

PVSS President's Address 2012
Martin Back, MD

BASEBALL TALK



A diversion is defined as an amusement, play or pastime. Truth is, I don't get out of the hospital enough to have many hobbies or explore new interests. In practical terms, a diversion could be better defined as an activity or focus that makes you forget the day's troubles and life's encumbrances. It enables escape to a more peaceful simple place.

Allow me to share my preferred diversion with you. While I love all sports, baseball is my favorite.





A brief history of the game of baseball. The legend of Abner Doubleday inventing the modern game of baseball in Cooperstown, NY in 1839 turned out to be false. While the striking of spherical shaped objects by a long cylindrical stick has been done for amusement for thousands of years, a game closely resembling modern baseball with a pitcher throwing to a hitter and bases separated in a diamond shape was credited to Alexander Cartwright a firefighter and amateur ballplayer in NYC 1845. Defensive players could record outs and balls and strikes were counted on the hitter.

The NY Knickerbockers and other teams formed in the Northeast US to play each other. The game spread south in the US during the Civil War. The first professional team (where players were paid to play) was the Cincinnati Red Stockings in 1869. The National League (comprised of NE US teams) was formed in 1876 and the American League (composed of many Midwestern city teams) in 1893. The first world series was played between the winners of NL and AL in 1903.

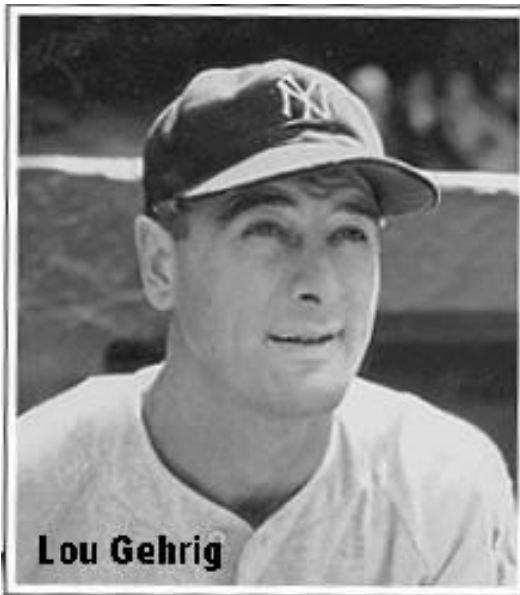




Two summers ago our family had the opportunity to visit the baseball hall of fame in beautiful Cooperstown, NY. The hall opened in 1939 and the first class of inductee players/coaches were honored in 1936 including George Herman (aka Babe) Ruth.



Within the entrance are bronze statues of 3 of the most influential players in baseball history, not just because of their phenomenal accomplishments on the field.



Lou Gehrig 'the Iron Horse' was the quiet consistent leader of the Yankee dynasty in the 1920-30s. He was humble, polite, kind, was active in charitable efforts, loved children, and was an extremely gifted and determined player and consummate teammate. His consecutive games played streak spanned 13 seasons and this streak and his career were cut short as he developed progressive debilitating weakness found to be due to ALS (come to be known as Lou Gehrig's disease).



Jackie Robinson was the first of many players from the Negro leagues to join MLB. Branch Rickey president of the Brooklyn Dodgers signed Robinson in 1947 well pre-dating the civil rights movements of the 1950 and 60s. Robinson was named rookie of the year in 1947 with his exciting, hustling style of play while enduring hateful, racial slurs, taunts and physical threats. Occasionally other white players intentionally tried to injure him in games. He controlled his anger, realizing that his efforts represented something much larger in the strive for equal rights and an end to segregation. He is honored every Apr 15 in all ML ballparks with every player wearing his #42.



