

THE SQUIBBER

February 2022

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

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TRIVIA QUESTION: Who was the first Washington player to come to bat in an American League game? (See answer below)

THE 2022 BOB DAVIDS CHAPTER MEETING "Frank'-ly, my Dear, we Did Give a Damn" – By Mark Pattison

First in war, first in peace, first in SABR. That's the Bob Davids Chapter for you. We were a chapter before SABR even thought of the idea of chapters. And that spirit has continued to typify our chapter.

When you have a SABR Day meeting lineup so appetizing that it gets mentioned in "This Week in SABR," you know it's going to be good. It was the case last year when we hosted former Washington Senator Fred Valentine and Washington Post columnist Jerry Brewer, among others. We topped out at about 104 participants at any one time during the meeting.

And the 2022 lineup was astounding on paper: Washington Senators slugger Frank Howard; first Washington Nationals closer Chad Cordero; Major League Baseball official historian John Thorn with presidential historian Craig Fehrman; Retrosheet founder (and chapter member) Dave Smith; and Nats analytics from the Baseball Prospectus dynamic duo of Sydney Bergman and Jarrett Seidler.

Numbers don't lie. More than 170 registered for the Jan. 29 event via Zoom, and we topped out at 126 participants at various points during the day.

Following a moment of silence for deceased chapter members Dave Paulson and Mark Pankin, Bergman and Seidler got things started with their take on the Nationals' rebuild on the fly last year, plus a look at the depth of the franchise's farm system.

Thorn and Ferhman engaged in a scintillating conversation over baseball and the American presidency, taking in a number of commanders-in-chief from George Washington to George W. Bush.

One highlight was the display (thanks "share screen!") of a pre-Civil War die-cast medal that included some of the rudiments of baseball as an example of the taming of a growing nation.

Chapter President Peter Cottrell kept things moving with Cordero, who called in from California (where it was 8:00 in the morning!) and said he still keeps his hand in the game, albeit at the amateur level.

Cordero spoke of his enduring fondness for his days coming out of the home bullpen at RFK Stadium, where he could see some of the stands shake -- literally -- with excitement as the just-transplanted Montreal Expos were making a serious bid to capture the flag in the National League East.

Speaking of RFK, nobody during the chapter meeting might have had a more intimate knowledge of the place than "The Capital Punisher," Frank Howard, who was blasting moon shots into the farthest reaches of the stadium well before men landed on the moon. In a day filled with highlights, Howard's perspective on his days as a Dodger and a Senator might have been the highlight-iest of them all.

We're crossing our fingers that we can have more sessions like this with "Hondo," and sooner rather than later.

Smith, who has always made entertaining presentations with Retrosheet data at in-person chapter meetings, merely transferred his mastery to the digital world with details on ejections, which have climbed from 11,000 from the late Doug Pappas' work to more than 18,000 and counting -- who got the thumb, and why, and who did the thumbing, and the seasons that some arbiters were super-sensitive to their authority being questioned -- and how video replay appeals now factor into these numbers.

While none of us know what the coming year will bring, the chapter shall always endeavor to assemble the most compelling possible speakers for its annual meetings.

CHAPTER MEMBER'S ACCOUNT A BEST BOOK FINALIST: Manheim Book Honored

Bob Davids member Jerry Manheim's book, "This Never Happened: The Mystery Behind the Death of Christy Mathewson," was recently named a Finalist in the Sports category in the 2021 American Book Fest Best Book competition.

"This Never Happened" is the first volume of The Cooperstown Trilogy, an exploration through fiction of some of the hidden dynamics of professional baseball. The remaining two volumes, "The Game Keepers: Whitewash, Blackmail" and "Doubleday Doubletake," will be published in April 2022 by Summer Game Books.

You can find the latest updates throughout the spring at Jerry's website, jbmanheimbooks.com.

HOME FOR A CELLAR-DWELLING TEAM, By Francis Kinlaw

The Washington Senators' 1957 baseball season, like most of the club's seasons of the decade, was filled with frustration. The team finished in last place in the American League, 43 games behind the pennant-winning New York Yankees, with a woeful record of 55-99.

