI CO-OWNER; BLOGGER; CHICAGO  
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT)

*The play also includes pre-recorded voice-overs by FANS, ANNOUNCERS, etc.*

## SETTING

A half-century after the merging of MLB, the NBA, and the NFL into the LPB<sup>2</sup>

- I. A production studio at TSE headquarters
- II. One year later: the edge of the Mojave Desert
- III. One year later: a production studio at TSE headquarters

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<sup>1</sup> The Sports Engine

<sup>2</sup> League of Professional Ballers, or simply Professional League

PRODUCTION NOTES

The set is simple and non-representational—for TSE in particular, a few chairs, tables, or podiums will suffice. When highlights and other recordings “play,” we hear but do not see them.

Specific locales may be suggested through changes in costume or accent (e.g., a character from Dallas may wear a cowboy hat or speak with a Texas drawl); through projections of distinguishing landmarks (e.g., a character from New York may stand before an image of the Empire State Building); or through other means devised by the director. Please do not allude to real-life sports teams or athletes—a character from New York should not wear a Yankees hat, a Joe Namath jersey, etc. In the world of *Ball*, these other sports no longer exist.

I

(Following an introductory burst of music, SAL sits facing the audience. She is the consummate professional in her field)

SAL

Merry Christmas. And today one ballclub, one lucky nation of fans, receives the greatest gift of all. Within the hour, megastar backer and Class AA Unrestricted Free Agent BJ Choice announces which of 32 eager teams he intends to join, and for how much and long. I'm Sal Shea, and you're in *Zone*.

(Seated next to SAL is BJ, a man in total charge of his world. Though he speaks in the clichés of his profession, he seems sincerely to believe them)

SAL (Cont'd)

I have with me the GOAT, Señor Backstop, C4—the man who needs no introduction ...

(turning to BJ)

How are you, BJ?

BJ

I'm well, very well.

SAL

I'm sure.

BJ

How are you?

SAL

To be honest, I'm trying not to fall out of my seat—

BJ

—Careful—

SAL

—I'm right on the edge.

BJ

Take a breath. Relax.

SAL

Is that how you keep so calm in the box?

BJ

Man, all that is is experience.

SAL

BJ, that's my point. In my experience, experiences like this one don't happen every day.

BJ

That's the beauty of life.

SAL

What is?

BJ

Every step leads to the next.

SAL

What has been your favorite step of late?

BJ

This has been an unbelievable journey, truly humbling. And I'd like to thank everyone that has helped me along the way. My agent, of course, Pat Gordon, and Stanny and Val and Leo Syropoulos, and all my Mobsters through the years—coach Mikey White and coaches Freeman and Weller, and Fernando and T-Rot, who pushed me each day to excel, and Hunter and J-Pac and Big Mo and Adam, Bug, Wu and Gerrod and especially Melvin Chow and Haloti, who I truly believe was the missing piece to a championship, and team president Lester K. Graham, and Darby, and Mr. and Mrs. Simon-Lewis and fam—I'd like to thank you especially for inviting me into your city, and coach Couch before them, and my crew at State—to Bo and Roberta and Bobby and T-Rob, my brother—we're one and two, T, you demanded my best, absolute—and, oh, and my Mom and my Pop and Dory, Gramma Lee, and the Big Man upstairs—bless your soul, Grandpa J—oh, and God, and all my fans all in Baltimore and the world—you and me, we did great things together, we left great things unfinished—but I promise, I swear, we just stay the course together, we will finish.

SAL

Sounds like you've made your choice.

BJ

I have, Sal.

SAL

How many people have you told?

BJ

Not many. There's my agent, of course, Pat Gordon, and Stanny and Val and Leo Syropoulos, and—

SAL

—Let's all welcome my co-host, Joey Lee. Joey?

(JOEY—younger than SAL and more consciously stylish—sits on the other side of BJ)

JOEY

How be J, my man?

BJ

I'm trying not to fall out of my seat.

JOEY

Only one landing.

SAL

(to BJ)

Have you told him?

BJ

Not that I'm aware.

JOEY

You're going Broadway, aren't you?

(BJ only smiles)

JOEY (Cont'd)

The Capital? Big D? The Oh Five?

BJ

Should I tell him?

SAL

He can sweat with the rest of us.

JOEY

Serious question, J, if I may.

BJ

What's up, Joe?

JOEY

What's been the sweetest step?

BJ

This has been an unbelievable journey.

SAL

Humbling?

BJ

Truly.

JOEY

Man's a better man than me.

BJ

I've received a lot of good advice.

SAL

I understand the President herself sent you a text.

(BJ grins)

SAL (Cont'd)

Care to elaborate?

BJ

The President told me, BJ, what makes you happy, brother.

JOEY

Send me those digits.

SAL

BJ, in about five minutes you're going to make some people very, very happy.

