

The INSIDE GAME

The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee

Volume 7, Number 4: "Let's get this lumpy, licorice-stained ball rolling!" November 2007

Chairman's Column

By **John McMurray**
deadball@sabr.org

Roger Salmon, who pitched in two career games for the 1912 Philadelphia Athletics, has one thing in common with Cotton Knaupp, who played 31 total games at shortstop for Cleveland in 1910 and 1911. Both are lesser-known Deadball Era players whose biographies need to be completed for SABR's BioProject.

The BioProject is an initiative to research and write online biographies of all major leaguers. Currently, 546 player biographies can be viewed at <http://bioproj.sabr.org>. But the work is far from done: counting the more than 300 Deadball Era player biographies published in the two volumes of Deadball Stars, we have completed bios of only about 10 percent of available major leaguers who played between 1901 and 1919.

Speaking at the Deadball Era Committee meeting at SABR 37, Jan Finkel pointed out that even if a particular player had a short career, he still has a life story that needs to be told. That story includes what the player did before and after his major league career, and it may involve some very interesting research twists and turns. Virtually every player who is not featured in Deadball Stars needs to have a biography written about him, from Harry Trezell to Wilson Collins to Bill Hogg.

BioProject Chair Mark Armour has been very supportive of the Deadball Era Committee's effort to add biographies from this period. If you

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"Reel Baseball": An interview with Jessica Rosner, Kino International

Editor's Note: This past spring, Deadball fans were treated to a new collection of short baseball films produced by Kino International (www.kino.com). "Reel Baseball" was the brainchild of Jessica Rosner, Director of Non Theatrical Sales at Kino and Cubs fan extraordinaire. RJ Lesch gives his review of the DVD in this issue, and Jessica was kind enough to give us some background on it.

Charles Crawley: How did you get the idea to collect baseball films from the Silent Era of movies into a DVD set?

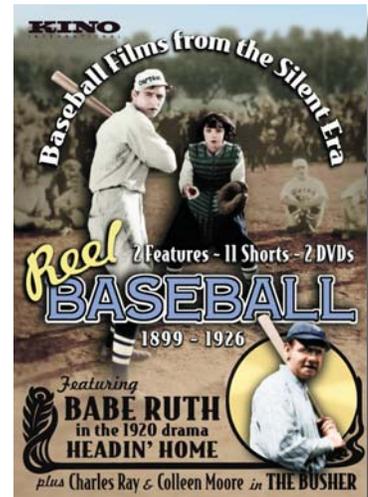
Jessica Rosner: That was the easy part. Baseball and early films—especially silent films—are my two biggest passions, so it was natural to want to combine them. My day job is working for Kino International, which is probably the leading distributor of silent films on DVD (Keaton, Griffith, et al). I managed to convince my boss to let me do this. I go to several festivals a year that show rare early films, mostly from collectors, and a few years ago I started thinking about what silent baseball films were out there that I could get. (I couldn't use any films still owned by studios which includes most features and shorts made after 1923.) My collector friends were extraordinarily helpful, though few have

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RJ Lesch goes to the movies.
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**Interview with Jessica Rosner,
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any interest in baseball, plus they thought it was the perfect project for me. (Ok most of them laughed at the idea of this being my project but they were great.)

CC: What is your favorite (or favorites) from “Reel Baseball” and why?

JR: Hard to pick one but I really love “His Last Game,” which is ironic because I originally passed on it. I saw it during a hectic viewing day at the Library of Congress, which was mostly disappointing. I thought it a bit too strange and then it literally haunted me. So I called the LOC back and ordered it. My other favorites are “Hearts and Diamonds,” DeWolf Hopper’s “Casey at the Bat” and the feature “The Busher.” If I had really good material on “Casey,” it might be my favorite; it is just bizarre. I come more from a silent films than Deadball Era background, so I am more interested in the films than specific historic footage or players in them, so for me John Bunny is a bigger deal than John McGraw.

CC: Does it strike you as ironic or humorous that Babe Ruth is cast as a rube in “Headin’ Home” and John McGraw as a kindly fatherly figure in “One Touch of Nature”?

