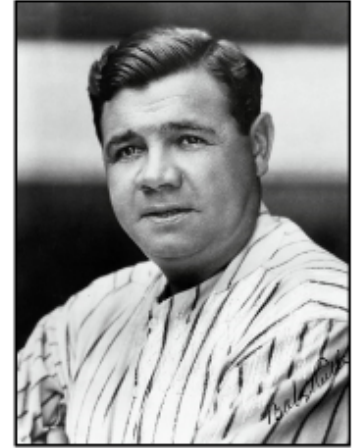




Babe Ruth

7-time World Series Champion
Career Batting Average: .342
Career Home Runs: 714
Career Pitching Record: 94-46
Career ERA: 2.28
1st in All-Time slugging percentage: .690
1st in All-Time OPS: 1.184



2019 Campaign

Edition No. 27

November 7, 2019

Hey guys!

Was that a great World Series or what? I don't know about the rest of you, but I was more than a little envious of PAwesome being able to personally witness an incredible piece of history being made at Nationals Park, even if the Nats did drop all three of their home games. If not for a nettlesome jury trial in which I was entombed all of last week, I would have been right there with him.

What the Nationals accomplished this season is nothing short of astounding. After starting out the season 19-31--and that was with a *healthy* Max Scherzer--and probably being only a week or so away from their manager being fired--the Nats somehow became a completely different team for the last two-thirds of the season and finished off the regular season with a 74-38 mark to make the playoffs. But I don't think many people even noticed what they were doing, because they never spent a single day in first place and everybody was talking about the 107-win Astros, the 106-win Dodgers, and the 103-win Yankees. I don't know what the sports book odds were for the Nationals at the start of the playoffs¹, but I doubt there were very many people who put down any significant money on them to finish as the World Series champions. Whoever did, cleaned up.

I didn't watch the Nats' wildcard game against the Brewers, but their Comeback Kids aura clearly started in that game as they rallied from a 3-1 deficit and scored

¹ On September 15, with an 82-66 record, the Nationals were 22-1 to win the World Series.

3 runs with 2 outs in the 8th inning against one of the top stoppers in the Big Leagues, Josh Hader, including Mr. Soto's heroic bases-loaded, lefty-on-lefty hit to right field that was misplayed by Brewer rookie Trent Grisham and ended up plating 3 runs and giving the Nats the 4-3 win at home.

Still alive and kicking after dispensing the Brew Crew, I can't imagine that anyone gave the Nationals much of a chance in the NLDS against the powerful Dodgers, who were looking to go to the World Series for the third consecutive year. And who but these Comeback Kids could have even conceived of hitting back-to-back home runs (Rendon and Soto, on consecutive pitches) off future Hall of Famer Clayton Kershaw in the 8th inning of the Game 5 win-or-go-home contest, or that the old but not-as-old-as-he-looks Howie Kendrick would swat out a granny to dead center in the top of the 10th to put a fork in the very done Los Angeles Dodgers.

Maybe I should have started believing in the Nats when they cremated the St. Louis Cardinals in a clean sweep (scoring 20 runs in the four games to 6 runs for the Cards) of the National League Championship Series, but I still thought that the powerful Astros--they of the Triple Rich Parfait of Starting Pitching named Verlander, Cole and Greinke--would swat the Nats like a hyperactive horse tail. Wrong again.

I finally started to believe only when the Nats stormed into Minute Maid Park and took Games 1 and 2 of the Series from the shell-shocked Astros. At that point, I figured that the Nats would probably not sweep the Astros, but more likely would take 2 out of 3 on their home turf and win the Fall Classic--exactly the right name for it--by 4 games to 1. Wrong again. A darned good thing that I'm not a bettor.