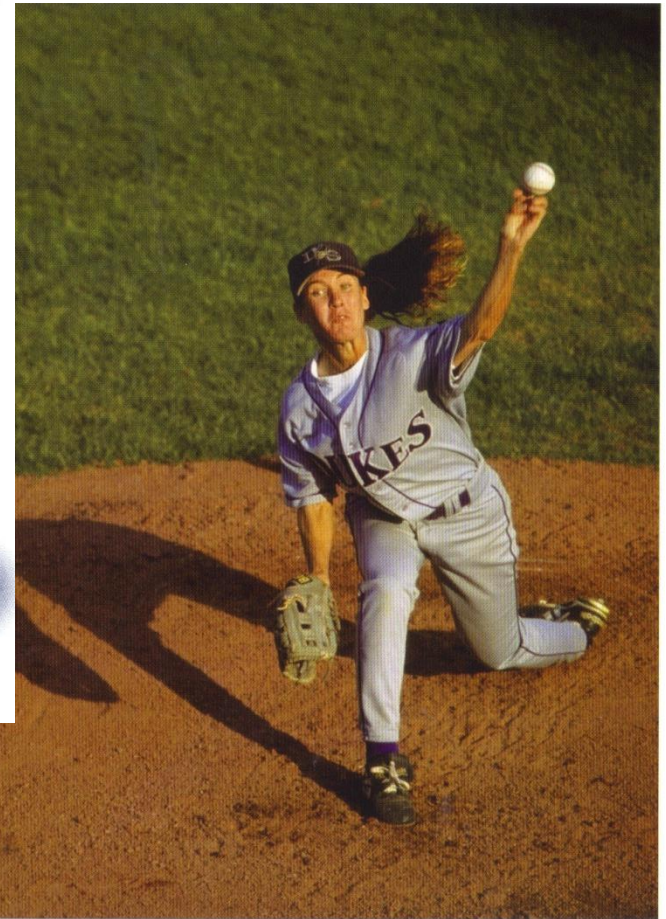
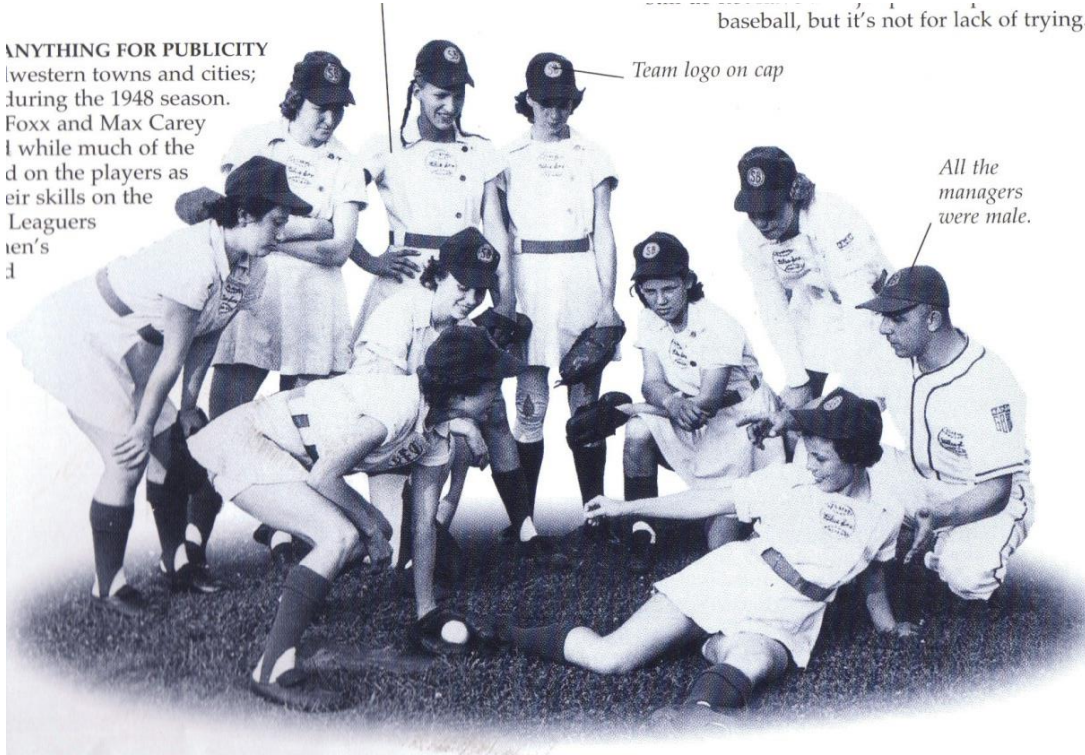
Roberto Clemente was the first ML player from a Latin American country in 1955. He was a complete ballplayer (with top-notch defensive & hitting skills and speed) and won several league MVP awards. He returned each offseason to his native Puerto Rico to run baseball camps for underprivileged youth and build homes in impoverished areas and participate in other charitable activities. His career was cut short as he unfortunately was killed in a plane crash in 1972 associated with PR relief efforts for a devastating earthquake in Nicaragua.

ANYTHING FOR PUBLICITY
in western towns and cities;
during the 1948 season.
Fox and Max Carey
while much of the
credit on the players as
their skills on the
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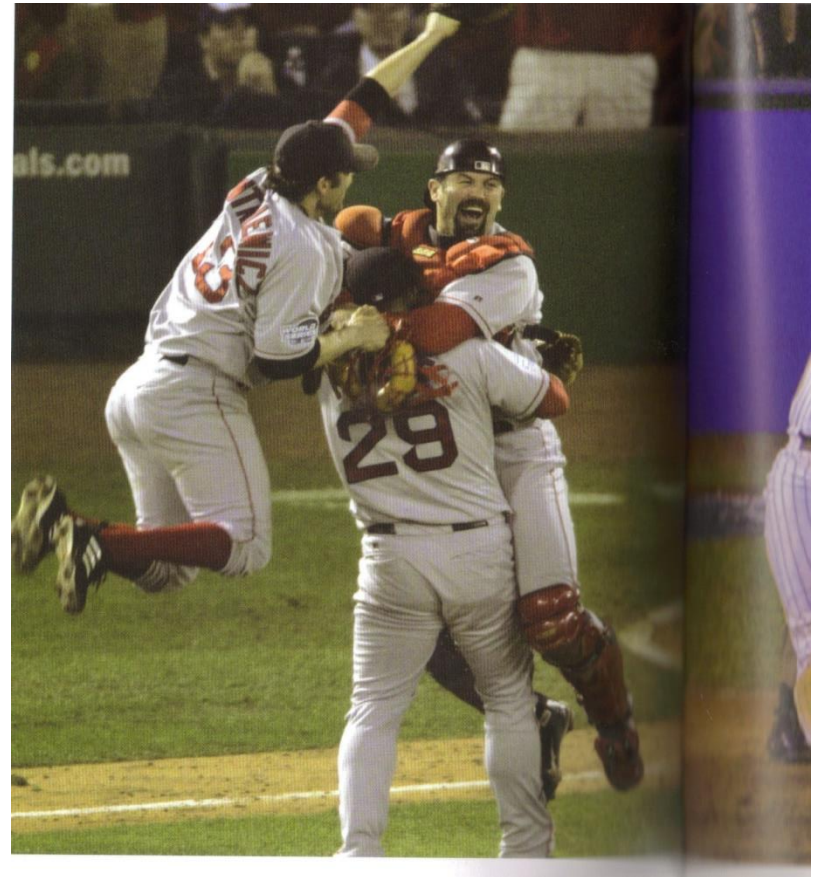
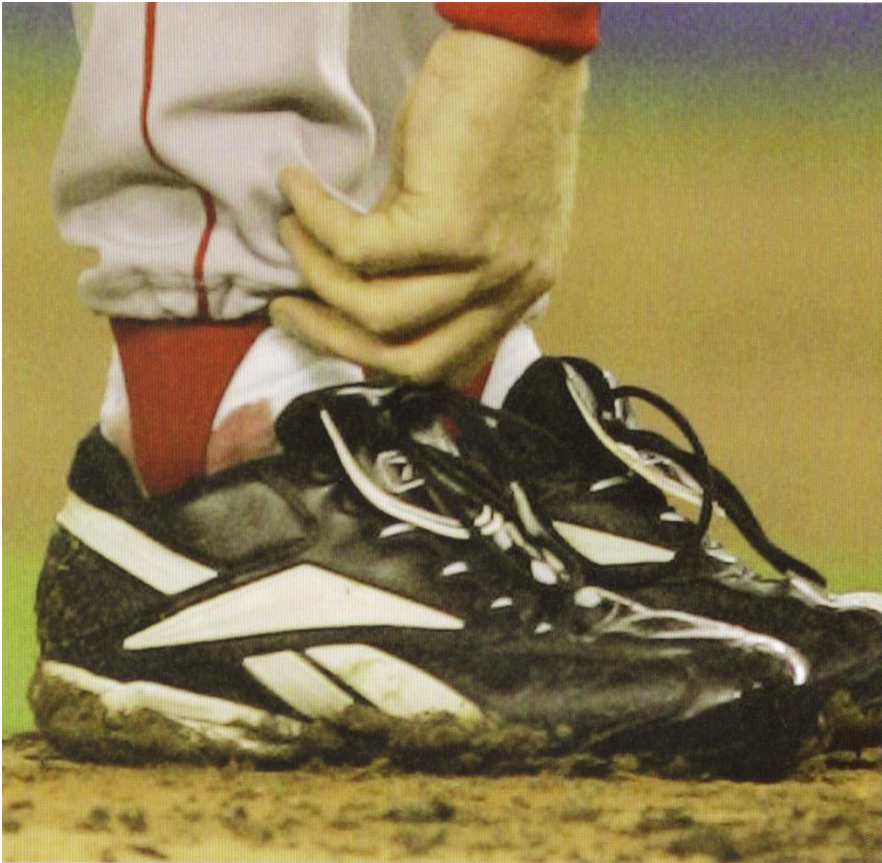
baseball, but it's not for lack of trying.

