



THE ORAL HISTORY RECORD

SABR'S ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2015

PROGRESS REPORT: WHAT WE ARE WORKING ON AND WHAT IS AHEAD

By John McMurray

The focus of the Oral History Committee during the past year has been on creating a committee infrastructure. In that spirit, vice chair Paul Ringel has helped us to revise and update our guidelines for interviewers, which are now available on the SABR Oral History Committee website. We also have a release form for interviewers available online as well as a newly created online discussion group. With the help of Jacob Pomrenke at SABR, the digitization of existing audiotapes is well underway so that their content may be posted online. And, with this issue of *The Oral History Record*, we are pleased to provide the first edition of the Committee's re-conceptualized newsletter.

Another change which will be evident shortly is the posting of original interview content on the Committee's website. In addition to remarks from Rob Neyer at last year's Oral History Committee meeting in Houston, you will find both audio content and transcripts from recent interviews that Oral History Committee member David Skelton conducted with former major leaguers Terry Kennedy and Bill Heath, as well as with esteemed former hitting coach Walt Hriniak. Others will soon follow.

Vice chair Paul Rogers offers his considerable insight into interviewing in two articles included

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TALES FROM INTERVIEWING THE WHIZ KIDS

By Paul Rogers

When I approached Robin Roberts in 1992 about writing a book on the famous Whiz Kids team that won the 1950 pennant on the last day of the season, he was immediately all in. Since I'd never written a baseball book (although heaven knows I'd read enough of them), I felt a little like the dog who chases a car and catches it. What do I do now? Since Robin had been my boyhood hero and now I had the chance to write a book with him, I particularly felt the pressure.

My thought was to work intensively with Robin about his memories of that epic season, but also to interview as many of the living Whiz Kids as possible. Robin liked that idea a lot since to him that team represented an ultimate team accomplishment and he didn't want the book to be just about himself. In addition, he was curious about how his teammates viewed that 1950 season with forty-some years of hindsight. One thing Robin and I quickly learned along those lines was how people involved in the same event can perceive it very differently. Not only do their memories differ of, for example, key games, but also do their perceptions of those games.

I set about interviewing as many Whiz Kids in person as I could over the next three or so years and ended up with some very memorable experiences. I was determined to conduct the interviews in-person when possible, both because I thought face-to-face would produce

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and receive future newsletters, e-mail sabroralhistorycommittee@gmail.com.

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PROGRESS REPORT

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in this newsletter. Mark Pattison, a longtime member of the committee who too serves as vice chair, is our link to the SABR office concerning the digitization of interview audio tapes, and he provides an update herein. Our eventual plan is to make all interview content in SABR's possession available on the Oral History Committee website.

Now that the foundation is set, we invite you to take on assignments interviewing players. To receive the name of a player to interview, please contact Paul Ringel at pbringel@gmail.com. (A list of players whose interviews have already been completed is available on the Committee's website). We also welcome interviews with anyone who has ever been formally affiliated with major league baseball, including managers, coaches, and front office personnel.

We can provide you with names of players who live in your local area, and telephone interviews are also acceptable. If you need a place to start, you are welcome to choose a player on our 'Wanted List' in this newsletter. Interviews with older players are, of course, a high priority.

In time, interviews with players may be incorporated into existing BioProject biographies; at present, few BioProject bios include any interview commentary. To that end, before interviewing a player, we would recommend you read through his respective BioProject entry, if one exists, so as to determine where any gaps might be and how an interview with that player might fill them.

It has long been my view that the Oral History Committee is central to SABR's mission. To that end, we want to promote an active and engaged committee that adds to our knowledge and understanding of the game and its history. We invite you to be in touch with any of us, and, most importantly, to participate when you can. The fruits of your labor are both important and enduring.

THE ORAL HISTORY RECORD

SABR'S ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

Committee Chair

John McMurray

sabroralhistorycommittee@gmail.com

Committee Vice Chair

Mark Pattison

mpattison@catholicnews.com

Committee Vice Chair

Paul Ringel

pbringel@gmail.com

Committee Vice Chair

Paul Rogers

crogers@mail.smu.edu

Newsletter Editor

Mark Ruckhaus

markruck@aol.com

SABR HQ WORKING ON ONLINE ACCESS TO DIGITIZED INTERVIEWS

by Mark Pattison

SABR's Jacob Pomrenke tells *The Oral History Record* that SABR has about two-thirds of its 800 oral history interviews digitized, and that, with its web developer, is working on a plan to make those digitized interviews available online.

"That's going to be a really exciting development," Pomrenke said.

Among the digitized interviews are a four-part interview conducted in 1982 with Hall of Famer Carl Hubbell. "Some of these interviews go back 40 years," Pomrenke added. "It's amazing we've been able to hold on as long as we have to them."

Those cassettes -- and in some instances reel-to-reel tapes -- have been converted to mp3 files.

There are two challenges. One is that there is no timetable to get the online architecture set up to post the interviews. The other is that there is likewise no timetable to digitize the remaining oral histories.

Digitization is a time-consuming process. Unlike downloading a file onto your computer rather than bending over a copy machine and copying it one page at a time -- much less retyping it from scratch -- the digitization process must take place in real time, meaning it's going to take at least an hour to digitize an hour-long interview, first in getting the taped material onto a CD and then digitizing the CD's content, Pomrenke said.

So, he cautioned, don't just go and mail all your older interview cassettes to Arizona. "Right now our focus is already on the ones that are mp3 files," Pomrenke said. "Once we get that infrastructure set up, we can work on the ones converting from cassette tape or adding mp3 files."

In a perfect world -- and we know how many perfect games are pitched -- "a SABR member (would have an interview recorded), it would

already be in mp3 format and the SABR member would already upload it to the website," he said. "Having people record and convert their own mp3s might be a higher technical standard than we can get from the membership."

That remains to be seen. However, the possibility for cross-committee work could mushroom thanks to the online presence of interviews.

"We could have a cycle: you do your interview; you submit it to the Oral History project, and you write it up for the BioProject," Pomrenke said. "We can all kind of collaborate and work together on that." Not to mention, he added, "we've got the Games Project now, an initiative where a lot of this type of stuff could flow together--a big repository of SABR resources and information. That would be the ideal goal here."

And, if anyone was still wondering, a long-disputed issue between SABR and the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library over the ownership of a clutch of oral history tapes was resolved. SABR now has copies of each of the disputed tapes, but now on CD. "There are about a dozen boxes or so of CDs that contain all the interviews," Pomrenke said. "In fact, they're sitting 10 feet behind me" in the SABR office.

The complete list of SABR's oral history subjects and dates (where available) the interview was conducted can be found at <http://sabr.org/content/list-oral-history-interviews>.

RESOURCES FOR INTERVIEWERS

Available on the SABR Oral History Committee website at <http://sabr.org/research/oral-history-research-committee>

- A primer on how to conduct and submit oral history interviews
- A list of completed interviews by committee members (and transcripts, where available)
- A release form to be completed by all interviewers
- And, soon, audio of recently-completed SABR Oral History Committee interviews

AN INTERVIEW WITH FAY VINCENT ON BASEBALL ORAL HISTORY

by John McMurray

When conducting oral history interviews with former major league players, which became the basis of three books that he published during the past decade, Fay Vincent would begin with the same question:

"I always started at the beginning and said to each player, 'What got you interested in baseball?'" said Vincent. "What's your first baseball memory? Was it your father, your mother, your uncle, your older brother, somebody down the street?"

"I would ask that question, then the next question wouldn't come up until ten minutes later, because that first question would generate ten minutes of really great material about how this ballplayer was introduced to baseball, sometimes by a father, sometimes by a neighbor, sometimes by a sibling. But once I did that and got them talking about their days as a child in baseball, everything really flowed."

Long after his tenure as baseball commissioner had ended in 1992, Vincent continued being actively involved with baseball by conducting videotaped interviews with scores of prominent former major leaguers, which are now at the Hall of Fame. His interviews now make up three books: *The Only Game in Town: Baseball Stars of the 1930s and 1940s Talk About the Game They Loved* (Simon and Schuster, 2006); *We Would Have Played for Nothing: Baseball Stars of the 1950s and 1960s Talk About the Game They Loved* (Simon and Schuster, 2009); and *It's What's Inside the Lines That Counts: Baseball Stars from the 1970s and 1980s Talk About the Game They Loved* (Simon and Schuster, 2010).

In these books, Vincent paints a complete picture of each respective era by examining particular events in great detail. In spite of the

complexity of topics he covered, Vincent kept his interview questions straightforward:

"I want them doing the talking, so I made the questions very simple. (When asking about the Shot Heard 'Round the World in 1951), I would say to (Ralph) Branca or (Bobby) Thomson, 'Look, it was absolutely a spellbinding day. Tell me about that day, where were you, how did you spend the day?' And Branca would talk about being in the bullpen. You led up to it. It flowed, at least it did for me."

Vincent claims first to have been inspired to conduct oral history interviews by Lawrence S. Ritter, "the fellow from NYU who had done such a great job with oral history. But it was mostly players who had played in the first half of the twentieth century. Ritter did it, I think, in the '50s and '60s. I heard, those tapes, and they were *fantastic*. I thought, *nobody's done anything since he died*. And so, in my years after baseball, I decided that I would do it.