And so of course, the rest is recorded in the history books. The Astros finally started playing like the team they were all season, and persuasively swept the Nats (4-1, 8-1 and 7-1) in their home ballpark, taking a 3 to 2 games lead and heading back to Houston for a near-certain victory and the championship trophy. Instead, the Nats took Game 6 by the score of 7 to 2--on the strength of Strasburg's 8-1/3 inning gem and 5 RBIs from Anthony Rendon--knotting the Series, and setting up the Grand Finale on Wednesday night.

After meeting with three of my expert witnesses Wednesday night to prepare them for their trial testimony on Thursday, I arrived home at around 9:30 p.m., and sat down next to Michele to watch the rest of the game, as she bemoaned² the fact that the Astros held a 2 to 0 lead and only three more frames to eke out at least 2 runs. All was lost, she seemed sure. My exact response was, "Are you kidding? This team has been coming back in every game that they play. They are poised right where they want to be." I really did say that. Really.

² Because her daughter Katy and her daughter Molly are both currently living and working in the D.C. area, suddenly she has become a "huge" Nationals fan. Don't tell her I said this, but she is one of the biggest bandwagon jumpers of all time. Like I said, don't tell her.

And of course we all know the rest of the story. Astros skipper A.J. Hinch inexplicably takes the hot-handed Greinke out after he gives up a solo shot to Rendon and issues a walk with one out in the 7th inning, replacing him with the Glummiest Gus of all time, Will Harris.³ Poor old Will then serves up a biscuit to Howie Kendrick, who slices what seemed to be a decent pitch just over the right field wall and into the foul pole at Minute Maid for a go-ahead home run, probably a harmless fly ball second out in almost every other Major League ballpark. So in the span of a couple of minutes, the Refuse-to-Lose Nats go from being just a few more outs from being World Series runners-up to grabbing a 3-2 lead, and not looking back. As the Nats padded their lead with two more runs in the top of the 8th and one more in the top of the 9th, the Astros' bats went dead as the game closed out, the 'Stros losing Game 7 by the score of 6-2, their fourth consecutive loss to the Nationals at Minute Maid Park, where the Astros won at a .741 clip (60-21) during the regular season.

As all of you surely know, this is the first-ever World Series that went 7 games and saw the visiting team win each and every game. Truly remarkable. And it brought Washington, D.C. its first World Series champion since 1924, when Walter Johnson aka *The Big Train* pitched the Washington Senators to their one and only World Series championship. Tom Boswell, the author of some truly great baseball writings (*Why Time Begins on Opening Day; The Heart of the Order; Cracking the Show; How Life Imitates the World Series*) has been having a field day with the Nats' playoffs success, penning several great articles about this wonderful story about this incredible Nats run. Here are links to a couple of his articles, if of interest to any of you⁴:

[The Nats' celebration wasn't a parade. It was a massive gathering of a joyous sports family.](#)

Sure, every victory parade is the same. But for D.C.'s baseball fans, this one was more like a revival.

[Nats' postseason upset run was the greatest in MLB history, with moments we'll never forget](#)

(The Washington Post, October 31, 2019; 3:03 PM)

[A baseball miracle or a deal with the devil? Nah, it was just Nationals baseball.](#)

(The Washington Post, October 31, 2019; 1:19 AM)

[The Nats had plenty of heroes in Game 6 — and even owe a thank you to Astros' Alex Bregman](#)

(The Washington Post, October 30, 2019; 1:06 AM)

[Baseball gods deliver Max Scherzer a cruel twist of fate. But don't dismiss these Nats.](#)

(The Washington Post, October 27, 2019; 11:17 PM)

³ Every time I see Harris in a game I think, "This guy looks like he would have any other kind of vocation *except* being a professional baseball player." I mean, he sorta looks like Mr. Haney on Green Acres, but he could be a plumber, an auto mechanic, a farmer, a stevedore, but decidedly not a professional athlete.

