

Jesus is my pitching coach

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [August 12, 1998](#) issue

Having retired from teaching, I find I have time on my hands. I had been thinking of resuming an interest in baseball, an interest abandoned after childhood. It is not a sport for people without time on their hands. It is especially not a sport for Chicagoans. I went to my last Sox game in 1959, and will return when they win their next pennant. I've attended Cubs games since then, to enjoy the greenery in Wrigley Field.

What's caught my attention lately is the infusion of Christians and Christian themes into the sport. As evidence I cite interviews with two players. Colorado Rockies pitcher Mike Muñoz told the *Denver Post* (May 4) that things were not going well on the field, and without his faith, he said, he knows he would "go out, get drunk, get hammered." Now he knows that "everything that happens to me is the best thing for me. Sometimes it's hard to believe that a 21.00 Earned Run Average is the best thing for me, but I have to remember the big picture. . . . It's easy to be a man with a 2.00 era." But Muñoz has to be a man with a 21.00 era, the kind that demands all the consolation Romans 8:28 can provide.

We Christians need models, and Muñoz found a good one in Mike Kingery, "a very outspoken Christian" who "played hard." "He was a great example of what it's like to be a Christian ballplayer. He never cussed, didn't knock things over, but he was a very aggressive player." Now for the supermodel behind Kingery and Muñoz: "I believe that if Jesus Christ was playing the game today, he'd go into second base very hard to break up the double play, he'd turn around and pick the shortstop up and say, 'Hey, I'm just going about my job.'"

I'll bet Jesus would have razor-sharpened his spikes and aimed for the shortstop's face while, with the joy that was set before him, he went about just doing his job.

Lesson two comes from Yankee pitcher Andy Pettitte, who in *World* magazine (June 13) defended himself and his team for their participation in a notable bench-clearing brawl. Orioles reliever Armando Benitez had intentionally hit a Yankee player on the neck. Jesus, who, we Christians know, built his ministry on "an eye for an eye, a

tooth for a tooth, a beanball for a beanball,” is also Pettitte’s model. “The Lord doesn’t want me to be a wimp, or to just say, ‘Go ahead and keep drilling us. We’re going to keep taking it.’ You have to take a stand sometimes.”

World asked Pettitte about the morality of his own beanball pitches--“Should a follower of Christ be pitching inside and administering a little chin music to batters?” “The Lord wants me to do my job on the mound to the best of my ability, . . . so I’m going to throw inside just as much as anybody else does,” Pettitte replied. “I’m not trying to hit anybody, but sometimes when you pitch inside you’re going to hit someone.”

I know how games are played, so I am ready for murderous violence. (I do watch football on TV.) But until now I feared that to transfer my impulses to baseball would make me the wimp that Pettitte and Jesus do not want to be. Pettitte says he prays only that he will “not do anything” to let his testimony for Jesus down. We’ve heard his testimony to Jesus, so some of us who had thought baseball was too gentle can find our interest quickened now that violent Jesus is backing the beanballers. Buy me some peanuts and Crackerjack . . .