

THE SQUIBBER

September 2018

The Squibber is the Bob Davids chapter's quarterly newsletter. It is emailed to chapter members roughly every three months. If you're a Bob Davids chapter member and are not getting the Squibber, please check that your email address and chapter affiliations listed on the SABR site are correct. Please send submissions for future editions to Squibber editor Walt Cherniak at wcherniakjr@aol.com.

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TALKIN' BASEBALL:

Upcoming Speakers Announced

Here is the speaker schedule for upcoming meetings of the "Talkin' Baseball" group.

On Oct. 6, Stephen Robert Katz will discuss his book, "Ware's Boys of Summer."

On Nov. 3, Jack Smiles will discuss his book, "Bucky Harris: A Biography of Baseball's Boy Wonder."

On Dec. 1, Bob Luke will discuss his book, "The Baltimore Elite Giants

On Jan. 5, 2019, John Coulson will discuss his book, "Wee Willie Sherdel: The Cardinals' Winningest Left-Hander."

The Talkin' Baseball group meets on the first Saturday of each month at 9 a.m. Meetings are held at Brighton Gardens, 7110 Minstrel Way, Columbia, Md. Come and bring a friend!

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LOOKING BACK AND AHEAD:

SABR Chapter Leaders to Lead Library Baseball Chat

Bob Davids Chapter President Dave Raglin and chapter board member Mark Pattison will lead a discussion, "Baseball: A Look Back – and a Look Ahead," Thursday, Oct. 25, at 6:30 p.m., at the Juanita E. Thornton-Shepherd Park Library, 7420 Georgia Ave. NW in Washington. While the date is supposed to be a World Series off-day, it'll start – and likely end – before the first pitch is thrown should a Fall Classic game be played on that date.

At least part of the discussion promises to be free-wheeling! The event is free, but attendees will be able to buy two Pattison-Raglin books: the "Detroit Tigers Lists and More: Runs, Hits and Eras" (2002) for \$10, and the SABR-published "Detroit Tigers 1984: What a Start! What a Finish!" (2012) for \$20. (The speakers cannot help but note that this is the golden anniversary of the Tigers' 1968 World Series-winning team, and that while their bio-book, "Sock It to 'Em Tigers: The Incredible Story of the 1968 Tigers," is out of print, copies are fetching triple-digit prices online.)

Should you want to continue the conversation outside the library, there's a Ledo Pizza across the street from the library. Parking is scarce at the library, and the District charges \$2.30 an hour for street parking – even after rush hour. The closest Metro station is Takoma on the Red Line, but that could be a good 15-minute walk. The 70 and 79 buses, though, run frequently along Georgia. Plan ahead! For more details, get in touch with Mark at either mpattison@catholicnews.com or 202-829-9289.

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REMEMBERING “WEE WILLIE”:

New Book Examines Oft-Overlooked Cards Ace

SABR member John Coulson has written and published a book entitled, “Wee Willie Sherdel: The Cardinals' Winningest Left-Hander.” It is the story of Bill Sherdel, the son of an immigrant German blacksmith who settled in the tiny village of Midway, between Hanover and McSherrystown, Pa.

Sherdel began his professional baseball career with the Hanover Raiders of the Blue Ridge League. He spent a little over a year with the Milwaukee Brewers before his discovery by Branch Rickey. Sherdel spent 15 years in the major leagues from 1918 to 1932, mostly with the Cardinals. He started the opening game in two World Series against Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and the powerful Yankees. Quite an honor considering his pitching teammates were Grover Cleveland Alexander and Jess Haines.

Sherdel and Ruth became good friends, with Ruth visiting Wee Willie at his home in McSherrystown, even attending the Catholic church there. For more on the book, check out John’s website, www.johngcoulson.com.

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A TALE OF TWO (MINOR LEAGUE) CITIES:

Bob Davids Chapter Minor League Outing

By Mark Pattison

As luck would have it, the Bob Davids Chapter’s minor league outing in Waldorf came less than a week after the Baltimore Babe Ruth Chapter’s minor league tour of Bowie, as the Baysox had been rained out of the original date in July. It set up, however, an eye-opening clash of cultures between the general managers of the Baysox, a Double-A affiliate of the Baltimore Orioles in the Eastern League, and the Southern Maryland Blue Crabs in the indie-ball (aka unaffiliated) Atlantic League.

Baysox GM Brian Shallcross addressed about 30 SABR members and guests on a hot, humid Sunday afternoon (Aug. 26) at Prince George’s Stadium, with a classic car show in one section of the parking lot

already in full swing. Shallcross had plenty of ideas about the relationship between the majors and the minors, as well as revenue generation, and we'll get to that.

But during one portion of his remarks – which went on for so long that there was no time for his assistant GM to speak, nor any time for his “director of broadcasting,” the guy who does play-by-play on the website -- Shallcross started sniping at the Blue Crabs. “Oh, we’ve got major-league players,” he said in a whiny, sing-song tone. “We’ve got Triple-A players.” Then, adopting his regular voice, Shallcross said any ex-big leaguers on Southern Maryland’s roster were on their way down, while Bowie’s players are on their way up to the majors, and features big-league Orioles on rehab assignments.

