

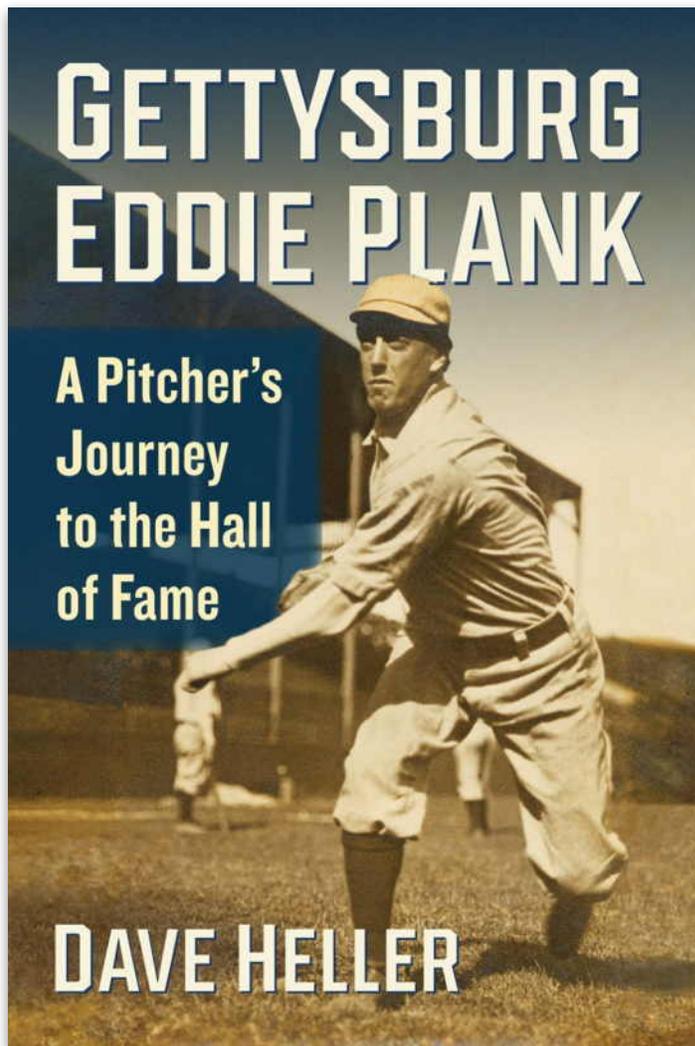
## GETTYSBURG EDDIE PLANK WINS 2022 LARRY RITTER AWARD

by **Doug Skipper**

*Gettysburg Eddie Plank: A Pitcher's Journey to the Hall of Fame* (McFarland, 2021), Dave Heller's interesting and illuminating biography of the 326-win Hall of Fame pitcher whose legend has dimmed with time, is the winner of the 2022 Larry Ritter Award.

The award is bestowed annually by the Deadball Era Committee (DEC) of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) to the author of the best book about baseball between 1901 and 1919 published during the previous calendar year. The winner's work must demonstrate original research or analysis, a fresh perspective, compelling thesis, impressive insight, accuracy, and clear, graceful prose.

Heller's curiosity was sparked when he viewed Plank's name on a list of 300-game winners and realized that he wanted to know more about the man who helped lead Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics to six American League pennants and three World Series championships. Heller began a passionate quest to answer questions about Plank and his distin-



### **ON THE INSIDE:**

<b><i>The Goodyear Pneumatic Baseball</i></b> by Chris Betsch .....	page 6
<b><i>Sam Griffith: One-Armed Wonder</i></b> by Phil Williams .....	page 8
<b><i>The Short Life of Hughie McLoon</i></b> reviewed by Andrew Milner .....	page 13
<b><i>The Best Team Over There</i></b> reviewed by Dave Lande .....	page 14

<b><i>Ted Sullivan</i></b> reviewed by Rich Arpi .....	page 16
<b><i>The Baseball Bat</i></b> reviewed by Dave Willer .....	page 17
<b><i>Opening Day in Brooklyn</i></b> by John Zinn .....	page 19
<b><i>Christy Mathewson: Spitball Pitcher</i></b> by Bill Lamb .....	page 27



*Dave Heller*

guished career. He produced a biography that illuminates the career of one of the Deadball Era's greatest pitchers.

"I looked at all of the 300-game winners in history and I was going down the list realizing that most of these guys, I knew about," Heller said. "Maybe not the 19<sup>th</sup> century guys, but the 20<sup>th</sup> century guys, they were either modern and we've seen them on TV or highlights or watched them ourselves, or it was guys like Christy Mathewson or Walter Johnson or Cy Young or Lefty Grove, the kind of names who you know. There's a movie about Grover Alexander, and all these guys are big names."

"Eddie Plank was the one guy among the entire group who I knew who he was, but I didn't really know much about him, anything beyond the basics," Heller continued. "And the more I looked into him, the more there were questions about him and things I didn't understand. 'How do I find out more about this guy?'"

As he researched the legendary lefty from the Gettysburg area, he learned "All of these things I just didn't know about the guy. The guy had won 300 games-plus, so I knew he was a good pitcher, but he was better than I thought," Heller recalled. "Just reading more about how dominating he was and that he was a strikeout pitcher back in the day. People say he wasn't a strikeout pitcher, but relatively speaking, for his times, he was." Over his 17-season career, Plank struck out 2,246 batters, and finished in his league's Top 10 for punchouts 12 times.

Heller specifically wanted to learn more about Plank's jump from Gettysburg College (which was then more of a prep school than college) straight to the Mack's 1901 Athletics squad, when Plank developed his distinctive crossfire delivery, and why Plank and Mack parted ways after the 1914 World Series. He learned a lot through his research, though his questions were not all answered.

"There's a lot of stuff I still don't know because he was very reticent to talk until later years and (news) papers obviously were different then than they are now," Heller said of Plank. "But I



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**Committee Chair**

John McMurray: [deadball@sabr.org](mailto:deadball@sabr.org)

**Newsletter Editor**

Bill Lamb: [wflamb12@yahoo.com](mailto:wflamb12@yahoo.com)

**Assistant Editor**

Mark Dugo: [claydad96@aol.com](mailto:claydad96@aol.com)

**Assistant Editor**

Bob Harris: [bob@bumblebeagle.org](mailto:bob@bumblebeagle.org)

**Book Review Editor**

Dan Levitt: [danrl@attglobal.net](mailto:danrl@attglobal.net)

**Past Issues**

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did learn a lot about his never pitching in minors and how that came about, and how he came to the Athletics, though I do still have questions about that. And I think I learned a little more about the crossfire delivery and where that came from. I think I found the answer to that.”

Several people claimed credit for facilitating Plank’s jump from Gettysburg College to Mack’s Athletics in the AL’s inaugural season as a major league. Heller states that Mack, hearing of Plank’s prowess, sent a telegram inviting the young lefty to Philadelphia for a tryout. The tryout, which also served as his debut, was so successful that Plank stayed in Philadelphia for more than a decade. A year later, Plank developed his signature crossfire delivery, contrary to legend that maintained that he had used it at Gettysburg. Heller discovered documentation that Plank implemented his distinctive delivery style during the 1902 season.

“I think the one thing I’m most proud of would be (his research on) the crossfire, where he came up with that, just the whole history of that. I was relying on what I had known (the Gettysburg legend) and found out that was not the case.” Using his new delivery, Plank won 20 games in 1902, a mark he would equal or eclipse seven more times.

The Athletics captured AL pennants in 1902 and 1905 behind the pitching of Plank, Albert “Chief” Bender, and George “Rube” Waddell, and won World Series championships behind Plank, Bender, Jack Coombs, and Mack’s “100,000 Infield” in 1910, 1911, and 1913. But after the Athletics were stunned and swept in four games by Boston’s Miracle Braves in the 1914 Fall Classic, Mack dismantled his dynasty, releasing Plank, Bender, and Coombs. Plank and Bender signed with the fledgling Federal League. Mack argued that the new league’s offers of higher salaries had distracted his team, that his pitchers intended to jump to the new league, and that he released them because he had no other option.

“Another question (about Plank) is why he went to the Federal League,” Heller added. “I read a story about Connie Mack saying, ‘oh he was leaving anyway’ and I found out the truth was that

maybe that wasn’t 100% accurate,” suggesting that Plank jumping to the FL after the 1914 season wasn’t a foregone conclusion. “The Federal League definitely hung over the major leagues the entire year,” Heller said. “I think it was August that the Chicago (FL) management went out and saw him (Plank) pitch, so we know there was interest and (longtime A’s teammate and FL agent) Danny Murphy was definitely pitching (touting the FL); one of his buddies was definitely pitching woo to all these Athletic players during the year.”

“They still won the pennant,” Heller said of the Athletics. “It didn’t affect them that much. And then I think that Connie Mack, (the idea) that they weren’t really playing for him (focusing during the 1914 World Series), is revised history. I mean these guys, they made more money by winning the World Series, right? And at the time when money mattered. In the book I outlay how the Braves won, and that was basically they took away the sign stealing (that the Athletics excelled at), they pitched differently, and they won close games. The A’s just couldn’t hit (and scored just eight run in the four games).”

Plank was one of the Federal League’s marquee pitchers in 1915 with the St. Louis Terriers. When the FL dissolved before the 1916 season, he was awarded to the AL’s St. Louis Browns and grudgingly pitched there for two years. Plank later played industrial league baseball and retired to his beloved Gettysburg, where he co-owned a garage with his brother. Sadly, Plank suffered a stroke and died at the age of 50 on 1926.

Never flashy, and ever a gentleman, Plank had been compared favorably with other Deadball Era pitchers like Christy Matthewson, Walter Johnson, Grover Cleveland Alexander, and Cy Young during his career. But after his untimely death, memories of the steady lefty faded. While Matthewson and Johnson were elected to baseball’s Hall of Fame in 1936, Young in 1937, and Alexander in 1938, Plank was not selected until 1946, along with fellow Deadball hurlers Waddell and Ed Walsh.

“People complain now about voting for the Hall of Fame, but holy cow, look back in the day when

it started,” Heller said. “They didn't put anybody in. They were very hesitant. They were only putting in who they thought of as the elite of the elite.”

“He stopped pitching in 1917 and the Hall of Fame opened up 22 years later, and he was dead, and it's one of those things where guys get forgotten quickly,” Heller said of Plank. “By 1945 they said ‘we need more people in the Hall of Fame. Let's start putting more guys in and he was in a big group that was inducted in 1946.’ That group of 11 was selected by the Veteran's Committee after the Baseball Writers Association of America declined to elect anyone to the Hall in its 1946 election. Mack, himself elected in 1937 and still active as the Athletics manager, lobbied the Veteran's Committee on Plank's behalf.

But after his belated posthumous election to the Hall of Fame, Plank's memory dimmed further. “He played for a franchise that doesn't exist technically, the Philadelphia Athletics (who relocated to Kansas City in 1953 and later to Oakland). He didn't play on TV. There was no radio. No one's around to talk about him anymore. He died young as well. He did win some World Series with the Athletics, but they were a long time ago. He was overshadowed by Walter Johnson, who played in the same era. Some of his teammates overshadowed him. Rube Waddell was a character. Connie Mack was larger than life as well. When you talked about the Athletics, Connie Mack was always mentioned. The guy was around for 70 years for crying out loud.”

How should Plank be remembered? “He was not a self-promoter,” Heller said. “I think he was definitely there to do his job and he would do it with class. But he also would help others, and I think that spoke a lot, especially during that era. Younger players were there to take your job. He was not a self-promoter, he was extremely helpful, and an extreme talent. He was extraordinarily steady. He was definitely pretty consistent, consistently good.

