

JEREMY FITZPATRICK

Brett earns respect in the end

I never really liked George Brett during his career with the Kansas City Royals.

Playing for the Royals was two strikes against him to start with. Brett's celebrated pine tar incident against my favorite team — the New York Yankees — was strike three.

So despite his talent and ability, George Brett was one of the "bad guys" of baseball for me. When he hit home runs, I groaned. When he struck out, I cheered.

But now that Brett has decided to retire when the baseball season ends this week, I have developed a new respect for him. I might go as far as to say I like George Brett.

It was the way he did it. In an era when most baseball players act like pampered millionaires who complain if their tax bracket is increased, George Brett showed class when he made his decision to retire public Saturday.

"The game became a job," Brett said, as he announced his 20-year career would end. "It wasn't a game anymore. And baseball shouldn't be treated that way."

In baseball's modern era, Brett stands with Don Mattingly, Will Clark, Kirby Puckett and Tony Gwynn as one of the few major stars to play his career with one team. He has a trait found in few players any more: loyalty.

"I'm proudest that I played my whole career with one team," he said.

Although Brett has collected three batting titles in three different decades, when he was asked to sacrifice his average for power to help the team this year, he did it. A career .307 hitter, Brett struggled through most of the season with a .260 batting average. But he followed through on his promise to deliver power and leads the Royals with 74 RBIs.

After 20 years, Brett said the game wasn't fun any more. And rather than cling to past glory and hang on until he



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was forced into retirement, he decided to leave in style.

"Baseball beats you down," he said. "It beat Nolan (Ryan) down. It beats everybody down. It took 26 years for Nolan. It took 20 years for me."

Even though I didn't always cheer Brett during his career, I'm sorry to see him leave the game. He played baseball hard and fast, the way it was meant to be played. He played hurt and rarely complained.

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But he isn't going out with a whimper. Sunday in his first game after he announced his retirement, Brett had five RBIs and two home runs. One of his homers came in the 10th inning to win the game for the Royals.

"I'm not the player I once was and I'll be the first one to admit that," Brett said after the game. "You just don't want to embarrass yourself. I'm not going out on top, but I'm not going out on bottom either... Hopefully I can get something going and give the fans something to remember me by."

George Brett was the kind of player that people either liked or disliked. It is hard to be lukewarm about someone who played so intensely.

I didn't like George Brett during

his career with the Royals. But I couldn't help but respect him for his work ethic and dedication to baseball.

And that respect has grown by leaps and bounds from watching and listening to Brett as he wears No. 5 for one last week.

George Brett has class.

"There's something about riding a roller coaster," Brett said Saturday. "If you ride a roller coaster 162 times, you're ready to do something different. Don't you want to go on another roller coaster ride?"

After Brett leaves the game this year, only Mattingly, Clark, Puckett, Gwynn and a few other players will remain as ties to the time when players played their entire careers for one team. It meant something when teams played because the rivalries and the players were familiar.

Now Wade Boggs, a career player for the Boston Red Sox, is playing in New York. Barry Bonds and Bobby Bonilla helped make Pittsburgh great, but deserted the team when the money wasn't right.

The game isn't what it once was. But George Brett has only improved with time. And strange as it might seem to me, I'm going to miss seeing him play.

Fitzpatrick is a senior political science major and the editor of the Daily Nebraskan.

PATRICK HAMBRECHT

America must learn from Stalin

Joseph Stalin killed 20 million of his own people, an atrocity equivalent to killing everyone at UNL 672 times. He was an evil person.

Stalin is also a hero, the ideal of pragmatic Leninism. In these days of cultural relativity, it is important we exclude our personal biases and judge Stalin by his own values. Political genocide may seem repugnant, but only because of the way we are educated.

Karl Marx advocated the overthrow of the bourgeoisie by any means necessary. Stalin upheld this creed admirably. For the glory of a classless society, he robbed banks, murdered cities and washed the world's soul with the blood of the common man. Marx and Fred Engels could hardly ask for more.

In 15 years of public education, I have heard almost nothing about Stalin. Every history class I've ever been in has focused the scope of World War II on Nazi Germany. Though I've personally heard victims of Auschwitz speak and seen countless films detailing the evil deeds of Hitler, I never heard more than a passing reference to gulags or purges.

Why is Stalinism not a curse word of common conversation, like "Nazism" or "totalitarian"? Is it because of our country's dirty conscience that we can't condemn a formal ally? Or is it because of Stalin's fairness — though both he and Hitler hated Jews, Stalin murdered everyone with an even hand.

Society's blind eye to Stalin has roots in the American psyche: We may renounce Hitler's superman, but we still want our superheroes.

Presidents Kennedy and Roosevelt are the most fondly remembered American leaders of this century because of their unique ability to rip power away from the people, for the people. Roosevelt's New Deal were both an insult to the free market and a



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constitutional farce, but he kept the pantries of his subjects stocked. Kennedy's Camelot era was aptly named; it was the reign of a monarch who seized the self-governing power of his municipal states so he could enforce his superior ideals. Do American citizens really want the danger of their freedom when they can have a wonder-president to assure them the trains will run on time?

Stalinism is the nightmare flipside to every promised "new deal," the specter of the utopian bait-and-switch. He reminds people that when they give enough power to a man with Graceland charisma, he can give them any change he likes. Big Brother lurks in any elitist political system, left or right.

When Stalinism is ignored, the only acknowledged lesson of World War II is the cliché I've heard in class hundreds of times: Xenophobia is the greatest evil. This idea is naive and dangerous.

Wars of love and compassion kill. Mohammed's sword, Papal Crusades and the mercy missiles of human rights have saved millions more from the threat of their own lives than have been liberated from oppressors.

The only thing worse than a spilling of blood for oil or money is killing for cartoon idealism. Stalin's communism, Mussolini's fascism and our supposed democracy are fabrications, imaginary systems that have little do with their practical enforcement.

Pretending there are heroes and villains in war is a sick game. Guns don't kill, Christ-complexes do.

At the Waco fiasco, ideas fought while people pulled the triggers and took bullets. A long-haired musician screamed the book of Revelations into a phone while a short-haired cop named Janet Reno played Nancy Sinatra records at a billion decibels. Then Reno got bored, attacked and won — she managed to exterminate a house full of religious extremists in the name of gun control. President Clinton called it policy; Stalin would have called it a purge.

Not many tears were shed for the loss of a few dozen armed psychopaths. People naturally fear freaks. But while David Koresh grabbed a Bible, how many maniacs have grabbed a badge, a presidency or a revolution?

If we could erase charismatic leaders and guns from the planet, I'd vote for it. But we can't. Marx recommended that all citizens be armed to protect themselves from tyranny. And in a sick world, Marx makes sense. Drive-by shootings are horrible, but Stalin and Tiananmen Square are worse. If every maniac in and out of office is going to wield a gun, then I want mine too.

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