

# The INSIDE GAME



The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee

Vol. 3, No. 4

"Let's get this lumpy, licorice-stained ball rolling!"

November 2003

## From the Chairman

### The Ultimate Collectible

BY TOM SIMON

When I was working in Washington, D.C., I once looked up where Walter Johnson lived in an old City Directory. It turned out to be a relatively modest rowhouse in Adams Morgan. I thought to myself, "Someday, when I have enough money to buy a house, I'm gonna live there."

When it comes to baseball memorabilia, people collect cards, books, photographs, autographs, uniforms, equipment, and a whole lot of other things, so why shouldn't I collect Walter Johnson's house? As it turned out, there were two good reasons: (1) I couldn't stand living in D.C., and (2) about the time I left, a serial killer was stalking Walter Johnson's old neighborhood. At least in theory, though, I still like the idea, though.

Think about it: Most players in the Deadball Era weren't making really big money, so their houses were probably fairly modest to begin with. And the neighborhoods around the old ballparks where they were likely to live, while once solidly middle-class, in many cases are now run-down. The area of North Philly where Shibe Park and Baker Bowl once stood was and is working class; you can probably afford the homes of Eddie Collins or Sherry Magee—or both! And I'll bet you can buy even the great Ty Cobb's house in inner-city Detroit for less than a two-bedroom condo in Ypsilanti.

Those of you who don't live near a major-league city might consider collecting player birthplaces. I know for a fact that the owners of Larry Gardner's birthplace in Enosburg Falls, Vermont, currently used as a beauty parlor, weren't even aware of the building's significance until the Gardner-Waterman Chapter of SABR asked to put up an historical marker in front of it. Imagine!

You better act quickly, though. Prices are certain to skyrocket shortly after this issue of *The Inside Game* hits your inbox.

## Three Finger Brown's Ageless Affection for the Game

BY CINDY THOMSON

Old baseball players never die, they just round third and head for home. Of course, that's after they've shown up at numerous old timers games.

In Cleveland on July 29, 1921, one of the first, perhaps the very first, games for retired players was held. The Indians were celebrating their 20th anniversary and wanted some nostalgia. They staged a game between former players Cy Young, Nap Lajoie, and others, and an amateur team. The proceeds were donated to charity.

In 1925 in Cleveland, former Cub players, led by Mordecai "Three Finger" Brown, took on old-time Cleveland players including Nap Lajoie, Cy Young, and Chief Zimmer. Perhaps to prepare himself, Mordecai Brown threw batting practice for the Chicago Cubs before boarding a train for Cleveland. Mordecai, also called Three Finger Brown, was nearly 49-years-old at that time.

Brown was perhaps beyond nostalgia. His heart had never left the game. After he retired from the pros, he played two seasons in the minors for the Columbus Senators and then briefly for the Indianapolis Indians. He was player/manager for the semipro team in Terre Haute, Indiana, and later managed oil company teams. He even served a short stint as pitching coach for Indiana University.

While he loved hunting, socializing at the local Elks Club, and operating his own gas station in Terre Haute, he stayed as close to the game of baseball as he could. He told a reporter in 1935, "Maybe I would have liked to manage a big league club. But you have to be on the inside to get those jobs."

In 1936, the Cubs celebrated the National League's 60th birthday by inviting old-time players to a special luncheon at the Congress Hotel and then to a ceremony at Wrigley Field. An exhibition of 1876 style baseball was held. Mordecai was invited as were Jimmy Archer, Clarence Beaumont, Art Nehf, and others. In addition to old-timer games, Mordecai and former batterymate Jimmy Archer teamed up to throw out the first pitch at a Midwest baseball tournament in

*Ageless Affection cont. on page 3*

## What's Inside...

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*James Elfers recounts the recreation of the Giants-White Sox exhibition game of 1913 in Oxnard, California.*



Hans Lobert:  
Seabiscuit, move over!

## Plus...

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*Warren Wilbert reviews Amour & Levitt's Paths to Glory.*

# California Dreams

BY JAMES E. ELFERS

Whatever else may change about America's pastime, it has always been a game of memories. We remember and revere its past and recall the games of our youth. Trips to the ballpark by fathers and sons are rites of passage in America. In Oxnard, California, a single game had so much impact that nearly a century later virtually the entire town chose to re-create it.