Fay Vincent
Picking up where Lawrence Ritter left off

"The second reason was, I wanted to preserve the stories of the old Negro League players, because I realized as they were dying off, their memories and stories were irreplaceable," said Vincent. "I

was very close to Larry Doby, and, so, the first interview we did was with Doby. I knew he was sick. I knew he had cancer. I knew he wasn't going to be around long. We went out to his house. Claire Smith, the longtime writer for the *New York Times*, she and I interviewed Larry for four hours, and I still think it's a very, very important historical document. And that's how we got started.

"I missed some of the greats," Vincent said. "I had Stan Musial scheduled, and, at the last minute, he begged off. What happened is he began to realize he had Alzheimer's, and he was disinclined to talk to me because of that. (Phil) Rizzuto for the same reason. As these guys recognized that they were losing some of their mental acuity, they backed away. Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams—DiMaggio agreed to do it but got sick and died. I missed Williams. My record isn't perfect, but I did the best I could."

Vincent does wish that the interview tapes he completed were available to a wider audience: "They're just sitting up there at the Hall of Fame, and it is really unfortunate that there isn't wider exposure, or a way to make Warren Spahn talking about pitching, available to kids and to people who might be interested," said Vincent. "You think about a rainy day at the ballpark, a rain break, and why wouldn't they run some of those tapes just to keep people interested? Whitey Ford, Yogi Berra. There are an awful lot of them. And Larry Doby's oral history is really historic because there isn't one of Jackie Robinson."

In preparing to conduct an interview, Vincent confirmed that he consulted books and articles about a particular player so that he was up-to-date with basic details, but he also allowed the interview subject to provide shape and direction for the interview:

"I really let the players take the lead," said Vincent. "I think they took me where they wanted to go. Now, we would interrupt every fifteen minutes, and I would ask them, 'What are we missing? Is there somebody you want to talk

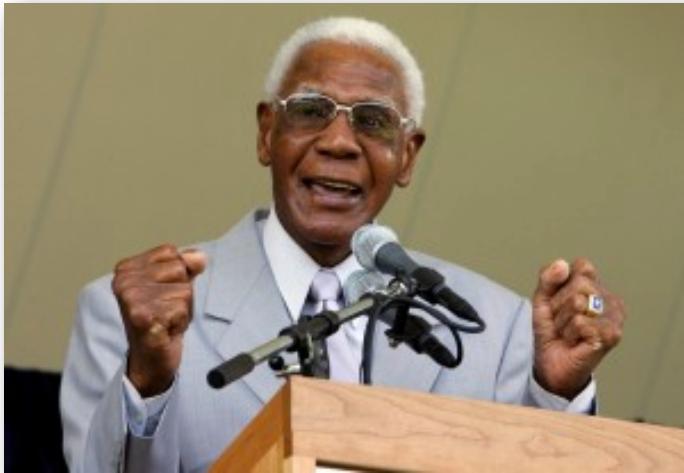
about?' In other words, I got the player to be a participant in the process. 'Is there a story that we skipped over? Is there anything I'm missing here? Is there anything that you want to say about a controversial person?' Getting Elden Auker to talk about Leo Durocher was not easy. He hated him. But it was important to get some of that material out."

Vincent had set up a foundation along with Herbert Allen, and their arrangement allowed Vincent to pay participating players \$3,000 each to be interviewed. Many of the players, as Vincent put it, were "very happy" to be paid in return for their stories. Vincent himself did not appear during the interviews, instead asking questions of players from behind the camera. The setting for the interviews was also an important consideration: "It was a hotel room, often," said Vincent. "Very comfortable. I think the players being interviewed have to be comfortable. Warren Spahn brought his son and friends. In other words, it was a very convivial, relaxed atmosphere."

It is the granular aspects of particular interviews which Vincent particularly recalls. "Frank Robinson, who is a man of steel and cast-iron temperament, I got him talking about his mother, and he started crying," said Vincent. "And I thought, 'that alone, that one tape of Frank Robinson getting emotional over the role of his mother in his development as a ballplayer is absolutely compelling.'

"Auker was certainly a lesser-known player, but his intelligence was very high, so his memories of Ted Williams as a rookie made for some remarkable stories. I probably interviewed, I'm guessing, ten or more guys from the old Negro Leagues, who never made it to the big leagues, including Slick Surrat, who nobody ever heard of. But his story, to me, was one of the most fascinating I'd ever encountered, of growing up in a dirt poor hillside in Arkansas and eventually fighting at Guadalcanal and being an Army bulldozer operator trying to clear Henderson Field. Their stories were really moving and powerful.

"I did Pesky. I did Dominic DiMaggio. I did Tommy Henrich. I got a lot of good guys, and they were very, very interesting. Buck O'Neil, of course, was absolutely magnificent. I think if I had to pick one interview for intelligence, I would pick Warren Spahn, but if I had to pick one for, sort of, spellbinding entertainment, I would pick Buck O'Neil. And, really, above all, it was because of Buck O'Neil's enormous enthusiasm and charm. He comes across as a black preacher, preaching the virtues of Negro League baseball."



Buck O'Neil

*"He comes across as a black preacher,
preaching the virtues
of Negro League Baseball."*

From a storytelling perspective, Vincent notes that baseball is distinctive. When asked why other sports do not emphasize oral history the way that baseball does, Vincent said: "Bart Giamatti had a great line. He'd say, 'Tell me a funny basketball story.' (Silence for effect). That really is the answer."

"There's something about baseball," said Vincent. "There's a certain lighthearted appeal. Baseball is a bunch of guys sitting around a lobby waiting for the ballgame to come up and for them to go out and play. And they're telling stories about each other. It's just part of the tradition."

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ORAL HISTORY TIPS

**A SABR ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE DOCUMENT,
UPDATED IN 2015 BY PAUL RINGEL**

Larry Gerlach, who interviewed many umpires, once likened a first oral history interview to a first date. In both cases, you want to initiate contact, but you're shy, hesitant, lacking confidence – so you put it off. Understanding this anxiety is easier than overcoming it. The only way I know is to take a deep breath, pick up the telephone and make the call (you can usually find their number in your regular source for phone listings, whether it's a book or online- if you can't find it, contact us and we'll help you). Tell the person that you're a member of SABR (you may have to explain the organization to them), and tell them that we have a national archive of interviews that we maintain for baseball researchers and fans, and that you would like them to be a part of it. The experience that most of us have had is that these people are thrilled to be asked, and even if they don't want to talk, they are rarely rude.

The people you interview do not have to be former major leaguers, or even former players. They can be anyone who was connected with the game: umpires, scouts, managers, or other baseball professionals. Journeymen can often tell you great stories about stars, significant games, or just everyday life in the major or minor leagues.

Once you have the appointment, be well prepared. If you're going to see a former major leaguer, use Baseball-Reference.com to examine his career. See if there is a BioProject entry on or Wikipedia page for your interviewee so you can learn something about his background. In short, do your research. Most interviewees will be more engaged if he (or she) sees that you know your stuff.

When you get to the interview, have the interviewee sign the consent form that we will give to you. If you bring a camera with you, ask for consent before taking any pictures. Then begin the interview with your interviewee's

name, your name, the date, time, and location. State that you are recording the interview for the SABR Oral History Archive, and make sure that you have the interviewee state on the recording that he has signed his consent for the interview.

Each interview will be different. Some are relaxed, while others are more formal, but most are fun and memorable experiences. Remember that you do not have to cover the entirety of an interviewee's career. Prepare questions, but do not make them too specific. Most importantly, listen. Don't dominate the conversation, and focus on what the person is saying rather than on your next question. Let the interview drift into unexpected areas if that's where the subject wants to take it, but also feel free to guide him back gently after a while if the digression is not producing interesting material.

Once the interview is concluded, thank the person (obviously) and tell them you will be in touch with a copy of the recording and of the transcript of the interview. Please send a copy of the recording, and hopefully a transcript, to sabroralhistorycommittee@gmail.com.

Thanks for considering participating in our oral history work. We think you will have a great time, and end up with great stories to share with your friends and family. If you have any questions about any part of this process, or if you want to draw from our list of available interviewees, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Welcome to the club!

TIPS FOR NEW SABR ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWERS

by David Skelton

I am quite new to the Oral History project. At publication, while I will have conducted just three taped interviews, I found each to be a very worthwhile experience. For a newcomer like myself, I would like to offer some suggestions that may make your own interviews just as rewarding:

When contacting the player to secure his collaboration, clearly state the purpose of the Oral History Project. The player should be apprised of the eventual preservation of the recording in perpetuity in on the SABR Oral History Committee's website.

Prior research is a must! Each of my three interviews was preceded by preparation of a written biography, allowing me a thorough investigation of the player's career. This comprehensive probe provided many opportunities of inquiry beyond what was initially gleaned from various baseball websites. For example, the chance to ask about the professional playing careers of the brothers of Terry Kennedy and Bill Heath opened unexpected doors into Kennedy's reluctance to be drafted by his father as well as to Heath's connection to a father who played semi-pro ball, and two cousins who played in the minor leagues. These were places sure to have gone unexplored, had I not dug further into these players' respective careers and lives.

Certainly a successful interview can be conducted without writing a full biography, as I did for Jesse Gonder, but it is important to do your homework ahead of time. My most rewarding experiences in both the Oral History and BioProject have been those occasions when I was able to cite a statistic or an event in the player's career to which he responded with, "I didn't know/remember that." Evidencing that you possess a strong working knowledge of his career will demonstrate that you took the time to do your study. The player will appreciate your efforts and will be all-the-more open with you in the interview.