Talking about ballpark promotions, the Baysox staff assesses which promotions worked best, which ones didn’t work out, and what can be done better for the year ahead. In one brainstorming session, someone in the room had a slip of the tongue and, instead of saying “glow in the dark” said “glow in the park.” Shallcross said they seized on that concept and then sought for ideas on how to bring it to fruition. The solution: glow-sticks -- “they cost three cents apiece,” he said -- given before a contest that featured post-game fireworks. After the final out, the crowd was instructed to activate their glow-sticks at the same time, and the resultant effect during the fireworks display was so awe-inspiring a camera operator uttered an expletive that had to be cut from the video.

Then Shallcross got in another dig at the Blue Crabs. When a promotion works, he said, “we share” with other minor-league clubs. “But we don’t share with Southern Maryland. That’s garbage baseball.” Apparently, nobody had sent Shallcross the memo that SABR was hosting another pre-game extravaganza six days later in Waldorf.

Blue Crabs GM Courtney Knichel, warned in advance about Shallcross’ antipathy toward her team -- but without the “garbage” adjective -- said they don’t compete with the Baysox for fans. Bowie and Waldorf are 32 miles apart, but “our target audience is Charles County” and the two counties south of it, Calvert and St. Mary’s, she said. “Somebody said the Baysox put a lot of their season schedules around here one year and we came and took them all away. Well, no we didn’t,” said Knichel, one of only a handful of women general managers in pro baseball, and the only woman heading up an indie-ball franchise.

Both teams average roughly the same number of fans. Bowie averaged close to 3,200 fans per game for 2018, although that figure put them 11th in the 12-team Eastern League. And 3,200 can look puny when your ballpark can cram in four times as many, as it did for the 2000 Double-A All-Star game. Waldorf also puts about 3,200 fannies in the seats, Knichel told the Bob Davids group Sept. 1 -- there were about a dozen who had been at Bowie the previous weekend -- but Regency Furniture Stadium holds only about 4,300.

Each played 70 home games. Bowie's season ended Labor Day, finishing out of the playoff picture (fourth place in the Eastern League's six-team Western Division), while Southern Maryland also had 70 home games in its 126-game schedule by virtue of a franchise folding after the 2017 season -- with a replacement club, the Road Warriors, playing its entire schedule as the visiting team -- starting in May and ending in mid-September. The Blue Crabs finished in the basement of the Atlantic League's four-team Freedom Division.

But more from each GM and their uniformed personnel.

Bowie:

Shallcross said Major League Baseball extracts an 8 percent tax from each ticket sold by all of its minor-league affiliates. Bowie's share of that is roughly \$80,000 each year. The total take is about \$18 million. Given MLB's revenue streams, "that's a rounding error," Shallcross declared. He believes MLB should set the funds aside as grant money to boost youth baseball. "I could do a lot, a lot, a lot with \$20,000," said Shallcross, who managed his son's 9-and-under team one year.

The Baysox's relationship with Prince George's County, which owns the ballpark, is "contentious," at least for the moment, he noted. The county is all for deriving more revenue from the stadium complex, but is miserly about spending money to make money. It shelled out \$300,000 for a new scoreboard in left-center field (which didn't work for the first two games of the Baysox-Erie SeaWolves series), but won't pay to extend the safety netting to the dugout areas, because its contract with the Baysox does not obligate it to pay for things it's not required to do. "We're going to pay for it ourselves, because it's a safety issue," Shallcross said.

But Bowie's relationship with the Orioles is solid. Bowie is one of four Maryland cities hosting Orioles minor-league teams (Frederick in the high-A Carolina League, Delmarva [Salisbury] in the low-A South Atlantic League, and the Aberdeen IronBirds in the short-season A-ball New York-Penn League). The Baysox's contract with the O's extends until 2020, and the Birds are the only big-league team Bowie has partnered with since the franchise's inception in 1992.

Shallcross is always on the lookout on ways to use the complex when the Baysox season is over, and even when they're on the road. There are yard sales, high school graduations, movie nights, celebrity softball games, and once a memorable Willie Nelson-Bob Dylan concert. The ownership group that runs the Baysox "would be happy if I increase attendance 3 to 5 percent next year," he said.

Prince George's Stadium is now 25 years old. Not only does it look empty on most game days, it also looks tired. When it was built, its investors "got their money back in four years," said Shallcross, who has been with the Baysox for 14 years. "You couldn't do that today. Building this stadium today would cost you \$60 million."

Manager Gary Kendall, who completed his eighth season as the Baysox skipper, liked how his team was coming together in the final month of the season, although the upsurge wasn't enough to get them into the playoffs. He also liked getting five prospects in trades the Birds made with the Dodgers and the Braves without having to cut anyone. Kendall said he'd gone through the whole season without having to release anyone -- a rarity at that level of the minors. He recalled one time when, as IronBirds manager, he had to cut five players in 10 minutes -- and one of them was the son of O's then-pitching coach Leo Mazzone. "Doing one a day is hard enough," Kendall told the SABR group, "and I knew I was going to get a call from somebody's dad" -- which he did.

