

The Game of Baseball
By
Daniel E. White August 4, 2025

Recently, my sister went to an afternoon Dodger game. Her retirement community arranged the trip. They provided the transportation and provided a “goodie bag” with a Dodger pin and a Bobble-head of the catcher, Will Smith. The ticket was for a seat in the bleachers behind center field, about 460 feet from the plate. Including the transportation, the cost to her was \$50. She told me she had enjoyed herself when we next talked on the phone.

We recalled together times that our family had gone in the 1950s to games played by the Seattle Rainiers, a Triple A level team affiliated with the Cincinnati Reds. We assumed that all five of us would have sat in seats along the third base line that, in total, cost less than \$50 for all of us. We were about 120 feet from the batter’s box. She remembered liking the Rainier shortstop.

She also talked about the San Diego Padres game she attended with our brother, Jody, his wife, Susan, Judy and me at Petco Park in 2017. We sat behind home plate, 15 rows up, in seats that cost about \$50 each. There, we were about 75 feet from where the catcher squatted to give the sign, the batter dug in, and the umpire leaned forward to call the pitch a ball or a strike.

We have here a concrete measure of inflation. I suspect the several multi-million-dollar player contracts involved these days have some relevance here. The attraction, though, still consists of watching highly skilled men earning their living by playing a game.

I asked Sandee what stood out in her memory of the Dodger game. “The shortstop was standing almost directly behind second base,” she began. “That didn’t happen before. Why does he stand there?”

That began a 45-minute question and answer session, Sandee wondering why this and how that, and me, providing explanations based on my having played the game and remaining a fan. (Warning: think about how you want to spend time before you ask a fan to explain the ins and outs of his or her passion.)

I started with statistics. Teams had been implementing the “shift:” three infielders on one side of the field to cut down on the number of ground ball hits by opponents. That led to me explaining how batters “pull the ball” to one side or the other.

The defensive strategy worked. But hits are more exciting than outs, so the rule-makers banned the shift. Putting the shortstop nearly directly behind second base was the defense’s response. The result has been more hits than happened with the shift but not as many as before the shift came about.

That likely-too-long explanation led to me talking about the challenge of using a rounded stick to hit a round ball thrown at 95 miles-per-hour by a fellow standing 60 feet, six inches from you, and the pitcher making said ball change its course from a straight to a curved line in so short a distance.

She seemed impressed and even thanked me for my descriptions and explanations. “Wow,” she said.

I asked her if she had watched the crowd around her at all. She had, she said. She could not understand why so many people didn’t seem to be paying attention to the actual game in front of them, many fiddling with their phones in some way. I offered that these folks were, like Sandee, just short of one-tenth of a mile away from the starting point for any action and chose the more immediate stimulation of a text or taking a selfie.

Then she wondered why so many people around her booed when a Dodger made an error or an out. Some people even shouted derogatory words toward the offender. Using her new-found understanding of the complexities of the game, she asked why these fans cut players no slack for mistakes. She thought they probably don’t get the complexities of the game.

I could hope that she was right; they just don’t get it. I doubt that is the case.

People of a Certain Age, how much of the complexity of the game of life do any of us understand, and how willing are we to “cut the players some slack?”

I would not choose to hold any political office these days; my guess is that I am not alone. The relative contempt with which many people regard politicians is one reason, but the bigger reason is that, as a polity, we have exchanged any understanding of the complexity of most issues for a simplistic ten-second bite.

Neither would I want to run a major corporation or even lead a school. Mistakes in those roles would likely result in worse consequences than a few boos or derogatory words.

Cutting some slack is not code for ignoring mistakes. Rather, it involves assuming that the “offender” has tried his or her best and, in this instance, failed to achieve the goal. It takes into account the complexities involved. It concedes that none of us is perfect.

You and I cannot do much about the rising cost of attending a baseball game or any other rising cost, for that matter. But we can be mindful about people trying their best and cutting some slack when appropriate.

In the end, baseball is much more forgiving than most people’s lives. After all, if you hit the ball safely 3 times out of 10 over your career, you have a chance to be in the Hall of Fame.

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