⁴ Use Linda's subscription in order to access the articles. User ID: lkoftan@pheblaw.com

Password: 3Kitties

[After a five-month climb, Nats are showing signs they may be afraid of heights](#)

(The Washington Post, October 27, 2019; 12:47 AM)

[The Astros are back in this World Series, and the chess game is officially afoot](#)

(The Washington Post, October 26, 2019; 5:00 AM)

[The Nationals' bats won Game 2, but it was Stephen Strasburg's grit that set the stage](#)

(The Washington Post, October 24, 2019; 4:30 AM)

[Nationals fans, welcome to the World Series. Here's hoping you make it to the end.](#)

(The Washington Post, October 23, 2019; 1:55 AM)

[The World Series is back in D.C. after 86 years. Enjoy the ride, because anything can happen.](#)

(The Washington Post, October 21, 2019; 7:00 AM)

[The Nats followed their own path to the World Series, metrics be damned](#)

(The Washington Post, October 16, 2019; 6:01 PM)

[Off to the World Series, these Nationals have proved everyone wrong](#)

(The Washington Post, October 16, 2019; 12:39 AM)

[The Nationals' unforgettable season is about to reach another level](#)

(The Washington Post, October 12, 2019; 11:28 PM)

[When it comes to World Series droughts, D.C. is a special place for suffering](#)

(The Washington Post, October 11, 2019; 9:00 PM)

[Howie Kendrick keeps the party going, and the Nats are dancing into the NLCS](#)

(The Washington Post, October 10, 2019; 3:58 AM)

[Ryan Zimmerman's goose-bump moment sends Nats to L.A. with Stephen Strasburg and plenty of hope](#)

(The Washington Post, October 8, 2019; 4:00 AM)

[After Game 3 haymaker, the Nationals need more punch to stay in the fight](#)

(The Washington Post, October 7, 2019; 1:12 AM)

[The Nationals are breaking the rules and just might steal the series from the Dodgers](#)

(The Washington Post, October 5, 2019; 7:50 AM)

[The Nats picked wrong time to show the worst of themselves in Game 1 of NLDS](#)

(The Washington Post, October 4, 2019; 4:00 AM)

[The Nationals' wild-card win was both thrilling and emotionally exhausting. Of course it was.](#)

(The Washington Post, October 2, 2019; 12:13 AM)

I don't know if any of you saw the editorial in last Friday's *USA TODAY* comparing the 2019 Nationals win over the Astros to the 1969 Amazin' Mets miraculous World Series win against the heavily-favored, Earl Weaver-managed Baltimore Orioles, but it was pretty good. Both teams were new NL franchises that started out being woeful and losing at an alarming level during their early years, but eventually

building strong pitching staffs (Jerry Koosman, Tom Seaver and Nolan Ryan for the Mets; Strasberg, Scherzer and Pat Corbin for the Nats) and fighting their way to respectability and eventually a championship.

TOP PLAYERS, POSITION BY POSITION

For your edification and enjoyment, provided herewith are the Top 10 position players from the Hot Stove League season just past:

CATCHER

1.	Yasmani Grandal	Bums	528.9
2.	J.T. Realmuto	FA	495.4
3.	Christian Vázquez	FA	407.6
4.	Mitch Garver	Tribe	402.9
5.	Gary Sánchez	Monarchs	381.7
6.	Omar Narváz	Chiefs	374.9
7.	Wilson Ramos	Senators	372.0
8.	Willson Contreras	Cubs	368.7
9.	James McCann	Bombers	357.4
10.	Robinson Chirinos	Tigers	337.1

1ST BASE

1.	Cody Bellinger	Bombers	759.9
2.	Freddie Freeman	Monarchs	706.3
3.	Pete Alonso	Tribe	696.7
4.	Carlos Santana	Blues	649.8
5.	DJ LeMahieu	Monarchs	639.6
6.	Trey Mancini	Bombers	634.3
7.	Josh Bell	FA	613.6
8.	Anthony Rizzo	W (Oct 1)	604.8
9.	Whit Merrifield	Bums	588.2
10.	José Abreu	Redbirds	585.9

