



Professor Baseball: Searching for Redemption and the Perfect Lineup on the Softball Diamonds of Central Park

Edwin Amenta

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It happens every summer: packs of beer-bellied men with gloves and aluminum bats, putting their middle-aged bodies to the test on the softball diamond. For some, this yearly ritual is driven by a simple desire to enjoy a good ballgame; for others, it's a way to forge friendships—and rivalries. But for one short, wild-haired, bespectacled professor, playing softball in New York's Central Park means a whole lot more. It's one last chance to heal the nagging wounds of Little League trauma before the rust of decline and the relentless responsibilities of fatherhood set in.

Professor Baseball is the coming-of-middle-age story of New York University professor and Little League benchwarmer Edwin Amenta. As rookie manager of the Performing Arts Softball League's doormat Sharkeys, he reverses softball's usual brawn-over-brains formula. He coaxes his skeptical teammates to follow his sabermetric and sociological approach, based equally on Bill James and Max Weber, which in the heady days of early success he dubs "Eddy Ball." But Amenta soon learns that his teammates' attachments to favorite positions and time-honored (if ineffective) strategies are hard to break—especially when the team begins losing. And though he rejects the baseball-as-life metaphor, life keeps intruding on his softball season. Amenta here comes to grips with the humiliation of assisted reproduction, suffers mysterious ailments, and finds himself lingering at the sponsor's bar, while his partner, a beautiful but baseball-challenged professor, second-guesses his book in the making. Can he turn his team—and his life—around?

Packed with colorful personalities, dramatic games, and the bustle of New York life, *Professor Baseball* will charm anyone who has ever root, root, rooted for the underdog.

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