

Out of Play

I'm pleased to present another puzzle by Bob Fink and Jerry Miccolis.

IT'S MARCH, AND IT'S SPRING TRAINING TIME, AND PLAYERS—particularly the starting nine—try to trim down and get fit. Of this puzzle's answers, nine (six across and three down) will not fit into the grid unless they are first trimmed down—with a type of exercise common to all nine. The clues for these nine answers contain three components (as opposed to the usual two—a wordplay part and a straight definition part); the third component, a word or phrase that otherwise would be extraneous, is a straight definition of the modified grid entry. Once the grid is filled in, the two central unclued entries will describe the puzzle's theme by identifying what is out of play.

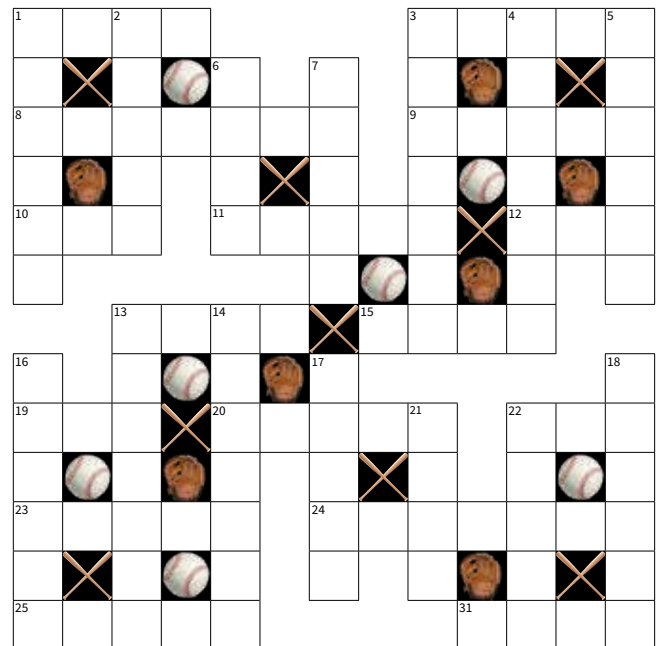
As you undertake the trimming-down exercise, you will notice that you will need to introduce nine letters to replace what is out of play. Those letters, appropriately rearranged, will spell out what, for many, would be an out-of-play highlight of any Spring Training game.

One clue answer is a proper noun, one is hyphenated, one a variant spelling, and one is two words. All other clue answers and grid entries are playable in Scrabble. As usual, be wary of punctuation, which is often used deceptively.

Thanks to Eric Klis for test solving and providing editorial suggestions.

Across

1. Leaders of American League, in the thick of strong draft, counterbalance pennant-holder
3. Put another way, pal, by all means, let the game begin on a Baja beach (2 words)
8. Memorable places I roam
9. Forward-looking Cards, after chasing off Astros' starter, create runs
10. Simple song from City of Angels embraced by naked boy
11. Voice Mimic: stream on a podcast next month
12. Group dance is leaving Bastille in confused state
13. See Instructions
15. See Instructions
19. Diamond stat time
20. Hopeless Minnesota nine endlessly follow Enos's core elements (hyphenated)
22. Ticket for western half of Baltic parking area spot
23. Prepare to rob a moll cavorting in dance hall
24. Pervert substituting fluorine for phosphorus in flammable gas
25. In opener, Reds dropped a pop-up
26. Hesitate outside boardwalk



Down

1. Force drug runner to go around South Carolina
2. Sail South Sea in reverse
3. Leg bone found in time in Spanish rice dish
4. Alas, our faltering libido
5. Passé Tsar retains benefits
6. Puerto Rican pineapple and ill-conceived pill ban: something to bounce around the table?