This author traveled to Oxnard, California, to witness the town's second visit by the New York Giants and Chicago White Sox. The first had been on November 11, 1913, when the Giants and White Sox were barnstorming their way around the world. Oxnard marked the twenty-fourth stop on a tour that would ultimately take the two teams through a dozen countries on five continents. On June 28, 2003, two teams of local high school and college players impersonated the Giants and White Sox.

In a wonderful alignment of stars, or just plain luck, Oxnard chose to re-create their visit by two of baseball's most storied teams as part of the town's centennial celebration at the same time my book *The Tour to End All Tours: The Story of Major League Baseball's 1913-1914 World Tour* was coming off the presses. When I heard what Oxnard was planning, I knew that I had to be on hand for this.

My guide to Oxnard was local historian Jeff Maulhardt. Jeff's family had brought the Oxnard family from Germany to an underpopulated section of the California coast. Intimately tied to the town's history, Jeff's connection to the 1913 game was not simply academic. When the Giants and Sox hit town in 1913 Jeff's grandfather spent the day serving as doctor to the two teams. Jeff Maulhardt's own book, *The Day the Gi-*

*ants Came to Oxnard*, is a beautiful little tome that tells the story of the one game in Oxnard. Jeff and I did a joint presentation on the Friday evening before the game.

The next day Eddie Frierson held center stage at a local high school, becoming the great Christy Mathewson in his one man show "Matty." Oxnard marked one of The Big Six's final appearances with the Giants. Desperate for a win, Matty utilized the spitball for the first and only time in his career.

Anyone who has read Lawrence Ritter's masterful *The Glory of Their Times* will recall Oxnard as the place where the players breakfasted on beer and lima beans and Hans Lobert raced a horse around the base paths. On an overcast but otherwise beautiful summer day for baseball, the magic of 1913 returned.

What struck me were the similarities in the midst of so much change. The White Sox and Giants of 1913 were—with the exceptions of Jim Thorpe and Chief Meyers—all white squads who played the game during the era of segregation. These Giants and White Sox were multi-ethnic high school and college kids who had never known segregation's sting. Even though many of the kids on the field would not have been permitted in Organized Baseball in 1913, there was no difference in the enthusiasm with which they played the game.

In another event that had to be a replay of 1913, I saw some of the players at the pre-game barbecue (sans ox, beer, and Lima beans) flirting with the local girls. How many hearts had the original Giants and White Sox set a twitter in 1913, I wondered?

Other changes I just had to ignore. No way were modern players going to the plate without batting helmets; neither were catchers going to adopt the bulky cricket style pads of 1913 or that era's birdcage style masks. Other differences would only stick in the craw of purists such as myself. There were four umpires in this game, unlike 1913

when two men, Hall-of-Famer Bill Klem and Jack Sheridan, worked the game. Russ Stevens, the gentleman who was the home plate umpire for this game, committed a willful historical blunder. While fully aware that Bill Klem wore a chest protector under his shirt, he chose to go with the huge A. L. style balloon protector because he felt it gave a more "old fashioned look."

Stevens' decision irritated me for all of about five minutes. Then I realized that despite my borrowed 1913 garb, I had overlooked an important detail. I, like hundreds of others present, was wearing a wristwatch. Wristwatches did not become popular until after World War One. Soldiers on all sides found them far more convenient than fumbling for pocket watches, especially when lives depended upon everyone swarming out of the trenches in mass assaults that were timed to the second.

The details for accuracy, large and small, made the day a fun event for all. Oxnard's Department of Recreation, led by the indefatigable Gil Ramirez, found replicas of 1913 equipment for everything, including uniforms, gloves, and bats. Seeing players stride up to the box gripping wooden bats without batting gloves, and seeing a magnificent fielding play by a player equipped with the woeful deadball era gloves



Players before the re-creation of the 1913 White Sox/Giants game in Oxnard, California. Photo by Jim Elfers

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was to see elements of the game that have been lost forever. Eddie Frierson fed the Giants dugout bits of history which increased authenticity as the game progressed. By the second inning the Giants were leaving their gloves on the field when it was their turn to bat.

The fences at the Oxnard College field were brought in because the replica deadball, even with its synthetic cover, lived up to its name in spades. A temporary hand operated scoreboard in centerfield added to the atmosphere. Ninety years ago the Giants beat the White Sox by a final score of 3-2. On this day the White Sox exacted a little revenge, trouncing the Goths by a score of 6-2. Just as in 1913 a grand total of one home run cleared the fences.

