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Great Moments in the Last Two Weeks in Abundance

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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In the last few weeks there has been an usual abundance of great moments in the games we love, a deluge of achievements and drama and struggle: Moments that have been historic and moments that have reached those heights of athletic achievement that make us all feel privileged that we were witnesses to greatness, as well as moments that demonstrate the best of human possibilities.

In baseball, tennis, and yes, hockey, it has been a particularly rich early September.

On the same night in baseball Eddie Murray joined an exclusive club, and Brett Butler rejoined his current club. Murray's achievement is historic, while Butler's is personal and dramatic.

Eddie Murray becomes the fifteenth member of baseball's exclusive 500 home run club and only the third player in baseball history to have hit 500 home runs and also have 3,000 hits. Hank Aaron and Willie Mays are the other two. Remarkably Murray is the only member of the 500 Club to never have a forty home run season, while Mantle is the only other switch-hitter in the club. Murray's homer not only tied a game in the middle of a pennant race, but it took place in Baltimore at Camden Yards exactly one year after Cal Ripken had broken Lou Gehrig's consecutive game record in that ballpark.

Before the game Murray, who had been looking for number 500 for a week, thought about the fact that it had been one year since Ripken's achievement, and he said that he believed that it simply could not happen that night. What is particularly fitting about it, is that Ripken considers Murray an inspiration and talked of his debt to Murray that night a year ago. On this night Cal was one of the first to greet Murray at home plate.

An hour later Brett Butler returned to the Dodger line-up in Los Angeles for the first time since May 1. Butler had undergone tonsil cancer surgery on May 21 and then went through subsequent weeks of radiation treatments during which he lost nearly twenty pounds. Most predictions were that Butler could not return to baseball this season.

But return he did. His third time at the plate he singled, and then in the eighth inning with the score tied he walked, stole second, went to third on a throwing error, and then scored the

winning run of the game on a sacrifice fly. In one of those marvelous understatement Butlers said, "It's probably the biggest day of my career."

A few days later David Cone came back from a blood clot in his shoulder to pitch brilliantly for the Yankees, after it was certain he would not return to baseball this year.

Less dramatic but still noteworthy Fernando Valenzuela won his eighth straight game this past week pitching for San Diego with one of those eight taking place in Mexico. Echoes of Fernandomania rattled around the memory bank as Valenzuela has resurrected his major league pitching career at the age of fortysomething.

The U.S. Tennis Open, under a cloud of controversy and a largely uninspiring event this fall, suddenly jumped up and produced one of the most dramatic moments in its history in a quarterfinal match last Thursday. Number one seeded Pete Sampras was stretched to the limit by unseeded Alex Corretja of Spain in a five set match that lasted four hours and nine minutes in the heat and humidity and ended with a tie-breaker.

Not only was there the drama of the big upset, but Sampras staggered through the final points suffering from dehydration and stomach cramps. Pete vomited on court, struggled to maintain his bearings, doubled over in agony between points, and somehow facing set point at 7-6 in the tiebreak saved the match. He then served an ace to go up 8-7 and Corretja followed with a double fault to end it.

Sampras had reached down deep to summon the will to go on. That he was officially crowned champion on Sunday only affirmed what we were witness to on Thursday.

Then there is hockey. The World Championship of Hockey is being played across two continents this past three weeks. What is most remarkable is that in September before the start of the professional season we are seeing playoff level hockey. Two matches in particular exemplified this. The Canada-Russia match in the first round was a thundering affair played with Cold War intensity, while the Canada-Sweden match went into two overtimes and was as nerve-racking a nail-biter as there could be. The finals between the U.S. and Canada is giving us more of the same. Through it all the world's greatest players are giving everything with only pride and not money at stake.

It is merely sport at its best and why we keep coming back to the games.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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