

### 34. Fall Classic

October in New England is an ideal month for outdoors, cool enough not to overheat, warm enough to avoid frostbite. October offers chances to ride along roads with trees overlaid with leaves so as to obscure where road leads among colors deep and intense, reds through yellows fringing what's yet in green, as if entering a psychedelic tunnel where the mundane ends entirely a few feet into its breach, enticing you to enter and not disappointing. After October rides, there are a variety of sports broadcasts to delight and distract while you nurse on rehydration.

Fans like sports because they're aired live, happen in here-now, and seem genuinely unpredictable; anything can happen. All sports programming exploits your fear of foreigners, pits local boys against invaders from a few counties away. Unlike tired plotlines rehashed from Greco-Roman theater, game outcomes are more like life, undefined, not always going to the best prepared, shrewdest, but sometimes the luckiest. Made any notion they could be preordained, fixed by bookies or presidents, all the more unpalatable. Gladiators lived short, sweet lives full of privilege and plunged headlong into death without regrets. Their contests proselytized sacrifices for their state made by soldiers fighting pointless wars, an idiom still in force, the National Football League. Religious fanatics revile pornography yet roister national jingoism in automotive advertising that underwrites football games. Gridiron action is a metaphor for roadnet traffic. Where's the patriotism of buying from a global carmaker? This hypocrisy is the true porno. "Advertising causes me/ therapy," screamed System of a Down.

Today's Major League Baseball was better, in his mind, than fighting for oil or pavement. Nobody died; few were injured more than bad bruises or infrequent sprains. It ended whenever it ended outside of merciless, rigid, sudden death. Each season was a classic conflict where only one team emerged victorious after thousands of games, twice as many as necessary versus all other sports presented. Could've finished writing book sooner had Al not spent so much time watching these time-killers. One could superimpose over any game a life of promise upon start, enthusiasm in early going, fortunate turns, nail-biting worries, and, in the end, sweet success or, way more often, wretched dejection. Or is anything ever a failure?

## Rounding the Horn

*1st Inning*

Should I repent all those misspent hours, days, years,  
 as a boy then man, dreaming, hoping, distracted to tears  
 in the land of the free, home of the brave, by what we all know is  
 a lost cause,

those bums in Boston, that Red Sox team?  
 A Fenway guest in third-class bleachers, creeping  
 up an asphalt ramp, stubs in fist, I pause,  
 to gaze upon a weathered battered gleam  
 of green facade behind the screen,  
 each time like first approaching  
 New Hampshire's Presidential Range,  
 way up there in northern fandom,  
 magnificent expanses, earth, life, air, a gloomy gray  
 glowering presence floating high above a sea of fecund green,  
 a holy epiphany of time and space and change.  
 For sports, Fenway is a sacred place, chosen at random  
 to be the last of first franchise venues, magnet for  
 each vengeful ghost.

But as a place to sell tickets, it doesn't suffice,  
 claim those who value profit over glory. Even if it IS the host  
 of unheard million's frenzied prayers,  
 devotions despite doubts and despairs.  
 Better than even Ebbetts or Wrigley,  
 it's THE absolute altar to forsaken sacrifice.  
 We fill the stands as shadows gather, twilight,  
 not life, not death, in between, that's when they usually  
 start these games which proceed well into the night.

*2nd Inning*

Pulsing CITGO sign frowns over Kenmore Square,  
 over there somewhere, gateway to this pile of bricks  
 "which murmur mighty exaltations," you swear:  
 Quintessential pitcher Cy Young, his favorite catcher Criger,  
 300th win of Lefty Grove, Jimmie Foxx, and Splendid Splinter  
 —brightest among all batters, yet unmatched at .406,  
 even better, back from crash and flame, swat an unofficial .407—  
 another RBI king, who quit for fear of flying, Jensen,

