# Society for American Baseball Research

# BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

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# **Comments from the Chair**

#### Andy McCue

4025 Beechwood Place, Riverside, CA 92506 909/787-4954 (home), 909/320-7868 (work) agmccue@pe.net (e-mail)

We've made a lot of progress on Research in Baseball Index (RBI) this quarter, which can be seen from Ted Hathaway's report (see opposite). Unfortunately, some earlier double-counting was discovered during the quarter and thus it appears the number of books indexed decreased. Ted has produced a brochure about the benefits of RBI. Those planning to attend a SABR regional meeting might contact Ted and obtain copies for distribution.

Roger Erickson has volunteered to produce indexes for Hank Aaron's I Had a Hammer (1991) and Mel Allen & Ed Fitzgerald's You Can't Beat the Hours (1965). Dick Miller will prepare an index to Gustav W. Axelson's "Commy": The Life of Charles A. Comiskey (1919). See below for a list of books that need indexing: why not cast your eyes down the list and volunteer to index? If so, please let me know.

Get ready for the blast of McGwire, Sosa, McGwire-Sosa, home run, and similar books to come out during the fall. Enjoy the postseason and we'll talk again early next year.

# **Book Indexing Project**

The following books lack indexes. Committee members who would like to volunteer to index books on this list should contact Andy McCue (909/787-4954) or Skip McAfee (410/730-5847).

<u>Author</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>
Allen, Lee	1964	The Giants and the Dodgers
Andreano, Ralph	1965	No Joy in Mudville
Appel, Marty	1988	Yesterday's Heroes
Barber, Red, & Creamer	1968	Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat
Barber, Red	1954	The Rhubarb Patch
Bartlett, Arthur	1951	Baseball and Mr. Spalding
Bashe, Philip	1994	Dog Days
Berger, W., & Snyder, G.	1993	Freshly Remember'd
Bloom, John	1997	A House of Cards
Borst, Bill	1992	Still Last in the American League
Borst, Bill, & Fischer, E.	1992	A Jockstrap Full of Nails
Bouton, Jim, w. Offen, N.	1973	"I Managed Good, But "
Broeg, Bob	1995	Memories of a Hall of Fame
		Sportswriter
Broeg, Bob	1983	My Baseball Scrapbook
Broeg, Bob	1971	SuperStars of Baseball
Brosnan, Jim	1962	Pennant Race
Brown, Bob, ed.	1991	The House of Magic 1922–1991
Bryan, Mike	1989	Baseball Lives

# Research in Baseball Index (RBI)

#### **Ted Hathaway**

5645 Fremont Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55419 612/869-1420 (home), 612/630-6301 (work) hathae@msus1.msus.edu (e-mail) sabrrbi@baldeagle.com (e-mail)

We have made our first big effort to advertise RBI to the general public. Informational brochures were sent out in late September to more than 250 college libraries, athletic programs, sports publications, and sports organizations. Another mailing soon will be made to public libraries, international sports organizations, and general media organizations.

The RBI brochure is a handy two-fold pamphlet describing the database. Anyone interested in copies to distribute to individuals, groups, or organizations should contact me.

We also updated our Web page (www.sabr.org/rbicdrom.htm) to include a "demo download". This is a 5000-record "sample" of the RBI database in Access 2.0 format available for anyone interested in getting an idea of RBI's content and structure.

Mike Hazen (Apple Computer) has generously volunteered his time and completed a conversion of RBI to a Mac version for File Maker Pro 3.x, thus making RBI available to many Macintosh users as well.

An announcement of the availability of the full RBI database will be appear in the Nov.-Dec. 1998 issue of *The SABR Bulletin*.

The magazine articles portion of RBI enjoyed tremendous growth this past quarter, increasing by more than 8000 records (a 14% increase in only three months) to 64,613 records! Through the use of my Univ. of Minnesota alumni association membership, I was able to borrow, for several weeks at a time, old issues of Collier's. We have now cataloged virtually the entire run of the publication (1905–1956; 1229 records). I was also able to borrow, much to my astonishment, hard copies of Porter's and Wilkes' Spirit of the Times from the 1850s and 1860s. I have completed more than a thousand records and plan on continuing with Wilkes' up to the end of the publication in 1902. This will greatly improve RBI's coverage of 19th-century baseball.

Brad Sullivan, while between graduate school and his new job at C.W. Post University's athletic department, was able to do his customary Herculean work, cataloging another 4474 articles from *The Sporting News* for 1984–1985 (we now have a complete run of *TSN* from 1977 to 1985—almost 20,000 records!) and *Sports Illustrated* (1961–1963, 1965–1971). Brad is responsible for about *one-third* of all the records in RBI. In addition to this enormous amount of work, Brad has also done much for other SABR projects, the SABR Research Library, and the SABR office. He is a real credit to SABR.

Bob Boynton has begun work on *Sports Illustrated*. After-cataloging all issues of *OldTyme Baseball News* as they have appeared over the years, Bob decided to branch out this year and is not only cataloging current issues of *Sports Illustrated* (since March 1998), but is also working on older issues from the early 1980s. In the past quarter, Bob has cataloged 296 articles.

