

“The Games People Play”

We were sitting around at the back table, just shooting the breeze, when the topic of games came up. “I don’t get it,” Arch said, tipping his chair onto its back legs and thumbing his cap off of his forehead. “You see these guys, all decked out in plaid shorts and spiky shoes, out there on the lawn hitting this little white ball around with sticks. Then, after several hours of sweating in the sun, they go in and drink and brag about how they got the best of that little ball.”

“Well,” Pauly interjected, “at least they aren’t getting their heads bashed in and their skulls driven down onto their spines. The worst that might happen to them is sunburn and a bad case of poison ivy if they spend too much time in the rough.”

Mud took a draw on his cigarette and laid his big hand on the table. “Most of the games don’t even take place outside,” he said, “most of them take place around a table, in some back room. Look at those guys over there,” he nodded to the pool table in the back of the room, “they’ve been here for hours, haven’t seen the light of day and the only green grass they’ve seen in the felt on the table.”

“Oh, there’s green enough,” someone said. “Haven’t you seen “The Color of Money” or “The Hustler?”

Mud raised his hand to his smoke and took another draw. “Oh, yeah, I seen them alright and I seen who had the green, the owner of the parlor and Minnesota Fats. Fats had that game so tied up, no one could even get in a game without his say so.”

Pauly said, "What about chess?"

"What about it?" Mud asked. "Nobody here plays chess."

"Yeah, but everybody everywhere plays chess. You can go anywhere in the world and set up a chess board and somebody will show up to start playing."

"That's just stupid," Ralph put in. "How can you play a game with some one half way around the world? How could you understand each other?"

"No, it's not stupid, but you're ignorant," Pauly replied. "That's the whole point I'm trying to make, man, everybody plays chess and they all play by the same rules. That's why you don't have to be able to talk to them. Just set up the board and they will know what you want to do."

"Yeah, I've seen that. They have it on TV sometimes. These guys set across from each other and never say a word. They have a timer and when they make a play, they hit the button to start the timer and the other guy has to make his play in a certain time. There's always some guy, talking to the camera in a whisper, explaining what's going on and how this guy is the champion from some country you probably never heard of and how he's been playing since he was two and the other guy just came out of nowhere and he's the challenger." Wally contributed.

"So what's the point, who cares?" Arch said suddenly. "All these stupid games and all these stupid rules, people traveling all over the world just to see how someone can play a game better than someone else. What for?"

The table was silent for a moment, then Pauly ventured, “Well, that is really the question, isn’t it? Why do we spend our resources of time and energy the way we do? What do you think we should do with our spare time, Arch?”

Arch stood up and adjusted his crotch and resettled his ball cap on his head. “Well, we should all get out there and play baseball the way God intended. Come on.” His team, resplendent in their new uniforms, followed him out the door and across the road into the dugout.