

## America's Pastime: Past Its Time?

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Since its emergence in the dawn of the 20th century, the game of baseball has been a summer time ritual adored by millions of Americans. "The Great American Pastime," a popular phrase used to describe the game of baseball, may be losing some of its relevance. With popularity among sports enthusiasts being diverted toward games that offer increased physical contact, baseball finds itself not as the game of choice any longer, but as a withering relic compared to its dominant self of yesteryear.

A comparison of the game of baseball between modern proceedings and the matches at the time of its origin would yield minimal contradictory results. Other than equipment and athletic ability of players, the format and structure of Major League Baseball have been relatively unchanged. One proposed setback in the continued prosperity of the game is a blinding realization that American culture is no longer as it was when an overwhelming majority of citizens preferred the laid-back confines of the baseball diamond. Instead, today's Americans are attracted to death-defying games and sports that serve thrashing blows to a team's supremacy in a single inferior bout with an opponent. Therefore, the insistence that baseball carry out time-honored traditions, such as the 160-game season, has left it where it started, in the 1900s.

Although both eras have spotlighted impressive athletics, today's baseball stars are portrayed as drug using (Darryl Strawberry), money-hungry mongrels that play the game simply for personal glory. The term "team" has lost significant meaning in present-day baseball. The franchise format of earlier periods called for an undying devotion by players, to a team, a noble

notion that has since gone by the way of the do-do bird. No longer can players be identified by team/position. The ever-growing market of free agency has rested the task of player/team recognition solely in the laps of the uniforms slapped on the individuals' backs, and the media coverage that follows a wild eight or nine player, four city-trade.

Marketing has also changed a great deal over the year. Many moons ago, players could (and did) sponsor products, such as soap, candy, tobacco, and countless other items. Television, magazines, and newspapers were the preferred method of spreading not only the message of the advertisement, but also the charismatic side of the star athlete. Today, some elite superstars are prohibited by team contracts to endorse products; autograph signing is also banned. Players that do sign autographs sometimes charge excessive amounts of money. It's no wonder current baseball icons aren't regarded as highly as former great ones once were; charging money for their signatures after putting the same ones on multi-million dollar contracts, what audacity!

Having said that, let's not forget how owners are able to shell out their enormous payrolls through baseball-generated revenues. Baseball attracts millions of fans summer after summer, just as it has since its beginning. There's something about catching a bag of peanuts, nibbling on a hot dog, and drinking a cold beer with thousands of people on a Tuesday afternoon in a ballpark that's inexplicably timeless. Decreased attendance and spiraling revenues hopefully won't be premonitions of what lies in baseball's future. Perhaps, optimistically speaking, baseball's proud traditions will weather the storms of faster-paced games and dwindling player respect to return to the forefront of American sports' fanfare.

*Nathaniel Lee Meins' major is Undeclared.*

**Ms. Acosta's Comments:** *Nathaniel's quick turn of phrase and passionate comment on America's past-time make this essay both fun and informative. I also appreciate how his discussion of baseball supports an analysis of contemporary American culture in general-a sophisticated twist on what might otherwise be another banal compare/contrast essay.*