

## The Last Word

## A Mendoza Line for Civic Action

by Russell Mokhiber

In baseball, the Mendoza Line refers to the measure of the ultimate in futility in hitting a major league pitcher.

When a player hits below a .200 average for the season, he's said to be hitting below the Mendoza line. (Named after Pittsburgh Pirates and later Seattle Mariners shortstop Mario Mendoza who hit below .200 in five of his nine big league seasons.)

It's rare for a major league hitter to hit below the Mendoza Line.

Currently, at All-Star break, a little more than halfway through the 2024 season, only one day-to-day major leaguer is hitting below .200 – that's Mitch Garver of the Mariners – hitting a measly .174.

I propose a Mendoza Line for civic action. Let's call it the Civic Slacker Line. And let's be generous and put it at .100. That is, if a citizen spends less than ten percent of their discretionary non-work, non-sleep time on civic action, that citizen can be said to be hitting below the Civic Slacker Line.

And to borrow a phrase of one of my favorite sports analysts, Mike Francesa – “let's be honest” – more than 90 percent of American citizens currently are hitting below the Civic Slacker Line.

In fact, in terms of results, civic action in America is exactly the opposite of major league baseball.

In baseball, it's rare to see a player hit below the Mendoza Line.

In civic action, it's rare to see a citizen hit above the Civic Slacker Line.

I was at a party the other day and came across a group of five or six liberal Democrats. They were talking about and blaming – who else – Donald Trump.

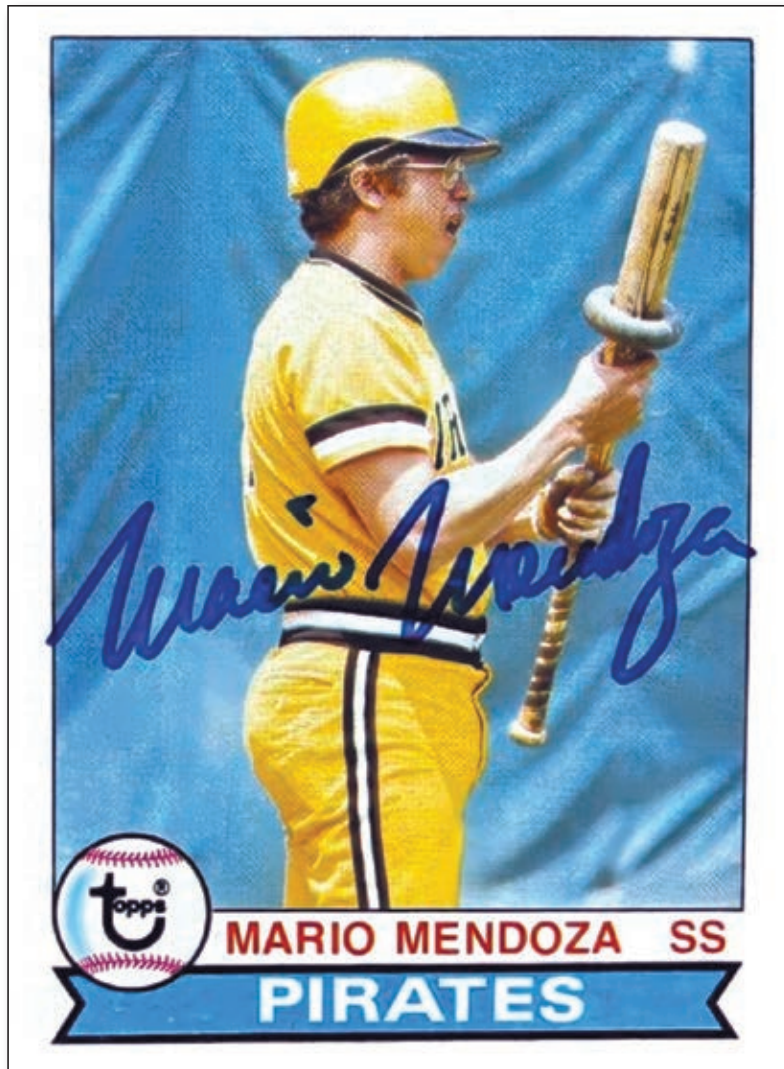
A friend of mine and I – both of us independents – listened as they went on and on – as they are wont to do – about the existential threat posed by Trump. But as we both tried to point out, both parties are controlled by the military industrial complex and it's the liberal Democrats in the White House and Congress currently sending weapons to Israel to slaughter thousands in Gaza.

