

# EDITOR & PUBLISHER

*Paper balked with Bouton at bat*

## And he's ... out at home!

BY JOE STRUPP

**F**ORMER MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL PITCHER Jim "Bulldog" Bouton, whose controversial memoir *Ball Four* still resonates among fans more than 30 years later for its revelations about the sordid lives of players, throws his latest fastball at a Massachusetts newspaper, claiming in a new book that the daily all but sabotaged his efforts to renovate a local ballpark.

In *Foul Ball*, the self-published tale Bouton plans to release in June, the retired pitcher claims *The Berkshire Eagle* in Pittsfield, Mass., deceived readers about the viability of a new stadium that the 31,277-daily-circulation *Eagle* planned to help bankroll — while it campaigned against a plan by Bouton and two partners to renovate the existing Wahconah Park, an 84-year-old venue and a favorite of minor-league fans.

"The moment we walked into town with the deal, we were attacked by *The Berkshire Eagle* and we couldn't figure out why," said Bouton, who lives south of Pittsfield and briefly pitched in Wahconah Park as a player during a tryout in the 1970s. "*The Berkshire Eagle* was pushing the new stadium by using the argument that if they didn't build the new stadium, there would be no baseball in Pittsfield and no stadium, which was not true."

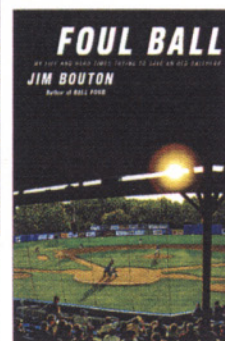
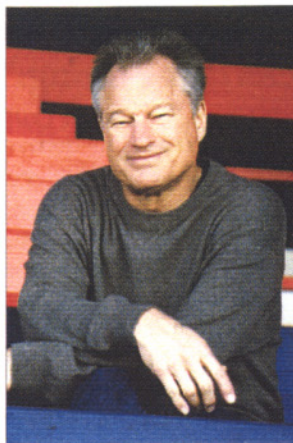
*The Eagle*, owned by Denver-based MediaNews Group Inc., has defended its efforts on behalf of a new ballpark while attacking Bouton's charges in several news stories as well as an editorial published April 16 that said Bouton's "command of the facts is so tenuous, and his allegations so unfounded, that it is no wonder he is reduced to self-publishing."

The tale of two ballparks began in 2001 when the Pittsfield Astros announced plans to leave the city-owned Wahconah Park for a new home in Troy, N.Y. Bouton and two partners pitched the idea for a \$1.5-million, privately funded renovation of Wahconah Park and a plan to find a new team.

That same year, a plan to build an \$18.5-million stadium and complex at a different site was put forth by a group of city leaders and local businesses, including the *Eagle*, which pledged \$2 million toward the project as well as land adjacent to the paper's headquarters, according to Martin C. Langeveld, vice president of New England Newspapers Inc., the MediaNews division that runs the *Eagle*. "It was an ideal



Jim Bouton (today and hurling in the 1960s), a 21-game winner for the New York Yankees in 1963, later wrote the popular book *Ball Four* and now a new saga in a minor-league key.



location, and it would have been a nice downtown ballpark," he said. "But the opponents [including Bouton] decided they didn't like it."

The new-stadium plan required voters to approve the creation of a civil authority to oversee its operation. The proposal struck out in June 2001 when residents mowed it down at the polls. Later

that year, the Pittsfield Parks Commission unanimously voted down Bouton's plan, then leased Wahconah Park to the owner of another minor-league team who moved his franchise to Pittsfield in 2002.

In his book, Bouton contends his proposal never got up to bat because of opposition from the *Eagle*, which he claims deceived voters about elements of both his plan and the new-stadium proposal. *Eagle* Editor David Scribner, whom Bouton dubbed Mr. Misinformation in his book, denied the accusation. "Editorially, we favored [the new stadium]," Scribner told *E&P*. "But, as far as our news coverage, that is not true. We actually got a lot of flak from our publisher that we were doing too much on the opponents of the new stadium, but that didn't stop us."

Despite complaints that Bouton's book is misleading, Langeveld said the paper does not plan to take any legal action against him.

*Foul Ball* was to have been published by Public Affairs Press of New York, but Bouton ended his relationship with the publisher after it requested he seek responses from the General Electric Co., a backer of the new-stadium plan that the book attacks.

"I never asked for a response from the baseball commissioner when I wrote *Ball Four*," Bouton told *E&P* last week, explaining why he would not oblige. "I just tell what happened and let the reader draw his own conclusions." □