Team logo on cap

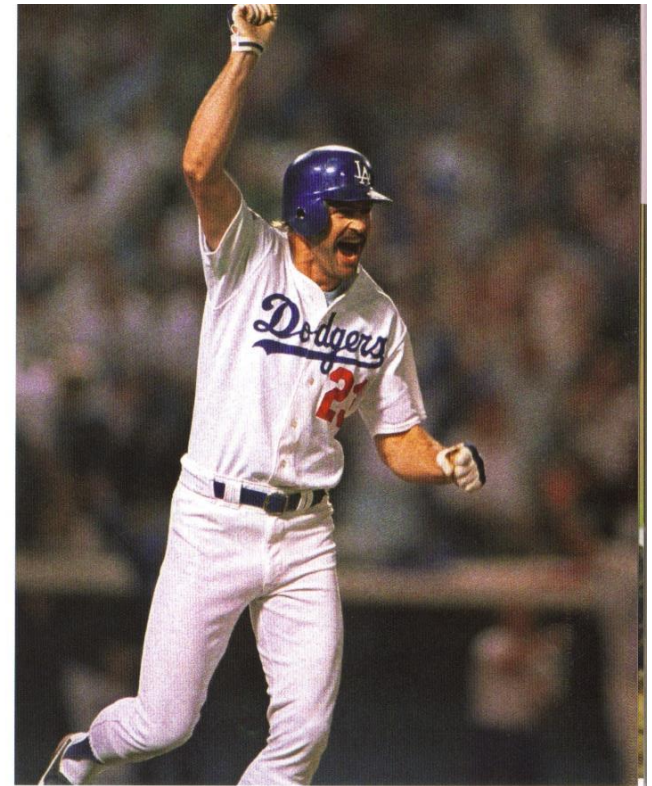
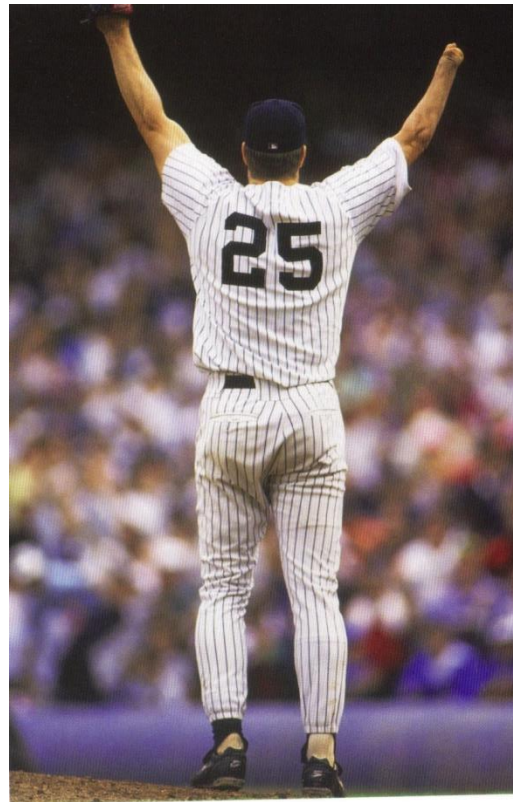
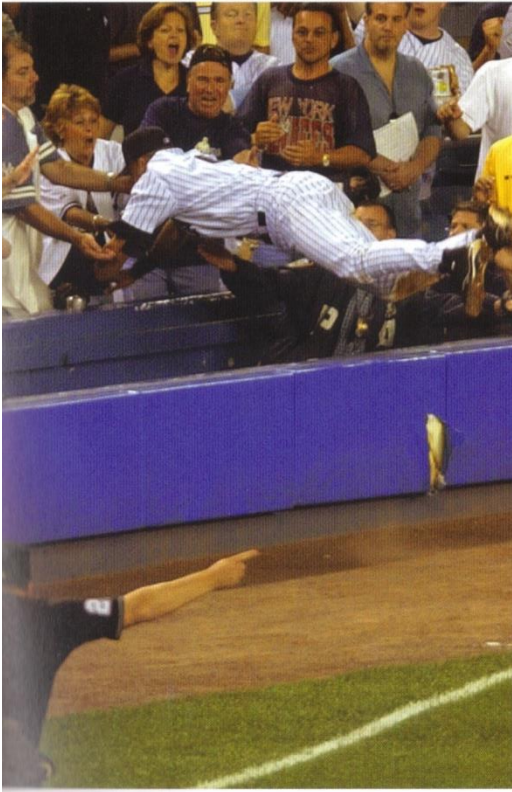
All the
managers
were male.