Then there was the story about the catcher set to be released. "But we wait until after the game" to cut players, not before the game, due to injuries that could happen anywhere else in the organization. This time, the catcher himself got injured, stepping on a nail as he was exiting his apartment. "You don't like to release somebody when they're injured," Kendall said. The player needed a month to recover, and by that time, there was a need for another catcher in the system. So he stayed on, hit .353 for the rest of the season, "and he extended his professional career by four years," Kendall said, smiling.

Despite the grind of being away from home from Valentine's Day to Labor Day, Kendall takes on extra work, managing the Orioles' instructional league players, which started Sept. 13. Why do it? "When they come here (to Bowie), they know me."

Southern Maryland:

Knichel (rhymes with "initial" but with a hard-K-plus "N" sound, like Milwaukee Brewers reliever Corey Knebel) said the biggest difference between affiliated ball and indie ball is cost. The major-league teams cover all the costs of minor league players' salaries and benefits. "Our budget for salaries is \$250,000, and our worker's comp budget is \$150,000," she noted, and that money's got to come from somewhere.

There's also a sizable difference in what GMs do in the majors and the minors. In the bigs, general managers are all about talent acquisition and development, not to mention contracts. In the minors, the GM is all about raising money and meeting payroll. "You don't want to have to tell a player, 'Hey, can you wait another week or two?'" Knichel said. Only the top players earn as much as \$3,000 a month, and many players make barely half that. It was the downfall a year ago of the circuit's Bridgeport Bluefish,

and is a big reason a new team will be installed in 2019 in High Point, N.C., where all the suites have already been sold, along with 500 season tickets.

One headache that's not Knichel's is concessions. She contracts that out to a division of Comcast that used to do Bowie's concessions when Comcast owned the Baysox. The night before the SABR outing was the start of high school football season "and they were down seven" concessionaires. "I'm glad I didn't have to worry about that."

Since indie-ball GMs don't deal with talent, it's up to each team's managers and coaches to find the players to fill out the roster. There can be an upside to that as well. The Blue Crabs sold six players' contracts to affiliated ball for \$3,000-\$6,000, depending on what level of the minor leagues was taking them. One of those players, Brandon Cumpton, pitched this season for Toronto.

Another Blue Crabs hurler, reliever Ryan Chaffee, spoke to the SABR group about his journey in the pro game. Chaffee said he'd had a pretty good season in 2017 and had thought about ending his career on that high note. "But then I thought I should play out the string as long as I can," he said. He estimated that the talent level of Southern Maryland and the Atlantic League is somewhere between Double-A and Triple-A.

Some familiar names dot the Blue Crabs roster: Drake Britton (brother of Zach), Kyle Drabek (son of Doug), Cory Vaughn (son of Greg, nephew of Mo). Once the season was over, though, Chaffee was going to see just how long that string was and pursue the possibility of playing pro ball over the winter in Australia. "I told my dad, 'Hey, Australia would be a great place to visit this winter!'", he said.

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ROY'S BIG DAY:

Recalling Sievers' 7-RBI Game in Washington

By Paul Scimonelli

(This article will soon be published by SABR's Games project)

"BLASTED!" yelled the box score. "Senators Drub Tigers Again, 16-6" lamented the sports page headline of the Detroit Free Press, September 3, 1954. Obviously, the Detroit scribes were miffed that the Tigers were soundly beaten by the Senators the day before, and to make matters worse, were swept in a

three-game series in September, just as they had been in July. Tigers hurlers were racked for 18 hits in the massacre, three by Roy Sievers and three by All Star Mickey Vernon, as well as the rest of the lineup.

Sievers, in particular, hustled hard all season to show owner Clark Griffith and manager Bucky Harris that their new faith in him was not unfounded. "Getting' traded to Washington was the best thing that ever happened to me," Roy said in an interview. "Saved my career!" And that is exactly what Sievers did in ol' D.C. in 1954.

After his tremendous 1949 Rookie of the Year season with the St. Louis Browns (.306 BA/16 HR/91 RBI,) Sievers fell victim to a "sophomore slump" in 1950, hitting an anemic .238 with 10 homers and 57 RBI. The slump continued into the 1951 campaign, so much so that he was sent down to the San Antonio Missions of the Texas League for "seasoning." It was there on Aug. 1 that he laid out to catch a low line drive, severely dislocating his right shoulder. Out for the rest of the season, Sievers tried rehabbing on his own, only to dislocate it again in spring training of 1952. Bill Veeck, the new Brownies owner, arranged for Roy to have a very experimental operation to fix the ailing shoulder. He wasn't 100% in 1953 but he managed a respectable .270 average with 8 homers and 35 RBI in 92 games, basically hitting with one arm!

