

## More Fun Than It Looks

Let's face it, the United States has tried to sell baseball to the rest of the world for decades.

So far, it has been exported into parts of Latin America, the Caribbean and Japan. The Canadians play the game, most likely to keep things calm in the immediate neighborhood. But no one in Canada seemed to notice (or mind) when one of the country's two teams changed its name and moved to Washington, D.C.

Don't get me wrong. I love baseball, go to games and played it as a kid, and I play it now every time 17 friends show up at my house with bats, balls and gloves. That's not very often.

The United States may have given the world the Wright brothers, MTV, Elvis and cheese in an aerosol can, but it can't seem to give the world baseball. And yet, true to its indomitable spirit, the nation still tries.

No one disputes that when the World Series is on, a few pubs in Britain switch on the tube. But that's only in those tony neighborhoods where lots of Americans live. Contrast that with the mayhem that engulfs the world when the World Cup is on.

There probably isn't another sport in the world, even if you include cricket, which no one actually understands, that puts so many players on the field with next to nothing to do. To the uninformed observer, baseball is a little like watching a group of laborers fixing a road — although you do get to drink beer as you watch. One worker stands there with a jackhammer, shaking and twitching like mad, while the other workers watch. Then they break for lunch. Change the jackhammer to a bat, and you've pretty much got baseball figured out.

Athletes who play any other sport — American and European football, basketball, rugby, bicycle racing, tennis — work up a sweat. You can't chase, kick, head-butt and body slam a soccer ball for 90 min-

utes and chew tobacco at the same time, which some baseball players do. And what other athletes, aside from auto racers and jockeys, wear sunglasses while in action? Imagine rugby with one player wearing shades. The other players would grab them, break them in two, and probably eat them, glass and all.

Then there is the energy that is expended during play. Footballers like Lionel Messi of FC Barcelona and Cristiano Ronaldo of Real Madrid never stand still. If they wore heart monitors underneath their colorful jerseys, there's no doubt they would be in the red zone. But a centerfielder in Major League Baseball? He'd be lucky to get his pulse above a resting rate of 72. In baseball, the players are often a lot more relaxed than the fans.

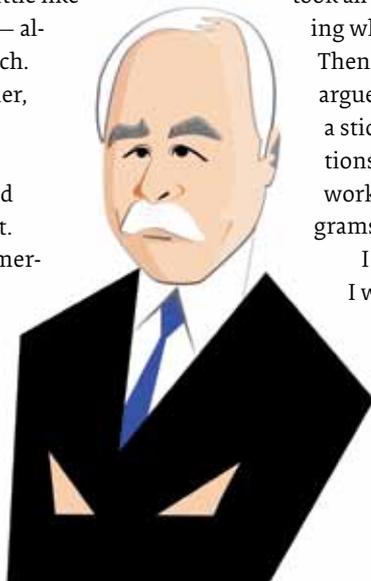
The game doesn't keep players trim either. Babe Ruth, whose career went from 1914 to 1935, smoked, drank and packed more than a few extra pounds. And yet, he managed to hit the ball out of the park and round the bases like nobody else. Contrast Ruth's physique with that of a fireplug like Pelé or a heartthrob like David Beckham.

And yet, despite the game's flaws and eccentricities, Americans, and a few others, love baseball. We watch it on TV and at the stadium, listen to it on the radio, read about it in the papers and on the Web, text each other the scores, and can't ever seem to get enough. Baseball is a passion.

It kind of reminds me of the guy who fixed my car. It took all day, he swore a lot and got grease on my steering wheel, and I'm certain did practically no work. Then he handed me an astronomical bill. When I argued with him about the bill, he sat back, chewed a stick of gum, gave me a series of plausible explanations and statistics, and compared his work to the work of those who had come before. He drew diagrams showing what he had done, and he smiled a lot.

I must admit, I was entertained by the guy and I was charmed, and I paid the bill in full. But then, after I left, I realized he hadn't actually fixed my car.

You have to love the game.



Robert Risko