JR: Well it is ironic but not that unusual for non actors to be cast against type in silent films. If you wanted a hard-drinking, womanizing baseball player you would probably use Wallace Beery and for a nasty cussing manager probably Tully Marshall. Frankly I think they wanted to use Ruth and McGraw as kinder and gentler than they were in real life, because these are films where they are trying to appeal to a broad audience, especially women. The real personalities would probably not have sold as well.

CC: I was surprised in “Headin’ Home,” which features Babe Ruth, that instead of the usual, fairy-tale walk-off homer as in “The Natural,” the Babe actually hits a home run against the home town team and almost gets lynched for it. Isn’t that rather unusual, given the sentimentality of that time?



Committee Chair
John McMurray: deadball@sabr.org

Newsletter Editor
Charles Crawley: crcrawley@yahoo.com

Assistant Editor
Mark Dugo: claydad96@aol.com

Database Manager/Distributor
Dan Desrochers: desrochsox@comcast.net

JR: No, as you can see in a lot of these films they are usually less sentimental than later films. There was not a huge pressure in silent films to be all sweetness and light.

CC: “How the Office Boy Saw the Ball Game” shows some great vintage Deadball Era footage. It also features a lovable ne’er-do-well who watches the game atop a telephone pole with a telescope that doubles as a bat. This is only a fragment of the movie. Do you know what actually happens in the movie? Or would you like to venture some guesses about how it turns out?

JR: We are not really sure if much more happens. It might be almost complete, just missing a final credit. A five minute film for 1906 is not that unusual, and we had two copies but both ended the same. Some descriptions have the boss and office boy meeting but I am not really sure. Ironically the collector who supplied the material called me shortly before the release to tell me he had located the negative we had been looking for, but alas it was way too late to use it, so I will never know what was in it.

CC: “Happy Days,” which shows some children playing baseball, is reminiscent of the Little Rascals. It is even interracial like the Little Rascals, with African-American children in the stands and in one key role. What else do you know about this film and any influence it might have had on Spanky and his gang?

JR: The film was produced by a *really* low budget company called the Weiss Bros who basically gave jobs to silent comedians like Larry Semon at the end of their careers. I had never heard of them before this, but in one the common ironies of silent film, their films—including “Happy Days”—survive in *much, much* better condition than films from bigger studios because some kind of bankruptcy kept their negative material together. “Happy Days” is easily the best looking of any film in the set. It was definitely a Little Rascals rip-off, but the big selling point was “Winnie Winkle,” the popular comic strip heroine. Also as for being interracial, on the whole silent films contained much, much more racial and ethnic diversity than films after the early 30s.

CC: “Felix Saves the Day” is a fun cartoon that displays an amazing amalgam of drawings, photos, and movies. Don’t some of our cartooning techniques today seem primitive in comparison?

JR: They were pretty inventive with animation in those days. “Koko the Clown” mixed live action and animation even more. I admire a lot of current animation but studio stuff tends to be a lot staler.

CC: What are some of your favorite baseball films from the non-silent era?

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***Interview with Jessica Rosner,
cont. from page 2.***

Chairman's Column, cont. from page 1.

JR: Like most fans I love "Bull Durham," but I am very fond of the 50s comedies' "Rhubarb" and "It Happens Every Spring"; and I love a little obscure one called "It Happened in Flatbush" that I saw at one of my film buff fests two years ago. There are also two terrific shorts—I don't recall the titles—but one is a hilarious one on Brooklyn's obsession with the Dodgers and the other features Babe Ruth invading a grade school class to teach the kids how to play much to the dismay of the very fey Franklin Pangborn.

CC: I understand that you are a Cubs fan. How does a Cubs fan survive in New York City, surrounded by teams that make it regularly to the World Series?

JR: First you get a satellite dish on your three-story building for your itty bitsy apartment so you can get WGN (and later Extra Innings). There is a good community of Cub fans here and I get a lot of encouragement on the street when I wear my Cubs jacket. I have always hated the Mets and the Yankees, proximity has only increased it. Also I have season tickets at Wrigley and manage to use up every available vacation day and make about 22 games a season plus the ones in New York, as well as either Philly or DC, and sometimes a special road trip.

CC: Do you have any plans for "Reel Baseball, Volume II"?

