

For those of you just tuning in

## **Why baseball is best on the radio**

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [April 12, 2017](#) issue



You can go to a baseball game and sit in the stands, and you can watch it on television, and you can now watch it on a small electric toy in your hand, or have

your toy chirp the game to you, but you can also still blessedly listen to baseball on the radio, which seems to me the most pleasant, apt, relaxed, and gracious way to savor a baseball game. I mean, it's great to be at a game, although the lower the league and the sparser the assembly the better, I think, but baseball on the radio can be a mysteriously joyful experience.

The quiet mutter of the announcer among the many slow moments of the game; the occasional wandering rambling anecdote that takes up a whole pitching change; the lovely plethora of tiny details on the batter ("from lovely Galt, Iowa, population 32!") and the pitcher ("once pitched two innings of relief for the Wichita Wingnuts with his other arm and only gave up one hit, and that a dribbler!") and the catcher ("spent two years as a logger in Kitimat, British Columbia, and recently donated bats for the entire Little League there!") and the home-plate umpire ("a renowned Hindu scholar in the off-season!") and the teams' long colorful pained entertaining histories.

The satisfying whap of a pitch landing in the catcher's mitt, a familiar sound, a sound you have heard since you were five years old, but here it is on the radio, as you drive along trying to discern between the foomp of a fastball and the thwick of a slider. The firm inarguable sound of the bat driving the ball somewhere, and the only way you can tell it's a homer is by the rising thunder of the crowd and the rising excitement in the announcer's voice; and bless the announcer who does not try for a signature call, a trademark, a hallmark, a catchphrase, but simply unadornedly shouts back back back gone!

The faraway rumble and thrum of the crowd like waterfall two bends downstream. The sometimes incisive remarks of the second announcer, often a former ballplayer who, if you are lucky, is the sort of quietly observant fellow who notes subtle fielding shifts before the pitch, and the exact length of a base runner's lead, and what pitch he stole on, and (if you are luckier than lucky) gently notes the scoring arithmetic, for those ancients among us who keep score, or kept score, and care about the alluring poem of something like 8-4-5-3, a very alert play by the third baseman. The insipid commercials, most of which you switch off hurriedly, but here and there one makes you grin at its wit or simplicity ("Thor's Toyota—we have cars!").

The warm silence the announcers let grow between themselves; they are comfortable with it, they know whose turn is next, they know not to tread on the other guy's territory and time. The way the lead announcer will be sure to mention the inning and the score and the dramatic plays that caused or influenced the score

every few minutes for those of you just tuning in. The phrase for those of you just tuning in, which seems so wonderfully polite to me, so courteous, so welcoming, so communally open, so uncommercial, so summery, so nakedly unassumingly human, so essentially American. There is no audience demographic in it, no market niche, no politics, no religion, no arrogance, no lecture or sermon or snark, just a friendly hey to the man or woman or boy or girl who just walked into the house of the broadcast.

There have been many days when I was wan and weary of conflict and shout, of sneer and snide, or cold and cruel, and I turn on the game, and the announcer says For those of you just tuning in, and I feel cleaner and taller and holier and happier about the deep generous character of my country, the wild bright dream of it, its cheerful refusal to acquiesce to those who would shut the door of the house.

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