Heller's quest to shed light on Plank's life, was aided by the online availability of primary sources on the internet. “It really helped that a lot of this work was done from my home. Every-

thing you could find on him was available on the Internet. Just look at the newspapers. The Gettysburg newspapers, the Philadelphia newspapers, the St. Louis newspapers. There were things I went out for like census and war records. I went to library for that kind of stuff, but everything else I could find from my home when I wanted to. I could finish work and go to my chair on the weekend or at night and there were no set hours, there was no limit, so that was that was very appealing and off I went. And it was like the more I did it, I was like this was a good decision and the more I thought about it, it's like, yeah, I'm glad I did this to satisfy my own curiosity and hopefully others as well.”

Heller said that he was motivated more by inquisitiveness than the prospect of financial gain or recognition to research and write about Plank. But he was honored to receive the award named for Lawrence Ritter, the author of *The Glory of Their Times*. In the 1960s, Ritter interviewed numerous Deadball Era players about their experiences and memories, and the resulting book is one of the best about baseball.

“Oh my gosh. It's such an honor,” Heller said. “I had the book. I mean, I don't know who doesn't have *The Glory of Their Times* who loves baseball, especially in that era? The first time I ever heard about the book, I think it was in eighth grade, and we had one of those things in social studies, where we would do journals or something like that, and the teacher gives you a subject and the subject was, ‘If you had one person in history you could talk to for dinner, who would it be?’ I wrote Connie Mack because the guy was involved in baseball from the 1800s to the 1950s. He had seen everything. One person. He had seen Cy Young and Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb and Jackie Robinson. He had been there, he could tell you about everything, so I wrote a whole thing on that. She came to me afterwards and said, ‘Have you heard about a book called *Glory of Their Times*? and started to explain it to me.’ I don't know if I read it then, but it was on my mind at that point, back in eighth grade, 12, 13 years old. I obviously loved the book. I've read it more than once. And then there were these tapes, I listened to some of the tapes (of Ritters

interviews with the players) that were out there as well.

“The big cliché is that it is an honor to be nominated. But it was an honor. It validates the research that I'm so proud of, and I hang my hat on the research itself. If someone recognizes it, that's great. That's all I want. Then, a finalist, the people on the list, there are some great authors, and some great books on there. Then to be named the winner, I was blown away to be associated with this award and it's hard for me to come up with the words. It's such an honor and looking at the list of winners in the past, and to be associated with these great books and great authors, it is an honor. So, get out the Thesaurus for elated and shocked and surprised and humbled and all that kind of stuff. I wish I had the words. I'm stumbling over them now, but this is an incredible honor.”

*Gettysburg Eddie Plank* is Dave Heller's fourth book on baseball, joining *Ken Williams: A Slugger in Ruth's Shadow*; *Facing Ted Williams*, and *As Good as It Got: The 1944 St. Louis Browns*. Heller is the digital content manager for Bally Sports Wisconsin and Bally Sports North and worked previously at JSOnline.com, cincinnati.com and CBSSports.com. He has written for several newspapers including the *Washington Post*, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Philadelphia Daily News* and *Cincinnati Enquirer*. A longtime SABR member, he lives in Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin.

#### **RITTER AWARD NOTES**

*Gettysburg Eddie Plank* was one of five finalists selected from a strong list of titles published in 2021 about Deadball Era baseball. The other four finalists for the 2022 Larry Ritter Award were:

*Wahoo Sam Crawford: The King of Sluggers* by Kent Krause (Kodar Publishing, 2021), an informative and interesting biography of the Tigers and Reds Hall of Fame outfielder who played much of his outstanding career in the shadow of Ty Cobb.

*Barney Dreyfuss: Pittsburgh's Baseball Titan* by Brian “Chip” Martin (McFarland, 2021), a much-

needed biography of the Hall of Fame pioneer Pittsburgh Pirates owner and National League official and baseball magnate.

*Comeback Pitchers: The Remarkable Careers of Howard Ehmke and Jack Quinn* by Lyle Spatz and Steve Steinberg (University of Nebraska Press, 2021), the well-researched and engaging biography of Deadball Era pitchers Howard Ehmke and Jack Quinn, who resurrected their careers during the Roaring 20s.

*Double Plays and Double Crosses: The Black Sox and Baseball in 1920* by Don Zminda (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), a compelling chronology that adds context and clarity to our understanding that tracks the 1919 Black Sox through the following season while the scandal was slowly exposed.

Conferred annually since 2002, the award is usually presented during the DEC meeting at SABR's annual convention each summer and a presentation of the 2022 award is planned in Baltimore in August. Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, presentation of the 2021 and 2020 awards was postponed. Plans are to also present those awards in August. *War Fever: Boston, Baseball, and America in the Shadow of the Great War* (Basic Books, New York, 2020) by Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith, a timely and provocative study of the transformative impact of World War I on American culture, set against a backdrop of history's most lethal pandemic, was the winner of the 2021 Larry Ritter Award. *Oscar Charleston: The Life and Legend of Baseball's Forgotten Player* by Jeremy Beer (University of Nebraska Press, 2019) and *James T. Farrell and Baseball: Dreams and Realism on Chicago's South Side* by Charles DeMotte (University of Nebraska Press, 2019) were the co-winners of the 2020 Larry Ritter Award.

The winner of the award is selected by the Larry Ritter Book Award Committee, chaired by Doug Skipper, with members Mark Dugo, Ben Klein, Craig Lammers, Mark Pattison, Andrew Milner, Don Jensen, and DEC Chairman John McMurray.

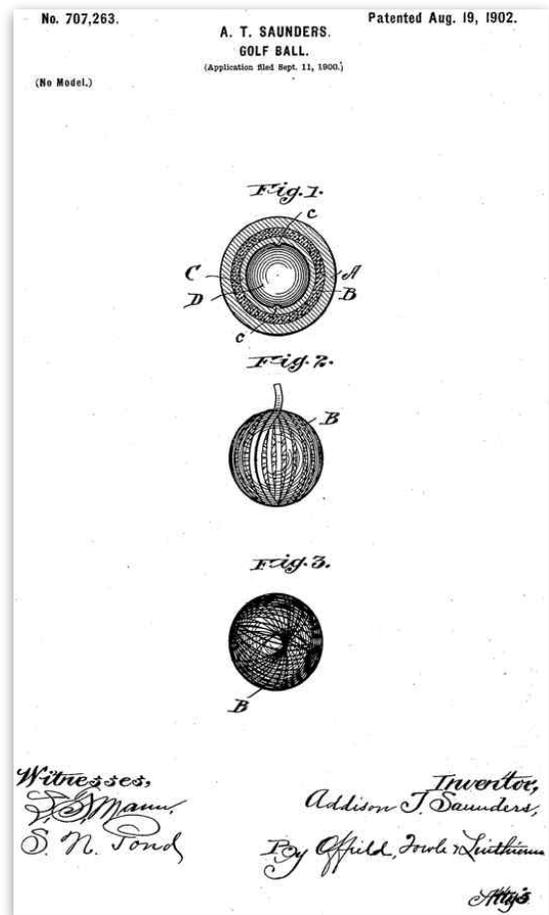
# THE SHORT-LIVED, EXPLOSIVE HISTORY OF THE GOODYEAR PNEUMATIC BASEBALL

by **Chris Betsch**

On September 11, 1900, the US patent office received an application for a patent for a new kind of golf ball that was designed by an inventor named Addison T. Saunders. His golf ball was different from others in that rather than using a core made from rubber or other hard material, it would instead use compressed air for the center. Saunders was the designer of the ball, but the patent application was officially submitted by Frank A. Sieberling, a founder of the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company. Saunders had worked with A.G. Spalding and Brothers at times on enhancements to sporting goods equipment, but he teamed up with Sieberling on this innovation. In an era where few people owned automobiles, Goodyear was always looking for more products that could be made with vulcanized rubber. Besides tires they manufactured rubber gloves, sheets, raincoats and rain boots, and horseshoes, and now they were looking to branch into sporting goods.

An item of note about this patent request was that though it was filed as a golf ball, it included verbiage explaining that the concept could be used for other items such as croquet-golf balls, and more notably, with baseballs. Patent number 707,263 was granted on August 19, 1902, and within a year the pneumatic golf ball was on the market.

Naturally a design for a baseball soon followed. The ball started with a hollow sphere of rubber that would be filled with anywhere between 600 and 1,200 lbs. of compressed air. The core was to be surrounded by twine or silk yarn, and then covered with a hide or material in a similar fashion to a standard ball. Saunders' baseball then had markings on the outside to show where a hypodermic needle could be inserted to add air as needed. The opening in the inner core would seal when the needle was released, and the hole in the outer covering could be easily mended. The baseball would be cheaper to manufacture because it



required less material, and it would solve the problem of baseballs getting misshaped or dulled after use, as you could basically pump it back up into shape.

The first mention of Goodyear's pneumatic baseball came in December 1905, when Cleveland captain Nap Lajoie and team secretary E.S. Barnard were in Akron and tested it. According to news accounts the two took batting practice with some of the new balls interspersed with regular baseballs and could not tell the difference. A production plant was promptly set up in Akron, Ohio, by the Goodyear company to manufacture the golf balls and baseballs, with plans to have upwards of one million balls produced. Advertisements started to appear in newspapers and in sporting goods stores, singing the praises of the pneumatic baseball and describing how it could be reshaped and re-covered as needed, yet it acted the exact same as a regulation ball.

The ball was tried in exhibition games in minor leagues and city leagues throughout the country. In December 1906, a winter game was set up in

Atlanta, Georgia, for the sole purpose of trying out the ball and demonstrating to fans how it would perform in action. Ty Cobb was listed as being among the Georgia natives who took part in the contest, along with other professional players from the state like Nap Rucker, Weldon Henley, and Ed Lafitte. Despite mostly positive reviews, the ball was still not approved for official use in professional games. But as more teams started giving the ball a try, word started to spread that it seemed to be a bit livelier than the official Reach and Spalding game balls. In September 1906, the New York Highlanders tested the pneumatic ball during batting practice before a game and apparently “they could hit them so far it was a joke. They slammed three of them into the bleachers the first time they tried it.”

Of course, if there was any benefit at all to be found by using the altered baseball, teams were going to try to find ways to use it to their advantage. Occasional newspaper columns broke the news that managers had been caught sneaking the ball into games when their club was at bat, or at least accused them of doing so. The major leagues even may have tried to get in on the act. After a late-inning loss in September 1906, New York players accused the Detroit Tigers of switching the ball on pitcher Jack Chesbro, but nothing more came of it.

Then a funny thing happened after 1907; the pneumatic baseball completely disappeared from newspapers, stores, and ball fields without explanation, only two years after its introduction. The archives department at the University of Akron, where Goodyear historical documents are maintained, could find no mention of the company even marketing a baseball. However, articles from that year regarding the original pneumatic golf ball likely explain what happened. Accounts such as this one from the October 31, 1907 edition of the *Boston Post* started to appear in sports sections of various papers across the country:

*“At the Brookline County Club Tuesday [morning] the crowds of onlookers who were watching Herbert Strong of New York drive were somewhat startled to hear a bang like the crack from a revolver. The sound came*

*from the pneumatic golf ball with which he was playing, and which exploded just as he hit it. It flew into a thousand pieces.”*

With multiple reports of their golf ball failing, it seems likely that the Goodyear company quietly pulled their baseball from shelves, and the idea was scrapped. By 1909, Goodyear had converted the pneumatic sporting goods plant into production of early air compressors. The pneumatic golf ball would continue to make comebacks from time to time over the years, but the baseball never returned. It ended up being an early failure in a wave of pneumatic baseball devices coming and going at the time. At least the pneumatic baseball had a cup of coffee in the professional ranks, topping pneumatic bats, catchers’ equipment, umpire vests, and my personal favorite, pneumatic bases that would whistle when stepped on by a baserunner. But in hindsight, maybe a baseball with a compressed center being struck with a solid object at a high velocity was doomed from the beginning.

