

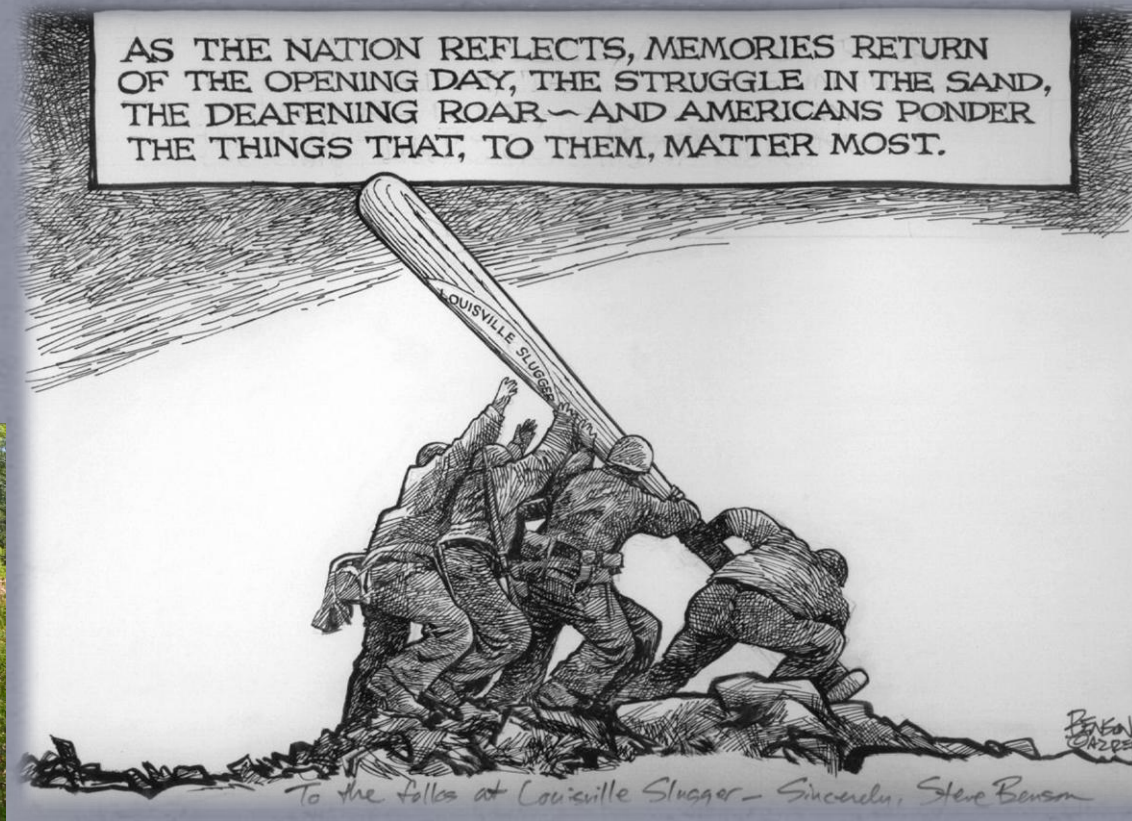
The American Game

**Faster than a speeding bullet, as American as apple pie,
before money, booze, sex, and steroids,
the boys of summer thrill to the crack of a bat,
a grand slam over the left field fence, a slide into home plate.**

When the last snow lingers on Mt. Ashland, children and parents
await the end of winter and the beginning
of all things good...baseball season.



When the first blooms of spring arrive, the heart quickens as opening day nears...then the ref calls out "PLAY BALL!!"



The American Game

I grew up with four brothers and a Dad who loved baseball. I did too. I played on the boys' team, went to Busch Stadium to watch Stan the Man hit homers, collected baseball cards, and knew all the stats. It was my ticket into the club, my badge of 'tomboy'. Then I had grandchildren. Kealii was my first (and favorite) ... until the next one. Now I have five – baseball players all!

