


8-2-1995

Catching Up after Peace Corps Reunion in Ethiopia

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Catching Up after Peace Corps Reunion in Ethiopia" (1995). *On Sport and Society*. 443.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/443>

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
August 2, 1995

When I left a month ago for a Peace Corps reunion in Ethiopia the Phillies were in first place and the Braves were futilely chasing them; Scott Erickson, Mark Guthrie, Kevin Tapani, and Rick Aguellera were all Minnesota Twins; and Wimbledon had just started.

While passing in and out of hotel lobbies I did see the occasional CNN sports segments with the familiar scenes of baseball and tennis highlights, and the not so familiar soccer highlights-a regular feature of CNN International's World Sports Tonight.

I learned that Pete Sampras had won at Wimbledon for the third straight year, thus earning him the right to be mentioned with some of the true greats of the game. I also learned that Martina Navratilova had won another Wimbledon title putting her within one of Billie Jean King for titles at the All-England Club.

However when I returned I still didn't know much about the All-Star game, although I did hear at one point that the National League had won, and at another point that someone from the Marlins, I believe Jeff Conine, had been the MVP of the game.

What was most startling was seeing the standings for the first time in nearly three weeks. This happened as I got on a plane in Frankfurt and picked up a copy of USA Today, the Overseas American's link to the plastic and artificial in late 20th century America. And there it was, the Atlanta Braves who I knew from those highlights had been winning, were now in first place in the National League East with a big lead over the Phillies who apparently had been doing an impersonation of the Chicago Cubs in one of their patented August free falls.

I was also surprised to see that Boston and Cincinnati had maintained comfortable leads in their divisions, while the Colorado Rockies had opened up a small lead in the National League West after the Giants had gone on the DL en masse. I think I also missed a no-hitter, although I am still not entirely sure of that. What was not a surprise was the Cleveland Indians were walking away in the Midwest division, while the California Disney Angels were riding Gene Autry's horse to a big lead out west.

Then I started seeing those familiar names in strange places-- Erickson in Baltimore, Aguellera in Boston--as the fire sales

began to hit everywhere. Is it just me or is there an unusual amount of movement by big names from the pretenders to the contenders? It seems that this may be the year of the most movement by largest number of stars in several decades. Big salaries are being jettisoned by the poor teams, while nearly everyone seems to be trying to find that one missing piece that will take them to the promised land.

But of course in the end there will still be only one team that will win the World Series and two pennant winners, and therefore only one General Manager or perhaps two, who will be the designated genius of this pennant race. The rest of them will be second guessed to death for dealing away the future for the elusive present, or for foolishly squandering the owner's money. Others will be denounced and derided for trying to buy a pennant, and others will be pronounced weak-willed and cheap for failing to pick up that one player that could have put them over the top and into the World Series.

It is interesting to see how much can change in few short weeks.

It was also good to see the return of Monica Seles with the hope that she can quickly find her form and help to rejuvenate women's tennis. The story of the arrest of Willie and the Duke for tax evasion was interesting, and what with Mickey Mantle's liver problems, it may be time for a new verse to "Talk'in Baseball" whose chorus speaks of Willie, Mickey and the Duke.

Finally the induction ceremonies for the Baseball and Football Hall's of Fame last weekend had two interesting moments. One was at Cooperstown where Mike Schmidt called for Pete Rose's admission into the baseball hall. While the fans cheered the other members of the Hall did not join in, and Johnny Bench offered a disparaging remark for Charlie Hustle. The other at Canton was Kellen Winslow's denunciation of the attack on affirmative action at his induction ceremony. With the overinflated ego of the Newt sitting in front of him, and the Regents of the State of California having just repealed the California commitment to special admissions policies for affirmative action purposes, Winslow let it be known that in his view any suggestion that an equal playing field exists in America is an absurd proposition.

He might also have inquired as whether the special admissions policies for football and basketball players in California will be dropped along with those for medical and law schools.

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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