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The Poet's Mind

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Ryan Futrell, currently a junior at Cedarville, will graduate in 1997 with a bachelor's degree in English. Following graduation, he plans to attend graduate school, to pursue his doctorate in English, and to teach on the undergraduate level.

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The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together. — T.S. Eliot

Where's the wisdom in it? — Prof. Philip Lopate,
Ohio University

It occurred to me the other day as I sat down to write that I have nothing to say, or rather, that I have so much I want to say I don't know where to begin. Bits and pieces of sentences float around in my head, but they lack the context of related topic strings to give them any substance. I can find nothing more to say than, "I seem to sleep best at nights when I am turned around backwards in my bed with my head in my arms and my feet on a stack of pillows." I actually wrote that sentence down the other day in my little blue notebook that I carry with me, thinking I might use it in an essay someday.

I also wrote down a strange thought about baseball the other day, which is strange only because I never liked baseball much. I didn't like it much even when I played first base for the Teyes Valley Astros, a little league team that always seemed to win our division. We were the Astros simply because our uniforms were the same hideous colors that the Houston Astros wore during the early eighties.

The thought I wrote down was a comment made to me this past Sunday by a friend of mine when he returned from an afternoon of studying at John Bryan Park. While he was there, he noticed a family of four: a mom, a dad, and two young boys tossing around a baseball. He said something to me about greed killing professional baseball and how empty Riverfront Stadium was the last time he saw the Reds play there, but that "The Great American Pastime" still lived on in families like these: families that go the park on Sunday afternoons to break in a new glove with a dad, an older brother, and a family dog.

This statement was meant to strike some emotional chord in me, I think, and the proper comment would have been how sad it is that the Major League ballplayers...

But I had a different thought: I remembered the baseball fields at Winfield Middle School where I played in those orange,
brown, and yellow uniforms. I remembered buying baseball cards after the game. Brent Kinder's dad gave us money for a pack of cards and an Atomic Fireball, the ones that were almost too big to fit in your mouth. I didn't care much about baseball then, but I would faithfully spend Mr. Kinder's money on those cards. I didn't care much about the cards, either; I was more interested in the rectangular piece of brittle, pink gum, included in the package, dusted with chalky, sugary powder.

Brent and I read every statistic on the back of our cards as we sat on the back row of the bleachers behind Mr. and Mrs. Kinder, who faithfully watched their older son, Gary, play outfield. Brent stole my good cards, since I couldn't tell the good cards from the bad ones. While we traded and traded again, my mom called for me from the parking lot in between conversations with the other tee-ball moms. I eventually yelled back, "I'm riding home with Brent!" who lived four houses down the street from us.

The Kinder House, or at least the backyard, was well-known in Briarwood Estates. It was a perfectly square backyard with trees on both the far left and right, but plenty of room for my favorite baseball-like game. It's a game just like baseball, a game that most of my neighborhood friends played, and that most of my neighborhood friends thought they invented.

Our game varied from baseball, since we used a tennis ball and a thin, yellow wiffle-ball bat; but, most importantly, we were able to throw the runners out by directly hitting them with the ball. (We also had to catch the ball with one hand, but I don't think this was an original rule — just one we added when Gary got too good.)

We played the game so that the batter faced the house for two main reasons. If we hit the ball away from the house, we risked losing it to the woods; but if the batter hit the ball over the house, he got TWO runs. If his ball hit the house, but still landed on the opposite side, he got one run. If he merely hit the house, he got an automatic double.

I spent every Saturday morning at Brent's house watching Superfriends, and as soon as the cartoon was over, we marched out to that familiar backyard baseball diamond and spent the rest of the day with that thin bat and that old, sun-dried tennis ball. If it rained, we took our teams down to Casey Pringle's house and played tackle football in the mud, which we did on most week-
nights anyway.

I was never very good at football in those days; my only advantage was my speed. Catching the runner and hurling my body at the mercy of his cleated feet composed the only play I could execute to make a tackle. Of course, making this play also meant I would have difficulty walking back up the hill toward home that night.

A while back I noticed that little has changed for me and football. Some friends of mine decided to play a friendly game after the Ohio State/Michigan game last year, so we walked down a few blocks to a field near the center of Yellow Springs. I mistakenly decided to play, ignoring my left knee on which I had surgery at the beginning of the year. Fortunately for my knee, I had little to worry about; even after all these years, I was still the kid being dragged into the end zone clinging to someone’s ankles, and I was still the kid told to go short when everyone else was going long.

These are some of the fragmented thoughts about which I have nothing profound to say. Nothing more than ramblings that occur to me when someone mentions baseball or playing football in the mud. Nothing more than wanting to write about rectangular pink gum, or the use the word “baseball-like” in a sentence. So “Where’s the wisdom in it?” I don’t know, Phil, I don’t know.

-- Ryan Futrell