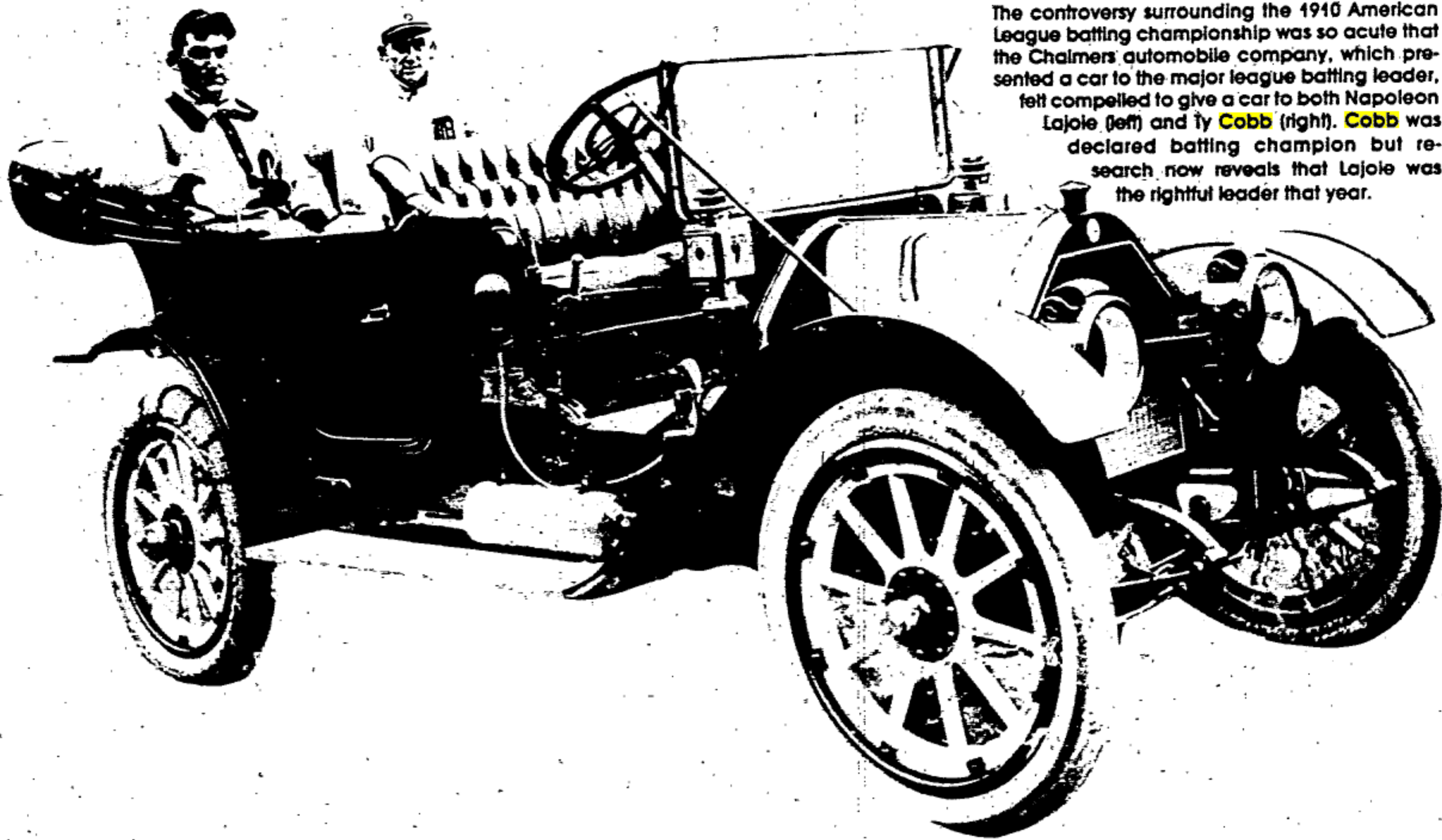


LAJOIE BEATS OUT COBB



The controversy surrounding the 1910 American League batting championship was so acute that the Chalmers automobile company, which presented a car to the major league batting leader, felt compelled to give a car to both Napoleon Lajoie (left) and Ty Cobb (right). Cobb was declared batting champion but research now reveals that Lajoie was the rightful leader that year.