Terry Smith, our noted book reviewer, has greatly increased his work pace on *Baseball Magazine*, cataloging 483 articles from 1908 to 1911.

Terry Sloope continues his excellent work on *Sport* magazine from the 1960s, completing 263 articles for 1966 and 1967. Terry also has been keying Terry Smith's hand-written work into the database and converting the Bibliography Committee newsletter to HTML format for the Committee's Web page (student-www.uchicago.edu/users/tmc5/bibcomm.htm).

David Marasco, a new RBI volunteer, has been working on recent issues of *International Baseball Rundown*. Several hundred articles from this publication were cataloged for RBI a few years back by Suzanne Wise. David's work will add significantly to RBI's coverage of international baseball. David, who also writes

for IBR, has thus far cataloged 153 articles, from Oct. 1997 to the present.

Other notable publications worked on during the past quarter include:

Boys' Life (1971–1996): 252 articles Look (1954–1960): 111 articles Ebony (1946–1953): 40 articles Life (1951–1953): 45 articles

Pearson's Magazine (1909-1917): 22 articles

Country Gentleman (1925, 1926, 1933, 1937, 1942): 20 articles

#### **RBI Statistics**

Level	Number	% change over last year	
Books			
5	3,704	16.0%	
4	1,772	18.8%	
Other	9,851	<u>-8.0%</u> (*)	
Total	15,327	-0.5%(*)	
Book Sections			
5	8,221	18.0%	
4	2,152	37.9%	
Other	186	210.0%	
Total	10,559	23.0%	
Magazine/newspaper articles			
5	56,291	42.9%	
4	1,272	-1.5%	
Other	7,050	<u>7.8%</u>	
Total	64,613	36.8%	
Total			
5	68,216	37.7%	
4	5,196	19.7%	
Other	17,087	<u>-1.3%</u>	
Total	90,499	27.1%	

<sup>\*</sup>Negative change due to elimination of earlier double-counting.

#### **Book Reviews**

#### Leverett T. (Terry) Smith

North Carolina Wesleyan College, Rocky Mount, NC 27804

### BRUSHBACK: A Rocksburg Novel

K.C. Constantine. New York: The Mysterious Press, 1998. \$22

This isn't a baseball novel, but it has enough baseball in it to be of interest. There aren't any descriptions of game action, and the novel's protagonist knows nothing about baseball, but the author's interest in the game shines through in various ways. *Brushback* is the 14th in a series of police procedural novels set in the increasingly desolate city of Rocksburg, a suburb of Pittsburgh. Constantine is known for his ability to write dialogue, and the books are almost entirely conversations among police, suspects, victims, and witnesses.

It's an excellent series: Constantine may be the best writer of detective fiction going. Certainly he's among the best. And off and on throughout the series there's a hint of Constantine's interest in baseball. In *The Man Who Liked Slow Tomatoes* (Penguin edition, p.127), Rocksburg police chief Mario Balzic meditates on the virtues of baseball:

"Baseball was skill and unlimited time ... and constant analysis and guesstimating about what ought to be or what might have been,

but above all it was to any policeman's heart the epitome of instant justice. Not a pitch was thrown that wasn't immediately judged. Nor a swing, nor a struck ball, nor a runner attempting to advance a base or to return to one, nor a fielder's catch or throw or indeed his decision where to throw. Justice was swift and sure and, except in rare cases, justice was irrevocable. And it was delivered by men dressed in blue ... "

In *Brushback*, Balzic is retired; his successor, Rugs Carlucci, knows nothing of the game, but the murder victim, Bobby (Brushback) Blasco, was a former professional baseball player.

We learn lots about Blasco in the course of the book. A high school and minor-league star, he pitched three games for the Boston Red Sox before an accident ended his career. Blasco was famous for his association with Ted Williams, whose autographed bat is the murder weapon. Blasco was also known for his brushback pitches (Sal Maglie is cited as his role model) and he once hit Williams while pitching batting practice. Constantine imagines Williams' response (p.131):

"Williams merely stayed in the batting cage and started hitting line drives back at Blasco, four in a row on the next four pitches, the last one hit so hard that it tore Blasco's glove off as he was falling backward to get out of its path."

Constantine worries about his portrait of Williams, writing in an "author's note": "I hope my fictional portrait is not inconsistent with his actual ability and character." It seems to me that he's done all right.

Much of the material about Williams appears in a feature article about Blasco by his former catcher, Joe Barone, currently a newspaperman (p.128-134). We learn a good deal more about Blasco and his penchant for throwing brushback pitches during a long, drunken "confession" Barone gives to Carlucci, which in a way is the climax of the book (p.225-245). Though it in no way forwards the murder investigation (and Carlucci-no baseball fan hedoesn't understand a lot of it), the reader is treated to a lecture on the nature of professional sports and learns the source of Blasco's particularly lethal pitching style. Blasco took the ideal of amateur purity to its absurd conclusion. According to Barone, Blasco had a "contrary opinion about everything". He was contemptuous of people who followed any sort of professional sport, in which category he included high school baseball (p.232-233, 235): "If you had uniforms, somebody was making money on it. ... If money changed hands before the game started, the name of the game wasn't baseball, it was commerce. ... We're in the fantasy business, you and me. ... On the field, that's reality. Up in the stands, that's fantasy."

