

How Baseball Has Changed—And Other Things Too

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One way to get a handle on what is going on now is to look at how this same thing went on in years past and compare. Last weekend, I had a chance to do that with baseball, which has been part of my life since my earliest memory. My father was a barber in a hotel shop where visiting team players in town to play the Saint Paul Saints, at that time a minor league team of the then Brooklyn Dodgers, as well as Saints players, got haircuts. This was back in the late 1940s and early '50s. I was a kid of eight, ten, twelve, in there, and would sit on one of the chairs lined up next to a wall facing the large throne-like barber chair and page through *Life* and *Look* magazines--gone now, *Life* and *Look* were predominantly pictures of current events, along with minimal writing essentially to put the pictures in context--and watch Dad cut hair and chat with his customers.

Dad would introduce me to the players--young, well-kept, polite, and, looking back on them from this vantage point, unsophisticated rural and working class men. One I remember, quiet and diffident, Dad introduced him as being from Cincinnati and said he played shortstop for the Saints, was Don Zimmer. Don, trim, pale, smallish, looked barely older than a boy; I can still picture him in my mind. He was so kind to me the couple, three occasions I spoke with him in my withdrawn, eyes-diverted manner. Don asked me how I was doing with my own ball playing—I was around twelve at the time and avidly interested in baseball and playing in kids' leagues at the time and later went on to play in high school and in the army and college. Don told me he was newly married and that he missed his wife when his work took him on the road. I think of Don, because he died a few days ago as I write this, at 83. Indeed, this was a long, long time ago.

The chance to compare baseball then and now came out of watching the seventh and final game of the 1952 World Series on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqZnPOnxO9U> The New York Yankees beat the Brooklyn Dodgers 4-3 in that game and won the best-of-seven Series. The YouTube was a kinescope of the entire black-and-white telecast of the game (no color back then) minus the commercials. They didn't have videotape in those days;

kinescope was a moving picture of the television screen. That doesn't sound good, and compared to videotape isn't, but actually the quality of the picture isn't all that bad. The two announcers of the telecast were the local announcers of the Yankees and Dodgers, Mel Allen and Red Barber. Just one announcer handled the games for teams in those years; no ex-player color men to comment on that action.

Although I don't recall watching that particular game when it was played, I must have, the seventh game of the World Series, it would have been a big deal to me at that time. We had just gotten a television set the year before, a seventeen-inch Zenith model that sat on the floor and was about four feet high. It was about the size of a small refrigerator. I knew of all the major league stars at the time, that's for sure. In particular, I was a big fan of Yankee center fielder and future Hall of Famer, Mickey Mantle. I modeled my batting stance after Mickey's.

I'll list differences between baseball now and back then that I picked up from watching that 1952 game and draw inferences from some of them. To help with the comparison, in some places I'll contrast that 1952 World Series game to the sixth and final game of the 2013 between the Boston Red Sox and the Saint Louis Cardinals. Boston won by a score of 6 to 1 and won the Series four games to two. While I'll be referring to baseball here, I'm also using baseball to talk about other things in life that I think are important to analyze; keep that in mind as you go through what's coming up.

So, some things I noted watching game seven of the 1952 World Series between the New York Yankees and Brooklyn Dodgers:

I'll start with what could be considered small things. Although I emphasize "could be considered" in that last sentence. Even small things matter. Everything matters in life. Everything has meaning and significance, and you can see that if you look hard enough at what appear on the surface to be minor, incidental, phenomena.

There was no designated hitter in the 1952 game. Pitchers batted. Now, only the National League in all of baseball, professional or amateur, doesn't have a DH.

The manager of the Dodgers, Chuck Dressen, coached third base—managers are always in the dugout now.

The players left their gloves on the field at the end of a half inning.

The Dodgers warmed up three relief pitchers at one time. I've never seen more than two; never even thought of the possibility of three.

No batting gloves then.