Other than ranting and raving about Donald Trump, not one of the citizens in that group is engaged in on the ground organizing here in West Virginia to make things better.

By my estimate, not one of them is hitting above the Civic Slacker Line. And the on-the-ground results of that collective inaction are devastating for democracy.

In the upcoming November elections in West Virginia, for example, fully 47 percent of state Senate races and 41 percent of state House races will be uncontested – the Democrats will not put up a candidate – the Republican candidates will run unopposed.

Instead of constantly complaining about President Trump, maybe the liberal Democrats could at least figure out a way to put up candidates with something to offer the people of West



Autographed Mario Mendoza 1979 Topps Baseball Card

Virginia?

And of course, it's not just the liberal Democrats. Any citizen repelled by the corruption and inherent violence embedded in both political parties can get on the ballot as an independent for state legislature with a few hundred signatures.

And it's not just West Virginia. According to the group Civic Pulse, fully a third of all state legislative races nationwide were uncontested in 2022.

That's just one indicator that baseball is doing better than civic action.

Another indicator is this – the non-stop whining.

As we taught our boys growing up in Little League – and as every parent teaches their kids about baseball in America – a cardinal rule is – there's no whining in baseball (or as Tom Hanks famously put it in the movie *A League of Their Own* – “there's no crying in baseball.”)

And there should be no whining or crying in democracy, either.

In civic circles, instead of winning, what we see is non-stop whining.

And it's not just the whining liberal Democrats. It's the whining lefties, who constantly complain about the corporate lock down on our democratic institutions – including our courts, the media, and our state and federal legislatures.

They like quoting the philosopher John Ralston Saul as saying that “we are watching a corporate coup in slow motion.” Their tag line is “it's over” – meaning the avenues for citizens to exert influence over their government

have been shut down and the only option is mass civil disobedience.

First of all, to quote my favorite philosopher, former Yankees catcher Yogi Berra – “It ain't over til it's over.”

Second, I have a question for these civic doomsayers – how do we know the legislative bodies are no longer democratic?

How would we know if we don't even try?

I get it. Here in West Virginia, the dominant force in the legislature in Charleston is the American Legislative Exchange Council, the nationwide corporate lobbying group that drives legislative activity in states around the country. They set the agenda for the Republican-led legislature. They write the laws and our legislators pass them.

But whose fault is that?

That's like saying that the Yankees keep buying the best players and dominating the sport. Again, whose fault is that? (Let's go Orioles!)

Instead of joining together to take

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direct democratic action, the vast majority of American citizens whine, belly ache or just sit back and watch.

So that's one baseball rule that I would apply to citizen action – no whining in democracy.

The second iron clad rule of baseball that I would adopt is – keep your eye on the ball – that is – limit the diversions.

Americans are consumed by so many diversions, there is little time for any citizen to keep their eye on the ball. And in democracy, if you don't keep your eye on the ball, most likely the fastball will come screaming at your head at 100 mph, as it is doing right at this moment.

Just from direct observations of my own relatives and friends, here is a list of diversions that eat discretionary time and drive the population as a whole under the Civic Slacker Line.

- Wordle.
- Netflix.
- Television.
- Tik Tok.
- Twitter.
- Facebook.
- YouTube.
- Podcasts.
- Junk food.
- Drugs.
- Alcohol.
- Cigarettes.
- Pickle ball.
- Golf.
- Soccer.
- Football.
- Baseball.
- Bowling.
- Spotify.
- Gambling.
- Video games.

You name the diversion, we got it. The list is endless. Americans are great at diversions. I'm a great proponent of healthy diversions as a form of emotional relief and social interaction. But only in moderation. When diversions eat away at our civic lives, we are in deep trouble – as we are right now.

The lives of citizens hitting above the Civic Slacker Line are exceptional, but rare.

See, for example, the work of a young Logan Lane who, with her friends, has started The Luddite Club and a print newsletter (*Luddite Club Launches Print Only Newsletter*, page 11) and the work of Kristen Salvatore and her colleagues of Maine, who have summoned their member of Congress, Jared Golden, to a town hall meeting to discuss issues of grave public concern to the citizens of Maine (*Maine Democrat Jared Golden Ignores Citizen Summons*, page 34), and the lives of Marie Cirillo, Jane McAlevy and Lewis Lapham (page 17).

So, what to do?

Take your lessons from baseball.

Keep your eye on the ball.

Limit diversions.

No whining.

Get off the couch. And as we say here in West Virginia – let's get 'er done.