

# The INSIDE GAME

The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee



VOL. XX, NO. 2: "LET'S GET THIS LUMPY LICORICE-STAINED BALL ROLLING!"

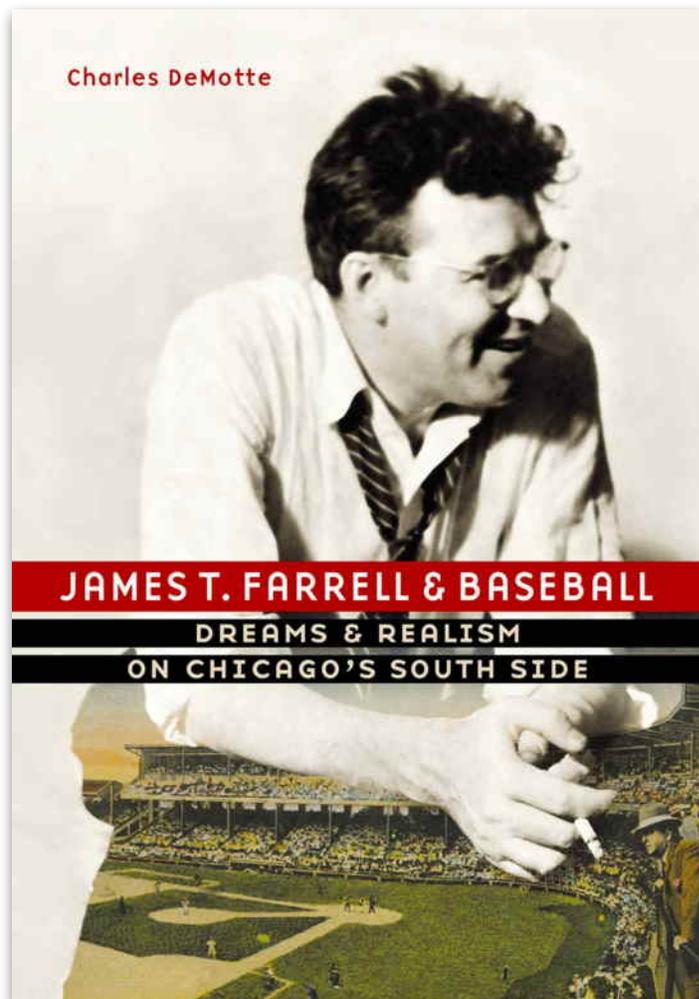
APRIL 2020

## BEER'S ILLUMINATING CHARLESTON BIOGRAPHY AND DEMOTTE'S JAMES T. FARRELL SOCIAL HISTORY SHARE RITTER AWARD

by **Doug Skipper**

During their lifetimes, James T. Farrell and Oscar Charleston shared little in common. Farrell, an Irish-American from the South Side of Chicago who embraced the American League's White Sox, penned more than 50 novels and political works. Charleston, an African American from Indianapolis, served in the Army before employing a unique blend of speed, strength, and fierce competitive drive to embark on a lengthy career in the Negro Leagues as one of the greatest players in the history of the game.

Both men came of age during and were shaped by baseball's Deadball Era, and each is the subject of a book that shares the 2020 Larry Ritter Award. Charles DeMotte's *James T. Farrell & Baseball: Dreams & Realism on Chicago's South Side* and Jeremy Beer's *Oscar Charleston: The Life and Legend of Baseball's Greatest Forgotten Player*, both published by University of Nebraska Press, have been named co-winners.



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**Charles DeMotte**

The award is bestowed annually by the Deadball Era Committee (DEC) of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) to the author of the best book about baseball between 1901 and 1919 published during the previous calendar year. The winner's work must demonstrate original research or analysis, a fresh perspective, compelling thesis, impressive insight, accuracy, and clear, graceful prose. Both authors and their books rise to the level of the award.

***JAMES T. FARRELL & BASEBALL: DREAMS & REALISM ON CHICAGO'S SOUTH SIDE***

Charles DeMotte's crisply written *James T. Farrell & Baseball* offers an engaging and enlightening history of the growth of amateur, semipro, and black baseball and its role as a social force in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chicago. DeMotte describes the rapid expansion of organized leagues and the development of playing facilities throughout the gritty, bustling, burgeoning metropolis, at the time America's second largest city. As baseball continued to gain popularity as a participatory sport, boys and young men ventured forth to represent their ethnically defined neighborhood-based teams, and they tested their skills on and off the diamond against representatives from other neighborhoods. DeMotte suggests that Farrell was more influenced by interactions with young men and boys in his own or adjacent neighborhoods.

Baseball was also popular as a spectator sport in Chicago, which boasted teams in the American, National, and Federal Leagues during Farrell's youth. The Cubs and White Sox each won two World Series during the Deadball Era and rooting for (or against) either team served as a melting pot that transcended ethnic and racial boundaries. As a fan of the South Side team, Farrell was able to cheer for Eddie Collins and Shoeless Joe Jackson at nearby Comiskey Park against the likes of Ty Cobb, Tris Speaker, and Babe Ruth. The White Sox won the World Series in 1917 when he was 13, but Farrell and his fellow fans were disillusioned by the Black Sox Scandal that erupted after the 1919 World Series. DeMotte vividly demonstrates that his experience as a fan of the White Sox, his participation

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in baseball as a young player, and his childhood experiences on the streets of the South Side of Chicago shaped Farrell's writing.

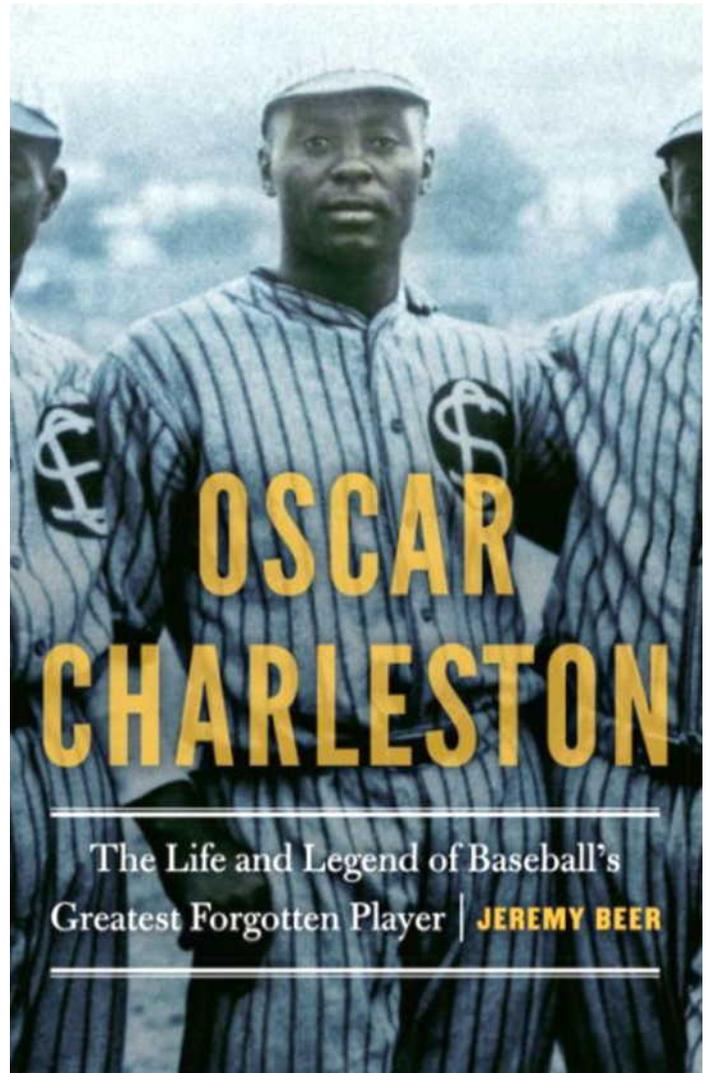
His first and most famous protagonist was Studs Lonigan, the subject of three successful novels published during the depths of the Great Depression. Studs roams the streets of the South Side, and like Farrell himself, comes of age during the final years of the Deadball Era. Studs, who never cared for baseball and was more interested in football, "was a lost soul with little sense of self-awareness which only got worse as he grew older," DeMotte observes. In subsequent novels, Farrell often revisited baseball and the South Side for inspiration, creating characters such as Danny O'Neill, a baseball-playing protagonist who frequented Comiskey Park in a five-novel series.

DeMotte serves as an adjunct professor of sociology at the State University of New York at Cortland. He previously authored *Bat, Ball, and Bible: Baseball and Sunday Observance in New York* (Potomac Books, 2016). "My initial reaction on hearing that I was a co-recipient on winning the Ritter award was one of pleasant surprise," DeMotte reflected. "I did not enter into the project of writing the Farrell book with any thought or expectation of award or how it might be received, other than a hope that readers would enjoy the book, and perhaps learn some things about the gamut of Chicago baseball during the Deadball Era. To that extent I am pleased."

"My second reaction was one of gratitude. There are many good books on baseball published each year and to be chosen for this award is indeed a high honor. My thanks go to the selection committee who I am sure had a difficult task in determining the winners. My good wishes and congratulations also go to Jeremy Beer, whose book I look forward to reading."

**OSCAR CHARLESTON: THE LIFE AND LEGEND OF BASEBALL'S GREATEST FORGOTTEN PLAYER**

Jeremy Beer's *Oscar Charleston* is a robust, well-researched, and brilliantly written biography that illuminates the life of one of baseball's most talented, enigmatic, and previously little-known figures. Rated by Bill James as the greatest Negro



League player, and the fourth best player overall behind only Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner, and Willie Mays, Charleston's legacy had been largely dimmed by time.

Beer traces Charleston's early life and development as a baseball player in Indianapolis, his enlistment in the US Army at the age of 15, and his military service in the Philippines, where he honed his blossoming baseball skills. Voluntarily discharged, Charleston joined Ben Taylor and Rube Foster as Negro League pioneers. During the final five years of the Deadball Era, in a time when black baseball leagues were transitory and movement between franchises were fluid, Charleston starred for the Indianapolis ABCs, New York Lincoln Stars, and Chicago American Giants. Still a young man, Charleston emerged as the Negro Leagues greatest star. He was an elite baserunner,

a fleet and strong-armed outfielder, a punishing hitter, and, eventually, a resourceful manager. He also possessed a quick and explosive temper and sometimes initiated or joined memorable fights, though Beer makes a convincing case that Charleston generally managed his anger both on and off the diamond.

Charleston's career extended well beyond the Deadball Era as he fashioned a 39-year Hall of Fame career in the Negro Leagues, ten seasons of winter ball in Cuba, and numerous barnstorming swings. He played with, against, and managed other Negro League legends, including Josh Gibson, Satchel Paige, Cool Papa Bell, and Judy Johnson, and on occasion, white major leaguers such as Lefty Grove and Lou Gehrig in exhibition games. Beer chronicles those encounters without exaggeration of hyperbole, leaving the reader to understand that Charleston would be more-widely considered an all-time great if only he had been welcomed into the white major leagues.

Well past his prime by 1947 when Jackie Robinson broke the major league color barrier and baseball slowly started to integrate, Charleston scouted Roy Campanella for the Brooklyn Dodgers in his role as major league baseball's first African American scout, and he managed and mentored young players as the skipper of the Philadelphia Stars. Charleston had just managed the Indianapolis Clowns to the Negro American League championship when he died at age 57 in 1954.