A further step in establishing openness: Develop a list of questions from your research and share those questions with the player **in advance**. Offer to remove any question he is uncomfortable addressing and ask if there are any issues he would like to tackle that are not included in your queries. In my brief experience, I never had a subject take me up on the former, but, in each instance, the player volunteered suggestions in other avenues.

Lastly, the BioProject's "Author Guidelines," reproduced below, also apply to oral history interviews:

The biography should cover the person from birth to death (or, if alive, to the present). Although their baseball career would usually be the focus, it should not be the entire story. Information about his parentage, childhood, siblings, schooling, marriages, children, off-field hobbies or jobs, post-career life, and death should be covered if possible. Their minor league years should be well-told. As much as possible, try to make the reader know your subject as a person, not just as a shortstop.

Painted in broad strokes, the above suggestions have helped me both before and during the interview process. I hope they help you as well.

THE NEED FOR ORAL HISTORY

by Graham Womack

I worked in an ice cream shop my senior year of high school, a few blocks from where Edmonds Field stood in Sacramento.

Edmonds Field, the home of the Sacramento Solons, met the wrecking ball in 1964, but there are still remnants of its presence, still people who remember it as one of the nicer ballparks of the old Pacific Coast League.

One of the perks of working in food service is the chance to meet, or at least have brief interactions with a variety of interesting people. One day, an elderly customer told me she had lived beside Edmonds Field.

I was working at the time on a high school senior project about the Solons, and my interest piqued. I asked the woman if she would be up for an interview, handing her my phone number. One of my coworkers laughed, thinking I was trying to "pick her up."

I didn't get to interview her, but she went one better, getting me in contact with an 89-year-old man named Bud Beasley. A former pitcher for the Solons and a number of other minor league

teams, Beasley had been opposing pitcher for the Seattle Rainers on a fateful night in Sacramento history, July 11, 1948.

On this night, hours after a game, old wooden, double-decked Edmonds Field caught fire, with the park being almost completely destroyed. The Solons played the rest of the 1948 season on the road.

No one was ever sure what caused the fire. Some speculated that a lit cigar had been left in the stands. Others suspected that the park was intentionally destroyed to collect insurance money. Whatever the case, the park was rebuilt as a single-story concrete structure the following year.

More than 50 years after the fire, Beasley told me of his train being stopped that night in nearby Davis while the blaze roared. Even 15 miles away, Beasley told me he could see the flames billowing from Edmonds Field.

Stories like Beasley's motivate me to research and write about baseball history and to talk to old ballplayers. I'm of the belief as a writer that everyone has a story, and I'm always amazed at how many of them former players have.

There's something of a historical imperative in talking to old players. Beasley died four years after our conversation, and while I'd imagine he told his stories to plenty of people, I fear that good stories often die or at least diminish in detail with the passing of old players.

I'm thankful for the times that someone publishes a brilliant interview with some old ballplayer 50 or 60 years after the fact, recounting some never-before-told story.

For instance, it's been common knowledge for many years that the Boston Red Sox had a shot at Jackie Robinson before he signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers, giving him a sham tryout in 1945 with Sam Jethroe and Marvin Williams. The Red Sox, of course, were the last team in the majors to integrate, with Pumpsie Green, in 1959. A few years ago, a former player spoke of being at the Robinson tryout and said it almost didn't happen.

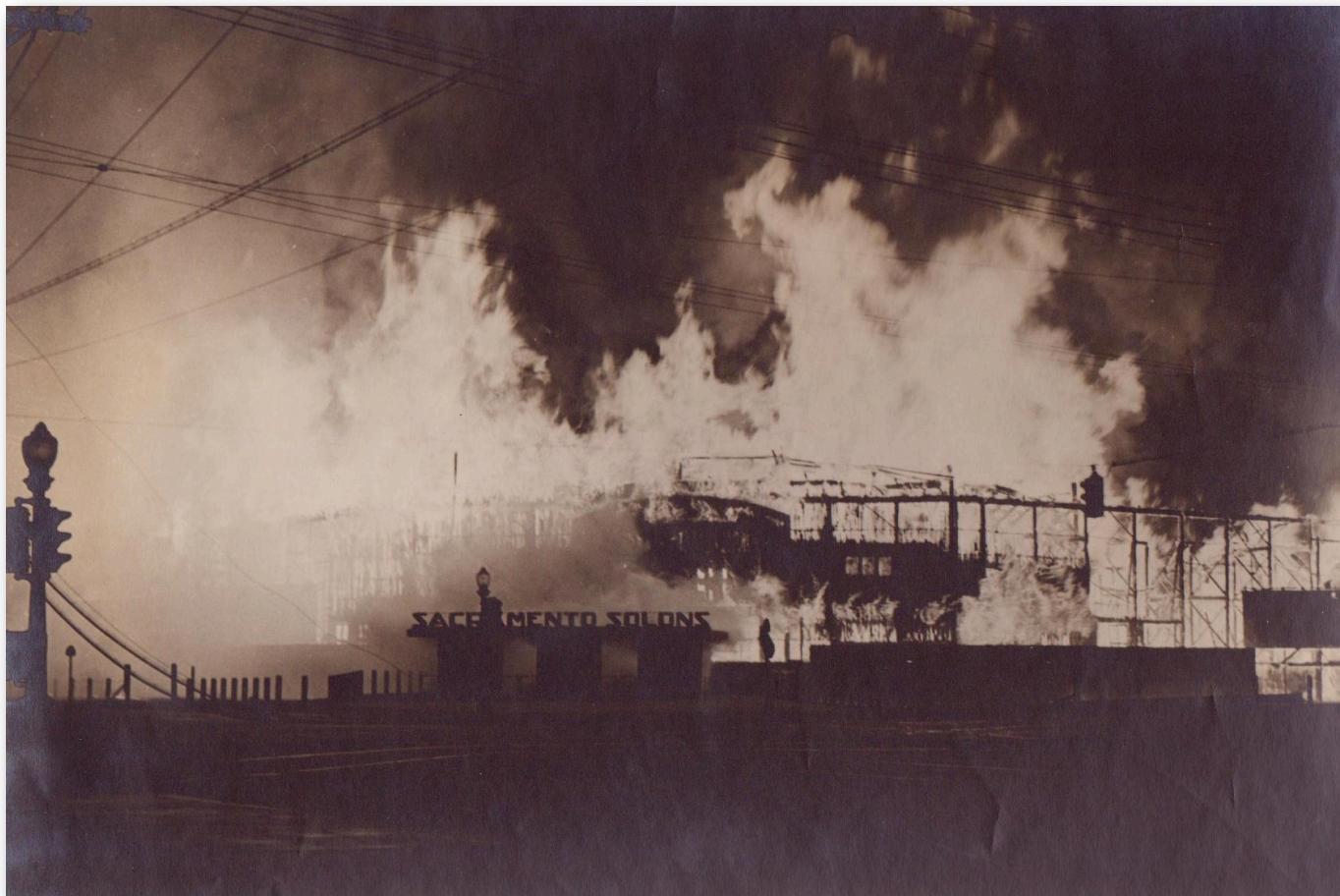
I wonder how many of these types of stories never get told. I don't believe magic interviews with former players are predestined. I think it's up to a good interviewer to seek out players, listen to what they have to say, and preserve their stories.

In that respect, I'm proud to be a member of the Society for American Baseball Research and its oral history committee. I think we can do for oral histories what SABR's landmark BioProject has done for compiling life stories on 2,000 former players.

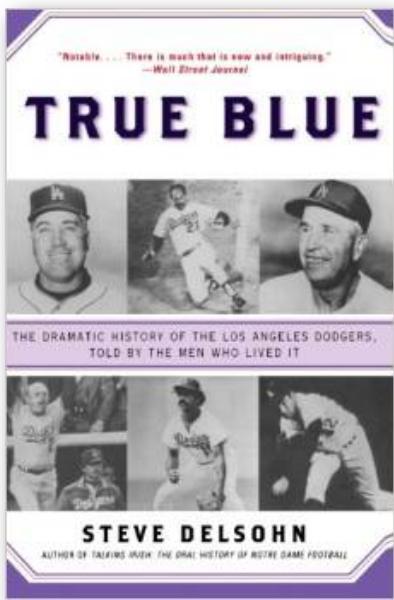
The Solons quit playing in Sacramento after 1960, and the old Pacific Coast League more or less died with the Giants and Dodgers moving to California. Fewer and fewer veterans of the old PCL remain, gathering for annual reunions that shrink by the year.

That said, I suspect there are still great stories that haven't been told. I've spoken over the years to several of these players. With SABR's help, I intend to reach out to all of the remaining players in the Sacramento area where I live. Hopefully, other members of this committee who live elsewhere will do likewise.

As a baseball historian and fan, I live for chance meetings with the Bud Beasley's of the world. I'm never sure what they're going to say, but more times than not, it's worth listening to.



Edmonds Field burning to the ground, July 11, 1948.



