

The INSIDE GAME



The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee

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"Let's get this lumpy, licorice-stained ball rolling!" September 2003

From the Chairman

No More Markers?

BY TOM SIMON

Today we unveiled a state historical marker commemorating the birthplace of Ray Fisher in Middlebury, Vermont. It was the fourth baseball-related marker in Vermont, all of which have Deadball Era connections.

The first honored the birthplace in Enosburg Falls of Larry Gardner, the third baseman for whom our local SABR chapter is named and whose career spanned from 1908 to 1924. The second marked the Colchester farm of Ray Collins, the Red Sox left-handed pitcher from 1909 to 1915. The third is at Burlington's Centennial Field, which hosted its first game in 1906. Today's honored a man who pitched in the big leagues from 1910 to 1920, mostly for the New York Highlanders, before becoming the baseball coach for nearly 40 years at the University of Michigan.

Fisher was born on a farm on Creek Road, a mile or so west of what is now Route 7, possibly Vermont's busiest highway. If we'd erected the marker at the site of the Fisher farm, only cows and a handful of farmers ever would have known of its existence. On Route 7, however, nearly every person in Vermont will eventually see it.

If erecting each of the other markers was like having a baby, the Fisher marker proved to be like giving birth to quintuplets. Convincing the Division for Historic Preservation that Fisher was worthy of a marker was relatively easy, as was persuading the Legislature to allocate the \$2,000 to purchase the cast-iron plaque. But the property on which we wanted to erect the marker, at the intersection of Creek Road and Route 7, is also the location of the Middlebury branch of a multi-state bank.

I can't imagine it would have been too much harder convincing the bank to lend us \$250 million to purchase the Markers, cont. on page 3

A Deadball Era Guide to the SABR Convention

BY GABRIEL SCHECHTER

No matter what aspect of baseball history interests you most, there was plenty of it at the SABR Convention in Denver. In a sense, my second convention was too much and not enough all at once. Ideas, information, and perspectives came flying faster than you could absorb, yet there were many times when fine speakers were just getting into the meat of their subjects when the allotted time ran out and we had to start all over with someone else. There was also the dilemma of having to choose between two appealing presentations given at the same time, not to mention finding time to socialize, rendezvous with old friends, make new ones, catch some ballgames, and much more. Here is one Deadball Era Committee member's guide to the presentations which touched on our territory.

The show-stopper of the week was Rockies GM Dan O'Dowd, who riveted a Thursday afternoon panel with his dissection of the difficulties of playing winning baseball "at altitude." As O'Dowd detailed the mental and physical travails of Rockies players constantly adjusting to baseball at a high altitude, baseball at low altitudes, and back and forth throughout the season, I couldn't help wondering what Deadball Era baseball would have been like if its westernmost outpost had been Denver rather than St. Louis. Would Gavy Cravath have been an early version of Dante Bichette? Would Hippo Vaughn have pitched like Mike Hampton? Or would they have attempted to use a single baseball for the whole season instead of just one game in order to hold down the scoring?

Thursday afternoon also saw a dynamic presentation by Jerrold Casway on the death of Ed Delahanty. Casway has clearly done more investigating and thinking about Delahanty than anyone else, and he squeezed as much as he could into his allotted half-hour. When the moderator informed him that he only had ten seconds left, Casway spluttered, "okay, but they're vital ten seconds." His big research discovery was the transcript of the hearing on the lawsuit filed by Delahanty's family against the railroad, in which they claimed that if the conductor had waited just fifteen more minutes before putting Delahanty off the train, he would have been safely on the American side and not in the jeopardy he found himself in, stranded in the dark on a bridge with precarious footing. Casway forcefully refuted the theory that Delahanty committed suicide, but he ran out of time before he could disclose his view of whether Delahanty slipped and fell from the bridge or was thrown over during his scuffle with the station master. For those

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ESPN.COM columnist Rob Neyer shares his views on Deadball at the SABR 2003 National Convention.

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Richard Smiley gives a second opinion on the SABR 2003 National Convention, and the prognosis is favorable.



Topsy Hartset: Deadball Leadoff Man Extraordinaire

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Charles Crawley reviews Warren Wilbert's A Cunning Kind of Play: The Cubs-Giant Rivalry, 1876-1932.



At SABR, who knows what you'll run into?

