

Baseball Card

And there you were -
blue cap and jersey,
white pants bat held high
above the shoulder
cocked and ready to swat one out
in that perfect stance of yours...
Shoulder turned, name half visible
(Proud you were to wear that name
Proud was I you wore that name)

Yes there you were -
smiling that smile of yours...
Cocky, confident, ready-or-not smile
The kind of smile of someone
who was exactly where he belonged
exactly where he wanted to be
in that very place, that very moment
doing what he was born to do
Fulfilling his destiny...
(Yes that's my boy out there
Yes he IS a good player isn't he?)

So there you were -
An all-star you were,
oh yes, a star a shining, glittering star
but: Stars are born to flame out, die
We are all born to die it is said
Seems only the best of us die young
and far too soon, too soon
You died too soon...

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Ex-Basketball Player BY JOHN UPDIKE

Pearl Avenue runs past the high-school lot,
Bends with the trolley tracks, and stops, cut off
Before it has a chance to go two blocks,
At Colonel McComsky Plaza. Berth's Garage
Is on the corner facing west, and there,
Most days, you'll find Flick Webb, who helps Berth out.

Flick stands tall among the idiot pumps—
Five on a side, the old bubble-head style,
Their rubber elbows hanging loose and low.
One's nostrils are two S's, and his eyes
An E and O. And one is squat, without
A head at all—more of a football type.

Once Flick played for the high-school team, the Wizards.
He was good: in fact, the best. In '46
He bucketed three hundred ninety points,
A county record still. The ball loved Flick.
I saw him rack up thirty-eight or forty
In one home game. His hands were like wild birds.

He never learned a trade, he just sells gas,
Checks oil, and changes flats. Once in a while,
As a gag, he dribbles an inner tube,
But most of us remember anyway.
His hands are fine and nervous on the lug wrench.
It makes no difference to the lug wrench, though.

Off work, he hangs around Mae's Luncheonette.
Grease-gray and kind of coiled, he plays pinball,
Smokes those thin cigars, nurses lemon phosphates.
Flick seldom says a word to Mae, just nods
Beyond her face toward bright applauding tiers
Of Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads.

After reading “Baseball Card” and “Ex Basketball Player”, analyze each piece for what you feel is the author’s intended message. What theme do the two poems share?

[illegible]

Both “Baseball Card” and “Ex-Basketball Player” suggest that one’s prime can only last so long before fading away. For example, in “Baseball Card” the baseball player used to be a “shining, glittering star” who was “doing what he was born to do”. However, stars are “born to flame out” and the player “died too soon”. This shows that he was a strong player of great ability who let his talent die out or fade away. Similarly, in “Ex-Basketball Player” we learn that “[Flick] was good: in fact, the best” but that he now only “sells gas, checks oil and changes flats”. He, too, could only live in his prime for so long. Both poems are about excellent players who were unable to sustain their prime.