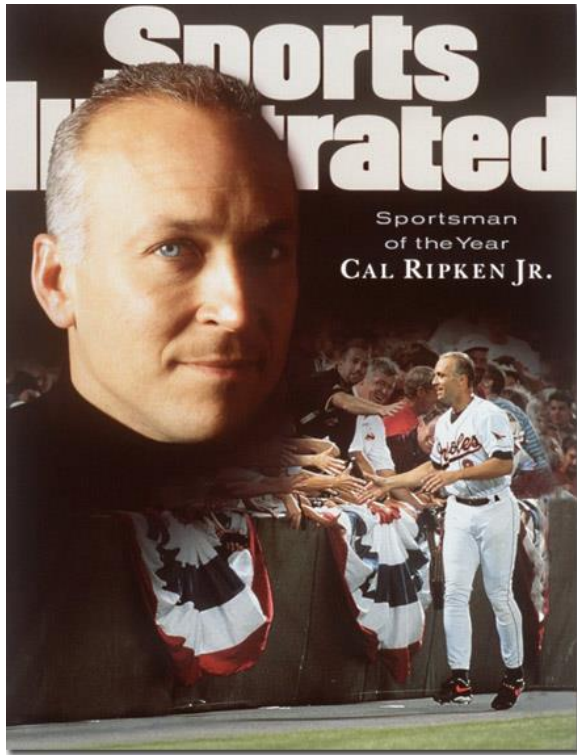
Women had an important role in baseball as well and separate from the growing popularity and participation of girls in softball. During WWII MLB was shut down. Starting in 1943 and for the next 10 years, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League flourished with teams in many cities and increasing fan interest. This was popularized in the 1992 movie *A League of their Own*. Lefty pitcher Ila Borders became the first woman college player in 1994 and the first female minor leaguer in 1997.



While many fans dwell on individual player successes and favorite teams winning games and titles, I see beauty in baseball in extraordinary effort and personal conviction and sacrifice. Down 3 games to 2 to the NY Yankees in the 2004 World Series, Curt Schilling nursing a large laceration and tendon injury despite suturing in his right ankle, pitched the Red Sox to a tough win to even the series despite ongoing pain and visible bleeding. Boston won game 7 to take their first world series since 1918 to erase the 'curse of the Bambino' (when they traded Babe Ruth to the Yankees).

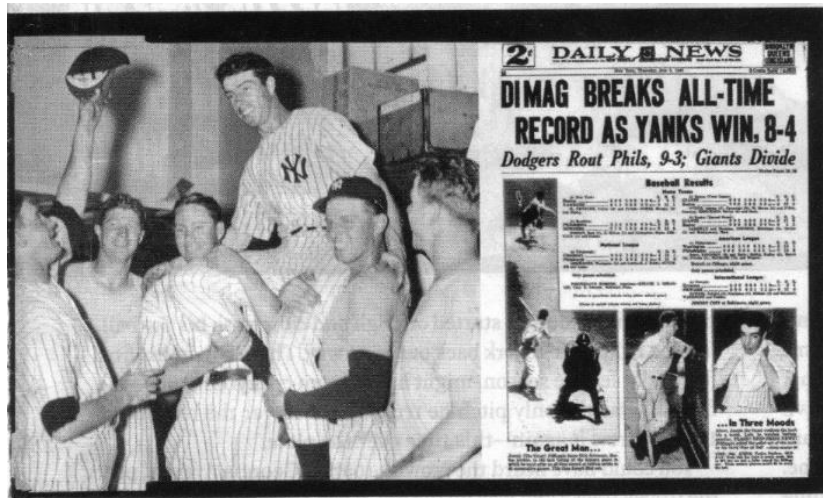


Derek Jeter at full speed diving into the stands to catch a foul ball pop-up when the Yankees were tied late in a game. He suffered a deep cut chin and had to be removed from the game but his effort fired-up his teammates who rallied to win the game. Jim Abbott, born without a right hand, was a quality major league pitcher for many years and pitched a no-hitter while with the Yankees in his later career. Envision balancing his glove on his right wrist while throwing a pitch with his left arm and then quickly flipping the glove to his left hand after delivery to field a quick hit or catch the ball. Kurt Gibson, entering as a pinch hitter in the 1988 World Series with the Dodgers losing, barely able to limp with a ligament tear in his right knee and a strained hamstring in his left leg. He hit a 3-2 pitch from star reliever Dennis Eckersly for a go-ahead home run lifting the Dodgers to victory but could barely get around the bases.



I marvel at some of the seemingly unbeatable records in baseball. Cal Ripken Jr, another gentle good guy, passed Lou Gehrig and played in 2632 consecutive games. Not even considering the daily potential for serious injury in competitive pro sports, can you imagine not missing a day of work due to illness for 16 straight years.

Joe DiMaggio had at least one base hit in 56 consecutive games during 1941. Joe, a quiet guy, would get lost in Superman comic books as pressure mounted later in the streak. He was also the first MLB player to make \$100k in a season.





Cy Young retired in 1911 with 511 wins in 906 career games pitched. Recently retired Greg Maddux of the Atlanta Braves is a distant second with 355 wins and it is unlikely that any current or future pitcher will make it to 300 wins again.

Nolan Ryan who pitched for more than 20 seasons in MLB and had the first 100mph fastball, not to mention throwing 7 no-hitters, finished with 5714 strikeouts. Second and third all-time Randy Johnson and Roger Clemens finished nearly 1000 strikeouts behind him.