Although Charleston's career took place largely after the end of the Deadball Era, *Oscar Charleston* earns a share of the Ritter Award because Beer has advanced our understanding of the period. He provides a depth and quality of content about a previously underexplored subject, black baseball in the Deadball Era, and provides us with a better understanding of his subject's often complicated personal and professional life during that time and beyond.

"It is a great honor to share the Larry Ritter Award with Charles DeMotte, whose book on James T. Farrell is deserving of every award and piece of praise that comes its way," Beer responded. "Ritter's *Glory of Their Times* is an American classic"



*Jeremy Beer*

Beer continued. "For Oscar Charleston to be linked with it in any way is thrilling. Charleston, of course, knew and played against many of the men interviewed by Ritter. That he was never interviewed at length himself is a pity, but I hope his story will contribute to the excellent research and writing that continues to be published on the Deadball Era. We still know far too little about the great black stars of that time. More biographies needed!"

In addition to a share of the 2020 Larry Ritter Award, *Oscar Charleston* has also been named winner of SABR's Seymour Award, SABR's Robert Peterson Award by SABR's Negro Leagues Committee, and *Spitball Magazine's* Casey Award. Beer is a founding partner at American Philanthropic in Phoenix. His work has been published in a number of national publications including the *Washington Post*, *National Review*, and SABR's *Baseball Research Journal*. He is the author of *The Philanthropic Revolution: An Alternative History of American Charity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

## RITTER AWARD NOTES

- Jason Novak's *Baseball Epic; Famous and Forgotten Lives of the Deadball Era* (Coffee House Press, Minneapolis), also earned consideration as a finalist.
- Normally presented during the annual DEC meeting at the SABR convention, arrangements to present the award to this year's winners are

unsettled at the moment but will be decided shortly.

- Conferred every year since 2002, the award winner is selected by the Larry Ritter Book Award Committee, chaired by Doug Skipper, with members Mark Dugo, David Fleitz, Ben Klein, Craig Lammers, DEC Chairman John McMurray, and Mark Pattison.

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## BOOSTERISM IN THE DEADBALL ERA

by **Phil Williams**

Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, Americans frequently discussed the roles of “boosters” and “knockers.” Baseball often framed these debates.<sup>1</sup> As such, they provide insights into the sport's role in American civic life during the Deadball Era.

Historian Daniel J. Boorstin, in 1965's *The Americans: The National Experience*, demonstrated how “a peculiarly American type of community maker and community leader” developed in the nineteenth century. “His starting belief was in the interfusing of public and private prosperity ... [and] he thrived on growth and expansion.”<sup>2</sup> Contemporaries adapted the term “businessman,” previously a dry term to describe one devoted to mercantile affairs, to identify these men. At the close of the century “booster” came into circulation to define such individuals.

In 1899 “two young business men of Chicago” formed a “Boosters club, a new secret fraternal organization.” A local reporter observed, “Those accustomed to the use of slang can readily understand the meaning of the term[s] ‘booster’ and knocker.’ They are found in all walks of life—among all professions, and among all races. There are those who will help a friend to a good position, while there are others who will do all in their power to throw a worthy occupant off the pedestal he has gained for himself.” The club's motto, “every knock is a boost,” reflected its principles of brotherhood and mutual aid.<sup>3</sup> Within months, Chicago's Booster Club was nationally reported in *Leslie's Weekly*.<sup>4</sup>

A year before *Philadelphia Inquirer* sporting editor Frank Hough began attaching the phrase “If you can't boost don't knock” to his weekly “The Old Sport's Musings” column.<sup>5</sup> Hough had been a Philadelphia sportswriter for a decade before coming to the *Inquirer* in 1896.<sup>6</sup> By this time the underachieving Phillies often earned Hough's scorn.<sup>7</sup> Only when team secretary Billy Shettsline took over the managerial reins in June 1898 did the Phillies begin to flourish. With this change of fortune, Hough began to call out “the babies in the bleachers” for unfair venom directed at the players.<sup>8</sup>

Other sportswriters and editors either directly acknowledged Hough's motto or utilized a variant in the coming years.<sup>9</sup> By 1901 the *Memphis Scimitar* adopted a “If you won't boost don't knock” stance.<sup>10</sup> That July 5, a train “bringing the Memphis ball team and upwards of 400 ‘rooters’” arrived in Montgomery, Alabama, for a game. “The Memphis men all wore badges which bore this inscription, ‘Memphis, 102,320. We root. If you can't boost, don't knock.’” The number referred to the city's population from the 1900 census.<sup>11</sup>

In Missouri, as the 1902 season approached, St. Joseph manager Byron McKibben observed, “There are a lot of knockers here. They sit in the stands and hiss their own team.” Seeing a local newspaper call for fans to boost their team in turn boosted McKibben's spirits, “I hope that with a good live newspaper such as the *Gazette* is and a sporting department that is up-to-date and on the boosting order, the fans may be induced to leave off their knocking.”<sup>12</sup>

In encouraging fans to boost instead of knock, perspective was valuable. “The Tucson lads are

not big league players,” the *Citizen* sports page opined in 1905. “They make errors — so do Lajoie and Collins and Wagner.” Imploring fans to “help the lads along instead of knocking them,” the writer continued, “It’s the booster who is the real good fellow — the genuine sport, the rock-bottomed, dyed-in-the-wool, rooter.”<sup>13</sup> The same season, under a “Don’t Knock, But Boost” heading, the *Eureka* (Utah) *Reporter* told its readers: “Eureka baseball fans should not get sore because the local team does not play professional ball on every occasion. If the players were capable of doing this we would not be able to keep them — they would be playing in some of the big leagues.”<sup>14</sup>

As early as 1902, an amateur outfit named the “Boosters” appeared in Sioux City, Iowa.<sup>15</sup> Other “Booster” teams soon sprang up from St. Louis to Reno and from Hutchinson, Kansas, to Walla Walla, Washington.<sup>16</sup> Des Moines residents voted in a newspaper contest to rename their Western League team the “Boosters” before the 1908 season.<sup>17</sup> Less common, but seen in Buffalo in 1910, an amateur team nicknamed the “Knockers.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite the imprints provided by Chicago’s Booster Club and Philadelphia’s Frank Hough, major-league boosterism during the Deadball Era mostly flourished in smaller cities with flailing teams and/or subpar fan support. Cleveland held a “Boosters Day” in 1905, Cincinnati fans cheered under “Don’t knock, but boost” flags when the Pirates visited on June 22, 1908; and a boosters’ club sprang up in Washington in 1913.<sup>19</sup> But among major-league elites, perhaps Connie Mack’s late-season take in 1910 held: “Knockers can’t hurt nor boosters aid our chance to win [the] pennant.”<sup>20</sup>

Boosterism reminds us again that, in the Deadball Era, baseball was primarily consumed by fans living outside of large cities. Here the stakes were different. “Baseball is the life of summer interest to any town. A city without a ball game during baseball time is too dead to bury,” opined an editorialist in Norwich, Kansas, in 1910. “One knocker can tear down what a dozen boosters build.”<sup>21</sup>

In Charleston, West Virginia, Ed Kenna offered a similar editorial take, yet with a unique perspec-



Drawn by Jim Nasium

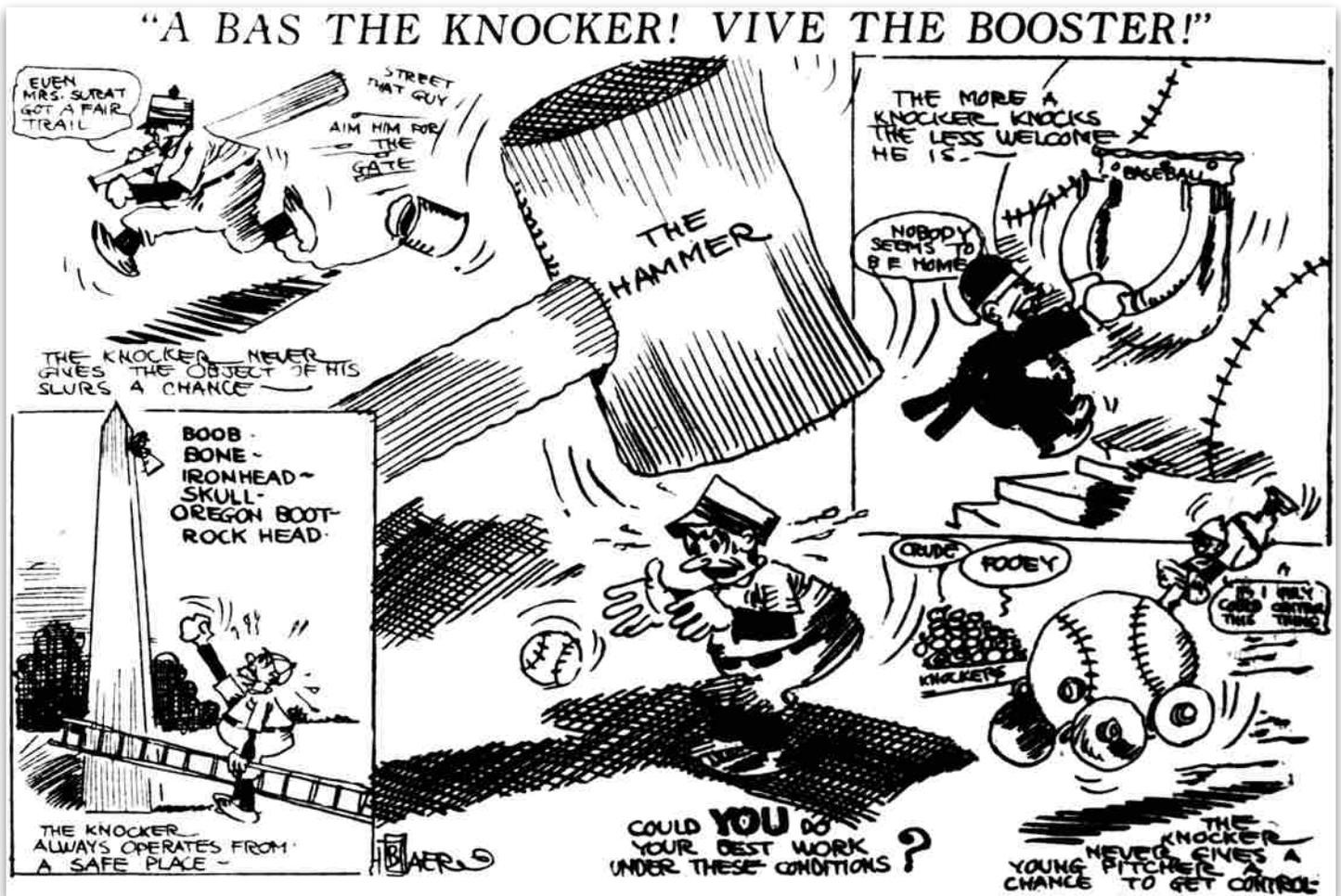
Philadelphia Inquirer, May 3, 1908

tive. Kenna's father had represented West Virginia in the U.S. Senate before dying when Edward was a teenager. After completing his education, the younger Kenna became famed as the "poet-pitcher," publishing verse and prospering in the high minors for several years. But for youthful indiscretions, Kenna might well have put together a more impressive major-league record than two games with the Athletics in 1902. By the end of the decade, his baseball career over, Kenna returned to West Virginia and assumed the editorship of the *Charleston Gazette*.<sup>22</sup>