**TRUE BLUE:
THE DRAMATIC HISTORY OF
THE LOS ANGELES DODGERS,
TOLD BY THE MEN WHO
LIVED IT.**

BY STEVE DELSOHN

2002. New York
Harper Collins
[ISBN 978-0-3808-0615-7.
320 pp. \$14.99. Softcover]

Reviewed by
Ben Klein

In *True Blue*, Steve Delsohn traces the history of the Dodgers from the twilight of their Brooklyn years to the dawn of the twenty-first century. Relying on firsthand accounts from notable players, executives, journalists, and authors, Delsohn's oral history takes its readers on a journey through the Dodgers' ascendance to one of the premier franchises in American sports. This ascendance, however, did not resemble the smooth arc of Chavez Ravine's symmetrical outfield wall, but took a form

more similar to the jagged contours of Ebbets Field, filled with ups and downs, trials and tribulations, and character.

Ebbets Field is where Delsohn's story begins, and the opening pages are devoted to Brooklyn natives describing the intimate integration of the Dodgers with the community, followed by tales of heartbreak that came when the borough's beloved ball club was extracted from Flatbush. The discussion then turns to varied accounts of owner Walter O'Malley's culpability for that trauma. Although O'Malley remains reviled by some for his decision to move the Dodgers to Los Angeles, the book gives voice to other causes of the uprooting, such as the dilapidated condition of Ebbets Field, demographic shifts in postwar America and Robert Moses. This evenhanded approach to controversial topics is a common theme throughout the book, and, at various junctures, Delsohn affords his readers the opportunity to be exposed to all sides of some of the most significant disputes to beset the Dodgers.

Although discord is a major component of the book, it is balanced by universal awe and appreciation of the subliminal talents of the greatest Dodger pitcher, Sandy Koufax. Although Koufax declined to be interviewed for the book, his conspicuous absence is almost fitting, considering his mystique as one of the games' greatest, though least accessible legends. Considerable treatment is given to Koufax's

emergence as baseball's premier pitcher, his personality, and his struggles with chronic pain. In addition to this fairly thorough portrait of Koufax as a player and as a man, Koufax is central to the story of the Dodgers in the sixties, both on and off the field. From his heroics in the 1963 and 1965 World Series, to his holdout with Don Drysdale before the 1966 season, Delsohn demonstrates the monumental importance of Koufax to the Dodgers, and sets the stage for the monumental void that was left by his abrupt retirement following the 1966 World Series.

After giving accounts of the lean years that ensued following the departure of Koufax and Maury Wills, the book enters the technicolor seventies, which saw the passing of the managerial torch from Walter Alston to Tommy Lasorda. Although the Dodgers are known for their continuity at skipper from the fifties to the nineties, readers may be surprised to learn that Alston's long tenure was precarious at times, perhaps most significantly when he shared the bench with the flamboyant Leo Durocher in the early sixties. Furthermore, the transition from Alston to Lasorda was not as smooth as one may suspect, with many in the Dodger organization split between the Lasorda and Alston camps.

When Lasorda finally took the reins of the Dodgers, he had at his disposal the services of Steve Garvey, Davey Lopes,

Ron Cey and Bill Russell. Although these stars combined to form one of the greatest infIELDS in history, they did not always get along amongst themselves. *True Blue* includes candid recollections of this friction from Garvey, Lopes, Cey, and Russell, as well as other Dodgers stars, such as Dusty Baker, Tommy John, and Don Sutton. Despite the fractiousness, the Dodger infield was the centerpiece of some very good teams, but Los Angeles was unable to get back to baseball's zenith in the seventies, thwarted by George Steinbrenner's Yankees and the inimitable Reggie Jackson in back-to-back World Series in 1977 and 1978.

After recounting the disappointments of the seventies, Delsohn takes readers through the roller coaster ride of the eighties. Just as Lasorda came to dominate the public image of the Dodgers, the former skipper's colorful commentary dominates *True Blue*'s account of the Dodgers in the eighties. Entering the decade with their stellar infield intact, and catalyzed by the explosive arrival of Fernando Valenzuela in 1980, the Dodgers returned to the World Series in 1981, where they again faced the Yankees. Glory returned to Los Angeles after the Dodgers defeated the Yankees in six games. After finally reaching the mountaintop, the steadfast infield of Garvey, Lopes, Cey, and Russell was dismantled, beginning with the departure of Lopes to the Athletics before the 1982 season. Lopes's replacement at second base, Steve Sax, was plagued by throwing problems. Sax's yips were not the only miscues that beset the Dodgers in the mid-eighties, but many of the most notable missteps occurred off the field. *True Blue* provides detailed accounts of the cocaine addiction of the Dodgers' prized closer, Steve Howe, including insightful commentary from Howe himself, and the book moves on to recount the disastrous *Nightline* appearance of General Manager Al Campanis. Although these incidents stained the reputation of the Dodgers, Los Angeles returned to baseball's biggest stage in 1988, powered to the World Series by newcomer Kirk Gibson. Inspired by a walk off homerun by a hobbling Gibson in Game 1, the Dodgers took the series over the heavily favored A's in five games.

The 1988 World Series stands as the last great triumph in *True Blue*, and the book concludes with the disarray, disappointment, and

discontinuity that characterized the Dodgers in the nineties. Fourteen years after the book's publication, the Dodgers faithful are still waiting for a return to the World Series. *True Blue* affords long-suffering Dodgers fans an account of the team's past triumphs, and offers encouragement that, as in 1959 and 1988, World Series glory may come at a time when it is least expected.

HOW TO JOIN THE ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE'S ONLINE DISCUSSION GROUP AS OUTLINED BY JACOB POMRENKE IN AN E-MAIL SENT TO COMMITTEE MEMBERS ON JULY 14, 2014

A new Yahoo! discussion group has been set up for SABR's Oral History Committee, and we'd like to invite all of you to sign up and participate. If you're familiar with any of the other SABR committee discussion groups set up through Yahoo!, you'll recognize the functionality and format of this group as being very similar. You can choose to receive messages individually or as part of a daily "digest."

To sign up for this Oral History discussion group, just send an e-mail to this address and include a brief note of introduction about yourself in the body of the message:

sabr_oral_history-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

You should receive an e-mail back once your request has been approved (FYI, this group is only open to members of SABR's Oral History Committee.) After you've been approved, you can post messages to the entire group by sending an e-mail to this address:

sabr_oral_history@yahoogroups.com

Once you're approved, you'll also have access to view or post messages on the group website, if you prefer, instead of over e-mail. Here's the link:

https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/SABR_Oral_History/

If you have any questions, please contact committee chair John McMurray at sabroralhistorycommittee@gmail.com.

REFLECTIONS ON INTERVIEWING THE 1962 NEW YORK METS

by Ty Waterman

When I interviewed the 1962 Mets (about twelve to fourteen years ago), I picked out the potential highlights of their individual seasons. I asked them for their greatest thrill and biggest challenge when playing for the Mets ('62 only).

Many of them felt they underperformed. But I concentrated on the positive whenever possible. I asked them to tell me their most memorable moment, which could cut various ways. I also asked for any funny moments they recall.

That year was essentially hilarious. I found a way to compliment each player at some point. I remember Jim Hickman felt he let the Mets down. But he was a candidate for rookie of the year and I let him know he was one of the stronger power hitters on that team. I found out that Clem Labine was down and still angry after all those years. My job was to listen and be understanding, especially when he was released after pitching only three games. I believe it was therapeutic for him to share that experience. I always tried to be respectful to each and every player.

My favorite interview was Felix Mantilla. His favorite moment was when, during spring training in St. Petersburg, Florida, team owner Joan Payson told a restaurant owner that she was taking her entire team out of that restaurant because Mantilla couldn't get served. Mantilla never forgot that gesture.

The purpose of an interview is to be as affirmative as possible. The interviewee senses that and shares at a deeper level. I allotted one hour for most of my interviews and that seemed to work well. When I interviewed someone who rarely played (Joe Ginsberg and Herb Moford) I still focused on that one shining moment they remember. I wanted them to really enjoy this experience of recalling the '62 Mets.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT INTERVIEWING FOR THE SABR ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Q: Do I need prior experience interviewing players in order to conduct an interview?

A: No experience is required. On the Committee's website, we have included a primer with basic guidelines and procedures, which should be of benefit to experienced interviewers and novices alike. If you would like specific guidance, please contact any of the Committee's officers directly.

Q: How long should an interview be?

A: There is no set length, but an hour-long interview would be a good benchmark. Many in-depth interviews last longer than that, and a longer interview allows for more in-depth exploration of particular topics. While we are glad to add shorter interviews to our collection and to post them online, the goals of our committee suggest that a half-hour interview at minimum would be necessary for a player's interview to be considered complete by the Oral History Committee.

Q: Can you put me in touch with a particular player?

A: In some cases, the Committee may be able to provide guidance and direction on how to locate a particular player. Please contact Vice Chair Paul Ringel as a starting point. We can also provide you with names of players who live in a particular geography.

Q: In what format should I submit interviews?

A: It is easiest for the Committee to receive digital audio recordings, as posting them online is a seamless process. Audio tapes are also welcome, including of interviews that you might have completed previously. It will take longer to post recordings of tapes in digital format, obviously, but it will get done. Some interviewers have videotaped their interviews, which too is an acceptable format.

Q: May I conduct interviews by telephone?

A: Interviews in person are preferred, as conventional wisdom is that subjects provide a better and more edifying interview with an in-person interviewer. That said, there are many instances where a phone interview is the only available way. If a phone interview is required, you must abide by all applicable laws in receiving permission from your interview subject to record the interview by phone. Also, it is important to use recording equipment that provides for a high quality of phone recording.

