THE LAST WORD

by Arthur Klausner

ROOT, ROOT, ROOT FOR THE HOME TEAM

I had the good fortune the other afternoon of going to a professional baseball game at Shea Stadium in Flushing, NY. Hopes of a few hours worth of lazing around in the spring sun dissolved into a chilly April drizzle. The game—and quite a display it was—stretched into extra innings. Not everyone stayed until the end, but perhaps half those in attendance stuck it out for all 18 glorious innings. The die-hards who remained were the real fans—a word, of course, derived from “fanatics.” This hearty, somewhat misguided bunch developed, toward the end, a kind of comradery. The good-feeling crossed many lines—race, age, and even team partisanship.

It's not too different in scientific circles, among scientific fanatics, if you will. Witness in this issue a paper on protoplast fusion in tobacco by researchers at DNA Plant Technology Corp. in Cinnaminson, NJ. The fourth author on the work is Yuri Y. Gleba, who was at DNAP for only six months in 1983–1984 while on leave from the Institute of Botany in Kiev. Dr. Gleba met DNAP director of research David Evans some years ago when relations between the U.S.S.R. and U.S. were somewhat less strained than they are today. Promises were exchanged about one or the other of them spending some time in his counterpart's laboratory, and Dr. Gleba eventually made plans to come to DNAP. Because a Russian citizen may not work for an American company, DNAP founded the Genetics Research Institute of DNA Plant Technology. The Institute, which consisted of precious little save Dr. Gleba himself, was enough to satisfy the paperwork of the superpowers involved. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and Central Intelligence Agency were aware of Dr. Gleba's presence, although they made most of their inquiries after his short stint at a model of American capitalism had ended. They reasoned that Dr. Gleba must be well-respected in the U.S.S.R. if he was allowed to travel abroad, so he would certainly be debriefed upon his return. “What kind of technology was being transferred here?” they asked.

Dr. Evans reports that the six months were fruitful, with each scientist gaining some understanding of the way science is done in the other's culture. Dr. Gleba was amused at the dependence of U.S. researchers on ma-

chines when a little manual dexterity may be all that is needed. Dr. Evans was impressed with the breadth of Dr. Gleba's knowledge, despite the lack of open scientific exchange in the U.S.S.R. Dr. Gleba was impressed by the balance between basic and applied research in the U.S.; the Soviets stress applications. Both discussed very little in the way of politics—this was a low priority when compared to science.

Another instance of East meets West in scientific circles occurred this April when The Dime's Group (Mountain View, CA)—a company focusing on technology transfer—sponsored a seminar in Moscow on “Advances in Biotechnology.” Presentations by speakers from the U.S., France, and England were supposed to complement talks from Soviet biotechnologists. The U.S.S.R. portion of the program never came about. The cause, the Dime's Group says, was some sort of misunderstanding—political, bureaucratic, or human. Even though no official presentations were made, the Soviet scientists did end up inviting at least one of the U.S. speakers to spend an extra day in Moscow. They showed him their laboratories, and they discussed topics of mutual interest.

The take-home message, if there is one, is that true fans will go to great lengths to see the game out to the end—on any field. Baseball fans will sit out in the cold to watch their team perform. Rock-and-roll fans in Japan will pack arenas to hear Bruce Springsteen play his music—even though they can't understand a word of it. Antique fans will drive to flea markets hundreds of miles away to sleuth for treasures that others may have missed. And scientists around the world will communicate their thoughts with that special kind of enthusiasm known only to fans. They will do it even if they work in competing labs. They will do it even if they work in competing countries.

Maybe governments could learn a lesson or two from these kinds of fanatics.

P.S.—For those who were wondering about the baseball game, the home team won, and the fans left satisfied.

Arthur Klausner is associate editor of *Bio/Technology*. These opinions are the author's own, and are not necessarily those of *Bio/Technology*.