For more than fifteen years I've been shooting them at their favorite past-time, learning photography in the process – composition, framing, and timing, structure and light source...the magic triangle. At the time it was this photographer's intention to capture, to record...to brag. The images call to me later as I sort, crop, edit. I have agency, creating meaning of pixels. And sometimes it's pure aleatory – a random improv that looks like ballet on the field

Whether hanging out with their teams, firing a line drive, or stealing bases, the pictures are about movement, caught in moments. They show boys (my boys) caught in the thrill of the sport, baseball and all the tangibles and intangibles that make up the game. Speaking a language beyond words, they connote life's emotion, the education of boys, the building of community. These images, over time, go beyond their formal aspects. They give us context, showcasing rituals and rites of passage. In their tension and complexity, they embrace the game; they reflect not only the growth of little boys to young men, but they shape cultural meaning and open a discourse on this national pastime. Collectively they communicate the game beyond the game. Quotes from players and fans, like the symbols of pictures and words, join to tell a story of baseball culture – baseball players, baseball families, and baseball towns.

I watch through lenses as kids grow from t-ball and coach-pitch, to Little League, Babe Ruth, and Legion, from Jr. Varsity to Varsity. I watch their private angst and public pride, their beauty, energy, joy as the images connote a surplus of meaning. Whether pitching, hitting, or running, or winning, losing, and competing, boys learn and grow, celebrating personal skills and shared values. Whether practicing, playing, relaxing between games, or celebrating after, they're learning discipline and building team spirit. Baseball is relational, making friends of brothers and brothers of friends.

Through the lessons of the sport and support of families, schools, and communities, this all-American childhood helps young boys grow into men...without going to war. With a touch of his own iconic genius, the cartoonist Steve Benson used a symbol of the American childhood – a baseball bat – and created an image raising the Louisville Slugger over Iwo Jima (a take on the iconic war photo) to make this point. There are other ways for young men to experience the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. Our national pastime shows the importance of friendship and honoring each other and deeper cultural roots; it builds local and national pride. Boys mature into men, learning life skills to serve them into their futures. Mostly it's about the fun...the play...the game, striking out and sliding home. In their very own field of dreams, when things build to a fever pitch, it's natural to take pride in a league of their own.

Baseball's a story of boys in their boyness, nervous rookies and seasoned players, bad news bears, and angels in the outfield. The game's the thing...the only thing...when the young are bright and fearless and only come in when mom calls or the last pitch gets lost in a soft dusk.

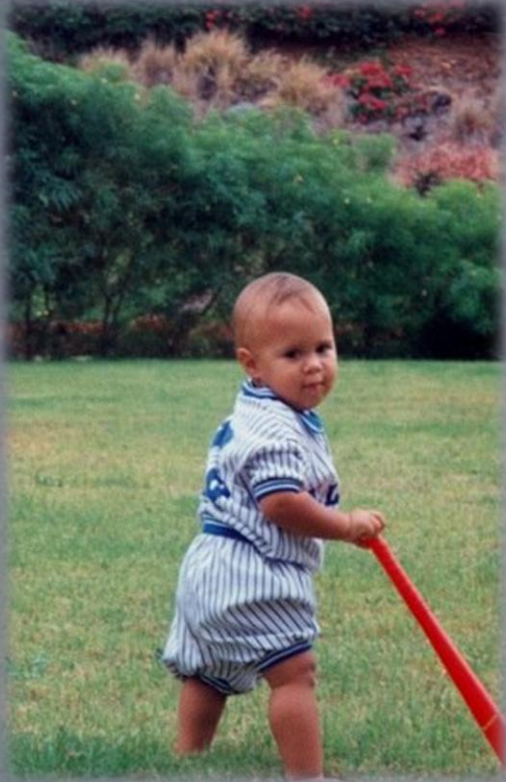
I love this quote from Yogi Berra – “*Little League baseball is a very good thing because it keeps parents off the streets.*” As therapy for workaholism, baseball saved me mid-career as I rushed from the office to slice watermelons and take oranges to the field. This sport takes a village...and builds a team, a club, school, community. Moms and Dads, tutus and uncles watch young children come alive and grow as they coach teams, manage concession stands, handle scorekeeping, broadcast the games, sell raffle tickets and organize carwashes. We text play-by-plays when children are scheduled in simultaneous games on different fields. Parents organize trips and raise funds in our communities for out of state trips and championship playoffs on distant fields. Through all the shared camaraderie, we fuse communities and cultures of shared values and love.

Beyond child and community building, beyond the syntax of images and their power to tell stories, baseball becomes public culture through television, online and newspaper reporting, through sports channels and sports sections across the land. Discourse goes far beyond Dads shouting at their Little Leaguers, and the rhetoric of baseball, even at this level, is often photographic. And although my photos never made the sports headlines, my grandsons did.