2ND BASE

1.	Ketel Marte	FA	668.0
2.	DJ LeMahieu	Monarchs	639.6
3.	Ozzie Albies	Senators	634.9
4.	Eduardo Escobar	Wahoos	624.3
5.	Jonathan Villar	Bombers	602.0

6.	Whit Merrifield	Bums	588.2
7.	Max Muncy	Monarchs	584.6
8.	Yuli Gurriel	Skipjacks	569.8
9.	Gleyber Torres	Redbirds	562.7
10.	Yoán Moncada	Tribe	542.1

3RD BASE

1.	Alex Bregman	Bears	789.3
2.	Anthony Rendon	Cubs	746.9
3.	Nolan Arenado	Blues	709.7
4.	Rafael Devers	Blues	702.7
5.	Carlos Santana	Blues	649.8
6.	Eugenio Suárez	Redbirds	645.6
7.	DJ LeMahieu	Monarchs	639.6
8.	Josh Donaldson	Monarchs	632.9
9.	Eduardo Escobar	Wahoos	624.3
10.	Matt Chapman	Bums	601.6

SHORTSTOP

1.	Alex Bregman	Bears	789.3
2.	Marcus Semien	Redbirds	720.1
3.	Xander Bogaerts	Senators	719.7
4.	Trevor Story	Wahoos	677.6
5.	Ketel Marte	FA	668.0
6.	Eduardo Escobar	Wahoos	624.3
7.	Jonathan Villar	Bombers	602.0
8.	Jorge Polanco	Senators	594.3
9.	Francisco Lindor	Cubs	584.7
10.	Gleyber Torres	Redbirds	562.7

LEFT FIELD

1.	Christian Yelich	FA	718.7
2.	Ronald Acuña Jr.	FA	700.5
3.	Juan Soto	Blues	689.0
4.	J.D. Martinez	Bums	644.9
5.	Trey Mancini	Bombers	634.3
6.	Kris Bryant	FA	598.8
7.	Austin Meadows	Senators	569.2

8.	Michael Conforto	Skipjacks	566.3
9.	Rhys Hoskins	Tribe	564.2
10.	Michael Brantley	Tigers	556.8

CENTER FIELD

1.	Cody Bellinger	Bombers	759.9
2.	Mike Trout	FA	723.0
3.	Christian Yelich	FA	718.7
4.	Ronald Acuña Jr.	FA	700.5
5.	Mookie Betts	Chiefs	688.0
6.	Ketel Marte	FA	668.0
7.	Bryce Harper	Senators	638.8
8.	Charlie Blackmon	Skipjacks	623.0
9.	George Springer	Tribe	600.0
10.	Whit Merrifield	Bums	588.2

RIGHT FIELD

1.	Cody Bellinger	Bombers	759.9
2.	Christian Yelich	FA	718.7
3.	Ronald Acuña Jr.	FA	700.5
4.	Mookie Betts	Chiefs	688.0
5.	Jorge Soler	Senators	658.3
6.	J.D. Martinez	Bums	644.9
7.	Bryce Harper	Senators	638.8
8.	Trey Mancini	Bombers	634.3
9.	Charlie Blackmon	Skipjacks	623.0
10.	George Springer	Tribe	600.0

STARTING PITCHERS

1.	Justin Verlander	W (Oct 1)	960.0
2.	Gerrit Cole	Senators	944.0
3.	Jacob deGrom	Skipjacks	768.0
4.	Stephen Strasburg	Bombers	765.0
5.	Shane Bieber	Senators	757.0
6.	Zack Greinke	FA	741.0
7.	Charlie Morton	FA	709.0
8.	Jack Flaherty	Bears	708.0
9.	Patrick Corbin	Senators	693.0