Mambo, Evans, Lonborg, Yaz, clutch hitter Fisk, Malzone,  
Gold Dust Twins Rice and Lynn, Tiant, Pesky's Pole,  
Conigliaro's painful Corner, the deep center hole  
where homers go to die, and 37 foot Green Monster alone,  
taunt to ancient dead ball hitters, hand cranked scores,  
arbitrary caroms that fool left fielders, favor extra bases,  
expanse of living carpet once rolled out for many all-star aces  
and hall-of-famers of every creed, stripe and era,  
to name a few, burned and banned Charlie Hustle,  
Reggie Jackson, Bucky Dent, Bob Gibson,  
Jolting Joe (famous, late, not our) DiMaggio,  
Hammering Hank Aaron,  
Mookie Wilson, Iron Man Gehrig, Mighty Mickey Mantle,  
Kirby Puckett, and aphorism spouting Yogi Berra,  
built hit by play. They call it a pleasant hideaway  
where grown-ups from a bygone day  
spent some bemused and truant time away  
from their Puritanical or Philistine chores.  
So say the confused. There's the fabled Dunn's Babe Curse,  
unique in sports. Who from beyond dares  
thwart us, we who worshipped him and wept? Where's  
the satisfaction in it for him? Why frustrate us? Worse,  
his forewarned damnation somehow stuck...  
after all, finagling a World Championship win  
is so cruelly difficult and a grounder's spin  
so wildly erratic, it must all be curse or fate or luck.

*3rd Inning*

All the hype, yeah, rookies, we bought in.  
We witnessed too much that's strange,  
the supernatural became to us as real.  
Anything can happen and did and will.  
The torture's pure, pain exquisite, Promethean, perpetual.  
In '86 we asked ourselves, "Weren't these the same Mets  
we thought buffoons? So what's the big deal?"  
Never hang your hopes on a pitcher's arm.  
"Hit the ball and run!" Pete would say. "Offense gets  
early runs in, pressures the infield, does the harm."  
Forlorn, Rocket dominates yet loses,  
his ERA less than 3.0 and STILL denied postseason wins.  
Where was his run support inning by inning?  
He always pitched opposite the best,

while flaccid bats wasted his blistering defense.  
 Mac, fretting, succumbs to worry, chooses  
 suspiciously ex-Met Schiraldi's feeble mid-80's  
 over Roger's mid-90's fast balls. The next pitch ties the game.  
 Bang, zoom, Norton, over the fence!  
 What's he doing it for, ladies?  
 Why save Clemens roughed up finger, for next Spring?  
 Give him a Band-aid. Then Stanley's wild pitch and Buckner's lame  
 ankles kill the season by forcing a fatal seventh contest.

*4th Inning*

Red flops. Disgusted, can bear it no longer.  
 No chance for those forbidden World Series rings.  
 Watching instead prospects down at McCoy.  
 In one night's game Mo went deep with 4 impressive dings,  
 one 'cross the street. Man, it got small in a hurry;  
 had anybody bothered to pace it off, went over 500 feet.  
 That ain't luck. It flew out from dusty days, the quiet joy  
 of a boy practicing daily, getting stronger  
 through sweaty summers, from spring's first blaze 'til  
 from sandlot ball to standing tall, a man defiantly  
 all begun long before with dad and son playing catch after dinner.  
 Unassisted Garciparra turns a triple play, a treat  
 for eye and mind. Often a spirited toss 'round the horn,  
 fiddles around because he's superstitious,  
 shares a hot potato with infielders. "Keep 'em  
 sharp," coached pop, "break the nervous  
 tension, bring out what it takes to be a major leaguer."  
 Back a decade, interesting catcher Gedman  
 rang up would-be stealers who'd jump too late,  
 erased 'em, even if nerves were shattered.  
 Southpaw Hurst hurling heat, doomed to drop  
 the crucial seventh, made us fans wish we were never born.  
 Compare his knee-high burner to a Stanley  
 50 mph palm ball right there on National TV.  
 The game's true purpose can only be to contrive such  
 It's bizarre, weird, unearthly, fatalistic. Turn the page,  
 watch Nomar run at safe hit record. Follow Flash's save string.  
 Personal bests always seem to set the stage  
 for a pennant race we might find exciting.

End well, go to Cleveland, lose two, then top  
 30 records coming back to take the division.  
 Earn the chance of a lifetime, to meet in post season  
 and beat the reaper, Yankees, a possible vindication,  
 Lazarus arisen, as if from dead. Our jaws hung in expectation.  
 Without that final win, wonder if heroics mattered.