"The support of the home team is one of the best ways to make its career one of success," the *Gazette's* editorial page stated in 1910, "and the successful ball team is one of the best advertisements a town can have."<sup>23</sup> In another editorial, the newspaper said of the city's knockers, "If this brand of self-sufficient, conceited and absolutely incompetent critics would but know that they are fools, then the task of the baseball booster, the

base ball player and the base ball owner would be easier."<sup>24</sup> A more-forward looking tact was used in another: "The game is growing and the caliber of its devotees is rising. When you go to a game boost or root, but don't knock. You cannot affect the contest and you certainly do not wish to disgust your neighbors in the stand."<sup>25</sup>

The debate about boosters and knockers could exhibit considerable nuances. "Did you ever hear of a poor baseball team improving by boosting?" asked a Birmingham, Alabama, columnist in 1904. "No sir; knocking is what makes the managers hustle around for new material."<sup>26</sup> In nearby Gadsden, after a team failed to survive in 1907, an editor wrote, "A knocker goes to the ball games. Get enough of them together and we can have baseball every day."<sup>27</sup> That same summer, Denver Grizzlies manager Ed Wheeler stated, "I have never made any remonstrance personally because the fans have knocked, for I respect their right to say or do as they please. It takes the knockers and the



Drawn by Arthur "Bugs" Baer

Washington Times, June 1, 1914

boosters, the loud-mouthed fan heard above all the others, the witty ones, the sarcastic ones and the encouraging pullers all combined, to make the great national game what it is.”<sup>28</sup> In 1916, after locals turned on a substandard Warren, Pennsylvania, team, a local sportswriter opined, “The fans cannot be blamed for refusing to put up with some of the playing exhibited ... there is a whole lot of difference between a ‘knocker’ and a ‘fall guy,’ and they refused to be a ‘fall guy’ for the Warriors.”<sup>29</sup>

In Washington DC, meanwhile, some 20 African American fans commonly sat in the right-field pavilion of Griffith Stadium when the Nationals were in town. Believing “that both ‘Boosters’ and ‘Knockers’ are necessary for the well-being of the national sport,” they founded the Baseball Boosters and Knockers Corporation. On Thanksgiving Eve, 1916, they held their first annual banquet. Complimenting the fans for their “fidelity” to the team, manager Clark Griffith, third baseman Eddie Foster, and pitcher Jim Shaw attended the dinner as guests of honor.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the most common sign of boosterism in Deadball Era baseball was the Boosters Day, an event that often reflected the increasing hardships of minor-league baseball. Often, as in Keokuk, Iowa, and Allentown, Pennsylvania, Boosters Day tickets cost a dollar, an inflated price to raise funds for a franchise.<sup>31</sup> Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, merchants donated suits and sporting goods as prizes to entice Booster Day fans.<sup>32</sup>

Sometimes, as was the case in a 1908 Boosters Day in Delectaur, Illinois, local businesses – already at the forefront of boosting their community – encouraged the purchase of special booster tickets. Then, when the big day arrived, much of the community turned out in a half-holiday. Staff from a dry goods store, “with flying banners, bells and horns, had a chartered street car” while a lumber company’s employees “came into the grounds on three lumber wagons, with flying banners, the men standing on the wagon platforms and giving a cheer for Delectaur and its baseball team.” Hundreds of boys were admitted free. Although not quite meeting expectations – local businesses would continue to push their tickets for future games – the day raised \$702 for the

team.<sup>33</sup> Yet Delectaur’s team, the Class B Triple-I League’s Commodores, continued to struggle financially. In 1910 the city sported a Class D Northern Association squad. By this time, both the Three-I and the Northern Association’s leadership encouraged Booster Days for all their teams.<sup>34</sup>

The evolution of baseball boosterism reached a higher still level of community participation as the Deadball Era closed. Prior to the 1919 season, booster committees in Moline and Fort Wayne sold hundreds of \$10 shares to sponsor athletic associations which, in turn, sought to aid local ball clubs.<sup>35</sup> The Illinois city successfully landed in the re-launched Three-I League; the Indiana city failed to land a berth in professional baseball.

Boosterism did not vanish from baseball, or American life, with a postwar return to normalcy. But with the publication of Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt* in 1922, which sold 1.6 million copies, it was subject to wide satire.<sup>36</sup> The country now had a majority-urban population, and broadcasting and celebrity culture would increasingly draw fan interest to the major leagues. Today, baseball’s Deadball Era boosters and knockers may seem excessive, but perhaps they are representative of “the strange disappearance of social capital and civic engagement” that concern contemporary observers of American life.<sup>37</sup>

## NOTES

1. One means of measuring the impact of these terms is through the search engine of a present-day newspaper database. For example, on March 13, 2020, the author reviewed Newspapers.com for the occurrence of pages with “boosters” and “knockers” within. A total of 58,732 pages were returned. Over 52% (30,830) came from the 1900 to 1919 period. Contrast this to pages with “supporters” and “opponents” within. A total of 4,286,836 pages were returned. Less than 8% (331,948) came from 1900 to 1919. Similarly, when “boosters” and “knockers” and “baseball” are used, 11,135 pages were returned. Almost 42% (4,656) came from the 1900 to 1919 period. Contrast this to pages with “catchers” and “pitchers” and “baseball” within. A total of 6,956,901 pages were returned. Just over 7% (508,821) came from 1900 to 1919.

2. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 115-116, 123.
3. "Boosters in a Club," *Chicago Inter Ocean*, February 18, 1900.
4. "The Boosters Club," *Indianapolis Journal*, June 24, 1900.
5. "The Old Sport's Musings," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 21, 1898. Hough had previously titled his weekly column "The Man Behind the Plate" and for the next several years would alternate between these headings.
6. For an overview of Hough's life, see his obituary: "Frank L. Hough Has Passed Away," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 16, 1913.
7. See, for example, his "Man Behind the Plate" column from August 16, 1897.
8. "The Old Sport's Musings," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 19, 1898.
9. For direct acknowledgement, see "Atlanta's A Winner, Let Every Fan Boost," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 15, 1906; "If You Can't Boost, Don't Knock," *Harrisburg Courier*, April 12, 1907. For variants, both Bob Dunbar in the *Boston Journal* (from 1905 through 1918) and Bob Thayer in the *Washington Times* (from 1911 to 1913) utilized "Every Knock is a Boost" mottos.
10. "If You Won't Boost Don't Knock," *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, August 1, 1901.
11. "The Fourth Observed," *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 5, 1901.
12. "Manager McKibben is Glad There is One Booster Here," *St. Joseph News-Press*, April 6, 1902.
13. "Two Days of Big Baseball," *Tucson Citizen*, May 15, 1905.
14. "Don't Knock but Boost," *Eureka (Utah) Reporter*, September 29, 1905.
15. "The Irish Win Again," *Sioux City (Iowa) Journal*, April 28, 1902.
16. "Amateur Baseball Notes," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 22, 1902; "Call 'Em the 'Boosters,'" *Reno Evening Gazette*, July 3, 1907; "Ten Innings Necessary," *Hutchinson (Kansas) News*, April 27, 1906; "Missionaries Lose Again," *Walla Walla (Washington) Evening Statesman*, May 3, 1906.
17. "Ballots Give Big Impetus," *Des Moines Register and Leader*, March 29, 1908.
18. "Amateur Baseball," *Buffalo Times*, May 2, 1910.
19. "Rooters Club for Pittsburg," *Pittsburg Press*, April 13, 1902; "Willis Holds the Redlegs to Three Hits," *Pittsburg Press*, June 22, 1908; "Boosters Club Will Hold Mass Meeting," *Washington Herald*, June 11; 1913.
20. "Knockers Can't Hurt nor Boosters Aid Our Chance to Win Pennant," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 2, 1910.
21. "Boost the Ball Team," *Norwich (Kansas) Herald*, March 25, 1910.
22. For more on Kenna, see the author's upcoming BioProject entry on him.
23. "The Ball Season Opens," *Charleston (West Virginia) Gazette*, May 4, 1910.
24. "Foolish Knocking," *Charleston Gazette*, August 24, 1910.
25. "The Nuisance of the Game," *Charleston Gazette*, August 21, 1910.
26. "Short Stories of Fact and Fiction," *Birmingham News*, January 7, 1904.
27. "Dots of the Day," *Gadsden (Alabama) Times-News*, August 2, 1907.
28. "Wheeler and His Woes," *Lincoln (Nebraska) Evening News*, July 31, 1907.
29. "Little Regret Over Disbanding of Local Team," *Warren (Pennsylvania) Evening Times*, August 7, 1916.
30. R.W. Thompson, "'Stove League' of Boosters at a Unique Spread," (*Indianapolis Freeman*, December 16, 1916. See also, "Stove League Fans Will Hold Banquet," *Washington Herald*, November 24, 1916.
31. "Keokuk and Clinton Tie," *Des Moines Register and Leader*, September 12, 1906; "Now for One Big Pull-Along!" *Allentown (Pennsylvania) Democrat*, July 17, 1913.
32. "Booster Day Starts Big Events; Reading Has Chance at Prizes," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, August 25, 1914.
33. "Baseball Boosters Make New Attendance Record," *Dectaur (Illinois) Herald*, July 23, 1908.
34. "The Northern Association," *Sporting Life*, March 26, 1910: 9; "Indiana-Illinois-Iowa," *Sporting Life*, August 13, 1910: 24.
35. "Moline is Pledged to Organize Fans' Association to Back Sport," *Moline (Illinois) Dispatch*, March 7, 1919; "Fans to Meet Thursday Night in Council Chambers at City Hall; All Interested Urged to Attend," *Fort Wayne (Indiana) Journal-Gazette*, April 22, 1919.
36. For a recent evaluation, see Nathaniel Rich, "American Dreams: 'Babbitt' by Sinclair Lewis," *Daily Beast*, July 13, 2017. [www.thedailybeast.com/american-dreams-babbitt-by-sinclair-lewis](http://www.thedailybeast.com/american-dreams-babbitt-by-sinclair-lewis).
37. Robert Putnam, "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America," *American Prospect*, December 19, 2001. [www.prospect.org/infrastructure/strange-disappearance-civic-america](http://www.prospect.org/infrastructure/strange-disappearance-civic-america).

## GIL WHITEHOUSE: LONG-AGO STAR OF MAINE BASEBALL

by **Bill Lamb**

In a remembrance published in the *Bangor* (Maine) *Daily News* of January 18, 1962, the decades-deceased Gil Whitehouse was described as “the Babe Ruth of his time” and “the greatest baseball player in Maine’s history.”<sup>1</sup> Something of a baseball prodigy, Whitehouse reached the major leagues as an 18-year-old catcher. But a one-game audition with the 1912 Boston Braves proved a disaster, and he was soon released. Two years later, the youngster rebounded with an outstanding mid-tier minor league season, and subsequently earned an Opening Day start as lead-off batter and right fielder for the 1915 Newark Peppers of the upstart Federal League. Again, the company proved too fast, and he was soon back in the minors. Only three years later and with his early promise unfulfilled, Whitehouse’s time in Organized Baseball was over, his playing days seemingly behind him before he reached his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.

In 1921, Gil relocated to Maine and finally entered his comfort zone. He found well-paying assignments with semipro and industrial league clubs, cushy club-sponsored off-season employment, and genuine personal contentment. For five summers, his hitting and pitching dominated play in Pine Tree State competitions. In the process, Whitehouse became the darling of the Maine sports press and a fan favorite throughout the state. Then without apparent warning, it all came to an abrupt end in February 1926. Called into work on a Sunday afternoon to open a company plant for delivery trucks that needed to be loaded and fueled, Whitehouse was casually pumping gas when his heart seized. He died within minutes. Gil Whitehouse was only 32, and left behind young three daughters and an eight-months-pregnant wife. The details of his sadly abbreviated life follow.

