

The Lovable Losers

By Sarah Tesch

When a fan enters the historic stadium, a line of shops and bars stretch as far as the eye can see. Small children clutch their prized trademark possessions and parents reminisce about seasons past. Familiar names often arise in conversation: Ron Santo and his most recent on-air radio blunder, hall-of-famer Ernie Banks and his legendary career starting at shortstop. When fans leave the inner sections of the stadium, a field of green and a diamond of dirt emerge before their eyes. The plush evergreen grass and walls of ivy create a serene, almost tranquil escape. These initial perceptions are short lived, however, as the uproar of tens of thousands of fans commences. The thunderous cheers and waves of excitement shake the brick walls and concrete ground of Wrigley Field. Fans dance, sing, and rave, tirelessly yearning for a series-clinching win, or their fifteen seconds of fame on national television. Who are these crazed fans and what team do they cheer so violently for? None other than the Chicago Cubs, the baseball team who has not seen a World Series win in nearly a century.

The Chicago Cubs—or the “Lovable Losers”—inspire fans regardless of their sub-par season statistics. The Cubs’ following has deep historic roots, and the love for this club has never wavered. The word “love” seems an odd choice when describing a baseball team. However, no other word can completely describe the loyalty and admiration of this fan base. Even when the season has essentially ended in mid-July for the team, the spectators continue to come in record-breaking numbers to the world-renowned Wrigley Field. Few other major league teams can boast about their nation-wide fan base—not even the White Sox with their recent World Series win.

I have seen the expansive network of Cubs fans myself. I have traveled with the team to catch a series or two in numerous other states, including Pennsylvania and Arizona. Those away stadiums are always packed with Cubbie blue and red. The Chicago loyalists usually outnumber the home teams' fans; I have seen this phenomenon with my own eyes. Now that is dedication. These diehard Cubs fans, not the questionable "fair weather" Chicago devotees, stick with the club through thick and thin, most notably the thin as of late. These other fans, the "fair weather" ones, shift their allegiance constantly between the two Chicago teams. History and character do not matter, only a winning record does. That is why this diehard network of loyalists is special. They never give up hope for a winning season with the team. The community that has built up around the Cubbies is truly a remarkable one.

The loyalty of the fans stems from their admiration of the baseball team. Countless numbers of spectators had their own dreams of playing in the big leagues. While most were unsuccessful in achieving this, they now entertain their childhood fantasies by watching the veterans of the game. The antics of the rookies also fascinate the minds of the fans as well. With each season, new heroes of the game are introduced, captivating the minds of the young and old alike. This is only the beginning of the fan devotion however. Even though they are the "Lovable Losers" of baseball, the Cubs organization still upholds high moral standards for the players as well as the fans.

This strict code of conduct ensures the safety as well as the enjoyment for the fans. While many instances in the past century illustrate this point, a few stand out above the rest. When the slight issue of falling concrete from the upper decks arose, the administration quickly remedied the situation. After all, a dead fan base is a nonpaying one. A less painful, but still noteworthy occurrence was the infamous reign of Sammy Sosa. His unsportsmanlike antics along with his

questionable—or rather unquestionable—use of steroids naturally had a negative affect on the fan community. As soon as the club organization noticed Sammy's falling out with the Chicago fans, they promptly ended his contract with the team. The Chicago club listens intently to the outspoken fans, a quality lacking in most other major league organizations across the nation.

The high regard of the owners along with the fan devotion is the necessary foundation for such a loving and amusing network of people. After all, sitting for hours on end waiting for autographs does lend some time to meet other unique fans. In my numerous travels to signings and conventions, I have met fellow collectors of antiques and memorabilia as well as the usual team enthusiasts. My bank account can vouch for this obsession with collecting baseball artifacts. Even though I have just started obtaining these items within the past year or so, I have accumulated quite the collection. From an authentic Wrigley Field stadium seat to the pinstriped pants of Cubs catcher Michael Barrett, I have it all. In fact, while standing in line at one particular signing, I met the lady who was actually bidding against me on eBay for the adorable Barrett's pants. It is a small world after all. Every fan I have met has been as diehard and loyal as me, willing to miss work or even the first day of college to meet the famed Chicago Cubs players.

It is not as if we stalk the players however, although that is an amusing thought. Just because a certain relief pitcher now recognizes me does not mean I haunt their every move. He just has an excellent memory. Regardless, these men love to meet their fans and always enjoy these scheduled outings. One of the most jovial characters would have to be the closer Ryan Dempster. Before every game he takes the time to sign autographs and pose in photographs with the devotees. He schedules off day appearances in local shops to further support his fans as well. Dempster is just one of the many examples on the Cubs staff.

Another opportunity for collecting those famed signatures is at the annual Cubs Convention. This event always sells out, regardless of the team's season record. Win or lose, the players and fans alike join together in the winter and enjoy the party. I adore the convention. The auction room continuously allows me to expand my collection of Cubbie wares. At the latest convention, I purchased a flag that flew over the scoreboard in centerfield at the historic park. The regularly scheduled autograph sessions allow me to meet my favorite players as well. Scott Eyre, Bob Howry, and Sean Marshall were all very accommodating and still entertaining. It is not everyday one of your favorite relief pitchers pretends to be an auctioneer. The amazing thing was that Eyre continued to sign for the fans between each item he sold. Talk about fan appreciation. Staying on the executive floors with the team is not too shabby either. What is best about Cubs Convention is that you never regret anything you buy. All of the money is donated to the team's private charity, Cubs Care.

This love affair with the Cubs truly is not one sided. Besides playing the roles of entertainers, the players continue to give back to the community. This support is shown in numerous ways, all of which benefit the fans and others within the city of Chicago. Again, the most obvious way of showing fan appreciation is through speaking with and signing autographs for the fans. However, the Cubs organization supports many local charities in the Chicagoland area as well as its own. Cubs Care provides monetary grants for children with special needs as well as those interested in youth sports. This philanthropic organization receives its funding from private donors, special programs, as well as from the players themselves. To date the charity has donated over eight million dollars to needy fans across Chicago (Chicago Cubs). This generous nature of the Cubbies truly displays their own loyalty to their fans. Both sides give in the end.

The fans pay for the players' paychecks, and the organization supports the community as well monetarily. It is a win-win situation.

So what have the Chicago Cubs taught me about love? Well the most obvious would have to be to stick with it through thick and thin. Even with almost a century of losses under its belt, the lovable Chicago team continues draw in a countless number of followers and loyal devotees. The historic field, the hopeful commentators, and the jovial antics of the players keep the fans coming back each year. Watching those tough, burly men dance in the dugout always make me giggle. The team has also displayed the need to reach out to fellow community members in an effort to better us all. A little cliché, but it is true. The Chicago team sets an example that every fan and rival should follow through their generous donations to needy children. This reciprocating love between the players and fans truly is beneficial. Most of all, the team has taught me to maintain faith. After all, it has been ninety-nine years since their last World Series win. The fans can only hope, but win or lose, the Cubbie community is here to stay.

Works Cited

Chicago Cubs: the Official Site. 2001. 15 January 2007.

<http://chicago.cubs.mlb.com/NASApp/mlb/chc/community/com_cc_whatIs.jsp>.