

## why can't legal education be like major league baseball?

This year's baseball season recently concluded with the Chicago White Sox winning the World Series for the first time in 88 years. A year ago, the Boston Red Sox won the World Series for the first time in 86 years. These were both impressive victories otherwise as well, for each of these two teams not merely swept its opponent in the World Series but won a record eight consecutive games to close out the playoffs.

From my perspective as a law school dean, I admit to looking upon the triumphs of these and other sports teams with a bit of professional envy. Like sports teams, law schools have seasons (we call them academic years). Yet when the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings come out each year, there is no chance that Marquette Law School will vault from its current place (around the middle of the 185-some law schools in the nation) to the undisputed national championship of legal education. How much better it would be, I am tempted to think, to manage an enterprise that, whatever its historical record, went into each year with the slate wiped clean, the same 0-0 record as its competitors, and the opportunity to go head-to-head with them. Why can't legal education be like major league baseball?

One answer, of course, lies in the unreality of sports. The even-playing-field or slate-wiped-clean aspect of each new sports season attracts us in part because it is so different from the rest of life. The law school that historically has been strong in some areas but not others brings to its new year almost all of the same personnel, the same financial resources, the same building as the previous year.

A more fundamental answer is that what we are doing here—or, more accurately, what Marquette lawyers do in their careers upon graduation—is far more important than the undertakings of major league baseball players, and the national rankings are not the measure of our success. The point is well captured in the observation of my predecessor, the late Robert F. Boden, L'52, who served as dean from 1965 to 1984:

*A lifetime spent in the service of law . . . is a public service in the front rank of public services, because justice remains*



*the great concern of humankind. . . . To participate in the quest for justice at any level and in any context is a privilege and an honor; to have devoted one's life to it is an uncommon and praiseworthy contribution to civilization. The lawyer, therefore, is at the forefront of establishing, for the age in which he or she . . . lives, the perfection in which organized society . . . will function. That comes very close to God's work on earth. . . .*

The success of Marquette Law School is measured, not dispositionally at the end of each year, as that of a sports team, but daily, incrementally, and usually imperceptibly in the individual undertakings of our graduates. No box score or final standings can reflect the individual client assisted in the pursuit of justice.

All of that said, there is one basic respect in which legal education resembles major league baseball. Just as a sports team requires contributions from all of its players to achieve greatness, so, too, does a law school require the participation of all of its stakeholders to advance toward greatness. Marquette University Law School is a great law school in a number of respects. To preserve these strengths and to shore up areas of relative weakness, we need the participation of all associated with the ambitious endeavor that is Marquette Law School today.

We increasingly receive it; examples abound. For instance, our alumni have become involved in helping us to attract students who possess the intellect, values, and diversity that suggest that they will make lasting contributions to the community; we do nothing more important than this at the Law School. As another example, last year I created a new faculty committee charged with ensuring that we bring to campus speakers from practice whose striking professional accomplishments our students should be exposed to—speakers, that is, with something important to teach from outside the academy. As a further example, this year we invited to the reception for entering students lawyers living in Wisconsin who graduated from the Law School three years ago, and we were gratified by the response. I myself have had the benefit of team-teaching two of my courses over the past year with extraordinary lawyers who volunteered their time. Space alone prohibits me from offering countless other examples.

There is one particular area in which every alumnus, every friend of the Law School and of the rule of law, can assist. If we are to fulfill our quest for greatness, we need to expand the number of those who make a financial contribution to the Law School. As I explain in my separately mailed annual-fund request, in many respects the percentage of alumni who contribute is as important as the amount of dollars donated. I hope that you will consider making a contribution. It is a contribution to the legal profession, to the rule of law, and to the community.

If the Chicago White Sox can win the World Series in part based on the home run of Scott Podsednik—a former Milwaukee Brewer who had hit no home runs during the regular season this year—is it so implausible to think that with assistance from more players on our roster Marquette Law School can also achieve great things?

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