The game, this great American game since 1839 – when not yet corrupted by big business and the buying and selling of players, when it’s all still a field of dreams and baseball gods are smiling, and boys play for the love of the game...when it’s all childhood and summer, and nervous rookies, seasoned sportsmen, parents and grandparents come alive – is a story of personal excellence and collective joy. It’s a photo journey into the heart of boyness. The images tell the story... the American story.

“God, I just love baseball!”

Robert Redford in *The Natural*



Kealii



Since two years old Kealii has had a magic bat.
In Legion playoffs last year all his teammates wanted to use it.
It was almost as magic as he was.



*“Baseball, it is said,
is only a game.*

*True. And the
Grand Canyon is
only a hole in
Arizona.”*

George F. Will

Connor

First teams...and first wins

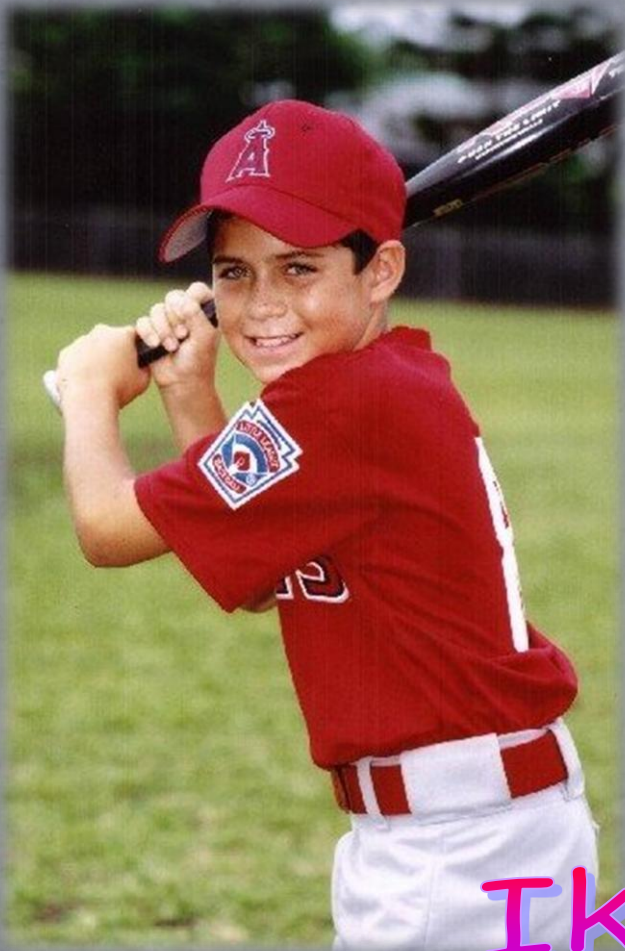


“There have been only two geniuses in the world. Willie Mays and Willie Shakespeare.” (...and my grandsons)

Tallulah Bankhead



Little boys grow into big boys



Ikaika





Little League Champs grow to Regional champs



WEST HAWAII TODAY | FRIDAY, AUGUST 6, 2004

SPORTS

LEAGUE CHAMPS



SPECIAL TO WHT
With a record of 10-3, the Waikoloa Dodgers were champions of the West Coast Hawaii/Kona Coast's Little League 11-12 Major Division. Back (from left) Sean Prentiss, Keoni Silva, Jesse Alvord, coach Walter Aniban, Johnny Himalaya, David Ezzo-White and Sammy DeSagun. Front, Ikaika Cecil, Seth Enriquer, Tyler Tsubota, Steve Johnson and Chase Burnham.



It takes a village...



Proud moms and dads, brothers, families, and fans





“Little League baseball is a very good thing because it keeps parents off the streets.”

Yogi Berra



Pledging allegiance and tipping hats,
building team and national pride



A field of dreams...



