

Baseball and life: Still unfair

By William C. Kashatus

When the Phillies' Cole Hamels nailed Washington Nationals rookie sensation Bryce Harper in the back with a 93-m.p.h. fastball this week, it reminded me of one reason for my love of baseball: its reflection of the injustices of life.

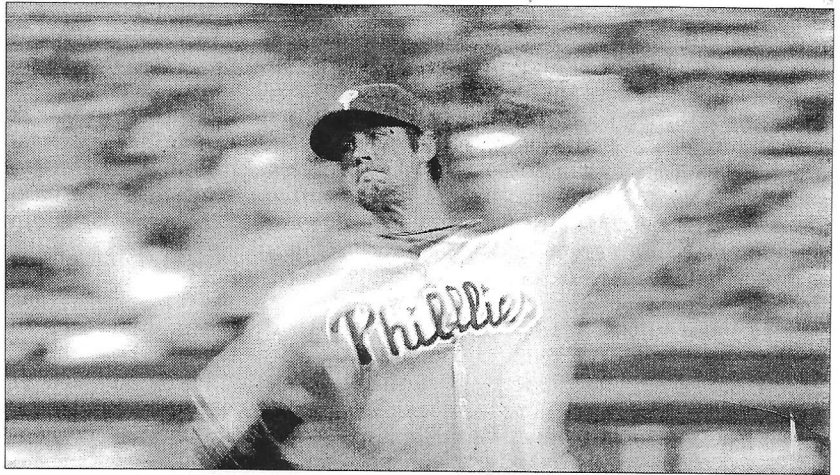
Whether or not you agree with Hamels' decision to throw at the 19-year-old rookie is irrelevant. Baseball has unwritten rules that allow such attacks for any number of reasons, and Hamels had several at his disposal.

Perhaps he wanted to galvanize his teammates after they had dropped two games in a row to the Nationals. Maybe he wanted to humble Harper, who had six hits and several stellar catches in those games. Or maybe he wanted to increase his value as a soon-to-be-free agent by cementing his status as an old-school ballplayer, the kind Philadelphia worships.

In life, similarly, apparently unjust acts are carried out every day for reasons known only to those who commit them. Some of the culprits are held accountable. Others escape punishment, often by lying.

Hamels chose to tell the truth, later admitting that he was "trying to hit" Harper. He was punished with a five-game suspension. He was also beamed in the leg later in the same game, though Washington's starter denied any intent.

Unfortunately, our actions in life, as in baseball, can have consequences not just for ourselves, but also for those close to us, who may become innocent victims by asso-



Duck! The Phillies' Cole Hamels admitted intentionally plunking Washington Nationals rookie Bryce Harper this week. Why did he do it? It hardly matters.

DAVID GOLDMAN / Associated Press

ciation. That is now the unenviable position of Hunter Pence, the Phillies' most productive hitter. Don't be surprised if he is pelted by the Nationals' pitching staff the next time the teams meet. The unwritten code of baseball calls for such continuous retribution.

Given that baseball and life aren't fair, what really matters is how one responds to the injustice. One can surrender to self-pity and become embittered. Or one can demonstrate the fortitude to put the past behind.

Thus far, Harper has responded admirably. After his tattooing, the rookie ran to first base without even a glance at Hamels. His vindication came later, when Hamels attempted a pickoff throw to first and the aggressive rookie stole home. Finally, when asked about the episode after the game, Harper refused to be drawn into the fray, calling Hamels

"a great guy" who "knows how to pitch." That's classy, especially for such a young man.

Perhaps Harper is mindful of another irony of baseball and life — that yesterday's enemies sometimes become tomorrow's allies. That could well happen to Hamels and Harper.

The Phillies are a team in decline. Their window of opportunity for another world championship is quickly closing. Washington, on the other hand, is a team on the rise, and one that is willing to spend money to win a championship.

If the Phillies begin rebuilding next year, Hamels will become expendable, and Washington could become a suitor for his services.

Just think: Cole Hamels, Washington Nationals ace. That would be strange. But that's baseball — and life.

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