After 70 Years, Researchers Prove Lajoie Really Did Win

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ST. LOUIS—Seventy American league batting races have passed in review since that epic contest between Ty Cobb and Napoleon Lajoie in 1910.

Thirteen Presidents have taken up residence in the White House since that October day when William Howard Taft and the rest of the nation learned that Byron Bancroft (Ban) Johnson, president of the American League, had taken away Lajoie's batting leadership and awarded the leading average to Cobb, thereby ending several days of investigation into questionable circumstances surrounding the last two games of the season.

In the intervening decades, record books have listed a .385 average for Cobb as the league's best in 1910. And that average also won Cobb a Chalmers touring car, presented by the automobile manufacturer to the major league player with the highest batting mark.

Baseball students have memorized Cobb's statistics as follows: a .367 career average, 4,191 lifetime hits, 12 A.L. batting championships, nine bat titles in a row (1907 through 1915).

Now, those memory banks need to be reprogrammed. Research in preparation for the 1981 edition of *Daguerreotypes*, published this week by THE SPORTING NEWS, has turned up record-keeping discrepancies that have resulted in significant revision of Cobb's figures. Those changes are detailed in the new edition of *Daguerreotypes*, which contains biographical sketches and complete playing records of 432 of baseball's greatest players, managers, executives and umpires. Every record was researched for this issue.

Though Cobb became a regular with the Detroit Tigers in 1906, his first two games of that season, April 22 and 23, were not entered on his official sheet in the A.L. office. Cobb went 1-for-8 in those two games.

Then the Georgia Peach actually had 4,192 hits? Not so. The research uncovered amazing occurrences in 1910. Not

only was Cobb credited with an extra 2-for-3 game erroneously entered on his sheet, but two additional hitless at-bats were found—one each on May 26 and August 10.

Thus, addition of the 1-for-8 in 1906 and removal of the phantom 2-for-3 in 1910 drops Cobb's lifetime hits total to 4,190. That means Pete Rose is only 633 hits away from tying Ty, not 634.

And, the corrections involving Cobb's at-bats reduce his career average by one point to .366.

Cobb's corrected average for 1910 is .382 (194-for-508), not the .385 recognized for 70 years. And Lajoie didn't finish at .384 that year, as the record books showed. Research found an extra at-bat for him on May 13 in 1910, and his corrected average that season becomes .383 (227-for-592).

So, Lajoie had the higher average that year, .383 to .382 over Cobb, but does that make him the A.L. leader? Cobb was declared the leader by Johnson, the league president, and the matter was closed—supposedly for all time.

As a result of the breakthrough in research, *Daguerreotypes* and other TSN publications such as the *Official Baseball Guide* and the *Official Baseball Record Book* will include notations in the records of Lajoie and Cobb. Lajoie is listed with the higher average and there is an explanation that Cobb was "declared leader by Johnson."

Thus, Cobb's major league record streak of nine consecutive batting titles could be considered intact, and he could be considered as still holding 12 A.L. batting leaderships. Removal of the 1910 leadership would interrupt Cobb's string of nine straight titles and make Rogers Hornsby the major league leader with six consecutive crowns (National League titles, 1920 through '25, with the St. Louis Cardinals).

Confused? Well, just consider the events of the final days of the 1910 campaign.

Cobb appeared a cinch for the batting championship. The Detroit outfielder was so sure of the title that he played irregularly the final week and left the team to attend stage shows in New York. He missed the last two games, departing with a .383 average (194-for-506).

Lajoie, meanwhile, kept his Gallic nose to the grindstone. In the final 17 games, the Cleveland second baseman collected three hits in each of eight contests, two hits in two and four hits in another pair. Those two four-hit games were in a season-ending doubleheader, and therein lay the basis for Johnson's investigation.