Hans Lobert's race about the bases against a horse was also duplicated. The pitcher came off the mound in the bottom of the seventh and actually defeated his equine challenger. Horses have not grown slower over the decades. The concessions to safety that now hem in our daily lives meant that the human runner had a distinct advantage. In 1913 Lobert took the inside corner of the bags, while the horse's hoofs tagged the outside corner. In 2003 rodeo barrels covered the bases and left the horse with a further course to run.

For me the greatest highlight of the day may have come after the game was over. Fred Snodgrass's grandson, Spencer Garrett, introduced himself to me and allowed me to hold his grandfather's pocket watch. This particular watch had a special history. It had been presented to Snodgrass on November 11, 1913, in Oxnard. Oxnard was Fred's hometown, and he had been instrumental in getting the Giants to stop by. Fred's teammates on the Giants surprised him by stopping the game at the bottom of the first inning and having the mayor present it to him. One of the few surviving artifacts from the tour and from that glorious day, it still keeps perfect time.

Terre Haute. Mordecai, so loved in his hometown area, was presented with a gift of luggage while his wife received flowers.

Terre Haute, home of the first Three-I league championship team, on which Mordecai pitched, was a baseball town. Perhaps that's what convinced Mordecai to settle there after his playing days had ended.

Mordecai's gas station in Terre Haute was adjacent to the hotel the Chicago White Sox used during a spring training visit. He was often seen dropping in during the White Sox workouts. In 1945 at the White Sox field, just three years before his death at age 71, he remarked that he could be ready to pitch if given a week.

If there's a field of dreams in heaven, Mordecai Brown would be pitching shutouts—for in heaven, you never grow old.



*Fireballers' Reunion: From left to right, Mordecai Brown, Red Faber, and Ed Walsh at the Old Timers Baseball Association Dinner in Chicago, 1946. Photo courtesy of Cindy Thomson.*

*Cindy Thomson together with her cousin, Scott Brown, are weaving the story threads of Mordecai Brown's life into a biography tentatively titled, The Value of a Name: The Mordecai Brown Story.*

### For Cubs/Red Sox Fans:

**“You can learn a little from winning. You learn a lot from losing.” Christy Mathewson, from *A Biographical Dictionary of Major League Baseball Managers*, by John C. Skipper (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2003)**

**The SABR Deadball Era Committee presents “Boiling Out II”:** Come out to Hot Springs to see where Babe Ruth, Cy Young, and Honus Wagner did their spring training!

**Time:** March 18-21, 2004, The Arlington Hotel

**Place:** Hot Springs, Arkansas

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***Paths to Glory: How Great Baseball Teams Got That Way*, by Mark L. Armour and Daniel R. Levitt (Brassey's, published in April 2003, \$27.95 hardcover, ISBN: 157488560X)**

**A BOOK REVIEW BY WARREN WILBERT**

Mark Armour and David Levitt's *Paths to Glory* is a comprehensive study of the fine art of putting together a ball club good enough to win it all. Wondering just how that is done and why some franchises are better at it than others apparently bothered these sabermetricians enough to cause them to ransack baseball's past for some answers. And they found some.

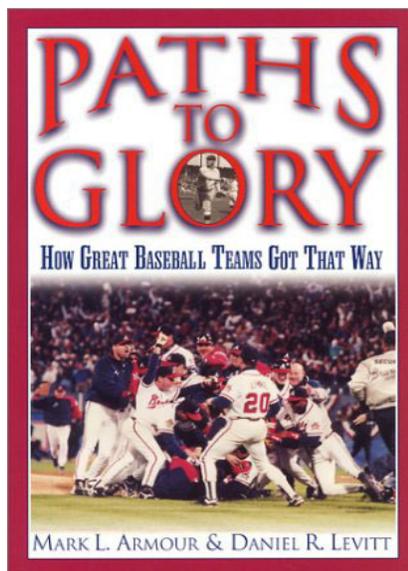
Twelve franchises, spread across the 20th Century, get the full treatment in this thorough and richly researched study. GMs, scouts, owners, ball parks, managers, development cycles, players, trades, player evaluation and contractual negotiations - these, and more - are all put under the magnifying glass for clues that point to successful organizations, and above all, that lead to baseball's ultimate prize, the world's championship.