(to audience)

But first, we look back at the thrills we've experienced to date in the historic career of Bernard<sup>3</sup> Jerome Choice.

(As BJ watches the highlights—which consist of voiceover narration and various other sounds: cheering crowds, grunting athletes, portentous underscoring—JOEY busies himself with his digital device and SAL scribbles a few notes. Occasionally they interact—the following are suggestions only)

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<sup>3</sup> Pronounced “BER-ned”

BJ (V.O.)

When I step into the pit, I'm no longer a man ...

ANNOUNCER 1 (V.O.)  
AND BJ CHOICE BLASTS HIS WAY HOME!

BJ (V.O.)  
I'm a god.

ANNOUNCER 2 (V.O.)  
THERE'S THE EXTRA GEAR FROM NUMBER 4!

BJ (V.O.)  
No ...

ANNOUNCER 3 (V.O.)  
MY GOODNESS!

BJ (V.O.)  
I'm a protogenos.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
To the ancient Greeks, the protogenoi, or first born, were the primordial beings that gave rise to the cosmos. First was Gaia, Mother Earth ...

ANNOUNCER 1 (V.O.)  
AND CHOICE BURIES HIM INTO THE GROUND!

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
Next came Eros, primal love ...

ANNOUNCER 2 (V.O.)  
HE SCORES!

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
Finally Khaos, the void unbounded ...

ANNOUNCER 3 (V.O.)  
JUST A ONE-MAN WRECKING CREW!

(An INTERN hurries onstage with a pot of coffee. She offers BJ a refill, which he politely declines. She moves to refill SAL's mug, and SAL thrusts the notes into her hand; the INTERN—accustomed to this routine—crosses to JOEY and hands him the notes. JOEY refuses to take them. SAL fumes. The INTERN exits)

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But even protogenoi have beginnings. For Bernard Jerome Choice, born on a blustery solstice, the game of ball came as naturally as breath. By the age of eighteen, young BJ had won the prestigious Go Deadspin Award for the nation's best high school baller five times. Taking his talents to Long Beach, BJ anchored those legendary Goby squads that thrilled the Pac-20, capturing back-to-back national titles and spawning some of the greatest athletes in the Professional League.

ANALYST (V.O.)

Those Goby squads under John Couch were loaded. We're talking Bo Briggs, Wie, Yuri Netsky, we're talking Robbins and Stone on the bump—you were lucky just to pluck the ball.

COACH (V.O.)

I have been fortunate in my time to coach some quality ballers. BJ Choice, he just might have been—we off the record, son?

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Forgoing his senior year, BJ declared for the draft.

COMMISSIONER (V.O.)

With the first overall pick in the LPB draft, the Baltimore Mob selects Bernard<sup>4</sup> Choice, home backer out of California.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The Mob had just completed its league-record 24<sup>th</sup> consecutive season without making the playoffs. There was talk of moving the club to Des Moines.

REPORTER (V.O.)

It got to where the locker room after a

(The INTERN re-enters with a bottle of water, which she offers to BJ. As before, he declines. JOEY takes the water and continues to play with his device. The INTERN exits)

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<sup>4</sup> Pronounced ber-NARD

game was dead men slumping. I think there were high schools drew better than Baltimore.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

BJ tore through the affiliated minors, earning an August call-up to the show, where he plucked a sizzling four-eighty-eight over the season's final month and put out 66 percent of home runners. Baltimore won 15 of its final 20 games, and the following year, with BJ leading the league in both offensive and defensive scoring, won 55 more, ending its postseason drought.

BJ (V.O.)

I have always maintained that I play the game to win. And victory belongs not only to me, but to each and every person that supports me.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Over the past four seasons, no team in the Professional League has won more games than BJ's Mob. But success in the postseason has proved elusive. A loss in the divisional round, a loss in the conference finals, a loss in the championships, a crushing first-round sweep by the lowly Megabytes have turned the accolades to question marks.

ANALYST (V.O.)

Look at the metrics—he simply isn't the same player under pressure.

COACH (V.O.)

If Baltimore would just give the man a supporting cast, he'd already have a ring. Or five.

ANNOUNCER 3 (V.O.)

MY GOODNESS!

(SAL whispers something to BJ, and they share a laugh. JOEY shows BJ something on his device. BJ shrugs and continues chatting with SAL. JOEY fumes)

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Wherever he ends up, there can be only  
one destination ...

COACH (V.O.)

He might be the greatest of all.

BJ (V.O.)

It's championship ... or bust.

(With a burst of music, the highlights conclude. SAL turns back to the  
audience)

SAL

He has scored more points in his first 398 games than all but two hackers in LPB  
history, and no one owns a higher career P-PA. By some metrics, he is singly  
responsible for every Baltimore win in the past five years. But where shall he win  
moving forward? Stay tuned for BJ's choice.