The fielders' gloves were significantly smaller in those years, and players caught with two hands. You never see first basemen and outfielders doing that now.

Some of the players chewed gum.

Getting in the habit of noticing the (so-called) small things in life—such as the above list—is a good way to make sense of the big things in life. Little things add up to big things, and attending to little things is good practice, good training, for attending to and comprehending the big things.

I will comment on one item from the above list, gum chewing. Just this year, after a lifetime of watching baseball on TV—I live in the Boston television area and watch the Red Sox games—it has started getting to me watching people play baseball rapidly chomping on gum, with the wad going in and out of their mouths. My annoyance has gotten to the level that I'm turning off the set and reading a book (which is undoubtedly a better use of my time than watching strangers play with a ball). I even wrote an email to the Red Sox public relations office saying that while I realize there are matters of more import than my displeasure at having to look at gum chewing ballplayers, it is resulting in my turning off the game and thus missing the car commercials, and I might not be the only one doing that, and the Red Sox might be interested in that. I got no response.

Until I watched the 1952 game, I had assumed that gum chewing is a recent phenomenon. I hadn't noticed it before. But there they were, players in '52 working on their gum. It struck me that what is different in 2014 isn't the players but rather me. They were doing the same thing back then that they are now. But for whatever reason, I'm noticing it now. They haven't changed, I have. That fact underscores that perception, meaning, is a function of an exchange between the external world or reality—in this case gum chewing ballplayers—and the internal, or subjective, world, or reality, of the viewer or consumer of it. In order to make sense of anything, understand it, you have to take into account both parties in that exchange. What something is about is not simply a matter of what's "out there." Nor is it just about what is "in here," inside a

person, thoughts and feelings and images, and whatever has shaped or influenced those phenomena. Rather, it is a function, a product, of an exchange, an interplay, between an individual and something outside him or her at a particular point in time.

All to say, gum chewing could have one meaning to me ten or twenty years ago and an altogether different meaning now (which is the case; I didn't even notice it in past years). And that is very important, and its importance goes way beyond the confines of baseball games.

A last point, a big challenge in understanding the world and yourself involves making the familiar strange. If you and I can get better able at seeing the commonplace as arbitrary, one of a number of possibilities—that is to say, strange—we will be more able to gain greater insight into things. If, say, we thought to ourselves, “The outfield gloves these days look like jai alai mitts. What's that about?” that can contribute to a becoming curious as to why we have to buy a cable TV package that includes paying for stations we've never even heard of just to see the Red Sox or some other team play their games.

An example along these lines, after all these years, I have suddenly started asking myself: Why the different first basemen's glove? It looks altogether different from the other fielders gloves. Let's say a player moves from playing third base to playing first base. He changes gloves; he goes to the bench and gets himself a first basemen's glove. He may have never used a first baseman's glove in his life, he's not used to one at all, but he'll switch gloves nevertheless, no questions asked. What exactly does he have to do at first base that he doesn't have to do at third? Field ground balls? Catch pop flies? Dig balls out of the dirt? He does all of that third with the glove he has that he has probably spent a year getting broken in and used to. But as sure as day follows night, he will break out a first baseman's glove when he switches positions even if he has to borrow one he has never used in his life.

So why did he do it? Because that's the way it's done, that's why. How much of life do we do because, well, that's just how it's done? Perhaps if we make first basemen's gloves, or the absence of left-handed catchers, strange, we will develop both the predilection and ability to make other, more important, things strange. Like, for example, why exactly Switzerland, right in the center of Europe, didn't fight in either World War I or II and the U.S., thousands of

miles away, across an ocean, did. When things become strange, it is clear that there just might be a different, and better, way to do things.

