

by William Meiners

Friends of *Sport Literate*,

Just a summertime check-in just after the New York Knickerbockers' NBA championship run, amidst the June swoon of your favorite baseball team (mine crashed in May), and any other pleasures that may accompany the summer solstice. Away from campus, I only wish that lucky old sun would slow its roll over the next two months.

Looking for some seasonal reading? We've got appropriate work in our "[Winter Resistance 2026](#)" issue, including plenty of baseball and some basketball. Twenty bucks on our [website](#) can have you reading that on the beach in a week followed by our fall issue currently in the works (which you can read at home). Alan Harawitz's "Opening Night" poem below feels timely given all the recent madness in and around Madison Square Garden. Scott Bandremer, a relative *SL* newcomer who provided a [witty reflection on disc golf](#) in the current print issue, celebrates his champion Knicks while also reflecting back on some old Mets. Consider it a basketball-baseball twofer. And William Loizeaux, one of our heavy hitters, goes deep with his reflections on the proverbial "mop-up pitcher," designated to a role of futility in both baseball and life.



Vincent in the Outfield. An original radical left-handed lunatic.



Michael McColly, author of *Walking Chicago's Coast*, along the path he walked. Photo by Justin C. Staley.

Justin C. Staley, who made his initial appearance in our "30th Anniversary Issue" with his travel essay, "[A Giants Fan Walks into a Bar](#)," interviewed and profiled Michael McColly, an *SL* vet who goes back to around 2000, about his book, [Walking Chicago's Coast](#). We'd like to make a semi-regular thing of book reviews and author profiles. On deck is my profile of David Murray's funny take on being a *Soccer Dad*. But I don't want to write all of them. Writers can query with appropriate book titles.

I feel a bit silly about this, but in late April, as the baseball club I've loved since 1974 finished the month atop the Central Division, I decided to document the Cincinnati Reds from May to late August. Like a good fallen Catholic, I blame myself for the team's descent into the madness of last place going 0-8 May first through the eighth. And as previously noted, the June swoon is swelling. Jason Wendel provides graphic comic images, just like his handiwork that accompanies Loizeaux's pitcher. I'm spilling about 500 words on each series for a team trending downward from .500. Should you dare, check out my [Reds Recap here](#).



## SL SAMPLES

---

### Poetry

#### Opening Night

by Alan Harawitz

at Madison Square Garden  
and the seats are packed with hope for the new season.

Television cameras pan the front row searching for celebrities.  
After all, this is New York and basketball at the Garden  
is the place to see and be seen.

The Knicks are the main attraction; it's been more than a half-century  
since the glory days of Walt (Clyde) Frazier and the last championship year.

There's a new coach, a couple new faces on the team and  
Spike Lee in the front row, fluorescent orange Knicks-colored suit,  
pinstriped, topped off by a black hat sitting on his head almost,  
but not quite, like a crown, Spike being the face of Knicks fandom,  
attending every home game.

Not to mention being a former middle school student of mine,  
adolescent 8th grader and I just a few years fresh out of Brooklyn College.  
Both of us having in common the strong bond, ardent Knicks fans.

To see him now fulfilling the dreams of his youth,  
dreams he could not possibly have foreseen back then  
coming as true as this, while I watch on television,  
nowhere near the Garden, in a different state,  
dreams of my own long forgotten.

**Alan Harawitz**, a retired New York City secondary school teacher, has been living in a small town on Maine's southern coast for about two decades. His poems have appeared in more than 100 publications including *The Writer's Almanac* (where Garrison Keillor read two poems from his book), *Poet Lore*, *Hanging Loose*, *Rattle*, *Fugue*, *Sport Literate*, *The Main Street Rag*, and *Gargoyle*. His first collection of poems, *The Day I Met Ava Gardner*, was published in August 2019 (Deerbrook Editions).



Spike Lee, New York Knicks superfan. And former 8th grade student of our featured poet, Alan Harawitz.

## SL ESSAYS

---

#### Thanks, Gil

by Scott Bandremer

Oh no.  
Another Knicks video just landed in my feed. Somebody's showing Game 5 again. Somebody else is filming grown men weeping in the streets of Manhattan. Another guy is hugging complete strangers like he'd just been rescued from a deserted island. And now they're playing Sinatra.

Stop. Please stop. I have no more tissues. My New York Knicks are NBA champions. World Champions! Even now, typing those words feels vaguely illegal, like I should look over my shoulder before publishing them. For 53 years I lived with a simple understanding of the universe: the Knicks were not going to win a championship again. Ever. That wasn't pessimism. That was data. I had decades of evidence. Entire presidential administrations came and went. Technologies were invented, became obsolete, and disappeared. I got older. My hair got thinner. Ticket prices became the GDP of a small nation. And still, no championship.