*5th Inning*

Long-gone row of windowed storefronts on Lansdowne Street  
 off Yawkey Way is, a half-century later, concrete,  
 an unbreakable multi-deck parking garage.  
 Who paid back then for all those smashed panes?  
 Late afternoon the monster's back looms large  
 and while we walk along it harmlessly rains  
 baseballs, clearing the screen and bounding around.  
 No doubt about it, Vaughn at batting practice.  
 Remember how, perched high above,  
 so long ago, saw his eminence Mantle and Roger Maris,  
 whose 61st homer came off a Red Sox pitch, pound  
 out bullets clearing far rooftops. My brothers, denizens of  
 Providence, from the edge, you know, of Yankee territory,  
 backed the winner, easily switch-hit their team loyalty.  
 Can't forgive cruel taunts, empty feeling, an inconsequential loss  
 too personnel and ill timed. "Fenway, bulldoze it down,"  
 I lamented, "Exorcise my teenage demons for me.  
 End this stinking, expletive deleted, doublecross."  
 Be careful what you wish. Today, everyone seems to agree,  
 to my horror, when all you really need do is bridge the street,  
 add a few seats, do a minor refurbish, preserve what's there.  
 Wrath befall all who'd put down a fine old dame in her eighties!  
 And what of us after we've outlived our fashionable utilities?  
 Greed's unchecked, so mankind suffers diminished  
 expectations. Forgive failures, soon quality of life is finished.  
 Inexorably they'll lay low this last important, unique, bit  
 of baseball fetish, sell its funky rags by pieces.

When they complete

this thoughtless, irreverent, dreadful mission,  
 let's truck its debris west, 'cross the Pike to Cooperstown,  
 and bury game's phony upstate shrine with it.  
 Because that's really as much as anybody seems to care  
 for honest memories, pride of place, and unpackaged tradition.  
 Why play baseball,  
 a silly game, at all?

*6th Inning*

Roll back to where it all began for me, 1963, who sat  
in un-conditioned shady August air  
in front of the Portuguese Club, by a picket fence  
sneaking a sip of neighborly Narragansett beer.  
Inside, behind pool tables, disembodied, Curt Gowdy bleats  
the play-by-play through crackly static. Why do tribal beats  
fade in from back along that dark highway hence  
I first squeezed hide and slapped old oiled leather  
behind a dusty homemade plate? It's as if Kerouac,  
alive for excellence alone, were back,  
in my lineup along with Williams' final home-run at-bat.  
What a fool. Can't revisit such personal connections  
but by rhymes and baseball's broken cadence  
which lulls you senseless between sudden decisive actions,  
where an instant drags on beyond scientific measure.  
Radio exploded our fevered imagining,  
who were so smugly secure in America's Potential,  
we learned to see the events inside our brain  
long before early autumn found us huddling  
round our oval Olympic, glued to some rare  
televised day game. It seemed all somehow essential,  
patriotic. It kept us out of dear Mom's hair  
while she baked her apple pies. Going, going, gone,  
another icon. At least we knew the park defied  
restless ephemerality where our comfort's otherwise denied.  
That extra season game we fought in vain,  
wrestling, like Laocoon & Sons, our nemesis,  
the Bronx Bombers, media giant money spawn,  
the best fangs influence can buy, spoiled brats  
of the world's worst and most despicable fat-cats.  
How did we actually, as we seem to do, get this  
close yet manage to flunk? A mythic tragedy,  
a Titanic sunk, which happened on the very day  
they opened this park out back by the Fenway.  
It's all related. Oh, the humanity.

*7th Inning*

Sight of Zimmer, Buddha 'midst dugout shadows, despised  
like Benedict Arnold, which, I guess, means  
more 'round here than anywhere else it seems.

Like Clemens and slap-hit Boggs, now winners yet comprised.  
 Traded their whites for pinstripes, all filthy mercenaries  
 seeking higher pay for outstanding play. Why NOT send  
 them all away if but a “graveyard” they perceive?  
 Boston’s a well trod road to Broadway sinning.  
 Once Knicks, took no ingenuity to steal a New England name.  
 Boston on the Hudson’s another of their tricks, snatching our  
 last spark of fame.