Game seven in '52 was on October 7th and game six of the 2013 Red Sox-Cardinals game was played on October 30th. The baseball season, as are all commercial sport seasons, is longer now. The sport exhibition companies have discovered that there is the big money to be made in playoffs. No playoff in 1952—the Yankees were in first place at the end of the year in the American League and the Dodgers in the National League, and so they went to World Series. No perceived need in those years after playing a 154-game season for the Yankees and Dodgers to start from scratch and win a playoff against the fourth place finisher.

These years it has come to what seems to me a deluge of seven game playoffs. In 1952, the last game of the NBA championship series between the New York Knicks and the Minneapolis Lakers (the franchise was since moved to Los Angeles; speaking of making the familiar strange, is there any stranger team nickname than the Los Angeles Lakers?) was played on April 25th. The last game in the NBA in 2013, the Miami Heat beat the San Antonio Spurs, each having won two previous seven-game series, was on June 20th. I realize the playoff format is working out great for the sport show corporations' bottom lines, but for me it's gotten to be where I'm trying to figure out what the Charlotte Bobcats are doing in a championship game, and one game is looking like every other one except that one team wins and the other team loses, and now team A is up three games to two over team B. I've seen the movie just too many times. I'm bored silly, but I realize that's just me—that meaning-the-result-of-an-exchange-between-reality-and-a-particular-individual-at-a-moment-in-time idea.

Watching the 1952 game brought home to me how greatly the presentation of the games and technology has changed over the decades. No centerfield camera to track the pitches in 1952. The view of the pitcher-batter confrontation was from high up behind home plate. The only close-ups were of the batters; no other players. No replays. No graphics—the inning and score, batting averages, etc.

That prompts thoughts about how communication technology has changed generally, and the effect that has had on American society and culture. Television was very new in 1952. There were fifteen-minute news telecasts on local and national television (four networks: CBS, NBC, ABC, and Dumont), but they didn't mean much to anybody. Television newscasts, which wasn't much and had to be hand carried to the station. Basically, the newscasts were talking heads (I remember Douglas Edwards). We got our news in those days primarily from the daily newspaper, in my case the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*. Or at least most people in Saint Paul got their news that way; I just read the sports section (as did Dad). Any pictures beyond the few in brief television news shows were in the newspaper and *Life/Look*-type magazines and in one-minute-long, this-and-that snippets in movie newsreels—the average American went to the movies weekly. My dad got passes from the Paramount movie theater for having a sign in his barbershop advertising the current movie that was playing at the Paramount. So there we were watching the newsreels (a ten second photo-op of President Eisenhower followed by a touchdown run in the Army-Navy game), which, along with a cartoon, preceded the MGM musical with Donald O'Connor and Dan Dailey. No twenty-four hour cable news, no Internet, no email, no texting. Imagine to have lived your life in that context.

It was a less informed and sophisticated public back then compared to now. The last couple days, I read up on the rigged prime time big-money television quiz shows in the fifties. America was shocked to learn that contestants on these shows were being given the answers to the questions, and that winners and losers on the shows were predetermined. I watched a kinescope of an episode of the show "21" that has become famous. Charles Van Doren—handsome, elegant, the son of the famous poet, writer, and critic Mark Van Doren—"defeated" a nerdy, unappealing opponent by the name of Herbert Stempel. https://archive.org/details/TwentyOne_630 The public was shocked and disillusioned to learn that the whole thing was a charade. I can't imagine anybody watching this badly-acted-to-the-point-of-ludicrous performance now buying it, but they did back then, and I think that says something about American in those years.

Back to sports, or nominally sports anyway, I remember serious debates in those years about whether professional wrestling was on the up and up. I wrote a thought for this site on one of the biggest names in wrestling in those days, George Wagner, known as “Gorgeous George (“On Gorgeous George,” September, 2008). Watch an old kinescope of him in action. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYq_FVXdg84 Would it be possible in our time to believe for a second that this is the real thing?