BY ROB NEYER

Rob Neyer is a columnist for ESPN.COM. This excerpt from his column of July 14, 2003, is reprinted with his permission. "Rob Neyer's Big Book of Baseball Lineups" has just been published by Fireside. For more information about the book, visit Rob's Web site at robneyer.com.

At the SABR convention, I attended a research presentation hosted by an incredibly thorough fellow named Richard Smiley.

The 1917 World Series pitted the New York Giants against the Chicago White Sox. After five games, the White Sox led the Series, three games to two. Game 6 was back at the Polo Grounds in New York, and after three innings, nobody had scored.

In the top of the fourth, though, White Sox second baseman Eddie Collins reached base thanks to an error by Giants third baseman Heinie Zimmerman. Collins then went to third when right fielder Dave Robertson dropped an easy fly. Batting next, Happy Felsch hit a grounder back to pitcher Rube Benton, and Collins was trapped off third when Benton threw to Zimmerman. Collins lit out for home, Zimmerman threw to catcher Bill Rariden, Collins headed back for third, Rariden threw back to Zimmerman, Collins headed back home ... and Zimmerman chased Collins, who scored the first run of the game. The Sox eventually clinched the Series with a 4-2 victory, and Zimmerman was awarded the goat horns.

Which doesn't seem fair, considering that Zimmerman presumably *would* have thrown the ball rather than run with it, if only somebody had been covering home plate (Benton, perhaps, or first baseman Walter Holke).

And in fact, Zimmerman said after the game: "What the hell was I going to do, throw the ball to Klem?" (Klem being Bill Klem, the plate umpire in Game 6.)

It's a great quote. The only problem with it—Zimmerman didn't say it.

As Richard Smiley has discovered, that "quote" was actually part of an imaginary postgame conversation between Zimmerman, his manager, and his teammates, and invented by Ring Lardner, the greatest baseball writer of his time. Here's the beginnings of what was *billed* as, "Ring Lardner imagines that something like this conversation between the Giants and their manager took place ..."

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Committee Chair

Tom Simon: tpsimon@aol.com

Newsletter Editor

Charles Crawley: crcrawley@yahoo.com

Database Manager

Dan Desroches: desrochsox@comcast.net

McGraw – Well, Heinie, you gave a great exhibition!

Kauff – I'll say he gave a great exhibition!

Zim – You're a fine lot o' yellow quitters!

McGraw – Who told you that you could outrun Collins?

Zim – What the hell was I going to do, throw the ball to Klem? Where was Holke? Where was Benton?

It runs on in this vein for a while longer, but you get the idea. The most famous thing ever uttered about the 1917 World Series wasn't uttered at all. For a long time, nobody knew this, until Richard Smiley came along.

Rocky Mountain High

BY RICHARD SMILEY

Deadball in Colorado? Sounds like an oxymoron!

Nevertheless, there were a number of sessions at this year's Denver SABR Convention, which held the interest of this deadball enthusiast. Being a long-time White Sox fan, I was particularly delighted to see that the team was featured in a number of presentations. In fact, even the cover of the convention program featured a 1910 photo of Comiskey and the White Sox (in uniform) at The Royal Gorge!

In order to present an overview of their recently published book, *Paths to Glory*, Dan Levitt and Mark Armour selected the 1917 White Sox as one of two teams which they explored in depth during their research session. The book delves into the backgrounds of how some of the championship teams over the past hundred years have been constructed. In the case of the White Sox, they highlighted the role that Comiskey played in rebuilding up his team by being a wise judge of talent and by being willing to aggressively pursue top players such as Eddie Collins when the ability to do so arose. They also showed that the transition from being competitive in 1915-16 to winning the championship in 1917 involved identifying and patching the holes in the team. Having read a lot about how this team came apart, it was good to see the background on how it was put together.

The presentation I gave also focused on the 1917 White Sox and a rather infamous fielding mishap by the New York Giants in decisive game of the World Series. I really enjoyed doing the presentation and was delighted by the questions and discussion after it was over. Many of these comments were from people who were not necessarily focused on the Deadball Era, but who were interested in hearing the story. I suspect that there are many such events from the Deadball Era that the general SABR membership would enjoy hearing about if properly brought to light.