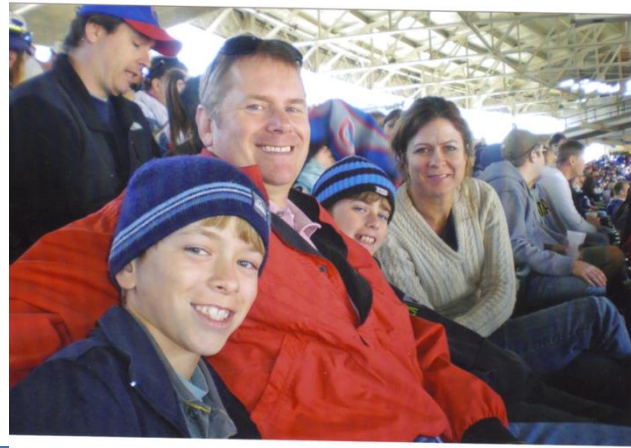




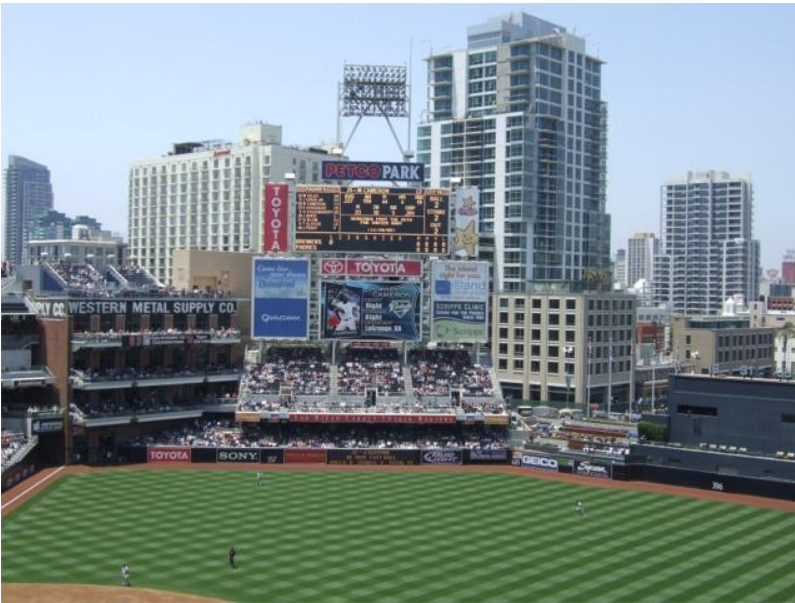
Roger Maris held the record for most home runs in a ML season with 61 in 1960. That record was shattered in 1998 and again in 2001. Whether you believe performance enhancing chemicals were involved in the significant muscle bulk shown in many recent powerhitters (Barry Bonds as a rookie and 15 yrs later), I remain in awe at the sheer athletic ability exhibited in their feats. The race between Mark McGuire and Sammy Sosa in 1998 to break Maris' record was exciting and brought fans back to the game after the player strike in 1994 deflated fan confidence. The superman-ish Barry Bonds in 2001 was intentionally walked almost 200 times but still managed to hit 1 HR every 7 at-bats. That is amazing.



There is something majestic and almost magical in big league ballparks that differentiate them from football stadiums and indoor arenas. Maybe it's the architecture or maybe the history in older parks. We're trying to experience as many of them as possible across the country. Fenway park in Boston built in 1912 is the oldest current ML park. The famed Green Monster left field fence and baseball-themed restaurants, bars and businesses along Yawkey Way immediately outside the park give it great ambiance.



Wrigley field in Chicago built in 1914 is another old gem and was constructed right in the middle of an urban community with no large asphalt parking lots to spoil the intimacy of games played here. Lights were not installed to allow night ball games until 1988. I grew up in LA going to Dodger stadium built in Chavez Ravine in 1962 and overlooking the downtown. The nicer view was in the opposite direction looking beyond the outfield stands at the 6000 foot San Gabriel Mountains in the background. I can still smell the foot long Dodger dogs.



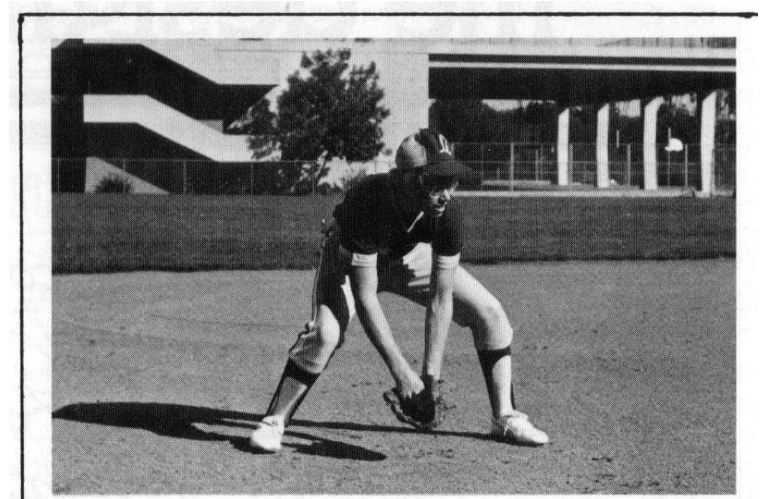
Some newer parks have been built with an older ballpark theme, constructed in downtown areas and with incorporation of adjacent old brick warehouses into outfield stands.



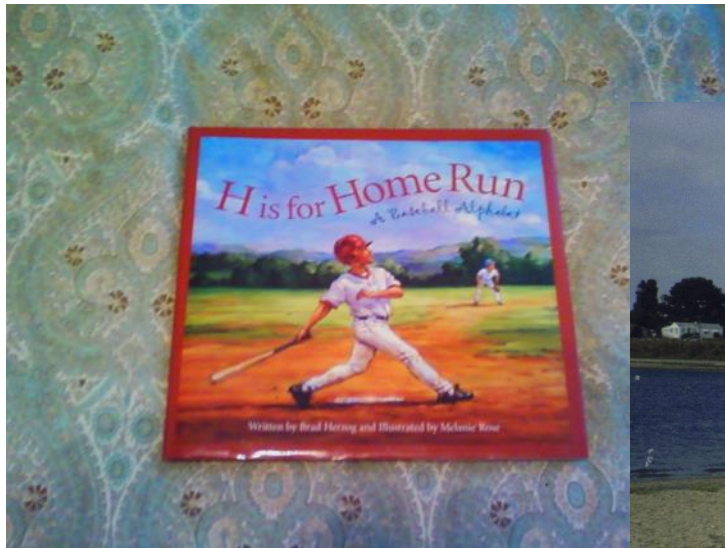
Thank god my lovely wife Barbara is a sports fan as well. I'm not sure in what ballpark this early photo was taken. Back at home in Tampa, the vacuous indoor confines of Tropicana Field were filled with more decoration, cheers, and energy when the Rays made a run to the world series in 2008 than at any time attending Rays games in my 13 yrs in Tampa.



