

THE SQUIBBER

September 2019

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

IN THIS ISSUE:

- CHAPTER EVENT AT THE NATS: SABR Group Hears From McKeon, Feinstein, By Mark Pattison
- TALKIN' BASEBALL: Upcoming Speakers Announced, By Dave Paulson
- THE WEEK THAT CHANGED SENATORS HISTORY: When Griffith Had Enough, By Gary Sarnoff
- TWO-SPORT TOM: The Amazing Dual Career of Tom Brown, By Walt Cherniak
- A LASTING IMPRESSION: Courtney Left a Mark in Washington -- and Elsewhere, By Jeff Stuart
- MYTHS OF BASEBALL: True or False? By Charles Pavitt
- RUNNING BLIND: Base-Stealing Futility and the 1957 Senators, By Francis Kinlaw
- BIG FUN IN BETHESDA: Big Train Outing a Hit, By Mark Pattison
- NEW HALLS OF FAME: Local Notables Inducted, By Bill Hickman
- AMERICA'S GREATEST ENTERTAINER: Jackie Price and the Senators, By Andrew Sharp

TRIVIA QUESTION: Who was the last player to record an at-bat as a Washington Senator?
(See answer below)

CHAPTER EVENT AT THE NATS: SABR Group Hears From McKeon, Feinstein, By Mark Pattison

In one of the first -- only? -- Sunday major league outings sponsored by the Bob Davids Chapter, more than 40 SABR members and their friends turned out at Nationals Park for a bang-up pregame luncheon Aug. 18 featuring "Trader Jack" McKeon, the oldest manager ever to win a World Series (Florida Marlins, 2003, at age 72), and currently a senior assistant to Washington Nationals general manager Mike Rizzo.

McKeon was full of good humor and good stories, some of them on himself. He said that from his 300-student Catholic grade school in South Amboy, N.J., came five guys who made

it to the majors, himself included (he didn't name the others -- rats). McKeon said he wanted to pursue a career in baseball, but his father wanted him to go to college first. McKeon told the audience he prayed to the Blessed Virgin Mary to let him play ball. His dad offered a compromise: Go to college once your career is over. "I'm a great believer in the power of prayer," said McKeon, a member of the Holy Cross College Class of 1948 (who suspected there'd be two Crusader alums in the Bob Davids bunch?).

Three years into his career, McKeon said he was approached by his manager, Danny Murtaugh, about the prospect of managing. McKeon said he was a bit put off at first, but realized that "I hit three ways: left, right and seldom." Out went the playing career and in came the coaching, managing and front-office career.

Every big-league owner has a philosophy. Marlins then-owner Jeffery Loria's was, according to McKeon, "Don't be afraid to take risks." This could account for McKeon being named Marlins manager a month-plus into the 2003 season. "It took a couple of weeks for the veterans to buy into my philosophy," he said. But once they did, Florida kept ascending in the standings.

Everybody remembers "the Bartman game" in the 2003 NL Championship series, McKeon noted, but few remember that the Marlins were the Cubs' opponent that night. And as for taking risks, history was against McKeon when he started Josh Beckett on three days' rest in Game 6 of the 2003 World Series against the New York Yankees (other hurlers were a combined 4-20, he said). "But I wasn't thinking about the past. I was thinking how to win this game," McKeon added. A two-hit shutout later, McKeon said he finally knew what it was like to experience in person what he had long witnessed on television: what it felt like to win a World Series.

Despite their reputations in the press, McKeon's bosses -- among them Ewing Kauffman, Charlie Finley and Ray Kroc -- were hands-off. And only once did native New Yorker Loria offer a suggestion to McKeon. "Did you know (backup catcher) Mike Redmond hits .800 against (Mets starter) Tom Glavine?" McKeon said Loria told him. "I don't care if he hits 8.000 against Glavine. I'm starting Pudge (Rodriguez)," was McKeon's reply. He told us, "Pudge hit a three-run homer in the first inning and we win 3-0. Loria comes into the clubhouse, pats me on the back and says to me, 'I'll never make another suggestion again.'"

McKeon said San Diego Padres owner Kroc's charge was for the new GM to do anything to make the Padres better. "After about 40 trades, one of the writers says in a story, 'Trader Jack's at it again,' and the name stuck. Even my own granddaughter doesn't call me Grandpa. She calls me Trader," he laughed. Even though he took heat for trading future Hall of Fame shortstop Ozzie Smith to St. Louis, "we were in last place with Ozzie, and we were going to finish in last place with him or without him," McKeon said. "We got three players for him, and next year (1984), we went to the World Series."

Even though he's a baseball insider, McKeon is no fan of the developments in analytics that have resulted in bullpen specialists, defensive shifts and the like. "It's made the game worse," he complained. "It's taken all the strategy out of it."

McKeon even had a couple of Yogi Berra stories. One dealt with the aftermath of a 5-for-5 day at the plate. One of the New York papers printed a box score the next day showing Berra being only 4-for-5 that game. He sought out that paper's beat writer about the mistake. The writer apologized to Berra, saying, "It must have been a typographical error." Shot back Berra, "It was a line drive! There was no error."

SABRites also heard from Fred Feinstein, who was general counsel for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) when the players went on strike 25 years ago -- Aug. 12, 1994, to be exact. Feinstein had been confirmed by the Senate mere months before the strike began. And during his tenure at the NLRB, "this was the only dispute where there were

satellite trucks outside." At various points during the dispute, they had to conduct press conferences in rooms similar in size to the Reagan Room on the 200 level of Nats Park where the SABR group was listening, "with even more reporters" than the 40-some gathered on that hot August day, Feinstein noted.

The issues that led to the strike -- no agreement on a new contract, the owners' insistence on a salary cap for baseball like the one used in the National Football League, and the owners' declaration of impasse during the ongoing negotiations -- led to a complaint by the Major League Baseball Players Association to the NLRB, according to Feinstein.

