



Tommyball Princess

The Astounding Life of Tim Hein

By Mark Richard

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If you wanna know how the game's gonna go, look at the chickens.

- Tim Hein

"Don't count your chickens unless they can count on you."

- Yogi Berra (probably)

Praise For *Tommyball Princess*

"The most influential book about the most influential character in Tommyball History."

- Unmade Times

"A foolish publication and a terrible insult to the art of serious biographical exploration and communication."

- Smithsonian Institute

"It would be perfect if it had a little more 'me' in it."

- Tim Hein

"A deluge of narcissism, mentions of a dangerous cult, and repeated insults towards a game without providing context makes for a tired narrative. And yet, it's just what the world needs in the middle of 2020."

- Tommyball Players Union

"I've been learning 'Money for Nothing' by Dire Straits. Here's the intro for it."

- Tim Hein

Table of Contents

Praise For Tommyball Princess	5
Chapter 1 - The Present	8
Chapter 2 - Philanthropy	12
Chapter 3 - Commentary.....	18
Want to Read More?	23
About the Author	23
Acknowledgements	24

Chapter 1 - The Present

Spring 2020. Shops and restaurants are shuttered as the world of sport looks to a Dutch YouTube channel that races marbles with surprising enthusiasm. Amidst the chaotic silence across the globe, a single point of light emanates from the enigmatic character of Tim Hein as he responds to my emails in preparation for the publication of this book.

Our story of Tim Hein begins in the present because my interactions with him over the past few months provide more color to his past than considering his past would provide to who he is today. This is just one facet of the living paradox that is Tim Hein.

As the submission date required by the publishers neared, I felt little anxiety. The charm of dealing with Tim was all I required to feel at ease. I knew this first chapter

would be written quickly, at great personal cost, but something about Tim made me *want* to do it. There is a cult of personality about him that is hard to escape; a well of gravity that pulls at great distances.

To begin, Tim does not respond to emails. At least, not in a traditional sense. As was discussed in the limited audio-book release of his recent autobiography, Tim is not one to read. Of course, neither is he one to write. Instead his emails are dictated to him, and all responses are recorded with the same bravado as his Tommyball commentary. His assistants set up a private RSS podcast feed for each person in his email contact list, and replies are posted each morning.

It is this persistence, this stubborn desire to play to his own strengths, that makes Tim such an inspiring, dazzling, and controversial member of the Tommyball community. He never lets unfortunate circumstances stop his progress. Weapon bans, engine limits, and redrawn chalk lines defined the obstacles of his playing careers, much in the same way that Rube-Goldberg recording setups and lawsuits hamper his current career in commentating. Despite this, he remains a visible and outspoken member of the Tommyball community, making sure it (and he) continues to receive excellent financial support.

I first met with Tim over a video call in March of 2020. The meeting was not intentional. I was teaching some students about the finer points of the mid-game rumble over Zoom when Tim suddenly appeared on camera. While I was initially shocked by the interruption, excitement overcame me as I realized who our Zoom-bomber was. Once the rain of expletives came from Tim, my shock returned. I was soon able to take hold of the situation,

invited Tim to provide some advice to the young Tommyball enthusiasts¹, and a lifelong commercially-viable relationship was born.

I was quickly inducted into the Hein Dynasty (or the *Heinasty* as Tim prefers). Leaflets and tote bags were sent to me, with requests that I don't keep them until I send a check for at least twenty Australian dollars. Coffee dates were held twice a week as I began exploring the real Tim Hein.

He was tired of working with ghostwriters, and his voice was wearing thin after his month recording out at the Loy Yang power station. He was desperate for a proper biography. "I'm giving you the exclusive," he told me, "because the only thing that sells better than a fifth tell-all book is a sixth tell-all book written by a nobody. The intrigue will get to everyone."

I was sold.

Five meetings in, I signed a contract to write this book, with the agreement that Tim would receive sixty percent of my advance, and forty percent of all royalties. I was also entitled to one free bag of coffee beans a year from *Tim Hein's*, his Aussie take on a Canadian establishment.