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**THE GOODYEAR TIRE & RUBBER CO., Ball Dept., E. Market St., Akron, O.**

*St. Louis Globe-Democrat, May 24, 1907*

## SAM GRIFFITH: ONE-ARMED WONDER

by **Phil Williams**

Late-nineteenth century American life could be quite grisly. Annually, from 1880 to 1900, some 35,000 workers died and another 500,000 were injured.<sup>1</sup> Away from the workplace, the deadly and maiming effects of fires, explosions, and railroads took up volumes of newsprint. Medical and public health advances that would roughly double American lifespans by 2020 lay mostly on the horizon.

These realities were reflected in the number of amputees playing baseball. “There [have] been one-armed pitchers by the dozen,” noted a New Orleans newspaper in 1901.<sup>2</sup> That August a team of one-armed men played a team of one-legged men in Minneapolis.<sup>3</sup> Three years later railroad employees in Wilmington, Delaware, formed similar teams and battled, with gate proceeds going towards repairing their artificial limbs.<sup>4</sup> Possibly the most famed of amputee players during the Deadball Era was Sam Griffith, a one-armed pitcher who appeared in preseason exhibitions for Connie Mack’s Athletics in 1901 and 1902.

Samuel Stewart Griffith III was born in Philadelphia on February 7, 1878. His mother, Anna, managed a large household. His father, Samuel II, labored as a brickmaker. How Samuel III lost his left arm, “amputated at the shoulder” per his WWI draft card, is unknown. Later newspaper accounts note only that he lost the arm “many years ago,” perhaps reflecting his reluctance to share specific background.<sup>5</sup> One possible cause: working alongside his father as a teenager. By the 1890s brickmaking — for decades one of Philadelphia’s leading trades — was mostly mechanized, with pug mills, slicers, augers, and rollers posing risk.<sup>6</sup> Also by this time, and fortunately for Sam Griffith, such surgeries were routinely accompanied by anesthesia and antiseptics.<sup>7</sup>

Starting in 1898, Griffith emerged as the “one-armed wonder” of the bustling Philadelphia amateur baseball scene, pitching for Norwood, a



*Philadelphia Times, May 2, 1900*

MANAYUNK'S ONE ARM PITCHER

*Sam Griffith, 1900*

borough just west of the city.<sup>8</sup> He four-hit two opponents in July to pick up victories.<sup>9</sup> Against neighboring Prospect Park on August 13, he yielded 12 hits and eight walks but hung on to win, 8-7.<sup>10</sup>

Norristown, a capable regional semipro team, stood ready to sign Griffith as the 1899 campaign

opened.<sup>11</sup> Yet he apparently only pitched for Washington, New Jersey, and West Grove, Pennsylvania, nines that season. Neither team was strong. Although Griffith earned positive press for his efforts, in the few accounts of his games that are readily available, he was badly beaten.<sup>12</sup>

Griffith's breakout season came in 1900, pitching for Manayunk, a northwest Philadelphia neighborhood known for its textile mills. His success was modest: in surviving box scores, he went 5-7 with the team. Yet Manayunk competed against the region's leading semipro and Griffith proved enough of a draw that, by late summer, the team's management marketed their product around him.<sup>13</sup> His season's highlight and low-light came against two of Manayunk's neighboring rivals. In Roxborough on Opening Day, he triumphed, 7-3, in front of 3,000 fans.<sup>14</sup> In June, behind their ace Pete Loos, Wissahickon rocked him for 24 hits and 10 earned runs in an 23-0 shellacking.<sup>15</sup>

His all-around abilities impressed onlookers. In early July, he picked up an additional payday with the Florence, New Jersey, team as they hosted Mount Holly. "Griffith fielded his position well [one out, seven assists, no errors] and was better at the bat [2-for-4] than was expected from a man with only one arm, but the visitors found him for 16 hits [and beat him, 8-5]."<sup>16</sup>

There is no evidence of Griffith ever using a glove. This distinguishes him from, in later years, Pete Gray and Jim Abbott. Yet pitching contemporaries of Griffith such as Bill Kennedy, Harry Howell, and Oscar Streit also eschewed gloves.<sup>17</sup>

In early 1901, Connie Mack dealt with constant flux as he sought to build Philadelphia's entry in the ascendant American League.<sup>18</sup> In particular, with Christy Mathewson and Vic Willis slipping through his grasp, and legal actions threatening his hold on Bill Bernhard and Chick Fraser, Mack faced challenges building a stable pitching staff.

The team trained in their new Columbia Park, hosting mostly regional semipro and scholastic teams for exhibition games. This allowed Mack to look over local talent, and for the city's fans to

familiarize themselves with trolley routes to see the new Athletics. On April 10, only a couple hundred fans braved a bitterly cold day to see visiting Manayunk, with Griffith in the box, take on the Athletics. Mack's squad prevailed, 9-8. Griffith allowed three earned runs in going the distance.

Noted the *Philadelphia Press* the next day: "Griffith, the one-armed wonder, pitched for Manayunk and with the exception of the third and fifth innings kept the hits widely distributed. The manner in which he fielded his position was remarkable. Seven men were thrown out by him at first base and nearly all his stops were of hard-hit balls."<sup>19</sup> The *Philadelphia North American* added: "Decidedly the feature of the game was the pitching and fielding of the one-armed Griffith, who is certainly a physical marvel. Griffith pitches a deceptive dewdrop, fields his position finely, and, most marvelous of all, swings his bat freely and hits the ball hard."<sup>20</sup> Griffith's performance stood (at least) even with two locals who preceded him that spring in exhibition game try-outs pitching for the Athletics: Howard Wilson (then pitching for the Frankford semipro) and Henry Hodge (previously with the University of Pennsylvania baseball team, before studying law at the institution).

A week later, Pete Loos pitched for the Athletics against his Wissahickon mates and won handedly. He earned an in-season trial, albeit a disastrous one, with the Athletics that May. Howard Wilson earned a more successful trial with the Athletics in 1902. Griffith, however, returned to Manayunk for the 1901 campaign. By June he seems to have fallen off their roster.

In March 1902 Mack sent his planned rotation of Bernhard, Bill Duggleby, Eddie Plank, and Snake Wiltse to North Carolina for an early training session. Several days before the pitching mainstays came north on April 6, the rest of the team began trickling into Philadelphia. Under captain Nap Lajoie's direction, Griffith and Al Maul worked out with the position players on April 2.<sup>21</sup> Three days later, Frank Leary — a University of Pennsylvania standout — pitched in the A's first exhibition match, a 7-5 loss to Yale. Philadelphia

was set to visit Jersey City on Sunday April 6 for a game versus their Eastern League team, with a re-match between the squads the next day at Columbia Park. Griffith was to pitch in the second game but it was rained out.<sup>22</sup>

More rain — and Hobart College's no-show — pushed the next game to Friday April 11 when Bucknell arrived in Philadelphia. Griffith pitched the entire game, yielding six hits and no earned runs, as the Athletics romped, 12-1. Then Mack began to place his starters in game action. Plank and Bernhard combined to beat Princeton, 21-4, on Saturday. Duggleby and Wiltse combined to shut out Jersey City on Sunday.

On Monday, against the Eastern League's Newark Sailors, after Plank and Bernhard each pitched three innings, Griffith came in. After hitting the first batter he faced, and yielding a walk to the second, he threw three hitless frames. Socks Seybold pinch hit for him in the bottom of the ninth and delivered an RBI single to give Philadelphia a 3-2 victory.<sup>23</sup> Two days later, Sam again followed Plank and Bernhard, allowing four hits but no runs across two innings, as the A's routed Villanova, 16-2.

Mack exclusively used his veterans over the remaining three exhibition games. Once the regular season was underway — and court rulings stripped the Athletics of Bernhard and Chick Fraser (and induced Duggleby back to the Phillies) — he sought other in-season solutions besides Griffith.

Mack had no misgivings towards ballplayers battling through physical disabilities. Righthander Fred Applegate, who had lost his pitching hand's little finger, was given a trial with the Athletics in 1904. That same season, left-handed outfielder Danny Hoffman survived a horrific beaming and, despite losing his right eye's center of vision, was employed by Mack against right-handed pitching in 1905. A dozen years later, Mack purchased righthander Rollie Naylor, who pitched for the Athletics for seven years despite having lost sight in his right eye as a youth.

The opportunities and (one assumes) guidance Mack gave Griffith in 1901 and especially in



*Philadelphia Inquirer, August 17, 1907*

**Sam Griffith, 1907**

1902, then, were ones of serious consideration. In 1916, the A's manager reportedly said if Griffith "had not lost an arm in an accident, he would have been a great pitcher."<sup>24</sup> One can only imagine what flaws Mack saw in Griffith's exhibition-game pitching that he felt would be exposed over the course of a major-league season.

After his second preseason stint with Philadelphia, Griffith joined a Bangor, Pennsylvania, team for the 1902 season. Mack reportedly recommended him to Fred Doe as he was building a Brockton, Massachusetts, New England League

team for the 1903 season.<sup>25</sup> Yet when the season began, Griffith was again with Bangor.

In February 1904 the Eastern League's Rochester Bronchos signed Griffith to his first professional contract. "He has surprisingly good control," a local sportswriter observed during a spring practice, "He does not altogether rely on speed, as some naturally asked him, but has a desirable change of pace, with a good slow ball. He has excellent control of a curve ball and gauges distance well."<sup>26</sup> Yet soon afterwards Rochester considered him not up to Eastern League competition and released him. Griffith returned to Philadelphia, briefly pitched for a Coatesville nine, then his regular baseball career effectively ended.<sup>27</sup>

Griffith instead focused on his full-time occupation of clerking and, away from work, was involved with Philadelphia's East End Republican political club. The East Enders coaxed him into twirling for them on the occasions they put together a team. His play was "phenomenal" when the East Enders claimed the local GOP championship by beating the Young Republicans, 9-8, on August 16, 1907.<sup>28</sup> A year later, with Griffith again in the box, the East Enders successfully defended their championship by besting the Twentieth-Century Republican club, 14-9.<sup>29</sup>

Both games occurred at Columbia Park, as did an August 1908 benefit game for Charlie Mason, former co-owner/manager of the American Association's Philadelphia Athletics. Mack, with his team finishing a western road trip, sent his extras east for the occasion. With a scattering of old-timers completing the lineups, Griffith took a 5-3 lead into the bottom of the ninth, before tiring out and taking a 6-5 loss.<sup>30</sup>

In 1909 Griffith married Eva Sherwood. The next year a son, Samuel IV, arrived. On May 24, 1919, Sam Griffith passed away in Philadelphia, at age 41, from cirrhosis of the liver. Laid to rest at Woodlands Cemetery, he was survived by his wife and son. Sam IV, for most of his adult life, worked as a workplace safety instructor.<sup>31</sup>

## NOTES

1. Robert Samuelson, "Work Ethic vs. Fun Ethic," *Washington Post*, September 3, 2001. Online: [tinyurl.com/3yh8bsen](http://tinyurl.com/3yh8bsen).
2. As quoted in "Caught on the Fly," *The Sporting News*, April 13, 1901: 6.
3. "A Freak Game," *Minneapolis Journal*, August 26, 1901: 10.
4. "Cripples to Play Ball," (Wilmington) *Morning News*, August 9, 1904: 7; "One-Armed Men Won," (Wilmington) *Morning News*, August 9, 1904: 7. Note similar Wilmington games were also played in 1902 and 1903, although it is unclear if railroad men comprised the squads. There is also no note of Griffith pitching in any of these Wilmington games.
5. "Maimed Athletes Shine in Difficult Games," *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 11, 1907: 30.
6. For this background, see I.B. Holley Jr., "The Mechanization of Brickmaking," *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (January 2009): 82-102. Online: [www.jstor.org/stable/40061568](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40061568).
7. For this background, see "Surgery at Bellevue," *The (New York) Sun*, March 30, 1890: 24.
8. "Norwood Defeats Upland," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 26, 1898: 12. For Norwood identified as an amateur squad, see "Great Amateur Game Today," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 13, 1898: 4.
9. "Norwood vs. Fairview," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 17, 1898: 10; "Norwood Ties the Series," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 24, 1898: 14.
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11. "Norristown's Ball Plans," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 2, 1898: 14.
12. *Washington (New Jersey) Star*, June 8, 1899: 1; "Shut Out at Dover," *Washington Star*, June 15, 1899: 1; (Dover, New Jersey) *Iron Era*, June 16, 1899: 5; "Bangor Wasn't in It," *Washington Star*, June 22, 1899: 1; "Oxford 18, West Grove 1," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 13, 1899: 14.
13. As an example, see "Sporting Notes," *Philadelphia Times*, August 25, 1900: 10.
14. "Manayunk Downs Roxborough," *Philadelphia Press*, April 17, 1900: 12.
15. "Loos in Great Form," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 10, 1900: 14.
16. "Base Ball," *Mount Holly (New Jersey) News*, July 3, 1900: 3.