Something else I’ve been looking into lately is World War II. (A book I highly recommend in this regard is *Human Smoke* by Nicholson Baker). I’m reading about and seeing visual depictions of all this anonymous killing and destruction—something like 50 million people slaughtered in Europe alone, 120 thousand people firebombed to death in Dresden, Germany in one night and so on—and I’m wondering, how did people so universally buy into this? I just finished a biography of the only Congressman to vote against embarking on that bloodbath, Jeannette Rankin (*Jeannette Rankin: A Political Woman* by James J. Lopach and Jean A. Luckowski). Rankin was vilified and mocked and declared ignorant for saying that war was barbaric and absurd and that there were other ways to deal with international conflict and that she wasn’t going to support young men being blown to bits. She was snubbed and blackballed and lost her Congressional seat the very next election.

I’d like to think that we aren’t the gullible lemmings that it seems to me we pretty much were in past times. Although you couldn’t prove by me that we are much better in this regard now. If the government tells us that it is our duty to kill people we don’t know in, say, Afghanistan or Iraq—places we couldn’t find a map—we’ll jump right to it, no questions asked. We never think to ask, why us doing all this shooting and bombing and not the Swiss? What do they know that results in nobody feeling compelled to fly planes into their buildings? We still buy the lines of the professional politicians and special interest hucksters. I’m just speculating that we are relatively—with relatively underscored—more on top of things now than then, and that it’s largely due to the proliferation of media.

While the commercials in the 1952 game weren’t shown, an advertisement for Gillette razor blades was superimposed on the

screen from time to time. Gillette was a prominent sponsor of sporting events in those years, including the Friday night boxing matches what were shown in prime time on NBC. The Gillette commercials in those years, and what seemed to be their support for sports, had a lasting impact on me. I still use Gillette products to this day, 60 years later, and so help me, every time I purchase or use them I think back to those old sport programs. The point: learnings, influences, experiences, from our youngest years stay with us all of our lives. They become part of us really. They are stored inside us organically, as a experienced inner referent that shapes our thoughts and perceptions and behaviors for as long as we live. I'll shave with a Gillette razor until the day I die, which, I'm afraid, is coming right up.

Watching the 1952 World Series game, I noted how fashions have changed. The basic look of the uniforms was the same then as now—the Yankees and Dodgers still wear these same uniforms—but the cut was different then, baggier. And all of the players, no exceptions, wore their uniforms the exact same way, with the knickerbocker pants bloused at mid-calf. Now, some players wear their pants bloused high up at the knee, while others have decided that baseball pants shouldn't be knickerbockers at all but rather long pants that extend to, and sometimes actually cover, their shoes. The players back then wore socks with stirrups, oval-shaped cutouts in the front and back, which revealed thin white sanitary socks, as they were called. None of that these days. And there were no player names on the backs of uniforms then, just a number.

About once every half inning, the camera would pan the stands in the '52 game. Everybody, I saw no exceptions, was all dressed up. The men were in suits and ties and had on snap-brim Fedora hats—if you have seen movies from the 1940s, you can picture what I'm talking about. The women were dressed in their Sunday best, as we used to call it (the reference being the clothes you would wear to church on Sunday). Seriously, I don't think these baseball spectators were any less dressed up than they would have been at their son or daughter's wedding. Many, if not most, of the women wore hats.

Clothes fashions reflect the society and culture at a particular time, and I invite you to think about what this clothing difference from then and now is about. Things may look to be arbitrary,

simply a matter of chance or whim, but if you look at them hard, deeper meanings become apparent.

A couple thoughts around the fashion differences between 1952 and now that come up for me:

With player's uniforms, could the difference now reflect a more individualistic time, and the difference in the demographics of the players?

In the 1952 game, the players all looked basically alike, interchangeable. Perhaps now, players, and people generally, want to express their individuality more than they did back then. Put my name on the back; I'm not just a number. I'm wearing my pants low (or high)—I'm not just like everybody else. And you are going to hear from me on Twitter.