During this initial batch of interactions with Tim, I was most struck by his generosity. For a man to be so generous after years of financial and personal issues, particularly those that were self-inflicted, was stunning to me. We so often hear of the celebrities that play a generous public game, yet are reportedly awful to those below them. Tim has the consistency to provide a mild undercurrent of

¹ My publisher informed me I can't repeat the advice verbatim, but the gist of it was "Do enough to get paid; get paid more than you spend; don't do so much that you get caught."

distaste for everyone equally, and manages to do the bare minimum donation amounts throughout the year to optimize his tax returns. This goes above and beyond those who shamelessly flaunt their wealth to others. Tim knows his place in the aristocracy of sports, and shares his mild celebrity and comfortable means with those around him who can increase both of those features for him.

As I've talked to Tim over several weeks, he has discussed his life in reverse order. After learning about his current pet projects, his career in Tommyball commentating and philanthropy, back into his playing days and youth, I was able to get a hold on the paradox introduced earlier. When Tim pursues something new, he does not look to the past and ask *What can I learn from those experiences?* He instead considers *What can I do to make my past consistent?* He has no interest in learning from mistakes. He was born with an innate sense of understanding and confidence. What he does is correct, and can only serve as a positive guide for the future. His time in the world taints his mind, so he continually strives to mirror his first moves in life, the pure choices that reflect the perfection from which he came.

While this chapter must come to a close soon, as I have until midnight to submit the manuscript, I have one prediction for the future. As people look for real leaders in this time of world crisis, Tim's cult of personality will develop into a following based on his world beliefs. There is strength and flexibility in the rhombus, and a purity to the game of Tommyball that Tim embodies. The world could certainly do worse than support the reign of the Tommyball Princess. I know I will.

Chapter 2 - Philanthropy

Tim came to the world of philanthropy late in life. As he explained it to me, donating before you have a stable job and increasing income is a fool's game. There are few benefits to be had when nobody is paying attention to you and tax write-offs are small. So, he bided his time. He accumulated wealth, lost it in a highly public fashion², gained it all back in an even more public fashion, then lost it in a far more anonymous way.³ The twists and

² The issue of [redacted] is, of course, to blame.

³ He dropped his credit card while romping around the beach, and couldn't be bothered to cancel it. Ironically, the card was found by none other than acclaimed video-journalist Bradley Haran, who was shocked to find a card with his own name on it! Tim would never *publicly* state this, but after his line of credit was lost from [redacted], he opened one in Bradley's name. Several camera purchases later, a mess was formed that still hasn't been entirely resolved.

turns of financial fate brought Tim along for a wild ride. After a surprising period of fiscal stability, Tim announced his philanthropic intentions to the world in the fall of 2017.

Tim started big, establishing himself as the face of a fundraising campaign to form a physical realization of the Tommyball Hall of Fame. Until that point, the Hall of Fame had only lived in the hearts and minds of little rhombi fans across the globe, and as a small sticky-note passed down by Tommyball League commissioners. Tim formulated plans to turn that note into at least a framed piece of A4 paper.

Using the magic of Kickstarter, dozens of Australian dollars were raised to support the effort. With only a few days left, Tim promised that if the campaign reached at least 300 Australian dollars, he would match the donations himself to create an individual exhibit to the newly-inducted Fred Dickerson, which would sit alongside the previously-pledged exhibit called *Tim's Tricks and Antics*.

Spurred on by this gentlemanly arrangement in favor of Tim's nemesis, each of the 137 Tommyball team owners donated one Euro.⁴ The conversion worked in Tim's favor, the goal was met, and the next controversy began for Tim.

Due to an unfortunate and completely accidental accounting error, all the money earmarked for Dickerson's exhibit was lost. Though magnanimous in offering to spend the 300 dollars found in the trunk of his car on training equipment for the Traralgon Titans, many fans turned on Tim yet again.

⁴ One must remember the domination of European teams in Tommyball League, much to the dismay of Tim, as he reminded me approximately 7 minutes into each coffee meeting. "It's a damn shame", he would yell out each time. "They already have a Union, and they want to infiltrate our league. Trapezoids aren't good enough, they need a *rhombus*. My God." It's a continual sore spot.

Tim was committed to this new approach to life, and did not let the initial setback deter him. After consulting with his business advisors, he determined the best step was to donate improved commentary equipment to high schools across Australia for aspiring commentators. He would also endow a fund to provide students discounted attendance to his various seminars on commentating, focused on the niche of Tommyball commentary.