17. On Kennedy and Howell, see: "Baseball Notes," *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, August 13, 1900: 16; on Streit, see: "Notes of the Game," *Philadelphia Evening Telegraph*, May 24, 1902: 8.
18. For a full accounting, see Norman Macht, *Connie Mack and the Early Years of Baseball* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2007), 204-235.
19. "Athletics' Close Call," *Philadelphia Press*, April 11, 1901: 7.
20. "Athletics Won Out in the Ninth Inning," *Philadelphia North American*, April 11, 1901: 15.
21. "Flick Joins the Squad," *Philadelphia Record*, April 3, 1902: 11.
22. "Athletic Team Only One Short," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 8, 1902: 6.
23. "Newark Nine Gives Athletics a Scare," *Newark Evening News*, April 15, 1902: 15.
24. "Baseball Gossip," *Pittsburgh Press*, July 23, 1916: 22.
25. "Baseball," *Fall River (Massachusetts) Evening News*, April 9, 1903: 5.
26. "Eighteen Men Have Reported," (Rochester) *Democrat and Chronicle*, April 8, 1904: 18.
27. "Coatesville Turned the Trick," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 15, 1904: 14. "Coatesville Takes the Count," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 17, 1904: 10.
28. "Team of East End Club Now Republican Champion," *Philadelphia Press*, August 17, 1907: 3.
29. "Politicians Win Honor on Diamond," *Philadelphia Press*, August 11, 1908: 2.
30. "Mason's Benefit Game," *Philadelphia Record*, June 23, 1908: 10.
31. Samuel IV's calling per email communication with Justin Calean, his great-grandson, March 14, 2022.

The raised pitchers' boxes in all major league cities will be inspected from time to time this year, as the rule makers believe that a reform is necessary. The inspection will be left to Umpires Connolly and Emslie, members of the joint rules committee, who will report in the fall.

Winnipeg Tribune, April 8, 1912

**The Immense, Cut-out "Bull" Durham Sign is a familiar sight in the outfield of Baseball Parks! Hitting this "Bull" Sign with a fairly-batted fly-ball for a \$50.00 prize is a feature of the National Game!**



**Baseball Players Won \$10,550 for "Hitting the Bull" Last Season!**

**THE** famous cut-out "Bull" Durham sign is erected in the outfield of league baseball parks throughout the United States. Every player who hits this giant "Bull" sign with a fairly-batted fly-ball in a regularly scheduled game, is presented with a check for \$50.00 by the manufacturers of "Bull" Durham Tobacco. Last season these cut-out "Bull" Durham signs were hit 211 times in league games for a grand total of \$10,550. Some of the famous baseball players who received \$50.00 checks for "hitting the Bull" are: Chick Gandil, Walter Johnson, Ping Bodie, Jack Murray, Hal Maggart, Hans Lobert, Gabby Cravath and Ben Houser. An additional prize of 72 sacks of "Bull" Durham is awarded for every home-run made in regular league games in parks where these "Bull" Durham signs are erected. Last year, baseball players won 257,400 sacks (\$12,870 worth) of "Bull" Durham by batting out 3575 home runs! Making a grand total of \$23,420 awarded to baseball players by the manufacturers of "Bull" Durham Tobacco during the season of 1912.

**GENUINE**  
**"BULL" DURHAM**  
**SMOKING TOBACCO**  
 (FORTY "ROLLINGS" IN EACH 5-CENT MUSLIN SACK)

Baseball and "Bull" Durham have been the nation's two favorite forms of enjoyment since 1859! Baseball, the good, clean, honest game—and "Bull" Durham, the good, clean, honest smoke—have both earned the loyal support of the millions of "fans" throughout the United States, in Panama, Hawaii, the Philippines and other parts of the world. Neither has a rival. Every real baseball "fan" considers a pipeful of "Bull" Durham, or a cigarette rolled from this grand old tobacco, essential to his enjoyment of the game.

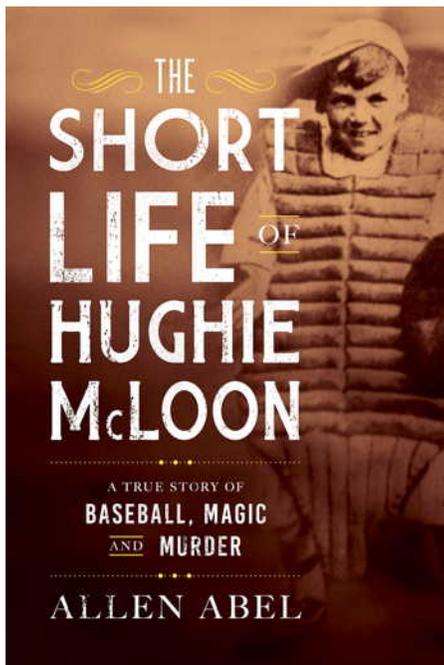
"Bull" Durham has been the standard smoking tobacco of the world for three generations—smoked by more millions of men than all other high-grade smoking tobaccos combined! No matter where you are, you can always get "Bull" Durham, and get it fresh. It is sold by more dealers throughout the world than any other single article of commerce. Get a 5-cent muslin sack at the nearest dealer's today, and learn why over 352,000,000 of these sacks were sold last year alone!

*Blackwell's Durham Tobacco Co.*

A book of "papers" free with each 5-cent muslin sack.



Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 9, 1913



**THE SHORT LIFE OF  
HUGHIE McLOON:  
A TRUE STORY  
OF BASEBALL, MAGIC  
AND MURDER**

**By Allen Abel**

2020, Sutherland House  
[ISBN: 978-1989555217. 220  
pp. \$22.95 USD. Hardcover]

Reviewed by  
**Andrew Milner**  
ajmilner@comcast.net

"Rollicking" might not be the first adjective that instantly comes to mind to summarize a biography of a man rendered a hunchback after a childhood playground accident and a mascot for the desultory 1916 Philadelphia A's only to be shot dead outside a speakeasy the following decade at age 26. Yet that's indeed the perfect word for *The Short Life of Hughie McLoon*. Veteran sportswriter Allen Abel's new book not only

tells the story of the unlikely Philly batboy, but summarizes the outsized role superstition played in early major league baseball, the opportunities granted to the physically disabled in that era, public health scares (including infantile paralysis and the 1918 Spanish flu outbreak), and the comparatively modern creation of the mascot.

Abel begins the book by acknowledging the lack of a proper paper trail. "His were not the people that posterity cherishes," he writes about his subject. "Fifteen years of searching have turned up no letters, no diary, no memoir, and no offspring of Hughie McLoon. This story is based on what was reported publicly at the time, which may or may not be truth. ... *The Front Page*, Ben Hecht's epic smack-down of creative, cutthroat newspapering, debuted on Broadway the day of Hughie's funeral, after all."

According to Abel, the notion of the mascot first captured the public's imagination with an 1880 French comic opera (*La Mascotte*). Baseball teams in the states began seeking out people having dwarfism, physically handicapped boys, or Blacks to use as mascots to improve their fortunes.

McLoon became a hunchback at the age of three by falling off a seesaw at a South Philadelphia playground. Abel writes, "[B]eing a hunchback a century and more ago subsumed all the other types of

identity that a person might have. Its bearer, to the superstitious, became the karmic equal of a shaman or a Gypsy or a Hindu fakir." Combined with the natural superstitions of turn-of-the-century ballplayers, hunchbacks became a precious commodity in the early major leagues. The Athletics of the "\$100,000 Infield" era kept a hunchback, Louis Van Zeldt, as a batboy, and A's players would routinely rub his hump for luck before stepping to the plate. Van Zeldt's death in 1915 coincided with Connie Mack selling most of his champion players, and by the next season the last-place team needed a good-luck charm. A 14-year-old McLoon, who six years earlier had won the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* "Scholars' Popularity Contest," joined the squad as a mascot that July, and while the 1916 A's would lose a league-record 117 games, McLoon became a fan and media favorite.

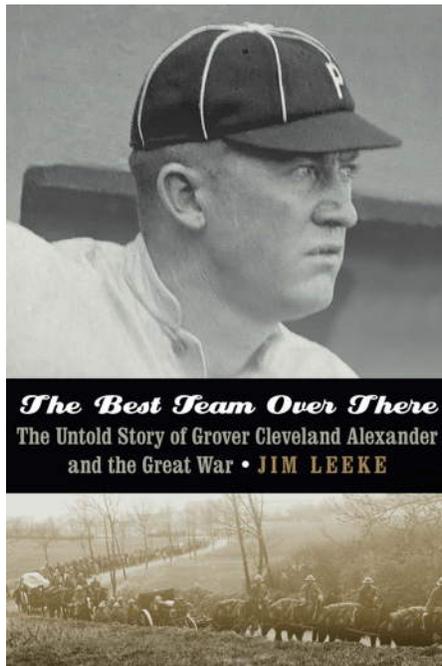
Abel offers many examples of the condescending way reporters quoted McLoon's speech, making him sound like the comic strip character Sluggo: "'Some of 'em want yuh ta' give 'em the bat with thuh handle t'wards the dugout,' said Hughie, explaining his duties, 'an' others want the big end pointed that ways, an' still others want 'a pick up their own — it's funny.'"

After his stint with the Athletics, McLoon tried his hand as a sportswriter and later as a promoter and manager in the local boxing scene — at the

1926 Dempsey/Tunney fight in Philadelphia, McLoon held up the round cards before a crowd of 130,000 — and a café operator. In Prohibition-era Philly, he inevitably found himself in the company of bootleggers. One evening in August 1928, McLoon made a pass at one gangster's girlfriend, who rebuffed him. In retaliation he trashed her apartment. "In daring to imagine himself in the arms of a whole man's woman," Abel writes, "he had gone too far. He had tried to climb through the one-way glass into a world only able to see him as a freak. ... But never had there been an insult like this and it got the better of him." Four days later, McLoon was gunned down in Center City Philadelphia, reputedly by the woman's boyfriend (though nobody would ever be convicted in the murder). An estimated 15,000 Philadelphians attended his viewing.

With cameos from ballplayer-turned-evangelist Billy Sunday, New York Giants mascot Charles Victory Faust, and Marine Corps Brigadier General Smedley Butler, *The Short Life of Hughie McLoon* conveys the energy of early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban life and Deadball Era sportswriting. It is an excellent read and would make a heck of a screenplay.

