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An Evening With Cub Fans in Scotland: The Craigs of Rockford

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SPORT AN SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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Cub fans are a unique species. Attachment to losing is taken to a level of religious fanaticism by the Cub faithful. Of course the charm of the Cubs is not simply that they lose, but that they are loveable losers. This is what inspires undying devotion in their fans. Indeed if the Cubs were to do the improbable, nay the impossible, and win a World Series I suspect Cub fans would lose the essence of their Cubness.

Cub fans are everywhere and you never know where or when you might encounter them. A few weeks ago I had dinner with a family of Cub fans in Edinburgh, Scotland. The Craig Clan of Rockford were in the U.K. to visit their daughter Jeanne, herself a devotee of the Cubs, devotion she inherited from her parents, Stu and Sally Craig. After spending a delightful Cub filled evening with these Cub fanatics over single malt whiskey and haggis I am convinced that when Harry Cary would say that a fan from Rockford caught that foul ball down behind third base, it must have been one of the Craig's to whom he was referring.

I knew that I was dealing with true Cub aficionados because when I started talking about a fourth of July doubleheader with the Expos on a brutally hot day in the mid-1970s, Sally interjected that yes she remembered that day and that outfielder Larry Bittner had come in to pitch for the Cubs in the final inning with the Cubs trailing by some twenty runs. I had been trying to remember Bittner's name all week, and Sally pulled it out of her Cub memory bank before I had finished the story. I was duly impressed and knew that I was in the presence of Cub mania.

From here the conversation went around to the varied and interesting ways in which the Craigs exercise their Cubness. Of all these my favorite is the highly amusing "Hundley Game." You can play this one both at home or at the ballpark. The object is simple. You need to predict before each at bat by Todd Hundley what he will do. The choices are 1) strike out 2) strike out looking 3) ground out 4) foul out 5) pop or fly out. Double prize money is awarded for predicting a Hundley home run, a prize no one has ever collected on, or if you predict that after striking out looking Hundley turns and stares at the umpire. The Craigs tell me that this game is particularly

fun at the ballpark, especially when the Cubs are on the road. Cub refugees across the majors insist on being allowed to play along in the "Hundley Game."

As you may know since that evening in Edinburgh Todd Hundley has been traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers. Not to worry, a Craig insider tells me, someone else will most certainly step forward to fill Todd's empty shoes. There has never been a shortage of futility, individual or collective, where the Cubs are concerned.

The most interesting part of the evening came during a discussion of Stu Craig's plans for a celebration when the Cubs are eliminated from the pennant race in 2007 thus establishing a "Century of Futility." (The date 2007 will be disputed by those who argue that the true date is the 2008 season, but as an authentic American event the first date will be the one celebrated)

The plan is both simple and complicated. When the Cubs are eliminated from contention for the World Series victory, be that in May or in October, Stu Craig and those who share his millennial vision will be at the deciding game. The complications will come from the fact that this could occur in any Major League City in North America and that it could occur within a multiple date window. This could require a considerable road trip by the Cub faithful. It could also require studying game results through the night or even on a night when the Cubs are not playing to identify the magic millennial moment.

The Craigs envision a Cub Caravan making its way across the major league landscape filled with anticipation of the moment. Hundreds if not thousands of the Cubs faithful will no doubt be present to mark this milestone of futility. Stu and Sally Craig, along with family members, will lead this trek across the diamondscape.

What sort of celebration does an event of this magnitude, this once-in-a-lifetime occurrence, require? What would be worthy of this historic moment? Certainly the traditional champagne would be appropriate with corks popping as soon as the team of statisticians renders their verdict. A party stretching through the night at a major hotel would follow this. Press conferences would punctuate the night air and on the following day the Commissioner of Baseball would arrive to present a trophy or plague paying homage to

failure on such a grand scale. The only question is should a Cub game be stopped if the elimination comes while they are on the field.

Mention of statisticians points to the complex mathematical computations required to ensure that the reverse magic number is properly calculated. Being in the financial field himself, Stu Craig is no doubt well placed to find just the right team to handle this delicate task. Who knows, maybe Bill James will volunteer his services to such a worth enterprise. In addition arrangements for transportation, hotels, and game tickets will require the skills of a traveling secretary.

The very thought of this historic Cub moment sends chills down my spine, and I am getting my name on the list for prime seats to participate in the Caravan come the 2007 season. I know you will want to be there too.

One caveat. Given Cub history one must be most cautious when making these plans. It would in fact be just like the Cubs to go and win the World Series in 2007 and ruin everything.

Or the world could end before this is allowed to happen.

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

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