Demographically, it is not just, with a few exceptions, white people playing the games now. African Americans in football and baseball and Hispanics in baseball are very prominent these years, and it would be natural for them to want their cultural tastes reflected in the uniforms they wear in the sports they play. I remember the first major league player that got attention for having his pants tailored so that they reached his shoe tops. George Hendrick, a black player. I associate the low baggy shorts style in vogue in basketball with the great black NBA player Michael Jordan and the 1991 all-black University of Michigan team, the Fab Five as they were called.

The difference between 1952 and 2014 that jumps out at me—I'm talking about generally, not just in sports—is the proliferation and prominence of communication technology, including social media, and the essentially private nature of today's entertainment and expression. It doesn't add anything or matter if you are dressed up to watch television or stream a video or participate in social media. I wonder if that norm has become value, a preferred way of being, and carried over into public occasions. You would have never seen presidents Truman or Eisenhower at a public occasion without a suit and tie on. You do with President Obama. Truman and Eisenhower wouldn't have referred to people as "folks" as President Obama does. While people still get dressed up for a symphony or opera, but not much of anyplace else. And do they even get dressed up for the opera and symphony?—a lot of people just put on what could be called dress-up casual clothes for even those events. I can't remember the last time I wore a sport coat

much less a suit, and I haven't worn a tie in my memory. It appears that electronic media, texting and streaming and all the rest, has "casualized" the culture."

America is not the European-heritage place now as it was in 1952. I believe over 90% of Americans back then were of European heritage. I read yesterday that currently over half of American children are of non-European background. I invite you to think about all of the consequences of those realities, from politics to the arts and entertainment to education to relationships and on down the list. Anything going on in the wider world is going to manifest in the narrower world of sports. If you want to understand America generally, you are helped in that direction if you give serious study to sports.

The pace of the 1952 game was faster than the Red Sox-Cards sixth game in last year's Series. In '52, once the batter got in the batters box, he never left it. No stepping out of the box to re-adjust the Velcro on batting gloves (no batting gloves, remember) no practice swings, no patting the batting helmet (no batting helmets). The pitcher never took his foot off the rubber, no pacing around the mound. He got the ball back from the catcher and right away looked for the sign from the catcher for the next pitch and went into his windup (a much more elaborate, arms-swinging-way-up-and-way-back affair than these days). The batters swung at whatever was in the strike zone. They obviously were not taking strikes looking to get walks and run up pitch counts.

The time of the game was shorter in '52. The Yankees-Dodgers game seven was played in 2 hours and 54 minutes, the Red Sox-Cards game in 2013 in 3 hours and 15 minutes. Actually that 20-minute difference doesn't reflect the disparity in the length of games then and now—it is more pronounced than that. The only game in the 1952 Series that went three hours was game five, which was exactly three hours, and that was an extra-inning game that went 11 innings. One of the seven games in '52 was played in 2:21 and another in 2:33. In the 2013 Series, only one game was played in under three hours (2:52) and one of the games in '13 was 3:34 and another was 3:54.

What this brings up for me is that change is not always for the better. The use of statistically derived data to guide baseball strategy, very prevalent these years, has in my view hurt the game.

In an essay/review of the film “Moneyball” on this site I argued this point (“Moneyball”: An Inquiry Into Media Manipulation. 2012).

Baseball isn't simply about its final result--winning or losing--it about a process, what happens during the game. It is about the experience of both players and spectators during the game. It is about the quality of the game as an activity. Most basically, baseball is about playing baseball. Sabermetrics, the use of statistics to guide sports play, arguably has hurt the game of baseball. The emphasis on on-base averages has resulted in batters taking strikes and waiting pitchers out in an attempt to get walks and thereby increasing their OBPs [On-Base Percentages]. Rarely these days does a batter strike at the first pitch. Pitch counts run up. An already slow game gets even slower. Action is replaced by inaction. Assertion is replaced by passivity. The joy of the game is diminished for both player and fan. Steal attempts are fewer and the excitement of the game is diminished for both player and fan. Bunts are fewer and strategy goes out of the game. Like life, baseball is not just a destination, this and that outcome or result; it is also, and most fundamentally, a moment-to-moment experience. The quality of the moments of our lives, including the time we spend playing and watching baseball, needs to be taken into account.

