

# Introduction

“Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking,” wrote Peter (2 Peter 3:1). And though Peter never played baseball, he surely was an all-star on the early teams of apostles, leaving us a host of stories and statistics about his life and ministry.

This little book that you hold in your hands is a sequel to *Steal Away: Devotions for Baseball Fans*. If you’re an ardent fan or student of the game, you probably won’t read any statistics or stories here that you haven’t heard before. Bill James or Larry Ritter I’m not.

But in this “second letter” my desire is to help the reader see even more parables in this great game, stories that can inspire us to read God’s Word and incorporate it into our lives. “You see, you spend a good piece of your life gripping a baseball, and in the end it turns out that it was the other way around all the time,” wrote Jim Bouton in his memorable book *Ball Four*. It’s my hope that as you grip God’s Word, it will gain an even stronger grip on your life.

Everybody has a baseball story, whether it’s of a time they played or when they sat in the stands watching someone else play. After *Steal Away* came out, many people wrote to me and asked if I was related to

Hugh Poland, a major league catcher during the 1940s. I am not, but I am related to other Hugh Polands—my father and my late grandfather. Others have asked if I ever played ball myself, and the answer is that although I was legendary in my own backyard, when it came time for public competition, I quickly discovered that my gifts lay in other areas. In fact, you might say that I inherited some of my ball-playing ability from my grandfather Hugh Poland.

“Popo” Poland, as I knew him, had been a catcher on sandlot and company-sponsored teams as a young man. During one game sometime during the 1910s, he was receiving behind the plate when he heard a noise that was very strange to him, a sound in the sky unlike anything that he had ever heard before. He rose from his crouch and took his mask off, and for the very first time in his life, he saw an airplane, flying in the distance. He stood there, slack-jawed, staring at the miracle and beauty of flight, a simple farm boy who couldn’t have been less aware of how new technology would radically shape his future in the coming decades.

His impatient pitcher, however, was more concerned about the game at hand and didn’t share my grandfather’s appreciation for that which had “slipped the surly bonds of earth.”<sup>1</sup> Eager to resume play, he threw a fastball toward the plate. It caught my unsuspecting grandfather on the chin and knocked him out cold. This probably explains why he wanted to duck every time he saw an airplane in the sky from that point on. It also

explains why “Keep your eye on the ball” is an adage that we Polands take very seriously.

I should mention that the recording company of my friend Kent Bottenfield is the inspiration for the title of this book. When I first met this former all-star pitcher turned contemporary Christian music artist, I asked him what the name of his company, IBB Records, meant. He connected the dots for me as he explained that “IBB” is simply a way of indicating on a scorecard an intentional walk. “BB” designates a base on balls, and the “I” in front indicates that it was intentional.

I want an intentional walk with Christ. I want it to be purposeful, not by accident. Sure, I’ll never be able to play ball on the same field with the players mentioned in this book (though maybe someday in another time and another place?). But I get to first base with God the same way they do: by God’s grace. And I want to live in that grace on purpose—every day.

I am inspired by and indebted to the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), particularly the research efforts of Steve Steinberg and Cort Vitty. My special baseball buddies at Woodridge—Dale, Bob, Rod, and Hank—also encourage me with their friendship. I also want to thank those who granted me interviews, including current and former players, such as Morgan Ensberg, Tom Griffin, Bobby Doerr, Al Worthington, Don Kessinger, and Willie Mays Aikens.

As always, the good folks at Judson Press know how to encourage a

writer. There were times when I thought that I wouldn't be able to finish this project, but Rebecca Irwin-Diehl and Kim Shimer are full of ideas on how to pitch each story and Scripture combination. They are a battery that any writer would want on the roster.

Finally, "Team Poland" serves as my inspiration every day. My wife, Karen, and daughters, Kayse, Jayme, and Ally, constantly teach me about life and the lordship of Christ. I can hardly believe that God lets me be a part of their lives every day.

Keep your eye on the ball—and the prize (Philippians 3:14)!