

Collegiate Baseball
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Special CWS Moments

Wild Pitches - You get the big picture from ESPN. But when you are in Omaha, it's the little fleeting moments that add the dressing on the salad.

“Emotions That Could Melt A Statue”

By now you know the winner and losers in Omaha. But as the politically correct crowd likes to say – there are no losers. Try telling that to Georgia Bulldogs' Mitchell Boggs - as he stood ever so patiently in front of the 'statue' at Rosenblatt's main gate minutes after Georgia was eliminated - so his proud dad could snap a few shots. Young boys kept interrupting the shoot to get Boggs' autograph. Tight lipped Boggs could barley contain his emotions, a mixed bag of personal loss, sadness, anger, self blame, and embarrassment. After all, just minutes before Georgia was eliminated from the series. But here he was standing in front of the most identifiable statue in college baseball, seemingly undeserving of all the attention. I don't imagine there is one of us who has not felt those emotions in a similar moment. Gently prodding with a salesman-like smile partly shielded by the camera, his dad knew, as all dads do, this awkward parental moment thrust upon his son would in time, after the pain of losing passes, yield a lifetime of positive memories for both.

“Remember the Mayne”...Do I Have To?

Easily the worst and most dangerous moment in this year's CWS was orchestrated by ESPN's Kenny Mayne. Mayne, I'm told, is the odd self centered and quirky TV anchor whose clownish antics seek only to gain attention and add little or nothing to the event. During a game, Mayne snatched a grounds crew shirt and was poised to imitate the ball girls' fame of trying to catch a foul ball rolling off the screen. This for some reason is a major source of fan entertainment, emitting a chorus of cheers or boos.

Well, Mayne is tediously standing directly behind home plate next to the cameras as several pitches, and several batters, fail to yield an opportunity for him to seize center stage. Pitch after pitch – no foul balls. But when all else fails, he constructs the moment for TV. Between batters, someone from the TV anchor booth directly above rolls a ball down the screen for Kenny to catch.

Since there is a timeout on the field, no one is looking at the field, let alone the deep area at the screen of the backstop. There is no ball to track, no play, no action to follow. As usual everyone is talking to someone else or looking at the crazies in the bleachers. Mayne retrieves the ball, falling off the net and instantly, and with no regard for the consequences, launches it deep into the unaware crowd seated behind 1st base. No one

saw it coming. Amazingly, it lands in one of the very few empty seats. Thankfully it did not hit a fan in the side of the head. ESPN avoided a justifiable lawsuit by inches. Few people in the stadium actually saw this ridiculous and dangerous moment at all. “Stupid is as stupid does”, but that’s his appeal. Max Patkin, you’re not. There is a line between a professional entertainer and an addict for attention.

Finally, a Cranky Person in Omaha

I love Omaha. Omaha may be the friendliest city in the country. But my bubble was finally burst. Mike Epstein and I spent one day together watching 2 games. When Mike and I get together, it’s a nonstop baseball training conversation and game analysis. A young woman sitting in front of us turned abruptly, paused to remove the Tiffany silver spoon from her mouth, and said, “We OWN these seats and your conversation is ruining our experience!”

Well, the two men she was with couldn’t crawl far enough under their seats. Mike was absolutely speechless – probably a 1st!! Had she listened, she would have learned more in 10 minutes than the total time she had spent in her ‘owned’ seats. She probably didn’t believe in rotational hitting and limiting pitch counts anyway!

Time to Stop – Enough with the Beach Balls

The bleacher crazies occupy the blue seats at the edge of the entire outfield wall and about 15 rows back. They will cheer and boo for anything. They’ll even boo the weather – good or bad. Their amusement is everything that happens between the official play of the game. It doesn’t matter who’s playing. Largely made up of young men – my guess 23 years and under and competitive by nature - they even develop a loud cheer in a begging manner during outfield warm-ups. Right field screams when the rightfielder catches a ball from the centerfielder. Centerfield fans scream louder on the return throw in hopes that the fielders will judge the louder section and toss the warm up ball into that group.

The bleacher seat crazies also have an ongoing friendly war with the yellow shirted security force. The beach ball game that occasionally erupts at other stadiums has become a life style at Rosenblatt. Between every inning the fans play a game of keep away from the yellow shirts who try in vain to manage some dignity and self restraint to capture and burst the beach balls. Make no mistake; this is a big deal during the games.

Midway into a Cal State Fullerton vs. SC game, a couple dozen beach balls were launched in the air at the same time to thwart the security opponents. It was quite a sight and greeted with a celebratory ovation.

This is cute for about 2 games. Then it becomes a major distraction in the game. There are dozens of beach balls launched in every game. Security even chases down and removes fans from the stadium.

I think there is a reason for this. The CWS attracts about 75% of attendance from the local area, albeit a six hour driving radius. Until the championship series, few take sides and root for a specific team. They do cheer for good baseball. But if there is not a barrage of exploding balls off bats they get bored and need some carnival amusement. Seemingly it's All American, deep in the heartland fun. NOT!

As the series progresses throughout the week, the players lose patience because the umpires have to stop the game so often and someone has to retrieve the balls falling into the field of play. More often than not the outfielders run it down. This year the constant north wind kept the beach balls perpetually in play. It's a constant irritating pause in the rhythm of the game. During the championship game even a middle aged mom sitting in front of me in the reserved seat section opened her purse to reveal two cleverly hidden but un-inflated beach balls. She nearly passed out while blowing them up for her apparently bored boys.

The NCAA has more etiquette rules for watching a baseball game than the English at high tea. They issue them through the stadium announcer ad nauseum prior to every game; but to no avail. This year there seemed to be many more interrupts than in previous years. Omaha, please stop. It's old. Move on.