

“THANK GOD FOR NUTS”: American Baseball and American Humor

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Major league baseball's seductive hold on American society poses a challenge to students of national character who seek to explain the phenomenon. That a typical game offers as little as ten minutes of action over the course of two and a half hours of staging is mind-boggling. Obviously important ancillary factors add zest to the spectacle and not the least of these are the humorous antics of baseball's constituents whose "nutty" by play enriches the game and contributes much to the complex structure of American humor.

In probing the interplay between American humor and the major league baseball spectacle, the dynamic and pluralistic realm of American humor is assayed and the slang term “nutty” is operationally defined as the behavior resulting from having one’s mind out of place.

In baseball, as in the culture at large, nutty minds out of place crop up in godsplenty of variety among the game’s several constituencies. The gamut includes mentally ill types, zealots, tricksters, jesters, exhibitionists, clever quipsters, colorful incompetents, ludicrous role failures, over conformers, canny screwballs, non conformists, over conformers and others.

Examples of these types are selected from ranks of players, fans, owners, managers, umpers, and the media to show how the game contributes to the burgeoning treasury of American humor. The presentation is augmented by selected slides and ends with the author’s personal selection of an “all nut team.”



The four speakers in the session on minor league baseball were Harry Jebson, John Findling, Dick Crepeau, and Sam Regalado.