

Take me out of the ballgame

Cal Ripken Jr. should retire while legacy is still strong for sake of fans, his failing health

Upon the retirement of Ted Williams, the great Boston Red Sox pitcher, the author John Doolittle wrote, "Gods do not answer letters."



MARK PASSWATERS

What was true in 1960 is probably true 39 years late but, hopefully, Gods do read letters.

How does someone tell a hero that their time on the stage is near completion?

It is time for Cal Ripken to retire. Not at the end of this baseball season — now. Ripken is one of the most recognizable names in American popular culture, one of those athletes who can be recognized based on his first name alone.

Like "Michael" or "Sammy," Ripken has played the game of baseball with dignity and class. Starting on May 6, 1982, and continuing for 2,632 contests, Cal Ripken has been in the Baltimore Orioles' starting lineup.

During "The Streak," a span of 16 years, Ripken hit more home runs than any other shortstop in history, won two Gold Gloves for outstanding defense, started 13 straight All-Star Games and won two American League Most Valuable Player awards.

But there were losses. He lost his hair from worrying about an often poor ballclub. His team lost 21 straight games at the start of the 1988 season. And he lost his father to cancer this spring.

Through all of this, Ripken kept his head up and his back straight, because that is what he was taught to do.

But now Ripken is on the disabled list. His back has finally failed him; a nerve problem has left him unable to play.

This season, his average sits at a weak .179 and he has made 5 errors — 2 more than he made during the entire 1992 season.

Ripken is now 38, and the body of the "Iron Man" is not healing like it used to. As a result, he has been diminished to a shadow of his former self.

Hang 'em up, Cal. You've got nothing left to prove.

Many athletes have tried to continue playing after their time was up. Ripken's own role model, Brooks Robinson, tried to keep playing after his abilities were diminished.

Two of Ripken's teammates, Eddie Murray and Jim Palmer, damaged their great legacies by trying for a few more wins or a few more hits. Willie Mays, Steve Carlton, Tom Seaver and even Babe Ruth tried the same approach.

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To the fans of these players, especially to the young ones, this must have been difficult — their heroes were not invincible; the time to stop had come.

As the players grew older, so did their fans. Then, when it was all said and done, both the player and fan said, "Where did the time go?"

Now I know how they feel. I started following baseball in 1982, when the rookie Cal Ripken won the American League Rookie of the Year. I have rooted for the Orioles ever since. Many a hot humid summer's night was made bearable

by hearing Jon Miller, the Orioles' radio announcer, say "Well, here comes Cal ..." and hearing the Public Address announcer at Memorial Stadium intone that the next hitter was "The Shortstop, Number 8, Cal Ripken..."

All of that is gone now. Jon Miller no longer works for the Orioles and Memorial Stadium has been torn down.

Gone with them is that little kid who sat and listened, hoping that Cal would come through just one more time.

That child from Virginia is now in Texas, out of radio range. Small worries have been replaced by bigger ones, ones about the future that once seemed so far away — back when Cal Ripken was the best player in the game.

One of the most difficult things for any human being is to accept when the time for things has come and gone. Seeing Cal Ripken on the field now, struggling to do what he once did so easily, is painful to watch.

There are few personal goals left, and it is not like the current Orioles team is World Series bound. In fact, they are a disgrace.

They do not play with any hustle, nor do they play as a team. Ripken has always given his best and has always played for the team.

Cal Ripken has always brought a certain element of class to the game of baseball every time he has stepped on the field. The way he handled himself made him an inspiration, a true role model. Walking away from baseball now would once again show his grace and dignity.

Showing that he can accept that he has lost his youth, no matter how hard it is, would be just as inspiring as anything he has ever done. Maybe it would help some of us to do the same.

Thanks, Cal. For everything.

Mark Passwaters is a graduate electrical engineering student.