The final White Sox related presentation that I attended focused on the origins of the break up of the 1917 championship team. Ralph Christian's wonderful talk focused on the little known major role that a number of Des Moines, IA gamblers may played in the Black Sox Scandal. Ralph showed that that it was possible that the source of the money for the fix was not from the well-known East Coast gamblers, but was rather from midwestern gamblers pretending to have ties to the East Coast money. His talk was well backed up with a number of old photographs of the people involved.

Finally, Bill James and Rob Neyer presented the most exciting research I saw at the conference. Bill and Rob are putting together an encyclopedia of pitching repertoires for pitchers dating back to the Deadball Era. What was a pitcher's out pitch? What were his other pitches? How do these pitches compare to modern pitches? These are the questions that Bill and Rob hope to address in a volume that they hope to get published in the next couple of years. It will certainly serve to enrich our images of who these players were!



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answers, we will have to wait for the publication of Casway's book on Delahanty next spring. The suspense will be killing me until then.

One of the Friday morning sessions I attended was Herm Krabbenhoft's fine presentation of his exhaustive (and exhausting, as it involved looking at over 150,000 boxscores from 1900 to the present) research designed to determine the best leadoff hitter before Rickey Henderson. He shared a wealth of data identifying who the primary leadoff hitters were for each team in each year and who the best leadoff hitters were in each league in each season. His final determination was that Lou Brock was the best leadoff hitter before Henderson, while Henderson contemporary Tim Raines was the second-best leadoff hitter ever. However, the best American League leadoff before Henderson was none other than Deadball stalwart Topsy Hartsel (who also ranked 5th all-time). In the American League, Burt Shotton ranked 12th overall and Harry Hooper 15th; in the National League, Bob Bescher ranked 3rd overall, Roy Thomas 7th, George Burns 8th, and Miller Huggins 10th. Hartsel topped the league in leadoff performance in five seasons, and Thomas and Burns led four times apiece.

Also on Friday morning, I skipped Dan Levitt's examination of how Charles Comiskey built his pennant-winning teams of 1917 and 1919, in favor of attending the enlightening talk by Peter Morris on the origins of the term "fan." Morris won the award for the convention's best oral presentation; in a nutshell, he presented a convincing case that "fan" did not originate as a shortened version of "fanatic" but rather had connotations involving baseball enthusiasts who couldn't help talking about their obsession, spreading their words about the room in the manner of hot air being dispersed by a fan.

Jeff Powers-Beck also gave a fine presentation on the adjustments made by Native Americans playing major league baseball, focusing on John Tortes Meyers. Using quotes from Meyers interviews and other research, Powers-Beck showed how Meyers differed from Charles Bender and Jim Thorpe. Meyers used his "warm personality and hot bat" to silence his tormenters, and was willing to accept some abuse and save his protests for when it really mattered to him. His pro debut came with a team in Harrisburgh, where he experienced severe hazing, finally complained to the manager, asserted himself, and got redress. Still, he always felt like a foreigner in his own country; in 1909, he said "this is a strange country to me". After his successful career, he used his name to speak out about national policies and the continuing unfair treatment of Indians by the government and the media (see his comment about movies in *The Glory of Their Times*).

Those are the Deadball Era-related session I'm aware of, which leaves only the DEC meeting to discuss. There were three significant areas covered at the meeting. First, Paul Rogers presented the Larry Ritter Awards for the past two years to Martin Kohout for his biography of Hal Chase and to Jim Reisler for his history of the New York Highlanders. Last, Richard Smiley discussed plans for Hot Springs 2004, our second spring training outing to the hub of Deadball late-winter boiling out. Plans for the 2004 weekend, to be

held March 19-21, are moving along well, and as a participant in the initial 2002 trip, I urge all DEC members to think seriously about attending in 2004. The high point will be an appearance by Eddie Frierson, performing his superb one-man show "Matty," but the best thing about Hot Springs will be the chance to meet fellow members in a setting that is pure Deadball.

In between the awards and the Arkansas plans, our chairman, Tom Simon, discussed plans for our two biographical volumes. Everything is moving along nicely, with most of the work done on the NL volume which we hope will be delivered to SABR members by the end of this year. Tom brought along a sample chapter, including the introductory material about the Philadelphia Phillies and a biography of Gavvy Cravath. The material was terrific, and Glenn LeDoux's work on the layout impressed everyone. From this tantalizing sample, a lot of people left the meeting with the feeling that this might turn out to be the best SABR publication ever, something we can all be proud to share with the whole organization.

