

### SOFTBALL DYNASTY

By Blake Hurst

The catcher is 60 and has a heart condition. She is also my mother. The first baseman is 61 and has lost a step. Let's face it: Dad didn't have a step to lose. They've hidden me in right field. One summer, when I was 16, I played on a baseball team with ten players. It was awfully lonely in the dugout while everybody else was out in the field. I don't think we won a game all summer. It's a little hard to accept that you are the worst player on the worst team in the league.

After two knee surgeries, my wife, Julie, plays intermittently. She was the only family member who could run well, and now it is painful for her, and for me, when she runs at all. My two brothers play shortstop and left field. One of my sisters-in-law plays second base. She is the best hitter on the team, but four pregnancies have robbed her of her speed. She has an unorthodox fielding style, stopping all ground balls with her shins, and then throwing the runner out. My youngest brother recently married, and his wife now plays catcher after Mom starts having chest pains. The third generation rides the bench, although a couple of them are excellent athletes. But as long as I'm paying for their Nikes and car insurance, I'm starting.

My family fields this team in two coed softball tournaments every summer, and if it isn't clear by now, we aren't very good. Coed softball is slow-pitch, played with five men and five women per team. The men and women must alternate in the batting order, and if a man walks, the woman following him in the batting order also walks. Two walks thus result in a run scored and the bases loaded, so your pitcher must have good control. This fact has caused some family difficulties. Dad was our first pitcher,

I DON'T THINK WE WON A  
GAME ALL SUMMER.

IT'S A LITTLE HARD TO ACCEPT  
THAT YOU ARE THE WORST  
PLAYER ON THE WORST TEAM  
IN THE LEAGUE.

and he had a little trouble with his control. In fact, we lost our first several games by an average margin of 20 runs. It's tough to put your father on the waiver wire, so I let my brother do it.

But we have a wonderful time. It's easy to forget, when you read about player strikes and Dennis Rodman's latest antics, that sport is supposed to be fun. That has been particularly hard to remember here in northwest Missouri, where most of our sports news comes out of Nebraska. (Question: When you see two Nebraska football players riding in the back seat of a car, who is driving? Answer: the sheriff.) But sport as practiced by our family is simply for fun. Though we try very hard, the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat are both rather muted.

We are no strangers to a more physical kind of agony, however. Team members have had two pulled hamstrings, two broken bones, cartilage tears, and more sore muscles and strawberries from sliding than you can count. It is a truly sublime sight to see a 250-pound farmer attempting to slide into second base. On one 105-degree July day, a sister of one of our players collapsed from heat exhaustion and was rushed to the hospital.

Tournaments sometimes last until well past midnight. By the fifth or sixth game of the day, muscles are stiffening and the will to win is burning less

brightly. By the seventh or eighth game, the second loss in a double-elimination tournament is akin to the end of the First World War. We don't really care who won. We're just glad it's over.

All my aches and pains have healed, but I still remember the catch I made seven years ago on a deep fly ball hit to right field. This selective memory is endemic to all who participate in sports, and no doubt explains why professional players hang around long after they should leave. All of us have forgotten how bad we look in short pants, and we are quick to overlook the plays we can no longer make. Instead, we are making plans for next year's tournament. One of us is on the 270-day disabled list due to pregnancy. Our pitcher has signed a free-agent contract with a bank in another town and will have to be replaced. But we're optimistic about our chances. In fact, this year we may even practice.

*Blake Hurst is a regular contributor to The American Enterprise.*

### BACK FROM THE BRINK

By Daniel Zanoza

I never thought I'd hear the words heroin and chic mentioned in the same sentence. But lately the two have been paired, in movies and other pop culture. This shakes me to my very soul, as I recall the private hell that heroin brought to my life for over 20 years.

A single decision can determine one's life path. My seminal moment came on my nineteenth birthday. A friend stopped by to help me celebrate. At the time, I'd been experimenting with all kinds of illicit drugs. Marijuana had been the first. Soon the world was a veritable candy store: alcohol, uppers, downers, psychedelics—there was a pharmaceuti-

cal cocktail for every mood. Combine this with the invincibility of youth, and life became one long party. Or so it seemed. My true goal was self-anesthetization from the pains of life.

On my nineteenth birthday, however, I crossed a further threshold. For the first time, I tried heroin, and the drug became my life partner for the next two decades.

At first, there were no meetings in dark alleys or dingy bars. Drug use was easy and attractive. Heroin was just another adventure. A negative experience might have been the best thing to happen on that nineteenth birthday, but that wasn't the case. I felt right at home in the sedated euphoria caused by the drug.

The insidious danger of heroin is that in early use, you're in control. You feel you can take it or leave it; therefore, quitting holds no urgency.