*Andrew Milner joined SABR in 1984 and has contributed to Baseball's Biggest Blowout Games and SABR's forthcoming Shibe Park book. He lives in suburban Philadelphia.*



**THE BEST TEAM  
OVER THERE:  
THE UNTOLD STORY OF  
GROVER CLEVELAND  
ALEXANDER  
AND THE GREAT WAR**

**By Jim Leeke**

*2021, University of Nebraska  
Press*

*[ISBN: 978-1496217165. 280  
pp. \$29.95 USD. Hardcover]*

Reviewed by

**Dave Lande**

davelande@msn.com

The life story of Grove Cleveland Alexander is well known — his Hall of Fame career with 373 victories (tied for third all-time) followed sadly by his post-baseball descent into alcoholism. Less well-known is his service in the United States Army during World War I, including time stationed with the artillery in France during wartime and in France and

Germany after the armistice. In *The Best Team Over There*, Jim Leeke has written an excellent biography of Alexander, focusing on his time in the army and the impact it had on his life and baseball career. It's a story filled with highs and lows, the routine of army life, and the terror of combat.

Alexander's baseball career through 1917 was spent with the Philadelphia Phillies and capped by three consecutive 30-win seasons. Sold to the Chicago Cubs in December 1917 along with catcher Bill Killefer for a then-record \$55,000, Alexander appeared in only three games for the Cubs in 1918 before being drafted by the Army and sent to Camp Funston, Kansas.

Leeke tackles two noteworthy topics around Alexander's induction into the military. First, due to his stardom, Alexander's 1-A draft status became a significant story. Leeke effectively describes the difficult decision faced by anyone, but especially by a high-profile athlete like Alexander, as to whether to appeal his draft status and risk public shaming as a shirker of military service. This decision was exacerbated by the often-changing conscription process.

Second, athletics (especially baseball and football) were deemed important to troop morale in cantonments (temporary quarters) such as Camp Funston. Accordingly, Alexander and other professional ballplayers were assigned to an artillery unit to enable it to

field a competitive baseball team. To emphasize this commitment to sports in the military, Leeke departed from Alexander's story for a chapter, which he devoted to football at the camps. In one of life's ironies, Alexander wasn't at Camp Funston long enough (barely five weeks) to play a baseball game before his half-trained field artillery unit was sent by train to New York, then to England at the end of June 1918, and finally to France, where he played in a handful of games before his unit was sent to the front lines.

Leeke stays focused on Alexander and avoids getting sucked into a larger history around the Great War. He excels at telling the many individual stories of Alexander and his fellow soldiers in their field artillery unit. In doing so, he draws upon letters penned by individual soldiers, including Alexander as well as official army sources, highlighting their lives while stationed behind the lines, in combat (firing their artillery and being

fired upon by the Germans), and in occupied Germany after the armistice.

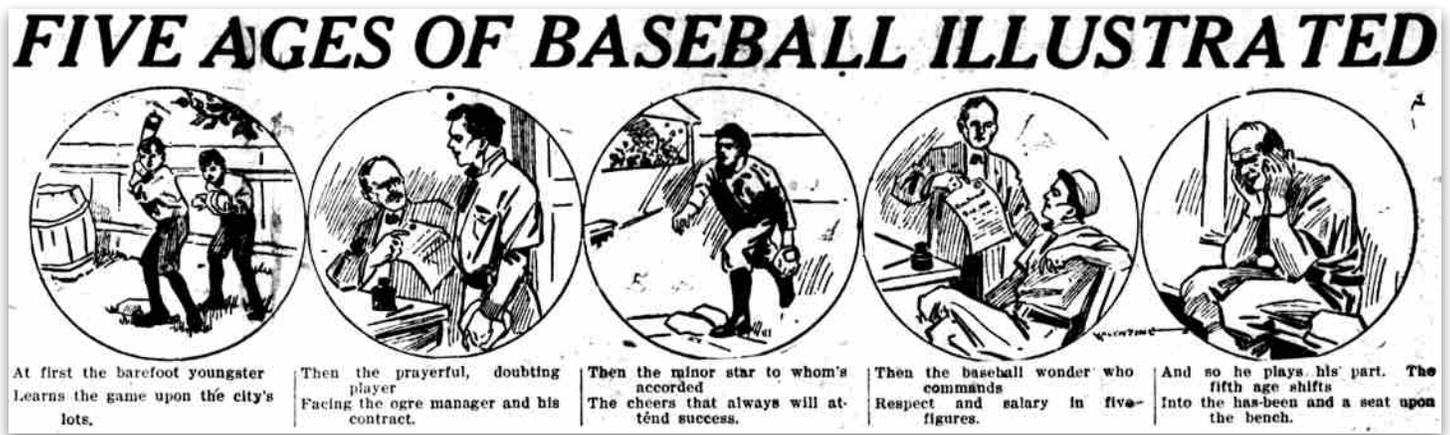
One of the conundrums facing Leeke as he relates Alexander's story is the lack of documentation regarding his medical history and Alexander's own reticence at discussing his various ailments. He suffered a severe beaming in 1909 (leading to what is known as a traumatic brain injury or TBI), occasional epileptic seizures after the beaming, hearing loss (probably due to artillery shelling), shell shock (post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD today), and alcoholism.

In his extensive research, Leeke draws upon what little contemporary documentation exists and blends it with assessments from modern experts and resources to present a case as to how these issues may have negatively affected Alexander's post-war life and baseball career. This is an area where an author could be tempted to pass down absolutes as to what his subject was suffering from and the degree

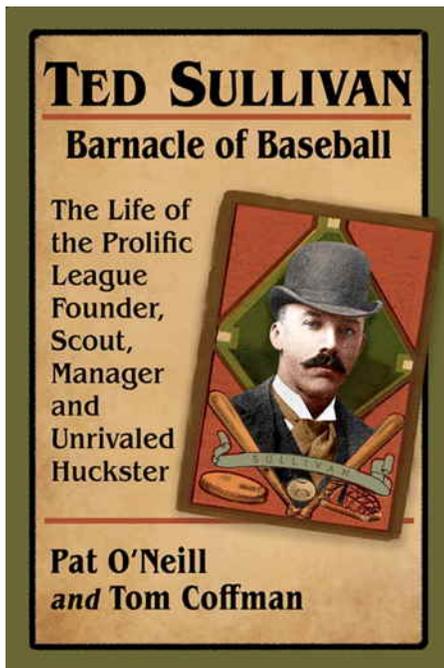
to which the events and ailments affected his subject's life.

To his credit, however, Leeke doesn't pass unqualified judgement on Alexander's health issues. Rather, Leeke presents his analysis followed by his conjectures as to the effect of these health issues on Alexander's life and baseball career. He draws upon numerous modern resources while doing so without getting lost in medical jargon. Leeke doesn't present this information without debate but instead allows the reader to come to the same or differing conclusions. This is a fascinating book that delves into a consequential but often overlooked time in Alexander's life.

*Dave Lande is a SABR member and a board member of the Halsey Hall (Minnesota) chapter. Now retired, he is a life-long fan of the Minnesota Twins and also the St. Louis Cardinals ever since they beat the New York Yankees in the 1964 World Series.*



*Spokane Press, November 2, 1909*



**TED SULLIVAN,  
BARNACLE OF BASEBALL:  
THE LIFE OF THE  
PROLIFIC LEAGUE  
FOUNDER, SCOUT,  
MANAGER AND  
UNRIVALED HUCKSTER**

**By Pat O'Neill  
and Tom Coffman**

2021, McFarland  
[ISBN: 978-1476684789. 285  
pp. \$39.95 USD. Softcover]

Reviewed by  
**Rich Arpi**  
rich.arpi@outlook.com

Ted Sullivan was a well-known baseball figure of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who is almost completely forgotten today. Authors Pat O'Neill and Tom Coffman in their 2021 biography entitled *Ted Sullivan Barnacle of Baseball: The Life of the Prolific League Founder, Scout,*

*Manager and Unrivaled Huckster* make a valiant attempt to rectify this. The book is published by McFarland and has 277 pages, an index, bibliography, chapter notes, and photographs throughout. The book is well researched and an engaging read.

The authors take the reader, year by year, through Sullivan's baseball career from his start with as an amateur player on the Milwaukee sandlots in the 1860s to his to almost unnoticed death on July 5, 1929. While some potential readers might never open this book due to the unfortunate subtitle *Barnacle of Baseball*, they would be missing an interesting figure in baseball history. Damon Runyon gave Sullivan this moniker because he always seemed to be involved in the most interesting baseball events from the 1870s to the 1920s. He was a mover and a shaker and an extraordinary huckster.

As O'Neill and Coffman write early in the book, "Ted Sullivan would eventually pop up in dozens of cities and towns across the United States, to play ball, to start a team, form a league, scout players for any number of major league teams, or simply promote the game." Risking the wrath of Damon Runyon aficionados, Sullivan would more accurately be described as baseball's most traveled nomad.

This book documents his career from his teenage years in Milwaukee, college at St.

Mary's in Kansas where he met Charles Comiskey, and managing gigs in Dubuque (1879), St. Louis Browns (1883), Richmond of the Eastern League and Kansas City of the Union Association (1884), Milwaukee in the Northwestern League in 1886, and Washington, D.C. in 1888 and 1890. The 1890s saw Sullivan managing in Chattanooga, Nashville, Atlanta, Dallas, Fort Worth, and several other cities. The book has plenty of newspaper quotes and illustrations covering Sullivan's career, but depth and analysis is lacking in spots. For example, the authors credit Sullivan with coining the term "fan," but there is very little supporting evidence or Sullivan's reasons for the term.

Biographers work with the material they can find and if no personal papers or family letters exist, they are left with published newspaper and magazine articles and any books or articles the subject might have written. Sullivan apparently never lived in one spot for very long, never married or had children, so forming a well-rounded analysis of his character is difficult. Sullivan did write one well circulated book entitled *Humorous Stories of the Ballfield: A Complete History of the Game and its Exponents*, published in 1903. Unfortunately, many of the humorous stories were well-hashed vignettes disparaging African Americans. While the authors wisely left those stories untold, it might have helped the book to in-

clude a few more snippets of his writing style.

Sullivan was one of the major organizers of the White Sox-Giants World Tour of 1913-1914 and apparently was involved in the meetings which organized the American League. The authors touch on Sullivan's involvement, but this reader was left wishing there was more elaboration. Also, Sullivan's involvement with the organization of the Irish Football (soccer) Tour of 1929, where he was accused of absconding with some of the funds, needed to be fleshed out. The Irish Football Tour follows a career pattern, where Sullivan built excitement, raised some money, and then disappeared.

The authors never satisfactorily answered why he kept on getting another chance. Part of the answer had to be that Sullivan's gift of gab, sharp wit, and Irish blarney could beguile people into parting with their

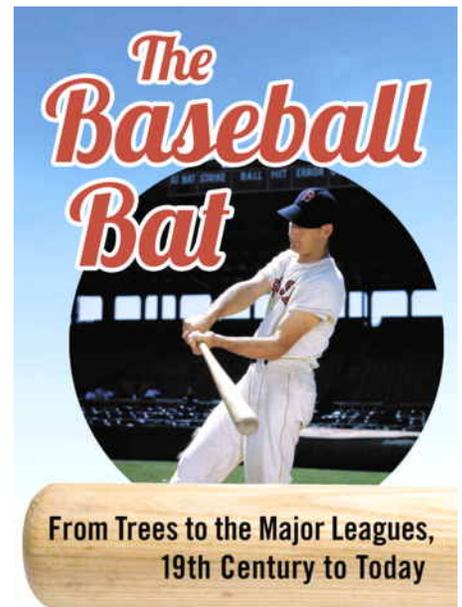
money. He traveled the country with a magic lantern tour on the history of baseball. Sections of this talk would have added to the book. Possibly they are lost to history.

