

He got dealt for catfish, then threw a perfecto

The story of Ken Krahenbuhl and a mighty Mississippi delicacy

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Art by Tom Forget

Ken Krahenbuhl wasn't happy.

It was 1998 and the former Cubs 1990 Draft pick was in his fifth season of independent league ball. He was 30 and the team he was on, the Pacific Suns, based out of his hometown of Oxnard, Calif., was going nowhere. They had a bad record, ownership was a mess and he wanted out.

"I kept asking for a trade, but they wouldn't trade me," Krahenbuhl tells MLB.com from his home in Houston. "I felt like I had a little leverage, because I was the best pitcher on that team -- a crappy team. I had all the best numbers, pitcher of the week, All-Star, whatever."



Photo via Ken Krahenbuhl

Krahenbuhl was an indy league veteran, having played in the Northern League with the Rochester Aces, and was now in his second stint with the Suns. But before all of that, he was a rising phenom on his way to big league glory.

His introduction to baseball came when he was 9 years old. He got in trouble from teachers for throwing rocks through a window at his school. Instead of punishing him, his foster parents thought they could redirect his penchant for throwing things toward a sport that has a penchant for throwing things.

"When I got home, instead of punishing me," [Krahenbuhl recalled](#), "my foster father told me, 'Hey, instead of doing something negative, why don't we teach you how to play baseball?'"

By the age of 16, Krahenbuhl was throwing 90 mph and had interest from pro scouts. Then the arm injuries piled up. He had Tommy John surgery before he finished high school. He came back from it and was drafted by the Cubs out of a junior college in San Bernardino. He pitched well at Class A Peoria for a couple seasons but elbow problems kept derailing any progress he made. He had surgery four separate times. The Cubs finally released him in '93.

Krahenbuhl thought his career might be done, but the wild, second-chance world of independent ball saved it. He didn't have to throw as hard as he once did, and he was still having good results and, most importantly, having fun.

But during that second stint with the Suns in '98, it had become anything but. He wanted to be dealt to Greenville, Miss., to play for the Greenville Bluesmen, the team he posted a 2.65 ERA for the year before. He didn't know how much longer he'd play and he wanted the chance to win a couple more championships before he called it quits.

With no trade happening, Krahenbuhl decided to take matters into his own hands.

"Back then, it was the Wild West," Krahenbuhl says to me. "You had a contract, but would they really get pissed off if you left a team? Probably not. So, I hopped in my car and drove to Greenville."

Krahenbuhl talks about the drive pretty casually, but Greenville is 1,866.4 miles from Oxnard. He drove straight through overnight for 25 hours, stopping only for gas.



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The two teams, realizing that Krahenbuhl was driving off across the country and not coming back, had to hurry up and make a deal. It would be

Krahenbuhl for \$1,000, two players and one of the strangest transactional items in baseball history.

"In Greenville, Miss., they were known for a farm-raised catfish," Krahenbuhl says. "That was their thing -- farm-raised catfish. So, the Greenville GM said why don't we throw some catfish in? It'll get us some publicity."

It was reported as 10 pounds of catfish, and it did [make headlines](#) around the U.S. The newly-acquired starter was even asked to go to the farm after his first game to pick out the finest stock available.