Q: Do I need to submit a transcript of my interview to the Committee as well?

A: It is certainly useful to the Committee if you are able to provide a transcript. We will post it concurrent with your interview. Many interviewers now submit transcripts when they complete their interviews. Still, the interview itself is the most important part from our point of view, and complementary transcripts can be submitted at your discretion.

Q: If an interview with a particular player has been completed previously, may I still approach that player for a follow-up interview?

A: The Committee's top priority, of course, is to obtain interviews with players who have not been interviewed previously. That said, there may be reasons to justify conducting a second interview with a specific player, particularly if the first interview was short, of poor quality, or was done long ago. Also, there are players whose careers are so substantial or significant that conducting a second interview is necessary in order to cover that player's life fully. It is worthwhile to inquire of the Committee before conducting a second interview for our collection.

Q: Do recordings still go to the Baseball Hall of Fame's Library?

A: While it had been the practice of the Committee for many years to provide tapes to the Hall of Fame, recordings we receive are now maintained by SABR and will be posted on the

Oral History Committee's website. With recordings listed on the Committee's website, anything you submit should have a broad reach.

Q: When I provide audio of an interview I conducted to the Committee, what rights to the recording do I retain?

A: The release form included on the Committee's website enumerates the rights retained by authors. The agreement grants SABR permission to use and post the recording, but the interviewer shares copyright with SABR, thus allowing interviewers to make use of interviews they have conducted in books, articles, etc. which interviewers may someday publish. This release form is derived from the traditional agreement that SABR uses for its published works.

Q: If I am seeking a player to interview, where should I start?

A: Aiming for interviews with older players is an excellent place to begin. Players over age 60 likely have extensive stories to tell, and it is important to preserve their history. Players who have recently retired often can be located through their former teams. We would also welcome interviews with current players, though they may not have as much time for a lengthy interview during the regular season. As a starting point, players who have been retired from baseball for more than thirty years is a good place to start.

Q: May oral history interviews be conducted with non-players?

A: Absolutely. A general guideline is that anyone formally affiliated with the game merits an interview. That could also include umpires and front office personnel, for instance. Our priority is interviews with current and former players, but, if you have a topic or angle that you would like to explore with an individual involved with the game of baseball, we invite you to pursue it.

Q: What priority does the Committee place on interviews with lesser-known players?

A: In the past, Committee members have been pleasantly surprised when they have contacted lesser-known players for interviews. Even when these players have had relatively short careers, they often have vivid recollections and stories to tell. Some members have claimed, often with great surprise, that so-called cup-of-coffee players seemed to be just waiting for an interviewer to call and ask about their careers. By all means, interviews with lesser-known players are an important part of this initiative and have our enthusiastic support.

Q: As I go through the process of interviewing, are you willing to provide guidance and direction?

A: Yes, and any member of the Committee leadership is glad to respond to questions. Each of us has conducted baseball oral history interviews, and we would be glad to relate our own experiences and to point you in a direction that helps you to conduct a successful interview.

SABR ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE'S TEN WANTED INTERVIEWS (ALONG WITH EACH PLAYER'S LAST KNOWN CITY OF RESIDENCE)

Bucky Dent (Boynton Beach, FL)

Alex Grammas (Birmingham, AL)

Bobby Morgan (Oklahoma City, OK)

Don Newcombe (Torrance, CA)

Jorge Orta (Flossmoor, IL)

Boog Powell (Baltimore, MD)

Rich Rollins (Copley, OH)

Frank Saucier (Amarillo, TX)

Dick Stigman (Burnsville, MN)

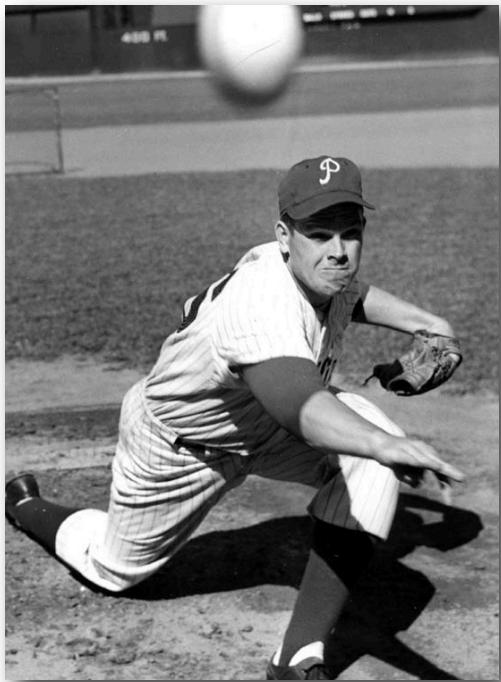
Steve Stone (Scottsdale, AZ)

Would you like to interview one of these players? Have another player in mind whom you'd like to interview? Want to find out which players live close to you? E-mail Paul Ringel at pbringel@gmail.com.

WHIZ KIDS

continued from page 1

much better results and because I really wanted to meet these guys. I started by flying up to meet Robin in the Philadelphia airport and driving with him to Valley Forge to visit with the then 87 year-old manager of the Whiz Kids, Eddie Sawyer. Eddie was known for his photographic memory, and pretty much all I did was listen as the two of them, who obviously had great affection for each other, reminisced while my tape recorder ran. I really didn't know what I was doing, but had a wonderful afternoon soaking it all in.



Robin Roberts

Got the ball rolling on the Whiz Kids project

Robin was to throw out the first pitch that evening in Wilmington, Delaware, which was resurrecting professional baseball for the first time in about 40 years. Since Robin had starred with Wilmington in 1948 just prior to being called up to the Phillies, he was a natural to help inaugurate the new era of Blue Rocks baseball. But Eddie and he talked so long that he lost track of the time (I was clueless as to when we needed to leave) and suddenly realized that we needed to leave, post haste, to get to Wilmington in time for the game. The problem was that it was pouring

rain and we got lost trying to get off Valley Forge Mountain. It's quite a hike from Valley Forge to Wilmington and we simply weren't going to make it by the time we finally got off that mountain. The only thing that saved Robin was that it was raining in Wilmington as well and the game was postponed until the next afternoon.

The logistics of arranging in person-interviews can be a challenge, but it is a rewarding experience when the schedule goes as planned and you have some good interviews. On a memorable day that went like clockwork, I was able to interview three former players in three different locations all around the Philadelphia metropolitan area. I was staying in midtown Manhattan attending a conference, which got me to the east coast. I played hooky from my meeting one day as planned, rented a car in midtown, rose at 5 AM, drove to the Limekiln Golf Club in Ambler, Pa. to interview Curt Simmons at 8 AM (Simmons and Roberts were co-owners of the course). After interviewing Curt with lawn mowers in the background, I met Del Ennis at 11 at his house in Huntingdon Valley, also north of Philadelphia.

My next stop was mid-afternoon at Veterans Stadium in south Philly where I'd arranged to talk to Maje McDonnell, who still worked for the Phillies in community relations. After a wonderful interview with Maje, I headed back to New York, arriving back in midtown late evening. It was an exhilarating, almost surreal day, and as I look back, I'm amazed that I, a Dallasite from far away Texas, managed it all without the aid of a GPS, cellphone, or even email.

I very much wanted to interview Dick Sisler, who had hit the most dramatic home run in Phillies' history, a tenth inning clout on the last day of the season against the Dodgers in Brooklyn to win the pennant. He lived in Nashville, but I learned from his wife Dot that he was in a nursing home, suffering from dementia. But she thought that he had enough long term memory to be of help, so I arranged to drive over from Dallas in the summer of 1993.

It was a very sad experience. Dick's room in the nursing home was stark, with a bed, a chest of drawers and a couple of chairs. There were a couple of family photos on the walls and the dresser, but no hint of his baseball career. Dick was 73 years old and looked like he could still play. He was relatively trim, erect, and still stood about 6'2" tall. He was one of the few men in the facility and, from his robust physical appearance, looked like he was in the wrong place. I had prepared thoroughly for the interview and with some prodding Dick was able to recall some events from his playing career, such as when he played winter ball in Cuba and became known as the Babe Ruth of Cuba because of several tape measure homers he hit down there. He also hadn't forgotten his momentous home run to win the 1950 pennant.

But as anyone who has dealt with dementia knows, Dick's memory was selective. He did not seem to have much recollection, for example, of his Hall of Fame father, George Sisler.

Later, I had a similar experience with Bill Nicholson, who, at 34, had been one of the veterans on the team and was also one of most admired. Bill had written me that he just didn't have any memory of his baseball career and that he was sorry but he didn't think he could help me. I was later able to meet him briefly when I flew back to a card show in suburban Philadelphia where several Whiz Kids, including Nicholson, were to sign autographs. Nicholson, who was the top slugger in the National League during the war years, was called "Swish" because of the noise his hard swing made when he failed to connect. At the show, Bill knew his nickname, but only because it had been drilled into him recently. When Richie Ashburn arrived at the show, he knelt down and told Bill who he was and that they'd been teammates on the Phillies. Bill pretended to know Richie, but couldn't engage in much conversation, and after a few minutes Ashburn got up with tears in his eyes.

