

Baseball as Metaphor
by
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The start of the baseball season revives memories of pick-up games when as young kids we would choose sides, set the rules, and arbitrate disputes. We learned teamwork and leadership, honed our skills and abilities, and developed a set of values. We learned that sides should be equal, that everyone should play, that we could resolve our disputes without outside interference or advice, and that having fun was the goal.

For those of us who are or were adult volunteers or spectators for youth sports, the start of the season also reminds us of how parental involvement and the corporate organization of children's games have stolen some of that joy. Travel teams, all-star status, and league standings are a far cry from neighborhood fun.

The start of the season also reminds us again that baseball, and its sibling softball, is America's sport, a metaphor for a frontier nation exploring new vistas. In this American myth, the young leave home on their own, using their talents and determination to find their way through the wilderness, overcoming obstacles, fiercely trying to stay safe, occasionally taking a respite to find a new way to proceed home with whatever bounty has been earned. The lone hitter becomes the lone runner, darting and weaving to return safely.

This is in contrast to football, which with considerable commercial success secured over a fraction of the time, and where large men in protective gear, guided by electronic communications and group tactics, try to prevail in a contest without parallel for women and where penalties for unnecessary roughness are common.

In literature, it is said that we can never return home again. But in baseball, and in softball, the hometown myth is preserved as a symbol of hope, derring do, and the pursuit of safe passage to all that is good. Play Ball!