Baseball makes friends of brothers and brothers of friends

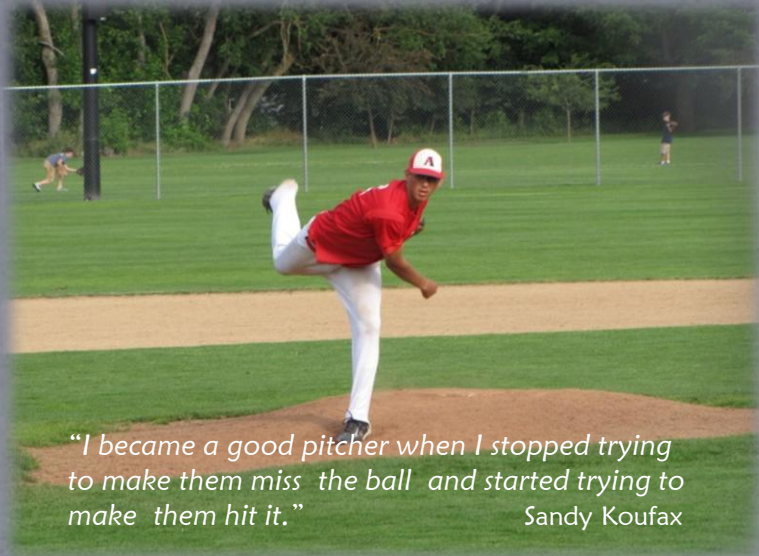


"I believe in the Church of Baseball. I tried all the major religions and most of the minor ones.

I've worshipped Buddha, Allah, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, trees, mushrooms and Isadora Duncan. I know things. For instance, there are 108 beads in a Catholic rosary and there are 108 stitches in a baseball. When I learned that, I gave Jesus a chance."

*Ron Shelton,
Bull Durham*

...when it's all still a field of dreams
and boys play for the love of the game.



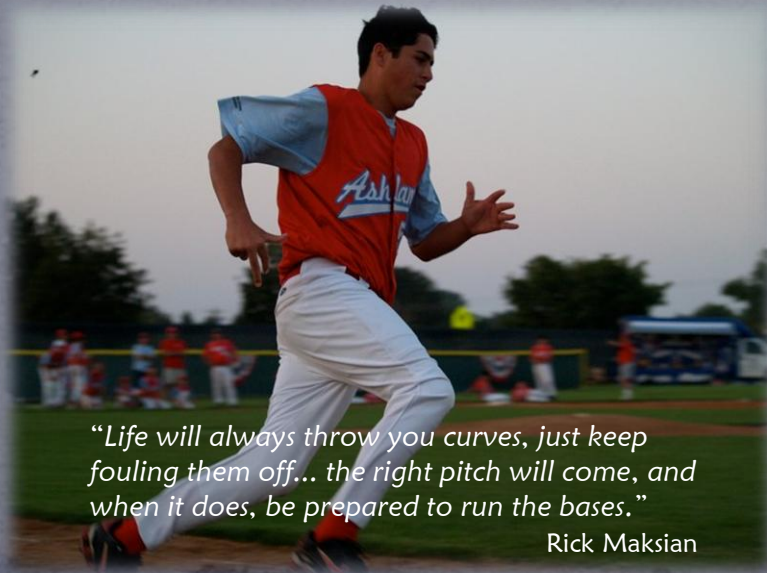
"I became a good pitcher when I stopped trying to make them miss the ball and started trying to make them hit it."

Sandy Koufax



"Baseball is an allegorical play about America, a poetic, complex, and subtle play of courage, fear, good luck, mistakes, patience about fate, and sober self-esteem.."

Saul Steinberg



"Life will always throw you curves, just keep fouling them off... the right pitch will come, and when it does, be prepared to run the bases."

Rick Maksian



"The other sports are just sports. Baseball is a love."

Bryant Gumbel

Play Ball!!

"Don't tell me about the world. Not today. It's springtime and they're knocking baseballs around fields where the grass is damp and green in the morning and the kids are trying to hit the curve ball."

Pete Hamill



"Pitchers, like poets, are born not made." Cy Young





Thom Larkin | Daily Tidings

ASHLAND'S KEALII CECIL, RIGHT, IS CONGRATULATED by teammates after his three-run, walk-off home run in the first game against South Medford Tuesday afternoon at North Mountain Park. The Pilots went on to win Game 2 to increase their lead over South in the Area 4 standings.

Cecil powers Pilots past Colts

The thrill of victory...



The agony of defeat...



“...along with many moments of glory, crushing moments of defeat - the crucial strikeout, the game-altering error, giving up the season-ending grand slam - moments when tears come to even adolescent eyes and the parents on the sidelines sort of crumple inside at the sight of their child's pain.”

David Brooks

Relaxing between games and celebrating after...
building friendships to last a lifetime





Photo credits and
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Gumbel, Saul Steinberg,
Robert Redford, Steve
Benson, Tallulah
Bankhead, George Will,
Pete Hammil, Ron
Shelton, David Brooks,
and Yogi Berra.

***“It’s our game –
the American
game.”***

Walt Whitman