Little enthusiasm was generated even early in the season, as the Senators lost 16 of their first 21 games. That depressing start to the campaign resulted in the firing of Manager Charlie Dressen by club President Calvin Griffith and the promotion of coach Cookie Lavagetto into a very challenging job.

Roy Sievers, who played most often in left field but occasionally at first base, was the star of the team, as he posted a batting average of .301 while leading the league with 42 homers and driving in 114 runs. Unfortunately, however, outfielder Jim Lemon was Washington's only other offensive threat, and Lemon hit 25 fewer home runs and produced 50 fewer RBIs.

Pedro Ramos led the club's pitching staff in victories with 12, while Chuck Stobbs and Camilo Pascual registered eight wins each. All three hurlers lost far more games than they won. Ramos lost 16 times, Stobbs 20 and Pascual 17.

With few impressive individual performances recorded by players other than Sievers, the turnstiles in Griffith Stadium rotated less often than in most major-league ballparks. The club drew 457,079 fans for 77 home games, an average of 5,936 people per game.

By comparison, the average total attendance among the eight franchises in the American League was 1,024,527; the average attendance per game league-wide was 13,305. Furthermore, fans who passed through the gates were nearly twice as likely to see the Senators lose as win since the local team was victorious in only 28 of its 77 home games.

Given this situation, it is not surprising that the following description of a "Griffith Stadium experience" in the April 15, 1957 edition of Sports Illustrated magazine began and concluded with references to the lack of competition for seats: "There are only 29,023 seats to choose from, but due to the Senators' decade in the second division, fans are few and good seats plentiful. So buy a ticket and take your pick: you will enjoy a fine view of the game.

"Griffith Stadium is an old and fairly obsolescent park, but it is well cared for and never wanting for fresh paint. Broken seats are promptly repaired. Ushers are courteous, (they) accept tips but do not demand them. The concessions, operated by the Washington ball club, serve best quality hot dogs but slip in (the) soft-drink department by loading paper cups with shaved ice. Because of District of Columbia liquor regulations, beer is sold only in (the) first few rows of (the) left-field bleachers, aptly called 'the beer garden.' A 1957 innovation and one all big league clubs should imitate: a 28-page yearbook-program for 15 cents replacing the old-fashioned scorecard.

"(The) stadium is located close to (the) center of Washington at 7th Street and Florida Avenue, N.W. Although only a mile from the main hotel district, a stranger will need radar if he is driving, what with confusions of Washington traffic patterns. There is room for 1,800 cars in (a) small lot. And since parking space is limited, (the) best way to (the) stadium is by bus (five lines) for a quarter or by cab for 60 cents. If you insist on driving, you will have one consolation: there is hardly ever any real traffic problem after games, due again to the understandable scarcity of Senator rooters."

More than 64 years after these words appeared in print, baseball fans continue to recall special feelings generated by different ballparks. Some fortunate people among us may possess memories of watching games in Griffith Stadium, and perhaps folks who never set foot in the place have derived pleasure by reading about the “feel” of the former center of Washington’s baseball universe.

GM OPPORTUNITY AT BETHESDA BIG TRAIN, By Bill Hickman

The Bethesda Big Train summer collegiate team is seeking to fill its General Manager position. If you have a young relative just out of college who is interested in sports management, this may be just the job for that person.

The position needs to be filled by May 1, 2022. The salary is pegged at \$42,500, but there is some room for negotiation.

The job is a year-round one, with the heaviest load coming in June and July. Standard benefits are offered. The job carries major responsibilities for ensuring that operations of the Big Train programs are planned and executed successfully.

For specific details about the job, interested parties are advised to access the following webpage:
<http://bigtrain.org/getinvolved/employment/>

Young adults who have held this job in the past have gone on to take positions in the Ripken Collegiate League front office, minor league baseball, and major league baseball.

TED’S POOR 1946 SERIES: Blame the Nats’ Mickey Haefner, By Andrew Sharp

Mickey Haefner was a decent lefty pitcher for an up-and-down Washington team from 1943-49. He won 10 or more games five seasons in a row, topping out at 16 in 1945. No taller than 5-foot-7 (not 5-8, as he himself confirmed in 1943), his nickname was “Itsy-Bitsy.” Despite the “last in American League” trope, the Senators actually finished second twice and fourth once during Haefner’s tenure.