While this book is a good introduction to the length and breadth of Sullivan's career, it should not be the last word on his life. Perhaps future historians will uncover long lost troves of Sullivan's papers and correspondence that will elaborate on his thinking on team management, managing philosophy, player scouting, and promotion of the game.

*Rich Arpi is a reference librarian and archival cataloger for the Ramsey County Historical Society in St. Paul, Minnesota. He has been a SABR member since 1982 and is an active member of Minnesota's Halsey Hall chapter, giving numerous presentations on Minnesota baseball history over the years.*

### **PUBLISHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

As always, the books reviewed in this issue of the newsletter were generously provided to us by their publishers. *The Short Life of Hughie McLoon* is published by Sutherland House and can be obtained by emailing [serina@sutherlandhousebooks.com](mailto:serina@sutherlandhousebooks.com). *The Best Team Over There* comes from the University of Nebraska Press and can be obtained by telephone (800-848-6224) or email ([orders@longleafservices.org](mailto:orders@longleafservices.org)). *Ted Sullivan* and *The Baseball Bat* are published by McFarland and can be ordered by calling 800-253-2187 or emailing [info@mcfarlandpub.com](mailto:info@mcfarlandpub.com). Your patronage of these publishers is appreciated.



### **THE BASEBALL BAT: FROM TREES TO THE MAJOR LEAGUES, 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TO TODAY**

**By Stephen M. Bratkovich**

2020, McFarland  
[ISBN: 978-1476679280. 205  
pp. \$29.95 USD. Softcover]

Reviewed by  
**Dave Willer**  
[dave.willer@hotmail.com](mailto:dave.willer@hotmail.com)

For any fan of baseball, the crack of the bat hitting the ball is one of those distinct noises we instantly recognize. However, it is fair to say that few of us fans give much thought as to the actual baseball bat used by major league players. While many fans may know what type of trees are used to make baseball bats, how many of us know where those trees come from, or what specific rules must be followed in making a baseball bat? To answer these questions

and many others, Stephen M. Bratkovich's book *The Baseball Bat: From Trees to the Major Leagues, 19<sup>th</sup> Century to Today* provides an entertaining and informative look at the baseball bat.

The author of the book describes himself as a baseball fan who studied forest science in college and worked as a forester/wood scientist. This specialized knowledge is helpful in explaining the science behind the trees and wood from which baseball bats are made.

The book begins with the origins of baseball and some of the earliest rules that governed the type of bats that could be used during a game. Some of the changes were incremental, while other changes had a more profound impact on the game. In 1885, for example, the National League legalized flat bats which were ideal for bunting, though this was disallowed in 1893. Interestingly, the maximum length of a bat has remained at 42 inches for over 150 years.

Since the Deadball Era is of particular interest to readers of this newsletter, this book notes that it was common for players in that era to swing heavier bats made from hickory (a very dense wood) and some from ash. In particular, Ty Cobb used a 40-ounce bat while Honus Wagner's bat was typically around 38 ounces. Both of these players batted using a split grip (*i.e.*, their hands were a few inches or more apart on the bat), which allowed them to control their heavier bat and make contact

more often. There have obviously been many changes to bats used by major leagues since the Deadball Era, with maple bats now being the most common followed by ash and birch. Moreover, in 1920, few major leaguers used bats that weighed less than 36 ounces. Today, the author notes that it is not common to see major league players use bats heavier than 36 ounces.

This book also provides some discussion on more recent issues. In particular, the rise of the maple bat in the early 2000s led to a record of number being broken, which also caused many frightening moments when fragments from broken bats struck players, fans, umpires, and base coaches. Author Bratkovich's background in forestry is helpful in explaining why this was a particular problem with bats made from maple: It is often more difficult to detect certain defects in wood from maple trees, causing many maple bats to be more susceptible to shattering. To alleviate this problem, in 2008 Major League Baseball investigated ways to minimize the number of broken bats. The next year MLB required that bat suppliers comply with the study's recommendations, and the result has been a substantial decline in broken bats.

The book also focuses on how a major league baseball bat is made, beginning from when it starts as a tree and ends up in the hands of a major league batter. Since the nineteenth century, most bats have come from forests in the northeastern United

States, especially states such as Pennsylvania and New York, though there are now many bats originating eastern Canada. Once again, Bratkovich's background in forestry allows him to spend some time discussing issues relating to these forests, including deforestation and tree conservation, as well as invasive tree pests, such as the emerald ash bore, which have killed millions of ash trees in the United States over the last two decades. The book details the experiences of a few bat manufacturers to show the specific process for turning a tree into a billet, and then into a major league baseball bat.

For anyone looking into understand more about the history and manufacturing of baseball bats, this is a very informative and entertaining book. It is not a long read (151 pages without the appendix and endnotes) and it is easy to follow even for those who have little technical or scientific understanding of wood or trees. There are also many interesting and enjoyable tidbits of information that are contained throughout the book (for example, Derek Jeter ordered over 4,300 bats during his career) and there is an even a discussion on rosin and pine tar (with a mention, of course, of the George Brett pine tar incident). Overall, this is a good book on an essential piece of equipment, often overlooked by many fans.

*Dave Willer is a SABR member and Blue Jays fan living in St. Catharines, Ontario. He is a practicing lawyer and a member of the Deadball Era Committee*

## OPENING DAY IN BROOKLYN

by John Zinn

Opening Day in baseball always comes with great excitement and anticipation, but especially during a time of war, pandemic, economic uncertainty, and political unrest. While that certainly is the human condition today, it was equally true of the Deadball Era (1901-1919), so called because of the lack of power hitting. The first two decades of the twentieth century saw the assassination of President William McKinley, the financial panic of 1907, the horrors of World War I, not to mention the deadly and even more pervasive Spanish influenza. Having “supped” thus

“full of horrors,” it’s no wonder Brooklyn Dodger fans looked forward to opening day even though their team spent 15 of the 19 seasons mired in the second division. At a time when sports photography was in its youth, Brooklyn newspapers used high quality artwork to capture the spirit of opening day. What follows is a sample of those drawings, primarily from the better known *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, but also from the borough’s other three daily newspapers, the *Standard Union*, *Brooklyn Citizen*, and *Brooklyn Times*.



*Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 21, 1911*

Legendary baseball writer Roger Angell once described opening day games as “chilly inaugurals,” a sentiment anyone who has endured a frigid early April afternoon in Boston or New York can appreciate. Although the season started later during the Deadball Era, frigid temperatures like those anticipated in the below April 14, 1904 *Eagle* drawing weren’t uncommon. While the day began with snow flurries, it didn’t keep some 20,000 fans from filling Washington Park only to suffer through a 7-1 loss to the Giants. Mercifully the game lasted only one hour and 42 minutes.



*Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 14, 1904*

A recurring theme during this period and even earlier was how office workers had to unexpectedly miss work or leave early on opening day for reasons creatively designed to bring a sympathetic response from the boss. In 1890, the *Boston Globe* reported that in many offices “the faithfulest (*sic*) clerk bound crepe around his arm” and rushed off “to bury an old friend” while “the inoffensive office boy” took “his widowed mother to the dentist.” Left on his own, “the deserted proprietor” had no alternative, but to join them. For the serious fan, it was no joking matter since in a world without radio and television, virtual attendance wasn’t an option. The below ad from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of October 11, 1916 actually refers to Brooklyn’s sole World Series appearance of the period, but gives a sense of how common the scheme was in desire if not in practice.

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*Brooklyn Daily Eagle, October 11, 1916*

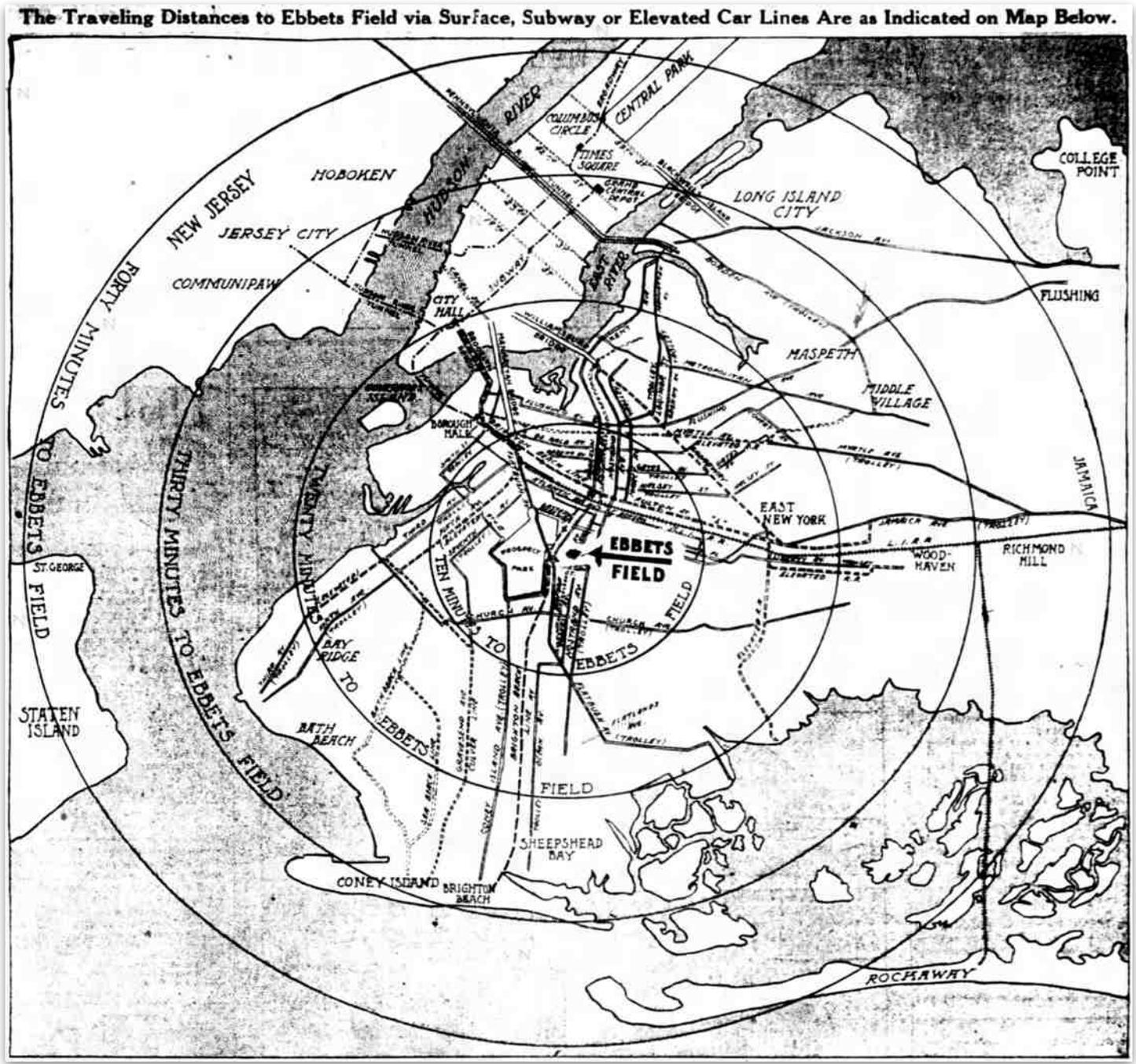
One hopes the young man pictured in the below drawing from the *Brooklyn Citizen* of April 8, 1913 was rewarded for his honesty. After all, it wasn't just any opening day, but the Dodgers first regular season game at Ebbets Field.



J. Campbell Cory

Brooklyn Citizen, April 8, 1913

The below map from the *Standard Union* of April 5, 1913 places Brooklyn's new ball park squarely at the epicenter of Brooklyn's baseball world. As convenient as Ebbets Field may have been by mass transit, anyone who believed the trip from Jersey City took only 30 minutes was also a likely potential buyer of the borough's best known bridge.