On the same trip that I met with Dick Sisler, I next drove down to Birmingham to interview Bubba Church, a rookie pitcher in 1950 who had won several crucial games for the club before being felled by a line drive off the bat of Ted

Kluszewski during the stretch run. The visit was one of the highlights of my time with the Whiz Kids. Bubba, who exuded genuine Southern charm, and his wife, Peggy, couldn't have been more accommodating or helpful. While I interviewed Bubba, Peggy chatted with my 15-year old daughter Jillian, who had been visiting a friend in Tennessee and was now with me. The Whiz Kids were so important to Bubba that he choked up more than once recalling that time in his life.



Bill Nicholson
Sadly, sometimes things don't turn out as planned.

Bubba had arranged for me to interview Ben Chapman, who had managed the Phillies into 1948 when the Whiz Kids were starting to arrive in the big leagues, but unfortunately Chapman had passed away about ten days before my visit. He had also arranged an interview with Harry "the Hat" Walker, who lived in Leeds, a Birmingham suburb. Walker had won the 1947 batting title as a Phillie and had a great perspective on the organization during that time. It was a long hike to Leeds from the Churches and so they led us there in their car. Then, while I interviewed Walker (or rather listened to him since he talked non-stop for about an hour) and got to hold his famous two-toned bat from the 1946 World Series, the Churches took Jillian off to a late lunch.

They returned Jillian to me and decided that I needed to get something to eat, so insisted on

leading us to a restaurant on our way out of town and sat and watched me eat. Bubba and Peggy became fast friends and when he was inducted into the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame in 2001, I was there along with his Whiz Kids teammates Robin Roberts and Andy Seminick.

Perhaps my most memorable experience involved an interview no show. Pretty early in this process, a Philadelphia entrepreneur put together a huge memorabilia and autograph show in the Philadelphia Convention Center featuring the Whiz Kids and the Phillies 1980 World Championship team. It was an opportunity too great to miss, so I flew up with the goal of interviewing as many Whiz Kids as I could. I particularly wanted to interview Granny Hamner, the Whiz Kids shortstop, who hadn't responded to me.

On Saturday night during the show, the promoter hosted a reception and dinner for the ballplayers, and Robin made sure I was included. Bubba introduced me to Hamner at the reception and told him what I was doing and that he really should agree to talk to me. Granny agreed to let me interview him and told me to come to his hotel the next morning around 10:00.

The next morning I interviewed Putsy Caballero at 9 AM and then headed over to Granny's hotel in a cab. The promoter had obtained comp rooms for the players at hotels all around Philadelphia's Center City, and Granny's hotel was on the other side of downtown. I got there a couple of minutes after ten and immediately called Hamner's room. No answer. He'd said to look in the coffee shop if he wasn't in his room, but he wasn't there either. I continued to call his room and check the coffee shop for about 30 minutes or so. Robin had told me that Granny wasn't exactly known for his reliability, so I wasn't entirely surprised, although I was, of course, disappointed.

By some small miracle, I remembered Granny's room number, so I finally decided to go knock on his door. When I did, I could hear either the radio or TV on at low volume inside the room, but there was still no answer. Of course, that doesn't mean someone is in the room, only that

someone has been there. Granny was supposed to sign autographs at one that afternoon, so I went over to the show, hoping that perhaps I could sit with him and ask him a few questions while he signed. There was a fairly long line of people waiting to get his autograph at the appointed time, but he didn't show up.

Robin thought that Granny had probably gone off on a bender and would surface in a couple of days. I flew home to Dallas that evening having met Granny (and taken his picture with some of his teammates) but without an interview. I was in my office the next day, Monday, when Robin called about 8:30. He said, "I found out why Granny didn't show up for the interview with you yesterday. They found him dead in his hotel room."

Apparently, shortly after I knocked on his door, housekeeping tried to get in the room and couldn't and called hotel security. They found him not breathing in the chair in his room, apparently waiting for me.

To add to this sad story, I distinctly remember Granny telling Robin, Bubba and Putsy the night before that he'd just had a checkup and that his doctor had told him he was as healthy as a horse, but that he really should stop smoking.

Most of the former players that I interviewed were very nostalgic about their baseball careers and were happy to reminisce. But for some, it seemed to evoke difficult memories. For example, my attempts to interview Mike Goliat, the second baseman of the Whiz Kids, proved unavailing. Although Goliat was a key contributor to the team, 1950 proved to be his only full season in the major leagues, making him the answer to an oft-asked trivia question, "Who was the second baseman for the Whiz Kids?" Goliat reported to spring training in 1951 overweight and out-of-shape, was shortly sold to the St. Louis Browns and, after a handful of games, was back in the minor leagues, never to return to the Show. When I called to arrange a meeting, I could never get past his wife, Eleanor, and pretty soon it became evident that Mike just didn't want to talk to me.

Another example was Ken Johnson, a left-handed pitcher, who as a spot starter had won four games against a single loss for the Whiz Kids, including a couple of complete game shutouts. But Johnson's career had also been a disappointment, mostly due to a lack of control. Ken lived in Wichita, Kansas and had a very successful post-baseball career as an insurance executive. I was anxious to interview him because he seemed almost reclusive about his baseball career, even though he'd been a real contributor in 1950. He wasn't in touch with any of his teammates and was the only Whiz Kid who hadn't attended the team's 25 year reunion in Philadelphia in 1975.

Ken and his wife couldn't have been nicer when I traveled to Wichita, taking me to dinner at the Wichita Country Club, where Ken seemed to know everyone and was clearly a pillar of the community. But interviewing him about his baseball career proved painful to him, because he thought he had squandered his talent. He viewed it as the most unsuccessful period of his life and best forgotten. I tried to convince him otherwise, but don't think I was particularly successful.

I had a somewhat similar experience when I reached Paul Stoffel by phone. Stoffel had been a late season call-up as a 23 year-old rookie pitcher and appeared in three games with a 1.80 earned run average. But, also because of wildness, he had a very abbreviated major league career. When I told him about the Whiz Kids project, he said, "Boy, you're scraping the bottom of the barrel talking to me."

Even more poignant was my telephone conversation with Charlie Bicknell, who the Phillies had signed for a sizable bonus right out of high school. Because of the bonus baby rule then in effect, the Phillies were forced to keep Bicknell on the major league roster for two years, which in his case were the 1948 and 1949 seasons. He'd pitched in only a handful of games those two years, mostly in mop-up duty, before being sold to the Boston Braves during spring training in 1950. Charlie told me how in 1948 when the team arrived in Philadelphia after spring training, everyone had two home and two

road uniforms hung in their lockers. Bicknell, however, only had one of each.

Charlie told me, "I never said anything or told anybody, but that hurt. If you ever notice the 1948 team photo, you'll see that I'm not in that picture. I'm not in it because I didn't want to be. I told the team I had somebody sick back home on picture day."

On the other hand, some bit players, such as utility infielder Putsy Caballero and Maje McDonnell, batting practice pitcher and unofficial coach, had much better experiences and viewed their Whiz Kid experience as the best of their lives, except for marriage and children. McDonnell told me that he knelt in the tunnel after the Phillies won the pennant in Ebbets Field and thanked God for the greatest moment in his life.

I also learned that one could uncover wonderful pearls by interviewing those who were close to the team. I interviewed by phone two sisters, Anne and Betty Zeiser, who were fervent Phillies fans and had formed the Andy Seminick Fan Club in admiration of the Phillies catcher. They had traveled to Brooklyn for the season's final two games and, when the Dodgers won the first, Anne was caught on camera hitting a priest in the box seats in front of her over the head with a scorecard because he had rooted for the Dodgers. Anne was convinced that the priest had prayed the Dodgers into the win.

That night, before the final game of the season, the sisters went into a little church around the corner from their hotel to pray for a Phillies victory. There they saw Caballero on his knees, praying and crying like a baby.

I was also able to interview Andy Skinner, the private pitching coach of ace reliever Jim Konstanty. Andy was an undertaker from Konstanty's hometown in upstate New York who had no real baseball background. Skinner was a good bowler, however, and applied the techniques he used to spin a bowling ball to Konstanty's slider and palm ball. Whenever Konstanty began to struggle, he'd call Skinner, who would drive to meet the team wherever it

was playing. It must have worked; Konstanty won 16 games for the Whiz Kids in relief and was named National League Most Valuable Player.

Skinner related one occasion in which he'd driven a hearse to New York to meet Konstanty (and pick up a body) and had given a ride back to the team hotel from the Polo Grounds to Konstanty and several teammates, who'd had sit in back where the caskets ride. They caused quite a stir when the hearse pulled up to the hotel and three strapping ballplayers got out of the back.

When Jim Konstanty died too soon at age 59 in 1976, Andy Skinner was the undertaker.

In a couple of cases, the widows of former Whiz Kids proved very helpful. Mary Anne Hollmig, the beautiful widow of Stan Hollmig, visited with me by phone and sent me some great material on Stan. Through Wilma Brittin, I learned the remarkable story of her husband Jack, who, as a late season call-up, had pitched in three games for the Whiz Kids. Brittin had been a top prospect, but his career was derailed by puzzling but chronic arm and leg problems until he was eventually diagnosed as suffering from multiple sclerosis. He spent much of his life in a wheelchair, although he was able to have a successful career as a state education administrator in his native Illinois. Jack became reacquainted with former high school classmate Wilma after a gap of 23 years and they soon married and lived happily together for over 30 years, until Jack's death in 1994.