This was widely lauded as a stroke of genius by business experts, and contributed to a positive swing in how Tommyball fans viewed Tim. Acknowledging that not everyone is set up for the rhombus, and paying mind to those with other aspirations proved a worthy and attainable goal. To this day, the *Tim Hein Commentary Foundation* runs with minimal corruption, and prepares two to four candidates in a five-year program for the rigors of Tommyball commentary.

Tim spent an entire meeting sharing his excitement about this program. He spent days poring over the curriculum: voice exercises, studying rules, developing new phrases, and selectively including expletives were all part of the core curriculum.⁵ Reviews were excellent, and a video series summarizing the main lessons were distributed to broadcasting schools worldwide. A line of textbooks is allegedly in the works, although Tim is far less involved in their production as he was with the videos.

⁵ Interestingly, Tim pioneered the technique of using hand signals to prepare the live TV censors of incoming expletives. However, in dedication to the purity of Tommyball commentary, the course on the subject is offered only every two years at 7:30 pm on Thursdays, and the textbook used is not available except as an unpackaged ream of three-hole-punched pages that also require an online code.

Heavy investments were put into a "Readiness" course, taught by career experts who normally roam secondary schools like vultures.

As Tim explained, there are few jobs in commentary. Unlike most sports, there are not several commentators per team. Instead, when each new season begins the potential commentators state their availability, and the 137 teams hold a draft: in each round, they draft a game's worth of time from an individual commentator.⁶ As a result, travel schedules are tough, and only the best commentators with either an encyclopedic knowledge of all players, or the ability to absorb the information in between assignments, get roles.

So, these Readiness courses are designed to make sure candidates in their fourth year understand the importance of the decision they made four years prior, that they may have trained very hard for a very long time to not get a job in the Tommyball field, at least not in the role they imagined. The candidates take aptitude tests designed by Time, letting them get a feel for their likelihood of a career in broadcast sports, and finding other interests that would serve them well.

To Tim's credit, any Readiness instructor who utters a phrase along the lines of *You can always work your way up, let's just practice a firm handshake* is immediately dismissed from the program, and the student receives ten Australian dollars on the spot.

⁶ An interesting corollary to this situation is that some teams aim to get at least one commentator per game, while others try to get the best commentators for their most popular games, leaving some without any commentary. Although candidates would gladly take those empty games, the rules of the commentary draft are strict, and a round-limit is punitively enforced.

In an attempt to capitalize on this success, Tim went to another area of expertise and released a physical fitness program aimed at Tommyball fans. Originally marketed as **P100X™**, it was quickly rebranded as *Tight Tommyball Tushies by Tim*. Tim navigated all the marketing on his own,⁷ focusing on fourteen to sixteen year old boys who enjoy discussing the Kessel Run.⁸

The program was a smashing success despite the efforts of Greg Hunt, the Minister of Health, who decried the program as "worse for the health of our youth than holistic medicine and Tide pod challenges."

Tim was naturally hesitant to expand on Hunt's quote, although with a bit of prodding he chose to defend himself. His vision for the program was to allow everyone a shot at Tommyball, regardless of their athletic ability when starting the program. He admitted the methods may have called for extraordinary measures depending on the initial fitness assessment. In particular, leaping from mid-sized buildings to improve muscle density and eating fried worms for improved flexibility were called out as egregious additions to the program.

I pointed out it wasn't much of a defense, to which Tim responded that the checks still rolled in, and not a cent of it went to a marketing budget. He had me there.

⁷ Another common complaint, though only every two weeks or so, was how paying for marketing was a scam. "Anybody can sell sand to a guy in a desert. If they can afford it, then just yell about how good it is without telling them about it. If they can't, give them a line of credit." Tim certainly does have a certain way of cutting to the core of things when he wants.

⁸ While Tim officially did the marketing, he may have received some free tips from a certain video-journalist.

