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Wimbledon - Baseball at Mid-Season

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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The world's oldest and most prestigious tennis tournament is heading into its final weekend. Strawberries and cream at Wimbledon go back over a century, and the royal trappings surrounding this tournament are enough to make a tennis millionaire feel right at home. One suspects however that this year Lady Diana will not make her usual appearance in the Royal Box at Centre Court, with most of the love having gone out of her game.

We know that Wimbledon is a prestigious tournament because NBC televises it live for several days during the morning hours, and we know it is a prestigious tournament because Andre Agassi has never won it.

As we head into the semi-finals, this tournament has offered some very good tennis and some very good stories. Jim Courier, the number one men's player in the world did not make the round of sixteen, as he was beaten by the 193rd ranked player in the world, Andri Olhovskiy. Johnny Mac then eliminated Olhovskiy and continues to be a factor at Wimbledon, as did fellow old-timer Martina Navratilova, who reached the semi-finals, where she was defeated by Monica Seles. Defending champion Steffi Graf still must be favored to repeat, but on the men's side the top four seeds are gone, including defending champion Michael Stich, Courier, Edberg and Becker. The men's semi-finals will match Pete Sampras against Goran Ivanisevic, and the past and would-be future of American tennis, John McEnroe against Andre Agassi.

Meanwhile we are nearly half-way into the baseball season. July 4 is upon us, and the all-star break is but ten days away. There is an old saying in baseball that whoever is in first place on the Fourth of July will win the pennant. The Fourth, which is almost always about half-way into the season, is a good time to assess the pennant races and to look at who is doing what.

First, to the pennant races. In the American League East, as predicted the Toronto Blue Jays are at the top, but joining them are the Baltimore Orioles, which was predicted by almost no one. It appears these two teams are likely to go to wire, just as they did two years ago. The Red Sox are the big disappointment in the AL East, always known as a great hitting team, they are last in batting average, runs scored, hits, total bases, home

runs, RBI's, and slugging percentage. And this while playing in Fenway Park.

In the AL West the big guns are the defending World Champion Minnesota Twins and Oakland. Close behind are the Texas Rangers, despite the fact that Nolan Ryan won his first game of the season last Sunday, and Rafael Palmeiro is having his worst season ever at the plate. It is likely that the Twins and A's will battle to the end, as Bobby Valentine seems incapable of taking a team anywhere. It appears that Valentine is destined to be the new Gene Mauch. Everyone says he is a managerial and baseball genius, but he has never won anything. And in Valentine's case he has seldom finished above .500.

In the National League there are many disappointments. In the East the Cubs and Mets look like something out of a World War I Army training film. Both teams invested heavily in the off-season free agent market, only to be disappointed again. Bobby Bonilla looks like a man who is learning the hard way that money does not buy happiness, while the Mets and Cubs look like something out of the Dodger school of defense. The Pirates just keep on being the Pirates, and Jim Leland continues to demonstrate that he is one of the best managers in the game, except when Barry Bonds is hurt.

In the National League West it looks like it will be a tremendous pennant race between the Braves and Reds, with the Braves likely to repeat if they find the bullpen closer, and if Marge Schott does something to mess up the Reds. The latter might be more likely than the former. As for the Dodgers, they have hit a new low, and Tommy looks like he is coming apart. Or is it just Slim-Fast Syndrome? The Astros are an interesting young team, but they have that one month Republican Convention road trip coming up, which could save the Dodgers from last place in the West.

As to individual achievements it would appear that the great pitchers continue to be Roger Clemens, Jack Morris, Tom Glavine, Jose Rijo, Tim Lincecum, David Cone, John Smoltz, Dennis Eckersley, and Lee Smith. While some of the best of the newcomers include Dave Fleming in Seattle, Juan Guzman in Toronto who is actually in his second great year, Brian Williams in Houston, and Charles Nagy in Cleveland. Among the hitters there is the amazing Kirby Puckett, Terry Pendleton, Fred McGriff, Eric Martinez, Roberto Alomar, Andy Van Slyke, Tony Gwynn, Barry Bonds, and Paul Molitor.

The big surprises of the year are Mark McGuire with his home runs, Gary Sheffield finding happiness in San Diego, Brady Anderson who seems to love the new stadium in Baltimore, and Darrin Daulton who seems in great shape after having missed so much of last season. All of them are candidates for comeback player of the year. And the home run boys in Detroit led by Cecil Fielder continue to amaze. But perhaps the most interesting story has been the development of Dieon Sanders, who everyday seems to get better and better, and who looks like the fastest man ever, going from first to third. If he continues to develop even at one-third the rate he has developed this year, for say two more years, he could become one of the great players of all time, or at least of Prime Time.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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