

Cross Current



Real help for real life

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A Diamond Gem



In one of the strangest home runs ever, the hitter touched all the bases — and everyone who witnessed the awesome event.

It was the second inning in a 2008 women's softball game between the University of Western Oregon Wolves and the Central Washington University Wildcats. Only one of the teams would go to the national championship tournament.


When Oregon outfielder Sara Tucholsky walked to the plate, she was intent on hitting a homer, something she'd never done in her eight-year career. That season, she'd had only three hits in 34 at-bats so she was anxious to redeem herself.

Strike one! But on the second pitch, Sara leaned in and smashed the ball with everything she had. With one eye on the missile, she started running and watched the baseball soar over the centre field fence. In her excitement, the fielder missed first base entirely but — catching her mistake — she wheeled around to go back.

RIP! Sara felt something tear in her right knee, driving her to the dirt. As she lay in agony, the umpire went to her coach and said Sara had to touch all four bases or the home run wouldn't count. If her teammates tried to help, she'd be out. The only other choice was to use a pinch runner but Sara would get only a single.

Watching all this was opposing player Mallory Holtman. Though she was the conference's career home run leader, she'd never been to the national tournament and — if her team lost — her playing days would be over. "Excuse me," she asked the ump. "Would it be okay if we carried her around and she touched each bag?"

The dumbfounded ump said he knew of no rule stopping the other



*God spoke to Moses
from a burning bush.
Today he speaks from
a burning heart.*

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team from helping an injured player, so Mallory and shortstop Liz Wallace raced over and gently picked up Sara. "I don't know what it looked like to observers," Mallory said later. "but... we'd get to a base and gently, barely tap her left foot." Wracked with pain, all Sara could say was, "Thank you, guys, so much!"

By the time Sara's foot hit home plate, many spectators were crying and a standing ovation drowned out everything. That sacrifice cost Mallory and her team the game — the Wolves won 4-2 — and Sara had to end her career with that homer. "In the end," said Mallory, "it's not about winning and losing ... She hit it over the fence and she deserved a home run."

As it turned out, the umpire was wrong. The homer was automatic and a pinch runner could've run the bases. But, then, we never would've seen the selfless sacrifice.

In many ways, the story is a metaphor for life as it's meant to be. After all, so many good things are bent and distorted, not by competition but by an unhealthy emphasis on being first. It starts when parents put their children in everything from sports and theatre to ballet and beauty pageants then insist they win at all costs. Often living vicariously through their kids, these parents condition them to think that failure is anything less than first place; that fun happens only when you win; and that doing your best is no match for being the best. Media reinforce the message. Peers add pressure

Self-worth is linked with how we do, not who we are. This carries over into business, the pursuit of trophy partners, even the acquisition of money, toys and technology. People intent on being first put themselves first, hoping everyone else will take the hint. Envy and ambition trump service and sacrifice. Status and power reign supreme.

But every once in a while, a God-like glimmer breaks through. Sara's coach said it best when reflecting on the heart-warming home run. "It's moments like that that you respect it's just a game," said Pam Knox. "I hope it's a lesson my players will never forget."

But life is no mere game. Failure will be a fixture and, even when we do well, we can't redeem ourselves. We need Jesus for that. So there needs to be a commitment among believers that even those who oppose us will be served sacrificially. Let's lift them out of the dirt. Sometimes it's only our love that will carry them safely Home.