

Idaho pig farmer wins \$360,000 'playing' baseball

by Jamie Grey

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GREENCREEK, Idaho -- The decisive game seven of the 2011 World Series still has to be played Friday night, but already, one Idaho man is planning for next season. That makes sense because he has made a lot of money by keeping an eye on the diamond: \$360,000.

To win big, Fantasy Baseball team manager Lindy Hinkelman says he watches stats, players and ballparks, before, during, and after the season. He learned how to keep close track of things by doing something else: Farming pigs.

'I've been a baseball fan all my life'

Growing up on a farm in Greencreek, on a quiet night, Hinkelman grew up knowing southern California by following the home team.

"I like the Dodgers. I could listen to the Dodger game at night from Los Angeles there. Starting at about 8:00 at night, I could listen to the games," Hinkelman said.

Now, at 59-years-old, he's still living on the land he grew up on. The house he grew up on still stands on the property. For that, Lindy Hinkelman says he's lucky.

"I took a liking to [pigs] when I was younger, and I took care of the pigs, and just knew what I wanted to do after I got out of college and raise pigs and was fortunate enough to do what I like to do, and a lot of people don't get that chance," Hinkelman said.

This fall, Hinkelman has around 450 pigs on his farm, some of them just born this week. He's a champion pig farmer; some of his boars have won titles in competitions.

"My operation now is kind of going more toward selling show pigs, 4H pigs for the kids for the county fairs in the fall," Hinkelman said. To raise pigs, and to sell them, Hinkelman has to keep careful records of the animals on his farm as well as looking at numbers to follow the trade. That skill has carried over to another area: Baseball stats.

"I've been good at that. I like keeping records. I think really played to my advantage, it just really helps me out in Fantasy Baseball. I've always liked it," Hinkelman said.

'I spend about as much time with the baseball as I do with the pigs'

In the winter, Hinkelman studies for a couple of hours each night, writing down facts that might help him draft his high stakes Fantasy Baseball team in Las Vegas each March.

Hinkelman competes against college professors and stock brokers, drafting alongside them. While he says people show up with fancy data on their computers, he brings a couple of highlighters and his hand-written notes.

"I go in those drafts with three pieces of paper. Other people bring laptops and all kinds of information," Hinkelman said.

With his detailed notes his attention to detail, Hinkelman is now a two-time National Fantasy Baseball Championship winner.

Hinkelman happily shares his secrets

To pick his team players, Hinkelman looks at books to see how players have been doing. He also looks at how he thinks those players, perhaps coming out of a good or bad season, might do in the upcoming year.

"Undervalued players. I like going after players that had a bad year because they're devalued, drafted lower," Hinkelman said. "Another thing I stay away from is people or players or free agents who sign big money contracts."

Baseball has always been a passion of Hinkelman, and he checks out games in person. So far, he says he's been to half the nation's major league parks, and he also goes to minor league games too. By looking at the parks, he says he makes better picks.

"Texas, you like the hitters there because that's a hitter's park. Denver, Colorado there, that's a hitter's park, so you take that into consideration," Hinkelman said.

Ditching his HD-TV and favorite team

To keep up during the season, Hinkelman ditched HD t.v. in favor of a quick-change standard model television.

"I can switch it and boom it's on there. In high-def, it'll take five seconds to switch the channel and boy, you miss a pitch or two there," Hinkelman said.

He also gives up on his favorite team; sometimes, he even ends up cheering against them.

"You kind of sell out your favorite team," Hinkelman said. "You know, I told you I like the Dodgers, but I'll have a pitcher that I have on another team pitch against the Dodgers and I'll end up rooting for the guy that's on my team. To hell with the Dodgers! That's what Fantasy baseball does to you."

Even when he's working in the pig pen, Hinkelman says his mind's in the bullpen.

"To be honest with you, I think about baseball a lot when I'm up here," Hinkelman said. "You don't need to be aware of exactly what's going on up here because you do the same thing every day, so I think of what I need to do in baseball to get better."

'You can't do it with strictly being luck'

Hinkelman says he's not just lucky to live the life he loves, with pretty big success stories, but he's lucky enough to know in pigs and in baseball hard work pays off.

"I think you can [win] it one year with having a lot of luck. You can't do it two out of three years with just strictly being luck," Hinkelman. "Things have just really come together. It's unbelievable to me how things have turned out."

In 2009, Hinkelman won big, bringing in \$240,000 in prize money. In 2010, he struck out, not winning anything. Then this year, he got more than \$100,000 pushing him to around \$360,000 in total winnings.

The prize money doesn't come without putting money in up front; this year, he spent nearly \$9,000 in entry fees for several teams.