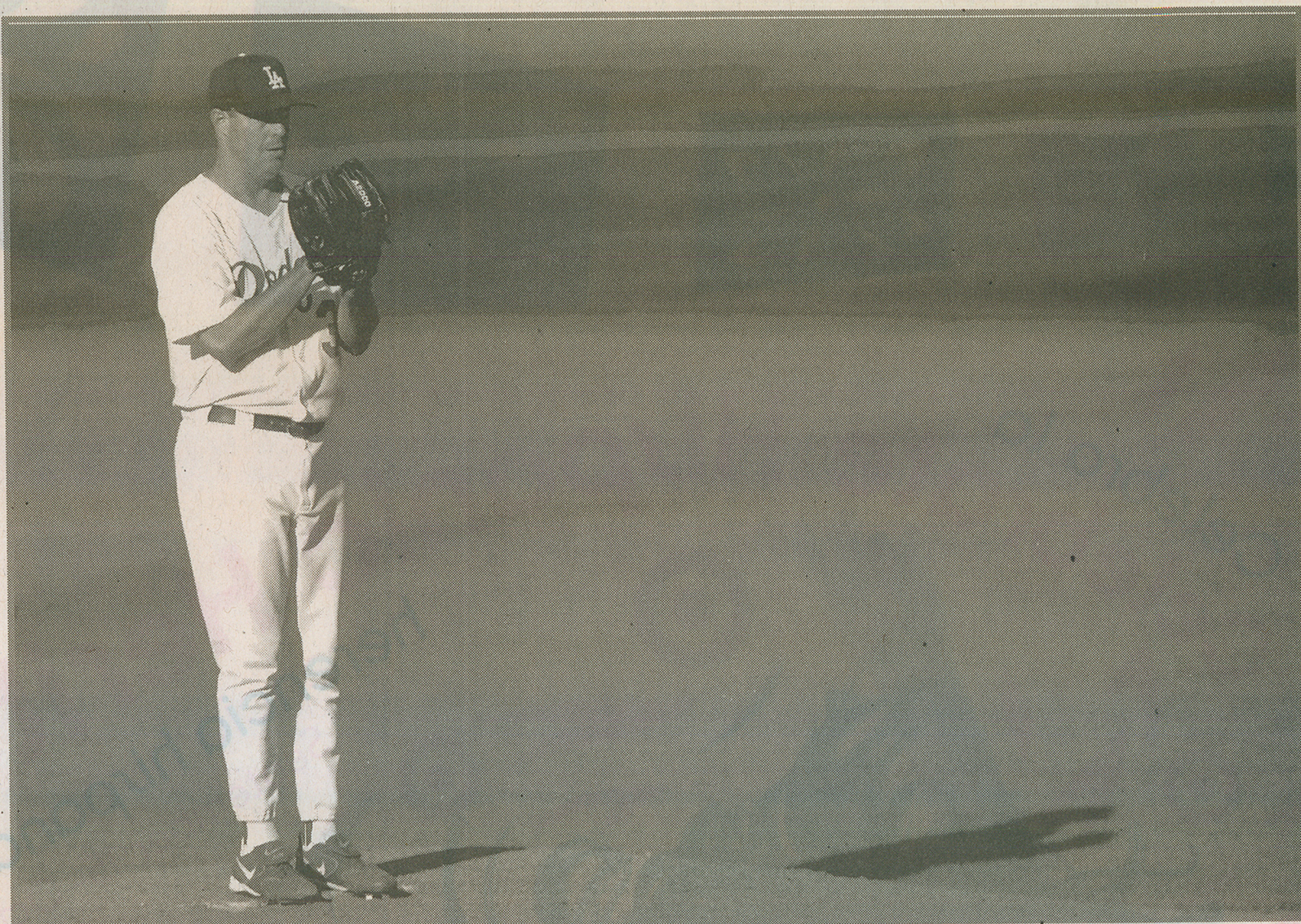


Baseball is a lyrical game. It's one of those artistic ironies that the only major sport without a clock should be so often immortalized in rhyme, where timing is everything. Over its rich history, baseball's best have been celebrated in everything from poems to ballads, limericks to lyrics, with fans getting into the act at every seventh-inning stretch. Verses on Ruth, DiMaggio and Koufax trumpeted their triumphs, while others on Greenberg, Robinson and Gehrig paid homage to their moral character. With their mixture of reverence and wit, rhymes on the diamond field have traditionally populated the print of newspapers as old as the game itself. But the most famous baseball poem of all, "Casey at the Bat," satirized the unwavering passions of the ardent fans as much as its mythical hero. So when asked to

