

At The Turning Of The Tide
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One of my earliest memories of childhood is of sitting in front of the television watching a baseball game with my mother in our apartment outside Boston. The year was 1975, and the Cincinnati Reds were playing the Red Sox in what has gone down in history as one of the most remarkable World Series matchups ever. The Reds were winning the game I was watching that day, and I turned to my mother and told her I was rooting for them. I wanted to be on the winning side, and even at that tender age I could sense the aura of inevitable doom that cloaked our hometown team.

You can't do that, she said. The Red Sox are your team. It is wrong to bail out on them because they are losing. You stand with your team no matter what. Besides, she finished, some day they will actually win this thing, and you'll miss out on the celebration if you discarded them before that happens.

I've been a die-hard Red Sox fan ever since. I remember Bucky Dent the way some people remember Sirhan Sirhan. I was watching the World Series in a basement in Newton in 1986 when that ball skipped nimbly through the legs of Bill Buckner, and my friend was so outraged that he punched the low-hanging ceiling hard enough to dent the linoleum floor of the kitchen above us. I just sat there, numb and dumb, with ceiling tile dust in my hair and a sinking feeling in my gut. Later that night we were walking back from the store when we were accosted by an abysmally inebriated Sox fan whose whole world had been destroyed. He made us do pushups on the greasy blacktop of a gas station to offer some sort of atonement to a universe that had, once again, reached out to crush us. We were young and small, he was huge and drunk, and as my nose lifted and fell off that oil-soaked pavement I thought, somehow, that it all made sense.

In George W. Bush's America, being even moderately liberal these days is like being a Red Sox fan. You know what needs to happen, you know what is

right, and
yet some cosmic force akin to the lingering shade of Babe Ruth always
manages to
ascend from purgatory and batter you into dust right at the moment when
something good and great is within your grasp. If you do manage to get
your
lineup together - home run issues, grand slam arguments, All Star
players - you
will get completely outspent by the damned Yankees who are sitting in
your
division with more money than God and the will to use it. Baseball,
like
politics, has no spending limits.

And then, of course, there are the umpires. In baseball they wear
blue and
there is no appealing their decisions, even when a call is clearly
wrong. I
remember with writhing specificity the 1999 ALCS between the Yankees
and Red
Sox. A Sox player was charging for second base and Chuck Knoblauch
swung a tag
at him midway down the line. Knoblauch missed the tag by a full three
feet -
there was a barnload of visible daylight between his glove and the Sox
player -
and the umpire called the Sox player out. No recourse, no appeal, and
the Sox
lost the series. The Yankees went on to annihilate the Atlanta Braves
for their
216,339,102nd World Series title.

In George W. Bush's America, the umpires sit in front of television
cameras and
work for major news networks. They look and speak like fashion models
instead
of journalists. They draw their paychecks from General Electric,
Viacom,
Disney, AOL/TimeWarner and Rupert Murdoch. There is no appealing the
calls they
make day after day and night after night, even when there is a barnload
of
visible daylight between their interpretation and the actual facts at
hand. The
people running this administration miss the tag with dreary regularity,
and yet
the media umpires seldom fail to pump their fists and yell, "You're
out!" They
hide behind their masks, and all the shouting and dirt-kicking
accomplishes
exactly nothing.

Baseball is, of course, only a game. There is an annual celebration
of shock,
heartbreak, rage and woe in Boston at the conclusion of every season.
The
lights go off at Fenway, the bags are packed and the bats put in

storage. Red
Sox Nation shrugs its shoulders and turns its collective focus to
Foxboro
Stadium, where a football team recently learned how to overcome the
generational
curse of assured failure. There is always some other team to turn to
when Nomar
and Manny and Pedro disembark for points south until April. Life goes
on. No
one is dead or broken or sick. No true damage is done.

This is not the case in George W. Bush's America. The season never
ends here,
and the dead bodies are piling up in grisly snowdrifts. The lies are
constant,
and the ranks of the broken and the abused swell inexorably towards
some awful
critical mass. The war in Iraq - treated like a sporting event with
bullets
instead of baseballs - has cost us the lives of well over a hundred
American
soldiers, with more coming every day. The war cost all of humanity
several
thousand civilians, who were killed in their homes and their beds and
on their
streets. More come every day, mowed down by nervous troops or blown to
pieces
by unexploded cluster bomb ordnance that was scattered across Baghdad
like
malignant pixie dust.

The war has set in motion the creation of a fundamentalist Shiite
regime in
Iraq, akin to the one currently in control of Iran. The Bush
administration is
shocked, shocked that a clear majority of Iraqis prefer this form of
government
to the quasi-democracy we promised them, and are working overtime to
prevent it.
Thus, the irony: Bush spent blood and treasure to "liberate" the Iraqi
people,
and now that they have a form of it, Bush is bending over backwards to
deny them
the most elemental aspect of liberty - the right to self-determination
and
self-rule.

Never mind that the original cause for war, clarioned time and again
by the
administration, was the existence in Iraq of mobile chemical
laboratories,
drones fitted with poison sprays, 15 to 20 Scud missile launchers,
5,000 gallons
of anthrax, several tons of VX nerve gas agent, 100 to 500 tons of
other toxins
including botulinum, mustard gas, ricin, sarin, and let's not forget
the 30,000+

illegal munitions. None of these terrors have been unearthed in Iraq after months of UN inspections, weeks of war, and more weeks filled with swarming American investigators tasked to locate the stuff.