Gilbert Arthur Whitehouse was born on October 15, 1893 in Somerville, Massachusetts, a northwest suburb of Boston. He was the second of three children<sup>2</sup> born to Albert Whitehouse (born 1865) and his wife Henrietta (nee Higgins, 1869). Both parents

were English immigrants to Canada where they met and married in Ottawa during the late-1880s. In 1890, the family relocated to Boston as Albert, a gymnastics/physical education instructor, was constantly on the move in search of employment. During Gil’s youth, the Whitehouse family resided in various Massachusetts towns; New Orleans; Durham, North Carolina; and, eventually, New York City, where Gil received most of his elementary school education.<sup>3</sup> In 1910, the US Census placed the Whitehouses in Philadelphia where 16-year-old Gil is listed as a sales clerk in a city department store. But New England news reports and Whitehouse obituaries tell a somewhat different story of our subject’s teen years, as well as his beginnings as a baseball player.

According to one undated/unidentified news clip in the Whitehouse file at the Giamatti Research Center, Gil first attracted attention playing ball for West Brookfield (Massachusetts) High School.<sup>4</sup> He then left school at age 15 to play with semipro clubs in the greater-Worcester area. Despite decent size, eventually 5-foot-10/170 pounds,<sup>5</sup> above-average foot speed, and a powerful right throwing arm, Whitehouse was never much of a gloveman and constantly in search of a defensive position that he could cover adequately. His forte, rather, was hitting. Although modern reference works list him as a switch-hitter, contemporaneous baseball reportage and vintage photos portray Whitehouse as primarily, if not exclusively, a left-handed batter,<sup>6</sup> and an outstanding one – until he ran into major leagues pitching. By 1912, Gil was playing for a semipro club in Norwich, Connecticut, hitting well and trying to get by defensively as a catcher. With the Boston Braves headed for a last-place (52-101, .340) National League finish and veteran catcher-playing manager Johnny Kling in need of someone to occasionally spell fellow backstop Bill Rariden and himself, Kling decided to try out the young Norwich phenom whom he had been hearing about and signed Whitehouse to a Boston contract.

On June 20, 1912, 18-year-old Gil Whitehouse made his major league debut in a home game against the New York Giants – and it could not have gone much worse. With Boston already trailing 9-0 in the fourth inning, starting catcher Kling decided to sit out the

remainder of the game and try out the prospect. At the plate, young Whitehouse was helpless against curve-balling southpaw Hooks Wiltse, striking out twice. He also proved inadequate behind the plate, committing two fielding errors and allowing a passed ball, while permitting seven Giants baserunners to steal safely (including Josh Devore who swiped second and third base twice in a seven-run New York ninth). With the Giants ahead 21-2 in a contest that the next-day *New York Times* would label a “baseball farce,”<sup>7</sup> Giants manager John McGraw lifted Wiltse and brought in a new recruit of his own to finish the contest, pitcher Ernie Shore. The lanky right-hander would go on to have a fine career, but his major leagues debut was awful, even worse than that of our subject. The Braves immediately set upon Shore, battering him for 10 last-inning runs. But of the three outs finally obtained by Shore, one was the third strikeout of Gil Whitehouse.

Given his nightmarish audition, Kling was not disposed to use Whitehouse again and released him soon thereafter.<sup>8</sup> Chastened but undiscouraged, Gil returned to Connecticut where he played for semi-pro clubs in South Norwalk and New Canaan.<sup>9</sup> An unidentified news clip in the Whitehouse file states that he was signed by the New Haven White Wings of the Class B Eastern Association for the 1913 season, but released before the regular season began.<sup>10</sup> Whitehouse received another chance in Organized Baseball at the start of the 1914 season, signed by the Worcester Busters of the Class B New England League. Gil’s bat made a favorable early-season impression on Worcester manager Jesse Burkett, but his work behind the plate remained substandard. And a position switch was stymied by the oversupply of outfielders and corner infielders already on the Busters’ roster. But rather than release Whitehouse, Burkett “loaned” him to the Portland Duffs, a NEL rival owned and managed by his friend Hugh Duffy.<sup>11</sup> Once there, Whitehouse made Burkett regret the move, as he proceeded to tear up the circuit.

Given the benefit of being in the Duffs everyday lineup – more often as an outfielder (75 games) than as a catcher (21 games) – the now-20-year-old quickly became one of the league’s leading hitters, staging a season-long duel with Worcester’s Chick Shorten for the NEL batting average crown. In the



*Gil Whitehouse*

end, Shorten (.345) nosed-out Whitehouse (.344) for the laurel.<sup>12</sup> Gil’s outstanding stickwork, however, did not go unrewarded, as it garnered him the attention of major league clubs, with the New York Yankees being his foremost suitor. But before he changed his professional status, Whitehouse altered his domestic one. That September, he married Mildred Barbour, a 21-year-old Portland telephone operator. Before the decade was out, the young couple would have three daughters, Shirley (born 1915), Mona (1916), and Barbara (1920).

On December 15, 1914, Whitehouse spurned contract overtures from the game’s major leagues establishment to sign with the Indiana Hoosiers, the inaugural champions of the renegade Federal League.<sup>13</sup> With competition for new talent fierce among the rival circuits, the pact called for a handsome \$4,700 salary, easily the most money that Whitehouse ever earned in Organized Baseball.<sup>14</sup> Gil’s good bat-weak glove reputation preceded him and once spring training began, Hoosiers manager Bill Phillips dispatched him to less defensively-demanding right field where his primary competition

was holdover Al Scheer. By the end of camp, Whitehouse had won the job. By then, the Indianapolis franchise had been relocated by new club owner Harry Sinclair. His ambition to place his just-acquired ball club in New York City thwarted by NY Giants boss Harry Hempstead,<sup>15</sup> Sinclair settled on nearby Newark.<sup>16</sup>

On April 10, 1915, Gil Whitehouse was the season-opening lead-off batter/right fielder for the Newark Peppers in an away game against Baltimore. As pointedly observed by a local sportswriter, “the youngster is very highly touted ... but failed to show anything in the opener,”<sup>17</sup> going 0-for-4, with three strikeouts in Newark’s 7-5 victory. Events pretty much repeated themselves during Whitehead’s next starting assignment four days later. He went 0-for-3, with two more strikeouts (but he scored a run and drove in another) in an 8-7 loss to the Brooklyn Tip-Tops. With that, manager Phillips had seen enough and consigned Whitehead to the bench. He sat out the next ten Newark games. But with the Peppers far behind Buffalo in the bottom of the ninth on April 27, Gil was inserted as a pinch-hitter and registered his first major leagues base-hit, a single off of right-hander Hugh Bedient. Whitehouse appeared in only one more Newark game thereafter (an unsuccessful pinch-hitting appearance) before being optioned in mid-May to the Hartford Senators of the Colonial League, the Federal League’s minor league affiliate.<sup>18</sup>

Once again playing daily and facing inferior pitching, Whitehouse’s bat quickly heated up. In 97 games for Hartford, he batted .318, third-best in the Colonial League, and began showing some power: 34 extra-base hits. He also made his professional pitching debut, going 1-1 (with four strikeouts but eight walks) in two appearances.<sup>19</sup> Whitehouse’s solid work earned him a mid-September recall by Newark, then in the midst of a five-club dogfight for the Federal League pennant. In his first game back, Gil went 3-for-5, with a triple and two runs-scored, in a 7-6 win over the St. Louis Terriers. Five days later, he registered another three-hit game in a 6-4 win over Kansas City. From then on, Whitehouse was a semi-regular in the Peppers lineup. He even pitched a scoreless inning of mop-up relief in early October.<sup>20</sup>

Regrettably, the performance of both the Newark Peppers and Gil Whitehouse faded down the stretch.

Briefly the Federal League front-runner in mid-September, the (80-72, .526) Peppers finished fifth in final FL standings – but only six games behind the champion Chicago Whales. The 26 base-hits that Whitehouse collected upon his late-season return to Newark elevated his 1915 FL season batting average to .225, underwhelming but a vast improvement over his .100 (1-for-10) start. In 35 FL game-appearances total, he also scored 16 runs and drove in another nine. Newark reserved Whitehouse for the 1916 season<sup>21</sup> but, teetering on financial collapse, the Federal League dissolved over the winter. With that, Gil’s time in Newark, indeed his days as a big leagues ballplayer, were now over.

Like other lesser Federal League lights, Whitehouse attracted little interest from the teams of the surviving major leagues. The best that he could do was land a berth in a mid-level minor: the Class B Eastern League.<sup>22</sup> But not just any minor league outfit, as the 1916 New London (Connecticut) Planters that Gil was joining has been ranked among the Top-100 ball clubs in minor league history.<sup>23</sup> For the most part, New London’s excellence was grounded in a superb pitching staff (four 19+-game winners), not batting prowess. Only one Planters regular batted over .270 (Harry Weiser, .323). By that measuring stick, Whitehouse’s .255 BA was tolerable, a bit better than the club norm. More, however, had been expected from the ex-Pepper, and he was not retained by New London for the 1917 season. In fact, it appears that Whitehouse did not play anywhere in Organized Baseball that year.

Whitehouse resurfaced in 1918. With America now fully engaged in World War I and player ranks thinned by military service or work in defense industry plants, the professional baseball situation was unsettled, with a number of leagues suspending play for the duration. But for the most part, the majors and high minors decided to start the campaign, and needed manpower to do so. Gil Whitehouse was physically fit and only 25 years old, but as a married man already with two young children he was an unlikely candidate for conscription. Given that, the Toronto Maple Leafs of the Class AA International League signed him.

Whitehouse performed capably in Toronto, batting .297 and playing decently in the outfield

through mid-July. At that point, the Boston Red Sox, which evidently held certain rights to Maple Leafs personnel (including Whitehouse), directed his release to a league opponent, the cellar-dwelling Jersey City Skeeters.<sup>24</sup> There, Gil's hitting waned (he finished the 1918 season with a combined .274 BA in 105 games-played)<sup>25</sup> but he was given the chance to hone a skill that he would put on full display in the years to come: pitching. In fact, Gil ended the abbreviated 1918 season<sup>26</sup> with an impressive iron-man hurling feat. On September 2, Whitehouse hurled complete-game victories in both ends of a season-ending doubleheader against the Newark Bears. As it turned out, the twin-bill triumphs marked the conclusion of Gil Whitehouse's career in Organized Baseball.

Jersey City reserved Whitehouse for the 1919 season,<sup>27</sup> but with the November close of the Great War ushering in the return to baseball ranks of hordes of established players, Whitehouse realized it was time to move on with his life. Returning Massachusetts, Gil got a job as a patrolman in the City of Newton.<sup>28</sup> And once the weather permitted, he supplemented his police department paycheck with weekend semi-pro gigs, most notably with the Brennan Shoe club of Randolph, the champions of southeastern Massachusetts. Now as much a full-time pitcher as an outfielder, he regularly took the hill for the Brennans, even throwing a no-hitter at the (Boston) Back Bay Knights of Columbus club in 1920.