Cleveland closed out the campaign October 9 in St. Louis, where the Browns, with nothing at stake, took a lighthearted approach to the contests and shifted players out of their regular positions, as was the closing-day custom of the times.

As a result, rookie shortstop Red Corriden was switched to third base by Manager Jack O'Connor, who cautioned the youngster that it might be in his best interests if he played deep because Lajoie, a powerful righthanded batter, frequently pulled line drives in that direction.

Lajoie, who went into the doubleheader with a .376 average, seven points behind Cobb, resisted the temptation to bunt toward Corriden his first time up. Instead, he rifled a drive past the third baseman that skidded to the left-field fence, good for a stand-up triple.

On subsequent at-bats, Lajoie took advantage of the inviting defense and bunted safely seven times so that, by the end of the second game, he was credited by the official scorer with eight hits in eight at-bats. One of the bunts was pushed toward shortstop Bobby Wallace and the others were fielded by Corriden. In each case, Lajoie beat the throw to first.

On one other at-bat during the day, a sacrifice on which Nap beat the throw to first, the official scorer did not credit him with a hit.

Lajoie's 8-for-8 day pushed his batting average to .384 (227-for-591), one point above the idle Cobb. And the performance was greeted enthusiastically by St. Louis fans who, like those in other A.L. cities, esteemed the big Frenchman more highly than they did the fiery, pugnacious Cobb.

Even eight of Cobb's Detroit teammates, hearing that Lajoie had surpassed Ty, sent Nap congratulatory telegrams.

At one point during the afternoon, Harry Howell, indisposed St. Louis pitcher-coach, visited the press box in civilian clothes and offered the official scorer a small bribe "to do well by Lajoie" on the sacrifice ruling. But the sacrifice stood.

When wire services carried the news of the bribe attempt and Lajoie's eight-hit day, which made him the per-

(Continued on Page 10, Column 1)



Ty Cobb (above), displaying his most fierce mien about 1940 for a photographer, was a source of pride for Ban Johnson and his relatively young American League. Cobb's batting feats enhanced the prestige of the A.L. in its battle with the older National League for the baseball spotlight. Napoleon Lajoie (right) was an N.L. star who jumped to the A.L. when it gained major league status in 1901. The photo was taken June 4, 1912, when Cleveland honored Lajoie with a horseshoe containing 1,009 silver dollars contributed by fans in recognition of his 10th anniversary with the club. Lajoie was so popular as a player and manager that the Cleveland team was called the "Naps." Nap Lajoie's friends, though, called him Larry.



record.
"An offer from me to purchase a duplicate of the Chalmers trophy for presentation to Lajoie in recognition of his service to the American League throughout his connection with it and as a reward for his grand batting record during the season just passed was met by Mr. Chalmers with an urgent plea that his company be permitted to donate a similar machine of its make and I have acceded to the request."
The next day, October 17, when asked why Lajoie was no longer the accepted batting champion, Johnson replied:

"The Cobb-Lajoie affair is a closed matter."
It is not known exactly when the duplicate entries were discovered. Was it immediately after the season ended, when Johnson ordered the check of Cobb's record? If so, did Johnson order retention of the two "phantom" hits? Or was the discovery made weeks or months later, when the statistics were being audited for publication as the final, official averages? If that was the case, were Cobb's two extra hits retained to avoid the embarrassment of another reversal, this time in Lajoie's favor?
Whatever the truth, Johnson had closed the book. And it

remained closed until research developments of recent years brought the 1910 discrepancies to light.

The late Leonard Gettelson, a New Jersey statistician who collaborated with TSN in compiling record books, including Daguerreotypes, detected the Cobb-Lajoie error before his death. Correspondence between Pete Palmer, a computer-oriented researcher in Lexington, Mass., and Gettelson was discovered when TSN acquired Gettelson's library.

Palmer, a programmer and evaluator of tactical data systems for a private firm in Massachusetts, had volunteered his computer know-how to help compile American League statistics when he, too, spotted the Cobb-Lajoie inaccuracy about three years ago. Palmer was working from microfilm copies of all the A.L. official sheets, obtained through the league publicity office.

