

Aging Lifestyles: Grandparents need to step up to the plate

by Joe_Volz

As spring training begins once again, it might be informative to look at what baseball has evolved into during the past half-century.

Once upon a time, baseball was child's play. Not only did we perform on sandlots carved out of open fields long before the advent of AstroTurf, but even the major leaguers were really big kids. They were paid so poorly that they had to work during the off-season to support their families. Can you believe that?

My, how things have "improved," if that is the right word. Today's ballplayers, if they can hit the ball out the infield, make millions. Until recently, the greatest of them were looked up to as heroes and role models.

We grandparents liked nothing more than to take the kids to the ballpark, even though we could hardly go to a Major League Baseball game, park the car and buy a hot dog without spending \$100 per person.

But it was worth it. Baseball was a metaphor for "real" life. Kids were learning lessons in character building, perseverance and courage, which would help them no matter what they later did in life.

I learned a lot about adversity 50 years ago playing for a sandlot team in Maplewood, N.J. That's when I realized I would never make the high school team, let alone the big leagues.

The New York Yankees, who played just 15 miles away, were my heroes. Those were the years when it was almost accidental if they didn't win the pennant.

What a team they had - Joltin' Joe DiMaggio was the star. An infielder - who played alongside the Scooter, Phil Rizzuto - was Bobby Brown, later president of the American League. Bobby had grown up a few years before me, succeeding on the same fields in Maplewood where I had failed so miserably.

I couldn't hit. I had to find something else to do in life. I became a reporter. I decided then that if I wanted to achieve anything in life, I had better line up as an observer, rather than as a participant.

I still dream about being at the plate at Yankee Stadium in Yankee pinstripes, listening to the roar of the crowd as my name is blared over the loudspeaker: "Now batting, No. 1, Joe Volz." And then, in one powerful

left-handed swing, I launch a curveball over the short right field wall.

These days, many of our baseball greats, once men of granite, have feet of clay. We are discovering that their records were achieved with the use of steroids. Those great muscles, which launched hundreds of homers, were built with steroids.

And the saddest thing is that the greatest of our heroes, men who could have set records on their own ability, felt the need to enhance their ability even more by using illegal substances.

Yes, baseball is still a metaphor for life. We see all around us our "leaders" in industry going to prison for cheating and defrauding stockholders. We see politicians either getting in legal trouble or fudging the truth.

Where do our grandchildren turn for national role models?

Rock stars who glorify drug use? Movie stars whose moral compasses are clearly askew?

Maybe, at the risk of sounding boastful, the kids should turn to us - grandparents. Some of us still possess values that count for something, morals based on better things than greed and power and lying and taking shortcuts.

Does that sound old-fashioned?

You bet it does. It is old-fashioned.

Maybe, in a world torn by recrimination and in the midst of a presidential campaign where candidates show such scorn for each other, old-fashioned values look pretty good after all.

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