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- 7. Fame, in a general way, is a dribble, friend
- 13. Brit's taste is primarily for lovely antique Victorian ottomans under restoration
- 14. Anonymous male enters den at university retreat
- 16. Hound head of bank over collectible gold coin
- 17. Plastered, I spew smack

- 18. Run right into a side of beef
- 21. Good fortune surrounds every swell at the highest point
- 22. Physician, brought before physicians' oversight body, generates theatrics

Spring Training game highlight: _____

Solution to Previous Issue's Puzzle—'tis the damn season

Across clues

- 1. (H)ARMED—CHARMED (“Lucky”) – C (“to experience average loss”)
- 4. INSUL(A)TED—Anagram of “Let unsaid”
- 10. LARCENY—RCE (“leaders of restructuring corporate entities”) inside LA and NY
- 11. MOON (P)IES—“monopolies” with “no” reversed – O “old” – L “liberal”
- 12. S(P)ILLS—SP – F (“inadequate application of SPF”) + ILLS (“Misfortune”)
- 13. CONSIDER—CON (“Imprisoned one”) + SIDE (“party”) + R (“right”)
- 15. CAN(Y)ON—CON (“No vote”) around ANY
- 16. CUTE—CUT (“Nick”) + E (“English”)
- 17. DA(N)TE—Outside “dangerous route” and literally
- 19. L(E)AST—Anagram of “tales”
- 21. AMID—Inside “pyramids” (“near the Eastern border”)
- 22. (W)EDGES—WED (“married”) + odd letters in “Guess”
- 25. TOMORROW—Double definition
- 27. BANKS—Double definition
- 30. HOL(Y) LAND—Anagram of “and Holly”
- 31. TR(E)ADING—Anagram of “gradient”
- 32. INDIC(A)TED—Anagram of “it, Candide”
- 33. SH(R)EDS—SH (“quiet”) + REDS (“communists”)

Down clues

- 1. ATLAS—Inside “What lasagna?”
- 2. MARILYN—Anagram of “in mylar”
- 3. DRESSING—D (“the debut of demonstrably”) + RESSING (“singers” scrambled)
- 5. NOMINATED—Outside “None dominated”
- 6. UTOPIA—“out” scrambled + first letters of “pontificate idiotically” + A (“The Scarlet Letter”)
- 7. TRIBECA—TRIBE (“a number of people”) + CA (“California”)
- 8. DESK—Inside “Lord’s kitchen”
- 9. SYNC—Anagram of “NYC’s”
- 14. LEGS - Outside of “legal troubles” and pun on “break a leg”
- 15. CELL—Homophone of SELL (“close”)
- 16. CAMBRIDGE—CAM (“Disk”) + first six letters of “Bridgerton”

1	A	R	M	E	D				4	I	N	S	6	U	L	T	E	8	D	
	T		A		R			9	S		O									
10	L	A	R	C	E	N	Y			11	M	O	O	N	I	E	S			
	A		I		S						N	I		P		B			K	
12	S	I	L	L	S			13	C	O	N	S	I	D	E	R				
			Y		I						A		A					14	L	
15	C	A	N	O	N			16	C	U	T	E		17	D	A	T	E		
	E				G				A		E			18					G	
19	L	A	S	T				21	A	M	I	D			22	E	D	G	E	S
	L		P			24	M		B					S		E				
		25	T	O	M	O	R	R	O	26	W			27	B	A	N	K	28	S
29	C		I		S						I			I		U				I
30	H	O	L	L	A	N	D			31	T	R	A	D	I	N	G			
	A		E		I		G			H				N						N
32	I	N	D	I	C	T	E	D					33	S	H	E	D	S		

- 18. LESBIANS—Anagram of “bless Ian”
- 20. SPOILED—SOILED (“Ruined”) taking P (“power”)
- 23. GENUINE—“engine” scrambled around U (“unconvincingly at first”)
- 24. MOSAIC—Double definition
- 26. WITH—WIDTH—D (“excluding depth”)
- 28. SIGNS—Homophone of SINES (“functions”)
- 29. CHAI—CHAIR – R (“Head of the committee ends early”)

Hidden message: HAPPY NEW YEAR

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