The following year, Whitehouse took a fateful step. He relocated his family to Maine, his wife's home state. For three seasons, Gil and his Livermore Falls teammates were the cream of local semipro clubs, dominating Maine state competitions. Again alternating between the pitcher's mound and the outfield and slugging long drives from both sides of the plate, Whitehouse was soon pronounced "the Babe Ruth of Maine."<sup>29</sup> After three acclaimed summer campaigns, Whitehouse assayed a comeback in Organized Baseball. But a Spring 1924 tryout with the San Antonio Bears of the Class A Texas League fizzled, and Gil soon returned to Maine.<sup>30</sup> Once back home, he promptly found a congenial situation: a soft, well-paying job as a storekeeper at the Eastern Manufacturing Company plant in Brewer and player-manager of the Easterns, his employer's crack baseball club



*In Memoriam: Gilbert Whitehouse*

in the newly-formed Maine League. As before, Whitehouse alternated between pitching and the outfield, leading the league in hitting with a .400+ batting average.<sup>31</sup> In September 1925, fan appreciation was demonstrated by the holding of "Gil Whitehouse Day" at the Easterns home ballpark. Gil repaid the locals' esteem by playing all nine positions in a 4-3 victory over the P.C.F. club.<sup>32</sup>

As he awaited the arrival of the coming baseball season, life was good for Gil Whitehouse. Then without seeming warning, he collapsed and died while attending to routine duties at the plant on February 14, 1926. Only thereafter was it revealed that an errant late-1925 season fastball that struck Whitehouse in the chest had required follow-up medical care for ensuing heartbeat irregularity "on rare occasions."<sup>33</sup> Medical records pertaining to the deceased's pass-

ing, however, do no more than guess regarding his demise: “sudden (probably heart disease), cause unknown.”<sup>34</sup>

Only 32 and “probably the best all-around baseball player in the state,”<sup>35</sup> the unexpected passing of the genial, well-liked Whitehouse stunned fans, teammates, and the Maine sports press, and tributes to the deceased poured in.<sup>36</sup> Days later, family, friends, and coworkers crowded funeral services conducted at the Second Congregational Church in South Brewer.<sup>37</sup> Interment at Forest City Cemetery in South Portland followed. Survivors included his pregnant widow Millie, three young children, and his parents.

Postscript: Some six weeks after her husband’s death, Millie gave birth to Gilbert Arthur Whitehouse, Jr., the son our subject never got to meet. In 1970, Gil, Jr. provided the Hall of Fame library in Cooperstown copies of family photos and the otherwise-difficult-to-locate news clippings that have helped this profile recreate the life and times of Gil Whitehouse, a good man and long-ago pride of Maine baseball who deserves to be remembered.

## SOURCES

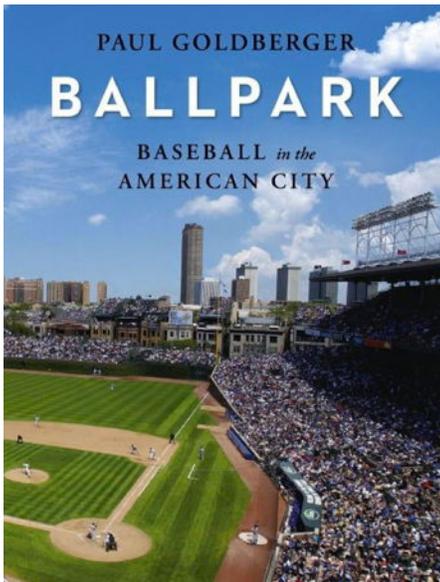
Sources for the biographical information recited above include the Gil Whitehouse file, complete with family scrapbook clippings and photos, maintained at the Giamatti Research Center, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, New York; US Census and Whitehouse family data accessed via Ancestry.com, and various of the newspaper articles cited in the endnotes, particularly the obituaries locally published at the time of Whitehouse’s death in February 1926. Unless otherwise specified, stats have been taken from Baseball-Reference.

## ENDNOTES

1. Owen Osborne, “Gil Whitehouse Was Babe Ruth of Maine,” *Bangor (Maine) Daily News*, January 18, 1962: 30. The writer is indebted to Betsy Paradis, Local History and Special Collections Librarian, Bangor Public Library, for providing this article and local reportage relating to Gil Whitehouse’s death in February 1926.
2. His siblings were sisters Monica (born 1891) and Beatrice (1899).
3. According to his son Gilbert, Jr. responding to a December 15, 1970 letter from Hall of Fame historian Cliff Kachline.
4. See “Whitehouse Is Lost to Duffs,” unidentified 1914 news article in the Whitehouse file at the GRC.
5. Gil Whitehouse’s TSN player contract card has him slightly bigger: 5’11”/175 lb.
6. See e.g., Ralston Goss, “New Outfielder Is Signed by Phillips,” *Indianapolis Star*, January 6, 1915: 10: “Gilbert Whitehouse ... is only 20 years old but gives every promise of being a fast player. He is a right-handed thrower and left-handed batsman.” Of the four different 1913-1918 batting stance photos and cartoon drawings of Whitehouse found in his GRC file, each depicts him batting lefty, not righty. A Whitehouse photo published in the *Indianapolis Star*, March 22, 1915, likewise shows him as a left-handed batter. From the evidence, it appears that right-handed batting, like pitching, is something that Whitehouse developed largely during his post-Organized Baseball playing days.
7. See “Giants and Boston in Baseball Farce,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1912: 11.
8. Current baseball reference works erroneously list Whitehouse as playing in two games for the 1912 Boston Braves. But review of box scores for the 18 Boston games that followed Whitehouse’s June 20 debut establish that he never played a second game in a Boston uniform. See also, “Records of the Boston Nationals,” *Boston Journal*, July 8, 1912: 8, which lists Whitehouse as having appeared in one game and being released.
9. A file card of unknown origin contained in the Whitehouse file at the GRC states that he played the 1912-1913 seasons with Brockton (Massachusetts) of the Class B New England League. No evidence of such an affiliation, however, could be discovered by the writer.
10. Whitehouse’s signing and release by New Haven in 1913 is also noted on his TSN player contract card.
11. As explained in “Former Norwalk Player Jumps to Federal League,” *Bridgeport (Connecticut) Evening Farmer*, January 4, 1915: 9, and “A New Hoosier,” *Sporting Life*, February 27, 1915: 9. The Whitehouse file also contains a January 14, 1915 letter written by Hugh Duffy which confirmed that “Whitehouse was not my property but I had the loan of him” for the 1914 season.
12. Per “New England League Statistics,” *Sporting Life*, January 2, 1915: 24. Whitehouse’s defensive work improved to mediocre, as he posted middle-of-the-pack fielding averages in the outfield (.931) and behind the plate (.945), per the New England

League stats published in the *1915 Reach Guide*, 220.

13. As reported in "Former Norwalk Player Jumps to Federal League," *Bridgeport Evening Farmer*, January 4, 1915: 9; "Federal Snare a Hitter," *Watertown (New York) Times*, January 7, 1915: 6, and elsewhere.
14. A copy of Gil Whitehouse's 1915 contract with the Indianapolis Hoosiers is viewable on-line via the National Baseball Hall of Fame website.
15. Once Hempstead learned of Sinclair's intention to relocate the Hoosiers to Gotham, he had his agents quietly purchase or encumber the few ballpark-sized property lots available in crowded Manhattan.
16. Wiedenmayer's Park, the only preexisting ballpark in Newark, was also unavailable, leased by the Newark Indians of the high minor International League. This forced Sinclair to place the newly-named Newark Peppers in a ballpark he had erected in the adjoining mini-city of Harrison, New Jersey.
17. Emanuel Daniel, "Baltimore Budget," *Sporting Life*, April 17, 1915: 10.
18. As reported in "Three Men for Hartford," *Boston Herald*, May 18, 1915: 10; "Hartford May Get Two Stars from Brookfeds," *Bridgeport Evening Farmer*, May 18, 1915: 9. Accompanying Whitehouse to Hartford were pitchers Fred Trautman and Harry Billard. Formerly a Class C minor league, the Colonial League abandoned Organized Baseball to affiliate with the Federal League just before the 1915 season started.
19. Per Colonial League stats published in the *Springfield (Massachusetts) Daily News*, August 30, 1915: 13.
20. Gil Whitehouse is not to be confused with left-handed pitcher Charlie Whitehouse (no relation). The two Whitehouses were Newark teammates early in the 1915 season, but Charlie had been released in early June.
21. As established by an undated letter to Whitehouse from Newark club president Pat Powers contained in the Whitehouse file at the GRC. Shortly thereafter, Powers agreed to release Whitehouse from the reserve clause of his contract with Newark upon payment of \$1,000. Letter of Powers to Whitehouse, dated January 12, 1916, in the Whitehouse file. Unsurprisingly, Whitehouse did not take Powers up on the offer.
22. Newark club owner Sinclair unloaded Whitehouse for the modest price of \$250, per "News of Sports," *Bridgeport Evening Farmer*, March 28, 1916: 11.
23. New London comes in 57<sup>th</sup> in the all-time best minor league rankings of baseball historians Bill Weiss and Marshall Wright on [www.Milb.com](http://www.Milb.com). The Planters went 86-34 (.717) to capture the 1916 Eastern League crown.
24. A telegram and follow-up letter memorializing Whitehouse's release to Jersey City signed by Boston club owner-president Harry Frazee is contained in the Whitehouse file at the GRC. The transfer was also noted in the press. See e.g., "6 New Skeeters to Play against Rochester To-day," *New York Tribune*, July 18, 1918: 14.
25. Per International League statistics published in the *1919 Official Reach Guide*, 291. Baseball-Reference has no 1918 stats for Whitehouse.
26. The regular season of professional baseball leagues was ended in early September 1918 by order of US Secretary of War Newton D. Baker.
27. As noted in the *1919 Official Reach Guide*, 215.
28. Patrolman Whitehouse's most high-profile collar was his arrest of serial burglar William "Raffles" Twomey, as reported in "Newton Robber Admits Guilt," an undated/unidentified news item in the Whitehouse file at the GRC.
29. See Owen Osborne, "Gil Whitehouse was the Babe Ruth of Maine," *Bangor Daily News*, January 18, 1962: 30.
30. See "San Antonio Bears in Spring Training," complete with photo of Gil Whitehouse, *San Antonio Evening News*, March (?), 1924: 10. Whitehouse was in the area visiting his sister Beatrice Munn and family that spring.
31. Per an undated/unidentified news item contained in the Whitehouse file at the GRC.
32. See "Whitehouse Stars in All Positions," an unidentified September 1925 news article in the Whitehouse file.
33. Per "Sudden Death of Whitehouse, Eastern Leader," February 15, 1926 (newspaper unidentified).
34. Per the Gilbert Whitehouse record of death obtained by the writer from Maine health officials. Because no autopsy was performed, the Whitehouse cause of death is unknowable. But cardiac arrhythmia as a result of trauma to the heart muscle is a distinct possibility.
35. According to "Veteran Pitcher Dies in Brewer," *Bangor Daily News*, February 15, 1926.
36. Illustrative is "Our Loss Is Great," in an undated issue of *The Mill*, the Eastern Manufacturing Company newsletter, a copy of which is contained in the Whitehouse file at the GRC. See also, "Sudden Death of Whitehouse, Eastern Leader," above.
37. As reported in "Deaths and Funerals," *Bangor Daily News*, February 17, 1926.



## **BALLPARK: BASEBALL IN THE AMERICAN CITY**

**By Paul Goldberger**

*2020, Alfred A Knopf  
[ISBN: 9780307701541. 365  
pp. \$35.00 USD. Hardcover.]*

Reviewed by  
**David Shiner**  
cunegonde@prodigy.net

It's been thirty years since Chicagoans were treated to the spectacle of their political leaders twisting arms to induce state congressmen to fund a stadium to keep the White Sox in Chicago. The bill passed, after the stated deadline, on the assurance that the new Comiskey Park would be the envy of baseball fans everywhere. Within a couple of years, it was clear that that claim had been baseless. A remarkable new ballpark had indeed opened, but it was in Baltimore, not Chicago. What factors made one park a resounding success and the other something less than that?

Paul Goldberger answers that question in his new book, *Ballpark: Baseball in the American City*. In fact, he answers every question you could think to ask about the evolution, construction, and success or otherwise of major league ballparks though the ages.

Goldberger begins with a broad brush. The ballpark, he avers, “evokes the tension between the rural and the urban that has existed throughout American history,” reflecting both “the Jeffersonian impulse toward open space and rural expanse, and the Hamiltonian belief in the city and in industrial infrastructure” in a manner that privileges coexistence over conflict. “For the game to succeed,” he states, “the two worlds have to work in harmony. In the ballpark, the urban and the rural worlds become one.”

Heady stuff, that. But those who might fear that this book will be a sociological tome rather than a celebration of baseball history – and I was one of them when I began reading – soon discover that there is nothing to worry about. The book is a brilliant and perceptive discussion of actual ballparks, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and concluding with the most recent of them. Goldberger is a renowned and prolific architectural writer – he has won a Pulitzer, and this is his tenth book – but he's also a knowledgeable baseball fan and an excellent writer, and those virtues shine throughout the

book. Additionally, the volume is replete with attractive photographs and instructive diagrams of almost all of the parks Goldberger discusses.

After utilizing the first three chapters to track the pre-history of the modern ballpark, Goldberger turns his attention to the first generation of steel and concrete ballparks, built during the Deadball Era. That was the period of construction of the only two ballparks that have lasted more than a century – Fenway in Boston and Wrigley in Chicago – plus lost gems like Ebbets Field in Brooklyn and Tiger Stadium in Detroit. Those parks, according to Goldberger, shared a sense of intimacy: “their different layouts all have the ability to make fans feel connected both to the field and to each other.” It was then that the idea of the ballpark as a civic building emerged, not only architecturally but also in other ways. Before that time, most ballparks offered few amenities to fans; the game itself was almost the only fan-friendly aspect of the experience. As Goldberger puts it, “[t]here were no concession stands, restrooms were generally filthy, and the stands often looked like they were cleaned between seasons, not games.” Weeghman Park, later renamed Wrigley Field, changed all that, after which all major-league parks would shortly follow suit.

The second modern age was the postwar concrete-donut era, featuring characterless facilities often intended for mul-

ti-purpose use. As Goldberger sees it, New Comiskey (now Guaranteed Rate Field) was the last of those parks, a sterile behemoth in which, as John Pastier has noted, the seats in the first row of the upper deck were further from the field than the seats in the last row of the ballpark it replaced. By contrast, Camden Yards was at once both majestic and intimate, “a triumph of balance” that ushered in the third age of modern baseball architecture. It offered satisfying views not only of the action on the field but also of the Baltimore skyline, “reminding fans that they were in Baltimore and nowhere else.”

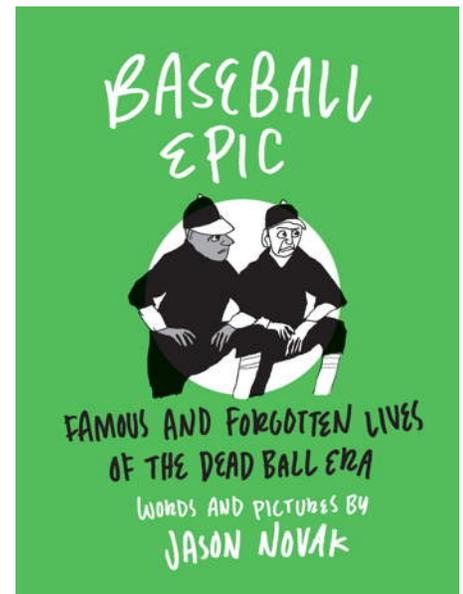
Goldberger concludes by discussing what he regards as the fourth era in ballpark design. SunTrust Park is the centerpiece of a huge entertainment complex, a sort of artificial village outside of downtown Atlanta. Instead of fitting into its urban setting, SunTrust Park aims to manage the environ-

ment around the ballpark in its own image. A similar if more limited effort to control the environment surrounding the ballpark is being undertaken by the owners of the Cubs, the Cardinals, and the Rangers. Goldberger is no fan of these efforts; he believes that a stadium works best “when it is embedded in the real city, with all the energy, diversity, and dynamism a city can display at its best.” That might be a sage observation, or it might be an instance of Old Fogeyism. Either way, Goldberger’s masterly tome will change the way you look at your local park, most definitely for the better.

*David Shiner has written numerous articles, book reviews, and stories about baseball for various sports magazines, research journals, and literary publications. He is also the author of Baseball’s Greatest Players: The Saga Continues (Superior Books, 2001), a sequel to Tom Meany’s classic Baseball’s Greatest Players.*

### PUBLISHERS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Review copies of the books reviewed in this issue were generously supplied to the newsletter by their publishers. *Ballpark: Baseball in the American City* was published by Alfred A. Knopf and can be obtained from Amazon and other book retailers. *Baseball Epic: Famous and Forgotten Lives from the Deadball Era* was published by Coffee House Press and can be obtained from the publisher by telephone: 612-338-0125 or email: [info@coffeehousepress.org](mailto:info@coffeehousepress.org). *The 1919 Black Sox Scandal* comes from Arcadia Publishing and can be ordered by telephone (844-882-1651) or email ([customerservice@arcadiapublishing.com](mailto:customerservice@arcadiapublishing.com)). Your patronage of these publishers is appreciated.



### BASEBALL EPIC: FAMOUS AND FORGOTTEN LIVES OF THE DEAD BALL ERA

By Jason Novak

2019, Coffee House Press  
[ISBN: 978-1566895422. 240  
pp. \$16.95 USD. Hardcover.]

Reviewed by  
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In the narrowest sense, *Baseball Epic* doesn’t live up to its title. It’s a slim volume, just 227 pages, about half of which are drawings, and the other half are short biographical details of the players depicted. There is no grandiose narrative and no through line of a main character.

But in another sense, the book, subtitled *Famous and Forgotten Lives of the Dead Ball Era*, “is an epic. Jason Novak writes a sentence or two about a variety of

players from the pre-1920 era, from Hall of Famers like Christy Mathewson and Honus Wagner, to Negro League players like Blue Washington and Oscar Charleston, to obscure major league players like “One-Wing” Maddox and Boss Schmidt. He even mentions women, like Maud Nelson of the Boston Bloomer Girls and Mae Arbaugh, who played as “Carrie Nation” for the All-Nations team.

The drawings aren’t intricate enough that the players are obviously identifiable, and the brief biographies that are included are almost universally morbid, detailing suicide, insanity, and in some cases even homicide. But the effect is a strangely gripping yet easy to get through book, with the pictures and words calling to mind the works of Edward Gorey or Charles Addams (like Addams, Novak’s work has appeared in *The New Yorker*), macabre yet heart-felt.

Some of the stories are relatively well-known to fans of the era – and more than a few talk about World War I. Christy Mathewson got gassed, contributing to his premature death from tuberculosis. Eddie Grant was killed in the Argonne. Serving in the artillery in the war left Grover Cleveland Alexander nearly deaf, to say nothing of the post-traumatic stress (then called shell shock) he tried to drink away.

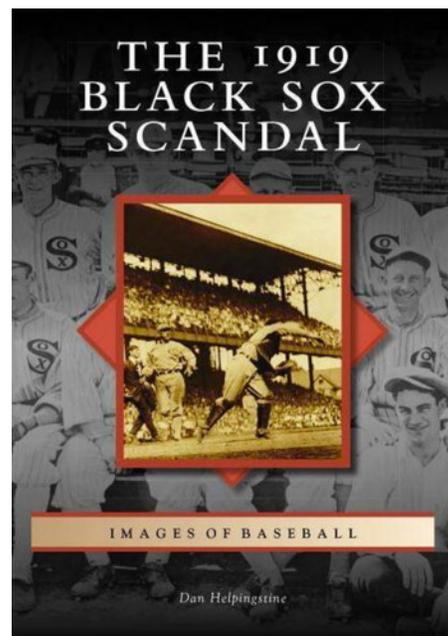
Most of the players Novak chronicles meet unfortunate ends. Chick Stahl drank carbolic acid in an act of suicide. Many of them are plagued by mental illness, dying on the streets or in institutions. It’s a reminder that being a base-

ball player was not the ticket to wealth it is regarded as today, and lives seemed a lot harder 100 years ago. The past was not simpler,” Novak writes in a brief appendix. “Just different.”

Occasionally, you get anecdotes that seem triumphant. For me, there were two in particular. Chief Bender saw insults hurled at him for his Native American background, but after wins, he would run around the field yelling “Foreigners!” at fans. Mordecai “Three Finger” Brown earned his nickname after his hand was mangled by farm equipment, and he apparently kept the machine that did it as a trophy. How can you not appreciate a story like that?

The book is not footnoted, and the list of references seems thin, principally populated with many of the usual suspects (Lawrence Ritter’s *The Glory of Their Times*, Bill James’ abstracts, and various SABR publications about Dead-ball Era players). In the appendix, Novak briefly discusses his research process, writing he was inclined to give players the benefit of the doubt when some tales seemed less believable than others. And I can’t argue that. It’s like John Thorn once said: Sometimes you just encounter a story that’s too good to check.

*Vince Guerrieri is a SABR member and Indians fan from Youngstown, Ohio (hometown of Jimmy McAleer, Bonesetter Reese, and Billy Evans). He is a journalist and author who has written for POLITICO, Smithsonian, Ohio Magazine, and Popular Mechanics, among others.*



## THE 1919 BLACK SOX SCANDAL

By Dan Helpingstine

2019, Arcadia  
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Reviewed by  
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Any way you cut it, 100 years is an historically significant span of time. So, it came as no great surprise in 2019 when a number of books were published about the 1919 World Series, better remembered for a series of events occurring both before and after, which collectively became known as the Black Sox Scandal. One such book, *The 1919 Black Sox Scandal* by Dan Helpingstine, is part of the Images of Baseball series by Arcadia Publishing. This is the author’s third Arcadia book about the Chicago White Sox.

The series emphasizes photographic images and accompanying captions over textual content, and the books are of uniformly high quality. *Baseball in St. Louis* by Steve Steinberg and *Baseball in Columbus* by Jim Tootle are two that come to mind. Similar was expected from Mr. Helpingstine, and to the extent that the writing is crisp, the content historically sound, and the images first rate, it does achieve that level. Unfortunately, the book should come with the warning “buyer beware” as only a little over half of its 127 pages contain text or photographs relating to the scandal. The rest relates to the highs and more frequent lows of the White Sox years that followed. Nothing in the book’s title or back cover description would suggest this is the case.

Helpingstine cautions readers in his introduction that this is a complicated story with no real winners. He touches on some of the issues confronting historians, admirably incorporating here and elsewhere material disseminated to the public in 2019 via SABR’s Eight Myths Out project. Helpingstine describes Shoeless Joe Jackson as the scandal’s — and perhaps even baseball’s — most controversial player. He compares Jackson as a hitter to Frank Thomas, another all-time White Sox great who had critics of his own. A comparison of the frugality and generosity of early White Sox owner Charles Comiskey to that of more recent longtime White

Sox CEO Jerry Reinsdorf is interesting, but due in part to its length the effort hampers the flow and might work better later in the book.