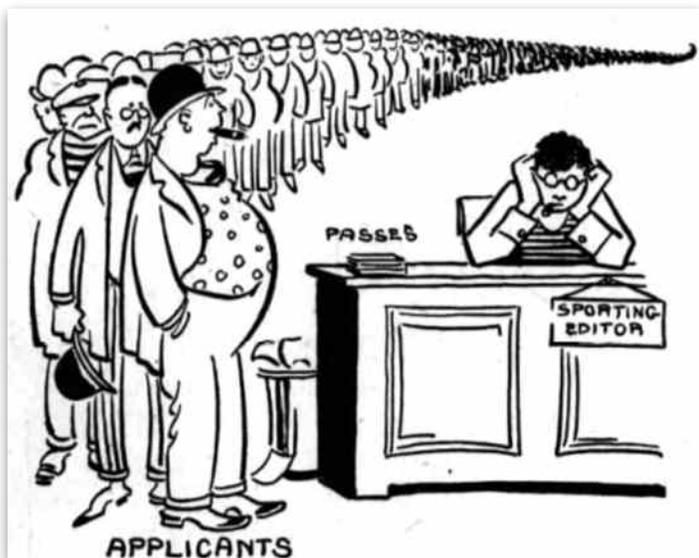
(Brooklyn) Standard Union, April 5, 1913

Regardless of how long the trip took, some rode the trolleys pictured below in the *Eagle* of April 12, 1916, the dodging of which supposedly gave the Brooklyn club its enduring name.



*Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 12, 1916*

Dodger owner Charles Ebbets complained loud and long about the cost and unfairness of free passes. The below drawing also from the *Eagle* of April 12, 1916 suggests the paper's sports editor (a remarkable resemblance to Abe Yager, the real editor) felt his pain.



*Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 12, 1916*

Some, of course, had less traditional ways not only to see the game, but to make money off of it. When this drawing appeared in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of April 16, 1907, the Dodgers still played at Washington Park, a wooden structure so the possibility was not entirely fanciful.



*Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 16, 1907*

### JOHNSON FAVORS SPECIAL OPENING DAY IN BROOKLYN

Ban Johnson favors the scheme of Brooklyn having a special opening day. The support of the head of the American League is of great assistance to President Ebbets, and makes it that much easier for the Brooklyn club to carry out its plans. President Lynch of the National League is opposed to it, but when he hears the views of the magnates he is likely to change his mind. Ebbets can count on probably six clubs to help him out, which goes to show how the magnates feel in the matter. The attitude of Johnson will probably influence the National League to fall in line. Johnson wants the Highlanders to have clear sailing on their opening day, and he will win out unless the dope is awry.

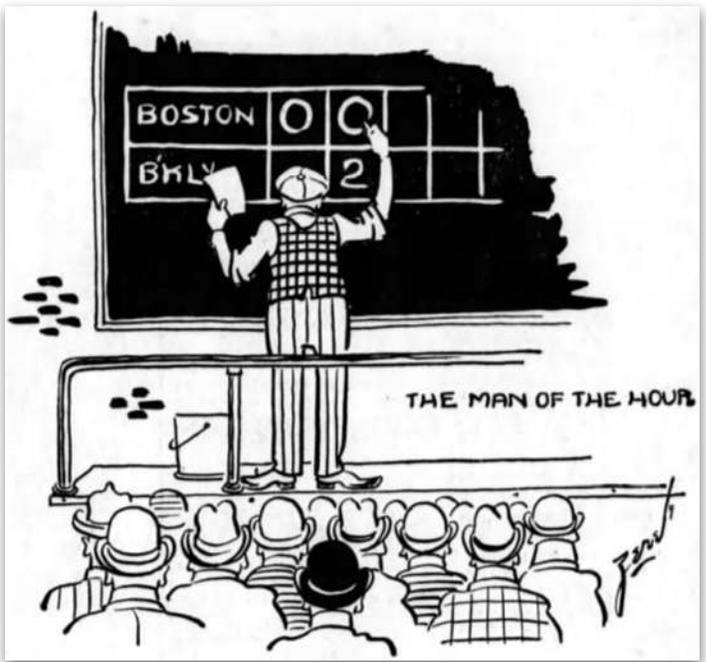
*Brooklyn Times, February 11, 1913*

In his essay “Why Time Begins on Opening Day,” Tom Boswell described baseball as “a great therapeutic wash of fact and anecdote.” The combination is depicted almost perfectly in the below April 9, 1913 *Brooklyn Citizen* drawing presumably of a grandfather and grandson at the first regular season game at Ebbets Field. The grandfather, who could easily have seen every opener since the team’s 1883 founding, has the facts, perhaps embellished by anecdotes, while the grandson could have gone on to witness every Brooklyn Dodger opener thereafter. We’ll assume the missing middle generation didn’t have a creative excuse to miss work or an understanding boss.

The only way the missing father/son could even keep track of the score was when a newspaper, tavern or other place posted scores received from the park such as the below example from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of April 12, 1916.



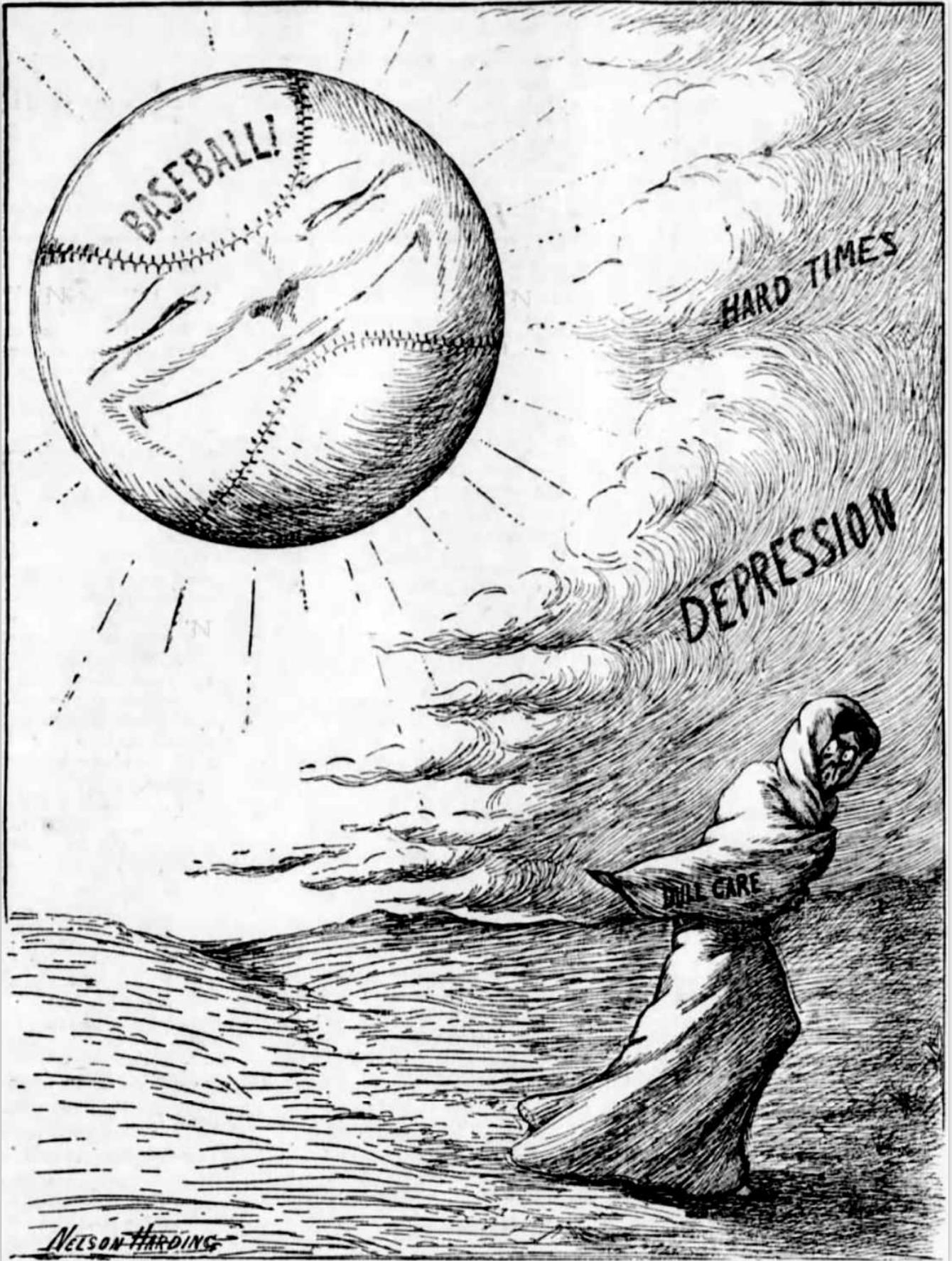
Frank Leet *Brooklyn Citizen*, April 9, 1913



*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 12, 1916

In the drawing on the next page from the *Eagle* of April 14, 1908, Nelson Harding, the paper’s Pulitzer Prize winning editorial cartoonist, captured the boundless optimism of opening day. Boundless, no matter how little reason there was for hope — at least on the baseball field. Not only had the Dodgers lost five straight home openers, they would lose again on this day, the first of over 100 losses and a next-to-last-place finish. Yet opening day still brought hope that went far beyond the ball field, no matter how difficult the times. And that hopefulness is as real today as it was over a century ago. While it’s tempting to speculate as to why a new baseball season has that kind of power, it’s perhaps wise to remember Roger Kahn’s admonition about not trying to summarize the 1951 National League pennant race. It was, Kahn felt, like attempting to summarize *King Lear* which would only “diminish majesty.” So we’ll let it go at that and just be grateful that once again baseball is back!

*This article was originally published in the April 7, 2022 edition of author John Zinn’s engaging blog A Manly Pastime.*



Nelson Harding

Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 14, 1908

## CHRISTY MATHEWSON: SPITBALL PITCHER

by **Bill Lamb**

*In a post on his informative blog Baseball History, Deadball Era historian and DEC member Steve Steinberg addressed Christy Mathewson's late-career resort to throwing a spitball. The paragraphs below expand upon Steve's treatment of that subject (accessible via [SteveSteinberg.net](http://SteveSteinberg.net)).*

Although there are other worthy candidates, Christy Mathewson is widely regarded as the Deadball Era's finest pitcher. Inarguably, he was the winningest, with all of his National League-record 373 victories compiled between 1901 and 1916.<sup>1</sup> But in many respects, Mathewson was more than just an accomplished ballplayer. Handsome, refined, college-educated, articulate, and clean-cut, he embodied a turn-of-the-century ideal: the athletic Christian gentleman. But appearance and character hardly suffice to make a Hall of Fame hurler. Mathewson was a right-handed nonpareil, a combination of pitching intelligence, exceptional control, and great stuff. In his prime, Matty's repertoire included a blazing fastball, a variety of curves, and an effective change-up, all thrown with pinpoint accuracy.<sup>2</sup> And kept in reserve for tight spots was Mathewson's signature pitch – the fadeaway, described by an admiring Walter Johnson as “a drop ball with an out curve, delivered so that it would shoot down past the waist.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1914, the 34-year-old Mathewson turned in another standout season with a 24-13 record, his twelfth-consecutive 20+ win season for the New York Giants. Superficially, the year looked much like the previous eleven. But upon closer inspection, signs of decline were evident in the Mathewson numbers. In a yeoman 312 innings, he had been hit more freely than in years past; his 314 base hits-surrendered yielded a new career-high .263 opponents' batting average. And the 16 home runs that he served up were the National League's most. Matty's 3.00 ERA was also out of character (and another new career worst). Perhaps most ominously, the five-time NL strikeout

leader had fanned a mere 80 enemy batsmen in 1914.

