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Let's Play Two

Ken Briggs | Apr. 25, 2014 NCR Today

A Catholic religious brother couldn't figure out what he'd just seen on television. We'd been sitting next to each other in a hospital waiting room when sports news showed the hubbub in Boston the night before when the Yankee pitcher was thrown out of the game for putting pine tar on his neck. The brother said he knew nothing about baseball and wondered if I did. Yes, I said, a pitcher must not use sticky stuff on his hand to make the pitch do funny things. Sometimes they hide it well enough to escape being ejected but in this case MIchael Pineda, the pitcher, had flagrantly violated the commandment and was expelled from the garden forthwith.

Then the combination of ingredients hit. This Sunday will feature the Catholic equivalent of something rarely seen any more in big league baseball: a double-header in the friendly confines of St. Peter's Square.

In days past, a twin-bill was, as the Vatican schedule will prove to be, a day long event. If either game went to extra innings, the whole thing could last eight to ten hours. Congenital baseball fans luxuriated in it, much as John XXIII and/or John Paul II fans will go away wanting even more. Winning or losing matter, but in more subtle ways on Sunday.

To play out the fantasy, John XXIII will be starting pitcher in the first game. He mirrors Whitey Ford, the legendary Yankee (as a lifelong Red Sox fan I can hardly believe I'm saying this) a crafty performer of small stature with great control. His deceptive quickness and motion kept batters off balance. In the nightcap, John Paul II will take the hill, reminiscent of the burly Roger Clemens, a hard thrower who came right at the hitter with fierce determination and a withering variety of pitches. Clemons left baseball under a cloud and so did John Paul.

Not all fans will probably show up or stay for both games but some will leave happy for two victories and others satisfied with one. It remains to be seen how many potential ticket holders sit it out. My brother friend has less than two days to decide.

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