10.	Lance Lynn	Bums	661.0
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RELIEF PITCHERS

1.	Sonny Gray	FA	607.0
2.	Josh Hader	Wahoos	517.0
3.	Max Fried	Skipjacks	506.0
4.	Liam Hendriks	Bums	492.0
5.	Dakota Hudson	Redbirds	492.0
6.	Kenta Maeda	Skipjacks	487.0
7.	Domingo Germán	FA	483.0
8.	Brandon Workman	Senators	458.5
9.	Will Smith	Chiefs	454.0
10.	Kirby Yates	Cubs	452.0

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO OF THE WEEK

Take a look at this great picture of Connie Mack, the Tall Tactician who managed the Philadelphia A's for 49 years (1901-1950) and five World Series titles (1910, 1911, 1913, 1929, 1930).



IDIOM OF THE WEEK

A day late and a dollar short.

This is one of my favorites. I can't be entirely sure of when I first heard it, but if I had to guess, I think it was my old 9th grade football coach, Andy Lohr, probably commenting on a missed blocking assignment in practice, as in, "Ernst, you are 'A day late and a dollar short.'" Another good story here, now that my 9th grade year has been called up from storage.

In the fall of my 9th grade year, I succumbed to peer pressure and tried out for tackle football, a first for me since I had not participated in the Lincoln Midget⁵ program. At that time, you had to weigh in, and if you weighed less than 135 pounds, you were placed on the "Lightweight" football team. If you weighed 135 pounds or more, or were actually good, you were on the "Heavyweight" football team. Weight-wise, only days away from a major growth spurt, I weighed in at something like 134 pounds and 15 ounces. Talent-wise, I was clearly cut out for the Lightweight team. Andy Lohr coached the line and the defense on the Lightweight team, if memory serves.

Anyway, during the course of our six-game season, playing at left guard, I grew about three or four inches and put on at least 25 pounds. Near the end of the season, not having yet mastered my position--perhaps the understatement of my life--I can still hear Coach Lohr's stinging remark to me after a failed assignment, "Ernst, you're the biggest 'Lightweight' I've ever had, and probably⁶ the *worst*." Sounds harsh, I have to admit now, but I think he was laughing when he said it. The good news is this didn't discourage me from participating in three more years of tackle football as a Rocket, and in an ironic twist of fate, during my senior year, I was the *lightest* tackle in the city at 185 pounds. And probably still the worst.

ON THE HOT STOVE LEAGUE CALENDAR

Here are a few suggested dates for upcoming Hot Stove League events. If anyone has a **conflict** with any of these dates and wants to propose alternative dates, please advise **ASAP**. Otherwise, please put these on your calendars and plan to participate if able:

December 20 (Friday)
January 11 (Saturday)

Christmas lunch at Jams
Winter Meeting⁷

⁵ Sounds pretty politically incorrect. Wonder if they still call it that?

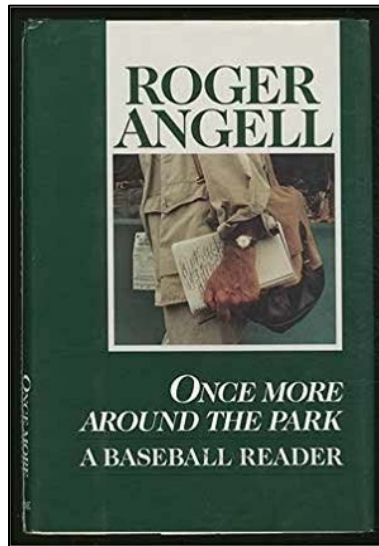
⁶ At least he left some room for doubt.