"The union, and the union's lawyer, was a little bit smoother, and knew a little bit more about what was going to happen, than the owners' lawyers did," Feinstein said. It helped that MLBPA attorney Gene Orza had worked at the NLRB before taking on the MLBPA job as staff attorney. "He knew how it was going to unfold," Feinstein said.

After the owners' negotiators declared impasse -- a legal term fraught with meaning -- the union filed charges with the NLRB. "We're not at impasse" was their claim.

At the NLRB, Feinstein said, "we were determined to make the board and the agency work better," including quicker resolution of such disputes. A case that plods on for months or even years, only reinforces the status quo. "You can't put that egg back together," he added.

The NLRB regional hearing focused on the impasse issue and sided with the players. Under the federal government's policy of deference, federal entities with specific expertise in a particular type of law or regulation are almost always given deference. Feinstein, as NLRB general counsel, deferred to the panel's judgment and likewise appeared with the union's position. He then forwarded it to the full five-member NLRB, which itself followed the deference policy and sided with the union. "There may have been a dissenting vote," Feinstein said, but could not remember 25 years after the fact.

The owners challenged the NLRB decision in federal district court, where it was assigned to a fairly new federal judge, Sonia Sotomayor. She did not have much of a reputation one way or another, but Feinstein said the owners' legal team wished another judge had been named to conduct the trial.

As for the trial, "I remember it well. I was right there in the room" as it was being heard, Feinstein said. "We argued there was no impasse." When both sides had finished presenting their respective cases, Sotomayor said she was recessing to her chambers and court would reconvene in 30-45 minutes. Typically, according to Feinstein, a decision is rendered weeks or months after the hearing. When Sotomayor returned to the bench, she announced, "I've made my decision," and it was for the striking players. "I'm going to issue the injunction," Sotomayor said.

"It was all over," Feinstein said. Well, almost. "The union called off the strike after the injunction" and declared they would be willing to play under the terms of the expired contract. The owners countered, "threatened a lockout without a signed contract -- a new one with salary-cap language -- and the use of replacement players for the 1995 season. "Three days later," Feinstein said, "ownership caved: 'The season will go on. We won't lock you out.'"

And, as for the game itself? It was Top 40 Day at the ballpark as the hits just kept... on... comin'! In a 16-8 pasting of Milwaukee, the Nats pounded out 19 hits, tying a club record with eight home runs. The Brewers had 17 hits themselves (four homers among them), but they weren't as productive with their hits. The Nationals had a 13-0 lead after three innings, so much of the rest of the game was academic -- but fun to watch nonetheless.

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TALKIN' BASEBALL: Upcoming Speakers Announced, By Dave Paulson

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

- Oct. 5 -- Dan Joseph, "*The Last Ride of the Iron Horse.*"
- Nov. 2-- Steve Klein: "*The After-Life of Hugh Fullerton.*"
- Dec. 7 -- Cameron Penwell: Baseball in Japan

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

Come and bring a friend!

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THE WEEK THAT CHANGED SENATORS HISTORY: When Griffith Had Enough, By Gary Sarnoff

The identity of the bumbling, stumbling Senators was as bright as the sun over Chicago's Comiskey Park on a warm August day in 1919. "I think our little Western League team down there could have given the White Sox a better battle than that," laughed a visiting fan from Oklahoma City.

"Oklahoma City or Terre Haute or Hyde Park High School might have done better against the White Sox yesterday than Washington," wrote *Chicago Tribune* sportswriter James Cruisinberry.

The Senators had committed four errors to pave the way for a four-run first inning for the White Sox. Ninety minutes later, when the game ended in a 11-4 Washington defeat, the Senators had lost their fourth consecutive game and 12th of their last 15. They were in seventh place with a 42-65 record and 26½ behind the first-place White Sox.

This was all Senators Manager Clark Griffith could handle. When he had arrived in Washington to manage the Senators back in October of 1911, he had a vision of a pennant flying over the District one day. But after this game in Chicago, it was evident that his goal was a long way from becoming a reality.

Griffith didn't give up or regret his decision to come to Washington. He didn't say a word about choosing the wrong team or profession. He never felt sorry about quitting law school or leaving Lake Forest (Illinois) College before earning his degree. His focus was still on completing the job he came to town to do. "I want to build a team of young ballplayers," he said when he arrived in Washington. Now, nearly eight years later, it was back to the drawing board. And there was no better time to start than the present.

Two days later, Griffith announced that he was going to "hit the road" on a scouting trip and would leave Senators coach George McBride in charge during his absence. "This coming after watching his team lose, 11-4, at Chicago," noted a Washington writer. "His team made 6 errors which convinced Griffith more than ever to make an overhaul on his team."

When asked by *Washington Star* sportswriter Denman Thompson where he was headed,

Griffith told him he was on his way to Buffalo to scout a second baseman named Bucky Harris.

Little did anyone know that this would be the first step for Griffith and the Senators toward the promised land of World Series champions just five years later.

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TWO-SPORT TOM: The Amazing Dual Career of Tom Brown, By Walt Cherniak

This is the time of year when baseball season and football season collide, with the two sports vying for the attention of fans who follow both.

For one Washington, D.C.-area athlete in the 1960s, the answer to the “Baseball or Football” question ultimately became, “Both, please.”

Tom Brown, a switch-hitting outfielder who played high school and college baseball in Maryland, spent much of the 1963 season with the Washington Senators.

But he earned much greater fame – and a pair of Super Bowl rings – on the gridiron.

Born in Laureldale, Pa., in 1940, Brown moved to Maryland as a boy, graduating from Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring. He didn’t travel far for college, moving on to the University of Maryland, where he played both football and baseball.

A two-sport star long before anyone had heard of Bo Jackson or Deion Sanders, Brown hit over .300 in spring training after signing a minor-league contract, and earned a spot on the Nats’ roster without having played in the minors.

