

Bring Back The Grass

by JIM MURRAY

"I don't know about you, but I'm kind of an old-fashioned guy who likes the real McCoy. I want butter that comes from cows. I like cotton in my shirts, wool in my socks, leather in my shoes.

I'm sick of the polyester, permanent press, plastic world. I don't want additives in my bread, chemicals in my beer. I think aspirin is the best cold remedy and castor oil will cure almost anything else that's wrong with you. I squeeze real oranges for breakfast or I go without. I won't buy a suitcase if its got plastic hangers in it.

But I'm willing to forgive the chemists, pharmacologists and syntheticians anything if they'll just keep their cotton-pickin' — pardon me, nylon-pickin' — hands off sports.

Football should be played on grass, baseball should be played outdoors, and golf should be played against nature, not hydraulics. I wish DuPont would stick to explosives, and Monsanto to fertilizers, and leave the gamesmanship to us.

Take last weekend: Three fine football teams from the Los Angeles area — USC, UCLA, and the Rams — ventured outside the all-wool-and-a-yard-wide world of the Coliseum and entered the plastics division of sports. You would have thought they were playing the game on solid ice. You half-expected them to halt the game at any time and say, "Wait a minute, I'll go home and get my skates."

The only game that should be played on an artificial surface is pool. (I exclude hockey, because, while it is artificially made, the surface is, after all, real ice and not a Libby-Owens-Ford derivative.)

I am not fully persuaded a football field should even be MOWED. (I remember one year the Trojans of USC played a game in Colorado in which they complained the grass was too tall for them, but I have to think any offense that can't move the ball against high grass should turn in its scholarships.)

A Thornless Rose

You see, good old American know-how can't leave any sport, fabric, climate, river, lake, or any other natural condition alone. It would tinker with Paradise. It feels it can fade nature. It can give you a rose without thorns, cattle without horns. I expect any day now they will let the contract for construction of a new synthetic earth and use this old one for a warehouse.

Take baseball. They begin to construct parks to eliminate the cheap home runs (forgetting the cheap home runs saved baseball after the Black Sox scandal) and, the next thing you knew they were playing it indoors, on felt, and with air conditioning. You take the sweat out of baseball, the blood out of football and the walk out of golf, and pretty soon you have a nice permanent-press, wash-and-wear, no-calories form of athletics. You can buy a world's championship in a super market.

I mean, where does it end? Do you have bats with adjustable settings for curveballs, fastballs, off-speed pitches — or are they self-correctible for whichever shows up at the plate? Do you magnetize gloves so that fly balls will drop in them wherever they are stuck up in the air?

Football on a carpet, indoors, at regulatory 72 degrees is an obscenity. Football is supposed to be played in nose-biting cold, watched from inside a raccoon coat, and on Mother Earth. It should not be played on any surface you can vacuum-clean or hang on a clothesline and beat. If it's raining or snowing, it should trickle down your neck, get in your cleats. Give us back our mud, gopher holes, puddles, grass. Go carpet Rhode Island or dome Delaware, if you must, but let's play football the way Walter Camp did. We don't want powdered football, artificially-sweetened baseball, or miracle fabric golf any more, thank you."

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