



**“Yes, I’ll ‘wait until next year’  
and, then,  
My Giants will be winners  
until they aren’t.”**

---

## **A Guy Walks Into The Flying Pig**

by Dan Sapone

I ride the BART train to 16th & Mission. Often there’s a guy playing music at the bottom of the escalator and I try to drop a small token of appreciation into his guitar case (sometimes it’s a violin case, sometimes it’s a trumpet). Emerging from the BART station, I walk to the intersection past some “regulars” who sit in their usual spots, some with borrowed shopping carts, others with baby carriages filled with a variety of necessities. The opposite corner is occasionally populated by a lively “preacher” with a small appreciative audience. The block past this corner features a grocery store with some outdoor produce and usually one or two homeless men sleeping in tents on the sidewalk just past the vegetables. Two more blocks, a left turn on Van Ness, and I approach a red awning that says “Flying Pig Bistro.”



“The Pig” makes a good impression right away — deep and narrow, alcoves at big windows on either side of the entrance, tables all the way down the right side, the register and a long bar on the left with three big TV screens hanging over an excellent collection of local craft beers and California wines. The kitchen is straight out the back. The two proprietors, sons of mine, run a good shop — extremely popular with aficionados of all sorts of sports, excellent food and drink, and comradery. Ben and Will greet me with hugs and offer a barstool in front of the screen where one of our favorite teams will play in a while. It’s a sweet place to spend an afternoon and evening. AND there are some friendly, interesting people among the regulars.

So, on this particular afternoon, I’m sitting on my usual barstool, sipping a Sonoma County Zinfandel with my BLT (delicious on fresh Focaccia), when a guy walks into The Pig, looks around, and says to nobody in particular, “OK, this awful World Series is over and “Who Cares” anyway?! So, is there something worthwhile to watch on these big screens today?”

Like the others on the bar stools, I turned to look — at first annoyed that someone had so loudly interrupted our conversation, but then ... I suddenly appreciated this guy. Yes, he was right. The World Series WAS awful. What was awful about it? Well, to start with, My Giants weren't in it. I suppose I could express some patience and quote the title of Doris Kearns Goodwin's wonderful memoir of growing up with baseball: "Wait Until Next Year" — BUT, she grew up a Dodger fan in Brooklyn and, well, ... that's not typically on a Giants' fan's reading list. On top of all that, this Series featured two teams that I would have wanted to see lose; but, in a one-on-one series, one of them has to win, right? After many years of establishing my baseball loyalty, these teams comprise my list of those that I like to see lose.

So, what's wrong with these two teams?

### **The Boston Red Sox**

First, the Boston Red Sox were from The American League. When I was a kid, I heard over and over that the American League was "The Junior Circuit" — never measuring up to the quality of baseball played in the National League. (You may ask: Did the fact that "My Giants" were in the National League influence that judgement? Well ... uh ... maybe ...) In the particular case of the Red Sox, I was also taught that they were doomed to operate under "*The Curse of the Bambino*." Ever since January 5, 1920, the day they sold the greatest power hitter in the history of baseball to the New York Yankees, the Boston Red Sox were destined to lose whenever it mattered. What a historic embarrassment! They sold Babe Ruth for \$125,000. I mean, Ruth had led them to three World Series victories in the six years he played in Boston. On top of that, The Babe had *pitched* 29 2/3 scoreless World Series innings, setting a new league record that would stand for 43 years and — AND — he had broken the major league home run record in 1919 with 29 homeruns (a remarkable feat since it was still the "Dead Ball" era when the baseball was manufactured like today's softball). He played more than 100 games in left field in addition to earning a 9-5 record as a pitcher. As of the 1919 season, he had easily surpassed Ty Cobb as baseball's biggest attraction. BUT, that season, the Sox had stumbled in spite of him, finishing in sixth place with a 66-71 record. New ownership took over, sold the star (for money the owner used to finance a Broadway production), and proceeded to take 84 years to win another World Series. (BTW, after acquiring Babe Ruth, the Yankees ended up winning 39 AL pennants and 26 World Series titles in what became known as "The House That Ruth Built.") "The Curse of the Bambino" that plagued the Red Sox was well deserved, and, *as far as I was concerned*, the fact that they finally won the World Series in 2004 hadn't absolved them of their historic crime.