Scenes flare back dissembled. Too many stats, facts, accuracies  
 to recall with precision when you’re not winning.  
 Adding insult, league owners insist that everyone acts  
 as if games were some kind of intellectual property  
 they own, not public domain. We bought tickets, paid the tax  
 that built these parks, and somehow have grown to accept  
 this monopoly.

Those who tune in, the community, press, hawkers of ice cream,  
 this extended family, are all just as much a part of this team.  
 You can accept it better when you’re the one whom you deceive.  
 Wondering what Martin would do after being fired,  
 then wondering how many more times he’d get rehired.  
 Wishing such confusion would continue  
 until somehow we slid home over the plate,  
 safe, at October’s pearly gate,  
 praying, yelling boisterously,  
 or, of we willed it, marveling silently,  
 “It wasn’t impossible. Yes! We could do it, too.”  
 Hang for ourselves a second championship flag to end  
 the longest baseball dry spell ever.  
 Dream that! What a trip! Reconciled to the idea of never.

### *8th Inning*

Baseball’s a place, a space, a fortress, a castle keep,  
 our home squad, protectors against invasion  
 from foreign foes, a vast unknown to which everyone can relate.  
 It’s xenophobic ingrained instincts, a dusky, deep,  
 surreal vision, apocalypse in a pastoral landscape, a regression  
 to primitive hunter/gatherers on and off the field,  
 where dangers lurk, where small sounds, adrenaline magnified,  
 matter,  
 where footprints in the dirt, like truths, are feared and smoothed.  
 Strangers come and go, one survives, another dies.  
 Runs, wins, losses, stranded, errors, outs: Numbers honor  
 each event, placed as they happen, indelibly engraved,

entombed, for whomever cares. Numbers rule, they say,  
and those whom the numbers name you can't forget,  
carved in stone.

But in these numbers is truth revealed?  
When you lose, nobody knows you. We expect  
such solitary fear, force ourselves to face the horror,  
just to witness what might happen along the way:  
a graceful swept tag, leaping stab, shoestring scoop, snowcone,  
slide, slam, hit the cycle, flyer, riser, line, pop, pull, slice, hook, flies,  
upper deck ricochet, clutch hit, foul tip, furtive signs, ball dug out,  
mask masher, broken bat, suicide squeeze, announcer color,  
because intangibles like imaginative patter  
decodes the meaning, give us incentive to attend.  
Catch a blooper, Texas or Rhode Island leaguer, spectator  
stupid stunt, K's on a wall, dragged bunt, call to the bull pen,  
varied delivery, screw, cutter, brush back, jammer, slider,  
Oilcan downward curve, floating Wake knuckler, 2-finger splitter,  
mystifying Martinez fly change cross seam grip,  
wily Eckersley sidearm submariner flip,  
painted corners, climbing the ladder, high heat, music to the chin,  
thank you very much, well mixed count, bad call, phantom put out,  
umpire errors, morphing strike zone that maddeningly grows  
and shrinks from poster to legal pad size,  
a flimflam any schoolkid can easily recognize.  
That's *baseball*, alpha to omega burnt into your brain.

### *9th Inning*

In '99 we urged along our beloved bumblers  
through a series 5 then gone. The year's done; we're numb,  
our best for naught, though valiant to the end.  
Suits assume they'll get their new stadium.  
Vacant stares. I vow never to watch again.  
Instead, I'll tell whoever might care to listen  
how small, but fully alive, capacity crowds are far better  
than a few souls you can hardly keep awake.  
And, while we fought and died and were again forgotten,  
our goal wasn't just to win but TRY, like all true heroes,  
against insurmountable odds and tyrants, and take  
into the frozen aftermath another shameless victory.  
We chose to fight right to the ragged edge of our ability,  
give it our all—battered, bloodied from the chase,  
honorably undone, paid the price, took the hit, stood our place—  
not yawn at some ho-hum superfluous low-risk win,