He made his debut on Opening Day 1963, starting at first base for the Senators against the Baltimore Orioles. Ironically, the Orioles’ starting pitcher, Steve Barber, was a high school classmate of Brown’s.

In the second inning, with two runners on base, Brown lined out to second baseman Jerry Adair in his first big-league at-bat. Adair then threw to first baseman Jim Gentile before Don Leppert could get back, completing a double play.

Brown struck out and walked in his other plate appearances before being lifted for a pinch hitter. He found major league pitching difficult to handle, going hitless in his first 15 big-league at-bats. Brown finally collected his first big-league hit on April 25, lining a single as a pinch hitter off the Twins’ Jack Kralick.

Hits were scarce for Brown, who saw his average plummet to .100 (8 for 80). The Senators demoted him to Double-A York, where he spent the next two months. After batting .228 with 4 homers in 77 games, he returned to Washington on Sept. 7.

Brown hit better in his second big-league test, batting .250 over the season’s final 16 games

and cracking his first (and only) big-league home run off Detroit's Phil Regan. But his first major league season wound up being his only one.

In 1964, Brown was back at York to begin the year. After hitting .217 with four homers in his first 59 games, Brown decided his sports future was on a different type of field. He left the York team in July after signing a contract with the NFL's Green Bay Packers.

Green Bay had selected Brown in the second round of the 1963 draft, with the 28th overall pick. He also was picked 20th overall in the AFL draft, by the Buffalo Bills.

Brown immediately found a home in Coach Vince Lombardi's defensive backfield, alongside future NFL Hall of Famers Herb Adderley and Willie Wood. He started four games in the 1964 season, and then started every game at safety from 1965-68 for the Green Bay dynasty.

Along the way, he played for three consecutive NFL championship teams, including the first two Super Bowl winners. His greatest NFL moment came late in the 1966 NFL championship game against Dallas, when he intercepted a fourth-down pass from Don Meredith in the end zone to clinch Green Bay's 34-27 victory.

The Packers cut ties with Brown after their second Super Bowl title in 1968, trading him to Washington to play for Lombardi. Brown played just one game for the Redskins before undergoing shoulder surgery that ended his career.

But he continued to make a major impact on the playing fields. In 1982, Brown moved to Salisbury, on Maryland's Eastern Shore and created Tom Brown's Rookie League, a non-profit organization, to teach youth sports to children in a positive atmosphere with.

With no fancy uniforms, trophies, all-stars or tournaments, the league enrolled thousands of players from Maryland, Delaware and Virginia and provided hundreds of self-funded scholarships for underserved children. Brown coached kids for more than 20 years before retiring.

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A LASTING IMPRESSION: Courtney Left a Mark in Washington -- and Elsewhere, By Jeff Stuart

It is not surprising that Hall of Famer Rogers Hornsby, who had a reputation for being hard-nosed, noticed young catcher Clint Courtney when he managed the Beaumont Roughnecks, a Yankees AA farm team in the Texas League in 1950.

The son of a tenant farmer, Courtney was born in Coushatta, La., and reared in Arkansas. He did not play baseball until he was 17, and then on an Army team.

Though he was an All-State basketball player in high school, Clint was short and did not appear athletic. But he made an impression on [Frank Lane](#), general manager of the Chicago White Sox. He watched Beaumont beat the White Sox in an exhibition game and told

Hornsby, "That Courtney's an old-time chew-tobacco type of player, like [Nellie Fox](#) and [Burrhead Fain](#). There aren't enough of 'em left in the majors. Too bad the little son-of-a-gun wears glasses."

"Glasses or not, left-handed or not. Courtney'll fight his way into the majors," Hornsby replied. He recommended Courtney and Gil McDougald to the Yankees. "Me and Gil done tore that league apart," Courtney said. "I think by mid-summer we had driven in about 100 runs each."

Courtney made the Yankee roster along with McDougald in 1951. No catcher in big league history had ever worn glasses before, but Courtney played little since the New York catcher was Yogi Berra.

Courtney joined the St. Louis Browns in 1952, where he was reunited with Manager Hornsby. He batted .286.

Clint was frequently embroiled in fights. "He's the meanest man I ever met, but I'm glad he's on my side," said Browns teammate Satchel Paige. "He's a great catcher, a kid I like to see hitting for me with the winning run on third base and one out."

In his autobiography, *Veeck as in Wreck*, Bill Veeck wrote that Courtney "had served notice that he wouldn't catch Satch. I liked Courtney because he was a rough, tough little man who played the game for all it was worth. I felt very strongly that this was a matter entirely of environment and upbringing. Once Clint got to know Satch, I was sure, he'd come around -- even though I was perfectly aware that Satch would do nothing to appease him."

Clint did catch Paige and the two ultimately became good friends. Teammate [Duane Pillette](#) and announcer [Buddy Blattner](#) nicknamed him "Scrap Iron" after a footrace against sportswriter Milton Richman in a railway yard near the end of spring training. Clint tumbled, sliced himself up all over on glass and rocks, but stayed in for the next day's exhibition game when Hornsby threatened him with a fine. He could barely hold the bat, but still got three hits against [Early Wynn](#). According to Richman, Clint missed several weeks, but he was the Opening Day starter.

A player rebellion forced Hornsby out as manager that year.

"It was force him out or kill him," former Brown Ned Garver said of the uncommunicative Hornsby. Yet Courtney was not bothered by Hornsby's style of managing. "He never spoke to me either," Clint recalled. "But I understood him. Most of these fellows couldn't play for him but I could. He was tough but he was okay with me."

Browns broadcaster Dizzy Dean dubbed Courtney "The Toy Bulldog," and new manager Marty Marion adopted it as his pet name for the catcher.

Courtney was inherited by the Orioles when the Browns moved to Baltimore in 1954. On Opening Day he clouted the first home run in Baltimore's remodeled Memorial Stadium. The fans deluged Clint with cash and gifts totaling \$1,000.

