

Recognize the power of actions

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In an effort to meet the needs of my fellow baseball junkies going through withdrawal, I offer another baseball lesson: Fifty-five years ago one of the ugliest incidents in Major League history occurred, involving two of the greatest pitchers to ever play the game, Sandy Koufax and Juan Marichal. A tight pennant race had heated the already fierce rivalry between the Dodgers and Giants. Several brush-back pitches early in the game prompted the home plate umpire to issue warnings to both teams. In the bottom of the third, Marichal came to bat somewhat expecting for Koufax to throw inside. However, he was surprised when the “chin music” came on the return toss from the Dodger catcher, Johnny Roseboro. Words were exchanged, Roseboro stood up out of his crouched position, and Marichal lost control. At least twice he struck Roseboro over the head with his bat. A brawl ensued which lasted nearly 15 minutes.

While it is possible that such an act would earn a lifetime ban from the game today, the penalty Marichal incurred for the attack was initially very light. He was suspended just eight games and fined \$1,750, but the greater punishment came later. Upon the completion of his career, Juan Marichal had clearly compiled Hall of Fame statistics; nine All-Star teams, 244 complete games, 52 shutouts, and a 2.89 career earned run average. However, none of these stats could erase the fact that he had once used his bat as a weapon and assaulted an opponent. For several baseball writers that made him unworthy of enshrinement in baseball’s hallowed hall.

Juan Marichal is a reminder of how one stupid act can ruin ones reputation. Unfortunately we see this truth displayed all too frequently in the military. Years of honorable service and great leadership can be flushed down the toilet with a single drunken decision. Sometimes that is all anyone remembers period. Much more than Hall of Fame votes is lost, including career, Family, and pride in one’s accomplishments. The price for a single indiscretion can be severely high. This is an important lesson to keep in mind.

Fortunately, though, the story of Juan Marichal offers a more pleasant lesson as well, thanks to the catcher he attacked. While it took a while, Johnny Roseboro eventually accepted Marichal’s apology and forgave him. By the 80s the two men were good friends. In fact, after Marichal was rejected by the baseball writers twice for election to the Hall of Fame, it was the appeal of Roseboro that changed their minds. Marichal became the first Dominican born member of the Hall in 1983. Several years later at Roseboro’s funeral, Marichal said, “Johnny’s forgiving me was one of the best things that happened in my life.”

I imagine that if we were all remembered primarily for the worst decision of our lives, very few of us would be worthy of admiration. While it is a sobering thought to consider the power one stupid action has to tarnish our reputations, it is much greater still to imagine the power forgiveness has to transform relationships and restore the meaning in lives that have been broken by one or more terrible decisions. If we are honest with ourselves, we all need a Johnny Roseboro in our lives. We need someone who says, “I know what you did. I know how much pain it caused, but I forgive you all the same.” Actually, I believe that someone already exists. If you want to know more, come by my office sometime and I will tell you why I wear a cross on my uniform. ... Maybe I’ll talk some baseball as well.