When somebody talks about change and progress, it's a good idea to think about whether this is a good change, and to be concerned about whether the progress he is talking about isn't actually progressing over a cliff.

Speaking of bunting, which there was a lot of in the 1952 game, bunting form was way better in those years. Not one player in the '52 game failed at getting the bunt down successfully. These days, the few times there is a bunt, it's most likely to be a series of awkward stabs at the ball and a trudge back the bench after a strike out and the runner not being advanced a base as bunts, at least sacrifice bunts, are designed to do. There were bunts to get on first base in the '52 game—not to sacrifice—and again the form was much better than now. For one thing, the bunts-for-base-hits in the Yankee-Dodgers game were much less telegraphed than they are in this era. As a kid, I was taught proper bunting form, which included keeping the bat parallel to the ground and catching the ball with

bat, as it was put, not jabbing out at it. For whatever reason, today's players have not learned those lessons. The point, people don't necessarily learn from the past. We should, but we don't. A potentially useful activity is to explore the reasons for that.

But then again, a lot of times we do learn from the past. I think I know about baseball, and watching the '52 game, it hit me that the form, technique (except for bunting, that's the exception) is much better now. Throwing and batting form are better now, no doubt in my mind about that. Some of those swings at the ball back in '52 looked like they were out of a beer league—Andy Pafko, a pinch hitter for the Dodgers, comes to mind. I would have missed this bad form back then, and even ten years ago, I'm sure of that. I think it is because I'm generally more attuned to reality, more observant, now than I was in the past. I've worked on becoming more observant, and it is paying off.

A number of the hitters on both teams in the 1952 World Series game “bailed out,” as it is called: they fell away from the plate as the pitch was thrown and as they swung at the ball. I speculate that that was due to the fact that there wasn't the protection of batting helmets back then. The kinescope was clear enough that I could see that some players had on thin plastic liners that fit inside their regular baseball caps, but they were virtually no help (I wore them back then myself and know how little protection they provided). And most players didn't even have a liner. So I'm guessing that, whether the ones doing it fully realized it or not, they were falling away from the plate as the pitch came whizzing at them in order to protect against the ball hitting them in the head. Indeed, bailing out works in that way, but it keeps you from getting the weight of your body into your swing and you end up swinging with just your arms unless the pitch happens to be inside, as I noticed this time, my hero Mickey Mantle did.

The demographics of the players have changed. The 1952 Yankees were all white except the pitcher Allie Reynolds, whose Native American heritage was well known (he was called “The Chief”), although he looked Caucasian. The Dodgers had three African American players. There were no Hispanic players on either team. After peaking in the 1960s and '70s, with significantly higher numbers in the National League, the number of African Americans

in major league baseball has decreased while the number of Hispanic players has greatly increased. Of the 29 players who played in the final game of the 2013 Series between the Red Sox and Cardinals, there were no African Americans, and there were six Hispanics (plus two natives of Japan). The '13 Red Sox-Cardinals Hispanic numbers somewhat underplay the Hispanic presence in baseball currently. For example, if the 2013 World Series had been played by the Toronto Blue Jays of the American League and the Los Angeles Dodgers of the National League and they had played the same players they did in an interleague game they played on July 24th of 2013, of the 29 players who played in the game, 16 would have been Hispanic (and two African American).

It is beyond the scope of this writing to go into its implications, but the Hispanic presence in American life in our time compared to past times, 1952 in this example, is much greater. Enough to say here that it has changed baseball, and it's changed everything else as well: politics, education, the popular culture, and on down the list.