He struck out just seven times in 437 plate appearances with the Orioles, which remains a club record. Throughout his big-league career, Courtney fanned only once for every 22 times he came to the plate.

On June 6, 1954 at Yankee Stadium Courtney was caught using a bat with a nail in the end. He said that the bat belonged to another Baltimore player and that he borrowed it because he had broken his own. Umpire Ed Hurley spotted the nail on Clint's third trip to the plate. He had singled his first two times up.

"Courtney is about three times better a catcher than anyone has ever given him credit for being," said Orioles Manager Paul Richards. "He hops around out there, but he gets the job done."

But the Orioles felt his temper and impatience weren't conducive to the development of brilliant young pitchers like Bob Turley and Don Larsen, and Courtney was traded to the White Sox at the end of the season. He didn't stay long in Chicago. On June 7, 1955, Courtney was traded to Washington for fleet-footed outfielder Jim Busby. The Senators also received outfielder Johnny Groth and pitcher Bob Chakales.

Courtney batted .298 for the remainder of that season in D.C., and .300 in 1956, his first full season with the Nats. That year he set career highs for games played (134), plate appearances (515), home runs (8), and RBIs (62).

He was a brief holdout in the spring of 1957, telling the Nats he was "turning around and going home" if he didn't get his salary figure. Courtney ultimately signed for a "slight increase" over the \$17,000 he made in 1956. "Man, I can't afford to stay out of baseball. I need the money -- like Ted Williams -- but I guess there is a big difference between his salary and mine," Courtney said.

Courtney was batting .357 on May 1, when was hit on the little finger of his right hand by a foul tip off the bat of Bob Usher. He stormed off the field and confronted Manager Charlie Dressen over his lack of playing time. "I guess he was upset over his injury," said Dressen. "I told him I was running this club and he's catching more than anybody else."

Courtney was a friend to [Pedro Ramos](#), who said, according to SABR author Rory Costello, "Clint Courtney was a funny guy who'd drink a lot of beer and talk about cows."

In the early 1960s it was widely believed that the fastest runner in baseball was either Ramos or Mickey Mantle. Courtney arranged a 100-yard race between the two in Washington's Griffith Stadium. Knowing that Mantle was better at acceleration and that Ramos could fly after reaching full speed, Courtney secretly measured 110 yards instead of 100.

When they finally raced, Ramos pulled ahead at the end and won by about a foot and a half. Mantle would have won at the 100-yard mark.

Courtney had a down year in 1959. In spring training of 1960 Manager Cookie Lavagetto wanted to see some improvement, especially defensively. Before the season began, he was sent back to Baltimore.

That season, he became the first catcher to wear an oversized mitt to handle the knuckleballs of [Hoyt Wilhelm](#). The glove was much larger than the standard catcher's mitt and 40 ounces heavier. Courtney first used the mitt on May 27 when Wilhelm pitched against the Yankees. The Orioles won 3-2, and the game was free of passed balls. "I don't know how many pitches would have jumped past me with a regular glove," said Clint. "Boy, is he rough to catch. I

don't see how anybody ever hits him.”

Courtney appeared briefly with the Kansas City Athletics in 1961 and returned for a third stint with the Orioles for the rest of that year, his last as a major league player.

In January 1964 Clint's wife Dorothy gave birth to their fifth child, but did not make it to the hospital. Clint had to handle the delivery at home. “Nothing to it,” he said.

In an 11-season career, Courtney was a .268 hitter with 38 home runs and 313 RBI in 946 games. As a catcher, he recorded 3,556 putouts, 379 assists and only 50 errors in 3,985 chances for a .987 fielding percentage.

Courtney died of a heart attack in Rochester, N.Y. on June 16, 1975, just three months past his 48th birthday. He was in town as manager of the Richmond Braves in the International League, the Triple-A affiliate of the Atlanta Braves.

In his obituary, sportswriter Milton Richman wrote, “Clint Courtney was only tough on the outside. Inside, he was a soft, compassionate human being, more outspoken than he should've been at times perhaps, but with uncommon understanding and honest concern for others which always transcended the rough exterior he chose to show the world. This empathy helped him become a successful minor-league manager. Had Clint not passed away so young he might have realized his ambition of managing in the majors.”

In July 1974 Atlanta fired Eddie Mathews as manager. The Braves narrowed their choices for successor down to two: Clint and Clyde King. The job went to King.

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MYTHS OF BASEBALL: True or False?, By Charles Pavitt

This is the fifth in a series of Squibber contributions intended to report the truth (as far as present data suggests) of the tidbits of “conventional wisdom” that TV analysts and comparable pundits make without any true knowledge about their validity.

Myth #13 – There is such as a thing as clutch hitter.

It would take several pages to properly review all of the work and, in particular, the debate on this issue. First, the issue is **not** whether there is such a thing as clutch hitting; of course there is, batters sometimes come through in high leverage situations.

The issue is whether one can find a group of hitters who consistently, year after year, perform better in high-leverage situations than in low (and conversely, chokers who consistently perform worse). Second, finding a few batters who are consistently good in high leverage situations does not demonstrate that there is a **real** difference in ability, because the number who do has to sufficiently exceed the number that would be expected by chance for the “clutch” claim to be valid.

Many of our best analysts, including Dick Cramer and Pete Palmer, have failed to uncover numbers exceeding chance. Several publicized claims that clutch hitting is a skill, including

one by a University of Pennsylvania student named Elan Fuld that received significant press attention, and continued attempts by the Hirdt brothers in the old *Baseball Analyst* books, were all marred with significant methodological weaknesses.

Better research by some skilled analysts (Nate Silver pre-fivethirtyeight.org and Andrew Dolphin) has revealed some evidence in favor, but if their analyses hold up as accurate, clutch ability accounts for about 2 percent of the outcome of high-leverage situations, and the batters who do seem to consistently excel tend to be singles hitters rather than sluggers.