ROBERT HYNCEK/THE BATTALION

Peace in Kosovo as important as healing in Colorado community

Two weeks ago, American news cameras turned their attention from Kosovo to



CALEB MCDANIEL

Columbine, and a grieving nation began to pour out its sympathies to the suffering, ailing families in Colorado. Meanwhile, in worlds away, other families grieved over the deaths of innocent Albanian

refugees killed in an accidental NATO bombings on a farm vehicle convoy in Kosovo last six weeks.

Despite the fact that both senseless acts of violence were equally tragic and destructive, Americans have expended enormous amounts of energy in mourning the fallen high school students while they have barely batted an eye about the civilian victims of NATO bombings.

There is no excuse for this inattention

of public opinion to the casualties in Kosovo in the wake of the killings in Columbine. Americans cannot be lured into thinking that one tragedy was more terrible than the other — the human blood shed in both places has been wasted by violent attack.

In both cases, the victims were unprepared for the sudden attacks. In both cases, the victims were noncombatants who were not supposed to die. In Kosovo as well as Colorado, lives were abruptly brought to an end, leaving loved ones to grieve for the loss.

There was, of course, one important difference between the two killings: The one at Columbine High School was intentional, and the one on the Kosovar convoy was not.

However, this fact does not make one group of deaths more grievous than the other. The victim of an unintentional attack is just as dead as the victim of an intentional one. The deaths of the Kosovo

vars was just as horrible as the deaths of the Colorado students.

In fact, the total number of innocent civilians killed by NATO air strikes has now doubled the death toll at Columbine High School, following the announcement earlier last week that a stray bomb hit a residential area in Yugoslavia.

Yet these who have died are not featured in American news stories or given coverage of each of their individual funerals. The most anyone has heard about the civilian deaths in Yugoslavia and Kosovo amount to hasty half-apologies from NATO's military spokesperson.

Why have these fallen not received our attention?

If Americans say it is because they are not American, we are being cruelly insensitive. A human life is worth just as much whether it was born under the Stars and Stripes or under a foreign flag. America is, after all, the nation founded on the idea

that "all men are created equal."

If Americans are less concerned about the civilian deaths because some of them are Yugoslavians and therefore enemies by association, they are making a horrible generalization. It is no more true that every Serbian is a Slobodan Milosevic than that every American is a Dylan Klebold.

Perhaps Americans merely accept that these deaths were the unfortunate but inevitable byproducts of war, but that is precisely what they cannot accept. Even our officials have tried to obscure the death of noncombatants as something other than what it is. We label fallen civilians with sterile names like "collateral damage," forgetting by and by that these two were ruined lives.

We have been moved by the tragedy in Littleton and rightly so. The massacre at Columbine High School never should have happened and we must go to great lengths to ensure that it never happens

again. But the massacres of noncombatants in Kosovo should not have happened either, and America must expend just as much energy in efforts to prevent them from happening again.

Ultimately, the only way to do that is to wage peace with as much fervor as we have been waging war. Bringing an end to the war in the Balkans is the only sure way to keep more unfortunate accidents from occurring.

If America would work as hard for peace in Kosovo as it is working for healing in Columbine, our grief would truly be genuine instead of appearing selective. If Americans would deplore all violence as much as they hate the violence in Colorado, then they might sincerely say that they are deeply wounded when any one of our fellow humans dies.

Caleb McDaniel is a sophomore history major.

Differences between individuals contribute to society, people should not fear sharing personal information

STANFORD, Calif. (U-WIRE)—I had an interesting revelation in a history section at the end of last week.

In discussing the "double consciousness" of minorities in America posited by W.E.B. DuBois, my teaching assistant launched into a story of her childhood in Texas, taking us into a child's experience of racial difference.

She had known the "twoness" of a visible and unbroachable difference in identity, external perception conflicting with internal sense of self. More interesting than the actual story was the reaction of the class.

We looked at our hands, flipped through our books and smiled awkwardly, worrying that we might be expected to share, cringing a bit when she looked at us expectantly. Capable of speaking coherently about abstractions of American racial dilemmas, we were stuck when it became apparent that these abstract themes might be likened to our own lives.