Haefner featured a knuckleball, although he frequently threw a fastball and curve, all delivered sidearm. He may be the only pitcher to have featured a sidearm knuckler. When the Senators fought the Tigers for the 1945 AL pennant, Haefner was part of a rotation that included four starters with knuckleballs. All of this should make Haefner more than a minor footnote in baseball history.

Yet one pitch in an exhibition game tends to bring up his name more often than anything else in his career.

After the 1946 season, Haefner was a part of an AL “all-star” team assembled quickly to keep the pennant-winning Red Sox sharp as they awaited the winner of a three-game NL playoff between the Cardinals and the Dodgers.

On Oct. 1 in the first of three games against Boston, Haefner hung a curve that hit Ted Williams on the tip of his right elbow. The pain was bad enough that the Boston slugger had to leave the game.

Although X-rays showed no break, Williams' elbow swelled up. He didn't play in the other two exhibitions.

Against the Cardinals in his only World Series, the Splendid Splinter famously went 5-for-25 with no extra-base hits as the Red Sox lost in seven games to St. Louis. He admitted years later that his injured elbow played a part in his shockingly subpar performance.

Haefner had one other, if obscure, claim to fame: an MLB record that still stands. On July 3, 1943, Ewald Pyle had relieved Washington starter Ray Scarborough and pitched four no-hit innings. Haefner, a 30-year-old rookie, followed Pyle and held the St. Louis Browns hitless during the seventh, eighth and ninth. This was the first time in MLB history that two relievers on the same team held the opposing team hitless for three or more innings each. A late Washington rally made Haefner a winner, to boot.

The Pyle-Haefner performance was matched in 2015 by Diego Moreno and Adam Warren of the Yankees against Texas. In this era of heavy bullpen use, this record soon could be matched or surpassed. But it remains a first.

Haefner topped 225 innings pitched three years in a row. He completed 91 of his 179 starts. He played with the Chicago White Sox and briefly for the Boston Braves before his career in the majors ended in 1950. In 1951, however, he pitched the Southern Association's Birmingham Barons into the Dixie Series against Houston. Then, he beat the Texas League champs twice, including the clincher in Houston before 10,500 fans, to win the title. He retired from pro ball at age 39 after that season.

Mickey Haefner died on Jan. 3, 1995, at age 82.

McMULLEN GAVE SENATORS A BOOST: A Mainstay from 1965-69, By Jeff Stuart

On June 29, 1963, the Los Angeles Dodgers announced that they had recalled infielder Ken McMullen from Spokane to replace Don Zimmer, who had recently been traded to the Washington Senators.

McMullen signed with the Dodgers upon graduation from Oxnard (Calif.) High School. He was one of the last of baseball's bonus babies.

His first major league home run was a grand slam off the St. Louis Cardinals' Ernie Broglio on the Fourth of July. He pulled a hamstring on Sept. 26 and didn't play in the World Series against the New York Yankees.

McMullen started the 1964 season with Los Angeles, but poor fielding and a .209 batting average led the Dodgers to trade him, along with Frank Howard, Phil Ortega and Pete Richert, to the Washington Senators for John Kennedy and Claude Osteen.

McMullen won an everyday job batting second for Gil Hodges' Senators. Hodges considered him the sleeper in the trade. "He's loose and handles himself well," said Hodges. "He appears capable of doing the job in the field and now we'll have to see if he can hit."

General Manager George Selkirk asked McMullen to report early to receive the benefit of personal tutoring from Eddie Yost, one of the American League's finest third basemen for 13 years. After hitting

a couple of hundred grounders at McMullen, who scooped up all sorts of chances, Yost said, "He'll do." adding, "For a while I wondered about him going to his left. But he can do it. He has remarkable action for a youngster."

McMullen wore the uniform of John Kennedy, No. 2, who had been traded to the Dodgers.

"I'm glad to work under Yost," said McMullen. "I watched him when he was with the Angels, I played third, first, and the outfield in Omaha. And when the Dodgers called me up, I even played second base. Nothing upsets a fielder more than to be moved around from position to position. I made some errors."

McMullen wasn't proud of his batting average in Spokane either. "I'll have to do much better than that to stay in the big leagues."