JR: If it sells really well my boss *might* let me do another one. I know at least three good features and a few shorts I did not use and I got a call from a collector friend after everything was done that he had located an unseen Ruth short, so you never know. ♦

have a Deadball Era player in mind whom you would like to profile, please contact me at the above e-mail address. If you do not have a specific player in mind, we would be happy to assign a biography to you. One of the additional merits of this project is that you can take on as many biography assignments as you can manage. Even writing just one player profile makes a real contribution to this dynamic project.

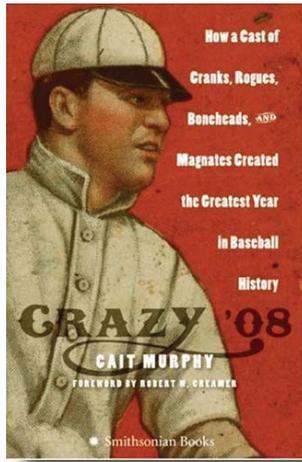
As the holidays approach, I wanted to be sure to remind Committee members about Boiling Out, which is held every other year in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Next year, Boiling Out will take place from March 15-18. A flyer outlining the activities there, which simulate a spring training regimen of a century ago, appears on the last page of the August 2007 issue of this newsletter. RJ Lesch (rjlesch_usa@yahoo.com) and Mike Dugan (mduganhome@cablelynx.com) can answer any questions about Boiling Out. Be sure not to miss what has become one of the signature events of the Deadball Era Committee.

Most of you are aware that there has been spirited interest in a potential committee project on Deadball Era sports journalists. We are in the process of convening a subcommittee to examine the feasibility of that idea and to gauge committee interest. So, if you're interested in this project or have recommendations about how it should be approached, please let me know.

As always, I welcome your comments and suggestions about the committee as we move into our eighth year. Whether it's reviewing a book for *The Inside Game*, writing a player biography, or suggesting and developing new committee initiatives, you can help the Deadball Era Committee to take its next steps. ♦



Babe Ruth in "Headin' Home." Photo courtesy of Kino International.



Crazy '08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads, and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History
By Cait Murphy

Smithsonian, 2007. [ISBN: 978-0-06-008937-1]. \$24.95, hardcover.

Reviewed by **Cindy Thomson**
cindy@cindyswriting.com

It's a great challenge to pen an entire book on a baseball season that has been written about many times. But it's a challenge that Cait Murphy, assistant editor at *Fortune Magazine*, was up to. Employing superb research skills, Murphy tells the story of what is probably the most intriguing, controversial, and engaging baseball season in history. In fact, Murphy contends that it *was* the most remarkable baseball season ever and defends that belief this way: "In 1908, there are simply more chapters, more incidents, more characters, more surprises, and more drama than in any other [year]."

David W. Anderson's *More Than Merkle, A History of the Best and Most Exciting Baseball Season in Human History* (University of Nebraska Press, 2000) and G. H. Fleming's *The Unforgettable Season, The Most Exciting and Calamitous Pennant Race of All Time* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981) also illustrate the 1908 season. Judging from the subtitles of these books, the baseball world has known for some time that 1908 was an incredible year.

If you haven't read them, I recommend these books for a well-rounded study of the 1908 season.

Crazy '08 is packed with social history, keeping an eye on American life as a whole and setting the year in the context of previous baseball seasons and those yet to come. While Murphy seems to go off on rabbit trails at times, in sections labeled as "Time Out", the reader is able to put baseball events in a framework, learning about the seedier side of the Major League cities, for instance, that undoubtedly influenced both the players of the day and their fans.

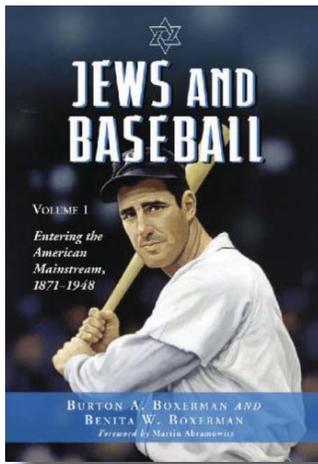
Murphy declares that 1908 was the year baseball "grew up." Many of its growing pains were past. The two-league system, while later challenged briefly by the Federal League, was in place and most of the game's modern rules were in use at that time. But of course, 1908 was the year of the Merkle Game. And the whole country was caught up in a fever that we will likely never see again—no matter how tight a race might be. There are simply too many other entertainment choices today. Baseball's most controversial game led to what was essentially the first Major League playoff game. No other season has had that much "drama" and these events all contributed to baseball's coming of age. We all know the story, but Murphy tells it with a fresh prospective, utilizing storytelling techniques rather than paraphrasing old accounts and spewing statistics. Readers who are not already familiar with the Deadball Era will find the tales in this book especially fascinating.