We self-effacingly think that nothing so serious could have really touched us, or if so, it is not worth telling or hearing. In part, the tangible reluctance may have been the result of an actual lack of experience in difference and rejection.

It is also a little embarrassing to hear

someone's story unsolicited — we remain strangers to most of our peers in spite of the connections that could make our lives whole. I would like to think, though, that our reluctance was less a result of our homogenous makeup or of rejection than of a fear of disclosure.

Such fear is what compels us to tell anecdotes rather than stories, to keep our interactions brief amidst the ever-quickening pace of a sound-bite society. Implicit is a fear of rejection, indifference — in short, looking stupid in front of multiple people, not being entertaining or coherent.

It is a well-founded fear. Humans are cruel beasts, sometimes unintentionally, and the deviation in levels of understanding from one person to the next are enough to dizzy the most apt psychologist.

We do not always make sense to each other, and there are times when we come to the most frustrating, painful and apparently most unavoidable collision of minds and emotions conceivable. We get gun-shy, either from the behavior of a particularly abrasive professor (when a simple "no" would suffice), the razor wit of an unaware housemate or the polite indifference of the person you've given

your heart to.

And so, understandably, we remain veiled from the relative lack of genuineness that being afraid in such a way leaves in our wake. Better to stay out of the water than end up freezing cold. Eyes closed to potential connections, we fumble through our days ... but to what end?

If we were all Care Bears and loved each other to oblivion and had no need for sarcasm, we would probably be disclosing all over the place, and our interactions would be candy-coated and sweetly sickening. Yuck.

If we were all edgy and relied on brilliantly biting sarcasm as the lone vehicle for our wit and ingenuity, we would end up vacating campus in a mass exodus for the East Coast where we could wear lots of black and drink coffee and yell at taxicabs. Double yuck.

We cannot satisfy the human desire for challenge, argument, compassion, authenticity, by becoming pastel stuffed animals or New Yorkers. We likewise cannot learn to appreciate genuine sincerity by telling our comrades in a steady unrepentant stream everything from the play-by-play of senior prom to how we learned to ride a bike or how often we have sex.

An increase in information alone will do

us no good. But to increase the opening in the old creaky door which stands at the entrance to our minds, with potential to be so open — to let some more light in — could give us the chance to grow. But we also cannot expect to be perpetually deep.

Sometimes you just need the breeziness and melodrama of a soap opera in your life. And it's not that being either totally lovey or sarcastic are necessarily bad. It's just when those two ways of carrying oneself through a conversation become so overpowering as to prevent any other element of emotionality from breaching the gap between people, something is lost.

We stop hearing each other. Hopefully we remain real to a few friends and acquaintances, family members, people whose history with or commitment to us does not allow for a casual complacency. It's a dilemma, how much to give, how to dispense with the fear and doubt which keep us distant, how not to be annoying.

Stay grounded, keep your ego in check? Or let go, lose yourself in living? Infinite possibility relies upon some disclosure. Speak. Someone will hear you.

Mari Webel is a columnist for the Stanford Daily.

MAIL CALL

Corps provides morality, strength

In response to Jason Starch's Apr. 28 opinion column:

It is about time that somebody has finally told it like it is. The large majority of student who attend Texas A&M in pursuit of a quality degree so that they may earn a successful and fulfilling career should drop on their knees and praise the true heroes of our campus, the Corps of Cadets.

It is only these students that know that we should be proud of our awesome military heritage and know that we would not be the proud nation we are today without our military victories.

The rest of us should be ashamed our ourselves for taking advantage of the freedom that our fathers and grandfathers provided and choosing to use our abilities for fields such as medicine, law, engineering and business.

The traditional values that made this nation strong are fading, and it is not through religion or truth or good parenting that we will resolve our moral slide. The only answer is the military.

Ross Macha Class of '99