

SECOND BASE (2009)

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

You've probably never thought of this, but there's no better proof of the order of the universe, the precision and sheer beauty of creation, than an attempted steal of second base.

It's all there; danger, excitement, the risk of uncertain success, an arena for the display of the ultimate efforts of human endeavor, and it happens every summer night out at your neighborhood diamond.

The uncertainty comes because of the manifold factors that converge in a second or two of high drama. Moreover, all the factors have been designed so as to make the outcome a virtual even bet: the distance from the pitcher's mound is 60 feet, 6 inches: not sixty-one feet. There's the distance from first to second — 90 feet, less whatever lead the runner takes. There's the runner's footwork on the crucial first crossover step, his speed as he runs, and what kind of elegant slide he employs. There's the catcher's footwork and his arm, and what kind of pitch he's called — and what kind is thrown. There's who's covering second, the second baseman moving east to west, or the shortstop sliding eastward.

The result is a convergence of glove and shoe and ball and bag, a cloud of dust, and then a moment's eternity before the call: "Safe!" or "Yer out!" Then the cry from the crowd — approval, affirmation, or "You're blind as a bat, you robber!"

Whether safe or out, it's done, decided, over: the game goes on, and a decisive battle has been won and lost, with no consequence whatever on the stage of world economics or risk to national security. It's been this way for a hundred years.

Others may point to the rhythm of the heavenly constellations, the symphony of

the stars... or the glory of nature, the spectacular sight of a pileated woodpecker or a perfect rose: but for me the clear proof of intelligent design (or of human evolution) happens right out there at second base.

The Rev. Houston Hodges, mostly retired Presbyterian parson, still preaches every month at two services at the Big Cove Presbyterian Church, at two sites on Highway 431 in the Owens Cross Roads area.