

How Baseball Showcases American Values

Baseball has long been America's national pastime. While football and basketball might take up more of our screen time, baseball still holds America's hearts.

What is it that makes the game so attractive? Perhaps it is the classic feel of the sport. Perhaps it's the freedom from the clock that the game gives to modern Americans consumed by hectic lives. Perhaps it is the easy way that we slip into baseball's rich history.

Maybe though, the enduring love for America's pastime is because baseball epitomizes American values and ethics. Here's a few of those values.

1. The American Melting Pot

Throughout the history of Major League Baseball (MLB), players have been born in 55 different countries, representing all six permanently inhabited continents. From the Dominican Republic to Japan, from Venezuela to Lithuania, men continue to travel from all over the world to seek fame and fortune in America's big leagues. [Ed Porray](#) was even born at sea!

Players like the Los Angeles Angels' [Shohei Ohtani](#) and the Pittsburgh Pirates' [Dovydas Neverauskas](#) came to America hoping to stand out from the crowd. They certainly did. Ohtani is the first true two-way player since Babe Ruth, working as both a starting pitcher and a designated hitter. Meanwhile, Neverauskas became the first Lithuanian player in MLB history.

2. Chasing the American Dream

This same desire to prove oneself drives many a high school and college ball player. The desire to be the best, and be generously compensated for it, lies at the heart of the American Dream. As an ancient Hebrew proverb says, “Prepare your work outside, get everything ready for you in the field; and after that build your house.” If only the work is put in on the field, the rewards can be great both on and off of it.

This principle is seen in the life of Ronald Acuña Jr., who left – or perhaps, escaped – Venezuela at age 16 to sign with the Atlanta Braves for \$100,000. He then spent more than three years toiling in the minor leagues making next to nothing. In April 2019 he signed a long-term deal that will net him [\\$100 million](#) over eight years, securing his own future and that of his family.

While [some publications](#) decried the deal as exploitative on the part of the Braves, Acuña was sure of what he wanted.

“I have no regrets,” Acuña said [according to MLB.com](#), “Nobody can see in the future. Nobody can see what will happen tomorrow. I’m extremely happy with the decision we all made.”

3. A (Mostly) Free Market

Amongst major sports leagues in the United States, baseball has the closest thing to a truly free market available. This is quite unlike the hard salary caps of basketball, football, and hockey, and most definitely unlike the closed-shop, league-owned contracts of American soccer.

A soft-cap does exist in the form of penalties for exceeding certain spending thresholds, but there is nothing really preventing teams from spending a billion dollars a year on their players, whereas teams are not permitted to exceed \$188.2 million in the [National Football League](#) (NFL) for the

2019 season, or \$81.5 million in the [National Hockey League](#).

While players don't typically reach free agency until after their sixth season in MLB, teams don't have the tools like Major League Soccer's [Re-Entry Draft](#), or the NFL's franchise tag system, to bind players beyond their initial contracts. MLB also uses arbitration between players and their teams to set salaries for years four through six of a player's career, rather than forcing them to sign rookie scale contracts like the [National Basketball Association](#).

4. Individual Glory Building to Company Success

"Whatever may be the general endeavor of a community to render its members equal and alike, the personal pride of individuals will always seek to rise above the line, and to form somewhere an inequality to their own advantage." – Alexis de Tocqueville, [Democracy in America, Volume II](#)

Most importantly for the American ideals, baseball, while still a team endeavor, is uniquely positioned for the evaluation and appreciation of an individual's accomplishments. Each at bat is a mono e mono duel between the batter and the pitcher. We track hits, strikeouts, home runs, stolen bases, fielding errors, and a multitude of other statistics. We derive statistics from this data, and then try to refine and weight those new statistics to give players a [single number value for their performance](#).

Regardless of any team-related outcome, we are able to peg individual players relative to their standing in the league as a whole. It therefore matters much less how a team is doing when awarding Most Valuable Player awards and the contractual bonuses that often accompany them. This dynamic allowed Mike Trout to post six top-two finishes in MVP voting over the last seven years, despite the Angels making the playoffs just once,

and finishing with a losing record four times.

Baseball as a sport is a venue to see the best of America, from the pride in individual accomplishment, to the love of history and tradition, to seeing the American dream in action. There are fewer and fewer places to see the love of American values so prominently on display.

Besides, there's something really joyous about the [untarnished playing of the national anthem](#).

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