Strapped for cash, Veeck was forced to sell the Browns to Baltimore in 1954. Word of Sievers busted wing, however, found its way into the hands of Baltimore manager Jimmy Dykes. Considering Sievers as "damaged goods," Baltimore traded Roy to the Senators for Gil Coan. It turned out to be one of Clark Griffith's better trades.[iv]

"When I come up to Washington, I asked [manager] Bucky Harris, 'Where'm I gonna play?' I told him I still couldn't throw too good, so's I couldn't play the outfield. He just said, 'You get rid of the ball quick as you can. I need your bat in the lineup.' So, he put me in left field. Back then, I would just kinda loop the ball to the shortstop best as I could." [v]

Nose to the grindstone, Sievers worked diligently to strengthen his arm. Under the watchful eye of team doctor George Resta and trainer George "Doc" Lentz, Roy's arm and bat showed great improvement. Playing nearly every game of the season, Roy regained most of his power. Although his .232 batting average was sub-par by his standards, he still managed 102 RBI and hit 24 home runs into Griffith Stadium's cavernous 388-foot power alley in left field. He was voted "Comeback Player of the Year" by The Sporting News.

Some 1,260 stalwart Senator fans twirled the Griffith Stadium turnstiles on a balmy 80-degree Thursday afternoon to watch their Nats make history against the Tigers in the last of a three-game set. If the Senators had a patsy for the year, it was surely the Tigers, beating them 13 out of the 22 games they

played that year. Led by veteran two-time AL batting champion and should-be Hall of Famer Mickey Vernon, as well as Eddie "The Walking Man" Yost and Sievers, the '54 Senators proved to be a competitive team; however, incongruously ending up in sixth place, two games behind the Tigers.

The Senators' Bob Porterfield faced off against the Tigers' Ned Garver. Garver had his career year in 1951, going 20-12 for the hapless Browns, where he teamed up with a very young Sievers. Porterfield was coming off of a magnificent 22-10 season for the 1953 Senators. The Tigers struck first. After a Harvey Kuenn fly out, Fred Hatfield and Bob Nieman singled off Porterfield. Ray Boone sacrificed Hatfield in and Wayne Belardi popped up to end the inning, giving the Tigers a 1-0 lead. The Senators came back with a vengeance, though. Yost did what he did best and walked to lead off the Nats' half of the inning. After a Jim Busby fly out, Vernon singled Yost to third. Sievers, hurting his old Brownies teammate Garver, doubled Vernon and Yost home. Jim Lemon and Ed Fitz Gerald both grounded out to end the inning, the Senators now up 2-1.

With his first hit of the game, Vernon became the 95th man in baseball history to record 2,000 career hits and the ninth Senator to do so. Other Senators greats include Joe Cronin, Joe Judge, Joe Kuhel, Heinie Manush, Clyde Milan, Sam Rice, Goose Goslin, and Ed Delahanty. Vernon finished 1954 with career highs in homers (20) and RBI (97) and lead the league with 33 doubles. The second inning and the top of the third was pretty much three up-three down for both Garver and Porterfield. The Senators half of the third was massive. After Yost and Busby singles, Vernon walked to fill the bases. Sievers' double to straight-away center field cleared the bases and chased his pal Garver off the mound. Reliever Billy Hoefl fared no better, giving up a triple to Lemon, scoring Sievers, and a double to Fitz Gerald, scoring Lemon. Hoefl finally settled down to get out the remaining Senators and end the inning. The Senators now led 7-1.

The Tigers got two back in the top of the fourth with hits from Chick King and Billy Hoefl. The Nats responded in kind in the bottom of the fourth. Busby led off with his 7th homer of the year, followed by a Vernon single. Sievers chased Hoefl off the mound with his 23rd home run of the year. Reliever Dick Marlowe gave up three hits and another run before finally settling down and retiring the side. The Senators were up 11-3. Roy's 23rd home run broke the existing Senators franchise home run record of 22, set by Zeke Bonura in 1938. Other than a Hatfield single, the fifth inning was pretty much three up-three down for both sides.

The Tigers would plate a run in the top of the sixth, making it 11-4 Senators. In the bottom of the seventh, Yost singled home Jerry Snyder from second. Jim Busby reached on an error and Vernon cleared the bases with his 19th homer of the year, setting a Senators team record for left handed hitters and besting the likes of Goslin, Stan Spence and Eddie Robinson. Senators up now 15-4. The Tigers went quietly in their half of the eighth. The Senators plated one more in the eighth with a Jerry Snyder single to score Fitz Gerald. Bob Porterfield gave up 4 hits and two runs in the top of the 9th, but still managed to hold on to a complete game 16-6 victory.

Sievers ended his spectacular night with three hits, seven RBI and eight total bases. Sievers eventually set franchise home run records in 1954 (24), 1955 (25), 1956 (29) and 1957 (42). In 1957, Sievers became the first player from a last-place team to lead the league with 42 homers, 114 RBI and 331 total bases. Roy went on to hit 39 homers in 1958 and 21 in 1959. In so doing, he set the Senators all-time home run record with 180, which would be bested only by Frank Howard with 237 during his years with the expansion Senators.