Palmer's researching dovetailed with facts already discovered at TSN. Upon learning of the discrepancies three years ago, Clifford Kachline, historian of the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., began looking into the matter.

By comparing the official A.L. sheets, the box scores as they appeared in TSN, plus those in the New York Times as provided by Alex Haas, a researcher-statistician, Kachline and TSN resolved all discrepancies in the Cobb and Lajoie records. Kachline had been aided by members of the Society for American Baseball Research in cities where additional information was available.

The Cobb-Lajoie discrepancies have been brought to the attention of the 13-member official Baseball Records Committee. One of the assigned purposes of the Records Committee is to research and act upon any and all errors or discrepancies in the official records and statistics that are brought to the committee's attention, handling them in the order of priority to be determined by the membership.

The committee members are: chairman Kachline, the Hall of Fame historian; Seymour Siwoff, statistician for the National League; Bob Wirz, director of information for the Commissioner's office; Joe Reichler, a special assistant to the Commissioner; Bob Fishel, A.L. public relations director; Blake Cullen, N.L. public relations director; Harry Simmons, administrative assistant to the Commissioner; Ralph Kiner, broadcaster for the New York Mets and a member of the Hall of Fame; Jack Lang of the New York Daily News, secretary-treasurer of the Baseball Writers' Association of America; Red Foley, a writer for the New York Daily News; Allan Roth, baseball statistician; Leonard Koppett, a TSN columnist who specializes in quantitative analysis of statistics, and myself of TSN.

The Cobb-Lajoie matter was to have been taken up by the Records Committee at the group's special meeting in New York last December. The issue was discussed but never voted on. A three-fourths vote of the committee is needed for approval of official records changes, and affirmative action then must be submitted to the A.L. and N.L. presidents and Commissioner Bowie Kuhn, who give their blessing on statistical revisions. For example, 21 revisions in the record of Hall of Fame outfielder Tris Speaker sailed through without a ripple in January, 1980.

Although TSN has gone ahead with the revisions in Cobb's and Lajoie's records, the issue is far from closed. Both Kuhn and Lee MacPhail, the A.L. president, oppose any changes that would take away Cobb's title.

A statement from Kuhn said, in part, "While we appreciate the devotion of various statisticians in researching this case (and others), the league presidents (N.L. President Charles Feeney as well as MacPhail) and I have determined that the recognized statistics on Cobb and Lajoie in 1910 should be accepted. We cite the following reasons:

"1. President Ban Johnson of the American League reviewed this batting championship at the close of the season and ruled that Cobb was the rightful winner. President Johnson said, in part: 'I will certify to the National Commission that Cobb has clear title to the leadership of the American League batsmen for 1910.'

"2. The passage of 70 years, in our judgment, also constitutes a certain statute of limitation as to recognizing any changes in the records with confidence of the accuracy of such changes.

"3. Since a variety of questions have been raised through the years about the accuracy of the statistics of that period, the only way to make changes with confidence would be for a complete and thorough review of all team and individual statistics. That is not practical.

"For these reasons, we all feel the official records as reflected in the record books should remain the same."

MacPhail concurred, saying, "If we had a project to examine all the records, and the Cobb-Lajoie error was one of the results, then I'd approve the change. But just to zero in on one isolated record after all these years seems unfair. Ban Johnson certified Cobb as the champion and I'm sure he had good reasons for it. Unless we examine all the records completely, we shouldn't change only this one."

It should be noted, however, that MacPhail raised no objections when such items as Babe Ruth's runs batted in totals and Walter Johnson's earned-run average were revised.

So, the issue remains. After 70 years, the odor may linger over Lajoie's seven safe bunts, but the questions over Cobb's phantom 2-for-3 are larger.

Readers of THE SPORTING NEWS have known for decades that this paper provides the most accurate, most informative news possible. The revisions in the Cobb and Lajoie records are in keeping with TSN's philosophy.