

The Kansas City Royals' Baseball Academy

by Richard J. Puerzer

The mythical set of traditionalist methods governing the management of baseball both on and off the field—known as “The Book”—has bound how the game has been played for essentially its entire history. Innovation regarding such issues as the training for, strategic approaches to, statistical analysis of, and the general knowledge of baseball has come in fits and starts over the history of the game. One such pioneering venture in the overall approach to the management of baseball, especially with regard to the development and training of players, was the Kansas City Royals’ Baseball Academy. The Baseball Academy was an effort to engineer baseball success, primarily through the application of science, technology, and improved training.

The Kansas City Royals’ Baseball Academy, established in 1970, was the brainchild of Royals owner Ewing Marion Kauffman. Kauffman, a self-made multimillionaire, had established the pharmaceutical giant Marion Labs prior to his purchase of the Royals. Kauffman attempted to bring his entrepreneurial spirit to baseball ownership through the establishment of the Baseball Academy. The goal of the Academy was the betterment of the Royals through the development and training of its students/players. The unique approach of the Academy was that these students were not among the traditional population from which baseball players were normally chosen. Subsequently, creating these potential major leaguers would expand

the pool of quality players available to the Royals. Likewise, the methods employed at the Academy for fostering the development of these players were anything but by “the Book.”

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KANSAS CITY ROYALS

The Kansas City Royals entered the American League in 1969 as an expansion team. Prior to 1969, Kansas City had been home to many major and minor league teams, including the Packers of the Federal League, the Blues of the American Association, the Monarchs of the Negro Leagues, and the A’s of the American League. Ewing Kauffman was awarded the Kansas City franchise after the departure of the A’s, owned by the contentious Charlie O. Finley, for Oakland, California, following the 1967 season. Upon learning that he was awarded the franchise, Kauffman immediately established a relationship with the city of Kansas City. This was the opposite of Finley’s style. He made a public vow to the city that in his lifetime the team would not move from Kansas City.¹ Also, he stated that he would provide the financial support necessary to field a winning baseball team and that he would hire knowledgeable baseball people to run the club.

Kauffman was true to his word in his hiring practices, seeking out experienced and perspicacious baseball men. Soon after he was awarded the franchise, Kauffman hired Cedric Tallis as executive vice president and general manager. Tallis, a veteran baseball executive, had spent the previous seven years with the California Angels. Recognizing the need to immediately plan for the expansion draft and develop a minor

RICHARD J. PUERZER is a professor of Industrial Engineering at Hofstra University. He lives in Metuchen, New Jersey with his wife and sons Casey and Aaron. He is a member of SABR’s Science and Baseball committee.

league system, Tallis in turn hired Charlie Metro as his director of personnel. Metro was a consummate baseball man, playing on both the major league (for the Detroit Tigers and Philadelphia A's) and minor league level from 1937 to 1953. Metro had also managed in both the majors (for the Chicago Cubs) and minors from 1947 to 1966. He had been working as a scout for the Cincinnati Reds when he was offered the job with the Royals. Metro had previously worked as a minor league manager under Tallis, and the two men had a great deal of respect for each other. Metro would later state that Tallis was one of the best judges of baseball talent he had worked with in his long career in the game.² Tallis then hired Lou Gorman as the director of player development. Gorman had been working as director of minor league clubs for the Baltimore Orioles. All three men would play prominent roles in the formation and decline of the Baseball Academy.

THE MANAGEMENT APPROACH OF EWING KAUFFMAN

When Ewing Kauffman first considered ownership of a major league baseball team, he was intrigued with the opportunity to employ the management principles he had successfully utilized in the pharmaceutical industry. He had earned a reputation not only as innovative but also as compassionate in his leadership.

Kauffman began in the pharmaceutical industry with an investment of \$5,000 in 1950, and by 1989, when he sold his controlling interest in Marion Laboratories, his company reported annual sales exceeding one billion dollars. His business philosophy can be distilled down to three principles: treat others as you want to be treated, share life's rewards with those who make them possible, and give back to society.³ In keeping with his philosophy, Kauffman pursued a multitude of philanthropic ventures including funding the mass teaching of cardiopulmonary resuscitation and the creation of a resource to positively encourage entrepreneurship in the United States. It was this management vision, translated to ownership of a baseball team, which brought about the quick and lasting success of the Kansas City Royals.

There are many and various examples of Kauffman's business approach in the management of the Royals. Shortly after acquiring the team, Kauffman announced that he was including profit sharing in the benefit package for Royals' non-player person-

nel.⁴ Kauffman's goal in instituting profit sharing was twofold, to attract excellent employees and to motivate those employees to work toward the success of the franchise. Kauffman also did not shy away from spending money in order to hire talented coaches and managers in the farm system, recognizing that these men were necessary to train and develop the nascent Royals players. Kauffman saw to it that, despite the cost, the Royals' minor league system featured more managers and coaches than any other team, with the idea that players would receive more personalized training than other teams' players.⁵ Kauffman also worked to establish an open relationship with his players, sharing with them the finances of the Royals and offering them counsel regarding their personal finances and careers.⁶ Kauffman would not admit to altruism, however, stressing that improvement in the performance of his team would also improve the team's, and thus his, financial performance.

Kauffman's entrepreneurial approach was most evident in the idea behind the Baseball Academy. After reflecting on the traditional methods of player development, Kauffman was disheartened by the extremely slow process of scouting, acquiring, developing, and finally promoting players to the major league level.⁷ Likewise, he was disenchanted with the conservative nature and the resistance to change found in the baseball establishment. The business environment of baseball was opposite to the environment to which he was accustomed, where without innovation and improvement, companies failed. Specifically, Kauffman was chagrined with how baseball was virtually ignorant of how technology might improve training methods and innovative ideas might improve the game in general. So, employing his entrepreneurial spirit and business acumen, Kauffman sponsored the creation of the Kansas City Royals' Baseball Academy in an effort to create baseball players and to learn more about how to best play the game of baseball.

PREVIOUS EFFORTS SIMILAR TO THE ACADEMY

Although the Royals' Baseball Academy was without question an innovative undertaking, it was certainly not the first organized attempt to improve the training of players or to gain a better understanding of what brings about success in the game of baseball. Although nothing came of it, John Heydler, president of the

National League in the 1920s, suggested that major league baseball should begin and sponsor a “baseball school.”⁸ Branch Rickey introduced several innovations for the training of players during his long and prosperous career in baseball management. Rickey utilized such teaching tools as sliding pits, batting tees, and the increased use of batting cages and pitching machines in an effort to teach, with greater efficiency and effectiveness, the fundamentals of baseball play.⁹ The Royals’ Baseball Academy utilized these methods as well as a multitude of other scientific endeavors toward the training of the game.

Another significant attempt to improve the training of players was undertaken by the Chicago Cubs in the late 1930s. In 1938, the Cubs hired Coleman R. Griffith, then known as the father of sports psychology in America, as a consultant to the team. In his two-year tenure with the Cubs, Griffith pursued many new methods for the analysis of the game in an attempt to build a scientific training program for the team. With the Cubs in the 1930s as with the Royals under Ewing Kauffman, it was an innovative and business-minded owner, Philip K. Wrigley, who sought to improve his team through untraditional means. While working with the Cubs, Griffith used such techniques as filming players, recommending improved regimes, the documentation of player progress through charts and diagrams, and changes in batting and pitching practice in order to make the practice sessions more closely resemble game conditions. Griffith suffered through acrimonious relationships with the two Cub managers he was to work with, Charlie Grimm and Gabby Hartnett, and had much of his work undermined by these men. In the end, although he produced some 400 pages of reports, including documentation on the use of methods and measures later used throughout baseball, including at the Baseball Academy, his work for the Cubs was essentially for naught.¹⁰

The St. Louis Browns employed another psychologist, David F. Tracy, in 1950. Tracy took an entirely psychological approach to improving player performance, working with players through relaxation techniques, autosuggestion, and hypnosis throughout spring training. Although Tracy was apparently well received by both the Browns’ players and management, he was fired on May 31 with the Browns (8-25) in last place.¹¹

Other efforts have been undertaken to improve player skills outside the regular spring to fall cycle of baseball development and play. In 1950, Casey Stengel,

then manager of the New York Yankees, utilized a post-season camp in an effort to expedite the development of players. Mickey Mantle, Gil McDougald, and future Baseball Academy director Syd Thrift took part in the camp.¹² It was effective in refining the talents of many players and fostering their transition to the major leagues. However, unlike the target group of the Royals’ Baseball Academy, all of the players taking part were already professional ballplayers.

Another effort with the aim of studying the science of the game was the “Research Program for Baseball,” a project underwritten by Philadelphia Phillies owner Bob Carpenter and carried out by professors from the University of Delaware and scientists from DuPont between 1963 and 1972.¹³ They studied of the intricacies of hitting, measuring bat velocity, bat acceleration, and total force. Research into player vision, and its impact on hitting as well as pitching and fielding, was also done. The project did advance the understanding of the science of the game, but was generally scoffed at by the baseball establishment, including scouts who perhaps were not eager to allow science to subjugate their expert opinion.

THE CREATION OF THE ACADEMY

After acquiring the Royals, Kauffman determined that the four traditional ways of acquiring players—the free agent draft, the minor league draft, trades with other teams, and the purchase of players from other teams—would not allow the Royals to quickly become a winning team.¹⁴ Kauffman therefore sought an untraditional method for gaining good players. This search evolved into the idea of a Baseball Academy, a school which could teach how best to play baseball. The basis for the Baseball Academy was to create players who were not already signed as a part of the baseball establishment. It was Kauffman’s idea that an athlete did not necessarily have to play baseball all his life in order to be a good baseball player.

This notion of turning a good athlete into a good baseball player may have been influenced by the performance of Lou Piniella. Piniella, who won the American League Rookie of the Year award in 1969 for the Royals, was more renowned for his basketball talent than his baseball talent in high school, even skipping a year of playing baseball.¹⁵ Essentially, Kauffman believed that given the proper raw materials, such as



Jim Lemon demonstrates bunting to Academy students.

athletes who had not been scouted by the baseball establishment, and the proper training and teaching techniques, the Baseball Academy could create baseball players.

In order to ascertain the physical and mental abilities necessary to excel at baseball, Kauffman hired Dr. Raymond Reilly, a research psychologist with previous experience at NASA and the Office of Naval Research.¹⁶ Approximately 150 players, mainly from within the Royals organization, were tested in order to help establish the requisite abilities to be a professional baseball player. The vision, psychomotor responses, and psychological makeup of the players were tested.¹⁷ The four attributes determined to be necessary for any potential player were excellent running speed, exceptional eyesight, fast reflexes, and superb body balance. Likewise, Reilly believed that the potential players should have specific personality traits, such as the need for success and achievement. He also determined that players should be of above average intelligence with a good memory for facts and figures.¹⁸ These requirements, summarized in advertising tryouts for

the Academy, were the only requisites for consideration: "An applicant must (a) have completed his high school eligibility, (b) be less than 20, (c) be able to run 60 yards in 6.9 seconds in baseball shoes (the average of major leaguers is somewhat above 7.0), and (d) be neither enrolled in a four-year college nor have been drafted by a major league team."¹⁹

Essentially what the Academy's scouts were looking for were good athletes who had never concentrated on playing baseball in the past. Kauffman was correct in assuming that these athletes existed, for among the applicants were: a New Mexico high school state wrestling champion, a Missouri high school sprint champion, a collegiate pole vaulter, an excellent bowler and weight lifter, and a former high school quarterback who had set his school's record in the javelin throw.²⁰

The construction of the Academy began in early 1970 with Lou Piniella, turning the first shovel of dirt.²¹ The Academy was located in Sarasota, Florida, enabling the team created at the Academy to play in the Florida Instructional League, and for the Royals to use the facilities year-round.²² The 121-acre cam-

pus featured five baseball diamonds, four of which to be used for training and instruction and one with a grandstand and lights for full-scale games. All five of the fields were built to the precise dimensions of the future Royals stadium that was to be opened in Kansas City before the 1972 season.²³ The campus also featured a 50-room dormitory for players, offices, lecture halls, laboratories, tennis courts, and a swimming pool. The cost of construction was reported to be \$1.5 million, with an additional \$500,000 to be spent on establishing the Academy in its first year.²⁴

Syd Thrift, who had originally been hired as the Royals' supervisor of scouting for the eastern U.S., was named as the director of the Academy. Thrift had formerly pitched in the New York Yankee minor league system, and was later a scout for the Pittsburgh Pirates. Thrift hired Steve Korcheck to be the Academy's coordinator of instruction. Korcheck had most recently worked as a baseball coach for George Washington University, and previously had been an itinerant catcher for the Washington Senators, appearing in 58 games throughout the 1954, 1955, 1958, and 1959 seasons. Carlton "Buzzy" Keller, a former baseball coach at Texas Lutheran, was hired and eventually became manager of the Academy team in the Gulf Coast League. In addition, several other former major league players were hired as instructors in the Academy, including: Detroit Tiger first baseman and Cincinnati Reds manager Johnny Neun, Washington Senator player and manager Jim Lemon, Boston Red Sox pitcher Chuck Stobbs, former Senators pitcher Bill Fischer, Royals first year manager and Yankee and Cleveland Indian second baseman Joe Gordon, and Yankee right fielder Tommy Henrich.

Several part-time or full-time members of the Academy staff were hired despite having no baseball experience. George Bourette, who was a high school football coach in Missouri for 26 years, worked with the players on losing or gaining weight while increasing strength through exercise.²⁵ Mickey Cobb would serve as athletic trainer at the Academy and would later go on to work as the trainer for the Royals' major league team. Bill Easton, the track coach at the University of Kansas, and Wes Santee, formerly an Olympian on the U.S. track team and who was once known as America's greatest miler, were hired to work with the players on their base running.²⁶ The aforementioned Dr. Ray Reilly was actively involved in the physiological and psychological testing of players. Two ophthalmolo-

gists, Bill Harrison, who played college baseball at California-Berkeley, and Bill Lee, were involved in the testing and improvement of vision.²⁷ In retrospect, this cadre of professionals constituted the first concerted effort to measure, evaluate, and improve both baseball players and the way that baseball is played.

THE SCIENCE AND TRAINING USED AT THE ACADEMY

Players were selected for the Academy based on their performance at tryout camps held throughout the United States. It was envisioned that 50 players would be selected from the several thousand who would take part in the tryouts. The first of these camps was held in Kansas City on June 4-6, 1970.²⁸ In the first year, 128 tryout camps were held for 7,682 candidates. From these candidates, 43 athletes hailing from 23 different states were culled.²⁹ The only player of notoriety going into this first class was Orestes Minoso Arrietta, stepson of former Negro Leaguer and Chicago White Sox outfielder Minnie Minoso. Although Arrietta would never reach the major leagues, three future major leaguers were among the first class: Bruce Miller, a light-hitting infielder who would appear in 196 games for the San Francisco Giants between 1973 and 1976; Ron Washington, another infielder who played for five different teams including a six-year stint with the Minnesota Twins; and Frank White, the star pupil of the Academy who would go on to an outstanding career with the Royals. Another member of the first-year class was Hal Baird. Baird would never make the majors, but he became the head baseball coach at Auburn University, where he would coach such future baseball luminaries as Bo Jackson, Frank Thomas, Tim Hudson, and Gregg Olson.³⁰

Players were to train and study baseball at the Academy for a minimum of ten months. All of the players selected to the Academy were paid a modest monthly salary, beginning at \$100 to \$200 a month in the first year and increasing to \$500 a month in the second year. They received free room, three diet-planned meals a day, uniforms, health and life insurance, and a round-trip plane ticket home for the Christmas holidays. In keeping with Kauffman's belief that an educated individual made a good baseball player and that all of the players should have education to fall back on should their baseball career not work out, each player was required to attend classes three morn-

ings a week at nearby Manatee Junior College.³¹

On the mornings that players did not attend junior college classes, they received classroom instruction on baseball at the Academy. Every afternoon they played baseball. In their time at the Academy, the players were to play approximately 150 games, first in exhibitions against collegiate and professional teams and later in the Gulf Coast League.

Much of the baseball training that the players were put through differed greatly from the standard practices of the time. For example, in the average minor league camp a hitter might spend but a few minutes in the batting cage for batting practice. At the Academy, players were given 30 minutes a day for batting practice, against both live pitching and a pitching machine.³² Another unique training method was the use of pitching machines for fielding practice. Because the pitching machine could create a uniform velocity and bounce, it could be used to test the reactions and dexterity of infielders. Likewise, it could repetitively drill infielders for work on their lateral range and footwork. These drills were supplemented with machines that could produce non-uniform ground balls, more similar to those caused by a bat hitting a ball.³³

Foot speed, especially on the base paths, was a priority at the Academy. Several approaches were taken to improving the base-running performance of players. Wes Santee was charged with setting up a running and conditioning program for the improvement of running form. Base-stealing ability, seen as one of the most important abilities, was addressed and improved through the development of the timed, measured lead. One aspect of this approach was the timing of an opposing pitcher's delivery and pickoff throw. It was determined that an average runner could take a 12-foot lead off first base, with faster runners taking slightly bigger leads. Likewise, a lead of 27 feet could usually be safely taken from second base. With this knowledge, players were instructed precisely how far they could venture off base. This knowledge also improved performance in that it instilled confidence in the players. The now ubiquitous approach of using stopwatches on the ball field was quite novel for its time. Given that the time required for a catcher to receive a pitch and get a throw to second base was timed, base runners could determine the likelihood of a steal based on specific battery combinations. Players were thus instructed not only how to steal bases, but also when to steal bases. Players were also trained in the proper use

of the delayed steal, using a large lead and the element of surprise, and the double steal.³⁴ This training proved fruitful, as Academy teams would lead their league in steals in each year of its existence. These base-stealing and base-running techniques would have a great impact on the running game in the major leagues in the 1970s and '80s. The Royals, and many other teams and players influenced by the Royals, would be quite proficient in stealing bases in this period. For example, Tom Treblehorn, who familiarized himself with the Academy approach to base stealing, passed his knowledge on to Rickey Henderson while managing Henderson in the minor leagues.³⁵

Reilly, Harrison, and Lee worked with the players on many aspects of improving their mental approach to the game. One technique that they employed was enabling the players to "center their concentration," that is, to have the players center in on one aspect of instruction until it becomes second nature. Through this approach, players were not bogged down by the many hitting or pitching instructions they often attempted to follow simultaneously, and were able to focus much more clearly on the task at hand.³⁶ Another technique for the improvement of performance was "visualization," the ability to readily obtain mental pictures and use these visual images for the enrichment of performance. It was believed that visualization would improve the mental approach of players and subsequently improve their physical performance through the reduction of stress and the improvement of timing and balance.³⁷ George Brett was one of the first major league players to utilize visualization and became a strong proponent of the approach, claiming that it helped him to concentrate and to break out of patterns of bad performance.³⁸

Several innovative physical training methods were utilized at the Academy. Under the direction of trainer Mickey Cobb, they were the first team to employ a mandatory stretching program. They were also the first team to utilize exercises performed in a swimming pool as a part of rehabilitation programs for a multitude of injuries. Cobb and strength and conditioning coach George Bourette developed innovative resistance training methods that used rubber bands and rubber chains. Methods for the use of these resistance tools were designed for the improvement of strength and for the prevention of injuries to players.³⁹

Another prescient topic on which the players were lectured was the abuse of drugs and alcohol

and its effects on both athletic ability and physical well-being.⁴⁰ It is ironic that this topic was addressed at such a relatively early time by the Royals, a team which would be plagued by drug problems a decade later, exemplified by the convictions and suspensions of Willie Wilson, Willie Mays Aikens, Vida Blue, and Jerry Martin.⁴¹

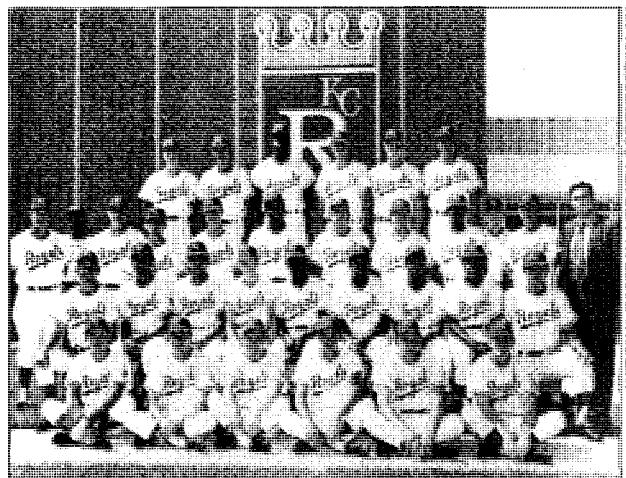
The result of all of these innovative training methods was not a “eureka moment” for any of the players or personnel at the Academy. Instead, the success of the teams and players came as a result of the screening of players, the traditional and innovative training methods, and the months and months of practice and games. The results of this work did culminate in reaching the goal of the Academy: the transformation of capable athletes into gifted baseball players.

THE ACADEMY EXPERIENCES OF FRANK WHITE

Among the first players selected to the first class of the Academy was Frank White. He would be the first Academy graduate to make it to the major leagues and played second base for the Royals for 18 seasons, be named to five AL All-Star teams, earn eight Gold Gloves, and be regarded as one of the greatest defensive second basemen in the history of baseball.

Frank White grew up in Kansas City, living but 10 blocks from old Municipal Stadium, and attended Lincoln High School, located right across the street from the stadium. He did not play high school baseball because baseball was not a sport at his high school. However, he did play in Ban Johnson and Casey Stengel leagues throughout his youth.⁴² He believes that he was never scouted because in the late 1960s, scouts, who were predominantly white, avoided scouting in inner-city areas.⁴³ He learned of the tryout for the Academy from his coach, who encouraged him to attend. White was reluctant to go to the tryout, but was pushed by his wife, and was given the day off at his job at a local sheet metal company. His performance at the tryout earned him a place in the Academy's initial class. Reflecting on the idea behind the Academy, he believed that it was “the wisdom of Mr. Kauffman to bring instructors to the players” which made the Academy a successful venture. For Frank White, it created a life in baseball.

White does not romanticize his time at the Academy, recalling it as being like a boot camp, with



Kansas City Royal Academy students.

6:00 A.M. wake-up calls, classes, near-constant practice sessions, and a curfew. As none of the players had cars, they would all ride into town each Wednesday night on the team bus for their precious little leisure time. He remembers not having much to do but practice and play baseball, so practice he did. Although he recollects feeling as something of “a guinea pig in a grand baseball experiment,” he also remembers the many new and great ideas that were explored and the approach that stayed with him throughout his baseball career. He feels that the strong point of the Academy was the teaching of fundamentals, and that it was the concentrated Academy approach that turned him into a major league baseball player in a few short years. White recalls the Academy as “a great, great experience.” In many ways Frank White embodied Kauffman’s idea of the Academy: that an excellent and intelligent athlete can be molded and transformed into a quick, resourceful, exceptional baseball player.

Frank White was promoted to the Royals in June 1973, just three years after joining the Academy. He recalls learning that Royals’ manager Jack McKeon wanted to bring him up to the major league team, but that the move was met with resistance from within the Royals organization. White believes that many within the organization did not want to see him succeed in the majors because they wanted to prove to Kauffman that there was no merit in the Academy idea, and that it should be closed. Despite these initial misgivings, Royals management would soon discover that in Frank White they had one of the primary components of a championship baseball team. He became one of the best defensive infielders in the history of the game,

and made an impact especially on how second basemen can play on artificial turf. He also became a good hitter, as evidenced by his hitting in the cleanup spot during the 1985 World Series. Bill James describes Frank White's career as interchangeable with that of Bill Mazeroski, who, primarily on the strength of his defensive prowess, was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2001.⁴⁴

THE PERFORMANCE OF ACADEMY TEAMS

The first Academy team began play in the Gulf Coast League in the 1971 season against rookie clubs of the Pittsburgh Pirates, St. Louis Cardinals, Cleveland Indians, Chicago White Sox, Cincinnati Reds, and Minnesota Twins. Skeptics wondered if the team would be able to compete against baseball talent discovered in the traditional manner, that is, recognized for their ability to play baseball as opposed to pure athletic ability. To their surprise, the Academy team ran away with the Gulf Coast League championship.⁴⁵

The Academy team finished first with a record of 40-13, for a .755 winning percentage, while leading the league in both team batting average, at .257, and team ERA, at 2.07.⁴⁶ One outstanding statistic of this team was that they stole 103 bases, 48 more than the next closest team, while they were caught stealing only 16 times. Clearly the team coalesced in the months of training prior to league play. This success brought many, including Kauffman and Thrift, to extrapolate the success of the team into the future and wonder as to their potential on the major league level.⁴⁷ Fifteen members of the first-year class were promoted into the upper levels of the Royals farm system.⁴⁸

Despite the great success of that first season, the role of the Academy began to be downgraded, signaling the discomfort many within the Royals organization felt with regards to the Academy idea. Evidence of this is also seen in the move of Syd Thrift from director of the Academy to his former position of eastern scouting supervisor. Lou Gorman, already director of the scouting staff and the Royals' minor league operations, would also assume the duty of supervising the Academy. Likewise, the second Academy class was limited to 20 players, with the restriction that only 17- to 19-year-old players could be selected. Also, existing players from within the Royals farm system would be assigned to the Academy for two months' time

after their regular season to provide them with the Academy's intensive instruction.⁴⁹

The performance of the second class of the Academy was still excellent, achieving a record of 41-22 for a winning percentage of .651, and finishing in a tie atop the Gulf Coast League for 1972. The team again led the league in batting average at .257 and stole an astounding 161 bases. They also pitched well, posting a team ERA of 2.81, good for second in the league. Rodney Scott, who would later enjoy a substantial major league career, was perhaps the most outstanding player on this team.

The third class of the Academy would fare well neither on the field nor in the collective mind of the Royals front office. On the field, the Royals finished with a record of 27-28, hitting but .224 as a team and posting a 3.87 team ERA, both near the bottom of the league in 1973. They still led the league in stolen bases with 96, exceeding the next closest team by 21 steals. The 1973 season marked the final season played solely by Academy players, as the Academy was closed following the season.

THE CLOSING AND LEGACY OF THE ACADEMY

In early 1973, three years after the opening of the Academy, Ewing Kauffman was asked to reflect on its success. To this point, the Academy had cost Kauffman \$1.5 million for construction and \$700,000 per year in operating expenses, a rather large investment for both that time and the baseball industry. Although the Academy had graduated several players into the Royals farm system, it had yet to create a sure-fire major league player, let alone a superstar. The Academy was also having trouble finding qualified students, as evinced by the decline in the size of its class from 43 in 1971, to 26 in 1972, to but 14 in 1973. Also, almost all of the students selected did have considerable baseball experience, dispelling the theory that a great many gifted athletes with little baseball experience would have the desire to attend the Academy. Still, the training and instruction at the Academy were highly regarded. Kauffman still saw promise in the Academy, stating that it would remain active for at least another five years.⁵⁰ However, a little over a year later, in May 1974, the Academy was closed.

It was with a heavy heart that Kauffman closed the Academy. He was quick to point out the Academy

DOUG BIRD ON THE BASEBALL ACADEMY

My first spring training with Kansas City was in Daytona. We stayed in barracks out by the speedway. Must have been a thousand guys there. I thought there's no way I'm going to stand out here. The next year was when they started the baseball academy for younger players.

I thought the academy was a great idea. They took good athletes who didn't have much baseball experience and taught them the correct way to play the game. They had people testing our eye-hand coordination, trying to figure out why we could do things that other people couldn't do. It seemed like a good idea, but it didn't last.

They had some Europeans come in and photograph me and Steve Busby. They were track specialists really—pole vaulters, javelin throwers, etc. I thought this was a great idea too. They didn't speak hardly any English.

They translated the film they took of you into stress points so they could tell where your stress points were from toes to fingertips. They had a way of determining how much stress you were putting on each point, excessive stress on your shoulder, elbow, knees, hips, ankles, whatever. They filmed us pitching against the Yankees in New York. We had a meeting afterwards, our pitching coach Galen Cisco sat in, and he told me later on they described Busby and me exactly.

I was a tall, skinny guy with a big delivery, fluid motion. That's how I had to pitch. Steve was a stocky guy, power pitcher, big hard curveball, and these guys knew nothing about baseball. But they described exactly what kind of pitchers we were from the films. They told them that I would have no problem; the angles of my delivery were where they should be. But Steve Busby they predicted would have trouble with his elbow and shoulder. I didn't see anything wrong with his delivery, but they said the stress he was putting on those points was excessive and it would be just a matter of time before he had problems. They were right.

They told the Royals they could go look at a high school kid the same way that the team was thinking of drafting and diagnose him in the same way. Maybe save them from wasting a lot of bonus money, by avoiding kids who had a high risk of getting hurt unless they changed something. Galen Cisco and I thought it was a great idea, but nothing came of it after that. Maybe because they'd have to wait a few years to see how it turned out.

—From an interview with Norman Macht

did get results, as Frank White was now with the big league team. But he acknowledged that for the costs involved, there should have been a bigger impact.⁵¹ The staff and facilities were downsized, with accelerated instructional camps still held at the Academy site for several months of the year. In 1979, the Royals abandoned the Academy complex and it was donated to the Kansas City YMCA.⁵²

At the time, it was generally reported that the Academy was closed primarily for financial reasons. In retrospect, however, it is easy to see that the Academy received little support from much of the management of the Royals, notably general manager Cedric Tallis

and head of player development Lou Gorman. Instead of being seen as an integral part of the Royals' player-development system, it was seen as competition, utilizing resources, especially financial, which could have been used in the traditional player-development programs. Because of this attitude of Royals management, the Academy may not have been given any more time to allow its potential to come to fruition. Syd Thrift, a believer in the Academy, resigned out of frustration in 1972, seeing that the Academy was receiving support from no one else in management but Kauffman.⁵³ Charlie Metro blames the failings of the Academy on Syd Thrift, noting that Thrift ignored almost all of

the advice Metro had to offer on the recognition of talent and the training of players.⁵⁴ Likewise Metro's opinion of the Academy, that it was "something of a disaster" and full of "crazy instruction," is indicative of both the contentiousness surrounding the Academy and the outlook of the career baseball men running the Royals at the time.⁵⁵ Despite acquiescing to his baseball people and closing the Academy, Kauffman remained frustrated by the inertia he found in baseball with regard to any new ideas. He later stated that he believed that the Royals would have been better off keeping the Academy alive.⁵⁶

Eventually, 14 graduates of the Academy were called up to the major leagues. The most successful of the group were: the aforementioned Frank White, who is currently working in management for the Royals; U. L. Washington, who played in the major leagues for ten years, primarily at shortstop with the Royals; Rodney Scott, a second baseman who played seven years in the majors, enjoying his best years with the Montreal Expos; and Ron Washington, who played 12 years in the majors, mainly with the Minnesota Twins, and who has served as a coach for many years following his playing career. Given that the 14 Academy alumni who made it to the majors would probably not have had any career in baseball without the existence of the Academy, its impact is readily apparent.

Even today, the Academy has had a lasting impact on many of those who were a part of the endeavor. Frank White states that he continues to use what he learned at the Academy in his teaching of players, and that "the Academy experience made an indelible impression on his approach to the game."⁵⁷ Steve Boros stated that "a day doesn't go by where I don't use the things I learned at the Academy."⁵⁸ Likewise, Syd Thrift called the Academy "the most stimulating baseball

experience I have ever been a part of."⁵⁹

In looking back at the Kansas City Royals' Baseball Academy, it must be seen as a genuinely innovative endeavor that challenged the hidebound methods of the baseball establishment. There is no question that the science employed at the Academy, the use of technology such as radar guns, video technology, strength and conditioning equipment, and even stopwatches quickly made their way into ubiquity among all major league teams. Likewise, many of the training methods were soon found throughout organized baseball after their employment at the Academy. However, as was found at the Academy, it is very hard to transform an athlete into a baseball player. The adage that the hardest thing to do in all of sports, to hit a baseball was again proven true at the Academy. All of the Academy graduates who enjoyed time in the major leagues were at best fair hitters.

The Academy was innovative and did represent the cutting edge in both the study of the science of baseball and the pedagogy of baseball. It was this approach which brought about its successes, including bringing several players who would more than likely *never played* any professional baseball to the major leagues, and advancing the scientific approach to physical and mental training for playing baseball. However, it was this innovative approach which led to the downfall of the Academy by creating fear in the minds of traditional hidebound baseball men who, as Bill James sarcastically put it "didn't want to be associated with any commie pinko radical ideas."⁶⁰ Clearly Ewing Kauffman's vision of the Baseball Academy, one of bringing science and an innovative business approach to the game, has made an under-recognized yet important impact on modern baseball.



Notes

1. Sid Bordman, *Expansion to Excellence: An Intimate Portrait of the Kansas City Royals* (Kansas City, MO, no date), 8.
2. Charlie Metro with Tom Altherr. *Safe by a Mile* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 226.
3. Anne Morgan, *Prescription for Success: The Life and Values of Ewing Marion Kauffman* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews and McMeel, 1995), 2-3.
4. Morgan, 249. It should be noted that major league players had their own retirement package offered through the players union.
5. Joe McGuff, "Royals to Place a Coach With Every Farm Team." *The Sporting News*, February 21, 1970, n.p.
6. Joe McGuff, "Royals Offer Players \$\$\$ Counsel." *The Sporting News*, July 11, 1970, n.p.
7. Morgan, 251.
8. Bill James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 504.
9. Murray Polner. *Branch Rickey: A Biography* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), 134.
10. For a description of Griffith's work with the Cubs, see: Christopher Green. "Psychology Strikes Out: Coleman Griffith and the Chicago Cubs." *History of Psychology* 6 no. 3 (2003): 267-283.
11. For a description of Tracy's work with the Browns and its impact on baseball, see: Alan Kornspan and Mary MacCracken. "The Use of Psychology in Professional Baseball." *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, 11, No. 2 (2003), 36-43.
12. Brad Wilson. "College Courses Part of Royal Academy Program," June 13, 1970, with incomplete citation from Kansas City Royals File, National Baseball Hall of Fame.
13. Kevin Kerrane. *Dollar Sign on the Muscle: The World of Baseball Scouting* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999 reprint of the 1984 edition), 153-156.
14. Morgan, 252.
15. Lou Piniella and Maury Allen. *Sweet Lou* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), 34-42.
16. Morgan, 253.
17. Syd Thrift and Barry Shapiro. *The Game According to Syd: The Theories and Teachings of Baseball's Leading Innovator* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 27.
18. Morgan, 253-254.
19. "SUAB Branch of Baseball: KC Academy," June 16, 1972, with incomplete citation from Kansas City Royals File, National Baseball Hall of Fame.
20. Thrift and Shapiro, 27.
21. Joe McGuff. "Work Starting on Royals' Academy," *The Sporting News*, February 7, 1970, n.p.
22. The exact location of the Academy was 6700 Clark Road in Sarasota, Florida, on State Highway 72, six miles east of its junction with U.S. 41.
23. Thrift and Shapiro, 29.
24. Joe McGuff. "Royals Will Build Florida Academy; Cost Is \$3 Million." *The Sporting News*, September 27, 1969, n.p.
25. Spike Claussen. "K.C. Baseball Academy Dedication on March 21." *The Sporting News*, February 27, 1971, n.p.
26. Thrift and Shapiro, 29.
27. Jerome Holtzman. "Kauffman Never Ignores a Bright Idea," April 1, 1972, with incomplete citation from Kansas City Royals File, National Baseball Hall of Fame.
28. Brad Wilson. "College Courses Part of Royal Academy Program," June 13, 1970, with incomplete citation from Kansas City Royals File, National Baseball Hall of Fame.
29. Claassen, n.p.
30. Information on the coaching career of Hal Baird at Auburn can be found at www.auburn.edu/athletics/base/baird.html.
31. Harold Claassen. "15 Selected for Royals' Academy." *The Sporting News*, July 25, 1970, n.p.
32. George McClelland. "Royals' Academy Makes It a Whole New Ballgame." *Virginian-Pilot*, August 27, 1972, E2.
33. Thrift and Shapiro, 125-126.
34. *Ibid*, 102-110.
35. *Ibid*, 34.
36. Holtzman, n.p.
37. "Royals Sharpen Wits for Hits." *The New York Times*, January 21, 1973, with incomplete citation from Kansas City Royals File, National Baseball Hall of Fame.
38. Thrift and Shapiro, 147-148.
39. *Ibid*, 31-32. Also see Joe McGuff. "Royals Adopting Mod Look in Training Camp Techniques." *The Sporting News*, March 24, 1973, 44.
40. Thrift and Shapiro, 32.
41. Morgan, 278.
42. Joe Posnanski. "Extra Innings: Frank White Is Back in the Games, Hoping to Lead a Royals Rally." *Kansas City Star*, September 21, 1997, n.p.
43. Frank White, phone interview by Richard J. Puerzer, February 4, 2003.
44. James, 504.
45. C. C. Johnson Spink. "We Believe . . ." *The Sporting News*, September 11, 1971, n.p.
46. All statistics related to the performance of the Academy teams in the Gulf Coast League were found in the 1972, 1973, and 1974 *Official Baseball Guides*, (St. Louis, MO: The Sporting News).
47. Joe McGuff, "Fast-Moving Royals Junk Timetable," *The Sporting News*, September 25, 1971, n.p.
48. "Royals Promote Grads," May 13, 1972, with incomplete citation from Kansas City Royals File, National Baseball Hall of Fame.
49. Joe McGuff. "Royals Extending Academy Plan to Farmhands." *The Sporting News*, August 5, 1972, n.p.
50. Joe McGuff. "Kaycee Academy Grooms Rejects, But Cost Is High." *The Sporting News*, April 21, 1973, 17.
51. Sid Bordman. "Royals Close Their Academy," May 18, 1974, with incomplete citation from Kansas City Royals File, National Baseball Hall of Fame.
52. "Owner of Royals Donates Baseball Complex to 'Y,'" December 23, 1979, with incomplete citation from Kansas City Royals File, National Baseball Hall of Fame.
53. Thrift and Shapiro, 33.
54. Charlie Metro, phone interview with Richard J. Puerzer, June 19, 2003.
55. Metro with Altherr, 331.
56. Morgan, 260.
57. White interview.
58. Thrift and Shapiro, 34.
59. *Ibid*, 25.
60. Michael Lewis. *Moneyball* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

This paper was presented first at the 15th Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, 2003. It has been selected for publication of the best papers from 2003 and 2004 under the title *The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, 2003 and 2004* by McFarland & Company, Publishers, Inc.