write about Greg Maddux, whose mark on America's game is of mythical proportions, an epic poem seemed a fitting format. Part primer, part tribute, this article in verse ventures to spotlight Greg's unique attributes as a player, illustrate his many nicknames, and highlight just some of his staggering accomplishments, while honoring the meter mighty Casey swung in. And so, in 31 stanzas, a fan tips her cap ...



Keith Birmingham/Staff Photographer

'THE GREAT GREG MADDUX'

By Devra Māza

Congratulations son! Your minor playing days are done
You've been called up to the majors. You'll be famous! You'll have fun!
But before you pack your gear, and high-tail it to The Show
There's something I think you're gonna need to know

See, there's a pitcher playing there, and Greg Maddux is his name
And you're bound to run across him in Los Angeles, in some game
So if you don't mind one last lesson, I'll just tell you while you're dressin'
About this ace you'll face up there, and once aware, you'll have my blessin'

He may not throw for power, or glower from a towering frame
But don't look at what he looks like 'cause he'll own you just the same
With an arsenal of weapons he can throw on any count
That ball will move like magic when Greg Maddux rules the mount

You'll swing at balls, you'll take the strikes, the hometown fans will boo you
Your friends and family in the stands will swear they never knew you
And all the scouts who sang the praise that you were stardom bound
Now say "You'll look the fool and like it!" when Greg Maddux takes the mound

He'll get ahead with first-pitch strikes, hit spots to suit his fancy
You'll hit like such a little girl, your coach'll call you "Nancy"
Forget it kid, you'll soon find out it's all part of his plan
He's done it to the best, you're just the latest bat he's fanned

He's the master of his craft and when he gets onto a roll
He'll pitch with pinpoint precision and perfect control
And his arm speed never changes, no matter what the grip or pitch
Because that's what they pay him for, and by the way, he's filthy rich

They call him Mad Dog and his matchups rabidly are planned
Like that doggie playing poker, he's got the upper hand
When he's dealin', he's a winner, but before the card game's through
This Doggie wants his dinner and I'm sorry, son, it's you

When it comes to painting corners, he's an artist with a brush
His sinker makes you buckle, and his changeup makes you rush
He'll throw a masterpiece, do your portrait, sign and frame it
"Batter Looking Clueless" will be what the press will name it

In the field of real estate, he's the proud owner of homeplate
And he knows how it's important to locate, locate, locate
And all the ump's who claim that just to meet you is a thrill
Will say "You'll eat that strike and like it!" when Greg Maddux takes the hill

With 17 years of 15 wins, this guy is so consistent
And as far as stingy pitch counts go, no one is more efficient
But don't think about it too long 'cause you'll find out soon or late
That the inning's done and you're the only one still standing at the plate

He's a golfer teeing golfballs and the baseball looks that big
He banks them off the breeze, and your bat swings like a twig
So quiet please, try not to freeze, address the ball and pivot
As it swats the grass, the grounds crew asks you please replace your divots

He's a magician and his game is smoke and mirrors, but don't laugh
You're just the lady in the box, and he's sawing you in half
Don't cry, you're not the only guy to cuss his own reflection
And don't question the umpire's calls or you'll face sure ejection

He's the professor here to school you in a few choice words in French
His class is on the black and your degree is on the bench
You're just another power hitter grounding out with all his might
Who's just a shadow of himself when Greg Maddux toes the white