While the book focuses on the Giants and Cubs, leading to the ultimate show down, readers will also find some interesting accounts of other players and teams. For example, the Chicago White Sox had an amazing turnaround that year, starting out 18-20 and then moving from sixth place to first via a thirteen game winning streak. Ed Walsh won 40 of the team's 88 victories. Fans of the St. Louis Browns had plenty to cheer about that year, so apparently did the players. The team's manager, Jimmy McAleer once ordered his team to get drunk, and the next day the players arrived on

the field worse for wear. Pitcher Jack McDowell saw "blue moons and black roses" before his eyes. Such odd stories add to the entertainment value of this book. Murphy's exposition on the racial atmosphere in baseball and in the country at that time is well done. A listing toward the end of the book of players' superstitions was interesting, and the epilogue summaries of major players' lives after 1908 was a good addition. But the focus of the book remains on the Cubs and Giants, and that seems appropriate for 1908.

The photographs for the most part came from the National Baseball Hall of Fame or the Chicago Historical Society. They are all common pictures we've seen before, but it's interesting that one, featuring the Cubs' famous double play combination, is of an illustration done by the author's father, John Cullen Murphy, for *Sport Magazine*.

A couple of complaints for me are the "Time Outs," which felt a little disjointed at times and might have been better offered as appendixes; the very brief description of the 1908 World Series, and one statement that I was especially sensitive to. Murphy states that Mordecai Brown declared that his disfigured hand caused him "excruciating" pain when he pitched. As a Brown biographer, I saw that quote also and dismissed it since it could not be verified and just didn't make sense. But that's a small faux pas in an otherwise extremely well researched work. I highly recommend *Crazy '08*. ♦



*Jews and Baseball, Volume 1:
Entering the American Mainstream
1871-1948*

by Burton A. Boxerman and Benita W. Boxerman
Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2006. [ISBN: 978-0786428281]. 232 pages. \$39.95, hardcover.

Reviewed by **Howard Goldstein**
goldstein@goldlaw.com

This detailed exploration of Jewish involvement with baseball in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century is but the latest in a proliferation of recent scholarly writings on the topic. While the book offers a trove of detail, it has a number of shortcomings which cause it to be less than the fascinating study which it could have been. As a result, it is suited more for the novice than for the advanced student of the subject.

The book is not, as its title suggests, a sociological/historical treatise. The Boxermans never develops an overarching thesis, and jump around chronologically much more than was required. Rather than being a cohesive narrative, it is an amalgam of disparate topics such as The Brooklyn Dodgers, The War Years, The Clown (Al Schacht) & the Spy (Moe Berg.), Jewish Pseudonyms (name changing), The Golden Age and McGraw's Mission (to find a Jewish star for his N.Y. Giants.)

The book is not encyclopedic in the treatment of any of its subjects.

Consequently, there are surprising omissions even within some of the otherwise excellent chapters. For example, in the chapter concerning the Jewish composer, Albert Von Tilzer, who wrote the music to baseball's national anthem, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," there is no reference to any other Jewish songwriter, not even to the great Irving Berlin himself, composer of the American standards White Christmas and In Your Easter Bonnet. Readers interested in this topic certainly would have been interested to learn the circumstances surrounding how, in 1913, Berlin penned the earliest Jewish baseball-related song: "Jake! Jake! the Yiddisher Ball Player."

The book is at its best in the three chapters which it devotes to Jews who have owned baseball teams. The role of Barney Dreyfuss of the Pittsburgh Pirates has been well documented previously, most recently by the Boxermans themselves in their wonderful 2003 *Ebbets to Veeck to Busch: Eight Owners Who Shaped Baseball*. This book also thoroughly explores owners who are not well known, such as the parade of Jewish owners of the Cincinnati Red Stockings beginning in 1882, including such forgotten names as Aaron Stern and Max and Julius Fleischman. The book excels as well in its discussion of the early Jews who contributed to development of the statistical side of baseball such as Louis Heilbroner and the Elias, as well as the early writers who covered the game such as Jacob Morse, Dan Daniel and Shirley Povich. There also is a splendid chapter devoted solely to the revolutionary umpire, Dolly Stark.