Year after year passed. I went to school and became a social worker. It was all right; I just needed to use responsibly. Can you believe that? A responsible heroin addict.

By age 30, the addiction was a way of life. The pain was great; an all-consuming dull throb of hopelessness and dependence that possessed my life. Greeting the day was a chore of the greatest magnitude. Sometimes I would sleep until 5:00 P.M. because the light was too revealing. I was a creature of the night, a vampire sucking family and friends for all they were worth.

No, I didn't commit any armed robberies or burglaries, but rarely did a gift or any item of value last for long. Sold or returned for cash. After all, what was really important?

Heroin was my god. It came before parents and friends. It came before a job. It came before food and shelter. Often, it came before life itself.

Most current and former drug addicts like

me will tell you that legalization of drugs is a terrible idea—and that includes marijuana. Marijuana was the first drug used by the vast majority of us, and recent research has shown it works on the brain in precisely the same ways “harder” drugs like cocaine and heroin do. That's why scientists now describe marijuana as a natural “gateway” to stronger narcotics.

Decriminalization or legalization would only create greater access to drugs. With the explosion of teenage drug use during the last four years, the last thing America should be thinking about is making drugs more accessible. One of the strongest deterrents to using drugs today is simply the fact that they are illegal.

Unlike other unhealthy “temptations,” drugs actually exert a chemical power over their users. I've asked advocates of drug legalization, “What do we do with people who have been up for three days on a cocaine bender?” There is a psychosis that grips such a person, and their binge ends only when they run out

of funds, or consciousness. Some dastardly crimes are committed by people under the influence of drugs. What do we do with such people if there is legalization? Give them a ticket and send them down the road to kill my family or yours? Or create a one-stop dispensary where an abuser can obtain the drug until his heart seizes?

In my own case, even a new faith wasn't enough to break the drug stranglehold at first. I expected a miraculous deliverance. God would do all the work; I would just sit back and wait. But that deliverance never came. It wasn't that easy: recovery takes strenuous effort. A substance abuser, I learned, must make a habit out of being sober.

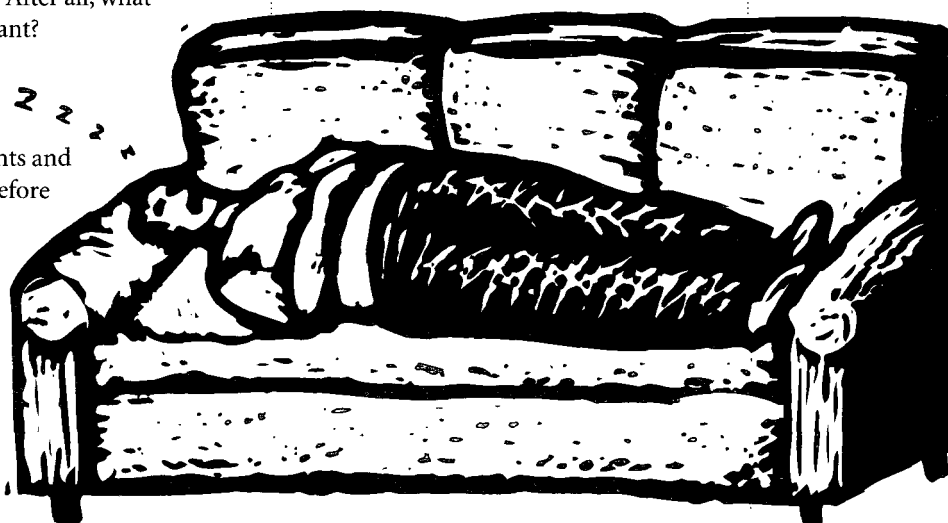
Eventually, with the help of God and the support of others, I was ready for that commitment—after decades of misery. I've been almost five years in recovery now, living life again. The appreciation of a beautiful sunset has returned, along with my gratefulness for true love and friendship. Silly things make me laugh and sad movies make me cry. The simple pleasures of household chores are no longer unimaginable burdens but welcome responsibilities.

Some of my human relationships were irreparably harmed, but those who cared about me most now care again. I asked for their forgiveness, and they've welcomed back the old me that was lost and nearly forgotten. I have a wife and family who never left my side. I have an emerging new journalism career, and I'm active in public service. I'll never be a lit-

erary giant, or president, but I'm looking forward to the future. With God's help, I will be the best friend, husband, and person I can be.

And for me, that's quite an accomplishment.

*Daniel Zanoza lives in Illinois.*



GREETING THE DAY  
WAS A CHORE OF  
THE GREATEST MAGNITUDE.  
SOMETIMES I WOULD SLEEP  
UNTIL 5:00 P.M. BECAUSE THE  
LIGHT WAS TOO REVEALING.