Markers, cont. from page 1

Montreal Expos and move them to Centennial Field, but finally, after two years and 17 layers of bank bureaucracy, we received permission to erect the marker on its property — pending some "minor formalities." It was good timing, as Fisher's Michigan-based grandson and biographer, John Leidy, spends a month each summer in Vermont at the camp on Lake Champlain where Fisher had spent his summers.

On Monday of this week I returned from being out of the office for two weeks. Awaiting my arrival was a two-foot pile of mail, and included in that pile was an 8-page, single-spaced "licensing agreement" from the bank. One of the provisions required me to take out a \$1 million insurance policy to protect the bank in case the marker injured somebody. It got worse from there.

I spent Tuesday negotiating as much of the meaningful stuff as I could out of the bank's contract, meanwhile trying to find somebody to install the marker and fielding phone calls from newspaper reporters and Fisher relatives wanting to know when the unveiling would occur. We had to hold the ceremony by the end of the week before Leidy returned to Michigan.

On Wednesday I received a good phone call. It was the Governor's office wondering what it could do to help. Apparently the Governor had attended "Robin Roberts Night" at the ballpark in Montpelier, and Roberts, who had played for Fisher in Montpelier in 1946-47, told the Governor about the difficulties we were having. The Governor's office offered the services of the Agency of Transportation to install the marker. It was done the next day. That afternoon I left my office at 1 p.m., but traffic and construction on Route 7 made the 45-minute drive from Burlington to Middlebury take over an hour. Each time I hit another delay, I said to myself, NO MORE MARKERS.

I caught my first glimpse as I crested a hill just north of the bank. In a state that doesn't allow billboards, the words BIRTHPLACE OF RAY FISHER jumped out at me from 50 yards away, gleaming in gold against the marker's green background. A crowd of 50 gathered around the sign, reading the details of Fisher's life, and cars honked as they whizzed by on Route 7 - driven by Highlanders fans, no doubt.

The crowd was awaiting my arrival patiently before beginning the ceremony, but before I even exited my car I was asking myself who or what might be worthy of our next baseball-related marker.

Guerre à Mort: Cubs vs. Giants A Book Review

BY CHARLES R. CRAWLEY

A Cunning Kind of Play: The Cubs-Giant Rivalry, 1876-1932. Warren N. Wilbert (Jefferson: North Carolina: McFarland & Co., Inc.) 2002. 250 pages with bibliography and index. \$29.95, paperback. Order information: www.mcfarlandpub.com or 1-800-253-2187.

One of the fiercest rivalries in the early history of baseball was between the New York Giants and the Chicago Cubs. SABR member and prolific baseball author Warren Wilbert has attempted to capture the intensity of this rivalry in his new book that covers the period between 1876, when the New York Mutuals (or Mutes) and the Chicago White Stockings began their engagements, to 1932, when John McGraw stepped down as manager of the New York Giants.

As a Midwesterner, one might suspect Wilbert of partiality to the Cubs, but the fact that he ends his book based on McGraw's retirement indicates otherwise. He is in full agreement with Connie Mack's assertion that "There is only one manager and his name is McGraw." If one can accuse Wilbert of any partiality, I think it would be to the Deadball Era, when the Cubs and Giants "were baseball's most bitter rivals" (1). During this time period, the excellence of play "reached dizzying heights" (2). There was also a special magic to the period, when "magnificent pitching, 'inside baseball' and cerebral strategies ruled the day" (2). Not only were the Cubs and Giants bitter rivals who played excellent baseball, but from 1904 to 1913 no one else could win the pennant except for the Wagner-led Pirates of 1909.

1902 was a pivotal year for both the Giants and Cubs, for it was then that McGraw stepped in as manager of the Giants and Frank Selee left the Boston National League Club to steer the Cubs. Both men, especially McGraw, had the "extraordinary ability ... to spot major league talent in players often turned aside by others" (81). Selee had already

won several championships since piloting the Bostonians starting in 1890. He began to build the Cub juggernaut of 1906-1910 by moving (against his will) Frank Chance from catcher to first base, Joe Tinker from third base to shortstop, and Johnny Evers from shortstop to second base (thus enabling Franklin Adams to immortalize them in "Tinker to Evers to Chance"). Illness forced Selee to abandon his building project in 1905, when he turned over the reins to Chance.

