

The Devil Advocates:



Dr. Seth C. Hawkins came to St. Paul because he was informed that it was a major league city. As an exiled New Yorker, he knows that there is only one way to do something: major league. He suggests that the citizenry of St. Paul do the same.

We escapees from the unsafe, graffiti-ridden Beirut-like metropoli of the East Coast can verify a paradox: those fortunate enough to have spent their entire lives in St. Paul can never directly or fully know how lucky they are. This magnificent Victorian city, even closer to being just this side of paradise with Fitzgerald dead and Keillor quiescent, does, however, have one horrific blight on its national reputation: the much-too-well publicized bush-league outlaw team, the Saints, a dreadful mistake in the wrong location. Move them, or disband them.

Granted, several state capitals, like Montpelier and Carson City, are dreary little towns cut off from civilization. But St. Paul, like Boston, is that rarer capital: a sophisticated, cosmopolitan *big-league* city, the shining focus of a large metropolitan area. The only justifiable instances of minor-league teams being placed in such cities is as "convenience" farm clubs of pre-existing major league franchises (e.g., as Boston and Montreal of the NHL did, or the Yankees' former Newark team). The Saints have made St. Paul the laughingstock of the USA: we are seen as hayseeds who cannot even get a true minor league team, one properly affiliated with MLB.

In yet another era in which professional baseball needs to be rescued from itself, we need to reduce and condemn, not increase nor lionize, systemic examples of the trivialization of baseball. Yes, minor leagues have long given in to the short attention spans of pseudo-fans with distracting promotions and other gimmicks. But it is irresponsible to endorse the sadly permanent cheap circus at Midway Stadium with the fallacies of "fun at all costs" or "that is what the fans want." If giving

people merely what they wanted was desirable, we'd legalize rape and bank robbery. There are varying degrees of subjective merit to watching trains, getting massages or haircuts, or deifying a mildly trained pig, but none of it should occur when baseball, a noble, complex sport requiring and deserving intense concentration, is being played. Sadly, we are in the grip of devolution: the gene for excessive experimental flamboyance and mindless showmanship appears to be dominant, and is easily passed to the next generation; the gene for good taste, judgment, and restraint, apparently is not.

One is amazed by the well-meaning wrong-headedness of many of my colleagues, those Soucheray calls "the swells at the University Club," who have embraced the Saints as a kind of cloying reverse chic, claiming that it is somehow pure, noble, and morally superior to see outdoor baseball enacted by underpaid has-beens and convicted felons in a wretched little bandbox in a seedy industrial area. To demolish their ravings:

The Saints are proclaimed a success because of their attendance levels: quite the opposite. The fact that there are *ever any* unsold tickets for their games in such a tiny park in such a large metropolitan area means that they are a marketing failure. When you do what Cleveland did, sell out 100% of 3.63 million tickets three months before the season opens, then talk to me of success.

It is facile to trumpet the "purity" of outdoor baseball in the wimpy short season of June 1 to Labor Day. But a dome is necessary for a real season in this climate. The oft-claimed absurdity that outdoor baseball is somehow morally superior is manifest nonsense: in no known moral system does the closing of the Skydome roof against an approaching storm diminish the quality of events on the field for V or H.

The self-righteousness affected by Saints' fans is made fully hypocritical by Mr. Veeck's eagerness to employ known criminals and other sociopaths, perhaps as role models in the "family atmosphere." Next, he could hire Pete Rose as manager, or bring Hal Chase back from the dead.

As for the sophism that minor league baseball is a symbol of a lost, better way of life, and a more rewarding experience, let such claimants cast off their hypocrisy, sell their Summit Avenue homes, move to a small town with no bank and a Perkins. Watching minor league baseball is by definition an unformed, incomplete, inherently inferior experience, as healthy as eating unripe fruit and uncooked meat, or discussing Aristotle with a child.

Wake up, deluded citizens off St. Paul! Allegiance to the Saints makes you mistakenly resemble small-town dullards.

But every good policy analyst has a solution. If Mayor Coleman wished, he could hire one of the nation's top analysts to accomplish this: get a major hotel corporation to buy a NL team, and build a stadium, hotel, conference center, and parking garage on the Plato Boulevard flats. Then let the Twins move. Perhaps I'll even help them to most-deserving Monterrey.

Editor's note: Dr. Devil will return next month with a selection of hate mail, plus the old proof that baseball is a Christian sport as well as how the Padres are wasting his money and the Royals' strange notion.