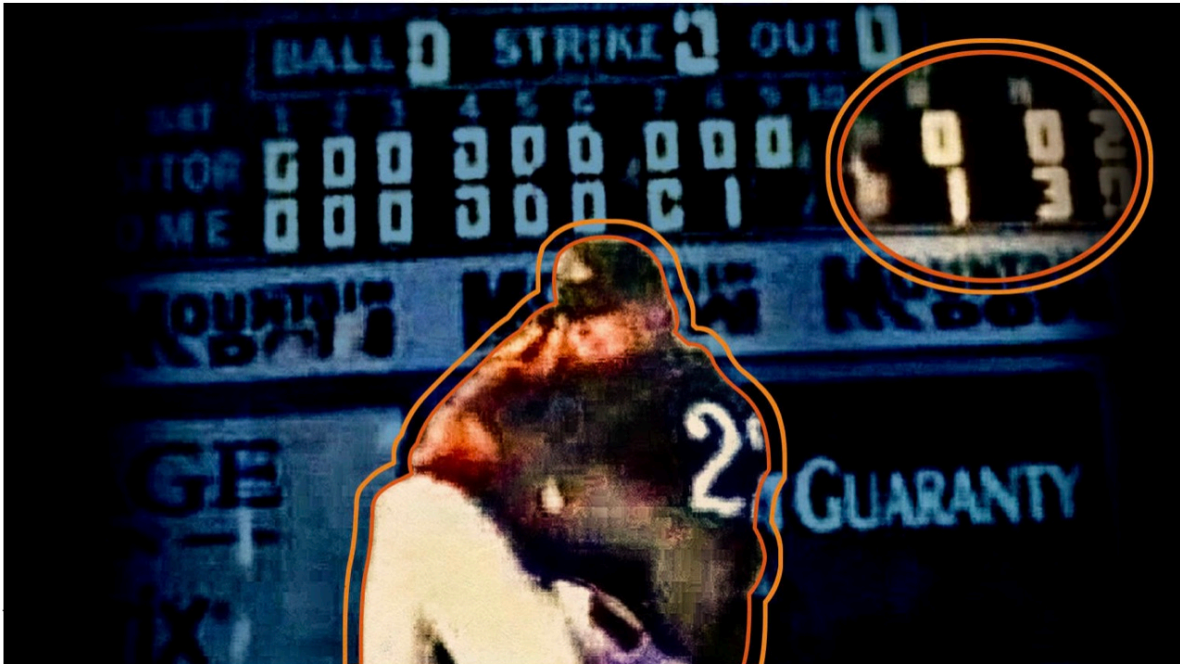
With no Twitter or cell phones, Krahenbuhl didn't find out he had been traded for catfish until he arrived at Greenville's Legion Field after his long drive. He was disappointed, as anybody might be after being traded for catfish -- [calling the deal "ridiculous"](#) -- but didn't have too much time to dwell on it. As soon as he got in from his 25-hour journey, on zero sleep, he was told he'd be starting that night.

"I got in, signed my contract, got my uniform -- this was '90s, man, we weren't afraid to play," Krahenbuhl tells me. "No sleep, knew nothing about the other team; other than they were the two-time defending champions."

And then, the story got even crazier.

On a cold, rainy night, with about "70-80 people" in attendance, against the reigning Texas-Louisiana League champion Amarillo Dillas, the sleep-deprived Krahenbuhl pitched a perfect game. Zero hits, zero walks, zero errors and a 1-0 win.

"The umpire said we're gonna play until you give up a hit," and Krahenbuhl never did.



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"You know as a pitcher, very rarely do all of your pitches work," Krahenbuhl tells me. "That night, I felt like I could close my eyes and throw any pitch and it went there. We had some great plays made behind me in some sloppy conditions."

The perfecto added a whole other layer to an already bizarre tale and Krahenbuhl got interviews on radio stations all around the world. Newspapers couldn't hold back with their headlines. Good Morning America came down to Greenville to talk to Catfish Ken.

"That was the same year that Sammy Sosa and Mark McGwire had that home run chase," Krahenbuhl remembers. "One article I read said this guy got more publicity than those two guys."

His old team, the Suns, also took advantage of the newsworthiness and the new wrinkle in the story: They decided to hold an entire Catfish Night at the ballpark -- celebrating the fact that "they traded their best pitcher for catfish and he threw a perfect game." Greenville sent over 1,000 pounds of the frozen delicacy, along with a chef, to cook it for everybody in attendance. Krahenbuhl says he's not a catfish fan, but he heard the food was outstanding.

Looking back now, the 52-year-old -- who pitched a couple more years in the independent leagues, became a car salesman and now coaches travel baseball in Houston -- has no hard feelings about the trade.

"I was never angry at them for trading me for that, I wanted to get out of there anyway," he said.

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<https://www.mlb.com/news/baseball-player-traded-for-catfish>

Ya gotta love these stories. Baseball produces them like no other sport.

Dallas Braden, the delightful color commentator for the Oakland Athletics—Glen Kuiper & Dallas make watching the sadsack, sell-off A's bearable, even enjoyable—pitched a perfect game on Mother's Day in 2010 when (he admits) he was badly hungover. But not from partying: Dallas lost his mother young and was raised by his grandmother in Oakland, and he drank hard the night before grieving for his mom.



May 9, 2010: Dallas Braden of the Oakland Athletics, a soft-tossing lefty who entered the day with only 17 career wins, was perfect against Tampa Bay. Jed Jacobsohn/Getty Images



<https://www.sportingnews.com/us/mlb/news/dallas-braden-perfect-game-hangover-oakland-athletics/uholfqbjaa5d159fyi6zuyr2g>

"In any case, Braden joins an elite circle of David Wells (hangover) and Dock Ellis (LSD) as the only pitchers to throw a perfecto or a no-hitter while under the influence."

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