but respect the heights you'll never go with your  
humdrum numbers.  
 Winners, losers, us. Isn't it ever so? Why bother to explain?  
 Grass grows. Boys play catch. It's only a game, at best  
 a slow assemblage of pitches and plays. What did you miss?  
 Perhaps you'll eat some nuts, enjoy a beer and cheer  
 for those focused on whatever might happen, witness  
 phenoms strive for fame, rise above the rest,  
 before another ill-conceived trade scatters  
 all fleeting hope of next year's redemption.  
 Acknowledge the fact that time on commercial air  
 is bought and sold strictly as a fiscal gamble  
 and nothing else but corporate profit truly matters.  
 See youngsters command outrageous wages, capture  
 not only fame but international financial attention,  
 make much more than those who probably serve  
 some noble task, quietly save lives, fight wars, preserve  
 the commonwealth, and more, accomplish everything  
 that's crucial to survival up and down the list  
 that makes this a world in which baseball can exist.  
 Forsake this futile puerile fixation. Forget the faithless furor  
 and frauds foisted on you. Figure out what fuels it all.  
 More than any field of dreams to which we might nonchalantly  
amble,  
 Fenway's where the dead yet live, harbingers like robins in Spring,  
 resurrected before that promised horn sounds the final rapture.  
 Parched from loss, unforgiven, we yearn for our  
fount of hope eternal...  
 but find it nevermore as Poe foresaw.

No team exemplified these obsessive intangibles more than  
 the 2004 Boston Red Sox. Down to their final out, faced with  
 elimination, they somehow evaded a deathblow by their chief  
 nemesis and feared rival, the New York Yankees. At the stroke of  
 midnight, he sensed a shift in the time-space continuum. Team's  
 least likely batter, last in order, somehow homered to send game  
 into extra innings. After 86 years of being denied, it was as if angels  
 swooped down out of nowhere and transfigured destiny irrevocably.  
 Is there a statute of limitation for curses? Can verses comparing  
 sports with death constitute a litany of devotion? Do prayers get  
 answered? This momentum shift was palpable. Bronx Bombers will  
 never let you forget that the way to Cooperstown is through New  
 York. Yet they had battled back to win from a 0-3 deficit in a best

of 7 series for the first time in League's history. Their comeback will live in legend for as long as baseball is played. They won 4 straight, each a fiercely fought, highly uncertain contest. Self confessed "happy idiots", they just played each game as if it were a series of 1, no, every strike as if it were their last. Idiots nothing, like Buddhists verging on Nirvana they were existing moment to moment. Tao founder Chang-Tzu intuited, "His thirst for survival in the future makes him incapable of living in the present." You can only win at anything by alert attention to matters at hand, by forsaking any dream of reward. Isn't such heightened participation in itself its own reward?

Red Sox went on to sweep Saint Louis Cardinals 4-0, 8 consecutive wins, for World Series title and a string of superlatives for all time and record books. It wasn't pretty, games loaded with errors, but whatever had to happen for Red Sox Nation and their own sake did. For him it meant personal vindication for being a Sox fan amidst Yankees, braving 40 years of jeers and taunts, and coming up short. No longer athletic, not even good at bicycling, once he could play baseball well—batted and caught superbly, never struck out in college—but who cared about organized sports during turmoil of the '60's? Had he missed his calling since he still cared so much about this bucolic game? At least bicycling can be a non-competitive way to participate in sports without *beating* someone. Not so organized sports, where teammates' expectations hold sway. Bicycling is solitary, either do or don't, your personal choice to try whenever you like. Prefontaine once said, "You run not to see who's best, but to see who has the most guts." A superior athlete needs superior determination to win. You only *beat* yourself, no matter what competition you enter. Racing alongside others is irrelevant.

Later they thanked Almighty Lord and each other, even losers. After all, nobody lost anything. They all collectively afforded World an inspirational spectacle that won't soon be forgotten and collected nice paychecks. Whether God cared or intervened was unlikely. Praying for game outcomes seemed sacrilegious, "Oh Lord, destroy my enemies, tumble down Jerico's walls," as if those in Jerico aren't praying for just the opposite. But this spectacle did reek of otherworldly influence. Gratitude and humility are refreshing in times of social injustice. Commercial aspects were quickly exploited. After all, teams buy any chance for wins by paying big salaries, so, in a market economy, the only losers are fans, who grow poorer for all their faithful support through higher ticket prices under threats of network blackouts. Thankfully, they still broadcast

most games, about as close as he'd ever get to a major league play-off experience.