From 1954 through 1959, Sievers' prodigious home runs made him the biggest gate attraction since Walter Johnson, increased gate attendance by over 40%, and forced the forever parsimonious Calvin Griffith to rethink his move to Los Angeles or Minnesota in 1957. A five-time All Star, Sievers ended his 17-year career with a .267 batting average, 1,703 hits, 318 home runs and 1,147 RBI. He was only one of five players to hit pinch-hit grand slam home runs in both leagues. He amassed 10 grand slams in total.

Vernon won a World Series ring as a player-coach for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1960. A seven-time All Star, he ended his 20-year career with a .286 batting average, 2,495 hits, 172 home runs and 1,311 RBI. The two-time AL batting champion (1946, 1953) would become the first manager of the expansion Washington Senators from 1961 until 1963. Both he and Sievers made history on Sept. 2, 1954.

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CUBA BALL FUNDRAISER:

Support Sought for Veteran Players

By Ted Leavengood

Numerous members of the Bob Davids Chapter have accompanied Kit Krieger on his tours of Cuban baseball over the past 20 years. It all began with Connie Marrero, the old Washington Senators pitcher who languished in Havana until Krieger managed to secure the pension Marrero had been denied as part of the U.S. embargo.

Marrero remained a constant on the Cubaball tours until his death at age 102 in 2014. But the need to support the veterans of Cuban baseball remains a crying need, felt all the more as relations have soured between the U.S. and Cuba once again.

The Krieger brothers, Bob and Kit, are raising funds anew for other elder statesmen of Cuban baseball. Prominent on the list is Luis Zayas, who at 81 is the last remaining living member of the Havana Sugar Kings. Martin Dihigo Jr., the son of "El Inmortal" and Cuban writers and broadcasters like Sigfredo Barros and Ismael Sene, aging host of the TV show, "Baseball Siempre," have also struggled in recent years and need the help of their fans in the U.S. If enough money is raised, it will contribute to the effort to maintain and restore memorials to Cuban legends such as Martin Dihigo, whose grave was first identified by the Kriegers.

You can support this worthwhile cause through PayPal at ejkrieger@shaw.ca. Every contribution of \$25 will buy the donor a ticket in a drawing that will provide winners with one of three prizes: a baseball card caricature by former Vancouver Sun political cartoonist Bob Krieger, a box of Cohiba Robusto cigars, or the Cuban National Team jersey given to Connie Marrero on his 99th birthday. Drawings will be held in October. Please Contact Ted Leavengood at tedandonna@verizon.net with any questions you may have.

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MYTHS OF BASEBALL:

True or False?

By Charles Pavitt

The goal of this series of Squibber contributions is to expose the truth about some of what I call the "myths of baseball." By that, I mean the tidbits of "conventional wisdom" that TV analysts and comparable pundits make without any true knowledge about their validity. The evidence suggests that many have no evidence to back them up, but there are others supported by sabermetric research. Here goes...

Myth #1: Getting each inning's leadoff hitter on base has heightened value for the team at bat.

The first relevant study seems to be Chuck Waselewski's examination of 1983 Red Sox games that was published in the 11th issue of the *Baseball Analyst*, a publication that Bill James began and edited during most of its existence. Chuck calculated that the odds of the team scoring a run increased from 16.8 to 50 percent, and the expected number of runs for the inning from .28 to .96, when the leadoff man either got on or homered.

Charles Hofacker, in the 13th issue, had some misgivings, arguing that innings with the leadoff man getting on probably are being pitched by weaker/more tired pitchers than those in which the leadoff man does not, biasing the comparisons above. Dallas Adams, in the 18th and 19th issue, showed how to correct for that problem by comparing the expected runs per out for a given team when the leadoff hitter does and does not get on base, and used Chuck's data to conclude that the leadoff hitters for both teams in 1983 Red Sox games were worth .49 extra runs when they got on base, 27 percent less than the .68 that Chuck had claimed.

Bottom Line: This myth seems to have some truth behind it.

Myth #2: How players get on base matters; for example, giving up a walk is a bigger challenge for the team in the field than other ways to get on base.

To be sure, a walk is not as good as a single because it cannot advance a baserunner unless first base is occupied. But does it matter for the batter getting the walk versus the single? The first evidence relevant to this issue was an examination by Dennis Bretz appearing in Volume 2, Number 9, of a short-lived publication called the Sabermetric Review based on Project Scoresheet data for 1984 through 1986. The expected number of runs for singles, walks, and one-base errors were all right around .75 runs. A dropped third strike was somewhat higher at .89, and hit-by-pitches were somewhat lower at .62. Other comparisons were also very close; for example, doubles were 1.01 and two-base errors at 0.98. Other analyses are consistent with Dennis's.

Dave Smith, in the Sept. 8, 1999, issue of the Retro Sheet, noted odds of scoring of right around 28 percent for singles, hit-by-pitches, and one-base errors, 25.5 percent for walks, and 20.7 percent for getting on base via force out. Others have reached similar conclusions.

Bottom Line: Although absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, present evidence implies that this myth is probably false.

Myth #3: How players make out matter:

Strikeouts are worse than outs on batted balls. What is interesting about this myth is that so many modern commentaries imply that conventional wisdom is false and it does not matter how batters make out. For example, the advantage of moving up runners on outs is cancelled out by the disadvantage of hitting into double plays.