Myth #14 – Having two good hitters in a row “protects” the first of these, by making pitchers less willing to pitch around him

Bill James was the first to question this presumption, reporting a study in the 1985 *Abstract* (page 258) by Jim Baker showing that in the previous six seasons, Dale Murphy had actually hit for a better BA with frequently-injured Bob Horner out of the lineup (.283) than in (.269). Several larger studies (David Grabiner, 1991; our own Mark Pankin, 1993; James Click (2006) either uncovered no protection effect or, as did Bill James for Murphy, the opposite.

In addition, Click noted that stronger hitters get more walks when batting in front of weaker hitters, which seems to be the opposite of a protection effect. John Charles Bradbury and Douglas Drinen (2008) continued in this vein, contrasting the “protection hypothesis” with an “effort” hypothesis in which pitchers put more effort into retiring the first hitter to try and ensure that he won’t be on base for the second.

The protection hypothesis implies that a good on-deck hitter will decrease walks but increase hits, particularly for extra bases, for the first hitter; the effort hypothesis predicts decreases in all of these indices. Retrosheet data from 1989 to 1992 supported the effort hypothesis; on-deck batter skill as measured by OPS was associated with decreased walks, hits, extra-base hits, and home runs for the current batter, with the association increased by a standard platoon advantage for the on-deck hitter.

Finally, David C. Phillips (2011) went back to Jim Baker’s original thinking by looking at differences in performance for a given player remaining in the same lineup position based on changes in the next batter caused by injury.

Based on Retrosheet data from 2002 through 2009, Phillips noted that injuries to protectors resulted in an overall OPS decrease of 28 points at that lineup position due to a weaker replacement. With the weaker replacement behind him, the hitter being protected tended to receive a lot more intentional walks and attain more singles but fewer extra base hits, indicative of the expectation that a non-protected hitter will be pitched around more often. These tendencies pretty much canceled one another out, resulting in little overall protection effect.

Myth #15 – There is such a thing as a batting streak and batting slump, with “real” causes (e.g., batters “seeing the ball” unusually well or poorly.

This issue has much in common with Myth #13, including some controversy. To begin, of course batters go through periods of time in which the hits fall and others in which everything is caught. Again the issue is whether these are due to real differences in player skill level over time, such that it can be explained by some physical or psychological factor relevant to performance (e.g., “Player A is seeing the ball really well right now”; “Player B’s mechanics are messed up right now”) or is just the result of random processes.

And even if it appears that streaks and slumps occur by chance statistically, two options remain: they are statistical artifacts only, or they have “real” causes that occur randomly. Players’ claims that are real cannot be trusted, as they are examples of the after-the-fact rationalizations that people always make for random occurrences that social and cognitive psychologists have studied in detail.

Now, if players started predicting when they were going to go into a streak or slump before the fact and those predictions turned out to be accurate, then we would be able to trust them.

Again, it would take several pages to describe all the relevant work. Jim Albert in particular has published quite a few studies approaching this issue in different ways. In summary, most evidence suggests that batting streaks and slumps occur randomly, based on studies showing that sequences of both single at bats and groups of at bats tend to follow one another as predictable by chance.

There are a couple of counterexamples revealing some non-randomness, but their effects were very weak and required very large sample sizes to uncover (see Trent McCotter’s work). Well-publicized work by Green and Zweibel (several years old before it was published in 2018) appears to have found evidence in support, but in some cases established defining criteria based on the assumption that the average player is hot five percent and cold five percent of the time, which strikes me presuming streakiness exists by fiat.

In conclusion, most variation in performance seems to be random fluctuation. Again, that could mean that streaks and slumps have “real” causes that just happen to occur randomly.

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RUNNING BLIND: Base-Stealing Futility and the 1957 Senators, By Francis Kinlaw

The Washington Senators of 1957 posted the worst record (55-99) in either the American or National League, and also distinguished itself in two other ways from every other major-league club of the 1950s.

The 1957 Senators collectively stole fewer bases than any other big-league team of that decade, while matching that dubious achievement by establishing the lowest percentage of successful stolen-base attempts from 1950 through 1959. Thus, Washington’s players could justifiably claim to have the lowest crime rate (at least on the basepaths) among their peers!

The 1957 Nats swiped only 13 bases in 51 attempts to advance. Their “success rate” of

25.5% ranked last in the American League, far behind the Cleveland Indians (46%, with 40 steals in 87 attempts) and the Detroit Tigers (43%, with 36 steals in 83 tries). The other five American League teams were successful in at least 56% of their attempts with the number of stolen bases ranging from a high of 109 (Chicago White Sox) to a low of 29 (Boston Red Sox).

A listing of stolen bases by the 1957 club, and the circumstances of each successful attempt, is short:

- On April 24 in Washington, Ed FitzGerald stole third base against the Red Sox in the second inning. Russ Meyer was pitching for the Red Sox, and Sammy White was the catcher.
- In the third inning of that April 24 game, Pete Runnels stole second base with Meyer on the mound and White catching.
- On April 26 in Baltimore, Whitey Herzog stole second base in the third inning. Ray Moore was pitching for the Orioles and Joe Ginsberg was behind the plate.
- On April 30 in Cleveland, Eddie Yost stole second base in the fourth inning. Bob Lemon was pitching for the Tribe and Jim Hegan was catching.
- On May 2 in Chicago's Comiskey Park, Jim Lemon stole second base in the fourth inning. Dick Donovan was the Sox' hurler at the time, and Sherm Lollar was catching.
- On May 24 in Yankee Stadium, Herzog stole second base against the Bronx Bombers in the third inning. Tom Sturdivant was on the mound for the Yanks, and Elston Howard was behind the plate.
- In the second game of a double header in Chicago on June 16, Runnels stole second base in the fourth inning. Jack Harshman was on the mound, and Lollar was catching.
- In the nightcap of that June 16 twin bill in Chicago, Milt Bolling stole second base in the eighth inning. Dixie Howell was pitching for the White Sox, and Lollar was catching.
- On June 21 in Washington, Bolling stole second base in the first inning against the Indians. Don Mossi was the opposing pitcher, and Dick Brown was catching.
- On June 27 in Washington, Julio Becquer stole second base in the eighth inning against the Tigers. Lou Sleater was pitching for the Tigers, and Tom Yewcic was behind the plate. (Yewcic's throwing error on Becquer's steal allowed the latter to advance to third base. This game was Yewcic's first, and last, in the major leagues.)
- On July 1 in Boston, Roy Sievers stole second base in the fourth inning. Mike Fornieles was on the mound for the Red Sox, and Pete Daley was his catcher.
- In the second game of a doubleheader in Washington on July 28, Becquer stole second base against Kansas City in the sixth inning. Ralph Terry was Athletics' pitcher; Hal Smith was catching.
- On August 28 in Kansas City, Becquer stole second base in the ninth inning. Virgil Trucks was pitching for the Athletics, and Tim Thompson was catching.

These relatively few successful attempts at thievery were far outnumbered by decisions on the basepaths that failed nearly 75% of the time.

Yost stole only one base in 12 attempts, and Lemon stole only one in eight tries. Becquer did reach safely in three of his six tries, while Runnels achieved a positive outcome in two of five efforts.

Bolling and Herzog were both 2 for 4. Herb Plews failed in all three of his attempts, and Rocky Bridges came up short in his two tries. Sievers succeeded once in two tries Ed FitzGerald became the only player on the '57 team to avoid being called out stealing because he never sought to match his April 24 steal. Art Schult, Faye Throneberry, Lou Berberet and Jerry Snyder each took off once, only to hear a base umpire yell, "Out!"

This futility on the basepaths contributed to the depression of manager Chuck Dressen, who was fired after the Senators lost 16 of their first 20 games, along with successor Cookie Lavagetto, and the Nats' fans. After all, Becquer, who stole just three bases and attempted three more in 105 games, was the most effective base stealer for a major-league team that played 154 games!

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BIG FUN IN BETHESDA: Big Train Outing a Success, By Mark Pattison

Imagine hearing not one, not two, not three, but four panels for a baseball pregame program with SABR. That's exactly what happened June 8 in Bethesda as the Bob Davids Chapter had its first outing at a Bethesda Big Train game in a decade.

Of course, it doesn't hurt that two of the team's guiding lights are chapter members!

Bruce Adams, who brought the Big Train into being, recalled writing an article for *Fodor's* on a cross-country road trip visiting minor-league ballparks. While it got read and appreciated, a friend told him, "Geez, we've got something like that in the Shenandoah Valley -- in your own backyard." At that point, Adams hadn't even heard of collegiate baseball -- wood-bat summer leagues where college ballplayers who think they've got a future in pro ball spend a couple months honing their skills. When the Washington Post Magazine published that article in 1997, another friend told him of the Clark Griffith League -- which Adams hadn't heard of, either.

Impressed with the community spirit, Adams set about establishing a team. With generous support from auto dealer John Ourisman and minor-league baseball team owner and ballpark builder Peter Kirk, the plans took shape. Adams convinced Montgomery County officials to share his vision. And "the Povich family was incredibly generous when it came to naming the field after him," he said of the descendants of longtime Washington Post sports editor and columnist Shirley Povich.

Bill Hickman, another SABR member who serves as the team's historian, talked about the Big Train's 34-6 season in 2018, the team's best ever, followed by a co-championship in their current loop, the Cal Ripken Collegiate Baseball League, when rain forced the

cancellation of the deciding game in the championship series.

The Big Train has had more than its share of alumni make it to the majors in its 15-year existence, from the likes of current Washington Nationals second baseman Brian Dozier to San Diego Padres outfielder Hunter Renfroe -- who still keeps in touch with his host family from his time in Bethesda. Tampa Bay second baseman Brandon Lowe is another active alumnus, and current New York Yankees reliever Joe Mantiplay, after a three-year hibernation from the majors, is another. Other notable alumni include former Orioles and Mets starter John Maine, and former Indians closer Cody Allen. Big Train pitcher Dirk Hayhurst, who also spent some time with the Padres, "turned out to be a better writer than a pitcher," Hickman quipped. Hayhurst's books include "*Out of My League*," "*The Bullpen Gospels*" and "*Bigger Than the Game*."

League commissioner Jason Woodward said 405 players from the league have been drafted by MLB teams since 2005, with another five signed as free agents. The Ripken League has forged a solid reputation in college baseball circles. "Our players are our biggest recruiters," Woodward said, adding that the league is partially funded by Major League Baseball.

The league shrunk to six teams for 2019, but Woodward said there were "three or four" applications to start up new teams or affiliate existing teams into the league. "We have to decide if they are a good fit for our brand, the Cal Ripken League brand," Woodward said.

Speaking of recruiting, the Big Train uses its partnerships with college programs to lock in players for the season ahead. As a result, 90 percent of the roster is already recruited by Labor Day each year, according to manager Sal Colangelo. The biggest problem is if his players are in the College World Series, which is still underway when the Ripken League begins play in early June.

Colangelo said that with players coming from a fistful of college programs, he doesn't try to change the players, or the plays. "He just lets us play," said outfielder Tyler Villaroman. Nor does Colangelo overuse players, who are mostly from too far away to have kin nearby and are giving up their summer vacations to work on their game.

Players adjusting to wood bats often complain about having to make the adjustment. Big Train pitcher Anthony Piccolino took the reverse view. As a hurler, "it's great for the first couple of weeks" throwing to hitters with wood bats, he said.

