

Wait till next time: "Memories of our best hopes"

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [June 5, 2002](#) issue

In his book *Take Time for Paradise: Americans and Their Games*, A. Bartlett Giamatti, who was president of Yale University and commissioner of Major League Baseball before his death in 1989, argues that we can learn far more about a society by studying how it plays than by examining how it goes about its work. Baseball, Giamatti argues, “is part of America’s plot, part of America’s mysterious, underlying design.” Furthermore, baseball is unique in its designation of its purpose as “coming home.” Home plate mysteriously organizes the field: “It is the goal of both teams . . . everyone wants to arrive at the same place, which is where they start.” T. S. Eliot said that too, I believe, as did the writer of Psalm 137.

Our love of a sport, Giamatti suggests, has to do with memory—“memories of our best hopes . . . of a time when all that would be better was before us.” For me, it was the summer of 1948 when I fell in love with the Pittsburgh Pirates, who were struggling to achieve respectability, and the Cleveland Indians, who that year won it all, defeating the Boston (!) Braves in the World Series. My memories include listening to the Pittsburgh games on the radio, the studio ticker tape clacking in the background as the announcers, Rosie Rosewell and Bob Prince, re-created the reality of a brightly lighted stadium and the game in my imagination.

My father bought a major league official scorebook for me and taught me that summer how to record every play for the record. I learned that the letter “K” is the official symbol for a strike out. It happens a lot in baseball.

Striking out is a very public failure. In this issue, David S. Cunningham, writing about the novel *The Brothers K*, suggests that striking out is about death, and ultimately about the creed’s affirmation that Christ “descended into the realm of the dead.”

Well, maybe. Anyone who has ever struck out with his parents and friends watching knows that it is an awful experience. And yet it is always, at the same time, the context for hope. There will be a next time in the game or in the following game. If

striking out is death, the hope of resurrection is born in the middle of it.

Chicago Cub fans know about this kind of death and hope. This year, the team seemed sound, strengthened by several off-season trades. But so far they have provided only a few hints of excellence. They are so far behind in the Central Division that it will take a miracle to bring about redemption. It's only two months into the season and some of us, while not having completely abandoned hope, are already waiting for next year.