In the run-up to the 1914 season, debate had raged about the effects that throwing a spitball had on a pitcher's arm. Much of the controversy was generated by the debilitating sore arm suffered in 1913 by the foremost practitioner of wet servings, Chicago White Sox ace Ed Walsh.<sup>4</sup> In the opinion of Mathewson, the cause of Walsh's difficulties lay elsewhere. “Spitball pitching does not injure a player's arm any more than if he used curve balls,” maintained Matty.<sup>5</sup> And he dismissed “the talk of Walsh's arm being injured by too frequent use of the spitball” as “newspaper talk and all bosh.”<sup>6</sup> Mathewson then revealed that his views were based upon personal experience. “I have a spitball, although I do not use it during a league game. I developed it in order to see just what it was.” He then added, “I do not expect to use it next year, but, of course, if I find that my regular curves and change of pace are not successful, I will use the spitter.”<sup>7</sup>

Mathewson's benign view of the spitball's effect on the arm was distinctly a minority one. The pitching elite of his day – Cy Young, Walter Johnson, Mordecai Brown, Chief Bender, even Rube Waddell – had all abjured use of the pitch.<sup>8</sup> Then in one of his syndicated newspaper columns, Mathewson himself changed sides. Noting the increased scarcity of spitballers in major league ranks, Matty listed the pitch's drawbacks as including the fact that catchers disliked receiving spitballs and that excess saliva on grounded balls caused infielders to throw wildly.<sup>9</sup> He also aligned with those who maintained that throwing the spitball was harmful to the pitching arm. Contradicting his earlier commentary, Matty declared, “I myself am against it, since I believe it hurts a pitcher's arm and shortens the period in which he is good for major league service.”<sup>10</sup> He then added, “I have practically never used the spitter since it was invented because it hurt my arm after working on it.”<sup>11</sup> During for-real National League contests, Matty only threw a spitter “once in a great while,” usually in an attempt to fool Honus Wagner.<sup>12</sup> Later, Mathewson said

that he probably had not used the spitter in a regular season game more than ten times.<sup>13</sup>

Ironically, the “reverse twist” that Ed Walsh imparted upon the ball in throwing his spitter closely replicated the “reverse twist” that put the fade in the renowned Mathewson fadeaway.<sup>14</sup> Other things that Walsh and Mathewson had in common were large, rugged physiques and intense competitive fire, a desire to win that willingly absorbed the cost of throwing an arm-taxing specialty pitch. Or in Mathewson’s case, another one besides the fadeaway. Matty’s outstanding 24-13 record in 1914 had not deluded the pitcher. He realized that he had lost velocity on his fastball and that his curveball and change-up were often hittable. If he was going to continue his dominance – and Mathewson was then in the second year of a lucrative three-season contract – he needed to fortify his pitching arsenal. So early in the offseason, Matty announced his intention to incorporate the spitball into his pitching repertoire for 1915.<sup>15</sup>

Mathewson got off to a slow start in the new year, dropping four of his first five decisions. How often he employed the spitter in these outings is difficult to discern, but he reportedly used the spitball in an early August win over Cincinnati that raised his season record to a substandard 7-9.<sup>16</sup> But even the use of trick pitches could not stanch Matty’s decline. “He hasn’t the stuff he used to carry,” admitted Giants manager and Mathewson friend John McGraw, sadly. “The hop on his fastball has disappeared.”<sup>17</sup> Used sparingly thereafter, Mathewson limped to season end, finishing with an 8-14 (.364) record with opponents’ batting average (.277) and ERA (3.58) figures that exceed the career-worst registered the previous season. And he again led NL pitchers in home runs surrendered (9). The Giants were only marginally better. Two years removed from a third-straight pennant-winning season, the McGraw club went 69-83 (.454) and tumbled all the way into the NL cellar.

McGraw appreciated the need to rebuild his ball club but was not about to jettison his longtime pitching ace until he was satisfied that Mathewson had nothing left. But a pitching hand injury



**Christy Mathewson, 1916**

incurred during a 1916 spring training intrasquad game deferred putting Matty to the test. He gave up 15 hits in his initial start, a ten-inning, 7-6 loss to Boston in early May. The defeat came during a grim season launch that put the New York record at 2-13. The club then embarked on an extended road trip. But abruptly, the Giants turned it around, with Mathewson playing his part. On May 20, he set down the St. Louis Cardinals on six hits, 4-1. “Matty Shows All His Old Cunning” was the apt caption of the game account published in the *New York Times*.<sup>18</sup> For cunning and masterly control of an array of off-speed pitches was what Mathewson now had to rely upon. He struck out only one Cardinals batter but made effective use of breaking balls that included both the spitball and the fadeaway.<sup>19</sup> The triumph was the Giants tenth-straight.

The following week, Mathewson was even better, throwing a four-hit shutout at the Boston Braves. His pitching formula was the same: a steady diet

of tantalizing off-speed pitches that included “flashes of a moist ball or a fadeaway”<sup>20</sup> that Boston batsmen popped up or beat into the ground. Only two Braves were struck out. The 4-0 victory was the Giants 17<sup>th</sup> straight road win, a new National League record. The triumph was also the 79<sup>th</sup> and final shutout of Christy Mathewson’s fabled career. Both he and the ball club subsequently cooled off. Used infrequently thereafter, Matty won only one more game for the Giants before a late July trade allowed him to become manager of the Cincinnati Reds.

Mathewson intended to manage the Reds from the bench and leave the pitching to others. But late in the season, he made one last start on the mound in a sentimental farewell matchup against old Chicago Cubs nemesis Mordecai Brown, also making his final major league appearance. The two failing pitching masters had little left, but both carried on manfully to the finish of a 10-8 slugfest won by Mathewson. The victory, Matty’s only one not posted as a New York Giant, was number 373, the record for most wins ever recorded by a National League pitcher that he shares with late-career adversary Grover Alexander. The extent to which resort to throwing a spitball contributed to that total, however, seems slight.

## NOTES

1. Prior to the onset of the Deadball Era, Mathewson went 0-3 for the 1900 New York Giants. The Mathewson mark of 373 NL victories was later tied by Grover Alexander.
2. In 4,788 2/3 major league innings, Mathewson walked only 848 enemy batsmen. He was even better in four World Series: only 10 walks in 101 2/3 frames.
3. See “Spitball Pitchers Never Last in the Majors Says Senator,” *Winnipeg (Manitoba) Tribune*, March 28, 1914: 21. Today, the pitch would probably be described as a hard screwball that broke down and away from lefty batters.
4. The chronically overused Walsh had thrown 393 innings while going 27-17 in 1912. The following season, he suffered from a sore arm and managed less than 100 innings for the White Sox.
5. According to “Spit Ball Does Not Injure Arm,” *Es-canaba (Michigan) Morning Herald*, January 21, 1914: 2.
6. Same as above. According to Matty, the spitball put no more strain on the arm than throwing a curve.
7. Same as above.
8. As reported in “Spitter Has Worked Havoc with Twirlers,” *San Antonio Light*, February 15, 1914: 20, which included Christy Mathewson among the “stars who turned [the spitball] down.” See also, “Walter Johnson Says Spit Ball Spoiled Walsh,” *Des Moines Tribune*, February 21, 1914: 6.
9. Per Christy Mathewson as published under the caption “Damp Sphere Wrecking Fielding, Says Matty,” (Denver) *Rocky Mountain News*, June 2, 1914: 11; “Spitter Is Rapidly Losing Favor,” (Portland) *Oregonian*, May 24, 1914: 3; “Matty’s Big League Gossip,” *Anaconda (Montana) Standard*, May 18, 1914: 3.
10. Per “Damp Sphere,” above.
11. Same as above.
12. Same as above.
13. Per “Matty Is Trying Out New Deliveries,” *Oregonian*, August 21, 1915: 19
14. Compare the delivery of the Walsh spitball in “Walsh Credits Stricklett with Discovery of Spitter,” *Washington Post*, March 22, 1914: 6, with the Mathewson fadeaway in Billy Murphy, “Magicians of the Box,” *Ogden (Utah) Evening Standard*, October 31, 1914: 19.
15. See “Mathewson Decides to Try to Stick with Spitball,” *Boston Journal*, November 11, 1914: 11. See also, “Matty to Depend on His Spitball,” *Owensboro (Kentucky) Inquirer*, November 22, 1914: 6.
16. Per “Christy Mathewson, After Many Seasons, Resorts to the Spitball,” (Rochester) *Democrat and Chronicle*, August 11, 1915: 17.
17. “Matty a ‘Has Been’; Old ‘Pep’ Is Gone,” *Salt Lake Telegram*, August 23, 1915: 8.
18. *New York Times*, May 21, 1916: S1.
19. According to “Matty Comes into His Own Again, at Expense of Cards,” *New York Sun*, May 21, 1916: 14. See also, “Big Six Starts Using Spitball,” *Miami Herald*, May 25, 1916: 8.
20. “Matty Comes Back, Blanking Braves,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1916: 10.

Instead of Mathewson and Tesreau pitching every day for the Giants, it is Marty O’Toole who is the one really called upon. Marty usually flings the ninth inning.

*Toledo News-Bee, September 16, 1914*

## GAMES/BIOPROJECT

Since the newsletter last went to press, the Games Project has expanded our knowledge of Deadball Era baseball by publishing 26 new 1901-1919 game accounts. Meanwhile, the BioProject kept busy with profiles of Deadballers Jack Enright, Jimmy Johnston, Hunky Shaw, War Sanders, Doc Parker, Harry Imlay, Lou Polchow, Everett Bankston, Carmen Hill, Bob Blewett, Grant Thatcher, Ralph Capron, Hi Jasper, George Starnagle, Bobby Marshall, Hugh High, and Don Flinn. Be sure to check these out if you have not already done so.

## NEW DEADBALL ERA COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*The Inside Game* is pleased to welcome to the committee the following SABR members who have expressed interest in the Deadball Era:

**Tom Alesia**                      **Robert Fitts**  
**Jeffrey S. Anderson**      **Gregory H. Wolf**  
**Nickolas J. Bartle**           **Brian Yoon**

We look forward to their active participation in committee endeavors. These new committee members, as well as our newsletter contributors, can be contacted via the SABR directory.

## WILL INCREASE BATTING

### OVERALL THINKS GLOSSY BALL WILL MAKE PITCHERS EASY THIS SEASON

Pitcher Jeff [sic] Overall of the champion Chicago Cubs predicts a tough season for the twirlers. He believes that the rule prohibiting the pitcher from soiling a glossy ball will greatly increase the hitting department of the game. He also sees trouble for the umpires in enforcing it, as he believes every pitcher will try to invent some way to get around the rule.

“You can’t curve a glossy ball,” said Overall, “and in my judgment there will be more pitchers knocked out of the box the coming season than ever before. The batsmen never had the advantage this new rule will give them, and unless I am very much mistaken the hitting average will go soaring this season. Supposing,” argues Overall, “a pitcher has two strikes and three balls on a batsman, and the next one is fouled off over the stand. That means a new, slippery ball. The pitcher wouldn’t dare to curve it on account of its glossy surface, which prevents getting a good grip on the ball. He has no choice but to stick the ball over the plate with the prayer that it be knocked no farther than the back fence.”

*Salt Lake Herald, April 5, 1908*

## FORGIVING PUZZLE



Did the Brooklyn fans, who shivered through yesterday's lost game, feel that muffs were excusable?

*Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 10, 1913*

# Old Pals of the Diamond of "Christy" Matthewson Who Showed Youthful Giants How to Play Ball



New York Evening World, October 1, 1921