Nothing struck me more about this final game in the World Series of 1952 than its apparent lack of urgency. I remember as a kid thinking these baseball games were the biggest deals imaginable. Heroes. Stars. Intensity. Excitement. Something really big was on the line. History was in the making. Oh, if someday I could be part this! Play centerfield for the Yankees like Mickey Mantle!! A dream come true!!! I picked up that outlook from Dad, who idolized the players, and from the sports pages I read every day, and from *Sport* magazine (*Sports Illustrated* came later), and I imposed this perception onto the games on TV when, the point here, it really wasn't warranted. This time, and it surprised me, the game in '52 looked like working men soberly and dutifully doing their jobs. Another day at the factory. It contrasted greatly with the 2013 game, where the players really did seem intense, emotions really did seem to run high, something big really was at stake as they saw it; this was a major event, if not *the* event, of their lives. Perhaps the fact that there were a far greater number of close-ups in the Red Sox-Cardinals game and the announcers were hyping the action much more fervently (Barber and Allen in '52 were low key, matter of fact) contributed to the difference I perceived between then and now, but still, the body language I picked up in the '52 seemed

almost lackadaisical. Jackie Robinson dancing off third base was the one time there was any break in that pattern that I could sense.

I wonder if I would have been as passionate about becoming a professional baseball player—it was virtually all I thought about growing up—if I had realized that professional baseball is a labor job; skilled labor to be sure, but something you do with your hands and body under the supervision of what amounted to a shop foreman (the manager). The glamour, the heroism, the specialness, the “star-ness,” has been layered on to the enterprise by the owners of the teams and the media—newspapers, TV, etc.—as a way to sell tickets and improve circulation and ratings, and I bought it as a kid.

Now that I think about it, I missed that these ballplayers in my dad’s barbershop saw themselves as common working men. I think of Ron Negray, a Saints pitcher, who wondered whether he should quit baseball and take a job at the factory back in Ohio, where he was from. Ray Moore, another Saints pitcher, talked about his farm in Maryland and never about baseball. Even Don Zimmer, who later on waxed eloquent about the great game of baseball, talked about himself as someone who hit and caught a ball for a living as a way to support the family he hoped to have, as nobody special.

But Dad saw these players as special—they left passes for us to see the game free!--as did the sports writers for the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* newspaper, and *Sport* magazine, and in their low key but reverential way so did the announcers of the games, Marty O’Neill for the Saints on WMIN, and people like Red Barber and Mel Allen nationally. I’m left to wonder how my life would have turned out differently—the professional baseball dream lasted until I was nineteen; nothing else, including my schoolwork, meant anything—if I would have been able to see, been helped to see, that 1952 game with even remotely the eyes through which I saw it just now. I wonder, too, about the twelve years olds watching ESPN SportCenter today who are like I was way back then—I assume they exist. I hope things turn out OK for them. Life’s worked out OK for me, but I’ve paid a lasting cost for those childhood sports preoccupations and self-definitions.

A last, and I guess grim, or at least sobering, impression resulting from watching the 1952 game, one that seems certain to have been prompted by my very advanced age, is the reminder that we all die. Of the 30 players and the two managers from that 1952 game, only

six are still alive. It hit me while writing these words that the one game we play that really matters, and it's single long continuous game, not a series of games, is the game of life, and we inevitably lose it. Death wins our game, and we can't be sure that our game will go nine innings. It could end tonight, tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, even though we might think we are in the early innings, or that at least it isn't the bottom of the ninth with two outs.

Perhaps what I said about baseball in the "Moneyball" writing I quoted earlier applies to our game: The game of life, like baseball is not just a destination, this or that outcome or result--which is not to say results, accomplishments, victories, don't matter, because they do. But most fundamentally the game of life, your game and my game, is about the moment-to-moment experience of playing our particular game honorably and having a good time doing it while we still have the precious gift of being able to.