

HUMOR

A league of our own

Gay athletes are on the ball

When I was in the third grade my parents decided I should play Little League, which only fueled my suspicion that they really hated me. Already a drama queen, I informed them grandly that I would deign to play any position—except batter.

What did I know? When I got an invitation to another boy's birthday party that said "Bring a glove" I thought it meant for gardening.

I was always the boy picked last for teams in gym, often after several girls and, one time, after a kid in a full body cast. I threw a ball like I was a duchess putting her hand out to be kissed and ran kicking my legs behind me like I was Angie Dickinson on *Police Woman*. Accurately assessing my abilities, the coach assigned me to the position that best described my participation in the game: Left Out.

I might as well have been playing in the parking lot, and was I ever thankful for it. I spent most of my time in the outfield singing show tunes and praying that some 9-year-old didn't suddenly summon the strength to wallop the ball my way.

I can still hear the groans when the coach would announce, "Acito, you're up at bat." (And that was from the parents.) Not only did the infield move way in, but the outfield took it as an opportunity to sit and rest awhile.

To avoid striking out every time, I would deliberately get hit by the ball so I could walk to first base. It's true—my lone athletic skill consisted of getting beamed by a baseball.

So, ever since, I've assiduously avoided anything to do with the national pastime until last month, when 2,500 gay and lesbian softball players arrived in Portland for their 26th annual World Series. It was a weeklong event that, in addition to the games, included a bachelor auction and a best buns contest. Since I'm also a music theater queen, I opted to attend the talent show at the Hilton, where the players were staying.

Proving the gods indeed have a sense of humor, the show coincided with a Republican fund-raising dinner featuring none other than the president himself. Couples who paid \$25,000 to have their picture taken with Dubya got even more for their money when some of the players from Manhattan made a point of sucking face in the lobby.

But that was nothing compared to the protest outside. More than 1,500 Portlanders showed up to chant, "Not my president, not my war," including a woman with a sign that read, "Lesbians Unite Against Dick—Lick Bush." Pretty Boy Floyd and I had to wander four blocks out of

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARC

by Marc Acito



our way to get into the hotel, but we just followed the crowds of tough-looking women and well-groomed men through the barricades.

The mood at the talent show was cheerfully subversive. "Are the Bush twins here?" the hostess in drag shouted. "No? Good. Otherwise we'd run out of booze."

Some measures had to be taken to ensure the security of the leader of the free world, however. Rose City Softball Association vice president Tim Bias had to be moved from the Mount St. Helens Suite ("It's where the tops blow," he said) to another room.

To call the event a talent show was optimistic at best. Suffice it to say there's a reason why most jocks weren't in their high school musicals.

The best performance came from Debbie "Brownie" Brown of the Kansas City Wetherbee Sting, who took the stage with her team carrying what appeared to be tubes of caulk. ("Those lesbians, always ready to remodel," said Tim.) While Brownie proceeded to sing the paint off the walls, her team filled the room and, on cue, confetti shot out of the tubes, showering us all. The effect was magical.

To me, the term "lesbian softball player" is redundant, so the next day I went out to watch the guys instead. The effect here, too, was magical.

For starters, I took one look at all the muscular men in tight capri-length pants and realized what I've been missing all these years: There were some very hot men out there playing with their balls.

More importantly, in a world in which the baseball bat is the gay-basher's weapon of choice, seeing so many athletic fairies confidently take to the field went a long way toward healing my Little League trauma. You see, without even trying to be political, these guys redefine for us what it means to be a gay man. As far as I'm concerned, here was the real talent show.

And that, my friends, is *The Gospel According to Marc*. □

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