Groundskeeper Jason Bowers -- he takes care of all the fields in Cabin John, the county park that is home to the Big Train -- said Shirley Povich Field gets a lot of use; club officials fear the Montgomery County rec system will act to put artificial turf on the field, which they don't want, since it would be easier and cheaper to maintain. Georgetown University uses Shirley Povich Field as well, and Big East rules require a tarp on the field when it's not in use.

Big Train General Manager Dave Schneider started with the club as an intern, and is now in his fourth year as GM. "it's a full-time job for him, from securing sponsorships, entertainment, even National Anthem singers. "There's a lot of cold-calling. You get a lot of 'no's,'" he said. The SABR game was also Health Night sponsored by Johns Hopkins, with medical-related between-innings patter and trivia.

Schneider also has to find interns, and looks among the ranks of sports management and journalism programs. One fellow he found was a stat geek who developed a modified system of WAR that better fit the conditions of the Ripken League -- and which league officials used to identify players for the annual All-Star Game.

Anne Fletcher, who coordinates host families with Emily Waldman, says players are well-behaved when they settle in for a couple of months. The host families try to match up with players' needs. Some will have cars, for instance, but others won't. If a player returns to

the Big Train for a second season, they generally stay with the same family. The odd exception is the player who says he wants to stay with a family "closer to the gym," Fletcher said.

The Big Train gives back to the Montgomery County area, helping maintain youth baseball fields and running summer baseball camps for young players.

Oh, and the game. With fewer teams in the league for 2019, there was the expectation of greater parity. After winning its first three games of the season, the Big Train suffered a 13-4 setback to the Silver Spring-Takoma Thunderbolts at home the night before our game featuring the D.C. Grays as an opponent. The game was close, and the Grays prevailed over the Big Train 4-3.

But the Big Train reeled off a 13-game winning streak at the end of the season to finish 31-7 and win their ninth regular-season title since beginning play in 2005, then swept the Alexandria Aces in the first round of the playoffs. The Thunderbolts, though, took Bethesda to a deciding third game in the finals, which the Big Train won 6-4 with the help of a six-run rally in the bottom of the eighth inning to win their sixth playoff championship outright, plus two co-championships.

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NEW HALLS OF FAME: Local Notables Inducted, By Bill Hickman

Three new local Halls of Fame have come onto the scene in 2019. The baseball personalities inducted into those halls are as follows:

Cal Ripken Collegiate Baseball League Hall of Fame

- Cal Ripken Sr. -- The man in whose name the league was founded. Bruce Adams -- Co-founder of the league and co-founder of the Bethesda Big Train team.
- Dean Albany -- Co-founder of the league and former manager of Youse's Orioles
- Sal Colangelo -- Long-time manager of the Bethesda Big Train team.
- Brian Dozier -- Major league player and former major league All-Star.
- Brett Cecil -- Major league player and former major league All-Star.

Montgomery County Sports Hall of Fame

- Walter Johnson -- Had a home in Bethesda and a farm in Germantown.
- The other five inductees were not related to baseball.

Rockville Baseball Hall of Fame

- Walter Johnson -- Is buried in Rockville.
- Jim Riggelman -- Grew up in Rockville.
- Gordy Coleman -- Grew up in Rockville.

- "Pint" Isreal -- Player on 1946 Newark Eagles team which won the Negro League World Series; star defensive infielder.
- Elbert Isreal -- Batting champ of the 1952 Class B Interstate League; runner-up to Hank Aaron for batting championship of the 1953 Class A South Atlantic League.
- Alex Harriday -- Star of the 1960 Indianapolis Clowns with a .387 batting average.
- Brian Howard -- No. 1 draft pick for two franchises; Cleveland Indians in 1982 (didn't sign) and Pittsburgh Pirates in 1983.
- Buddy Kinder - Respected coach for the Rockville Baseball Association for 43 years.

All three new halls hope increased recognition of the contributions of these players and other individuals to the game of baseball will help inspire younger people who reside in the area to believe they too will have important roles to play in the game's future.

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AMERICA'S GREATEST ENTERTAINER: Jackie Price and the Senators, By Andrew Sharp

"Jackie who?"

If that was your reaction, you've obviously never heard of the man described in 1950 as "America's Greatest Entertainer."

Jackie Price, an amazing acrobatic baseball player, performed his tricks with bat, ball and glove for a capacity crowd before the Senators' game on July 22, 1950. He "bowed out to the loudest fan salute ever given a pre-game act in Griffith Stadium," the *Washington Post* reported in the next day's paper.

That high praise came from Shirley Povich, who for years had watched the storied antics of Nick Altrock and Al Schacht, Griffith Stadium's resident coach/comedians for 15 years in the 1920s and '30s.

Although often compared with those comedians, Price relied on a jaw-dropping assortment of skills. He was a professional ballplayer who toiled for most of a decade in the minors before appearing in seven games with the Indians late in the 1946 season. By then, he was already known for his baseball acrobatics, which is why Bill Veeck, then the new owner of the Indians, brought him to Cleveland.

Even though Veeck said Price "played good enough shortstop to win the pennant for me at Milwaukee," the flamboyant team owner was in awe of what Price could do to entertain fans. "I can hardly believe my eyes when I watch that fellow perform," Veeck said after he acquired Price from Oakland in the Pacific Coast League. "He simply can do things with a ball, a bat and a glove that nobody else in the world can do."

That was hardly an exaggeration. As Hall-of-Famer Tris Speaker, who accompanied Price on public appearances for the Indians, said, "If I hadn't seen these things, I wouldn't believe them. And I'm still not sure that I do."

Price spent three seasons in the 1930s in the low minors before he got married and had a

daughter. Not having advanced past Class B or hitting any better than .268, he quit to find work that could support a family. But he kept working on baseball tricks that he hoped would someday earn him some money.