McMullen became the Senators' regular third baseman and hit 18 home runs in his first season with the club in 1965. Though he led the American League with 22 errors, he soon earned a reputation as one of the better fielding third basemen. On Aug. 13, he tied an AL record by starting four double plays against the Baltimore Orioles. And on Sept. 26 against the Boston Red Sox, he set an AL record with 11 assists. He led league third basemen in total chances over three seasons from 1967 to 1969, and led AL third basemen in double plays in 1967 and putouts in 1969.

McMullen had a 19-game hitting streak in 1967, the longest streak for any expansion Senator. The Senators, at one time 13 games under 500, had climbed to a 56-57 record when he was injured by a line drive off the bat of Minnesota's Bob Allison. The team lost 7 of 8 without him in the lineup.

He finished the season batting .245 with 16 home runs and 67 RBI. McMullen had his first career multi-home run game on July 16. Later in the same month, he hit a game-winning home run to end a 20-inning marathon with the Minnesota Twins.

He was the Nats' most valuable player in the drive to the .500 mark in mid-August.

The Nats won 76 games in 1967, 5 games better than the 71 games they won the previous year. And they were in the pennant race in mid-August. McMullen hit 20 homers in 1968. The next year, under new Manager Ted Williams, he batted a career-high .272 while hitting 19 homers and driving in a career-high 87 runs. The club finished 86-76, posting the first winning season for a Washington franchise since 1952 and the only winning season in the tenure of the expansion Senators.

McMullen's play drew praise from Yankees slugger Mickey Mantle, who called him "the most underrated player in the league."

But Williams was not sold.

Williams, a five-time American League leader in runs batted in, wanted more production out of McMullen, who drove in just two more runs than first baseman Mike Epstein in 159 more at-bats.

"Work up the figures on McMullen for me and see if they prove what I think," Williams asked Burton Hawkins, the Senators' secretary. "Get me last season's figures and this year's too." Those stats showed McMullen left more men on base, 285, than any other Washington player.

On April 27, 1970, McMullen was traded to the California Angels for third baseman Aurelio Rodriguez

and outfielder Rick Reichardt. "I'll be one surprised SOB if I can't help both of those guys hit more than they've been hitting for the Angels," said Williams.

He wanted a right-handed hitting outfielder and felt that Reichardt was misusing his 6-3, 216-pound frame. Williams promised he could help Reichardt with his hitting. "You don't know how long I've been looking forward to having Mr. Williams look me over," said Reichardt.

McMullen had hit .444 against the Angels in 1969 and they had visions of him providing the right handed power they needed.

"I had misgivings about the Ken McMullen deal because we didn't get a pitcher, " said Nats owner Bob Short. "Williams' deals have been working out well. But I'm not trading any more of our top players if we can't get pitching help."

Well, after the 1970 season he traded shortstop Eddie Brinkman and Rodriguez to Detroit for Denny McLain. We all know how that turned out.

McMullen hit 21 home runs for the Angels in 1971.

After the 1972 season, he was dealt back to the Dodgers as part of another seven-player trade. Over the next three years, he was primarily used as a pinch-hitter.

Reichardt did not meet Williams' expectations. One of the last of baseball's bonus babies, he hit .277 with 15 home runs and 46 RBI, Prior to the 1971 season, Washington traded him to the Chicago White Sox for pitcher Gerry Janeski.

After McMullen returned to the Dodgers in 1973 his wife, Bobbie, was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was three months' pregnant with the couple's third child and declined treatment that could have taken the life of the unborn child.

The baby, Jonathan, was born healthy in November 1973, but Bobbie died in April 1974.

McMullen continued as a reserve that season and finally made it to the World Series, where the Dodgers lost to the Oakland A's. In the 1974 National League Championship Series, he struck out against the Pittsburgh Pirates' Bruce Kison in his only postseason at-bat.

Prior to the 1976 campaign, McMullen was let go by Los Angeles and soon caught on with the Athletics, for whom he had an AL-high nine pinch hits that summer. He spent 1977, his final season, with the Milwaukee Brewers.

In his final big league at-bat, on Sept. 14 against the Seattle Mariners, McMullen hit a two-run home run, belting an 0-1 pitch from Tom House over the left field fence at the Kingdome.

McMullen was an Air Force reservist with the 831st Tactical Air Wing at George AFB, in Victorville, Calif. He made ends meet by working at a service station in the offseason. Such was life for non-superstars in the 1960s and 1970s. After retiring, McMullen ran baseball camps, created a youth benefit golf tournament, co-owned a minor league team in California and did community relations work for the Dodgers, including fantasy camps. McMullen will turn 80 on June 1.

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

This is the 13th in a series of Squibber contributions intended to report the truth (as far as present data suggests) of the tidbits of “conventional wisdom” that TV analysts and comparable pundits make without any true knowledge about their validity. This is the second in the series that is dedicated to one topic; in this case, pitch calling by home plate umpires.

Myth #37: The “called strike zone” (CSZ), as it is interpreted by major league umpires, does not reflect the “rule book strike zone” (RBSZ).

This has absolutely been true, at least in the past. Research starting in 2007, when PITCHf/x data first became available, has been unanimous in this regard, although the details have differed across studies. First, the CSZ, defined as that area in which at least 50 percent of pitches are called strikes, has been larger horizontally and shorter vertically both at the top and bottom than the RBZ.

Second, the CSZ has differed between right-handed and left-handed batters, with the latter's both larger and displaced away from them such that, while the righty batter CSZ was symmetrical around the plate, the lefty batter CSZ was displaced about four inches to the right from the pitcher's point of view.

Overall, the CSZ has been smaller than the RBSZ. Just for one example, Zimmerman, Tang, and Huang (2019), using data from 2008 through 2016, computed the right-handed batter CSZ as 475 square inches, the left-handed batter CSZ as 492 square inches, and the RBSZ as 527 square inches on average; keep in mind that the exact dimensions are affected by the batter's height.

Third, the shape of the CSZ has not been rectangular as the RBSZ defines it. Rather, its shape has been a cross between an oval and a rectangle that Zimmerman et al. refer to as a “superellipse”; see Wikipedia for a description of that shape.

Part of the reason for these differences, and the reason why I describe it in past tense, is that when averaged across umpires, the CSZ has changed over time. Back in 1995, the Commissioner's Office instructed the umpires to change their CSZ to better reflect the RBSZ. Some umps did and some umps did not, and after the mass resignation/firing of the umps in the 1999 labor dispute, those that were not rehired tended to be from the group that did not.

The introduction of QuesTec technology in the mid-2000s provided added pressure for the CSZ to adjust, and at least through the mid-2010s accuracy in pitch calling steadily improved. It is probably at 90 percent or better now, depending on how close the pitch is to the edges of the plate.

Myth #38: Home plate umpire calls are influenced by the reaction of the fans.

This has probably been true, with circumstantial evidence from several different sources. For example, In his analysis of 1.5 million pitches using PITCHf/x data, Dave Allen (2011) uncovered a tendency for umpires to have made fewer errors on true balls (12.3% versus 13.4%) and more errors on true strikes (20.0% versus 19.6%) for the home than the road team, amounting to a greater bias toward balls for the home team (3.6 extra per game versus 2.7 for the road team).

Further, there is some evidence that the size of the crowd is significant. According to Moskowitz and Wertheim's (2011) study of 2007 pitch-calling, in the games classified in the upper one-fifth in attendance, home teams received 263 more walks and 39 fewer strikeouts on called pitches than away

teams. In the lower one-fifth attendance games, the respective numbers were 33 more walks and 54 more strikeouts.

To truly nail down this claim would require calls to be correlated with attendance game-by-game. Even without that, this proposed bias is one of the more strongly supported explanations for the consistent 53-54 percent home field advantage.

There are a few other proposed biases with substantial supportive data. I have already described the differences for batter handedness. I call what is perhaps the most important of these the “count compensation bias.”

Just for a couple of relevant contributions: John Walsh (2010, 200,000 pitches to right-handed batters) first noticed this bias, measuring the strike zone as 3.09 square feet overall but 3.52 square feet at 3-0 versus 2.42 square feet at 0-2.

Moskowitz and Wertheim (2011) expanded on this finding in their already-discussed work.

Overall, 49.9 percent of the pitches on the (undefined here) corners of the plate were called strikes. Whereas 51.2 percent of these pitches at 0-0 were called strikes, with two strikes that percentage shrunk to 38.2, with 0-2 particularly low at 31.5 percent.

In stark contrast, pitches at the corners on three-ball counts were called strikes 60.0 percent of the time, with 3-0 at 67.6 percent. One more bias consists of a nod to player reputation, with more experienced and more accomplished players getting the benefit of the doubt on borderline calls.

Several other possible biases have undergone examination but either have not amassed multiple supportive studies, have had contradictory results across studies, or have received no support when tested. I particularly want to stress that there have been several attempts to uncover bias in calls due to player ethnicity but none have revealed any consistent trends.

Myth #39: Umpires establish a CSZ early in games and generally maintain it throughout.

The goal of research by Hunter (2018) was to establish a set of methods for measuring the accuracy and within-game consistency of CSZs.

One of the methods presumed that the established strike zone is rectangular, others did not, and the fact that the methods differed substantially in their judgment of umpire consistency is at least partly due to the fact that some umpires' established CSZs, based on 2017 data, were more rectangular than those of other umpires.

Putting that aside, Hunter's conclusion was that umpires as a whole were fairly consistent within games, with of course variation in the degree to which this was true.

ONE DAY FROM GLORY: How the Senators Prepared for the 1924 Clincher, By Gary Sarnoff

It's Sunday, Sept. 28, 1924, one day after the Washington Senators moved a step closer to winning the first American League pennant in franchise history by beating the Red Sox at Fenway Park, 7-5.

The surprising Senators, picked to finish sixth before the start of the season by most baseball experts, were two games ahead of the second-place Yankees with two games remaining in the season and needed just one more win to clinch the pennant.

However, because Sunday baseball games were prohibited at Fenway Park, the Senators, who were anxious to clinch the pennant and get the pennant race over with, would have to wait until Monday afternoon to play their next scheduled game.

Bright and early on Sunday morning, Walter Kerr, a Cornell man and huge Senators fan who knew the players and visited the Senators in Tampa every spring training, drove to the front entrance of Boston's Brunswick Hotel, and three members of the Washington baseball team, Walter Johnson, Bucky Harris and Roger Peckinpaugh, climbed into his automobile.

Kerr had invited the Washington trio to get away from the mental strain of the battle for the pennant and spend the day at his large stock farm, located 35 miles south of Boston in the coastal town of Scituate. While Johnson, Harris and Peckinpaugh rested at Kerr's residence, the other Washington ballplayers spent a quiet and relaxing day at the Brunswick Hotel or visited the city's historical sites.

Later that evening, Kerr returned his guests to the team's hotel. "Kerr took us all around his farm, showed us the prize cattle, hogs and chickens," Harris told a group of sportswriters shortly after arriving back at the hotel. "Johnson ate it up, being a farmer. I never saw him so interested in anything before. Roger and I, not being farmers, saw a lot we didn't understand. But the three of us sure did benefit from the salt air and the fine dinner we had. I feel like a new man right now."

Harris added that "I have been thinking about baseball 24 hours a day for so long that it is beginning to get to me. All day long it has been baseball, baseball, baseball. Down at Kerr's place there was no baseball. It was just a lovely, quiet day on a farm near the ocean."

When asked about the two remaining games in the season, Harris said he believed the Senators would win. "I feel positive that we will experience little difficulty in disposing of the Red Sox in one of the remaining two games."

Senators left-hander Tom Zachary was scheduled to pitch Monday's game, and just in case the season went down to the final day, Walter Johnson was slated to pitch the last game.

But according to Zachary, he was going to pitch the game that would clinch the pennant. "I will beat them," Zachary assured. "Tell the folks back home I can beat them and I will. It will all be over tomorrow night. And just as a side note, I will beat those Giants when I pitch against them in the World Series."

TRIVIA ANSWER: Who was the first Washington player to come to bat in an American League game?

Center fielder John Farrell, who was making his major league debut, was the leadoff batter in Washington's American League opener in Philadelphia in 1901. Farrell, who went 0 for 4 in the contest, led Washington with 100 runs scored in its inaugural season.