American forces have interrogated dozens of Iraq scientists and officials as to the location of all this, and none of those interrogated seem to be able to point the way. In fact, they are denying any of the stuff is there at all. Now that Saddam Hussein, principle motivation for any obfuscation on their part, has been removed, what reason now do they have to lie about this?

But wait. Of course, it is all in Syria. Somehow the vast network of spy satellites that can read the time from space on a wristwatch of a man sitting in Central Park failed to see the massive convoy that would have been required to move all of this hastily across the border. That's it. I get it now.

Has anyone heard the media umpires claim that Bush has missed the tag here? I haven't.

Perhaps this sounds too gloomy. Are things really this bad? Is the state of the game so awful? Are we really being lied to this profoundly? Are the media umpires blowing it this conspicuously?

A writer named Kelly Kramer recently compiled a 'resume' for George W. Bush. In it, she listed his central accomplishments. Among them are:

- * Shattered record for biggest annual deficit in history;
- * Set economic record for most private bankruptcies filed in any 12 month period;
- * Set all-time record for biggest drop in the history of the stock market;
- * First year in office set the all-time record for most days on vacation by any president in US history;
- * After taking the entire month of August off for vacation, presided over the worst security failure in US history;
- * In his first two years in office over 2 million Americans lost their jobs;

* Cut unemployment benefits for more out of work Americans than any president in US history;

* Appointed more convicted criminals to administration positions than any president in US history;

* Signed more laws and executive orders amending the Constitution than any president in US history;

* Presided over the biggest energy crises in US history and refused to intervene when corruption was revealed;

* Cut healthcare benefits for war veterans;

* Set the all-time record for most people worldwide to simultaneously take to the streets to protest a sitting American President, shattering the record for protest against any person in the history of mankind;

* Dissolved more international treaties than any president in US history;

* First president in US history to have all 50 states of the Union simultaneously go bankrupt;

* Presided over the biggest corporate stock market fraud of any market in any country in the history of the world;

* First president in US history to order a US attack and military occupation of a sovereign nation;

* Created the largest government department bureaucracy in the history of the United States;

* Set the all-time record for biggest annual budget spending increases, more than any president in US history;

* First president in US history to have the United Nations remove the US from the human rights commission;

* First president in US history to have the United Nations remove the US from the elections monitoring board;

* All-time US (and world) record holder for most corporate campaign donations;

* Biggest life-time campaign contributor presided over one of the largest corporate bankruptcy frauds in world history (Kenneth Lay, former CEO of Enron Corporation);

* Spent more money on polls and focus groups than any president in US history;

* First president to run and hide when the US came under attack (and then lied saying the enemy had the code to Air Force 1);

* Took the biggest world sympathy for the US after 911, and in less than a year made the US the most resented country in the world (possibly the biggest diplomatic failure in US and world history);

* With a policy of 'disengagement' created the most hostile Israeli-Palestine relations in at least 30 years;

* First US president in history to have a majority of the people of Europe (71%) view his presidency as the biggest threat to world peace and stability;

* First US president in history to have the people of South Korea more threatened by the US than their immediate neighbor, North Korea;

* Changed US policy to allow convicted criminals to be awarded government contracts;

* Set all-time record for number of administration appointees who violated US law by not selling huge investments in corporations bidding for government contracts;

* Failed to fulfill his pledge to get Osama Bin Laden 'dead or alive';

* Failed to capture the anthrax killer who tried to murder the leaders of our country at the United States Capitol building. After 18 months he has no leads and zero suspects;

* In the 18 months following the 911 attacks he successfully prevented any public investigation into the biggest security failure in the history of the United States;

* Removed more freedoms and civil liberties for Americans than any

other
president in US history;

* Entered office with the strongest economy in US history and in less than two years turned every single economic category straight down.

If you can believe it, this is an edited list. So it goes.

What does any of this have to do with baseball? This is serious stuff, as serious as anything this nation has faced in its history. With all of this happening, and with no apparent way to reverse or blunt this course, wouldn't it just be easier to give up? Where do I get off making trite sports analogies in such a situation?

I do it because it is instructive when considering the next step. The issue here is a simple matter of volume, and of hope. The list above is abridged, and grows exponentially longer by the hour. People of good conscience cannot surrender the struggle against this rising tide with all that is at stake.

You have to capture the mentality of the Red Sox fan, as I have. You start every season and every game almost completely sure that you will be beaten soundly. You lick your wounds and dust yourself off and maybe cry a little into your pillow. But you always, always think to yourself - even after the Bucky Dents and the Bill Bukners and the missed calls and the fact that you are being outspent by your arch-rivals and the umpires are not doing their jobs - you always think to yourself, "This could be it. This could be the year."

You do it because you want to be there at the turning of the tide. The Boston Red Sox have not won a championship in 85 years, and there is no sense today that they have a prayer of winning one any time soon. Yet the stands in Fenway Park are filled, night after night, to capacity. The crowd cheers and hoots and prays and comes back again and again. In its own small way, this is the very definition of hope. When that day does dawn, when some October night in a time to come absorbs the victory roar of people who have watched great-grandfathers and grandfathers and fathers live entire lives and die unfulfilled,

when the
Boston Red Sox finally win that championship, it will have been worth
every
moment of pain and disappointment.

That's just baseball. This is America. Keep your head in the game.

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