
Baseball: The Green Fields of the Mind

It's spring, Truist Park is open for full capacity, and our dear Atlanta Braves have so far lost more games than they have won. Yet, I believe they will begin to win! Such is the beloved sport of baseball. Today I offer a thanksgiving for baseball, but for this somber reason: I thank God for baseball, because it breaks our hearts.

I remember the beautiful words of one of my baseball heroes, a scholar named A. Bartlett Giamatti. Bart Giamatti, a devoted Red Sox fan, was an academic, a professor of English Renaissance Literature, at Yale University. In 1978, when he was a candidate to become president of Yale (Yale University!) he said, "The only thing I ever wanted to be president of was the American League."

Well, he did become the president of Yale. But he resigned that position a few years later (1986) to become president of the National League! And then he became the Commissioner of Baseball in 1989. His rather tumultuous tenure ended only five months later, when he died of a heart attack.

"It breaks your heart," he wrote, "It's designed to break your heart." He wrote those words about baseball. In Atlanta, we have remembered some great baseball men this past year: Bill Bartholomay, Phil Niekro, and "The Hammer" Mr. Henry Aaron. May their souls rest in peace, and I thank them for being among many who helped bring baseball to Atlanta.

But these words of Bart Giamatti are my prayer today. They are taken from an essay titled, "The Green Fields of the Mind:"

It breaks your heart. It is designed to break your heart. The game begins in the spring, when everything else begins again, and it blossoms in the summer, filling the afternoons and evenings, and then as soon as the chill rains come, it stops and leaves you to face the fall alone.

...(Giamatti then speaks of Dame Mutability, who never loses; and he describes the final at-bats of the last Boston batters of the season's final game, his beloved Red Sox, losing against their rivals, the Yankees.)

...It breaks my heart because it was meant to, because it was meant to foster in me again the illusion that there was something abiding, some pattern and some impulse that could come together to make a reality that would resist the corrosion; and because, after it had fostered again that most hungered-for illusion, the game was meant to stop, and betray precisely what it promised.

*Of course, there are those who learn after the first few times. They grow out of sports. And there are others who were born with the wisdom to know that nothing lasts. These are the truly tough among us, the ones who can live without illusion, or without even the hope of illusion. I am not that grown-up or up-to-date. I am a simpler creature, tied to more primitive patterns and cycles. I need to think something lasts forever, and it might as well be that state of being that is a game; it might as well be that, in a green field, in the sun. (from "The Green Fields of the Mind," in *A Great and Glorious Game: Baseball Writings of A. Bartlett Giamatti*).*

AMEN to those words! "I need to think something lasts forever."

Baseball breaks our hearts, but it sure lifts them, too. May our eternal God teach us through the game of baseball: an orderly way to experience the mutability of life, the changes and chances of life, the wins and losses of life, the ups and downs. May God grant us great games played in green fields in the sun. May they last forever.

Play Ball!

Amen.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Very Rev. Sam Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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