

The boys of summer are off and running; and what could be a better start to the new baseball season than the Dodgers and Giants playing in LA? ~~Well, the Dodgers and Giants playing in SF!~~ I was a Dodgers fan and my wife a Giants fan, so we both had something to cheer about the last couple of days when Clayton Kershaw of the Dodgers shut out Matt Cain and the Giants in the season opener, and the Giants bounced back with a gem from Madison Bumgarner winning the second one. I used to delight in Dodger baseball, their wins and losses seemed as important as breath itself, when I was a kid. Sandy Kaufax, Don Drysdale, Maury Wills: were my heroes. Today, I admit I did not watch either of the games: no time. But, I'm not sure I would, even if I had the time. Baseball is not what it used to be: when the O'Malley family owned the Dodgers I at least had the impression that they liked the game—maybe even more than the money. Today the term “Moneyball” describes it all...owners, players and managers too.

My disillusionment with the Dodgers and baseball, reflects a broader disillusionment with sports in general. The amount of time many Americans spend in front of the TV watching games between 18 guys swatting a dead piece of horsehide, or in fall and winter 22 guys pushing the dead pig back and forth-- gives me pause. I do not doubt their skill level--I played college baseball and noticed that only the best of the best were given a try at pro ~~baseball~~ with a chance to make “the show.” But I do doubt that watching or playing baseball, football or any spectator sport, for that matter, has any moral purpose beyond that of simple escape. Now don't get me wrong, I enjoy sports and think athletic expression is a good way to keep a body in shape. The problem is that we have legions who do *nothing* but watch others *do everything*, vicariously identifying with the winners, scorning the losers and getting fatter every game.

What we need is a more democratic involvement with sports, with less emphasis on money and winning, and more on the sheer joy of physical expression. Do I sound like an airy idealist to suggest it is possible to enjoy the outdoors, get some exercise, socialize with other human beings, and go home smiling win or lose? The problem surfaces when sport becomes more than sport: it takes on almost religious dimensions when pride swells and a person or team don't want to be just “good,” they have to be better than everyone else. Today's fierce competition that wants to win at all costs: cheating with drugs, or any other means possible, does not make us more human, it makes us less so.

Are we without *any* sports heroes? I like to remember Eric Liddell, the great sprinter from Scotland, who refused to run on Sunday in his best event and skipped the relays as well, ~~for the same reason.~~ He still went on to win a gold and bronze medal in the 1924 Olympics, but likely would have won three or four gold medals had it not been for his religious principles. Later, Eric Liddell traveled to China as a missionary; he died in a concentration camp in China during WWII. He did Scotland proud again when, sixty-three years after his death, China revealed that Eric had been included in a prisoner exchange. But rather than going free, he had given up his place to a pregnant woman.

Now that's a hero!

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment