

THE PEE WEE REESE REPORT

Newsletter of the Louisville Chapter of

the Society for American Baseball Research



Another Successful SABR Day in the Books

By Tad Myre

SABR Day 2024 for the Pee Wee Reese Chapter was another success. Held on Saturday, February 3, 2024, at the Louisville Slugger Museum, the program was well-attended and action-packed.

Commissioner Tad Myre led things off by announcing that our friend Lew Freedman had a last-minute emergency that prevented him and his wife Debra from making it this year. Lew was going to focus on his delightful recent book "Tales from the Clubhouse." Commissioner Myre gave a short "book review", and we'll look to make it up to him sometime, either with a visit or a Zoom meeting.

Next, Mr. Myre introduced Bailey Mazik, our primary contact with the Louisville Slugger Museum and Bat Factory, who has attended a number of SABR Days in a row and has been a good friend to our Chapter throughout. Bailey is originally from Columbus, Ohio, came to Louisville to get her master's degree, and has stayed with our fair city and with the museum for seven years now. Bailey took a moment to tell the audience about the recently completed work at the Slugger Museum and upcoming activities.



Nick Curran of the Bats gives a preview of the upcoming Louisville Bats season.

Next up we passed our new Bylaws, prepared by Ken Draut (with some edits by Tad), and elected a full slate of officers and Steering Committee members. The new leader, elected by popular acclaim, is Chris Betsch. Chris will make a great Commissioner and hopes to get a lot of support from the Steering Committee and anyone else who wants to participate in Chapter activities, research, writing, etc.

In Ken Draut's absence (he was in Florida), Doug Draut presented the financials. The Chapter has a positive bank account so that Mr. Myre didn't leave Mr. Betsch completely in the lurch.

Next up was new member Greg King. Greg, a recently retired Louisville attorney, is a history buff and has been developing and leading a series of tours at Cave Hill Cemetery. Greg wants to develop a baseball tour there and expand it to include other sports. With Muhammad Ali buried there and a host of other celebrities, most recently including Denny Crum, it should be a full show. Mr. Myre sang Greg's praises, having already gone on the lawyers and politicians tour, and Greg gave us an overview of his plans.

Mr. Myre then introduced Dorian Hairston, whom we had the good fortune of landing as a guest last week. We weren't sure how much time we could allot Dorian, who had just published a book of poems, but with Lew's unfortunate absence, that gave Dorian more time than he would have had. Dorian's new book of poetry, "Pretend the Ball is Named Jim Crow," is written mostly through the

consciousness of the great Josh Gibson, although Harold "Hooks" Tinker also makes several appearances. Dorian, who was accompanied by his Mom, Dad, and brother Devin, talked about his work and then proceeded to read seven or eight of his poems. It was clear that the crowd was touched, and a number of questions came from audience members. A wonderful job by Dorian and a wonderful book for your library, baseball or otherwise.



Dorian Hairston shares a selection from his book, "Pretend the Ball is named Jim Crow."

Gary Cieradkowski next took the podium and, with the help of slides he'd prepared, told us about some of his latest projects. Gary is our newsletter artist and will be doing a Sammy Hughes baseball card soon. Gary's work is fabulous, and if you haven't signed up for his blog that should be a no-brainer. <https://studiogaryc.com/>. He's down to earth and has found a niche in baseball writing and art that no one else comes close to filling.

Chris Betsch, incoming Commissioner, then told us of plans for 2024. These include the program at the Frazier Museum on March 26, future meetings and Bats games, providing a grave marker for Sammy T. Hughes, and work to secure some historical markers commemorating the founding of the National League and Fleet Walker's breaking of the color barrier at Elliot Park here in Louisville.

Then, everyone went down to the first-floor theater to watch Evelyn Pollard's splendid documentary about the Cleveland Buckeyes. It was really well done and told the story of a team that came out of nowhere to win the Negro Leagues World Series. Evelyn is a teacher with JCPS and a Cleveland native, so she has been chasing this for some time. All that work has paid off. Everybody was totally impressed with the film, and afterward Evelyn made a few remarks and answered a few questions.

Finally, we had our trivia contest, administered by Jack Sullivan. Commissioner Myre got the first four and finished with thirteen, mostly due to having just read Lew's book, but that wasn't enough even to show. First place was Chris Betsch, second place was Rodger Payne, and third place was Ryan Schroer.

It's always good to see the out-of-towners at the meeting. Thanks to Roger Snell and Ted Sloan for making the trip over, it was great to see Kelly Park up from Benton, Jerry Walker up from E-Town, and Gary Cieradkowski and Russ Speiller from the Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati area. Great to meet the Hairston family, and a special thanks to Ryan Schroer for making the trip and to his devoted friend Lesa for getting him here. ■



Check out our Facebook page!
Pee Wee Reese SABR Chapter Group

A Concise History of the Pee Wee Reese SABR Chapter (Part Two)

By Harry Rothgerber

This is the second in a series of articles that will tell the history of the Louisville Chapter of SABR. The series will be continued in future editions of the Pee Wee Reese Report.

Part One of our chapter's history took us up to 1993 when Bob Bailey, then chapter chair, moved to the Philadelphia area. It is interesting to note that when Bob left, he donated Pete Browning's original gravestone (with his name incorrectly spelled ("Lewis" R. Browning), to the Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory. This 500-pound grave marker carved from Vermont granite had rested in his garage since the dedication of the new monument to Browning in 1994. That elaborate grave marker for "The Gladiator" was erected in Cave Hill Cemetery courtesy of Louisville Mayor Sloane, the City of Louisville, and the employees of Hillerich and Bradsby Company. Upon noticing that the old one was to be discarded, Bob asked cemetery staff to load it into his station wagon, and he drove tailpipe-to-asphalt back to Goshen. Lord only knows how he unloaded it!

Upon Bob's departure, Barbara Oremland became chapter chair and served in that capacity officially until 1998 when the first chapter election took place. Oremland was an assistant professor of physical therapy at the University of Louisville. Her love for baseball history only began in 1991, when she applied for an assistant producer position on a PBS documentary about baseball. A self-described baseball illiterate until then, she learned quickly and joined the Cleveland SABR chapter. "I love history," she said, "and had no idea this game so boldly told the story of this country."

A first: When involved with a stickball fundraiser on behalf of Louisville's Neighborhood House, for which a New York team came to play, Oremland was named "Stickball Commissioner of Louisville" by Mayor Jerry Abramson. An active researcher, Oremland worked on a television show about the history of baseball in Louisville, titled "Louisville Sluggers." The University of Kentucky also asked her to write the section on African-American Baseball in the Encyclopedia of Louisville. Morris Eckhouse, then national SABR CEO, said, "She is incredibly enthusiastic. To say that she has a fondness for the subject is an understatement."

At times, Oremland was a study in contrasts. A story in the Courier-Journal titled "Woman fields reputation as baseball history expert" began with these remarks: "Barbara Oremland isn't your standard baseball junkie. She can't fill you in on the rules, doesn't play in a Rotisserie League and has no idea who might win this year's batting title. But when it comes to baseball history, she's a fanatic."

During one brief period in the mid-1990s, she served as chair of the informal group Louisville Baseball Task Force, led the 70th Anniversary of Parkway Field celebration, and wrote trivia questions for USA Today's Baseball Weekly. However, the Couri-

er-Journal observed, "You shouldn't expect to see Oremland at many games. She's not a big fan of today's sport." Oremland responded, "No matter what happens in my life, baseball always comes through."



Harry Rothgerber presents the Home Plate Award to Anne Jewell in 2013 as the chapter's namesake looks on.

Meanwhile, in 1995, a group of local SABR members and other baseball activists led by SABR stalwart Henry C. Mayer met at the Louisville Visitors and Convention Center to discuss a plan that Henry had hatched—to make a formal proposal to the SABR Board of Directors to host a future national convention. The 20-25 people who were present voted unanimously to be "all in."

Henry enlisted the writer to be his co-chair on this project. Where was chapter chair Barbara Oremland? She chose not to be involved, but quietly gave her blessing to our efforts.

Immediate contact was made with Norman Macht, chair of the national SABR convention committee (and author of the 742-page Connie Mack and the Early Years of Baseball). Meetings were held, lengthy phone calls were conducted, and promises were made. An important third co-chair came on board as local SABR member E. A. "Bud" Thieman became treasurer and financial wizard for the effort. A very long story short—Louisville won its bid to host the 1997 SABR national convention. It was a watershed moment in our chapter's history. ■



Barbara Oremland, Louisville SABR chapter head, 1993-1998.

(Photo: Arza Barnett, Courier-Journal)



L to R: Bud Thieman, Henry Mayer, and Harry Rothgerber - the three co-chairs of the 1997 SABR National Convention in Louisville.

SABR Member Bryan Peabody Keeps Alive Memories of The Long-Departed Kitty League

In the prime years of the minor leagues after World War II, there were once as many as 59 leagues operating under the umbrella of organized baseball. But in the 1950s many of them started shutting down as people began opting to spend their days and nights enjoying other amenities that were becoming more common, like television, drive-in movies, and household air conditioning. Most of the leagues that were forced to cease operations were the ones that were focused on smaller towns. For those who might not be aware, one of the longest-running minor leagues was based in and around Kentucky, Tennessee, and Illinois. The Kentucky-Illinois-Tennessee League was the official name, but everyone knew it better as the Kitty League. The Kitty League was active off and on from 1903 to 1955, and throughout its history it included teams from Owensboro, Hopkinsville, Paducah, and other towns all over Kentucky.



Bryan Peabody displays his certificate showing his appointment as an official Kentucky Colonel. (Photo: baseball.bryanpeabody.com)

Pee Wee Reese Chapter member Bryan Peabody has always taken a special interest in the Kitty League, and especially in baseball around his hometown of Owensboro, Kentucky. For years Bryan has researched all aspects of the league, including players and personalities, memorable games, ballparks, and milestone events.

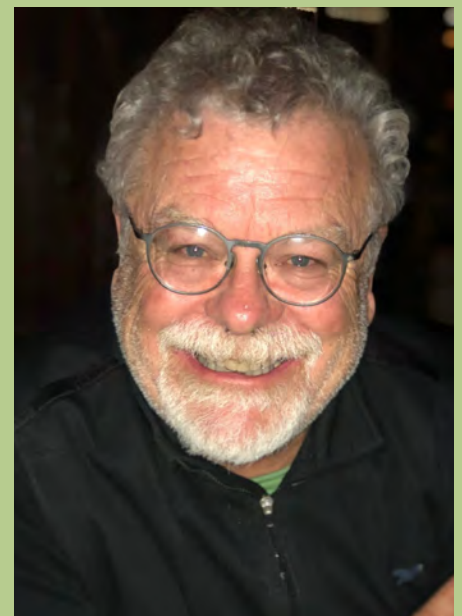
His work can be found on the web page he runs, baseball.bryanpeabody.com. There, you can find a collection of his research articles detailing the history of the Kitty League. His latest post examines the season of the 1946 Owensboro Oilers, the town's first team after the league resumed play following the war. Bryan has also had his articles posted in *Beating the Bushes*, the newsletter of the SABR Minor Leagues Research Committee. In April 2023, Bryan was appointed by Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear as a Kentucky Colonel for his efforts in digging up and documenting the history of the long gone, but not forgotten, Kitty League. ■

Tad Myre Ready to Hand Over the Reins of the Pee Wee Reese Chapter

By Chris Betsch

After serving as President of the Pee Wee Reese Chapter since October 2019, Tad Myre is stepping aside, and Chris Betsch will take over as Commissioner of the Chapter. Tad took over the role after longtime leader Harry Rothgerber was ready to hand over leadership duties. Over the last four years the Pee Wee Reese Chapter accomplished many baseball achievements, most notably providing grave markers for former major league players John Dodge and Felton Snow. Both marker projects helped raise the profile of the chapter, as the events were covered by local news media. The Felton Snow marker dedication was attended by Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer and Negro Leagues historian Larry Lester. Tad helped grow our relations with many Louisville groups including the Louisville Bats organization, the Louisville Slugger Museum, the Frazier History Museum, Cave Hill Cemetery, and the Roots 101 African American Museum. During the past years the chapter held successful events for members such as outings at Bats games and the annual SABR Day meetings, and during the Covid year of 2020 we had many Zoom calls to help keep things going. Tad will continue to be active in the chapter in the role of Immediate Past Commissioner. Thanks to Tad for all he has done for the chapter.

Chris Betsch joined SABR in 2018 and since then has been active in several chapter initiatives, including the Dodge and Snow markers, and starting up the Pee Wee Reese Report newsletter. He is excited to see what's in store for the chapter as the 2024 baseball season gets ready to kick off.



*Tad Myre,
President of the
Pee Wee Reese
Chapter since
October 2019*

Gary Cieradkowski's Decades-Long Quest to Learn What Happened to the Chicago Black Sox Players After the Scandal Results in His Latest Artistic Masterpiece

By Russ Speiller

This article will also appear in an upcoming edition of Turnstyle: The SABR Journal of Baseball Arts

We are blessed as modern baseball fans to be witnessing a “unicorn,” the great Shohei Ohtani, a dual-threat ballplayer who shines both on the mound as a pitcher and in the batter’s box as a hitter.

In the world of modern baseball artists, we are equally as fortunate to be experiencing the rise of a dual-threat star who, too, may be a unicorn. SABR member and artist Gary Cieradkowski shines as both an imaginative illustrator and a creative storyteller. You likely have already been introduced to Gary when he made an appearance in Episode 150 of Rob Neyer’s SABRcast or, more recently, when you received your Spring 2023 Baseball Journal Record and looked at the cover art.

If you are unaware, since 2010, Gary Cieradkowski has been creating original illustrations of ballplayers he considers “America’s forgotten heroes,” who primarily played in ‘outsider’ baseball leagues such as semi-pro ball, the Negro League, and the Cuban league. The illustrations are combined with his well-researched and written stories into a series aptly titled *The Infinite Baseball Card Set*.

On September 8, 2023, I had the pleasure to sit down with Gary in his Northern Kentucky basement studio where, among many things, we talked about his latest completed project, an 8-part booklet series of illustrations and stories entitled *After the Black Sox*.

Gary’s personal connection to the Black Sox dates to the late 1970s when he was a kid growing up in New Jersey. Young Gary listened intently as the older gentlemen around him would talk about seeing (Shoeless) Joe Jackson play in a New Jersey Bergen County semi-pro baseball league in the 1920s, after his excommunication from major league baseball.

As a child, Gary had heard about the Black Sox scandal in which eight Chicago White Sox players, including Jackson, were banished from baseball by commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis for throwing the 1919 World Series against the Cincinnati Reds in exchange for money. Thinking it was “really cool” that Jackson ended up playing near his home in Jersey, Gary always had it in the back of his mind that he wanted to find out the real story behind this appearance.

Fast-forward to September 1988, the arrival of the movie *Eight Men Out* based on the 1963 book of the same name. At the very end of the film, a scene portrayed in the year 1925, Black Sox third baseman Buck Weaver, played by actor John Cusack, is sitting in the stands of a New Jersey semi-pro baseball stadium where he is watching Joe Jackson in the field, who is now playing under the assumed name of Brown. Upon seeing the scene, Gary excitedly thought that maybe there was some truth to those stories he heard as a kid.

Thus began Gary’s quest to validate or invalidate the appearances of Joe Jackson in Jersey. Gary located an article in a defunct New York newspaper from 1922 describing a game in which Jackson

played for a Westwood team in Hackensack, New Jersey. It was detailed down to describing the suit that Joe Jackson wore to the game. Gary proceeded to file the article away.

We next come to the year 2010, when Gary Cieradkowski, in a moment where he was deeply missing his father who had suddenly passed away a year earlier, posted on a blog his first illustration, a quickly made pen and ink sketch of baseball player Leon Day, to which he later added a written story accompaniment, thus giving birth to *The Infinite Baseball Card Set*. Gary wanted to come back to the Joe Jackson story and his research led to his learning that all of the other banned Black Sox players continued to play in ‘outsider’ baseball leagues just as Joe Jackson had. The whole idea of an outsider baseball economy with unaffiliated leagues has always fascinated and excited Gary, fueling many of his stories and even the title of his 2015 book *The League of Outsider Baseball*.

Gary’s quest just got much larger. No longer content to settle on a single illustration and story of Joe Jackson post the Black Sox scandal, he was yearning to learn the stories and imagine the illustrations of all eight banned ballplayers as they, too, partook in outsider baseball leagues.

Writing eight separate stories and constructing eight separate illustrations can take a while. In this case, it took thirteen years for several different reasons. Early on, Gary had started some sketches and 1-2 pages of a story per player. But it wasn’t until just a few months before the COVID outbreak in 2020 that Gary could find the time to revisit the Black Sox players in more depth. It was also during this period when a lot of new research came out, a good deal stemming from the SABR Black Sox Scandal Research Committee. Gary went back to his original drawings and brought them up to the much more detailed level of his current work, while also augmenting his old notes with the new research. Being as accurate and up to date as possible in his illustrations and writings is a point of pride for Gary. In fact, it’s the desire for accuracy that led to a few more postponements in the Black Sox scandal project as Gary would believe to be finished with a story and then would receive new information from one of his research inquiries.

Gary set his sights on doing additional research out West where several of the Black Sox players were known to have played ball, but the newspapers from that region were not well digitized. He wrote emails to libraries, awaiting responses. Then came COVID. Library staff was sent home to hunker down, putting a major damper on Gary’s ability to continue to research the Black Sox players as his emails to librarians were met with silence, forcing Gary to again put his project on hold.

In May 2023, Gary finally told himself that he was going to make his ongoing project a final reality. However, as with any booklet Gary is looking to write, he needs a “hook” that will bring his readers into each story. Often finding the hook involves not only a lot of research on the ballplayer, but also an “aha” moment that is unpredictable as to when and where it may occur. For example, at



Baseball illustrator and storyteller Gary Cieradkowski stays very busy in his studio researching, drawing, and writing about the colorful lives of baseball outsiders.
Photo by Russ Speiller

least one aha moment happened for Gary while on a plane trip to see his in-laws. In the case of the After the Black Sox booklet series, Gary recounted for me how he found the hook for his booklet on first baseman “Chick” Gandil.

“Chick Gandil was pretty much the guy who put the whole scandal together. He was the driving force behind it. He wound up taking most of the money and stiffing the other guys. He was just a mean, nasty person which is interesting, but not a hook. I started thinking about what made him that type of person.”

Gary researched Gandil’s background, learning interesting tidbits about Chick, including that he left home in his teens and then worked in a mine in Mexico. Digging still deeper into the background of Chick’s parents, Gary uncovered that Chick’s mother Louisa, who was a housemaid, and Chick’s father Christian, who was a gardener, were witnesses in a famous, but forgotten murder, in which a shady detective constantly harassed the Gandils. Mr. and Mrs. Gandil were kept servants for a wealthy family on the West Coast, leading Gary to postulate that perhaps growing up in a situation where Chick was seeing his servant parents working for crazy rich people with untouchable opulence, fueled his anger, monetary greed, and desire to get out of life what he thought was rightly his. With the murder story in-hand, Gary finally had his hook.

Perhaps the toughest of all challenges that Gary faced in putting the After the Black Sox booklet series together was parsing out the false reported stories of the Black Sox players versus the true ones. For example, Gary found one story in which it was reported that all the Black Sox players appeared for a team in Louisiana in 1923. In fact, Joe Jackson was there but none of the others were. Gary was able to substantiate that the other Black Sox were playing ball someplace else at that time. Fun note: The ‘Sidebar’ section in the Joe Jackson booklet is titled “Black Sox Everywhere,” with a list of all the places the Black Sox players were reported to be sighted.

On the illustration front, Gary’s drawings have evolved quite a bit since the early days of his The Infinite Baseball Card Set blog, in which his favored medium consisted of using pen and ink, as well as oil-colored pencils that would make the drawing look like an oil painting. The illustrations and physical manifestations of Gary’s unique cards were inspired by his love for the old tobacco baseball cards where the images themselves were illustrated. Dimensionally, the initial physical cards Gary constructed were business card size, 2” x 3.5”. However, over time, feedback from Gary’s audience guided him to increase the size by 10% to make the cards easier to read.

In addition to changes in size, over time the line width has gotten smaller and smaller to enable Gary to include more detail in each drawing, ultimately leading to a style of boldness that not only

pleases Gary, but his readers as well. Gary’s goal has always been to create a unique art card style not yet seen in the baseball art world.

That uniqueness is derived and evolved from the work of Gary’s favorite artist, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Specifically, it was upon laying his eyes on the posters of the Frenchman Lautrec that Gary fell in love. Another of Gary’s favorite artists, Edward Penfield, an American illustrator during the “Golden Age of American Illustration,” himself, was inspired by Lautrec. It’s both Lautrec and Penfield’s use of bold lines and flat colors that have always captivated Gary and to which he emulates in his baseball art.

As Gary approaches the finishing touches on the artwork for his cards, he will solicit feedback from his wife and friends, particularly if he is trying to decide which background scene to depict behind the ballplayer. Most often, Gary says, “it’s the first option that I do that I then tend to go with because if you overthink something too much, you tend to screw it up.”

I asked Gary about the public reactions he has gotten to his art cards and stories over the years, especially considering that The Infinite Baseball Card Set was born out of the lack of his ability to continue talking with his father about baseball after his dad passed away and, thus, was a kind of personal therapy for Gary that just happened to catch the attention of others.

Thankfully Gary Cieradkowski did decide to post his sketches and stories in a manner that the public could find him because not only did they discover an incredible illustrator and storyteller in Gary, but Gary discovered in them a community of like-minded individuals who, though they could never replace his beloved father, have been able to help fuel Gary’s contin-

ued passion for uncovering the stories of baseball’s great ‘outsiders.’

But most gratifying of all for Gary are the telephone calls and letters he receives from parents telling him that because of his stories and artwork, their sons, and daughters, who previously had no desire to listen to or go to a ballgame with their dads and moms, have now reversed course and found their love for the game and the personalities within it.

As I wrapped up my conversation with Gary and prepared to leave, I couldn’t help but notice that his dining room table was stacked with copies of his now finished After the Black Sox booklet series waiting to be assembled in the special boxes Gary has designed for them before they are mailed out as a part of the preorders he received. Soon enough the mailboxes of many will be filled with a new set of captivating illustrations and stories, sure to bring even more folks into the baseball fold. Unicorn Gary Cieradkowski will be welcoming them with open arms and a gracious heart. ■

Acknowledgment: I would like to greatly thank baseball artist and SABR member Gary Cieradkowski for allowing me to interview him at his studio. You can find all of Gary’s work at studiogaryc.com



Picture of the After the Black Sox special booklet series

Recap of The 2023 World Series Game Watch Party

By Chris Betsch

The Pee Wee Reese Chapter once again met for a World Series game watch party on October 20. We have done this for a few of the past series and it's starting to become a fun annual tradition of getting together and seeing some faces. We weren't sure what kind of turnout we might have, so we let the folks at Damon's Restaurant in St. Matthews know there might be eight to ten of us coming to watch the game. They were less than enthused when about 25 baseball fans piled into the backroom to watch Game 3 of the series. But the team at Damon's gave us great service, and we appreciate them accommodating us.

When discussion in the room started up around who everyone was rooting for to take home the title of the world's greatest wildcard baseball team, the Rangers or the Diamondbacks, the overwhelming opinion seemed to be "I don't care." It was hardly a match-up of clubs of either historical or regional interest to us. However, there was a buzz going around about how local Louisville product Brandon Pfaadt, from Louisville's own Bellarmine University, was doing. He was cruising along for the Diamondbacks, and the Rangers only got to him in the 3rd inning when they scored three runs, but that was all Texas needed as Arizona could only muster one run in the game.

But the game took a back seat to some laughs and some great baseball talk. Conversations ranged from a rundown of the past 50 World Series winners and losers, to how the 1985 World Series would have been much better with instant replay (at least in Tad's eyes, Rodger is fine with the way it turned out), to Moses Fleet-

wood Walker and Happy Chandler's Kentucky connections, and with a smattering of what books we're reading. Then, as always, Dr. Jack Sullivan both entertained and flustered us with one of his World Series trivia contests. His questions covered just about everything, except oddly there was no mention of the '75 Series. To the surprise of pretty much nobody, the Sawyer brothers wound up with the highest score.

We'll plan to do this again next October, no matter who makes it to the series in 2024. But in the meantime, we will have some more meetups during the upcoming season, whether we hold them at a ballpark, in front of a set of big-screen TVs somewhere, or on Zoom. Hope to see you at one!



Pee Wee Reese members at our World Series Game Watch party.

The Major League Baseball Lifetime Pass

One of the favorite pastimes of Pee Wee Reese Chapter member Rob Gividen is to scour through old articles on Newspapers.com looking for odds and ends of baseball through the years in Louisville. If you are on our Facebook page (and if you aren't, why not?), you have seen Rob's posts that have introduced us to the Louisville Junior Colonels academy, showcased past Colonel teams, and recalled popular events at Parkway Field, among other things.

Recently he read up on a curious but little-discussed subject in baseball: the major league lifetime pass that gets its holder into any baseball game of their choosing. Baseball players are eligible for a pass after eight years of service, and executives are eligible after 25 years. Kentucky politician and SABR friend Ben Chandler once reminisced about being able to go to games with his grandfather, A.B. Happy Chandler, using the pass. Interestingly, the pass isn't just given to baseball lifers. Over the years baseball life passes have been handed to celebrities, presidents, soldiers, and American heroes. The stories of some of those passes can be found here:

<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/80785/baseballs-golden-ticket-mlb-lifetime-pass>

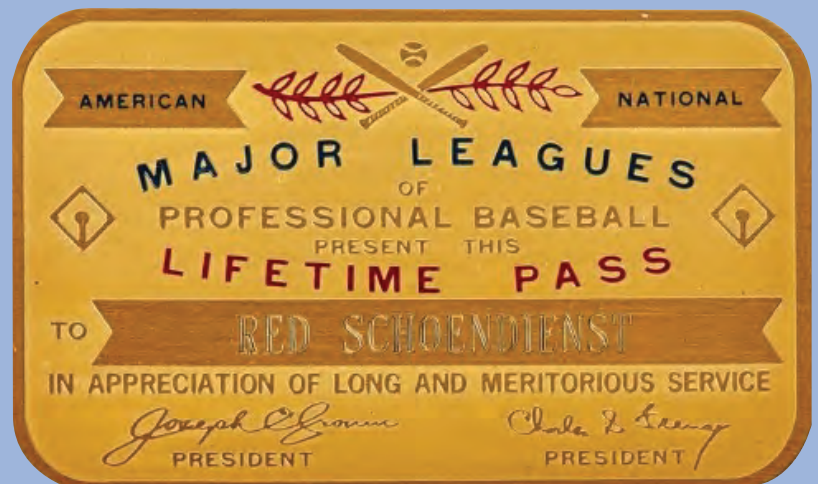


Photo: Leland's Auction

A Review of “Back To Baseball” Game Simulator

By Roger Snell

Software developers who love baseball as much as we do are converting all these years of SABR research into remarkably fun replays and “what ifs” of baseball history. My discovery of backtobaseball.com was shared with all of you via email several weeks ago.

On Jan. 11, the national SABR committee on simulations and games spent more than an hour zooming with Dave Koch, who created a dice and tabletop baseball game while in school and then learned programming to launch Action PC Sports more than two decades ago. In addition to baseball, he has created basketball, football, hockey, and golf games. In this dream world, Joe Burrow doesn’t get hurt and I get to play out just how great this year’s University of Kentucky basketball team is going to be.

Digital Diamond Baseball v 11 is a new entry into the field by another baseball-passionate solo programmer. What is unique about this game is that you can play your tabletop dice baseball and enter play outcomes as they occur to generate box scores and an encyclopedia of stats. But my favorite feature is that he provides an extensive catalog of Negro League Baseball teams, generated from SABR researchers who are increasingly amassing historical stats of these teams. The same has been done for the Pacific Coast League as far back as the 1920s.

I’ve had the great fun of actually “watching” my personal Moonlight Graham, Berly “Trader” Horne, pitch along with Charlie Root in the PCL. Those who have read my bio of Charlie Root know about Horne as my neighbor in Arcanum, Ohio. He was the subject of the first of 3,000 newspaper articles I wrote in my career. He won only one game in the major leagues in 1929 but had over 100 wins in the minors during a lengthy and wonderful career in California. Info about this and my book can both be found at rootforthecubs.com. Fellow Pee Wee Reese chapter member Ted Sloan was the editor. While researching the book, I was joined by Sloan and member Steve Vest, publisher of “Kentucky Monthly,” while we watched Babe Ruth’s “called shot” off Root in the living room of Kirk Kandle, whose grandfather filmed the entire at-bat.

I have been a beta tester for Out of the Park Baseball for nearly 20 years and may talk about that more in a future newsletter.

According to the developer, “Back to Baseball is dedicated towards providing graphical play-by-play for major league baseball games, including all World Series, All-Star, and playoff games, as well as most regular-season games dating back to 1903.”

“Play-by-play is shown only for the last pitch of the at-bat. Thus, ball and strike sequence is not shown. However, where available, the ball and strike count is shown at the time of the last pitch. It should be noted that our play-by-play text contained in the Current Play and Prior Plays are representations of what might have happened given the play information available to us, and therefore are not necessarily actual descriptions of those plays. Although every attempt has been made to accurately represent this information graphically, Back to Baseball makes no guarantees of its accuracy, and shall not be held liable for any consequences arising from its use.”

Here’s another great feature. You can match any two teams against each other and sim 5,000 games in just seconds to learn these answers to my favorite questions:

- *Who said there’s no tying or crying in baseball? The 1976 Reds won 2,500 times and so did the 1975 Reds. Some mysteries shall never be resolved.*
- *Should the 1929 Chicago Cubs have defeated the 1929 Philadelphia Athletics, the focus of my book? Barely. 51-49 percent in favor of the Cubs.*

Back to Baseball is free and easily accessed on the web without any frills or ad garbage. It’s a passion project of someone who built a program around every play-by-play and box score ever recorded by SABR and other baseball nuts like us.

You can watch the actual “as played” games, including our chapter’s namesake, Pee Wee Reese, in the World Series or any other game of his career.

Member Jack Sullivan can relive every play of his beloved Red Sox winning the World Series for the first time since the Caveman era or run 5,000 sims of Red Sox’ “what ifs.”

On the home page currently, every home run hit by Hank Aaron is displayed in a spreadsheet. You can click and “watch” any home run, including his last on July 20, 1976, with a look at the lineups, box scores, and the rest of the game if you wish.

Another link goes to the “50 greatest games in baseball history” (as chosen by fans using the website) with the complete play-by-play visually displayed. Examples include the Mantle/Maris 61 home run quest; Randy Johnson’s 300th win; Jim Maloney walks 10 Cubs but wins a no-hitter in more than 9 innings on Aug. 19, 1965.

Note from the Pee Wee Reese chapter – we would love for you to share your own tests, results, and favorites so we can post them in future newsletters.

Kentucky Baseball on



Jake the Diamond Dog

One of the most unique things about taking in a game at Slugger Field in the 2000s was Jake the Diamond Dog delivering fresh baseballs to the home plate umpire. Here’s some footage of Jake in action during the 2011 Father’s Day game in Louisville between the Louisville Bats and the Toledo Mud Hens.



Rare Home Movie of the Louisville Colonels at Borchert Field from 1936

Great in-game action of the Louisville Colonels and Milwaukee Brewers taken on May 1 and May 3, 1936 in Milwaukee’s Borchert Field.



Felton Snow marker dedication

WLKY News story about the Felton Snow marker dedication – and look for our Pee Wee Reese Chapter member Ken Draut!

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The Duke of Highs and Lows

By Gary Cieradkowski

ONE OF MY FAVORITE teams to study are the Cincinnati Reds of the 1935-1945 period. During this time the Reds were trying to rebuild after their tainted 1919 World Series victory. Though they had some good teams in the early 1920s, The New York Giants always seemed to beat them out. Being a small market, the Reds didn't have the cash resources that the Giants had nor the farm system the Cardinals boasted. Plus, their biggest star, Edd Roush, staged long hold outs over his contract that often stretched into the first month of the season. His absence from the Reds lineup likely cost the Reds the 1922 and 1923 pennants as they finished in second place both those years. The Reds sank into a second division team after this and the start of the Great Depression in 1929 sent the team into a further nose dive.

Things began to slowly change for the better when Larry McPhail was brought in as the club's General Manager. He freshened up the old ballpark, convinced millionaire Powel Crosley to buy the team and introduced night baseball to the majors. McPhail spent Crosley's money wisely and the Reds soon developed a decent farm system, replacing former stars like Babe Herman and Kiki Cuyler with homegrown players. This began paying off with a close 4th place finish in 1938 and finally with back to back pennants in 1939-40 and a World Championship in 1940.

One of the only players who bridged the eras of the lousy and great Reds of the 1930s was starting pitcher Paul Derringer. This guy has to be one of the top players in any discussion of the "Hall of Very Good" category, and not many pitchers in baseball have had the dramatic highs and lows that Paul Derringer's career had.

He came from a family of Kentucky tobacco farmers. Though his given name was Samuel Paul Derringer, he insisted people called him "Duke." The regal moniker matched his out-sized "take-charge" personality that was already evident in his teen years. Case-in-point: originally a catcher, Derringer was behind the plate for his high school team when the starting pitcher started walking everyone in sight. Not wanting to miss a camping trip he had planned for after the game, Duke shed his tools of ignorance and ascended the mound to take over. He struck out the next eight batters and went on his camping trip. He also found his calling.

After high school Derringer played semi-pro ball for coal mining teams in West Virginia. Somehow, a scout for the St. Louis Cardinals found him, and he entered the minor leagues in 1927. Six-foot-three and husky, Derringer developed an imposing high leg kick delivery style that helped keep batters off balance while he served up his blazing fastball.

Once, when he was trying to impress some Cardinals front office types, Derringer went into an especially exaggerated high leg kick windup – and promptly got his cleat caught in the webbing of

his glove, collapsing in a heap in front of home plate.

The Cardinals brought him up to The Show in 1931. As a rookie he won 18 games for the pennant-bound Cardinals and looked to have a bright future in St. Louis. However, the Cardinals badly needed a shortstop, and he was dealt to Cincinnati in 1933.

Going from a pennant contender to the last-place Reds, Derringer lost 27 games in '33. Toiling for a terrible Cincinnati team made up of over the hill veterans and no-account bush leaguers, Derringer lost 21 games the next year.

But then Duke's take-charge personality kicked in. Beginning in 1935, he almost single-handedly dragged the Reds out of the cellar, winning 154 games through 1942. Reds teammate Billy Werber tells a great story that fully illustrates Derringer's competitiveness. During the tight pennant race of 1940, Duke was pitching as often as his arm could stand it to keep the Reds in first place. The Cardinals were coming on fast, and in one game against them, he was winning, but starting to falter in the ninth inning. Werber went to the mound and said, "Strike out the side, Paul, and I'll buy you a beer." Derringer promptly whiffed future Hall of Famers Enos Slaughter, Joe Medwick, and Johnny Mize to end the game. "My God," said Werber, "You'd do anything for a beer!"

The 6-time All-Star annually finished near the top in strikeouts, complete games and ERA while his pin-point control meant he averaged just one walk per game. His excellent 25-7 record in 1939 led the Reds to their first pennant since 1919 and his .781 winning percentage led all NL pitchers. He won 20 games in the team's 1940 World Championship season and was the victor in both Game 4 and 7 in the World Series. Derringer was the winning pitcher in the first MLB night game in 1935 and pitched two 1-hitters in 1940. Among Reds pitchers he ranks 3rd in career wins and innings pitched, and 9th in career strikeouts.

He was traded to the Cubs in 1943 and won 16 games in 1945 as Chicago won the National League pennant. This was his to be last season in the majors, wrapping up a 15-year career that saw him winning four pennants with three different teams.

Derringer also led the league in mischievousness. He was the Reds' fashion plate and an all-star man-about-town. A big fan of his spirits, Duke sometimes found his alcohol intake at odds with his fiery temperment. His most notorious bacchanal happened in 1936 when the inebriated pitcher tried gate crashing a private party at a Philadelphia hotel. When he was refused entry, Duke went full Joe Louis on the party's host. The ensuing bust up caused eight grand in damages and earned him a suspension.

Later in life, Duke repented his formerly roguish lifestyle, settling down in Florida and raising a family. The change was so radical that when two of his former Reds teammates attended his funeral and listened to the preacher eulogize Derringer's devotion to family, community service, and philanthropic good deeds, one nudged the other and whispered, "Is he talking about Paul?" ■



Kentuckian Paul Derringer has to be at the top of any "Hall of Very Good" list



UPCOMING BASEBALL EVENTS

- MARCH 20** → *MLB Opening Day*
- MARCH 29** → *Louisville Bats season opener*
- MARCH 31** → *Louisville Bats home opener*
- APRIL 15** → *MLB Jackie Robinson Day*
- APRIL 5** → *Bowling Green Hot Rods opener*
- APRIL 25** → *Lexington Legends home opener*
- JUNE 6-9** → *SABR Negro League Conference*
- AUG. 7-11** → *SABR 52 Convention*

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Have questions or comments, or want to contribute to a future newsletter? Email Chris Betsch at cbbetsch@gmail.com

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