

Hope in October: The Cubs have done it again

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [October 30, 2007](#) issue

The Chicago Cubs have done it again. After winning the National League's central division, they were swept aside by the Arizona Diamondbacks. The Cubs have not won a World Series since 1908 and have not even appeared in one since 1945. Cubs fans are the brunt of bad jokes. We learn to respond by quoting St. Paul: "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope."

On the day after the Cubs made the playoffs, Barbara Wheeler, president of Auburn Theological Seminary, an avid Yankees fan, looked me in the eye and said, "I want to extend my condolences." "Why?" I responded, "We just won the division." Her rejoinder: "I'm extending my condolences in advance for what you know is going to happen next."

She was right. We lost three straight. In fact we never even made it interesting. At such times one asks oneself why one cares so much about baseball—cares enough to spend time at the games, keep score, follow games on television and read about them in the paper.

In *Take Time for Paradise: Americans and Their Games*, A. Bartlett Giamatti argued that "sports represent a shared vision of how we continue, as individual team or community, to experience a . . . care so intense, so rare, and so fleeting that we associate their experience with experience otherwise described as religion."

Sports do create community, as Giamatti pointed out. The joy of victory is shared joy, and when you lose you are part of a community of grief. People who are reluctant to pass the peace in church turn to one another in Section 421 at Wrigley Field and high-five their neighbor in response to a home run or a well-turned double play.

Giamatti loved baseball and described it with exquisite affection. Baseball, Giamatti pointed out, is played in “parks.” Football is played on a field in a “stadium”—not unlike the coliseum where humans battled to the death. Some sports—horseback riding, rodeos—derive from work. Some—like throwing the javelin—come from war; others—boxing, wrestling—come from hand-to-hand combat. Baseball, Giamatti said, is essentially about coming home. While the object in other sports is to invade territory, score or blitz, the object of baseball is to leave home and safely return, a theme at the heart of great literature and Jesus’ most famous parables.

“Hope,” St. Paul promises, “does not disappoint us.” It is a little less than five months until pitchers and catchers report for spring training. As generations of us have learned to say, “Wait till next year.”