Eventually, disappointment becomes part of your identity. Knicks fans don't merely root for a basketball team. We major in hope while minoring in heartbreak. Then the impossible happened. The Knicks won. And here's the strange part: I knew exactly how to handle losing. I'd been practicing since Richard Nixon was president. What I wasn't prepared for was winning. Now every video sends me spiraling. Every highlight reel feels personal. Every replay unlocks some forgotten room in my memory.

To quote Jackson Browne, "Here come those tears again." I find myself sitting in the middle of this beautiful emotional hurricane, dazed and grateful and more than a little confused. Because somewhere beneath the celebration, another memory keeps tugging at me. The last time New York sports made me feel this way was when I was a kid. Oh, the Mets championship in 1986 was very special, indeed.

But this feeling I now have is something else. Something that is drawing me back in time, as I close my eyes and begin to float away on a magic carpet ride deep into my past ...And suddenly I'm drifting backward through the decades. Back to a time of innocence. Back to the losing ways of the New York Jets, the New York Knicks and the New York Mets. Back to a man named Gil Hodges who taught me something about heroes long before I understood the lesson.

[Read more...](#)

## Mopping Up

by William Loizeaux

Imagine you're a mop-up pitcher. You're near the end of a ballgame, say, the eighth inning. By the seventh, when you came in to relieve the horror-show of a starting pitcher and two middle relievers, your team, the home team, was already down 9-1. It's mid-September. Your team is in last place. For almost two long innings, you've tried your best, thrown your best 87 mph fastball, your best curve, and when those pitches went anywhere near the strike zone, they'd all been clobbered. You've already walked three men, hit a batter, given up two moon-shot home runs, and what outs you recorded were screaming line drives that nearly tore off your infielders' gloves. Years ago, you were a promising prospect. But let's face it, you're now a washed-up pitcher who doesn't have his stuff anymore. Your manager isn't about to put you out of your misery by taking you out of the game. Your job, your "duty," is to absorb innings, to just keep pitching, to take a beating if that's what it takes, and try to get this game over with.

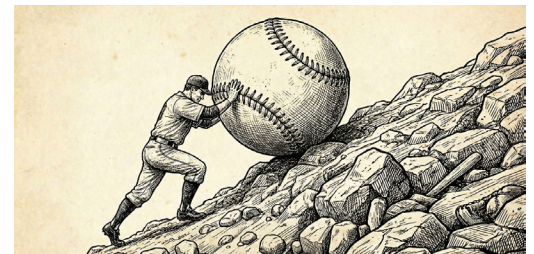
So, at the end of the eighth, you rise again from the dugout, trudge across the first base line, then the infield grass, and, in a couple of steps, you climb up the pitching mound, which seems steeper with each inning. As always, your catcher tosses you the ball, and you throw your eight warm-up pitches. With his broad bottom toward you, the umpire bends down and brushes off the plate. He puts on his mask and gets into position behind the catcher. The batter steps into the batter's box, takes a few practice swings and gets into his stance. It's the same as it's always been. The same old rituals and rhythms. You stand, glove on one hand, ball in the other, both shoulders facing the batter. You peer in toward the catcher and get the sign. You nod. You bring your hands together at your chest, the ball in your right hand, hidden in your glove. You adjust your grip on the ball. You feel its smooth hide, its stitches like the nubs of a zipper. You take your short rocker step and plant your pivot foot against the pitching rubber. You are about to wind up, rear back as best you can and throw the ball.

But you don't.

There's an odd quickening. In your blood? In your soul? It's like an unexpected change in the air, like the scent of rain, though the sky is baby blue. It makes you stop and look around. Except for a few drunks



Hall of Famer Gil Hodges (Class of 2022), was a slugging first basemen for both the Brooklyn and Los Angeles Dodgers. He returned to New York after his playing days, managing the "Miracle Mets" to a 1969 World Series title.



Jason Wendel, *Pitcherphus*, 2026.  
Artwork created using Gemini.

in the bleachers, everyone has left the stadium. For all intents and purposes, the game is over. The season is over. It's hopeless. On your little mound, you're the center of no attention. No one cares. And if no one cares, why should you?

*So what am I doing here?*

[Read more...](#)

[William Loizeaux](#) is an award-winning writer of short stories, essays, three novels for children, a novel for adults, and two memoirs, one of which, *Anna: A Daughter's Life*, was a *New York Times* Notable Book. His novel *The Tumble Inn* was a New York Book Festival winner. His stories have appeared in anthologies and journals, including *The Kenyon Review*, *The American Scholar*, *The Gettysburg Review*, and *TriQuarterly*. His *SL* essay, "Sin and Baseball," was cited in *The Best American Essays 2020*. In what might seem a contradiction, he is both a Yankee fan and an admirer of those, like mop-up pitchers, who take a beating and muddle through.

---

SPORT  
Literate