

I believe in baseball. In baseball, I can wallow in the instant replay beauty of a home run hitter connecting with the ball and watching it sail away. I believe in the loyalty demonstrated when you cheer your pitcher for holding the runner on first and boo the opposition for doing the same thing; the camaraderie engendered when you and the stranger sitting next to you chant harmoniously, "Let's go Marlins, let's go," as if you were long-time singing partners; and I believe in indulging in the delicious (but harmless) hatred of your rival team, knowing that your venom doesn't really hurt anyone. I'm a relatively late blooming baseball fan, discovering its real joys when my baby Marlins won the World Series in '97. But I date my baseball watching Zen to my childhood. On long car rides with my dad, we often listened to Giants baseball. When his team fell behind or made frustrating errors, my dad would curse his beloved Giants and angrily turn the radio off, unable to listen to another minute. After ten minutes or so, he'd announce that he just wanted to see how the game was going and casually (as if he didn't really care), turn the game back on, hoping for a dramatic change. He couldn't not know the outcome. Although I recently lost my dad, his style lives on and I'm often seen pacing or even leaving the family room unable to watch, only to return a few moments later with the hope of baseball redemption. I share this baseball love now with my son and, together with two of his buddies, we're in our third year of a fantasy baseball league entitled "Three Dudes and a Mom." I recognize that baseball is not without its warts: overpaid prima donnas, illegal drugs, and unsportsmanlike conduct, plague America's pastime—I'm not naive. Hillary Salans Kambour grew up in San Francisco as a Giants fan and now lives in Miami, where she also roots for the Marlins. She is appellate counsel and director of legal training for the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program, which represents abused and neglected children in court. Of course, I feel and admire these emotions and skills more acutely with respect to my own team and its rivals, but I am finding that as I mature as a fan, my admiration and passion extends beyond my team to encompass the entire sport. But in so many areas of my life, I have to temper my rages and suppress the urge to gloat. I believe in the agility and grace of fielding a line drive, pivoting on one foot, and rocketing the ball across the field for the out at first. In baseball I can fully indulge in the tension and anxiety of watching our closer walk a guy in the ninth with two outs. I believe it takes a special kind of self-esteem, or gumption, or panache, to remain focused on getting a hit or making a play even when you are down by seven runs in the fourth. In baseball, I am free to dive into the pool of joy at my opponents' misfortune and do as many laps as I please. I believe in the strength it takes to hit a 90-mile-an-hour fastball, or throw a runner out at the plate from right field. I believe in the stamina players need to play 162 games before they rest. Just the ability to stay on the field and not dissolve into tears is impressive.