However, Tom Ruane, in an analysis published on the Baseball Think Factory website based on 1982, 1983, and 1987 Retrosheet data, showed that the expected loss in runs during an inning from strikeouts was greater than that for flyouts and, in particular, groundouts, and that the difference among the three increases as the hitter becomes faster as measured by Bill James's "speed score" metric: Strikeouts Fly outs Ground outs Slow runners -.278 -.261 -.262 Average runners -.276 -.257 -.244 Fast runners -.268 -.254 -.230. These data imply that, relative to strikeouts and fly outs, the positive value of moving up baserunners when making outs through hitting the ball on the ground outweigh the negative value of hitting into double plays.

These overall numbers mask huge situational differences. I illustrate with two extremes for average speed runners hitting with one out: With only a runner on first, the type of out barely mattered (strikeout, -.305; flyout -.303; groundout, -.327), although here double plays do slightly trump moving the runner up. With runners in second and third, it makes all the difference in the world (strikeout, -.825; fly out, -.438; ground out, -.302), reflecting in particular the possibility of the runner on third scoring with any batted ball and additionally the runner on second moving to third on a groundout.

Bottom Line: The traditionalists were right; strikeouts are worse than batted ball outs.

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THE LYSTON BROTHERS:

New Book Revisits 19th-Century Baseball

Jimmy Keenan's new book, "The Lyston Brothers: A Journey Through 19th Century Baseball," chronicles the 19th-century baseball careers of three family members from Baltimore. Starting with limited information, Keenan uses every available resource to unearth information on this trio of ball-playing siblings. The book features biographical sketches of the famous and not-so-famous individuals they encountered along the way. Stories from this bygone era of our national pastime along with narratives of contemporary events are interspersed throughout the text. The book is currently available on Ebook and paperback at Amazon.com.

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EVERS WAS HIS NAME:

D.C. Was His Home

By David Rapp

Evers was his name, baseball was his game, and second base was his bag. But Washington, D.C., was this ballplayer's home.

Johnny Evers, the great second baseman of the early 20th century and pivot man in the iconic double-play trio of Tinker-to-Evers-to-Chance, grew up in baseball-mad Troy, New York, where he got hooked on the game at an early age. One of his role models was Uncle Tom Evers, who lived out his days in Washington, D.C., after preceding his Hall of Fame nephew in the fast company of big league baseball.

Baseball had always been in Troy's bloodline. As early as 1867, an item in the Troy Daily Whig recorded a "match game of base ball" between the Independent and the McKeon Base Ball clubs. On the McKeon roster was the name "Evers," no first name or position mentioned. "The game was exciting and witnessed by a large concourse of people," the paper noted.

In the 1880s, Johnny's father, John J. Evers Sr., joined by others in his Irish-American clan, played for the Troy Haymakers, an independent semi-pro team named after one of the National League's charter franchises. John Sr. commanded the pitcher's box. The Haymakers "became such a family organization that there was little room for outside talent," boasted Evers Jr., whose first job was bat boy for the team.

John Sr.'s younger brother, Thomas Francis, showed the most talent, and he tried to make a go of it as a big-league ballplayer. Tom Evers appeared in one game in 1882 for the old Baltimore Orioles of the American Association. After a year kicking around minor and semi-pro leagues of Baltimore and Washington, D.C., Tom latched on to an early version of the Washington Nationals in 1884. These Nats were part of a short-lived "major" league called the Union Association, a 12-team circuit with franchises in several large cities on the Eastern Seaboard and Midwest states.

Tom Evers played in 110 games with 99 hits and 54 runs for the Nationals, who finished seventh in the UA's 1884 season. He finished the year with an unremarkable .232 batting average. Like his nephew, Tom was slight of build (5'9", 135 pounds). But here's the thing: He was a left-handed second baseman, an oddity even in those days. It required the fielder to turn completely to his left to throw a runner out at first base (right handers can simply sling the ball across their chest). But Tom seemed to make it work. Though turning a ripe age of 33 as the 1885 season approached, he was high on everyone's watch list — for the moment, at least.

“Tom’ Evers is too well known here to need much comment,” the Washington National Republican reported in its spring preview of the 1885 season. “He will again cover the territory about second base, and needless to say will do it well. Evers is one of the surest fly-catchers ever seen. He covers a great deal of ground, and is as agile and quick as a cat.”

Even this writer, however, saw a limit to Evers’s potential. “He labors under the disadvantage of being left handed, and is not always up to the highest mark in handling low grounders,” the scribe commented. “But, withal, [he] is an honest, alert player, who always does his best for his club.”

Tom was slated to be the Nats’ second baseman in 1885. Unfortunately for Tom and his teammates, the Union Association folded before the 1885 campaign could even get off the ground. He was suddenly out of a job and had no other prospects in organized ball. He landed a job as a receiving clerk in the War Department and would stay in Washington for the rest of his life, playing for local amateur teams such as the Mount Vernon Baseball Club.