My own baseball playing experience began at 9 yrs old in La Canada Little League. Sporting my favorite #6 throughout my limited baseball career after Steve Garvey of the Dodgers. My father Lloyd (on the left) was a manager or coach thru most of my pre-high school yrs. He was an all-city shortstop in San Francisco in the late 1940s and was offered a minor league contract with the Yankees after high school, but turned it down due to nominal salaries of the day, and was drafted into the Korean war conflict.



I have many fond memories playing competitive sports but making the varsity baseball team as a junior was the best. We had very good teams that went well into the Southern California CIF playoffs. Playing a steady third base and hitting a modest .300 for the varsity, I started to really drive fastballs, curves, and offspeed pitches, hitting .500 the second half of my senior year. You might be thinking “glory day” but I say “Good times.”



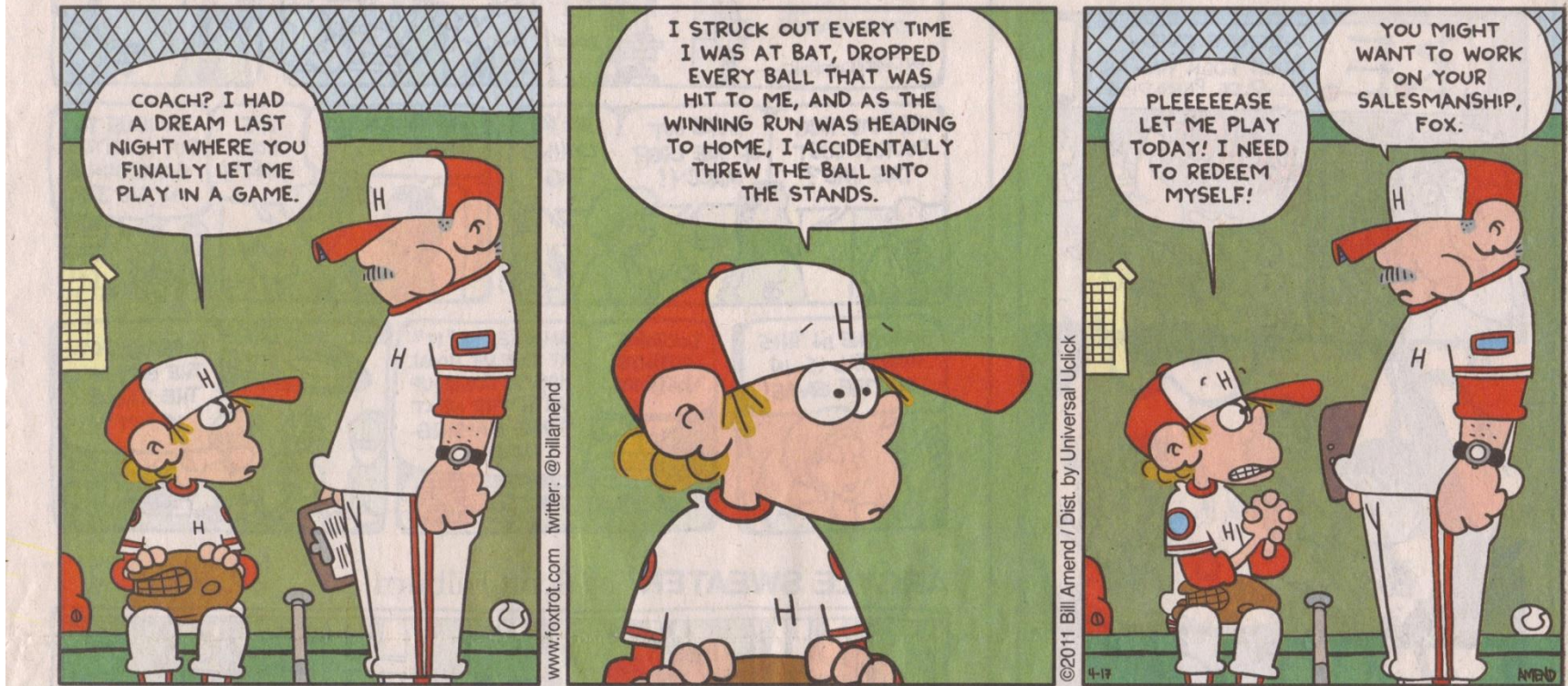
They say its good to start 'em young. We all wish and want our children to excel in activities they participate in while growing up. Unfortunately, where gentle motivation starts and monstrous overbearing control ends depends on one's frame of reference. John Gardner said "the toughest thing kids have to face is the unfulfilled lives of their parents." Andre Agassi was haunted by rigorous 6 hr/day tennis training forced on him daily by his father most of his childhood. He stated in his recent memoir that there were periods where he lost interest in playing tennis. He persevered to being a champion but at what cost of innocence and opportunity lost.



I've worn the hats of manager, coach, teacher, parent, father and fan and its not easy. Balancing instruction, motivational cheerleading and restrained discipline for 'bad behavior' is a tough act for all teachers, all occurring under the potentially unbending bias of involved parents.



