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## Letters to the Editor

### A worthy hero for boys and men

**I**N those impressionable pre-teen years of our lives, many of us come upon an idol whom we attempt to emulate and who helps shape our view toward the world we will grow into. Mine was Joseph Paul DiMaggio.

As a boy, I thought I was quite special to share a name with him, a claim my buddies and fellow baseball fans were not able to make. I would try, with limited success, to imitate his wide stance, long fluid swing and picturesque follow-through, even to rocking back on my left heel. I was proud that he was, like me, right-handed, in an era dominated by southpaw sluggers. His style of fielding I managed better because my long legs were more suited to copying his loping gait while gathering in fly balls.

But it wasn't until my mature years, long after DiMaggio's career was over, that I understood what he really symbolized: class.

He brought to baseball, and his private life, the improbably simultaneous qualities of majesty, simplicity and elegance. This combination is indeed rare in human affairs -- and it is the same combination I found within my later love of physics. That the life and achievements of one ballplayer can provide a metaphor for the methodology of science is really astounding as well as personally satisfying.

We all believe our heroes will live forever. I was making arrangements to attend opening day in Yankee Stadium, where Joe D. had been scheduled to throw out the first ball, bringing along my 8-year-old Little Leaguer and reliving an important part of my boyhood. I had always thought I would run into DiMaggio sometime, someplace, and tell him about the exploits I'd seen him perform when a boy and the more profound example he became as I grew to manhood.

Sadly, both hopes must now become dreams unfulfilled.

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A homily on the passing of Joe DiMaggio. This piece won the San Jose Mercury News 1999 Silver Pen Award.