

# Cubs fan sees red when it comes to Cardinals



Bo Schembechler, the legendary football coach at Michigan, had just died when I had the following exchange with a close friend who is an Illinois fan.

"Well," I said, "maybe now you can bury the hatchet with Michigan."

"Louie," he said, using my high school nickname, a signal to the gravity of his pronouncement, like your parents calling you by your first and middle name, "there's no possible scenario in which I will ever root for Michigan."

"You gotta let things go, man," I countered, a classic case of the pot calling the kettle black as you will soon learn. "I realize the history with Schembechler, but you tellin' me you're not going to root for Michigan if they're the Big Ten rep in the Rose Bowl?"

"I will never root for Michigan," he said, blood running hot, a man prepared to fight a war he cannot win, damn the consequences or logic, you know, like a far right or left member of Congress.

That exchange pops into my mind as the St. Louis Cardinals, yet again, compete for a spot in the postseason. Due to the crapshoot that is genetics and environmental influence, I am a Chicago Cubs fan. My grandmother, Alta Pemberton, her son and my father, Jim, are to blame. The tinged lineage traced to when Grandma was 8 and the Cubs won the World Series. That was in 1908, for those of

you unfamiliar with the Cubs sordid history. The woman lived to be 97, a span that included Kitty Hawk, the moon landing and space stations, but not another Series win.

A Cubs addict, she sought company in her misery by luring my father when he was a boy, then me, into the destructive disease cycle that is Cub fandom: Sky-high spring optimism, sweaty, dog days of summer doubt, soul-crushing fall defeat and winter "hot stove league" rumors about free agent signings or bright minor league prospects stoking the embers of hope for spring training, the cycle repeating.

The '69 collapse, the '84 2-0 lead against San Diego slipping past Leon Durham's Gatorade soaked glove, the 2003 National League Championship Series meltdown and the 2008 playoff sweep by the Los Angeles Dodgers are recent low points. The 2003 loss and many Cubs fans' harsh treatment of Steve Bartman has created, in my mind, a deservedly bad karma which may make the "Billy Goat" curse appear minor and prevent victory for another century. Theo Epstein should have a Steve Bartman Day as an apology and create a positive karma so at least the Cubs can lose based on their normal, real-world fashion of combining poor pitching with an accumulation of overpaid everyday players past their prime.

But I digress.

I lived in Dallas for seven years in the late 1980s and early '90s. I attended Texas Rangers games and adopted them as my American League team, a logical choice given

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my baseball pedigree. The Rangers were, in many respects, the Cubs of the American League, their teams filled with mediocre pitchers and not enough good day-to-day players to fill out a roster. They came to Texas in 1971 and did not win their first American League pennant until 2010. They won their second in 2011 and faced, guess who, the Cardinals in the World Series. Due to my past support of the Rangers and disdain for the Cardinals, I did not feel like a bandwagon jumper. However, I am primarily a Cubs and National League fan and so, per baseball tradition and the position I took with my Michigan bashing buddy, should have supported the Cardinals.

I could not.

Was it, like my friend's loathing of the "Maize and Blue," childish jealousy for their success?

Absolutely.

Was it due to their 18 pennants, 11 World Series titles, Cardinals fans witnessing championship teams

over the last century filled with players like Rogers Hornsby, Dizzy and Daffy Dean, the Gas House Gang, Stan Musial, Lou Brock, Bob Gibson, Steve Carlton, Ozzie Smith, Albert Pujols, coming to be known as the "Yankees of the National League" and their many victories over the Cubs?

You betcha.

Just as Michigan's numerous Big Ten championships, major bowl appearances and consistent thumping of the Illini over the decades grates my buddy, the Cardinals success sticks in my craw.

It would be nice if I could give you a logical, unemotional reason for my dislike. Great, if I could point to some dastardly deed or even a lighting rod owner like George Steinbrenner or tough-talking coach like Bo Schembechler to hang my Cubs hat on as a legitimate grievance. But I cannot.

Cardinals fans are some of the most knowledgeable and friendly people in baseball. The Cardinals organization is a tremendous corporate citizen within the St. Louis area and throughout the states of Missouri and Illinois. Stan "The Man" Musial was a harmonica-playing folk hero.

No, like my friend and Michigan, my dislike is based on one of the seven deadly sins: envy. I would confess to a high school buddy who is now a priest, but he despises the Cardinals too and I doubt a call for absolution from him will withstand an Almighty review.

And my sins are many. I stood, along with a few other Cubs fans,

and booed two St. Louis players introduced at halftime of an Illini basketball game. The Cardinals had won the World Series that fall and were making the rounds. I could not help myself. It was an automatic emotional reaction. A friend attending the game with me, a Special Forces vet, coolly calculating our chances of survival when surrounded by cheering Cardinals fans, tugged at my sleeve.

"Better take a seat, Mike," he said, "you're outnumbered."

That incident aside, I am attempting to conduct myself in a more adult manner in regard to the Cardinals. A friend of my father passed recently who was an avid Cardinals fan. Yet I refrained from talking ill of the dead, grumbling only to myself at the mention of his lifelong love of the Cardinals in his obituary. Okay, maybe I said something to my wife, Yolanda, but that was it.

But let's face it, given the odds that the Cubs will not beat the Cardinals on a regular basis and that St. Louis is perpetually in the postseason mix, my emotional outlets are limited. So the best way I can see to maintain my position of total disgust with the St. Louis Cardinals, minus the venom, is obvious:

Root for their opponent.

At least I know I have one friend who understands.

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