FOXTROT / by Bill Amend



The opportunity for coaches to move beyond the shallow approach of “win, win, win” efforts and to instead strive to build individual character, confidence, work ethic, individual sacrifice for team gains and sportsmanship may be more meaningful and life lasting. One of the main reasons kids quit playing competitive sports at early ages is that they learn the wrong lessons from the experience especially negativity in losing. Coping with fear and failure and learning from defeat are equally as important as celebrating wins. Re-evaluate, re-focus, correct fixable mistakes, work harder and keep looking forward to the next game. Maybe that approach has a wider applicability.



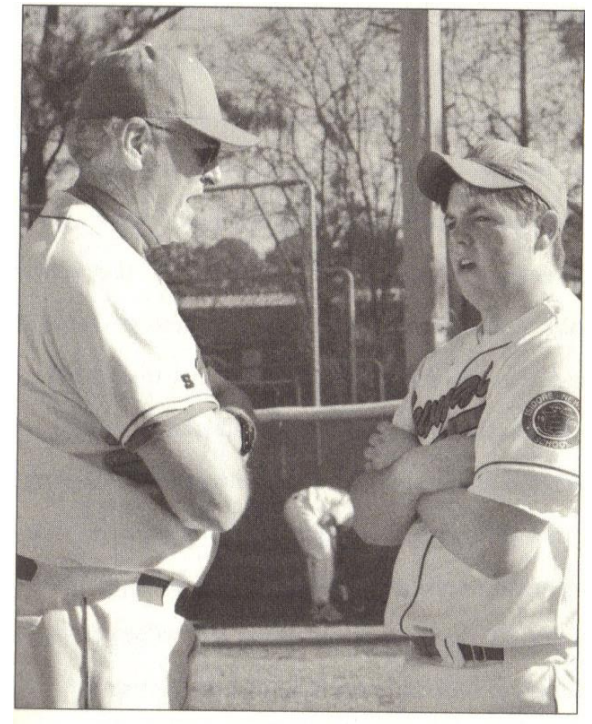
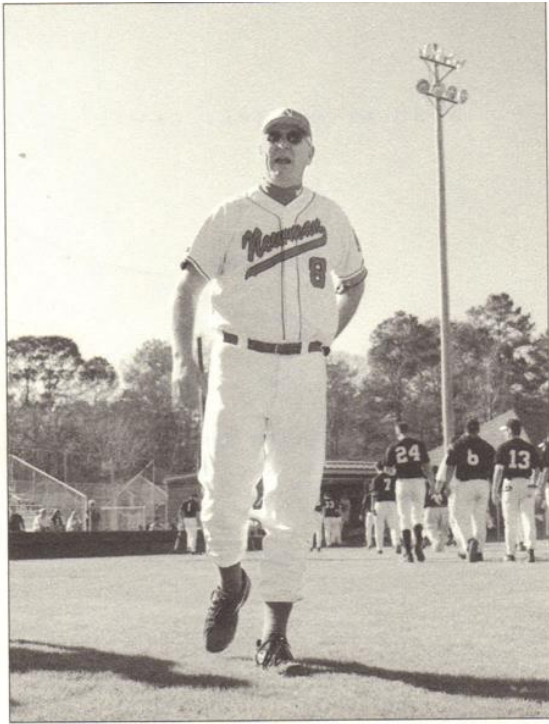
Certainly with younger kids, the experience has to remain fun. Some of that is dependent on individual success. I sought to have each player master or at least improve his/her weakest skill by the end of each season and would announce this accomplishment individually and in front of the whole team. Staying positive (with some exceptions) is the key to coaching.



This concept utilizes several great ideas – every player deserves equal focus, creating teachable moments and positive reinforcement, recognition of effort not just results, “praise in public, criticism in private,” and allowing kids to participate in evaluation activities. To be a role model, coaches must exhibit restraint and discipline. Never give up on a team, never give up on a player. These ideas should inspire us in our everyday lives.

