

Why We Still Play (Even Though We're Past Our Prime)

By Miles Ryan Fisher

Twenty years ago, I had a high school baseball coach who berated me to the point that I quit the team. In spite of being the team's starting second baseman, I decided that there was no more baseball for me in Horsham, Pennsylvania—the Philadelphia suburb where I grew up. But I loved the game too much to walk away for good.

At the age of 38, I still play in a Washington, D.C.-area adult baseball league, a league competitive enough that most of the players played in college. Whether or not every one of us played collegiate baseball, there's one thing that we all have in common, other than our love for the game. If you go down the batting order, each player will tell you about a coach who tried to extinguish his love for the game. If we didn't encounter that coach in high school, then we encountered him in college—a coach who didn't concern himself with the role baseball would play in our respective futures, maybe because we were never going to become professional players.

No, all of us ended up doing something other than playing professional baseball to earn our livelihood. We're architects and software engineers. School counselors and teachers. Writers and physicists and entrepreneurs.

Yet baseball remains an integral part of our lives—something those coaches never foresaw or cared to foresee. They failed to understand that long after we'd reached the highest level we were able to compete at, baseball would continue to influence our lives.

Our love for the game has affected our lives in ways that, during our earlier playing days, we never necessarily considered. Some of us have brought youth teams to play in Cuba. Some of us have taken baseball equipment to the Dominican Republic. Some of us have coached players of all ages, helping further their love for the game and teaching them important life lessons. Many of us will play catch with our own children and show them the game for the first time.

It makes me think about when I moved to Washington, D.C., after I graduated from college 15 years ago. It was a new city for me, and I didn't know very many people. I joined an adult baseball team and—almost instantly—formed what would become lifelong friendships. Over the years, I've gone on trips with teammates to see the World Baseball Classic in San Jose, Puerto Rico, and San Diego, California. I've attended teammates' weddings, helped them demolish basements, and celebrated the births of their children. I've gone out for countless postgame dinners with them—the hot dog after the game once again being a favorite part about playing.

And, of course, I've noticed how baseball has surfaced in relation to our own professions. The architect has designed renovations pro bono for a baseball facility. The software engineer has made plans for fantasy baseball platforms. The school counselor has coached his school's baseball team. And the writer has—no surprise—written about baseball.

Now that I'm two decades removed from the experience I had in high school, I see the game with a much wider, more complete perspective. I see the many ways baseball has since affected me and my teammates—ways that we were never told to expect, much less encouraged to pursue. Simply put, baseball continues to enrich our lives in various ways we never imagined.

Even though I began to notice this phenomenon several years ago, it wasn't until recently that I recognized some true irony behind my high school experience: Of all the players that coach had on my high school baseball team, I'm the only one who still plays.

And my life is much more rewarding for it.