### **The Los Angeles Dodgers**

So, why couldn't I root for the National League's champion? It was my own league from my own state; should be an easy choice, right?

Nope.

Since the Giants and Dodgers moved to California when I was a kid, it didn't take long for me to decide that I had a strong loyalty to my TWO favorite teams:

1) My San Francisco Giants

and

2) Any team that happened to be playing against the Dodgers on any particular day.



So, my distaste for the Dodgers took precedence over my National League loyalty. However, here in 2018, there was no apparent way for both of teams to lose this World Series — hence my dilemma. But the World Series did end yesterday with The Red Sox dumping the Dodgers four games to one. SO, I guess I got the best half of what I wanted.

So, back to this guy who has just walked into The Flying Pig.

### **At The Pig**

I greeted him warmly, as did Karl and James on adjacent bar stools. He introduced himself as Russel. “Welcome. Around here they call me PapaDan, This is Karl. This is James. Thanks for reminding us about the series. Don’t worry, Dodger fans won’t show up ‘til next year, if then.”

My son Ben, one of the proprietors, suggested quietly that we don’t want to piss off any customers who happen to be Dodger fans. “They are good customers; they buy plenty of beer — even if it’s just to drown their sorrows. OK?” I nodded my head in agreement. His brother Will, the other proprietor, chimed in, “Besides, the Warriors game starts in a few minutes, so you’re just in time to watch something good.” And he always seems to know the right thing to say → “Can I pour you another one of those?”

We agreed to keep our voices down on sensitive subjects. I accepted another glass of Zin; Karl and James each had another Fieldwork IPA. The “new guy” turned out to be a fervent basketball fan — an admirable quality — who appreciated the high-quality and exuberant style that the Warriors offered. He also had a refined taste in local craft beers — when he ordered an Altamont Maui Wauai IPA — a number of heads turned in admiration and nodded approval.

So, the new guy settled onto a bar stool, raised his glass, and declared: “Now that all of that foolishness is over, it’s now officially basketball season.” I liked this guy. With Steph Curry and his buddies on the screen in front of us, we found we had a number of things in common:

1. That Warrior basketball was fun.

— When Steph Curry hit one of his “downtown” three-pointers, he would dance across mid-court waving his arms, not so much to call attention to himself, but to say “Look at US, all of us. We know how to have a good time out here!” Warrior fans took his jubilation to be inclusive — “We’re all having fun, aren’t we?” He was right; and those of us sitting at these bar stools were part of his “We”; especially in the comfortable atmosphere of The Flying Pig. The Warriors were proud of their unselfish approach to the game. When Steph gets in his ‘zone’ and can’t miss, other players get him the ball and get out of his way. When Clay Thompson threatens to break an all-time NBA record for three-pointers in a single game, they make sure he is at the end of their typical passing barrage beyond the three-point stripe. And when the rest of team gets into a cold snap, they cheer Kevin Durant when he takes the ball the length of the court and dominates the game at both ends. They’re here for each other and that attitude rubs off on the fans in the arena and at the other end of the TV screen. Warrior basketball is about “us.”

2. And then there’s baseball. We agreed that changes in major-league baseball rules and the way the game is played have threatened to ruin the game.