If you haven't had Sabermetrics 101, look out. These fellows have availed themselves of all the bells and whistles baseball's modern math provides as they work their way through the mounds of data they've amassed in researching this interesting though often maddening subject. *Paths to Glory* is drenched in statistical analysis, tables, graphs and comparisons between great, good, bad and absolutely lousy ball clubs. But to their credit, Armour and Levitt have gone out of their way to define terms and explain some of the more uncommon, albeit crucial concepts that underlie the careful examination teams like the Brooklyn Superbas, the Minnesota Twins and the Oakland Athletics are given.

Along the way these two baseball analysts take a searching look at the evolution of relief pitching, patterns in aging as a player's career hits the sunset trail, ball parks and baseball environments, and a look at the work of Dr. Theodore Modis, "a physicist turned management science consultant," in the words of the authors. Some of these excursions into what may seem to be baseball esoterica appear, at first blush, like unnecessary tangents, but hold on. Armour and Levitt weave this information into the overall scheme of organizational structure and management and its effect on what happens out there on the diamond. This kind of stuff, it turns

out, is essential, nay, sine qua non to winning baseball, and successful franchises sit up, take notice and go about their business accordingly.

There are several heroes to this piece, among them two Braves teams, one of them from Boston, the 1948 National League champions, and the other, Atlanta's contemporary Braves, touted by the authors as an example of a modern baseball organization Braves' competitors would do well to emulate. GM



Schuerholz, guiding light behind the Braves' consistent success, comes in for high marks regarding his management of Atlanta's fortunes. Knowledgeable baseball people would hardly disagree. The authors do not spare the klunkers.

Among a significant number of pleasant surprises that scrambled the standings in both leagues during the Deadball Era, the 1915 Phils and 1917 White Sox are singled out for special kudos, representative of heads-up front office management and skillful negotiating that brought enough talent together to crash the winner's circle. There were others that might have been cited, including Comiskey's 1906 Hitless Wonders, Detroit's 1907-'09 American League champions, the 1914 Miracle Braves, Wilbert Robinson's 1916 Brooklyn club and the Boston Red Sox franchise, which managed to find ways and means to stay atop, or within striking distance of the AL's frontrunners for most of the 1910's. And there were teams that finished higher than they should have, equally alert in board rooms and afield. Washington's 1913-'14 Senators and the 1919 Cincinnati Reds would be cases in point.

But the authors settled on the Philadelphia National League and Chicago

American League teams as their exemplars. The Phillies especially were well chosen as a sterling example of a franchise that moved to the head of the class by bringing together outstanding talent in key off-season maneuvering, installing a manager who was "just right" for his unique situation, and fine-tuning the roster so that every phase of the game was upgraded to the extent that the two outstanding players on the team, both of whom enjoyed career years, could lead the club to victory. Those two ball players, by the way, Pete Alexander, known by one and all, and Gavvy Cravath, recognized as one of baseball's premier outfielders during the Deadball Era, headed up a strong, though not overpowering roster. Armour and Levitt tell that story both in depth and with some clever insights based on - you guessed it - the sabermetric numbers.

Much as it might have hurt Mark Armour, a self-confessed Red Sox fan, he and partner Levitt put the 1930s Bosox on the griddle, searing them at one point with: "In retrospect, the notion that the 1936 Red Sox had a chance to compete with the Yankees (World Champions that year) is laughable." (pp. 123 and 125) That retrospective judgment comes after a thorough dissection of the Tom Yawkey front office, his fading stars and the mismanagement of Yawkey's millions despite his good intentions. The Red Sox' fatal flaw? Triple A talent in the major leagues. And that, after all, is a factor up there among the top two or three that ultimately determines championships. Failure to provide top drawer talent inevitably consigns a ball club to baseball's hinterlands. Even those who know next to nothing about Sabermetrics have figured that out.

One puzzlement: in a book that examines franchise management so carefully, how did those New York teams escape scrutiny? No McGraw? No Rupert? No Steinbrenner? No Fred Wilpon? No Stengel or "Leo the Lip?" Nonetheless, it's refreshing to encounter a book about baseball that doesn't stumble all over those Big Apple franchises as it discusses success (and excess) in the world of baseball.

Despite, or quite possibly because of the big sabermetric footprints all over this fascinating book, baseball readers will have a real adventure ahead of them in this knowing look at the white collar machinations of baseball's front office and the behind-the-scenes maneuvering in its endless pursuit of championship laurels... Enjoy!