

Baseball brings recollections of a singular team of yore

The baseball season began its long run on April 8. From Pete Rose's first base hit (it was a double) till the last play of the World Series in faraway October, baseball will be a daily part of the music of America.

Although basketball is the sport Made in USA and football appeals to elemental strains of power and passion, baseball wears best over a season of many months.

The dominant team in baseball in 1984 was the Detroit Tigers. They were a young team. If they win it all again this season there will be talk of a "dynasty" and fans will rummage for comparisons with the past.

While others recall the Yankees of the 1950s and 1960s or the Reds of the 1970s etc. etc. as their favorite great team of yore, I am sitting here this evening remembering the worst baseball team ever assembled. (So there's a slight exaggeration in saying worst, but the stretching of the truth is not too far removed from the reality. Read on.)

The butterfingers crew of which I speak represented Rosary School (St. Francis of Assisi Church) about the fifth and sixth grade age level some 30 years ago. I was an assistant pastor at the parish.

At the breakfast table, I would leaf through the Oklahoman until I found the sports pages. My finger would run down the fine print of the YMCA league scores until I located Gatewood 33 Rosary 2, or Edgemere 26 Rosary 0.

It probably was morbid curiosity or perhaps a dash of parish loyalty that brought me to the scene of the crime.

There I found Jim Burke, the manager, preparing his charges for yet another try at elusive

victory. Providentially Jim had been gifted with a straight face and a well-developed appreciation of the incongruous - an appreciation which had ample room for exercise with this bunch.

Unfortunately my recollections are fragmented but clear. I remember two-thirds of the outfield. Bob Butcher was in left and Charles Love in center. They subscribed to the stand-pat school of outfielding.

By keeping perfectly still, neither Bob nor Charles was struck by a batted 'ball the entire season. On the other hand their technique had drawbacks. If a ball got past the infield - on the fly or bouncing or rolling - the odds are it was a home run.

Arms at their sides Bob and Charles gave close observation to the ball. When it stopped moving, they ambled deliberately toward it, picked it up and flipped it back toward the infield where one of the enemy was busy crossing home plate to the delirious cheers of his teammates.

Our outfield was responsible for great leaps forward in self-esteem by our opponents.

Then there was Kale Khoury at shortstop. Baseballs skittering across the

ground toward him found numerous ways to escape his clutches. They ricocheted off his ankles, struck him in the wrists, and often got through him without being touched at all.

Kale would come off the field at the end of a long inning and solemnly tell manager Burke, "The ball went right through the webbing of my glove."

Then there were the Barnes brothers, Gary and Michael, one of whom was the catcher. His main preoccupation was arguing with Mr. Burke over how things should be done.

Jimmy Burke, the manager's son, added a note of reality to the scene. He had a puckish sense of humor. With so many peculiar things happening around him, Jimmy spent a substantial amount of time simply laughing.

Finally -there was the long-suffering pitcher Gary Pellegrini. Gary was the best athlete of the group. He realized that if the other team hit a fair ball a kaleidoscope of mishandling would occur behind him. He young manfully stayed with the team until the merciful end.

What happened to the Rosary Squad - the boys of summer of decades ago? I know where a few of them are and they seem singularly undamaged by their brush with baseball. Inquiries to the Baseball Hall of Fame reveal that none of the team has arrived there yet.