In chapter one, entitled “Overshadowed by Controversy,” the author attempts to explain through text and photo captions why White Sox teams prior to 1919, particularly the World Champion 1906 and 1917 teams, have been overshadowed by the events surrounding the 1919 World Series. The photographs of these earlier teams, unlike those of post-1919 teams, add context to the Black Sox story, although more player identifications in group photos would be welcome. For example, only Oscar “Happy” Felsch is identified in a photo of five 1917 White Sox outfielders and only Eddie Collins in one taken of the 1917 infield.

Chapters two and three, entitled “Baseball’s Infamous Year” and “Two Trials” respectively, concentrate on the 1919 Series and resultant scandal. Most of the photographs are on point. In discussing the Series, Helpingstine asserts that the Reds won the Series only because the White Sox threw it. A case can be made otherwise, but no real analysis is offered. In discussing the two trials, Chicago (criminal, 1921) and Milwaukee (civil, 1924), the author states that in a way the jury is still out, the verdicts unclear, “the baseball jury seems to be hung.” Again, an interesting premise begging for further analysis. There was room for

such analysis, as well as for additional pertinent photographs, such as those of some of the gamblers. Instead only two of the last five chapters touched on the Black Sox saga.

Chapter five explores the iconic movie *Field of Dreams* and the continuing aura surrounding it, while chapter eight deals with the ongoing fascination with Joe Jackson, the museum in his honor, and attempts to clear his name — something the author clearly favors. The remaining chapters, four, six, and seven, are filled with photos of White Sox players, managers, executives, and a new ballpark that don’t really fit a book dedicated to “baseball historians who have explored and attempted to explain the Black Sox scandal.” If that was the author’s intended reader, then the final product is lacking. But if Helpingstine’s intent is to merely introduce the casual baseball fan to one of the game’s most controversial and intriguing sagas and depict how it affected the White Sox franchise moving forward, then he has in some fashion succeeded.

*Rick Huhn is an original member of the Black Sox Scandal Research Committee. He serves as co-chairman of the Hank Gowdy (Columbus) chapter of SABR, and is the author of three Deadball Era books.*



Walt Hoban 1914

## THE CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

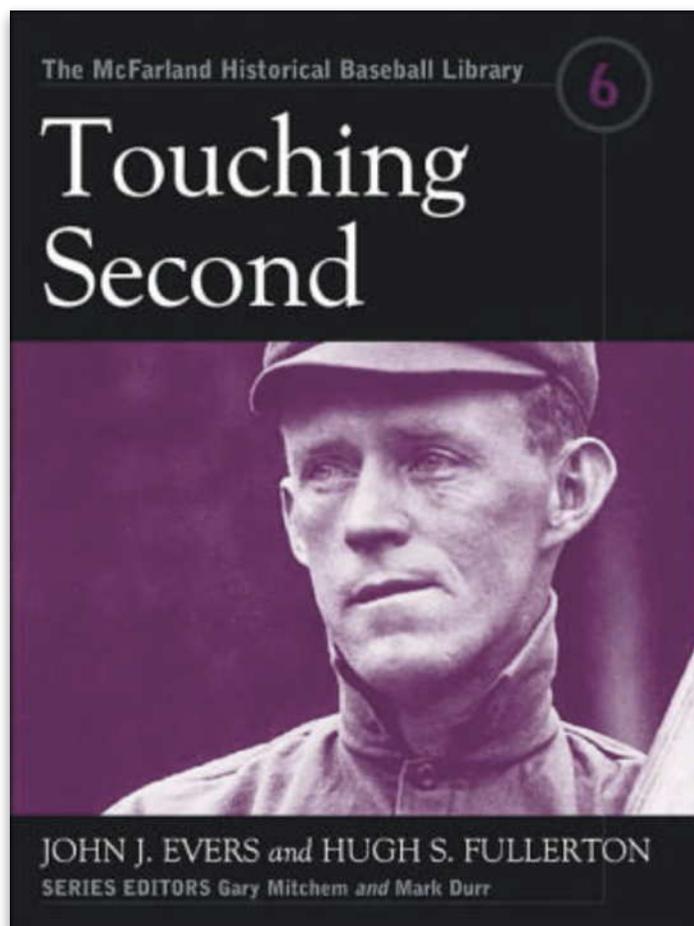
by **John McMurray**

Considering that players of the time were seldom quoted in daily newspapers, opportunities to acquire first-hand knowledge of a Deadball Era player's perspective are rare. As such, *Touching Second: The Science of Baseball* (1910) by Johnny Evers and Hugh S. Fullerton, is time spent well. The work's subtitle was originally *Inside Play in Big Leagues Baseball*, which may, in fact, be more indicative of the book's content. Whether speaking of the distinctive role of the catcher or of how baserunning was to be done, the authors focus on the strategic maneuvers and calculations which made the contemporary game so rich.

While the voice of this volume is, no doubt, more Fullerton than it is Evers, there are instances when the former makes evident when the sentiments expressed are those of the latter. Fullerton, who was among the first to quote players and to bring their voices to the forefront, penned this book with Evers in the middle of the Deadball Era, long before Fullerton gained wider recognition for his role in exposing the Black Sox Scandal.

Told in matter-of-fact fashion, *Touching Second* brings home the ruggedness of Deadball Era conditions and expectations. In the chapter which underscores the centrality of the catcher to the contemporary game, for instance, the authors note that in 1909, George Gibson "in spite of chest protectors, shin guards, and heavy pads, had black and blue spots imprinted by nineteen foul tips upon his body, a damaged hand, a bruise on his hip six inches square where a thrown bat had struck, and three spike cuts. Yet he had not missed a game and congratulated himself on his 'luck.'" Pat Moran held on similarly, until a foul ball "broke through his mask and tore his face."

There is also an attempt to recast some impressions. Few would contest that baseball was still raw and coarse in many corners as the second decade of the Deadball Era began. Yet the authors allege that players being perceived of as "ruffians or at best itinerant ne'er-do-weels (*sic*)" was firmly a thing of the past circa 1910 and that baseball had risen on the social scale and become an "hon-



**Johnny Evers on cover**

orable trade." Evers and Fullerton contend that when baseball firmly became a commercial endeavor, it was enough to root out the unsavory elements of the sport quickly, an idea which included its share of wishful thinking and had not yet reached its time in full.

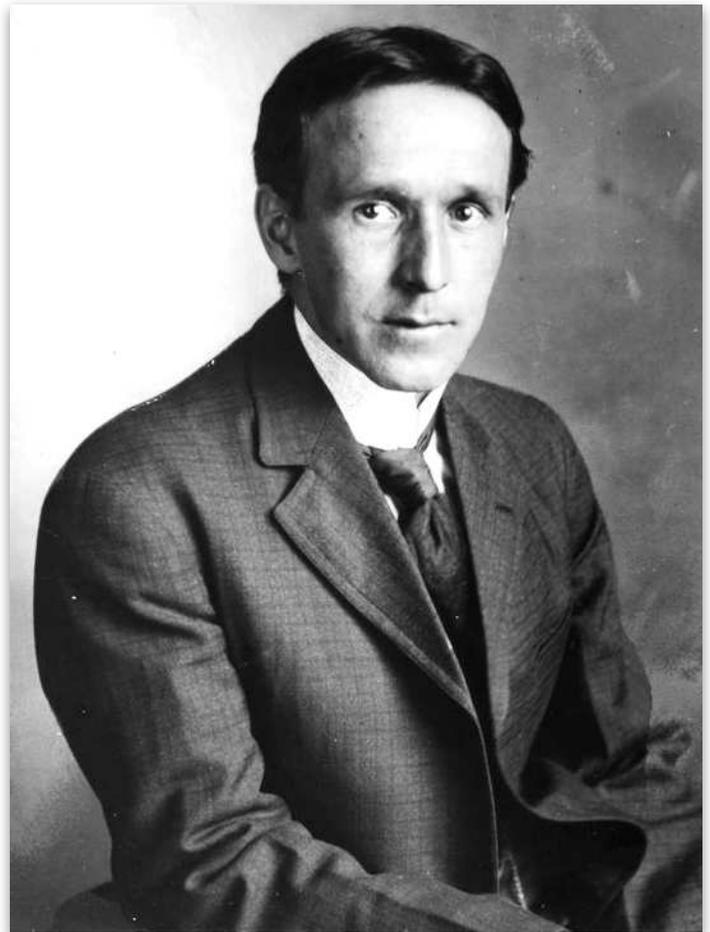
So many key events happened during the Deadball Era requiring luck or happenstance, and several are chronicled here, whether with some embellishment or not. The authors offer that Barney Dreyfuss "was sitting in a buggy on a dusty turnpike near Goshen, O.," where he happened upon a schoolmaster who was playing with his boys. Rather than tossing the ball over the roof, as the game of 'Anthony-over' required, the schoolmaster apparently curved the ball around the barn, hitting one of the boys in the back. "Dreyfuss thereupon climbed out of his buggy, thereby discovering Sam Leever, one of the greatest of pitchers," said Evers and Fullerton. Less dramatically, Dan O'Brien, manager of the Indianapolis team, arranged a local exhibition game, and only after

paying Sam Thompson \$3 to woo him away from shingling a barn, did O'Brien discover the eventual star outfielder.

The authors also provide an edifying window into baseball's reserve system. Conceding that baseball's model would never hold up under civil law, they argue, for the most part, that baseball's player reserve system was essential to the sport's success. While there are hints of dissatisfaction with the system which required players to be "perpetual property" of their respective teams, the positive aspects of keeping a team together under "absolute ownership of the services of players" often outweighed the obvious negatives, in the authors' estimation. They suggest that the reserve system promoted an improvement in the conditions of the sport, while at the same time at least raising the notion that, if players could freely contract, they might be eventually better off after an initial period of "destructive bidding."

*Touching Second* provides a first-hand account of principles which Deadball Era devotees often hear to be true. There is an emphasis on the unique leadership qualities of particular managers (Charles Comiskey, in particular); on players learning their respective crafts so deeply that they would be well-positioned to join the managerial ranks; and how managers imposed discipline, without which, players would have become a rudderless bunch. (Frank Chance, for instance, allowed players to play poker games with a twenty-five cents limit, provided they would be finished with the merriment by 11 o'clock).

There is also the incontrovertible suggestion that the baseball of the Deadball Era was better and more advanced than anything which came prior. Indeed, progress is a theme of the book. "Players of even a few years schooling in the minor leagues to-day, know more about the game, how plays should be made, and what not to do than did Mike Kelly or the other famous inventors and originators who were pioneers of scientific baseball." Too, the authors feared that, with the study of how baseball was played in past decades and the accumulated knowledge that came with it, the game would become "machine-like," presumably where quick thinking and guile would be replaced



***A young Hugh Fullerton***

with the equivalent of analytics, insofar as they existed at that time.

Through it all, the problems of baseball then are often the problems of baseball now. Efforts at sign stealing "by the most brazen and unsportsmanlike efforts" echo. Of Morgan Murphy of Philadelphia (who just inched into the Deadball Era with the Athletics in 1901), the authors say: "[s]tationing himself with a confederate in the club house in center field ... armed himself with a pair of field glasses with which he watched the signals of catchers as well as the signals of managers from the bench. It was afterwards learned that he watched the pitcher, catcher, and manager making up their signals before a game and frequently knew before play started every signal which was to be used."

