
Batter up! Baseball fanatic turns experiences into words

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As a seventh grader, John Nemo and his father made the pilgrimage down from snowy Minnesota to sunny Fort Myers to catch the Twins in pre-season action. Father and son sat on the outdoor bleachers, chomping popcorn and discussing the rookie pitcher's curveball.

Now Nemo is trekking back to Hammond Stadium with his new novel in tow.

The baseball fanatic and writer will be promoting his latest book titled, "The King's Game," this week and next at both the Twin's Park and the Red Sox's City of Palms Park.

According to Nemo, his story is about a veteran pitcher who goes into the biggest game of his life, unaware that he's playing the last nine innings of his existence.

King, the protagonist is portrayed as a perfect pitcher but underneath the surface, he possesses lots of chaos.

"It's an attempt to explore one guy's struggles and uncertainties," Nemo said. "The pitcher is really wrestling to find out what he believes in. I think it's a book everyone can relate to. Everyone has struggles."

Nemo comments that the novel plays out like an episode of the TV show "24."

"It's a fast moving quick read where you learn more through the flashbacks," he said.

Besides baseball, the book is about faith.

Nemo weaves a thread of spirituality into his work on the mound contender.

"I'm not a bible thumper but I am a Christian and worked Christianity into the book," he said. "I like to be subtle."

Besides facing his troubled past, the main character must confront the St. Louis Cardinals in the seventh game of the World Series.

"The villain in the story is the Cardinals," he said. "They are the Yankees of the Midwest but we beat 'em in '87. They have a bit of swagger. I like to pick on the Cardinals."

Nemo is looking forward to heading south and showcasing his newly published novel at the Fort Myers baseball parks.

"We're counting the minutes," he said. "My son dances in the kitchen singing the word, Florida. I am just grateful to get a book published that is close to my heart and to share my love of the game with baseball nuts and fellow Cardinal haters."

Nemo describes his book as "a perfect storm" where his passions for baseball and writing collided.

The son of two English professors, the author grew up in a Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St.Paul, Minn.) suburb.

As an '80s kid, he was more interested in Nintendo than reading Shakespeare or Hemingway. But he realized he had the knack for writing at age 16, after winning a sportswriting contest sponsored by the Minnesota Timberwolves. The Midwest NBA team awarded him with free tickets and published his article.

"I guess I knew then that writing was in the blood," he said.

After college, Nemo pursued writing further. During a writing internship, he interviewed his childhood hero Kirby Puckett.

"That was my first story where I crossed the boundary between fan and reporter," he said.

He later served as a reporter for the Arizona Republic outside Scottsdale before getting homesick and returning home to write for The Associated Press in Minnesota.

Nemo freelances out of his Woodbury home, a Twin Cities suburb. He writes for a smattering of sports publications including: mlb.com, sportsillustrated.com, the Minnesota Twins magazine, Hoop Magazine and NBA Inside Stuff.

“Being a reporter, I talked to the guys in the dugout, watched them practice, and I used these observations as material for my book,” he said.

His fictional inside account on baseball has not gone unnoticed. Since its publication, Nemo’s book has been endorsed by Minnesota Twins outfielder Michael Cuddyer and Steve Sisco, former Atlanta Braves infielder who said that the “book captures the essence of what the players and coaches talk about and go through on the field.”

Dedicating his novel to Dr. John G Nemo, the author says that he has his father to thank for inspiring his love and knowledge of the game.

Nemo’s father was an English professor, but he also was a baseball fanatic.

Father and son cheered for the Twins, their Metrodome attendance averaging 30 to 50 games per season.

Nemo acknowledged that his father also illuminated baseball’s poetry to his son.

“He not only loved the game but viewed it as a metaphor of life,” Nemo said. “He taught me how you have to work together as a team on defense yet when you go up to bat - you’re by yourself.

Nemo continued that his father showed him how baseball is a mirror, reflecting American culture. His father spoke on baseball seeing into the business world with expressions like “I struck out,” or “I hit a homerun.”

Every spring, Nemo’s love for the Minnesota Twins buds a bit more. He notes that it is not only the players’ skills but also their demeanor that Twin City fans cling to.

“The players here have always been down to earth,” he said. “They give the time of day when you see them around town. They’re just regular guys – laid back and not having to prove anything. Cy Young pitcher Johan Santana has humility and is so down to earth. He epitomizes the city’s populace.”

Nemo is excited about reliving baseball with his dad by passing on the love of the game to his own two sons.

“My 3-year-old son is now most excited about getting the cotton candy at the game, but he does yell ‘Twins, Twins’ and wears the team’s jersey,” he said. “My wife doesn’t get it - this generational passing of the torch.”

He continues that his kids are free to pursue any path they choose in life.

“If they want to do it, they can play, but I’m not going to force them into baseball or being the next Curt Schilling,” he said.

Nemo divulged that he’s not happy with all that goes down in baseball, including the steroid usage, high salaries and sense of arrogance that exists in some of the players and owners.

“It’s a pure game, and sometimes it gets fouled up,” he said. “But baseball survives everything, strikes and scandals. The game is bigger than all that stuff.”

Nemo is currently at work on “Time of Change,” a time travel mystery novel about a teen discovering a dark family secret, propelling the 17-year-old back into the 1920s to a mobster ridden St. Paul, Minn.

The title is slated to publish in 2008. For more information on John Nemo, visit JohnNemoBooks.com.

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