

# Summer weather sets stage for baseball's laid-back style

By Pat Clark  
Columnist

If it's baseball, this must be summer. Baseball may or may not be the best sport in the world, but no other sport so accurately reflects the mood of the season in which it is played. Look at baseball. In the dead of winter, thousands of players don shorts to play the game, racing up and down the court with an energy totally incongruous to the climate outside the arena.

Or take football. You sometimes hear about a fall day that is "great football weather." Those days, however, are perfect for anything, not just football. Football, with all of its padding and equipment covering humans that you would not recognize except for their numbers, operates outside of climate altogether. It is as at home indoors at the Superdome as it is outdoors at Memorial Stadium.

You probably could make a case for ice hockey. After all, a game played on ice suits the winter pretty well. But in an effort to become a big spectator sport, hockey has moved indoors, which removes that relationship with the weather. They might as well play the game on Teflon.

But then there is baseball. So much has been written about baseball as The Summer Game that the claim seldom engenders an argument. Baseball is slow, ritualized and leisurely. If there was such a thing as "perfect baseball weather," it would be a day too hot and lazy to do anything else.

People who go to baseball games for the excitement might just as well stay home and grill hamburgers and play lawn darts for all of the excitement they are going to get. That's hardly a rap on baseball; it is what it is. The fact remains that there is more excitement in three minutes on a roller coaster than in three hours of watching baseball, but the fact also remains that something keeps baseball fans coming back.

Baseball fans, real hardcore baseball fans anyway, go to see not just the sudden ex-

citement of a Reggie Jackson home run or Fernando Valenzuela strikeout, but for the tradition and ritual that apply to even the most typical fly ball to left field. The actions of baseball players are codified and preserved to an extent unparalleled in any other sport. Baseball takes place at such a leisurely pace that even the fans have time to track everything, scratching whole innings of play into a few cryptic numbers and symbols in a scorebook.

Aha, the fans. Baseball fans are like any other sports fans in their fervor, but unlike other fans in that they get as much out of going to the games as they do from watching them on television. Basketball fans go to their games all huddled up in big coats; they look like they are smuggling contraband into the arena. Football fans bring their kitchens with them for the tailgate parties; some even bring televisions to the game when the home team is on the air.

Baseball fans go to the park to get the whole package; a suntan, a beer, a hot dog and, incidentally, a ball game. Baseball doesn't get the television ratings that some of the other major sports do and part of the reason is because the baseball fan loses too much of the feel of the event when he or she stays home. That doesn't mean baseball fans won't watch on television, it means they would prefer not to.

So, when one of those days (or a series of those days) hits when it's too miserable outside to do anything, remember that it is "perfect baseball weather" and go to a game. The College World Series in Omaha offers a good opportunity, and there's even a chance that the Huskers could make their first appearance in the CWS this year. It's a good show, well worth the money, even if the Huskers don't get in.

Fall and football will be here soon enough. In the meantime, as long as you know it's going to be a hot summer, you might as well make it a hot and enjoyable summer. Summer is the ultimate sit-back-and-relax time, and the best way to enjoy it is with the ultimate sit-back-and-relax game: baseball.



Photo by Jodie Fields  
Nebraska's Scott Hooper goes up against the Oklahoma State Cowboys in action at Buck Beltzer Field. The Huskers and Cowboys are at the top of the Big Eight standings and both hope to qualify for the College World Series in Omaha. The series is a summertime favorite of Nebraska sports fans.

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