JOEY

Meantime, BJ, question ...

BJ

What's up, Joe?

JOEY

Ball is a team sport, am I right?

BJ

The ultimate team sport.

JOEY

Yet if you never win Baltimore a championship, some would judge your career there  
a failure. Is that fair?

BJ

You know, people are going to think what they think—I can't get lost in that.  
Everywhere I've played, I've won championships. And the necessary requirements to  
win championships, they don't change.

JOEY

But you can't win a championship alone.

BJ

You win as a team.

JOEY

And so my question, J, if I may, is how much did your teammates and coaches—their talents and their intangibles—influence your decision?

SAL

(to audience)

In a minute, the answer to the question: Where will BJ play?

BJ

First let me say—

JOEY

—Sal, my question—

SAL

—But first: One last spin around the league so folks can make their case.

JOEY

Right, right.

SAL

First up, Chief Brown.

JOEY

He's the Flats' GM.

BJ

I know.

(The GENERAL MANAGER of the Cleveland Flats appears)

SAL

Tell us—why should BJ go to Cleveland?

CLEVELAND GENERAL MANAGER

It's very simple, Sal. The answer's money. And celebrity. And women. And the freedom to do whatever you like with them. All at once.

(The CLEVELAND GENERAL MANAGER disappears. The OWNER of the Dallas America appears)

JOEY

Giddap, Dallas ...

DALLAS OWNER

BJ, I'll be straight. You know the moves we made already, and you know how much

we spent on 'em. On paper, son, this team is poised to win the Pan, so hop aboard this train—nothin' to lose but an upset.

(The DALLAS OWNER disappears. The OWNER of the New York Towers appears)

SAL

Talk to me, Towers.

NEW YORK OWNER

Whaddya want me to say? You wanna play in the New York of ball, you come to New York. Boom.

(The NEW YORK OWNER disappears. The CO-OWNER of the Miami Fanatics appears)

JOEY

The lovely Miss Miami ...

MIAMI CO-OWNER

If selected, the Fanatics organization will do everything in its power to prove a winner, on and off the ball field. Our boys go into the community—building houses, manning soup kitchens, mentoring underprivileged children—and we happily match donations made to charitable foundations. Together, let's make a little slice of heaven on Earth.

(The MIAMI CO-OWNER disappears. The HEAD COACH of the New York Minarets appears)

JOEY

NYC deux ...

NEW YORK HEAD COACH

I'm buildin' a team of bull elephants, and bulls run over their opponents—ground 'n' pound!

(spits)

Ya wanna be an elephant, Choice? DO YA?!

(The NEW YORK HEAD COACH disappears. The PRESIDENT of the Canada Superiors appears)

SAL

Why not Canada?

CANADA PRESIDENT

Pardon ... Is that question for me?

(The CANADA PRESIDENT disappears)

JOEY

Next the text.

BJ

I'm flattered by the attention and the offers—

SAL

—In the past two hours, this network has received nearly one million forms of text—

BJ

—And I know I would be successful in New York, Miami, and all the other places on hold.

JOEY

Next is Albuquerque.

BJ

But none of this is necessary.

SAL

BJ, we agreed on a format.

BJ

Sal, I'm so excited to start the future, I can't wait. And my fans will forgive me, I'm sure, if we end the suspense.

SAL

You're absolutely sure?

BJ

No doubt.

SAL

Fine. Well, BJ ...

(long pause—perhaps augmented with a drum roll)

You seem remarkably calm.

BJ

I'm a pro.

SAL

Let's see those nails ...

(BJ holds out his hands. SAL scrutinizes his nails)

SAL (Cont'd)

I remember when I first interviewed you, right before the draft. These were nubs.

BJ

I've grown.

SAL

So you have. So tell us, BJ ... What's your choice?

BJ

This was very difficult, but in the spring—and, God willing, every spring—I'll be reporting to the same training camp as always. With Fernando and T-Rot and Hunter and J-Pac and Big Mo and Adam, Bug, Wu and Gerrod and Melvin especially and coaches White, Freeman, and Weller and—

JOEY

—Hold, you mean—

BJ

—I'm re-signing with Baltimore.

SAL

Baltimore?

BJ

I'm winning championships for Baltimore.

SAL

An unexpected turn. A twist in the road. A wrinkle in the best-laid ...  
(to audience)

We'll be back.

(A burst of music concludes the segment. SAL turns to BJ)

SAL (Cont'd)

BALTIMORE?!

(JOEY dives into his device. The INTERN hurries onstage with a can of soda)

SAL (Cont'd)

After months of speculation, promotions on the ones, a camera crew embedded in each of your houses—after three of the most lucrative advertising deals in this company's history, all contingent on your expanding the brand—YOUR CHOICE IS BALTIMORE?!