

# THE US SHOULD NOT BREAK WITH ITS TIES

“AND PROMISH ME ONE THING,” I SAID, AS I SLIPPED SLOWLY TO THE FLOOR, “BE AMERICAN, AND NEVER ALLOW GAMESH TO END IN A TIE”

1. No American sport allows for the possibility of a tie. Any game must continue until there is a winner and a loser. (Compare this to older, more tolerant civilisations where we recognise that teams can finish equal).
2. Half-way through the baseball season, there is an All Star game, in which the competing teams are drawn from the American and National leagues. The teams are said to be selected by the fans. That is true for the starting players, but the two managers are allowed to fill out their squads with their personal favourites.
3. The 2002 All Star game was held in Milwaukee, in front of a capacity crowd, and after an emotional opening ceremony. (Anastacia sang *The Star Spangled Banner*, fighter jets swooped overhead, there were tributes to dead baseball stars, and a walk-on role for living former stars who turned the crowd misty-eyed at their continuing ability to doff their baseball caps.)
4. The first two innings at Milwaukee were tight, but then the replacement players were gradually substituted for the starters and, to a non-fan, it became difficult to remember which was the American team and which the National.
5. After the nine regulation innings, the game was tied at 7-7, and went into extra innings. No score in the 10th. No score in the top of the 11th, and the two managers conferred urgently with the Commissioner of Baseball. (Apart from the President and the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, there is no one more important in the US than the Commissioner.)
6. The television commentators guessed that the managers had been telling the Commissioner that both teams had run out of fresh pitching arms. An announcement was made to the crowd that, unless there was a score in the bottom of the 11th innings, a tie would be declared. The crowd chanted: “Let them play.”
7. No score in the bottom half of the 11th, and the crowd began to boo, and threw beer bottles. (In older civilisations, we would have just shuffled off into the night, turning up our coat collar against the rain, and murmuring: “Close game, that. A draw was about right”).

What am I doing filling a column in *The Treasurer* with trivia from North America? After all, I don't have to prove to you that I can now work my VCR.

Why then? I think it is because the All Star game provided the perfect illustration of the difference between the US and the rest of us. I played a small part in preserving that difference.

I once attended – years ago – a course at a business school in upper New York State. It had an idyllic location on the top of a hill, part of an estate once owned by a railway robber baron. The robber baron had done his worst back in the days of Teddy Roosevelt, floating the San Diego, Tombstone & Poughkeepsie railway, and magicking the flotation proceeds into his back pocket.

When he died, his wealth went to his son, who became an elder statesman and a confidant of FDR. Getting on in years, the son married one of *les grandes horizontales*, who had spent her previous life gazing at the bedroom ceilings of the Churchill and Agnelli families, but who, with the family fortune behind her, became a great mover and shaker and fundraiser for the Democrat party. (Have I given you enough clues yet?). Somewhere in the story, the mansion on top of the hill was donated to the business school.

I can assure you that I was not taking a degree course at the business school. That would imply that I am the equal of Dubya, who got an MBA from his business school. I might have got a certificate at the end for Good Attendance and Not Slouching at My Desk, but this was a short course – 10 weeks, 13 weeks, something like that – for middle managers. The packaging was seductive, and the title of the course was along the lines of ‘The Challenge of Change for Middle Management’, or ‘The Challenge of the Changing Business Environment – Issues for Middle Managers’.

There was a students' bar, where we gathered before dinner. The bar was run by an Afro-American steward, who got us to sign a chit and presented us with a bill at the end of the course. His book-keeping was a shade eccentric, but no one dared complain, since by this time white Americans had started to have stirrings of guilt towards Afro-Americans. I can remember standing at the bar, with a can of Budweiser in my hand, lecturing a group of Americans on how they should behave if they wanted to lead the world. “It ish your Manifesht Deshtiny to colonishe the Moon,” I urged. The group clinked their cans. “It ish your Manifesht Deshtiny to shtop the dominoes falling in Vietnam”.

“Right on,” they roared. “Kick their sorry asses”.

“And there ish nothing wrong with building billboardsh beside freewaysh, or with digging open-cast mines,” I added. I pumped myself up into a climax, along the lines of, “The free world needsh you as you are.” They were so delighted that a pinko European could talk so much sense that they kept plying me with more cans of Bud.

“And promish me one thing,” I said, as I slipped slowly to the floor, “Be American, and never allow gamesh to end in a tie.” **JF**