Unfortunately, the book is weakest in its exploration of the ballplayers themselves. There are only 24 Jews who played professional baseball through the end of the Deadball Era, but little is written about them that did not already appear in Peter and Joachim Horvitz' 2001 *The Big Book of Jewish Baseball*, or its seminal predecessors. As evidenced by even a cursory review of this heavily notated book, the Boxermans rely heavily on the Horvitz book as well as such other authoritative texts in the field as Postal and Silvers' 1965 *The Encyclopedia*

of Jews in Sports, Ribalows' 1984 *Jewish Baseball Stars*, Slater's 1992 *Great Jews in Sports*, Levine's 1992 *From Ellis Island to Ebbetts Field* and Riess' 1998 *Sports and the American Jew*. Of particular interest to this readership will be the Boxermans' excellent use of SABR Research Journal and Bioproject materials for some of the more interesting stories included in their book.

Surprisingly, of the 74 Jewish baseball players who played from 1871 thru 1948, there is simply no mention of 9 of them, and another 18 are mentioned only fleetingly. The fact that Harry Schuman was the first American Jew to play Olympic baseball does not even merit a footnote. Deadball Era devotees will be better served reading the Horvitz book, or his 2006 groundbreaking chapter concerning early Jewish baseball players in *The Big Book of Jewish Sports Heroes*.

While omitting discussion of many of the ballplayers who should have been covered, the book surprisingly devotes a full chapter to Washington Senators star, Buddy Myer. Myer was the first "Jewish" ballplayer with only one Jewish parent, but that unusual situation is not explored at all. This failure is consistent with the Boxermans' concentration on the ballplayers as ballplayers, rather than as Jews who played baseball, the title of their book notwithstanding.

While almost all the ballplayers discussed are deceased, sparse effort was devoted to seeking unpublished first-hand accounts from the available archives, and insights from living sportscasters or relatives (not even from Hank Greenberg's son Stephen, the former Deputy Commissioner of MLB). While there is an overabundance of statistical data and well-worn stories, there is a scarcity of original research into the ballplayers' lives and certainly not enough to give the reader a true sense of the living and breathing athletes who all of these players once were.

There also was insufficient contact with those few still living ballplayers, Mickey Rutner for example. (He

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***Jews and Baseball, cont.
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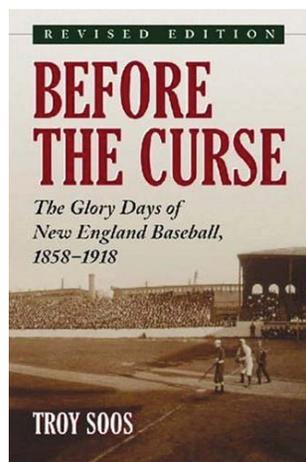
is the oldest living Jewish baseball player, and was the inspiration for Eliot Asinof's compelling *Man on Spikes*.) The Boxermans even omit any discussion or use of such important first hand Jewish ballplayer accounts as Cy Block's self-published memoir *So You Want to be a Major Leaguer?*, or Al Schacht's fascinating three biographies.

While, as previously mentioned, there is a breadth of information provided about many of the ballplayers, the reader generally receives the impression that the treatment of the ballplayers was superficial due to the book's failure to explore their humanity. For example, even though one of the chapters is entitled "The Brooklyn Dodgers," there is no discussion of any interactions between the various Jewish Dodger players. Though they surely had to be feel like kindred spirits besieged on all sides, that subject has been left to be explored another day.

While the Boxermans deserve considerable praise for compiling in one volume much of the important information which previously has been written on the topic, the book is really more of a bibliographic review of the field than a groundbreaking study. In fact, there are far too many points in the book where more questions are raised than answered. For example, there was a Phillies' ballplayer named Harry Kane (formerly Cohen) who went by the nickname "Klondike." How Harry got his nickname, or whether it disclosed some fascinating nugget about his life outside baseball, is not explored. Similarly, it is noted that the "cup of coffee" ballplayer, Jesse Baker, was a friend of such memorable and diverse individuals as Damon Runyon, Walter Winchell and the Marx Brothers. Not one story about these friendships is set forth, most unfortunately. One more story left unexplored is that concerning Mose Solomon (whom John McGraw thought would be his first Jewish superstar for the N.Y. Giants) having played football for the Carlisle Indian School. How this unique ethnic mixing of Jews and Indians arose,

and what impact it had on Mose as a Jewish baseball player is again left to the readers' imagination.

