

# Talking Balls and Strikes

*by* Paul de Denus

That's nine balls in a row! Nine! I respond with my favorite gesture: Jesus splayed on the cross with burning mad dog eyes! The ump - *Ray Charles* - whips off his mask and glares back, mouthing words I don't understand. Walter, my catcher has taken off his mask too and is calmly talking to the ump while nodding towards me. I throw in a scream, **"you like d' balls very much azhole?"** That gets the ump - *Helen Keller* - walking my way, gets old coach Hardwick to move like a fever out of the dugout.

I don't see the problem. In the country I come from, language is the best part of the game. It is the passion expressed! It is life! Without expression, there is nothing! The crowd seems to enjoy the performance. I listen to their cheers and jeers. The umpire - *Stevie Wonder* - stands in front of the plate looking over Coach Hardwick's shoulder, asks me what I said. **"Your mowder enjoys the donkey,"** I respond and flail my fisted hand in a pumping motion. The crowd erupts as the ump, Salvador Pena returns the favor by giving me the 'out-of-here' thumb jerk. He is from a country like mine and plays our game well. He continues to bark at Coach Hardwick who has picked up the passion by now arguing the strike zone. Nine balls for God's sake! I'll show him balls! The next two he sees will be mine, as I unzip and show him my striking pair.

