



**Eric Schroder**  
Editor

[eschroder@m2media360.com](mailto:eschroder@m2media360.com)

717-805-4197  
P.O. Box 280,  
Dauphin, PA 17018

## This great game

**T**HE HEADLINE of this column is also the name of a book I received as a youngster; it still has a black and white printed sticker inside the front cover, depicting a silhouetted boy sitting in a tree, reading. My name and “A book is a new adventure” surround the boy, along with images of a cowboy on a bucking bronco, an Indian in a canoe, an airplane and a schooner (the boat not the beer glass!).

For nearly 40 years I’ve occasionally browsed through this book. Its photographs run from a shot at the Polo Grounds in 1890, where the outfield is ringed by spectators taking in the game from their buggies, horses tied to a rope, to a shocked Harvey Haddix, who pitched 12 perfect innings in 1959 but still lost the game, 1-0, in the 13th, to a sequence of Brooks Robinson stealing another hit from the Big Red Machine in the 1970 World Series.

Paging through this book, which includes lots of pictures as well as chapters on strategy, pitching, hitting and other topics, including “The Salaried Elite” (\$100,000 was termed “huge”) sometimes leaves me yearning for simpler times. Always, it makes me wish I could once again be on a green diamond, knowing I will never run out of grass to catch that fly ball if I just can get there fast enough. Balls smacking leather. Wood cracking cowhide. Spitting as much as I want. Baseball.

Here’s where a lot of folks start to whine about the state of today’s game. The obscene money, performance enhancing drugs, hitters’ body armor, tiny strike zones, the readjusting of gloves after every pitch, how you cannot pitch inside any longer, the homerun celebration garbage, etc. And as an old schooler, I share those thoughts, I really do—but I’m tired of hating on the game. Because it’s not the game, at least at the higher levels, it’s the people playing and running the game.

I have a 10-year-old son who can’t wait to get back out on that field and play baseball. He doesn’t know what it “used to be” and he doesn’t care. He cares only that he’s developing a knuckleball, that he’ll most likely bat leadoff again, that his legs are longer so maybe he’ll be able to steal 3rd base more easily this spring. He loves the game and couldn’t even tell you why.

Baseball’s beauty—the field itself, the unhurried pace, the chance to mess up and be a hero all in the same play is part of what draws so many of us to it each spring despite the mess at the top.

The professionals don’t own baseball, Americans do. This, our, great game.

## SportsTurf

1233 Howard Street, Suite 2I  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
Phone 415-839-5060  
Fax 415-398-3511  
[www.sportsturfonline.com](http://www.sportsturfonline.com)

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**STMA Office**  
805 New Hampshire Suite E  
Lawrence, Ks 66044  
Phone 800-323-3875 Fax 800-366-0391  
Email [STMAinfo@STMA.org](mailto:STMAinfo@STMA.org)  
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