Of course, I can't omit the *Beans of Change* program run by his *Tim Hein's* fast-casual chain. It began in late 2019, and despite its name, was designed to be a direct competitor to McDonald's Monopoly. For each piece of change in the tip jar at the end of the day, the organization would donate a coffee bean to a university student group in the area. If a customer puts change in the tip jar, they receive a 4x5 glossy picture with a date on it. It has one of 137 messages written on the back as well, taken from both Dove Chocolate quotes and Laffy Taffy jokes. If the customer comes back in on the date listed, they may be eligible for a cash or coffee reward based on the listed message.⁹

Although it's a new addition to the Tim Hein Universe of Giving™, the *Beans of Change* program has already provided several ounces of coffee to university students.

To really understand the nature of Tim's philanthropic efforts, I asked him which he was the most proud of. He asked me which one made him look the best, and which one people talked about the most. He also began to pull out his tax forms for the previous year before our 40 minute timer on Zoom cut us off.

It's safe to say that Tim is having a massive impact across the country and the world, and that his heart is in the right place. Merchandise is the heart and soul of Tommyball, and Tim Hein is the center of Tommyball. He looked back at his goals to become a Tommyball great, and continues to work to that end. He is truly an inspiration in these trying times.

⁹ Since each message is handwritten, there have been concerns that a store sets up the game so it's impossible to win. Despite reports of winners every few weeks across Australia, it's widely believed these are fabricated. Tim declined to comment.

Chapter 3 - Commentary

Commentary is Tim's lifeline. If playing the game was his bread, then publicly rendering judgement on it and how others play is his butter. As our biweekly conversations roamed from topic to topic, it was hard to separate out commentary as its own idea. It's persistent throughout his life, though it only professionally occupies a small piece of it.

From a young age, Tim was witty, pithy, and full of scathing criticism. His mother recalled "how toxic he was, a tongue full of vitriol, always aimed at the other boys in the schoolyard."

"A mouth like a sailor, and the courage of a Caribbean pirate" a former teacher said.

Working for the school newspaper, he dictated many a movie review that would make Roger Ebert go pale, so colorful and varied the language was. He was eventually

removed from that particular school club when the editor became desensitized to the rough language and let a foul word slip through one week.

Yet, unlike most boys in their late teens, he became more refined as he prepared for university. The criticism and wit were still present, but the words became more measured. It was becoming clearer that after the necessarily short-lived career in Tommyball as a player, he would have promise in the booth.

Tim told me these startlingly acute observations about himself, but didn't offer up any clear explanation as to how the change originated. I went to investigate.

I eventually tracked down his old Tommyball coach. Apparently, Tim held a fake ID and managed to spectate the third day of a match at only 16 years old. During a verbal rampage ordered by the officials, he joined a crowd focused on abusing the Istanbul Bulls. He began "spitting hot fire", and immediately was retaliated against by an umpire.¹⁰ Ejected from the stadium with an official Tommyball Tattoo requesting him to clean up his language, he turned a corner to make sure his Tommyball career would not be in danger.

When the time for broadcasting came, Tim reached out to the greats like John Madden, Andres Cantor, and Pepper Brooks. Pulling together wisdom and experience from the esteemed individuals, he began to build his own style. He tirelessly worked on audition videos, on planning logistics, and learning how to sleep in 15 minute increments to maximize his availability in the draft.

¹⁰Oddly enough, it was a clever turn of Australian phrase used against this Bulls player that may have elicited cheers had the player not been female. It's a fine line to walk, but Tommyball rules have always been clear: You can insult the play, but not the player.

His hard work paid off. He managed to get a game for each of the 12 teams¹¹ in '99, which propelled him into his reputation for knowing each team thoroughly. Just two years later, a year before expansion, he managed the only *Broadcast Bingo*: he was on the commentary team for every match in the Tommyball League season.¹²

After the '01 season, Tim was regaled as the "Voice of Tommyball."¹³ Many lawsuits put forth by both Tommyball League and the Tommyball Players Union were quietly settled as a result.

I asked Tim what his goals could possibly have been after reaching the pinnacle of success. Tim set his coffee down, stared straight down the barrel of his webcam, and simply said "The game was still [expletive] broken, and there was always going to be something to say about that."

And that is what is so inspiring about Tim. He believes in the purity of the game, and the importance of his craft. His voice needs to be heard. Nothing captures the essence of his commentary career better than his signature phrase, *That's Tommyball*.

¹¹ The early '00s were known as the *Era of European Expansion*. Prior to Europe entering the league, there were only the 10 Australian teams, the Turkish team, and the Mongolian team.