He's a surgeon in the strike zone and his skill controls your fate
His scalpel is his cutter and he's carving up home plate
And if you don't like the prognosis, well, who cares? It doesn't matter
The ballpark's his operating room, and you? You're the cadaver

He knows each hitter's tendencies between the letters and the knees
With every hit and every miss, he sees things nobody else sees
And he's too smart to ever try to get you out the same way twice
The way he studies batters, it's his noggin he should ice

In fact, I hear the trainers soak his head after each game
To cool off the computer we mere mortals call his brain
So if you think that you can think with him, you're in for a surprise
You've a better chance of hitting if you swing and close your eyes

When it comes to comebacks his position has no peer
He's got 15 gold gloves on his shelf. You ain't got one anywhere
Hit it near him, he will spear it. Any flare, he'll snare himself
So if you hit it, better hit it somewhere else

If you think that you can run on him, well, maybe that's the case
But it won't matter what you think if you can never get on base
So if you want to steal a bag when he gets between the chalk
You better hit a hole and race, 'cause there's no way he'll let you walk

But say you get to first and steal, it's the only break you're gettin'
Before you swipe another bag, he'll pick you off of second
Or he may not care and leave you there for some other strategy
When he's throwin' from the stretch, nobody knows what that'll be

Fans love to see him get in trouble just to see what he will do
Watching him get out of jams, you could learn a thing or two
So if you're thinking RBI, meet Greg Maddux's best friend
An inning-ending double play of which your out's the end

Now when you take the field and the pitcher's slot is due
Don't fall asleep out there. He'll hack and even whack a few
And when it comes to rounding bases he's as smart as any runner
If it's a sacrifice that's needed, don't forget, he's quite a bunter

So don't rest when he's at bat, and don't snooze when he's on base
'Cause he can take that smirk of yours and wipe it off your face
He's a hurler with a history of helping his own cause
His guile and wily ways have given veteran players pause

In his heyday they yelled "mayday!" when it was his start they faced
They'd pray for rain and hope he'd sprain his neck and be replaced
And every slugger cried to mother: "See those three guys by the wall?
There's nothing gettin' out back there. He doesn't need them there at all!"

He started with the Cubs then joined Atlanta's famed rotation
Where he garnered raves for the Braves and dazzled all the nation
But Chicago rued the day they let him leave the Windy City
So they brought him back to play where like the Ivy, he winds pretty

And now he shines in sunny Dodger blue Chavez Ravine
Where every fifth day on the mound a legend can be seen
Polishing the diamond, no matter what his number
'Cause gems are tossed when Greg Maddux pushes off the rubber

Now L.A. fans demand the owners of the team will hear
Their pleas as they buy season's tix, to bring him back next year
For he's the missing link they think will send them on their way
To what the Dodger faithful pray will be postseason play

So when you're 0 for 4 in hits and realize you can't buy one
Remember, he's won four Cy Youngs. That's four more than Cy Young won
With fielding assists and All Star trips and ERA's that barely exist
The résumé of his renowned play is still a growing list

With 3,000 K's and counting and well past 300 wins
Fans stand and clap and photos flash. You think it fazes him?
They're just some other stats to be bronzed on his plaque
In the hallowed Hall of Fame with his face and his hat

Like Koufax, Mathewson and Young, long after all his wins are won
He'll be remembered as a standout of his era when he's done
And when folks look in record books they'll be sure to find his name
For he'll be there among the greatest to have ever played the game

Now I may be just a bush league skipper and that's all I'll ever be
But like Vin Scully, I know greatness when I see it on TV
So I hope that you'll reflect on everything that you've just heard
With any luck, this lesson's stuck, and if you're smart, you'll mark my words:

Someday, years from now, when your career has gone its way
When you've racked up all those hits and runs and made those sparkling plays
They'll ask of what you're proudest, and you'll tell them all about
How you faced the great Greg Maddux, and, by God ... He got you out

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To hear Hall of Fame Dodgers broadcaster Vin Scully read
Devra Māza's poem, "The Great Greg Maddux," go to dailynews.com