

“I Don’t Know How Fame Feels”: Baseball, Memory, and Subjectivity in the Minnesota Twins Open Tryout Camp

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Each June, the Minnesota Twins invite baseball fans to their home field, the Metrodome in downtown Minneapolis, for what they call the Minnesota Twins Open Tryout Camp. This is an event which anybody, regardless of talent, experience, or ability can tryout at any position they like for a chance to become a professional baseball player. Without very much publicity beforehand, the Twins can expect at least 200 people, almost exclusively young men between the ages of 18 and 25, to show up for the first day of the two day camp, even though most who come have no chance of receiving a contract to play at even the lowest level of the Twins’ minor league system. This paper focuses upon how fans use the historic memory symbolically encoded in the game of baseball to construct ideas of themselves within lives fragmented into spheres of work and leisure, public and

private. This becomes the key issue in how the open tryout mediates between the anxieties of those who participate in it, and the social and historic conditions that prevent baseball fans from being who they want to be.

The main body of data for this project comes from participant observation at the tryout, and in depth interviews with 22 fans who attended the event in June of 1987. Theoretically, this study interprets the tryout participants' ideas, aspirations, and fantasies from a number of different perspectives. Perhaps most important is the work of Richard Terdiman, who outlines the increasingly fragmented nature of social organizations and cultural perspectives within the historic development of industrial and post-industrial capitalism. As ideas of work have become increasingly separated from ideas of consumption over this time period, unstable and contradictory identities for individuals have emerged. According to Terdiman, invented traditions such as baseball can allow people to use a memory apart from that which is officially institutionalized, to question the unstable nature of their own identities, and maintain a dissatisfaction with the routinization of modern society.

In the end, the tryout participants illustrate some important points of cultural contradiction within their lives and their conceptions of themselves. Baseball has historically addressed the kinds of tensions that result from the segmentation of work from leisure, and public interest from private interest. And this look at the Minnesota Twins Open Tryout Camp helps us see the dynamics of this historic process at specific moments.