This writer is aware that Jewish Major Leaguers, the organization which coordinates most of present activity concerning Jews and baseball, expects to soon publish a series of oral histories of the Jewish ballplayers, both from those living and of those deceased ballplayers whose baseball life stories were earlier recorded for posterity. Hopefully that forthcoming book will provide the human interest side of this compelling story about Jewish involvement with baseball. In the interim, *Jews and Baseball, Vol. 1*, will at least provide a rudimentary education to those interested in the subject. ♦



Before the Curse, The Glory Days of New England Baseball (1858-1918)

By Troy Soos
Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2006. [ISBN: 978-0786426256] 226 pages. \$29.95, soft cover.

Reviewed by **Irv Goldfarb**
Irvin.J.Goldfarb@abc.com

I've often wondered what interest "regional" baseball writing held for readers who were not followers of the featured teams. I was never sure, for instance, who besides rabid Met fans would want to read *Amazin'*; or if anyone outside the Sunshine State would be studying a history of the Florida State League.

Silly me.

Before The Curse, The Glory Days of New England Baseball (1858-1918) is an eminently readable, absolutely fascinating narrative of the evolution of the game from base ball to baseball, and how it captivated an entire region that's still recognized as a cradle of the sport.

Troy Soos has re-issued his 1997 book, adding newly-discovered material (John Thorn's "Pittsfield by-law," first and foremost) and an updated preface, made necessary in part, by the fact that the real 'Curse' officially died in 2004.

As expected, the book centers on the teams of Boston, culminating in the Red Sox' dominance of the AL during the 1910's and the Braves' miracle of 1914. Readers are treated to the stories of 'Nuf Ced's Third Base Saloon ("How Can You Get Home Without Reaching Third Base?") and the tale of how Mayor 'Honey Fitz' led the Sox' Royal Rooters in an on-field demonstration that nearly cost their beloved team the 1912 World Series.

For those already familiar with the various legends surrounding the Fens, *Before the Curse* goes much deeper into regional lore: the college rivalries, including Harvard's fifteen-year domination of Brown; the many incarnations of the New England League; and painstakingly-researched segments detailing circuits in Vermont, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.

The writing in *Before the Curse* flows: it begins as a primer, starting with a comparison of the Massachusetts and New York games. Then, much like Seymour's histories, each chapter takes us through subsequent decades of New England baseball history. To his further credit, Soos offers explanations of names and terminology that often get overlooked as common knowledge (so THAT'S why they called Radbourn "Old Hoss" ...)

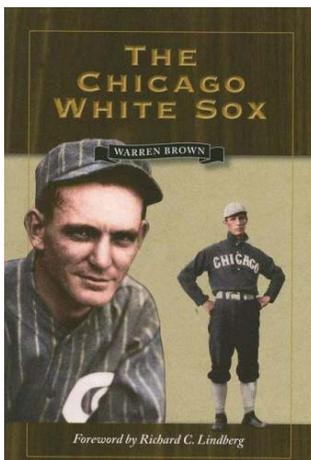
The book is complemented by a better-than-average array of photos, including the only known picture of a game played under Massachusetts rules; there's also a photo of the 1877

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***Before the Curse,
cont. from page 6.***

Harvard team, decked out in their new uniforms that has to be seen to be fully appreciated! Even the appendix (a part of many works I tend to skim over) is worth studying: contemporary articles and box scores, highlighting some of New England's most "Historic Games." Here you'll read the story of a match between the freshman and sophomore girls of Smith College, see the first appearance of East Brookfield's Connie Mack for the Meriden, Connecticut nine, and even learn the details of a baseball-chess doubleheader (the meeting of "muscle and mind") between Amherst and Williams colleges, held on July 1, 1859. I won't give away which team swept the twinbill.