The different personalities of old ballplayers are often striking to oral historians. I mentioned how Harry Walker talked non-stop and that I, as interviewer, could scarcely get a word in edgewise. In contrast, Del Ennis was a man of few words. He was the leading practical joker on the team, so I was surprised at how quiet he was. When I arrived at the appointed time at Del's suburban Philadelphia home, he greeted me curtly at the door and bade me come in. Del ushered me down to his basement, which his second wife Liz had converted into a virtual shrine to his playing career, including his locker from old Connie Mack Stadium (In contrast, Dick Whitman's Arizona home contained little or no

hint he'd been a major league ballplayer). Usually an interviewer can get into a flow of conversation with his subject, but it was tough with Del, because he answered my questions very succinctly and almost abruptly.

He was a kind man with a sparkle in his eyes, but he just wasn't prone to much conversation. But I still managed to get some great material from him. For example, I asked him about the Gil Hodges' fly ball he'd caught in the bottom of the ninth in the last game of the season with two outs and runners on second and third to send the game into extra innings. Contemporary accounts had described the ball as a routine fly to fairly deep right field.

"Easy fly ball all right." Del said, "I lost the ball in the sun; the line drive hit me right in the chest and dropped right in my glove. I knew it was coming right at me so I just stood there and it hit me right in the chest. After the game, I had the seams of the ball in my chest."

If Ennis had not caught that ball, the winning run would have scored, forcing a best of three playoff for the pennant. Whew!

In addition to experiencing dramatically different personalities, an oral historian also quickly learns that some ballplayers have much better memories than others. For example, I was lucky because Robin Roberts, my primary subject for the Whiz Kids project, had an incredible memory for detail, enhanced by the fact that although he pitched for 18 years in the big leagues, he viewed the 1950 season as the highlight of his career. In contrast, for Curt Simmons, a 17 game-winner that year before his National Guard unit was called to active duty in August, the season was something of a blur. During our interview Curt would frequently tell me, ask Robin about that, he remembers everything.

Of course oral historians quickly learn that memories are inherently inaccurate and that events need to be verified. I've learned that the hard way more than once. For example, I talked to several Phillies about the infamous 1949 shooting of first baseman Eddie Waitkus in a

Chicago hotel room by a deranged female fan. I got some great recollections from Russ Meyer, who had been to dinner with Waitkus that evening. Waitkus was critically wounded but survived four operations to return to the Phillies as the regular first baseman in 1950. Russ told me that Waitkus ended up marrying his nurse and I printed it in the book. Wrong. Waitkus married a young woman he met on the beach during his rehab in Clearwater the following winter.

Without a doubt, however, one of the best interviews I conducted was with Russ Meyer, a/k/a as the Mad Monk during his playing days because of his volatile temper while on the mound. The stories about Meyer's temper were legion and so I arranged to meet him at his home in Olgesby, Illinois, about 90 minutes outside of Chicago (By the way, Meyer was the only one who asked to be paid for his interview, although he quickly backed off when I told him I was financing these trips out of my own pocket. "Ah, come on up," he said.).

Russ's wife left to go shopping shortly after I arrived, leaving us to ourselves. I had been a little curious about what Meyer's attire would be, since he'd been known as a real clothes horse during his playing days. Sure enough, although Meyer's house was modest, at 72 he was resplendently casual in a grey v-neck sweater and bright plaid wool slacks.

At first, Meyer was a little wary, but he soon became comfortable with me and got into the swing of the interview. He had tremendous recall and could remember verbatim arguments he'd had with umpires, sprinkled with what I'm sure were the original f-bombs and other colorful language. I was there over three hours and emerged with wonderful material, as Russ was extremely candid and admitted doing any number of things that he regretted. So colorful was the language that when working on the book at home I had to make sure that none of my young daughters were around when I played his tapes.

Meyer had a number of run-ins with Jackie Robinson, who could get under Russ's skin with

his antics on the base paths. He even admitted calling Robinson the n-word. "Bad judgment on my part but I said it and I'm not going to deny it." Meyer told me that when he was traded to the Dodgers before the 1953 season, he was initially very excited because the Dodgers were winning pennants and he'd likely be cashing World Series checks. Then he remembered with trepidation that he was going to have walk into the Dodgers' clubhouse and face Robinson.

Meyer then related that when he did walk into that clubhouse in Vero Beach at the start of spring training, the first person he saw was Jackie Robinson. "Oh, no," he thought. Robinson saw Meyer, got up from his locker and walked over to Russ, put out his hand and said, "Monk, we've been fighting one another. Now, let's fight 'em together."



Russ Meyer

After heckling Jackie Robinson from the opposing bench, became friends with him after being traded to Brooklyn

That's striking gold for an oral historian. That type of interpersonal information is just not available without going to the sources. By the way, Meyer told me that he became fast friends with Robinson.

Two other wonderful Robinson stories that I unearthed came from Robin Roberts. It is well known that the Phillies were particularly hard on Jackie when he integrated the majors in 1947, fueled by racial invective from manager Ben Chapman and coach Dusty Cooke, both

southerners. That Phillie team was mostly a veteran team, but the rough treatment of Robinson continued even into 1948 when the club began calling up some of the younger players who would form the nucleus of the 1950 pennant winners. Roberts and Curt Simmons both recalled an incident at Ebbets Field shortly after Robin was called up and shortly before Ben Chapman was fired as manager.

Robinson had helped the Dodgers sweep a doubleheader with seven hits and a couple of stolen bases. Afterwards, Chapman waited for Robinson under the stands where the runways from both dugouts met for a common tunnel to the dressing rooms. Roberts and Simmons were behind Chapman and when Jackie walked by, they heard Chapman say to him, "Robinson, you're one helluva ballplayer, but you're still a [n-word]." Roberts thought that if Robinson lit into Chapman, it would be a whale of a fight, since both were big strapping men, but Robinson, turning the other cheek, just looked at Chapman, and kept on walking.

A little over two years later on the last day of the season, October 1, 1950, the Phillies defeated the Dodgers in ten innings for the pennant in a game the Dodgers seemingly had won in the bottom of the ninth inning. According to Roberts and others, in spite of that bitter loss and notwithstanding the way the Phillies had treated him when he broke into the league, Robinson visited the Phillies clubhouse after the game and went player to player to congratulate them on winning the pennant.

Thus, I learned more about Jackie Robinson's character than I'd could have imagined simply by interviewing his rivals.

One person who was a must to interview was Richie Ashburn, the Phillies star centerfielder who had thrown out the Dodgers' Cal Abrams at the plate in the bottom of the ninth inning of that decisive game in 1950. The Dodgers had Abrams on second and Pee Wee Reese at first with no outs and Duke Snider at the plate. Ashburn was thought to have a weak arm and over the years the Dodgers and others had indicated that Ashburn was playing more shallow than usual in

case Snider bunted or the Phillies tried to pick Abrams off second. Richie labeled both theories as "preposterous" because the Phillies didn't even have a pick-off play at second and, even in the unlikely event that Snider bunted, the play would be at third or first, not second. He told me he did come in a couple of steps because the winning run was on second and simply raced in, caught Snider's line drive on one hop and fired to the plate, just as he'd done in practice thousands of times before.

Abrams was out by a good fifteen feet and the play cost Dodgers' third base coach Milt Stock his job, since he'd sent Abrams with no one out. Stock subsequently resurfaced as the third base coach for the Cardinals and Ashburn recalled that he'd then thrown out three Cardinals at home in one game. Richie was known for his dry wit, and told me, "I guess he never thought I could throw."

Ashburn, of course, was the beloved broadcaster of the Phillies games for 35 years after his retirement as a player. I'd driven down to Houston to interview him in his hotel room in the Galleria during one of the Phillies trips there to play the Astros. Near the end of the interview but with the tape still rolling, I asked Richie off-handedly how long he thought he'd continue to broadcast. He thoughtfully responded that the travel was very wearing, but that he thought he would really miss the games. He said he wasn't sure how long he'd keep doing the games, but said, "I'll tell you one thing, I don't want to end up like Don Drysdale."

Hall of Fame pitcher Drysdale was a Dodgers' broadcaster who had died just two years earlier, alone in a hotel room in Montreal, Canada, while there to broadcast a Dodgers-Expos series.

Unfortunately, in September 1997, about two years after my interview with him and shortly after he'd finally been inducted into Baseball's Hall of Fame, Whitey did meet the same fate, dying in a New York hotel room after broadcasting a Mets-Phillies game.

In reliving the glory of 1950 with the Whiz Kids themselves, I was able to experience their full

range of emotions, and I became sort of an unofficial Whiz Kid myself since they all knew what I was up to. I developed friendships not only with my boyhood hero Roberts, but also with others such as Bubba Church, Andy Seminick, Curt Simmons, Richie Ashburn, Eddie Sawyer, and Putsy Caballero.

The culmination of these interviews was a book titled *The Whiz Kids and the 1950 Pennant*, which Robin Roberts and I co-authored and which was published by the Temple University Press in late 1996. We wrote the book as seen through Robin's eyes, but sprinkled it liberally with quotes from all the ballplayers and others whom I interviewed. So, for example, we had the recollections of all the participants of the key plays of the pennant-clinching game in Ebbets Field: Ashburn on his throw in the ninth to save the game, Stan Lopata who caught the throw and tagged out Cal Abrams, Robin who pitched the entire game, Dick Sisler who hit the legendary tenth inning home run, and Del Ennis who caught the last out of the ninth in spite of losing the ball in the sun.

