

THE LOST SEASON

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*" . . . the people of America care about baseball, not about your squalid little squabbles. Reassume your dignity and remember that you are the temporary custodians of an enduring public trust."*²

-- A. Bartlett Giamatti --

Baseball is played everywhere: in parks and playgrounds and prison yards, in back alleys and farmer's fields, by small children and old men, by raw amateurs and millionaire professionals.

It is a leisurely game that demands blinding speed, and the only one in which the defense has the ball. It follows the seasons, beginning each year with the fond expectancy of springtime and ending with the hard facts of autumn.

Americans have played baseball for more than 200 years, while they conquered a continent, warred with one another and with enemies abroad, struggled over labor and civil rights and the meaning of freedom.

At the game's heart lie mythic contradictions: a pastoral game, born in crowded cities; an exhilarating democratic sport that tolerates cheating and has excluded as many as it has included; a profoundly conservative game that sometimes manages to be years ahead of its time.

It is an American odyssey that links sons and daughters to fathers and grandfathers. And it reflects a host of age-old American tensions: between workers and owners, scandal and reform, the individual and the collective.

It is a haunted game in which every player is measured against the ghosts of all who have gone before. Most of all, it is about time and timelessness, speed and grace, failure and loss, imperishable hope—and coming home.³

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2. THE SPORTING NEWS, Sept. 26, 1994, at 1.

3. KEN BURNS & LYNN NOVICK, PREFACE TO GEOFFREY C. WARD AND KEN BURNS'

Not since 1904 have Americans failed to enjoy a World Series. In 1904, John McGraw, the fierce manager of the New York Giants, simply refused to have his ball club participate in the Series in a bitter revenge plot against Byron B. "Ban" Johnson, the creator of the American League who suspended McGraw for abusing umpires and encouraging bench-clearing brawls.⁴ Now, ninety years later, we are unfortunately forced to revisit that same empty feeling of yesteryear.

Today, baseball has evolved into a pure money-driven business where terms such as player agents, free agency, salary caps, collusion, and multi-year, multi-million dollar contracts encompass most of the sports pages instead of what baseball truly involves: bats and balls, wins and losses, RBI's and home runs. In today's baseball enterprise, we are more likely inclined to read about which player, or player's agent, negotiated the highest contract, or which ball player hasn't showed up to spring training because he believes he hasn't been paid enough money. What baseball has seemed to have forgotten, or perhaps neglected to have seen, is that the "game" of baseball is unconditionally for the fans—no matter what their age, race, color, or gender. The controlling issues surrounding the present Major League Baseball strike and resulting lost season, not only caused the American fans to be deprived of their well-deserved fall classic, but they also injured the character, purity, and integrity of our National Pastime. The late Commissioner of Major League Baseball, A. Bartlett Giamatti, succinctly explained how baseball affects the American fans and how we count on its distinctive magic each and every fall:

It breaks your heart. It is designed to break your heart. The game begins in the spring, when everything else begins again, and it blossoms in the summer, filling the afternoons and evenings, and then as soon as the chill rains come, it stops and leaves you to face the fall alone. You count on it, you rely on it to buffer the passage of time, to keep the memory of sunshine and high skies alive, and then, just when the days are all twilight, when you need it most, it stops.⁵

Unfortunately for the fans and people of the game in 1994, baseball stopped just when we needed it most. Our hearts have been broken.

During the 1940's when war was at bar, it was suggested that baseball alone could remedy the world war conflict:

BASEBALL: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY xvix (1st ed. 1994).

4. GEOFFREY C. WARD ET AL., BASEBALL: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY 69 (1st ed. 1994).

5. *Id.* at 453.

Baseball is more than a National Game. It is America's anchor. It keeps the ship of state fast to its moorings in a balanced life. American boys play ball. "Play Ball" is their battle cry, not "Heil Hitler."⁶

Americans even believed that the "infamous deed" initiated by the Japanese on the morning of December 7, 1941 was due to the fact that "our National Game never touched [the Japanese]" and "Japan was never converted to baseball."⁷

The power of baseball will inevitably heal itself from the American travesty of the 1994 season. Our cherished "Field of Dreams" will ultimately come full circle and regain the respect and honor that it once had. Perhaps the respect and honor for the game was never lost; just out of our control. This belief was best illustrated by Terence Mann (played by James Earl Jones), a meaningful character in "Field of Dreams" who emphasized that the game of baseball has been saturated with magic and power:

And they'll watch the game. And it'll be like they dipped themselves in magic waters. The memories will be so thick, they'll brush them away from their faces. People will come. The one constant through all the years has been baseball. America has ruled like an army of steamrollers. It has been erased like a blackboard, and rebuilt, and erased again, but baseball has marked the time. This field, this game, is a part of our past. It reminds us of all that once was good. And it could be good again. Oh, people will come; people will most definitely come.⁸

Whether Mr. Mann foreshadowed how baseball will rebound remains to be seen. What is important among the legal, economic, and business relations between the players and the owners is that baseball is still a game. We must remember what it felt like to cheer our heroes to victory and to revere their talents as if they were gods in the midst of the cherished World Series; not spite the game for how it has emerged. For baseball reminds us of all that once was good, and it could be good again, if it would just "come home."

6. *Id.* at 276.

7. *Id.*

8. FIELD OF DREAMS (Universal City Studios, Inc. 1989)