⁷ Presumably to award Jim Ed his first Hot Stove League championship. However, Commissioner Drews is currently reviewing a Whistleblower Complaint about a phone call which allegedly took place last summer in which Tirebiter allegedly threatened to cut off legal services to Blow Torch's financial empire unless he

March 21 (Saturday)
June 5-7

Draft Day
HSL Trip to Baltimore for Orioles v.
Astros series

**ONCE MORE AROUND THE PARK:
A Baseball Reader**



I have almost finished reading yet another great collection of Roger Angell baseball writings, this one called *Once More Around the Park*. Published in 2001, *Once More* contains some vintage Angell pieces, about half of which I had read in his earlier-published books. Here are a few tasty samplings:

DAYS AND NIGHTS WITH THE UNBORED

In this great chapter, Angell reviews the 1969 World Series winning season of the Amazin' Mets. Here's what he had to say about their pitching that year:

PITCHING--Tom Seaver and Jerry Koosman, who appeared and flowered in succession in the past two seasons, are now the best one-two starting pair on any team in the majors. This year's freshman was Gary Gentry, up from Arizona State (the Notre Dame of college baseball) and only two years in the minors, who won thirteen games and invariably proved obdurate in the tough, close ones. A veteran, Don Cardwell, and two more youngsters, Nolan Ryan and Jim McAndrew, together provided the fourth and fifth starters, and Ron Taylor and Tug McGraw were the stoppers from the bullpen. Ryan throws pure smoke (in the minors he once fanned eighteen batters in seven innings), but there are those who think that McAndrew may be an even better pitcher in the end. ***Young hurlers' arms are***

acceded to the previously-mentioned Kyle Seager for Luis Severino trade proposal, potentially an impeachable offense.

as delicate as African violets, and Hodges and the Mets' pitching coach, Rube Walker, stuck to a five-day rotation through the most crowded weekends of the schedule, arriving at September with a pitching staff that was in splendid fettle. Rube has been known to glare at a pitcher whom he finds playing catch on the sidelines without his permission.

.

After a season of such length and so many surprises, reason suggested that we would now be given a flat and perhaps one-sided World Series, won by the Orioles, who had swept their three playoff games with the Minnesota Twins, and whom reporters were calling the finest club of the decade. There would be honor enough for the Mets if they managed only to keep it close. None of this happened, of course, and the best news--the one *true* miracle--was not the Mets' victory but the quality of those five games--an assemblage of brilliant parables illustrating every varied aspect of the beautiful game.

The Baltimore fans expected neither of these possibilities, for there were still plenty of tickets on sale before the opener at Memorial Stadium, and the first two Series games were played to less than capacity crowds. This is explicable only when one recalls that two other league champions from Baltimore--the football Colts and the basketball Bullets--had been humiliated by New York teams in postseason championships this year. Baltimore, in fact, is a city that no longer expects *any* good news. In the press box, however, the announcement of the opening lineups was received in predictable fashion ("Just *no way* . . ."), and I could only agree. *The Orioles, who had won a hundred and nine games in the regular season, finishing nineteen games ahead of the next team and clinching their divisional title on September 13, were a poised and powerful veteran team that topped the Mets in every statistic and, man for man, at almost every position. Their three sluggers--Frank Robinson, Boog Powell, and Paul Blair--had hit a total of ninety-five homers, as against the Mets' team total of a hundred and nine. Their pitching staff owned a lower earned-run average than the Mets' sterling corps. Their ace, screwballer Mike Cuellar, had won twenty-three games and led the staff in strikeouts; their second starter, Dave McNally, had won fifteen games in a row this year; the third man, Jim Palmer, had a record of 16-4, including a no-hitter. Since Cuellar and McNally are left-handers, Hodges was forced to start his righty specialists (Clendenon, Charles, Swoboda, and Weis) and bench the hot left-handed hitters (Kranepool, Garrett, Shamsky, and Boswell) who had so badly damaged the Braves. Just no way.*