— When I was a kid, and more recently, it was a major achievement for any major league pitching staff when one of their starting pitchers would “go the distance” and pitch a complete





game. At the bar at The Pig, we exchanged some stories → I retold a vivid memory of a night in the summer of 1963, going to bed with my transistor radio in my ear because one of the great 'young guys,' Juan Marichal of My Giants, was pitching against one of the great 'old guys,' Warren Spahn of the Milwaukee Braves. Ben and Will nodded to each other — they had heard it before. I told (RE-told) the story of the night I listened through 16 innings of shutout baseball until Mays came up in the bottom of the 16th inning and hit one out into the night for a 1-0 victory. Both Juan Marichal and Warren Spahn had pitched all 16 innings of shutout baseball until Mays sent them all home. The next morning in the Chronicle, the full story emerged. Since Marichal was scheduled to bat third in the 13th inning, Manager Alvin Dark had asked the 25-year-old if he had had enough. Marichal replied, "That 42-year-old is still pitching. I can't come out." So it was. Spahn, deeply depressed, was interviewed after the game, "I threw him a screwball and it just hung there. It didn't do a damn thing!" This is [a story](#) that is no longer possible now that managers employ the "strategy" of pulling starting pitchers out after 100 pitches — even if they're in the midst of a shutout or a no-hitter (yes, it happened this season) — intentionally depriving a whole generation of baseball fans of the kind of complete-game stories that I grew up with. (OK, so Game Three of this World Series turns out to be the exception that proves the rule, eh?) Here at the Flying Pig bar, we raised our glasses in agreement, lamenting the loss of such legends. Somebody said, "Say it ain't so, Joe." (Some younger guys from further down the bar, eaves-dropping on the conversation, said to each other, "Who's Joe?")

— And then there are the latest insulting MLB rule changes: time limits between innings, limitations on batters stepping out of the box, limits on visits to the mound by managers and even catchers ... "Baseball team owners have run amuck with their rule changes., They think the game belongs to them. It doesn't." Glasses were raised again, "The game belongs to US!"

Somebody brought up, "And what about all the new baseball Stats? What kind of idiot want to measure 'Wins Above Replacement?' Huh?" We agreed we didn't want to talk about it — "Please bring me another one of these, will ya Will?"

OK, so I made a feeble attempt at summing up the conversation: "So, the net effect is that baseball has diminished; and given a choice between watching baseball and basketball — a choice we have in October and again April through June — I choose basketball."

I raised my glass and drained the last of my Zinfandel. Russel looked at me and said, "Really?" As if in response to his "Really?", baseball stories spilled out of each one of those at the bar — some bittersweet stories about 'what might have been' — a small crowd gathered to listen. My last one was Willie McCovey's final at bat in the 1962 World Series. On two consecutive pitches, Willie Mac ALMOST won it all. It's a painful story for those of us who remember.



After the Warriors were done clobbering whoever they were playing, Russel looked at his watch, “Time to go. Gotta catch BART to Warm Springs.”

“Yeah, me too, I’m off to Pleasanton. I’ll walk you to the station.” I dropped a few bills on the bar, exchanged hugs with the guys. And we were out the door.

On the way past the tents and the sidewalk produce, just as the corner preacher was getting warmed up, Russel stopped and looked at me with both eyes. “So, you’ve been a Giants fan since you were a kid and — I’ve heard some of your stories — you watched attentively through all of their history here in San Francisco, right?”

“That’s certainly true.”

“So, I understand what you said about the rule changes and the new strategies — none of it is what it used to be — but tell me straight — if *Your Giants* were in the World Series, how would you feel about it?”

Without hesitation, I owned up to the contradiction: “You got me. The fact that My Giants just had two really bad seasons is not the end of the world. Heck, it’s happened before and it’ll happen again. With my guys in the Series, it would be just as big a thrill as it was when I was twelve and My Giants were in the 1962 Series against the Yankees. Yes, I’ll ‘wait until next year’ and, then, My Giants will be winners until they aren’t. I guess I’m stuck with that.”

“I get it,” he said. He got on his train and I got in mine. Meanwhile, the Warriors had won, Curry had set another record, and basketball season had officially begun. And, yes, once again, baseball survived more or less undiminished.

- *Willie McCovey passed away October 31, 2018 at the age of 80* •  
— “A Hall-of-Fame Human Being” — *SF Chronicle*

[Click here: “Remembering Willie McCovey:](#)

<https://www.mlb.com/video/giants-honor-willie-mccovey/c-2518534883>