Tom Evers’ reputation and glory days in Troy lived on for young Johnny, however. Tom would return to the Evers’s stomping ground in South Troy for holidays and family weddings. And Johnny would visit his uncle at his home at 911 Westminster Street NW in the Shaw neighborhood whenever he got to D.C. The two men remained close for years.

Tom Evers died in Washington on March 23, 1925, a week before his 73rd birthday, and was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery. He was survived by his wife, Edith, who died in 1948, and a daughter, Edith F. Tutwiler, who died in 1962.

(David Rapp is the former editor of Congressional Quarterly and Roll Call, and lives with his wife on Capitol Hill. He is the author of “Tinker to Evers to Chance: The Chicago Cubs and the Dawn of Modern America,” published in April by the University of Chicago Press.)

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READY IN A PINCH:

Elmer Valo, Senators Record-Setter

By Andrew Sharp

On May 23, 1960, the Yankees released 39-year-old Elmer Valo, a 20-year major league veteran who had been carving a niche as pinch-hitter and part-time outfielder in the late 1950s. He was signed the next day by the Washington Senators, who immediately anointed the left-hand hitter as the team's go-to bat off the bench.

Valo did not disappoint. Much as Adam Lind did for the 2017 Nationals, Valo kept getting on base. He didn't have Lind's power, but his batting eye was outstanding. He reached base in five of his first seven pinch-hit appearances, with two singles and three walks.

Valo's 18 pinch-hit walks and 82 pinch-hit appearances in 1960 remain American League records. So does his career total of 91 pinch-hit base-on-balls. Two of those 1960 walks came as a Yankee, but his 14 pinch hits all came with the Senators. Also hit by a pitch once, he reached base as a Nat 32 times pinch-hitting in 75 plate appearances – a .427 on-base percentage. (Valo started just one game all season.) In comparison, in 2017 Lind had a .396 OBP with 16 pinch hits in 48 plate appearances. He was walked three times, once intentionally.

Valo was born Imrich Valo in Czechoslovakia in March 1921. His parents brought him to the United States when he was 6. He was a solid hitter, noted for his hustle and daring in the outfield, during his decade with the Athletics. He moved with the team from Philadelphia to Kansas City in 1955. In 1957, he played with the Dodgers during that team's last season in Brooklyn, then went with them to Los Angeles. And of course, he played with the Griffith franchise in its last year in Washington before spending part of his last season as a player in Minnesota.

When it looked like Valo's career as a regular player was over, he had an amazing resurgence during the Athletics' first season in Kansas City. Playing mostly against right-hand pitchers, he hit .364 with a .460 on-base percentage. It was also in 1955 that he began to make his mark as a pinch-hitter with a .452 batting average in 40 plate appearances in that role.

Valo spent several years as a coach and minor league manager for the Twins and later worked for the Phillies, for whom he also had played. He died in 1998 in Palmerton, Pa., his childhood home in America. In 2016, the Little League field there was renamed in his honor.

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IT HAPPENED IN WASHINGTON:

300th Win for the Big Unit

By Steven C. Weiner

In the late afternoon of June 4, 2009, the weather at Nationals Park was miserable. The 16,787 certified baseball fans in attendance were there for one purpose, to see Randy Johnson become the 24th pitcher in major league baseball history to win 300 games.

Will there ever be a 25th pitcher to reach the 300-win mark? The SABR game essay, "June 4, 2009: Randy Johnson wins his 300th career game," provides some perspective on the answer. Even Giants manager Bruce Bochy was skeptical: "We don't know if we'll see another one." He understood the grit, determination and resolve that Johnson exhibited over 22 seasons to reach that milestone.

At SABR, the Games Project and the BioProject capture baseball history one game and one biography at a time.

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THE OTHER GUYS:

Looking at the "Rest" of the Frank Howard Trade

By Jeff Stuart

On Dec. 4, 1964, Frank Howard was traded by the Los Angeles Dodgers with 22-year-old third baseman Ken McMullen and 25-year-old pitchers Phil Ortega and Pete Richert to the Washington Senators for 23-year-old shortstop John Kennedy, and 25-year-old pitcher Claude Osteen, and \$100,000. Washington also got 24-year-old first baseman Dick Nen as part of the deal.

Howard was the key player for the Senators. He led the '65 Senators with 21 home runs and 84 RBI. He was an All-Star in four consecutive seasons, and between 1968 and 1970 belted 136 home runs. But the others also contributed.

The Senators went on to win 70 games in 1965. That was 8 games more than the team won in 1964. Richert immediately became one of the team's best players. In limited action with the Dodgers in 1964, he had gone 2-3 with a 4.15 ERA in 6 starts.

Inserted into the Washington rotation in 1965, he got off to a slow start. But he went 15-12 for the eighth-place club, with a 2.60 ERA that was fifth best in the American League. "I can't express how much it meant to me to know that Gil (Hodges) was willing to stick with me," Richert said. Manager Hodges had exiled him to the bullpen. "I got straightened out and started to pitch the way I should."