The Deadball Era is distinguished by its characters, its style, and its stories. That Jimmy Slagle would serendipitously catch a line drive with his left hand, only after getting his right hand stuck in

his pocket while reaching for his chewing tobacco, is a tale unlikely to be replicated today. Fans know these players, but they are always at a distance and the information we have about them is incomplete. To that end, this book is essential reading for filling in several of those gaps — and, unlike *The Glory of Their Times* — it has the merit of being assembled while the games were going on. The inventiveness and strategy of the era, which make it so inviting, exist here, in this oft-forgotten seminal work.

### **GAMES AND BIOPROJECT**

Since the last newsletter was published, the Games Project has published accounts of a 1911 one-hitter by rookie pitcher Grover Alexander; the ending of Ty Cobb's 1913 holdout; and a ten-strikeout shutout thrown by Bill Doak in 1914, all by Thomas E. Merrick, and an article about a riot during a 1915 minor league game in Nashville by Chris Bertsch. The BioProject, meanwhile, has added to its roster of Deadball Era profiles with portraits of ballplayers John Dodge, Bill Yohe, Jimmy O'Rourke, Harry Juul, Frank McManus, Herb Juul, Art Fromme, Harry Cheek, and Ray Morgan; sportswriters Ina Eloise Young and Walter Schlichter, and Newark's Wiedenmayer's Park. If you have not already checked these out, we urge you to do so.

### **DEADBALL ERA BIOPROJECT CONTRIBUTORS WANTED**

Another productive way to fill idle hours caused by the current health crisis is to research and write for the BioProject. A host of interesting, sometimes little-known Deadball Era figures remain without a BP profile. Pol Perritt, Sam Woodruff, John Ganzel, Bobby Keefe, Jim Nealon, Dick Egan, Bob Ganley, Fred Odwell, and the original Baltimore Orioles club ownership group of Judge Harry Goldman and the Frank brothers, Sidney and Moses, are but a few of the worthies in need of attention. If any of the above or some other Deadball Era subject catches your fancy, just notify BioProject curator Lyle Spatz (bioasign@sabr.org) of your interest.

### **NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS NEEDED**

With publication of this issue, our inventory of news articles and original research pieces is pretty near exhausted. Yet, there are two (perhaps three) more newsletter issues to be published this year. So, if you have a Deadball-related manuscript that needs a home, or if you ever wanted to try your hand at writing a newsletter piece, or if the present pandemic has marooned you at home with time on your hands that might be devoted to 1901-1919 baseball research, now is the time to submit something to *The Inside Game*. Just email wflamb12@yahoo.com. All contributions will be gratefully received. Thanks. Bill Lamb, Editor.

### **NEW DEADBALL ERA COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

*The Inside Game* is pleased to welcome to the committee the following SABR members who have expressed interest in the Deadball Era:

***Richard Armstrong***  
***Andrew Aronstein***  
***Tom Cronin***  
***Chris Hicks***  
***Joseph T. Jordan***  
***Jim Passon***

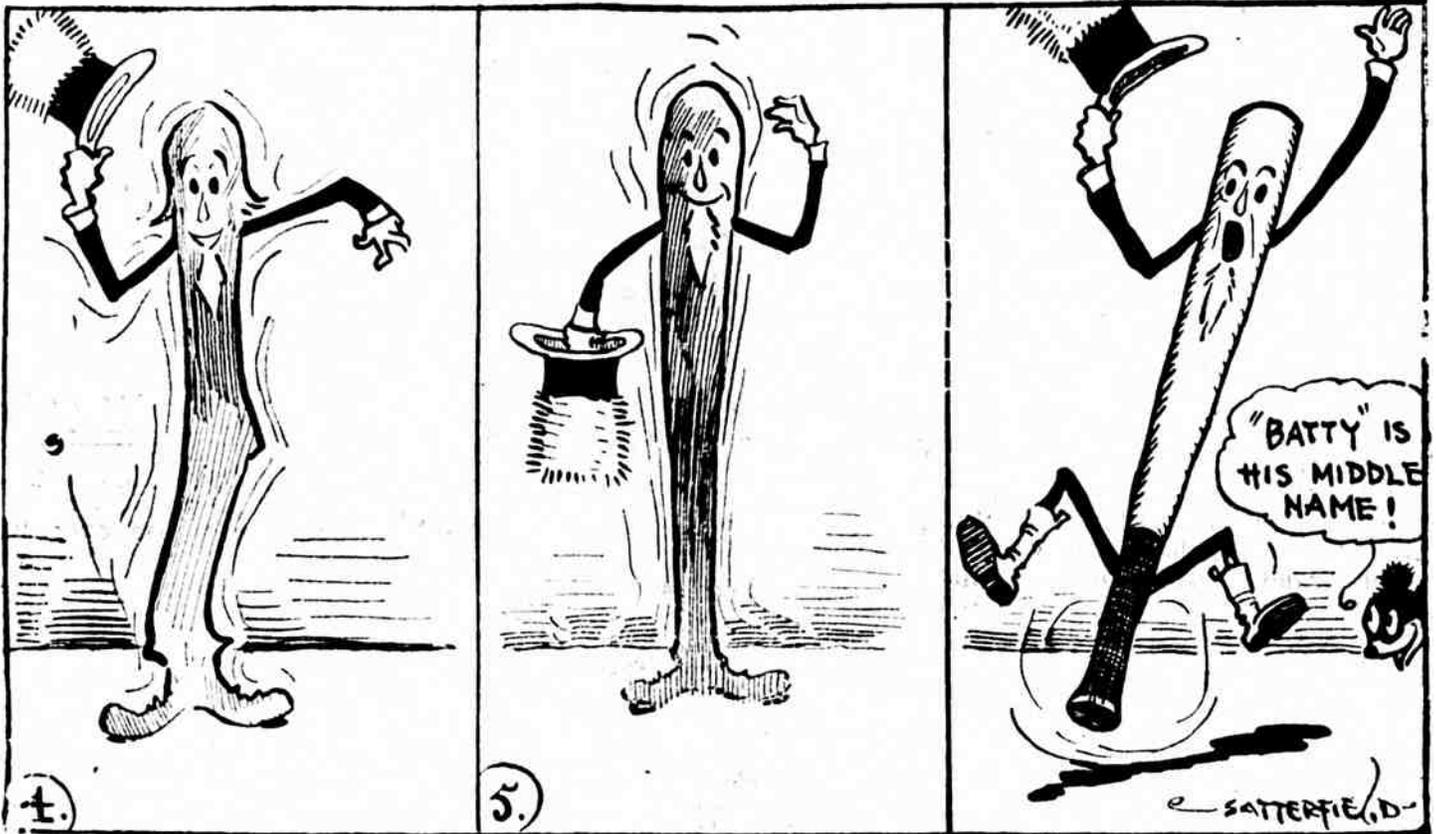
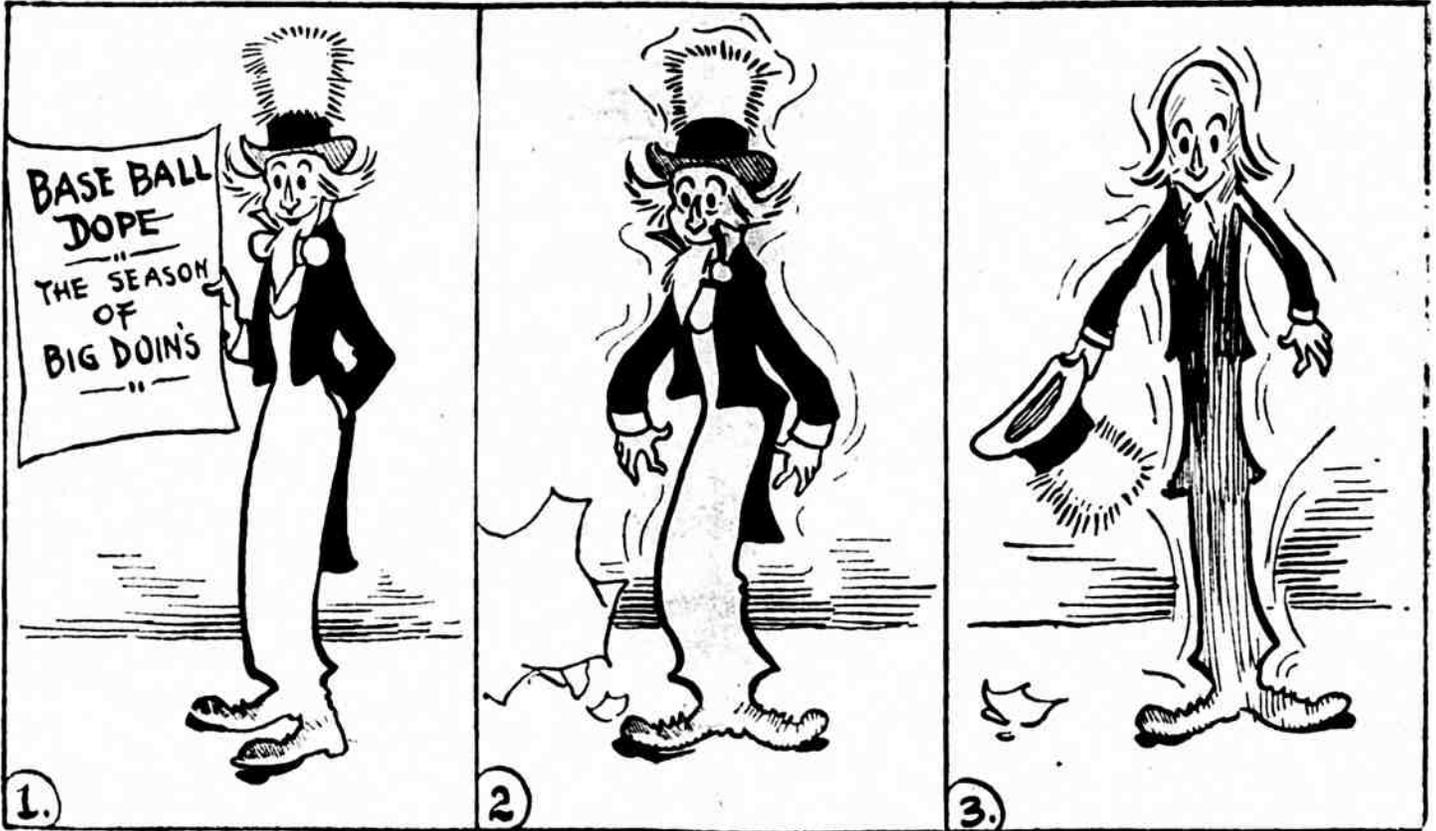
We look forward to their active participation in committee endeavors. These new committee members, as well as our newsletter contributors, can be contacted via the SABR directory.

### **CHAN RICHTER IS DEAD**

Philadelphia—Chandler D. Richter, a well known baseball writer of this city, died here [yesterday], a victim of Spanish influenza, which developed into pneumonia. He was the youngest son of Francis S. Richter, editor of *Sporting Life*, and for the last few years was connected with the staff of the [Philadelphia] *Evening Ledger*. He was sick only a few days.

(Pittsburgh) *Gazette Times*, October 15, 1918

# The Evolution of Uncle Sam



Drawn by Bob Satterfield

Bismarck Daily Tribune, September 22, 1916