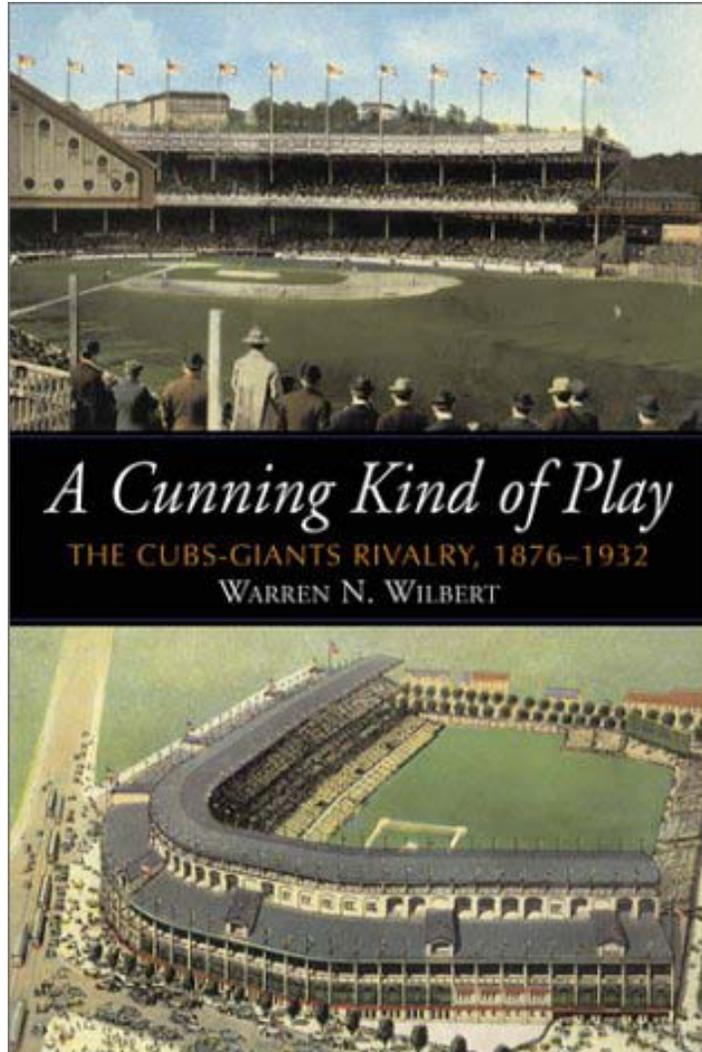
the last out for every advantage and every run it could get its hand on" (89). Compare this to McGraw, for whom "Championships, no matter how they were won, were clearly more important to John McGraw than social graces or public relations" (93).

With McGraw and Chance on the same field, nothing but a WWF smackdown could ensue: "Typical of the heat generated in these races was the *guerre à mort* staged at the New York and Chicago ballparks. And the might armies assembled to wage that warfare were beyond doubt among baseball's premier teams up to that point in time" (95). Indeed, Wilbert thinks these Giants and Cubs rank with the greatest teams of all time and places the 1905 Giants and 1906 Cubs in his top ten teams.

The book also covers the "sabbatical years" of the rivalry (1914-20), the roaring twenties (1921-1929) during which McGraw refers to Babe Ruth as "the big dummy," and the finish of the great rivalry (1930-1938). But his heart is in the Deadball Era, which is why many of you would enjoy his book.

His writing style is engaging and it often made me chuckle, as he refers to the "smasheroo" of the 1920s and to Charlie Weeghman as the "first of the fast food kings." There are a few annoying typos, especially in captions, and though the listing of the Cubs-Giants series games each year may be neces-

sary, it is often tiresome. I would have preferred the space to be spent on the characters of the Giants and Cubs of those times, and there are plenty of them. That said, I would still recommend the book to any Giant, Cub, or Deadball fan.



Wilbert compares Chance to Cap Anson, who was in his mind the premier 19th century ballplayer. Anson left Chicago in 1897, and Chance started with the North Siders in 1898: "Frank Chance, just as mentally, and indeed physically as tough as his famed predecessor, Cap Anson, was already the leader on the field of play, heading up a gritty, hustling club that would fight to