Before the Curse is a fascinating portrait of baseball development in a baseball-crazy region, and here's the highest compliment I can pay: like many of us, I keep a stack of books from which I pick off my next adventure. With so many books I haven't gotten to yet, I still plan to find time to read Troy Soos' tribute to New England baseball at *least* one more time. ♦



The Chicago White Sox
by Warren Brown with a foreword by
Richard C. Lindberg

First published in 1952 by G.P. Putnam, reprinted by Kent State University Press March 2007. [ISBN 978-0-87338-895-5]. 258 pages. \$18.00, soft cover.

Reviewed by **James E. Elfers**
jeelfers@netscape.net

First Published by G.P. Putnam in 1952, Warren Brown's book is being reissued as part of Kent State University Press's Writing Sports series. Brown's book covers the story of the Sox from their inception until the eve of the 1952 season, a point in time when their star was, after a steady stream of second division finishes, at last ascendant.

The book is supplemented excellently with a foreword from Richard C. Lindberg, noted White Sox historian. Lindberg recounts how Brown was hired to write the book and the story of its publication. He also provides a fascinating biography of Brown that makes him immediately appealing to readers.

The book divides roughly into three uneven segments. Each section covers a portion of Sox history. For deadball fans the long first section of the book provides the most interest. Brown tells the story of the American League franchise in Chicago from its inception until the Black Sox scandal. The information that Brown tells varies from perfunctory to detailed depending upon the chapter. The founding of the Sox, the 1906 World Series, and the erection of Comiskey Park are covered in just four brief chapters.

Two chapters cover the 1913-1914 White Sox-Giants world tour. Of particular note is Brown's history of the Black Sox scandal. Three well detailed chapters present Brown's take on the darkest episode in baseball's history.

Brown was a young reporter in 1919. He was not reporting from Chicago at the time but the affair unfolded just as he was earning his journalistic chops. As a youngster Warren Brown played baseball with Charles "Swede" Risberg and Claude "Lefty" Williams, knowing them in a context no other reporter could hope to. Brown's analysis of the Black Sox Scandal makes fascinating reading in that it was amongst the first detailed accountings of the scandal to see print after the 1920's. The story follows the lines of the tale we know from other accounts of the scandal but in

1952, Brown was striking out in new territory. Especially of interest is his analysis of the Comiskey – Johnson feud and its impact on the scandal. Brown points out that there were in fact two fallings out between Ban Johnson and Charles Comiskey and that the second one ruptured any hope that the two would reconcile.

A portent of how Johnson would treat the Sox after his falling out with Comiskey asserted itself with the John Picus "Jack" Quinn issue. After the demise of the Federal League, Comiskey wanted to sign Quinn, who had ended up with the Vernon club of the Pacific Coast League. After receiving permission to talk directly with him, the crusty Quinn ended up on the Sox roster. However, the Yankees also expressed an interest in Quinn and prevailed upon Johnson to void his White Sox contract. In a ruling that was one of the most bizarrely worded missives to ever come from baseball's head office, Johnson repeatedly misstated which team Quinn had been with in the PCL and further denied that permission had ever been given to the Sox to negotiate with him. Johnson then unilaterally negated Quinn's contract and awarded him to the Yankees!

Seeing how he had been treated in the Quinn issue probably gave Comiskey a sense of how he would be treated by Johnson in 1920. While much more about the scandal has been revealed in the years subsequent to 1952, Brown's version of events jibes with virtually all-subsequent retellings of the events and is well worth the reading.

Brown's portrait of Comiskey is at slight odds with that of later writers such as Eliot Asinof but he does point out that Commy had a history of money problems with his team. The Sox had expected extravagant bonuses after the 1917 Series, as had been awarded to the 1906 World Champion "Hitless Wonders." When no bonuses were forthcoming, the Sox began to fragment into those who were loyal to Comiskey and those who were opposed to him.

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***Chicago White Sox,
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The final two segments of the book deal with the 1) fall out of the Black Sox Scandal and Comiskey's struggles to find a winning formula up to his death and 2) the Sox from the Great Depression to the post war era up to resignation from the team of Charles Comiskey, II. These sections of the book are a bit tougher going for the reader. Then again, it is difficult to make one cellar dwelling team after another interesting.