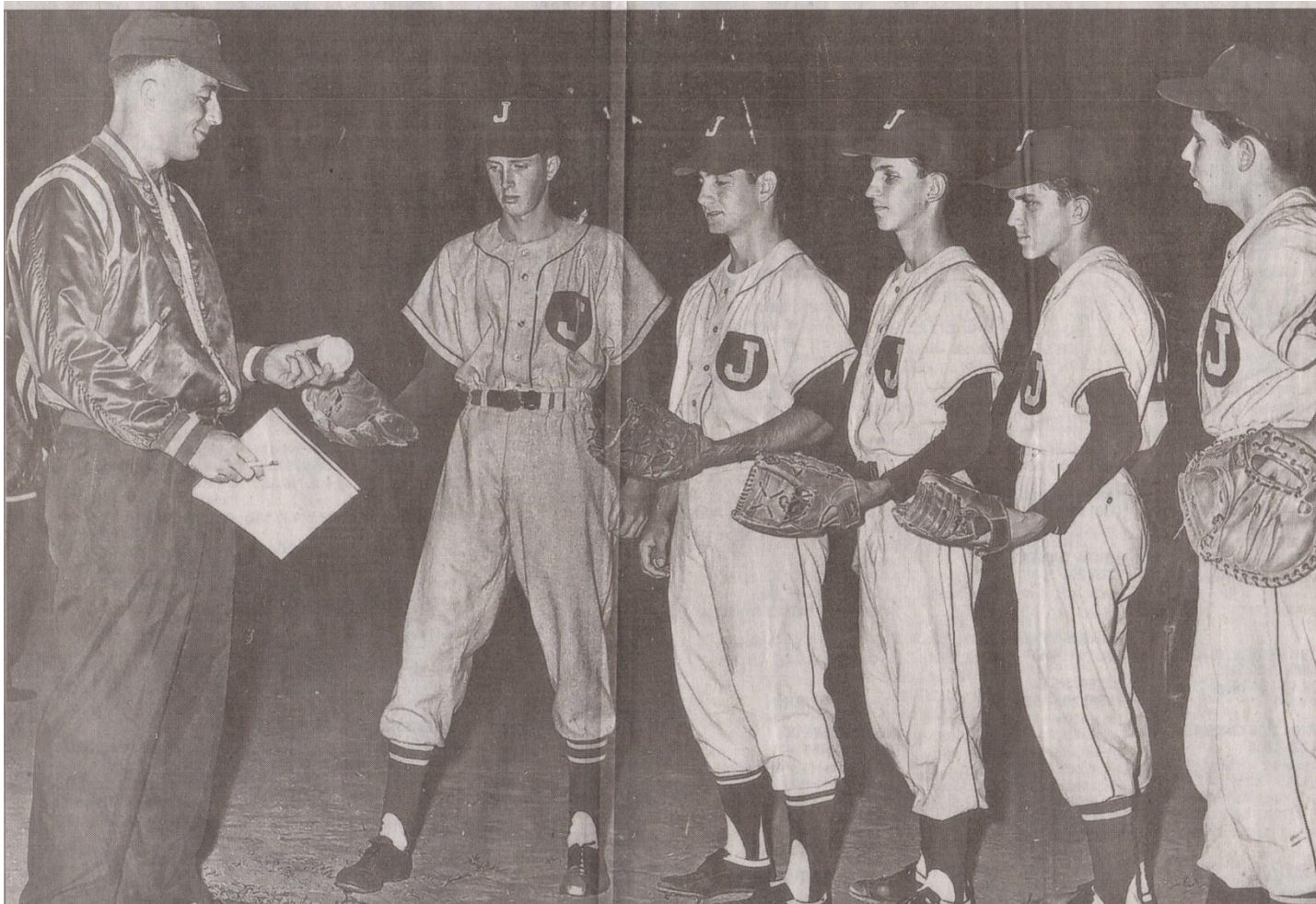


My boys are both athletically blessed with speed, deft fielding and throwing skills, compact explosive batting swings and baseball smarts, but more importantly possess quiet confidence, strong work ethic, healthy competitiveness and friendly demeanors that make them great teammates and teachable players. They are far less excitable than me. We have made many friends and acquaintances thru their baseball travels. I'm a proud parent on many levels.



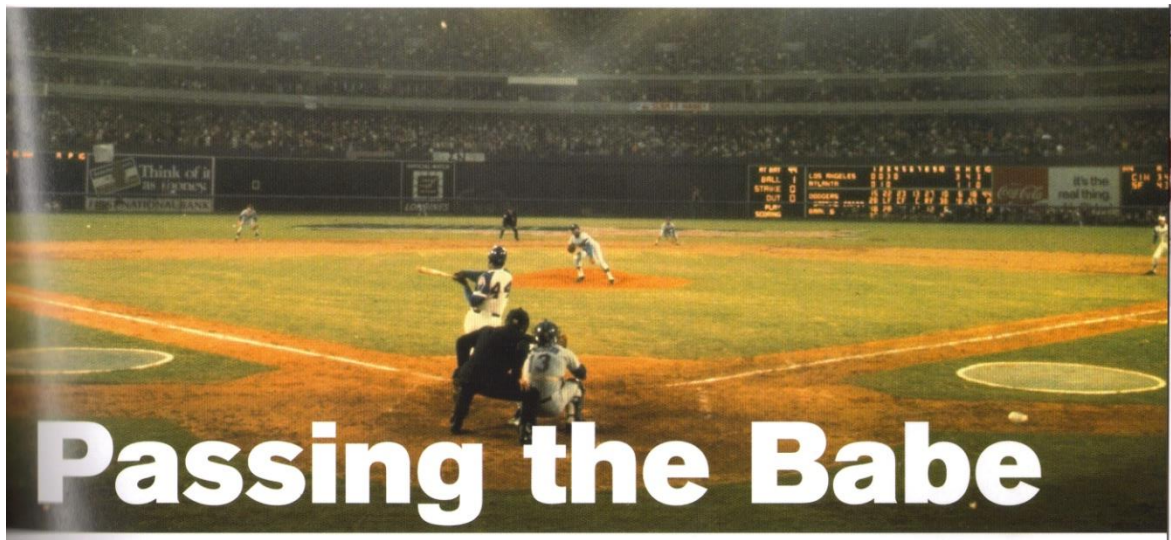
“There are teachers with a rare ability to enter a child’s mind – it’s as if their ability to get there at all gives them the right to stay forever.” Those words from a book by Michael Lewis about the lasting mark left by his high school baseball coach while growing up in New Orleans. Coach Fitz attempted to instill self-respect, courage, sacrifice and endurance in his adolescent players at a private school that most couldn’t appreciate until years later. Peyton Manning played ball for him and felt coach Fitz was one of the more influential in his development compared to the large number of football coaches he encountered on his ascent to the pro level.

He stated “One of the things I had to learn growing up was toughness, because it doesn’t seem to be something you can count on being born with. Dad (Archie Manning) says he have told me ‘Peyton you have to stand up for this or that’ but the resolve that gets it done is something you probably have to appreciate first in others. Coach Fitz was a major source for mine and I am grateful.”



In closing, believing in yourself, accepting responsibility, not backing down from challenges, exhibiting civility and citizenship, and supporting the team... in baseball and maybe in life.

Thank you for allowing this digression regarding my favorite diversion.



And now for my selection of a PVSS All-time All-star team.

In the outfield and leading off ... Ruth Bush (LF and president 2013). Batting second and playing CF Lew Schwartz (president 2005 and doing his best Bob Dylan impersonation). Hitting third and playing RF Hugh Gelabert (an early influence in getting me to join in 1990 coming out of medical school). Batting cleanup and playing the hot corner (3B) Sam Money (pres 2004). Jeff Ballard (pres 2003) plays shortstop, bats 5th, and invited me into the executive committee in 2004 where as Spring meeting program chair I had to navigate our first co-meeting within the VAM (small room but phenomenal attendance and interest from senior SVS members). Batting 6th and playing second base, Marc Passman (pres 2011). Playing first base and hitting 7th Will Jordan (pres 2007). Catching and hitting 8th the funnest PVSS president ever Clem Darling (pres 2002). Pitching and hitting 9th is Chip Sternbergh (pres 2008) with his nasty arsenal of pitches and will guarantee us a win today !!!