

THE LEGEND OF MARCH 25

Spring begins this year on March 20 at about 12:15 PM as our planet Earth speeds through the celestial equator. Why are we celebrating it with a game on March 25? We must go far back in history to answer that question.

Our Gregorian calendar had its seeds in Rome over 2000 years ago. The city-state of Rome originally followed a lunar calendar as was common at that time. Each month started with the new moon, as a narrow sliver rose in the morning sky then progressed as the moon waxed full into the ides of the month before waning back to a moonless pitch-black night. The reappearance of each new sliver was met with great rejoicing amongst people fearing a perpetual moonless world. Life was tough at night before Wegmans introduced 24-hour Edisonian-illuminated harvesting.

The problem with lunar calendars was the discrepancy between 12 lunar months and one solar year, about 10 days. Whenever you began counting in the solar cycle, 12 lunar months was not quite enough to get back to the same spot. The discrepancy would grow to a full month about every third year so it was common to simply add a month from time to time to get back into sync.

The problem was somebody had to make the decision of when to add the month. Unfortunately, that authority was put in the hands of politicians. Need I say more! If the party in power was concerned with reelection fearing a loss of seats, then they voted to delay things by intercalating an additional month hoping for smoother sailing ahead. The result was to upset the synchronization of the calendar with the seasons. A new leader, Julius, undertook reform in 46 BCE, ultimately becoming a most important historical figure. He decreed a solar calendar with a 365-day year removing the synchronization of the months to the lunar phase while fixing their place in the solar cycle.

Julius was having an affair with an Egyptian chick at the time who apparently looked like Elizabeth Taylor. The Egyptians had long used a solar calendar so perhaps she made him an offer he could not refuse. We will never know but the resulting calendar has been passed down to us filled with allusions to long gone despots and gods after some modification becoming our civil calendar.

What does any of this babble have to do with our game? Julius specified the date of the vernal equinox on his brand-new creation to be March 25, hence we gather to observe the event. Hail Caesar. We who are about to play bridge, salute you.