¹² This was prior to regulations on the Commentator draft. Time claims were not reviewed, so Tim said he was available for more than 24 hours a day. He recorded many of his catchphrases, distributed them to his broadcast partners, and went on holiday for several months.

¹³ Building off this success, he was hired as a voice coach for Morgan Freeman over the next year as Morgan prepared to play God in *Bruce Almighty*. "It was a joy to work with him, a master of his art, although a bit tall for his own britches", Freeman wrote in an email exchange.

However, it was not always obvious that this pure goal was at the forefront of Tim's mind as scandals emerged among his increasing fame. While I won't dive into some of the more salacious issues,¹⁴ the [redacted] incident is worth discussing.¹⁵

It started in early [redacted], when a crow entered the octagon.¹⁶ Typically, avian species avoid the field until after a match is over, where they can pick at the earthworms that have been churned up by the players, and maybe cooked by the central furnace. So, such an intrusion caught Tim's broadcast partner, armed with a set of canned sayings from Tim, off-guard.

The broadcaster quickly cycled through the sayings, and settled on [redacted]. It could have played well, except the opposing team was [redacted], and that caused quite a ruckus. Unsure what to do, the broadcaster quickly grabbed the cardboard cutout of Tim he kept on-hand, set it up in the booth, and ran off. Although it's rumored that he was [redacted], Tim doesn't bear any grudge. The results were ugly, and Tim received a [redacted] until [redacted]. But he took it in stride, and came out the other end in good spirits.

¹⁴ Read more in chapters 43 - 58 of his most recent autobiography.

¹⁵ I was particularly excited to get this exclusive, since the [redacted] incident has been scrubbed from newspaper archives and the internet. Tim is finally ready to get the word out, and it's a big break for me as a writer. I haven't let my publisher know, since I want them to be surprised by this get; it'll mean a big boost in sales. I know my editor will have to clean up the phrasing a bit, but it's exciting to get the main details of the scandal out there. Take that *Buzzfeed*.

¹⁶ Casual fans may not know the change to a rhombic field is recent (and heavily opposed by Tim.)

I asked how Tim could forgive such an ordeal, and Tim, with his charming simplicity, said "Hey, everything wrong with Tommyball is because of people, so you can guess how much bollocks happens with people themselves."

When I moved the conversation along, Tim looked visibly relieved, excited to move into discussing post-expansion commentary.

As has been mentioned in many other interviews, Tim has a scathing hatred for much of the post-expansion era. And anything that can fuel frustration and critique is precisely what Tim wishes to discuss. While he hopes Tommyball can better itself through all this change, he firmly believes the League has simply been throwing ideas at a wall and seeing responses, rather than thinking about it closely.

"Look", he said in a recent game, "I know Tommyball. I know you have to think a bit, see your enemies, and play to your strengths. The strength of Tommyball is in the fans and the weapons they can wield against the players. If the League doesn't see that, the commissioner needs to go."

After a lengthy Twitter feud,¹⁷ the commissioner was gone.

Tim concluded by responding again to my earlier question about peaking after the '01 season with the Bingo. "I have work to do, and nobody else is doing it. This game matters."

An inspiration, a princess, and a joy to know.

¹⁷ It started when the commissioner tweeted "And what if @TimHein is our enemy?" An RSS feed and one day later, the commissioner had a colorful response that contained far more than 280 characters.

Want to Read More?

Go bug Brady and Tim first, or you can email Mark, or post on reddit with your own stories about the Tim Hein we know and love. Mark would love to work them into both new and old chapters, and continue building the lore.

About the Author

Mark Richard is a widely unknown Tommyball enthusiast and hobbyist writer. Coming to the game late after growing up in a baseball family, the switch left him disowned and struggling to make ends meet. In the spirit of Tim Hein, he decided cheap commercial endeavors were the way to go, and this book was the result.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Brady Haran and Tim Hein of the Unmade Podcast for creating such a rich vein of material. Taking in the improvisational world-building of Tommyball always provides a chuckle and a smile.

Thanks to my own podcasting buddies for being a sounding board, keeping me honest, providing inspiration to take on new projects, and subjecting themselves to my creative endeavors during the last few years.