He and his buddies, the Pope Boys, decided to celebrate this remarkable victory by riding from minor team's park to sacred shrine of major's. This near century in November was made all the more tiresome by partisan bickering. The only reason he routed, mapped and arrowed this long and arduous trip into Boston was because his buddies asked him. If people approached him with a ride idea, he worked with them. This is what a club should be about, helping each other, making friends, pleasant interaction. "But, nooooo," he ranted as if Belushi steering off a verbal precipice into madness. Finks demanded all credit for anything *club*, couldn't bear to share a bit lest they lose their puny grip on power. Could accuse Fink's henchman Brock of bad timing, holding a competing ride on same day, too asinine to think up some other way to celebrate, but it was more than that, malicious, splinter mentality undermining club camaraderie. He couldn't have it both ways, though. Riding in a big group meant more trouble than it was worth. He didn't much enjoy their company anyway. Offer, then consider yourself lucky when nobody accepts.

On a blustery, frigid morning, both rides only drew a few takers anyway. Brock's ride wasn't arrowed or mapped, so, if you didn't keep up, you'd be hung out to dry. His was more flexible. He did offer shorter loops that didn't go full distance; several riders who started later said they enjoyed them and were grateful for the arrows and map. "That's what they're for," said he, glad to oblige. Full ride wasn't at all what they'd expected; included roads club had never used, which made it all the more interesting. Theme rides were like theme parks; can be overwhelming, and you either avoid or enjoy them.

For the Real McCoy-Fenway tour, five with game had an epic ride, 93 miles, all the way, no bailouts, hotel rooms, or T rides, just pure road-eo. His posse of four convened at 8:00 AM, snapped chilly threesome shots next to Pawtucket Red Sox's mascot bear, Paws, a triple life-size carved wood sculpture, then were joined as planned en route by one companion in Foxboro. Having intercepted route from its arrows, waited patiently, since Mr. Swift had a puncture flat a half-hour in. This unscheduled delay didn't affect their 11:30 AM ETA at Fenway. The short 3.0 hour inbound roll-time at 15.3 mph, excluding repair and a rest break was aided by tailwinds and well-scouted terrain, with just a couple hills in Walpole then Brookline.

Approaching Boston was exciting, full of interesting sights: college greens, colonial reminders, emerald necklace, famous parks, glimpse of Gillette Stadium, green patina statues, little league games, narrow tree-lined lanes, plaque houses—oldest, 1710—among many colonial town commons, river views, segments of bike path, shimmering ponds, and a twisty roller coast through oak lined streets into Back Bay. Traffic was mostly light, thanks to advice from a real randonneur. Picking club bike routes was usually a bad long distance strategy, as designers dote on an overabundance of gradient dares. Worse sections were feeder roads to beltway in- and out-bound. There were only 5 miles or so you'd call urban, wide boulevards replete with construction jackhammers, emergency vehicles sirens, and gridlock easily passed by bike. Mr. Swift went ahead just before Break 1 with a plan to visit his alma mater.

Group spent nearly an hour, Break 2, poking about Fenway Park, oldest surviving venue for major league baseball, opened the same day in 1912 as the Titanic Disaster. They saw the Citgo sign, giant coke bottles, MVP billboard behind left field, souvenir shops, surrounding nightclubs. Gazed in from Lansdowne Street through the center field breachway at dump trucks and piles of dirt. Unexpectedly, the field was under major drainage renovation. Never imagined they could drive such big vehicles in there. Heard rumors they might add some seats above Greenie and behind Pesky's Pole; could it be possible? Passersby offered to snap shots of them with Ted Williams statue, which is situated suitably outside of right field. New stadiums are located in outskirts, have more convenient parking facilities, and seem more inviting than a mill ruin. Munich's new stadium—venue for 2006's World Cup finals—is an airy quilt that blends into horizon except during events, where it lights up red, blue or white depending upon which team is playing. Yet being within walking distance from home for 500,000 fans for almost a century gives Fenway Park a unique familiarity.