Richert had a 2.80 ERA for the season and went 4-1 with a no-decision in his last 6 starts. He struck out 45 in 50 innings and had an ERA of just 0.90 for those starts. "He needed a third pitch to go along with his fast ball and his curve. He now has a fine change up that he can get over the plate," Hodges said." Picked to play in the All-Star Game at Minnesota's Metropolitan Stadium, Richert threw two scoreless innings, striking out Willie Mays and Willie Stargell.

The Senators finished in eighth place again in 1966, but Richert had another good year, finishing 14-14 with a 3.37 ERA. On April 24 he tied an American League record by striking out seven Detroit Tigers in a row. He went to the All-Star Game again, and was charged with the loss when former teammate Maury Wills drove in the winning run for the National League in the bottom of the ninth inning.

After going 2-6 as a starter with Washington in 1967, Richert traded to the Orioles in late May for pitcher Frank Bertaina and first baseman Mike Epstein. That trade added additional value to the Senators.

Ortega became a starter for the Dodgers in 1964 because Johnny Podres was injured and Stan Williams had been traded to the Yankees. He started 25 games and also appeared 9 times in relief. He went 7-9 with a 4.00 ERA.

It took some time for Phil to contribute in Washington. He lost 7 of his last 8 decisions for the '65 Nats, finishing 12-15 with a 5.11 ERA. But he posted a 12-12 record in '66 and went 10-10 in '67. The Senators finished well below .500 in both those seasons.

Ortega was a Yaqui Indian whose nickname in the team's clubhouse was "Tears on my Pillow."

"I don't think I have ever been pitching better," said Phil, on May 17, 1966, after losing a 2-1 decision to the Twins in Minnesota. "I can usually get the fastball where I want it. That's the big thing. He had lost 7 of his last 8 decisions in 1965. But in May of 1966 he pitched 7 shutout innings against the Orioles, 6 2/3 scoreless against Kansas City and stretched the streak to 19 innings before the Angels scored on him on May 12th.

On Aug. 28, 1966 Ortega threw a three-hitter at the Indians, winning 3-1 at D.C. Stadium. He beat the Chicago White Sox, 1-0, in the last days of the 1967 season, eliminating them from the pennant race.

McMullen led the American League with 22 errors in 1965. But he became one of the better fielding third basemen in the A.L. and a fan favorite. On Aug. 13, 1965, he tied an A.L. record by starting four double plays against the Orioles. And on Sept. 26, 1966, he set an AL record for third basemen with 11 assists against the Boston Red Sox.

Ken led AL third basemen in total chances over three seasons from 1967 to 1969, and led AL third basemen in double plays in 1967 and putouts in 1969.

McMullen had his first career multi-home run game on July 16, 1967. And later he had a career-high 19-game hit streak, which saw him hit a game-winning home run to end a 20-inning marathon with the Minnesota Twins on Aug. 9. The Nats won 76 games in 1967 and were in the pennant race in mid-August. That was 14 games better than the 62 games the club posted in the year before the trade.

Under new manager Ted Williams, Ken batted a career-high .272 while driving in a career-high 87 runs in 1969. He hit 19 home runs. The club finished 86-76, 10 games over .500. It was the first winning season for a Washington franchise since 1952 and the only winning season in the tenure of the expansion Senators. It was "A whole new ballgame." And it would not have been possible without the Howard trade in 1964.

Shortly into the 1970 season, a season in which the team won only 70 games, McMullen was dealt to the California Angels for Rick Reichardt and Aurelio Rodríguez.

But it was Nen who had one of the most auspicious major league debuts in history with the Dodgers.

Los Angeles was in a tight pennant race with the Cardinals. He was called up by the Dodgers Sept 18, 1963 for the third game in the critical series with St. Louis.

LA had a three-game lead, having won the first two games of the series. But Bob Gibson took a 5-1 lead as the eighth inning opened with Nen pinch-hitting. He lined out, but the Dodgers scored three times.

Ron Taylor took the mound for the top of the ninth with the Cardinals holding on to a 5-4 lead. After McMullen lined out to second base, Nen homered on an 0-1 pitch, tying the game.

His dramatic homer was the only hit Nen got in 1963, and his only hit as a Dodger. But for that that hit the Dodgers voted him a full World Series share.

It is harder to make a case for Nen being a contributor with the Nats. He started 69 games in 1965 and batted in 31 runs for the Senators, batting .246. But he had his moments.

On August 21, 1965, Dick hit a two-run homer off Luis Tiant with one out in the bottom of ninth inning to give the Senators a 3-2 victory in Washington. Jim King walked ahead of the homer.

On June 2, 1966 in Boston, Nen wore new glasses in the batting cage. "I might as well give them a try," he said. "I can't do any worse. He walked the first time up which would indicate he was getting a good look at the pitches of Jerry Stephenson of the Red Sox.

But the glasses weren't comfortable so he discarded them the next time up and hit the ball into the right field stands to give Washington a 4-1 lead. He was still without his glasses later when he walked with the bases loaded. The Nats ripped Boston, 12-2.

On Sept 10, 1967, the Senators defeated the Angels at D.C. Stadium, 4-0. Nen hit a three-run triple in the fifth inning, scoring McMullen and two other Nats. He scored the games' final run a few moments later on a single by Cap Peterson.