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Back at Shea Stadium, before an uncharacteristically elegant but absolutely jam-packed audience, Tommie Agee rocked Jim Palmer with a lead-off first-inning homer--Agee's fifth such discouragement this year. Gary Gentry, who had taken such a pounding from the Braves, was in fine form this time, challenging the big Baltimore sluggers with his hummer and comforted by a 3-0 lead after the second inning. He was further comforted in the fourth, when Tommie Agee, with two Orioles aboard, ran for several minutes toward deep left and finally, cross-handed, pulled down Elrod Hendricks' drive just before colliding with the fence. Agee held on to the ball, though, and carried it all the way back to the infield like a trophy, still stuck in the topmost webbing of his glove. It was 4-0 for the home side by the seventh, when Gentry walked the bases full with two out and was succeeded by Nolan Ryan. Paul Blair hit his 0-2 pitch on a line to distant right. Three Orioles took wing for the plate, but Agee, running to his left this time, made a skidding dive just at the warning track and again came up with the ball. The entire crowd--all 56,335 of us--jumped to its feet in shouting tribute as he trotted off the field. *The final score was 5-0, or, more accurately, 5-5--five runs for the Mets, five runs saved by Tommie Agee. Almost incidentally, it seemed, the Orioles were suddenly in deep trouble in the Series.*

.....

The Earl of Baltimore

Later, in his quiet office, Earl Weaver was asked by a reporter if he hadn't thought that the Orioles would hold on to their late lead in the last game and thus bring the Series back to Baltimore and maybe win it there. ***Weaver took a sip of beer and smiled and said, "No, that's what you can never do in baseball. You can't sit on a lead and run a few plays into the line and just kill the clock. You've got to throw the ball over the goddam plate and give the other man his chance. That's why baseball is the greatest game of them all."***

ANGELL ON CATCHING

Once More includes an entire chapter on catching, entitled "In the Fire," written in the winter of 1984. For this glittering piece, Angell interviewed a whole host of different receivers, including Bob Boone, Terry Kennedy, Joe Garagiola, Milt May, Dave Duncan, Carlton Fisk and Tom Haller. A few of the delicacies from this chapter are as follows:

- We fear or dote upon the batter, depending on which side is up; we laugh at pitchers a little, because of their contortions, but gasp at their speed and stuff; we think of infielders as kids or terriers, and outfielders are gazelles or

bombardiers or demigods; but catchers are not so easy to place in our imagination. Without quite intending it, we have probably always patronized them a little. How many of us, I wonder, have entirely forgotten "**the tools of ignorance**," that old sports-page epithet for the catcher's impedimenta (it was coined in the 1920s by Muddy Ruel, a catcher with the Senators, who practiced law in the off-season).

- Talking to catchers is even more fun than watching them, as I discovered last season when I began to sense how little I knew about their dusty trade and sought out a few of them for enlightenment. They were surprised to be asked, it turned out, and then they seemed eager to dispel some of the peculiar anonymity that has surrounded such a public occupation; if you want an earful, go to a man in a highly technical profession who feels he is underappreciated.
- I talked to my informants separately, beginning with extended colloquies around batting cages and in dugouts and clubhouses during the leisurely 1983 spring term in Arizona and Florida, and then coming back for some short refreshers whenever I ran into one of them during the regular season. In time, these interviews ran together in my mind and seemed to turn into one extended, almost non-stop conversation about catching, with the tanned, knotty-armed participants together in the same room, or perhaps ranged comfortably about on the airy porch of some ancient summer hotel, interrupting each other, nodding in recollection, doubling back to some previous tip or tonic, laughing together, or shouting in sudden dissent. But they grew more serious as they went along. One of the surprising things about the catchers' catcher-talk, I realized after a while, was how abstract it often was. Old names and games, famous innings and one-liners and celebrated goofs seemed to drop out of their conversation as they got deeper into it, as if the burden of anecdote might distract them (and me) from a proper appraisal of their hard calling. ***Everything about catching, I decided somewhere along the way, is harder than it looks.***
- The "one-handed glove" that so many of my catching informants referred to is the contemporary lightweight mitt that everyone, including Little Leaguers, now employs behind the plate. Thanks to radical excisions of padding around the rim and thumb, it is much smaller than its lumpy, pillowlike progenitor, more resembling a quiche than a ***deep-dish Brown Betty***. The glove is still stiffer and more unwieldy than a first baseman's mitt, to be sure, but if you catch a thrown ball in the pocket, the glove will try to fold itself around the ball and hold it, thus simply extending the natural catching motion of a man's hand. ***Catching with the old mitt, by contrast, was more like trying to stop a pitch with a dictionary; it didn't hurt much, but you had to clap your right hand over the pill almost instantly in order to keep it in possession.***
- Every catcher exudes stability and competence--there's something about putting on the chest protector and strapping on those shin guards that suggests a neighborhood grocer rolling up the steel storefront shutters and then setting out the merchandise to start the day.