A recurring lament of Brown is that the Sox are, in a sense, a jinxed franchise. Brown relates one misfortune after another that befell the Sox with the refrain that "such a thing could only happen to the White Sox." After reading this fine history you very well may agree. ♦

Reel Baseball 1890-1926: Baseball Films from the Silent Era.

Kino International, 2007. (www.kino.com) (\$29.95)

Reviewed by **R. J. Lesch**
rjlesch_usa@yahoo.com

This two-DVD set contains two feature films and 11 short films with baseball as their common subject.

I recommend this to anyone interested in Deadball-era baseball, early film history, or early 20th-century pop culture. I don't recommend this set to anyone wishing to while away an evening at the movies, because the films, though interesting, are not particularly entertaining to modern audiences.

We today, though descended from the people who watched these films in theaters a century ago, do not have the same tastes in either our pathos or our comedy. What makes us laugh now is not necessarily what made people laugh then. It is true that writers such as Mark Twain appeal to both audiences, as do filmmakers Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. I would suggest, though, that these artists largely shaped our modern tastes. Audiences found them fresh and innovative and passed that opinion along to us, while comedians and writers in vogue then are forgotten today.

These films too might be forgotten were it not for the baseball content. We care about "Headin' Home" because it stars Babe Ruth, not because it is a great movie. It isn't, though it isn't a total stinker either. It's a fairly typical example of 1920s melodrama, told in an amusing flashback style by an old-timer from Babe's purported rural home town. The movie depicts Ruth as a small-town boy with a big heart who is taking care of his fictional widowed mother and kid sister—the close family Ruth never had in real life.

What makes the film worth seeing, though, is that this is Babe Ruth on the screen, walking, gesturing, swinging a bat, and throwing a baseball. More fascinating, this was Babe Ruth in 1920, when he was young, slim, and at the height of his powers. For those of us who grew up with the image of a stocky Ruth chugging around

the bases on spindly legs toward the end of his career, it is an eye-opener. We don't see Ruth playing baseball except in staged fashion, but it is wondrous just to see the man chopping firewood. Some of the stock footage is interesting also. We see the Yankees taking the field in one shot, wearing black armbands (perhaps in tribute to Ray Chapman?).

The same goes for "One Touch of Nature" (1917), featuring John McGraw. McGraw is well-behaved, and it's too bad the filmmakers couldn't have worked in some footage of him arguing with an umpire or chewing out a batter who refused to lay down a bunt. Still, as a McGraw admirer, I enjoyed seeing the man in action. Oh yes—and in his introduction, SABR's own Rob Edelman suggests that one clip of a pitcher warming up might actually be Christy Mathewson. I think he's right. If that doesn't send chills up your spine, I don't know what does.

The other feature film, "The Busher" (1919), stars two actors who were well known at the time but are forgotten now. It also includes Louis Durham, the star Indianapolis pitcher who made over thirty silent films after his playing days. The film itself is hard to take, though, because many of the scenes take painfully long to develop considering that they are silent. One opening scene between the title character and his father has the former shuffling his feet and shrugging for what seems like an eternity before his father lets him run along to play ball. Modern films would either break up the shot from different angles or keep us entertained with dialogue.

The set contains two short films I've always wanted to see. "How the Office Boy Saw the Ballgame" is a light comic romp, while "His Last Game" is a brief tragedy which, though not filmed well, is moving. Both have intrigued me ever since I read the contemporary reviews in microfilmed copied of *Variety*. Perhaps the most entertaining film, the one I think best stands up to modern viewing, is "Butter Fingers" (1925), starring Billy Bevan, which seems clearly influenced by the emerging concepts of film comedy pioneered by Chaplin and others.

The disappointment to me was "Hearts and Diamonds" (1913), featuring John Bunny, who was famous in his day. I can't for the life of me figure out why, at least from this film. It is this film, more than any other in the collection, which makes me suspect that audiences in 1913 simply had different senses of humor than we do. I've thought this—and perhaps you have too—when doing newspaper research. Stumbling across light essays or comics in the papers of the Deadball era, I rarely find one which makes me laugh out loud as do modern comics, or even comics of the 1920s and 1930s. We now have examples from film which might not have survived—certainly would not have been released in DVD format today—without their special interest.

Can we draw conclusions from these films about the changing nature of American humor? I think a baseball researcher versed in comparative literature could have fun with this question. ♦