

Serious Baseball

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner, WLRH Radio Huntsville, AL USA

Is there anything frivolous that's as serious as baseball?

It's serious, all right: Marty Noland, editorial writer for the *Boston Globe*, describes the pain that comes with being a Red Sox fan: like "They killed my father, and now they're coming after me!" That's a quote by David Halberstam, in *The Teammates, a Portrait of a Friendship*, one of the many good baseball books.

A lot of those books make the same point: baseball is a great field to practice on, not just at picking the runner off first or making the double play, but also at those larger life-skills called "winning" and "losing," both of which contain serious lessons about the construction or demolition of character.

The reason it's good practice is that the outcome really doesn't matter!

Hold on there, sport, it doesn't matter? —Last of the tenth, tied at two; one out. Sharp slap-shot to the shortstop, and there's the game. Make the double play and you're on to the eleventh inning; make it a slice of a second slow, and you've lost another. Then is when your response is triggered, as you trot off the field: you either grin and shrug and tell your buddies, "Wait 'till tomorrow!" or you kick something hard and throw a nearly empty bottle at something, or someone. Whichever way you choose, you paint another layer of character on the portrait of yourself, ad you affect what people say about you from now on.

Do other sports affect folks the same way? —Maybe, perhaps, it might be so. Maybe tennis, or golf, or football, or horseshoes gives the same opportunity to practice wild elation or abject desolation, at such a bargain price. No armies roll, no children go to bed hungry. Not a dollar is added to the national debt. Someone loses, someone wins. I hear that in other countries the emotions tied to world class soccer rise to great heights, and gangs of hoodlums fail to tell the difference between sport and World War 3, but in my estimation baseball makes a really good set of lesson-plans for the school of life.

You know, maybe we need to replace that cumbersome, expensive testing process of selection called "primary elections" in the political field with a few rounds of fast-pitch softball to see what the gals and guys who want to be elected can do on the diamond instead of on the campaign circuit!