Route back traced totally different roads. Traipsed easily on bike path alongside Jamaica Pond and Riverway. Fallen leaves weren't a problem, but they did dodge many twigs broken during high November winds, which caused a chain drop quickly remedied. Foliage was past peak but still pleasant in spots, bronze oaks and sheltered maples holding out. They left Boston on a nice long glide through a wooded preserve. At end of Break 3 in Readville, mile 56, saw pass other contingent, who appeared somewhat stunned, pedaling like mad to stick to their cruel guide lest they become lost without arrows. Having taken his route in reverse, they had to climb through there instead of coast.

Probably shocked to see his group well out of Boston already on return leg, they all but ignored hails. Just afterwards Mr. Swift satirically rejoined his far more flexible group for a bit.

Dedham then Canton presented strong headwinds and tiresome climbs. Aerodynamic and lightweight, Swift forged ahead to finish 45 minutes earlier than them. road flattened agreeably in Easton, where fifth member turned off for home. Luckily, rural tree-lined roads dampened winds, which eventually abated. Even passed a cranberry bog on a ride that had it all. A carefully picked 82-mile rest stop in Barrowsville was well timed, all three nearly ready for a grave, with wide wooden stairs in full sun to lounge on for a long spell on a cool day, soak up warmth like lizards, take off balaclava, glasses, gloves and helmet, toss down salty snacks, and try to rehydrate. It was so peaceful and still, he almost wanted to dally forever, lapse into eternity, but not yet.

Last 20 miles were almost flat, just what you want on an extended late Fall tour. Estimated total climbing was 3,500 feet, no climb over 150, all grades <10%. Bonked and rolled into Slater Park to a glorious sunset, passed 1 of nation's oldest houses—1636—then was greeted at McCoy by a welcoming committee, sweet salve for weary limbs. Even in Winter garb, route rated among his easier near centuries, plenty of rest stops.

Rounding 4 quarters by bike reminds you that life consists of short pocket trips carefully worked out: a clash at first, a dash second, steal third if you can, then a tired trot home. Neapolitan pizza capped a fantastic experience, at once fulfilling and revealing. If you can ride into Boston without incident on a good plan, what's to stop you riding roundtrip anywhere? This is especially true with enthusiastic friends who make riding a joy. After all, isn't a club to bring people together? Wouldn't have tried without amiable companions whose idea this was. Fittingly, he always offered to accompany people on risky routes, and here he was, recipient for a change. This outing was a small shadow of what Red Sox themselves must have felt, World Champions by merit of persistent teamwork and will to go all the way.

He used to be fearful of Boston. There is blight, but his route skirted all that. Rode bikes in and out, without locked car doors, and not a bit scary. He used to fear truly expressing himself, too. Can't worry about what mom, powerful adversaries, or strangers might think.

While scouting, a stray pitbull rushed him in a park near Blue Hill. Fortunately, a small stream separated them which gave him time to elude this villain. While riding, he did get rushed by a

irksome Corgie, but downshifted and ramped up cadence so it couldn't latch on. Owner was right behind calling, but he would've soccer kicked it back anyway Pele style with impunity, leash laws in effect. Anyone would get cranky when treated with disrespect 70 miles into a century. If only permitting him to pass by as if nonexistent, it would be enough. Muzzle those mutts or pay the price.

By way of an epilogue, when Sox prevailed yet again, nobody showed interest in repeating his victory bike tour. Any thrill of vicarious participation had worn off. Been there; done that. Once you reach such a peak, you seek something greater, perhaps beyond your abilities to attain: Coastal Maine, Great River Ride, iron-butt multiday tours, RAGBRAI, Viking Highway. Another late season century over the same ground seemed like a silly time waster. He was disappointed enough never to ask former friends to join him again. "He struck out," echoed a friendly announcer from deepest recesses of his earliest childhood memories. Did that mean an end or start of something new? With mankind's unlimited challenges, it's a wake up call.

Lucky for club owners, there are new generations of suckers to attract to \$125 Green Monster seats from which you can hardly see players but get a better chance at a souvenir ball (you can buy for \$10 at team store), so a tradition continues.