As a thank you, I sent all the Phillies I'd interviewed a wonderful color lithograph of the Whiz Kids that a Philadelphia based sports artist named Stan Kotzen had produced, along with a copy of the book. I sent one of each to Mike

Goliat, who'd effectively resisted my efforts to interview him, as well. Unexpectedly, in return I received a note of thanks from Mike, a vintage baseball that he signed, and another piece of memorabilia autographed by several of his Whiz Kids teammates. Thereafter I received a Christmas card from the Goliats for as long as they were alive.

Unhappily, time is of the essence when obtaining oral histories from old ballplayers. I conducted my interviews of the Whiz Kids about 20 years ago, or about 45 years after their pennant-winning season. Even then several members of the team had passed away including Waitkus, third baseman Willie "Puddinhead" Jones, pitchers Konstanty (the National League MVP), Brittin, Jocko Thompson (one of the most decorated paratroopers of World War II), Blix Donnelly, reserve catcher Ken Silvestri; and reserve outfielder Hollmig. Now, however, only three survive, Simmons, Caballero, and Bob Miller.

In retrospect, I'm just so glad that I did what I did when I did it. It took real time and money to fly around the country to talk to old ballplayers over about a three-year period, but the memories I uncovered and the benefits that I received were, as the popular ad says, priceless.



BASEBALL ORAL HISTORIES OF NOTE

Compiled by Paul Rogers

This chronologically arranged bibliography of published oral histories is intended to be a work in progress and I hope others will add to it. Although I consider memoirs and autobiographies to be oral histories as well, I didn't make an effort to list them except for, since I started the list, the three that I have co-authored. One option is to develop a separate bibliography of ballplayer, etc. memoirs. In any event, I do hope oral history committee members will add to this list.

My Greatest Baseball Game
by Don Schiffer (1950)

My Greatest Day in Baseball
by John Carmichael (1951)

The Long Season
by Jim Brosnan (1960)

Pennant Race
by Jim Brosnan (1962)

The Glory of Their Times – The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Played It
by Lawrence Ritter (1966)

Ball Four
by Jim Bouton (1970)

The Boys of Summer
by Roger Kahn (1971)

Baseball When the Grass Was Real – Baseball from the 20s to the 30s Told by the Men Who Played It
by Donald Honig (1975)

Baseball Between the Lines – Baseball in the 40s and 50s
by Donald Honig (1976)

The Man in the Dugout – Fifteen Big League Managers Speak Their Minds
by Donald Honig (1977)

Even the Browns – Baseball During World War II
by William B. Mead (1978)

The October Heroes – Great World Series Games Remembered by the Men Who Played Them
by Donald Honig (1979)

The Men in Blue – Conversations with Umpires
by Larry Gerlach (1980)

Baseball for the Love of It – Hall of Famers Tell It Like It Was
by Anthony Connor (1982)

Bums – An Oral History of the Brooklyn Dodgers
by Peter Golenbock (1984)

Forgotten Fields
by Paul Green (1984)

I'd Rather Be a Yankee – An Oral History of America's Most Loved and Hated Team
by John Tullius (1986)

Voices of the Game – the First Full-Scale Overview of Baseball Broadcasting, 1921 to Present
by Curt Smith (1987)

Rowdy Richard: A Firsthand Account of the National League Baseball Wars of the 1930s and the Men Who Fought Them
by Dick Bartell and Norman Macht

Legends of Baseball – An Oral History of the Game's Golden Age
by Walter Langford (1987)

Baseball Fathers, Baseball Sons
by Dick Wimmer (1988)

Diamond Greats – Profiles and Interviews with 65 of Baseball's History Makers
by Rich Westcott (1988)

**The Men of Autumn – An Oral History
of the 1949-53 World Champion
New York Yankees**
by Dom Forker (1989)

**Legends – Conversations with
Baseball Greats**
by Art Rust, Jr. with Mike Marley (1989)

**Sweet Seasons – Recollections of the
1955-64 New York Yankees**
by Dom Forker (1990)

**When the Cheering Stops – Former Major
Leaguers Talk About Their Game & Lives**
by Lee Heiman, Dave Weiner, & Bill Gutman
(1990)

**Black Diamonds – Life in the Negro
Leagues From the Men Who Lived It**
by John B. Holway (1991)

One Shining Season
by Michael Fedo (1991)

**Baseball Players and Their Times:
Oral Histories of the Game, 1920-1940**
by Eugene Murdock (1991)

**Get That Nigger Off the Field – the Oral
History of the Negro Leagues**
by Art Rust, Jr. (1992)

**For the Love of the Game – Baseball
Memories From the Men Who Were There**
by Cynthia Wilbur (1992)

**Baseball Between the Wars: Memories of
the Game by the Men Who Played It**
by Eugene Murdock (1992)

Baseball – the Writers' Game
by Mike Shannon (1992)

**Maz and the '60 Bucs – When Pittsburgh
And Its Pirates Went All the Way**
by Jim O'Brien (1993)

**Rex Barney's Thank Youuuu for 50 Years in
Baseball from Brooklyn to Baltimore**
by Rex Barney and Norman Macht (1993)

**Cobb Would Have Caught It:
The Golden Age of Baseball in Detroit**
by Richard Bak (1993)

A Glimpse of Fame
by Dennis Snelling (1993)

**Baseball Chronicles – An Oral History of
Baseball Through the Decades**
by Mike Blake (1994)

**We Played the Game – 65 Players
Remember Baseball's Greatest Era,
1947-1964**
by Danny Peary (1994)

**Rex Barney's Orioles Memories
1969-1994**
by Rex Barney and Norman Macht

**Masters of the Diamond – Interviews
with Players Who Began Their Careers
More Than 50 Years Ago**
by Rich Westcott (1994)

**Dugout to Foxhole – Interviews with
Baseball Players Whose Careers Were
Affected by World War II**
by Rick Van Blair (1994)

The Whiz Kids and the 1950 Pennant
by Robin Roberts and C. Paul Rogers III (1996)

**Wrigleyville – A Magical History Tour of
the Chicago Cubs**
by Peter Golenbock (1996)

**This Side of Cooperstown – An Oral
History of Major League Baseball
in the 1950's**
by Larry Moffi (1996)

**Hornsby Hit One Over My Head – A Fans'
Oral History of Baseball**
by David Cataneo (1997)

**Covering the Bases – the Most
Unforgettable Moments in Baseball in the
Words of the Writers and Broadcasters
Who Were There**
by Benedict Cosgrove (1997)

**Voices from the Negro Leagues –
Conversations with
52 Baseball Standouts**
by Brent Kelley (1998)

**Baseball's Forgotten Heroes – One Fan's
Search for the game's Most Interesting
Overlooked Players**
by Tony Salin (1999)

**The Spirit of St. Louis – A History of the
St. Louis Cardinals and Browns**
by Peter Golenbock (2000)

**A Bittersweet Journey – America's
Fascination With Baseball**
by Rick Phalen (2000)

**The Negro Leagues Revisited -
Conversations with
66 More Baseball Heroes**
by Brent Kelley (2000)

**Voices from the Pastime – Oral Histories
of Surviving Major Leaguers,
Negro Leaguers, Cuban Leaguers and
Writers, 1920-1934**
by Nick Wilson (2000)

**Splendor of the Diamond – Interviews
with 35 Stars of Baseball's Past**
by Rich Westcott (2000)

**Memories of a Ballplayer – Bill Werber
and Baseball in the 1930s**
by Bill Werber and C. Paul Rogers III (2001)

**True Blue – The Dramatic History of the
Los Angeles Dodgers Told by
the Men Who Lived It**
by Steve Delsohn (2001)

Growing Up Baseball – An Oral History
by Harvey Frommer & Frederic Frommer (2001)

**The Pastime in Turbulence – Interviews
with Baseball Players of the 1940s**
by Brent Kelley (2001)

**Cup of Coffee – The Very Short Careers of
Eighteen Major League Pitchers**
by Rob Trucks (2002)

**Amazin' – The Miraculous History of
New York's Most Beloved Baseball Team**
by Peter Golenbock (2002)

**Pop Flies and Line Drives – Visits With
Players From Baseball's Golden Era**
by Jack Heyde (2004)

**Hardball on the Home Front –
Major League Replacement Players
of World War II**
by Craig Allen Cleve (2004)

**You Never Forget Your First –
Ballplayers Recall Their Big League
Debuts**
by Josh Lewin (2005)

**The Only Game in Town – Baseball Stars
of the 1930s and 1940s Talk About
the Game They Loved**
by Fay Vincent (2006)

**No Greater Love – Life Stories from the
Men Who Saved Baseball**
by Todd Anton (2007)

**We Would Have Played for Nothing –
Baseball Stars of the 1950s and 1960s
Talk About the Game They Loved**
by Fay Vincent (2008)

**It's What's Inside the Line That Counts:
Baseball Stars of the 1970s and 1980s
Talk About the Game They Loved**
by Fay Vincent (2010)

Lucky Me – My 65 Years in Baseball
by Eddie Robinson and C. Paul Rogers III (2011)

**When Baseball Was Still King – Major
League Players Remember the 1950s**
by Gene Fehler (2012)

**Throwing Hard Easy – Reflections on a
Life in Baseball**
by Robin Roberts and C. Paul Rogers III (2014),
[originally published as **My Life in Baseball**
(2003)]