

Old baseball memories become irreplaceable souvenirs

While Joe Carter's '93 Series-winning home run became my last, perhaps greatest thrill as a baseball fan — I have finally had enough of players and owners gutting the game of its timeless joy. My baseball memories dating all the way back to my childhood will always remain.

With the coming of October and the baseball playoffs next week, it's inevitable that some of those recollections will resurface. After all, the influence of a childhood centred around the fantasy of big league sport is always there. I can still recall the excitement I felt in Grade 1 when Jackie Robinson led the Brooklyn Dodgers to victory in the 1955 World Series. I may have been blind to the social significance of Robinson being the first player to cross big league baseball's colour barrier, but I was very much aware that this guy was my hero.

My passion for baseball would extend through my teens and even into my 20s. But unlike the Carter rocket shot heard all around the baseball world, not all my memories involve historic happenings. They're as likely to evoke fond recollections of ball diamond doings that had significance to me, while going unnoticed by others.

Take June of 1969. My girlfriend was expecting me to accompany her to her grandparents' cottage for the weekend. The thought of waterskiing and lying in the sun for a few days had definite appeal to a guy of 20. Problem was, my beloved Athletics, who had just recently moved from Kansas City to Oakland, were featured on TV that Saturday.

I had been following them since my early teens as they continually languished in the league cellar. Now they were showing signs of rewarding my patience. They had a young outfielder who was proving to be a home run threat. I wanted to watch my new hero on what might be the Athletics' only appearance on TV that season.



From Where I Live

Bruce Stapley

Young love being what it is, I managed to convince my girl to go to the cottage without me, telling her I would borrow my dad's car and drive up when the game was over. I sat down with my chips and pop and watched the game. I wasn't disappointed.

The first time the young pup came up, he set me to jumping with joy when he knocked one out of the park. It was the only run the As would get that day, but that didn't really matter. I got what I was hoping for, and happily spent the rest of the weekend with my future wife.

The Athletics fell short that season, and the next, before finishing first in '71. They won

the World Series three straight years beginning in '72, the culmination of my all-consuming fandom. One player, Reggie Jackson, helped lead the Athletics to those championships — "Mr. October," whose bat powered the Yankees to consecutive Series victories later that decade. Jackson hit upwards of 600 homers in

his career, but there is one I will never forget — the first one I saw hit him on TV, when I stayed home from a cottage. Just like Carter's historic blast, some things are destined to remain forever etched in the memories of a former baseball fan, determined to hold on to a few irreplaceable souvenirs.

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