

# Nicknames, Baseball, and Faith

As these thoughts come together, the World Series of 2017 (baseball for non sports readers) is tied at three games apiece for the Houston Astros and Los Angeles Dodgers. Baseball players have had some of the most imaginative nicknames I have ever seen.

There was Shoeless Joe Jackson, who was a character in the movie Field of Dreams. Then we find Suitcase Simpson who played first base in the 1957 World Series featuring the New York Yankees (nicknamed the Bronx Bombers) and the Milwaukee Braves.

The Pittsburgh Pirates had some imaginative monikers. There were: Vernon "Deacon" Law, Don "The Tiger" Hoak, Bill "The Quail" Virdon, Gene "The Stick" Michael, and Dave "The Cobra" Parker.

Some names, a little further back, stood out even more: "Noodles" Hahn, "Hippo" Vaughn, "Piano Legs" Hickman and "Three-Finger" Brown for example.

In more modern times we have "Hammerin' Hank" Aaron, "Caspar the Friendly Ghost" Adair, "Mighty Mouse" Amarista, "Old Aches and Pains" Apling, and Johnny Bench who was named "The Little General", probably because he ran things on the baseball field, well, like Napoleon, who was very successful and very tiny. Johnny Bench was also nicknamed "Hands" because they were so big he could hold seven baseballs in his right hand.

And we cannot rule out Babe "The Sultan of Swat" Ruth, Ted Williams the "Splendid Splinter", or Mickey "The Commerce" Mantle.

If we have a nickname, hopefully it describes us in a positive way. We gather them as we live, sometimes from childhood or work, or even when we might become president of the United States. There was Honest Abe Lincoln, there was Teddy "The Rough Rider" Roosevelt, and then there was Calvin Coolidge.

"President Calvin Coolidge was famously known as a man of few words. His nickname was 'Silent Cal.' His wife, Grace Goodhue Coolidge, told the story of a young woman who sat next to her husband at a dinner party. She told Coolidge she had a bet with a friend that she could get at least three words of conversation from him. Without looking at her he quietly retorted, 'You lose.' "

We don't get to choose our nicknames. They just arrive at certain moments in life. What is yours and why did you get it? Who gave it to you? And is it something you want to be known for?

There was a cartoon recently about one of Jesus' disciples who had a weak moment of faith. He says to two other well known followers of Jesus, "Why am I saddled with this nickname? You aren't called Denying Peter or Man who Ran Away With No Clothes On in the Garden. One of the others says, "I get what you are saying, Thomas, but it's time to move on."

There are many classic names for people in the church. Some might get a negative nickname, like Complainer, Pew Warmer, Occasional Attender, Words Aplenty, or Perfectionist.

Others might get a different description, like Faithful, Every Sunday Attender, Always There and you can count on him, Songbird, or Never said a bad word about anybody.

Peter's name, one that he surely was glad for because Jesus gave it to him, was "The Rock" for Jesus said he would build his church on him.

James and John were known as the "Sons of Thunder". John in later days was known as The Evangelist. Paul gave himself the nickname "The Thirteenth Apostle." And it stuck.

Perhaps there is time for us yet to earn a nickname which describes how we are and how we might want to be. Actor Matt Damon said, "Now that I have kids, I'm probably more overprotective than I've ever been. My wife's nickname for me is 'red alert.' I sometimes check just to see if the kids are breathing. But I try not to be a helicopter parent."

Singer John Legend likes his name. "John Legend" he says, "is a nickname that some friends started calling me, because they said I sang like an older man, and it kind of grew into my stage name.

That brings to mind a final thought. A person who is known as a legend in his own time is a person who does extraordinary things that become well known while they are alive. Then there are those who are known as a legend in their own mind, because they think of themselves as people of note or respect, but are not, precisely because of the thought.

By now the World Series of this year is over. Maybe we might want to be known as Mr. October like Reggie Jackson because we did the best in Christ's service in the month of October. We must do the best we can with all we have in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ all the time. Then the nickname we find, will be the one God gives us, when he says, "Well done, you good and faithful servant.