- That afternoon, Tom Haller and I sat on folding chairs in a front-row box in the little wooden stadium in Scottsdale and took in an early-March game between his Giants and the Seattle Mariners. Haller is a large, pleasant man, with an Irish-touched face, and a perfect companion at a game--silent for good long stretches but then quick to point out a telling little detail on the field or to bring up some play or player from the past, for comparison.
- No catcher of our time looks more imperious than Carlton Fisk, and none, I think, has so impressed his style and mannerisms on our sporting consciousness; his cutoff, bib-sized chest protector above those elegant Doric legs; his ritual pause in the batter's box to inspect the label on his upright bat before he steps in for good; the tipped-back mask balanced on top of his head as he stalks to the mound to consult his pitcher; the glove held akimbo on his left hip during a pause in the game. ***He is six-three, with a long back, and when he comes straight up out of the chute to make a throw to second base, you sometimes have the notion that you are watching an aluminum extension ladder stretching for the house eaves.***

Is it just me, or is that not some of the most beautiful baseball prose you have ever read? Angell is truly one of a kind.

Switching gears from *Once More*, I share with you one more passage from *Game Time*, which I have been saving for the end of the season. This is actually from the "Introduction" of the book by Richard Ford, a New Englander from Princeton who is no slouch of a writer in his own right. His Introduction begins with:

Loving baseball is (or once was) easy. The game offers regular-sized humans performing oversized, occasionally glorious feats with grace and precision, all of it viewable in normally nice weather, pretty surroundings, and in real time.

But it's his ending to the Introduction that rings so very true to me, because it dwells on the day *after* the end of a baseball season, one of the worst days of the year for all of us. I think back to just last Thursday, the day after the concluding Game 7 of the wonderful World Series we just watched, and I remember already starting to feel morose about having to endure the months of November, December and January before we will begin feeling the excitement of next season's spring training. So here's the final passage from Ford's Introduction:

Sometime along in the middle of October, 1981--a dreary season for me in almost all respects--my wife was sitting in our house in Princeton, staring moodily out the living-room window at the maple's seeming to change leaf by leaf, and with it the year, its dour end game begun. The Series had just finished. The Dodgers had defeated the Yankees in six games. No one's back was any longer against the wall. The fat lady'd sung. There *was* a tomorrow, and this was it. ***No one who fancies baseball ever feels very good about things on this day, no matter who's become champ.***

"Ho-hum," my wife said, resigned, her nose to the cool glass, her eyes gray and unblinking.

"Right. Ho-hum," I said, offering her some company.

"Well," she said. "That's all over now." She nodded. But suddenly her face brightened. "In a week, though, we'll have Roger Angell to read, and I'll probably feel better again. It's the only good thing about the end of the season--Roger Angell comes along and makes it go alive again. I wish it could be today."

"Me, too," I said.

And baseball, by these simple acts, was tucked away for another quilted winter, to be attended to properly, lovingly in the interval. So that come March we'd all find it again, renewed and much as it was--the way we like it.

My wife smiled at me, happy for this prospect. Together we commenced our wait.

And so, too, do we wait. If only we still had the prospect of a new Angell perspective on our great game.

Skipper

Next Issue: El Tiante; the 1986 World Series.