By 1942, with the age for conscription expanded as the war raged, Price, now 29, was drafted into the Army and sent to California's Camp Santa Anita to train for the ordnance corps. He persuaded his superiors that his developing tricks with bat and ball could entertain troops. A hip injury earned him a medical discharge in 1944.

Once his hip injury healed, and given the player shortage because of the war, Price was re-signed by the Cardinals and sent to Columbus, Ohio, in the American Association. Price signed two contracts, one as a player and one as a stunt performer.

In 1945 with the unaffiliated Milwaukee team, owned by Veeck, Price hit a career-best .293. There, Veeck had a first-hand look at Price's ability to perform, as the shortstop already had made a name for himself. His act involved catching balls in his uniform and throwing balls accurately to two or three different catchers with his back turned or lying on the ground, batting while standing on his head or suspended by his ankles from an overhead bar, and catching fly balls while driving a jeep across the outfield.

When he purchased Price's contract, Veeck outbid the Yankees' Larry MacPhail. "He won't hit much but is the greatest baseball entertainer in the country," Veeck said. Price, 33, joined the Indians' active roster on August 12.

Price unveiled his act in Cleveland on Aug. 13 before 65,765 fans at a game honoring the Indians' longtime team trainer. He was an immediate sensation. By the time the Indians arrived in New York on Aug. 28 to play the Yankees, Schacht, the longtime "Clown Prince of Baseball," had to see what the fuss was about. "He's worth whatever they pay him," Schacht said after watching Price perform.

Price made his first major league start against the Senators in Cleveland. He led off and played shortstop. He singled and scored the lone Cleveland run in an 8-1 Washington win. He started at short against the Nats the following night and went 0-3

Price ended up hitting .231 with 3 hits in 13 official at-bats. He never struck out. The Indians released Price as a player on September 30, but kept him under contract as a performer. In February 1947, an eight-and-a-half minute MGM film titled *Diamond Demon*, showing Price performing many of his tricks, was released in movie theaters, vastly increasing his fame. (Turner Classic Movies often shows the film at the start of baseball seasons, and it's on YouTube.)

In the 1948 season, Veeck's team led the league in attendance, drawing 2.62 million fans. One of the biggest crowds – 73,494 – was on hand on August 8 to watch Price's act between games of a doubleheader with the Yankees. Cleveland won a three-way fight for the pennant and beat the surprising Boston Braves in the World Series. Veeck had Price perform before Game One in Boston.

In 1950, Price incorporated into his act an air-powered "bazooka" he would use to shoot baseballs 600 feet in the air so he could catch them while riding in his jeep. Or he would blast the balls completely out of the stadiums in which he performed. Today, at almost every

professional game anywhere, a mascot of some kind will use such a device to shoot T-shirts or wrapped hamburgers into the stands as the crowd screams in delight. Thank Price for providing the inspiration.

That season, Price performed at 132 ballparks in 48 states. His act clearly was a big hit, drawing large crowds at minor league parks – and boosting attendance at some big league venues.

The July 22, 1950, game in Washington was a prime example. “He hung from a special trapeze and whacked out line drives, upside down. He fungoed two balls in opposite directions with the same swing,” the *Post* reported.

Price performed at Yankee Stadium before an Aug. 18, 1952, game between the Senators and the Yankees. He “put on a dazzling pre-game show,” *The New York Times* reported. “Among other things, he threw simultaneous strikes to three catchers while standing on his head ... went roaring over the outfield turf in his jeep to catch towering flies.”

As he had been in his first big league start, Price was a good luck charm for the Nats. This night, over the eventual World Series champions, the Senators had one of the team’s greatest comeback victories. New York led at one point 8-1 before the Nats scored seven runs in the top of the ninth. The Yanks went down 1-2-3 in their half. Washington won, 10-8.

The last time Price performed before a Senators game was in Baltimore’s Municipal Stadium on Sept. 21, 1957. Again, Price was the charm as the last-place Nats beat the Orioles, 8-1, (The loss kept Baltimore from finishing above .500)

By then, the newspapers were referring to Price most often as a comedian, a cruel way of describing his athletic skills. “The best tribute to Price,” Shirley Povich wrote in 1950, “is that his greatest admirers are the ball players, who marvel at the things he does with a baseball.”

By the late 1950s, as the number of minor leagues contracted and major league games were broadcast on TV nationwide, the demand for Price’s services gradually declined. “The places to show are getting fewer and farther between,” he said in 1959. “Everywhere I go, the minor league people tell me they’re worrying how long they can survive.”

In addition, Price’s tricks and hours of practice were more physically demanding than the training regimens of active players. He had turned 40 years old before the 1953 season. His physical skills declined with age. His last reported performance was in 1962.

By then, Price could no longer earn enough to justify the preparation and days of long drives to distant minor league parks. Approaching age 50, he took a job at J&J Bar in San Francisco, where he and his wife had moved, and faded from public consciousness.

No longer able to find work doing what he alone could do, Price became increasingly despondent and began drinking heavily. On Oct. 2, 1967, Price took his own life by hanging himself at the home he shared with his wife in San Francisco. His death went unnoted in the San Francisco newspapers.

“Isn’t it a shame that baseball bypasses really great performers like Jackie?” Will Cunningham, a former minor league roommate of Price, had written in a 1965 letter to *The*

Sporting News.

Baseball almost certainly will never see another like Jackie Price.

This is adapted from a longer BioProject essay on Jackie Price, posted at SABR.org.

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TRIVIA ANSWER: Who was the last player to record an at-bat as a Washington Senator?

This is a bit of a trick question. The answer is Tom McCraw, even though two more players came to the plate after his one-out single off the Yankees' Jack Aker gave Washington a 6-5 lead in the bottom of the eighth on Sept. 30, 1971. Elliott Maddox was next and delivered a sacrifice fly to make it 7-5. Of course, no at-bat is charged for a sac fly. Toby Harrah stepped into the box next, but McCraw was thrown out stealing to end the inning.