Barone finally relates an occasion on which he chides Blasco for throwing brushback pitches. It's clear that Blasco himself is not immune to fantasy. Barone remembers laughing when Blasco told him (p.239): "I'm the Brushback Kid, I fly with birds of prey." But when he called Blasco gutless for throwing at batters, Blasco replied (p.243): "Don't you ever talk to me about fear again. I've seen fear. It don't look nothin' like those guys look draggin' those bats up there tryin' to hit me." Contrary as Blasco is, this rings true.

Another dimension of the book that baseball fans will enjoy is its depiction of football and hockey fans. These people despise baseball, and this is clearly a limitation of their characters. Crime scene tech Howie Emrich is drunk when he arrives at the scene of Blasco's murder and explains himself as follows (p.23):

"Hey, asshole, it's Friday night, what'd you expect? It's high school football in western Pennsylvania, it's Miller time, this Bud's for you, it don't get any better'n this. Durin' the game, you drain your Thermos, after the game you haul ass down to Evanko's, get a fish, warm your body, fill your soul with all the killer hits you just saw, know what I'm sayin'? Whatta ya think, Jack? Think he knows what I'm talkin' about, huh? ... Guys like him don't know what America's all about. America's all about football ... "

Carlucci tells Emrich that if he gets out of his truck, he's under arrest. The kids who find Blasco's body are hockey fans. They tell

Carlucci (p.31, 33): "Hockey's where it's at. ... We're talkin' Mario Lemieux, Jaromir Jagr, Ulf Samuelsson, man, Penguins, we don't talk baseball." This young man, Carlucci finds, has stolen the dead man's wallet.

Carlucci himself doesn't follow sports, but for those of us who do and who prefer baseball to other sports (I'm a hockey fan myself), *Brushback* is a good read. But the baseball thread in it is just one among many, so it's best if you enjoy detective fiction, too.

WALTER JOHNSON: A Life

Jack Kavanagh. South Bend (Ind.): Diamond Communications, 1996. 299p. \$14.95

OL' PETE: The Grover Cleveland Alexander Story Jack Kavanagh. South Bend (Ind.): Diamond Communications, 1996. 179p. \$22.95

The three dominant pitchers of the first part of the 20th century—Walter Johnson in the American League and Christy Mathewson and Grover Cleveland Alexander in the National League—have now all been subjects of recent biographies. Both of Kavanagh's biographies are valuable: the Johnson biog being the longer and better book, but the Alexander biog equally enjoyable and perhaps the more valuable because so far as I know it's the only biography of Alexander we have. Both books stand out for two qualities: each focuses sharply on its subject's career in baseball and each aims for a portrayal of its subject as a human being. Reading them, we get a lot of baseball, and we get to know Johnson and Alexander personally.

The latter isn't an easy task. Henry W. Thomas, Johnson's grandson, doesn't accomplish as much in his lengthy consideration of Johnson's life (Walter Johnson: Baseball's Big Train, Phenom Press, 1995), though that book certainly has its virtues. Kavanagh's Johnson is more clearly human and less of a public ideal. Kavanagh carefully catalogs Johnson's salary negotiations and exhibition earnings, noting finally (p.286): "One must wonder what tools he would have left behind had he an agent to negotiate performance clauses into his contracts. Johnson was ever alert to opportunities to pick up extra money so he could build up his farm property. He pitched exhibition games at every chance and endorsed products as unlikely as pipe tobacco."

"At every chance" is right. At another point Kavanagh chides Ken Burns for a moment when Burns rewrote history. First reporting that Johnson had pitched a game in Rochester, N.Y. "for a barnstorming team the day after winning the [1925] World Series", Kavanagh turned his attention to Burns' film, Baseball (1994):

"The incongruity of Walter Johnson leaving Washington before cheering had stopped to pick up a fee for an exhibition appearance was lost on the editors of the Ken Burns documentary. ... They warped the events of this historic moment by stating that the next day Walter Johnson headed a victory parade in Washington. The film was eye-catching. There were the mounted elite cantering past, the open touring cars, the sidewalks deep with cheering spectators. Of course, it was the parade which had celebrated winning the American League pennant a week earlier." On the day after the Series, Johnson was in Rochester, picking up a few extra bucks.

Kavanagh's treatment of two episodes in Johnson's career deserves special mention:

- 1) Kavanagh gives the 1924 World Series between the Senators and the New York Giants four wonderful chapters, characterizing it (p.183) "the most thrilling World Series ever played". Though partisans of the 1975 and 1991 Series (to mention two) may want to prepare rebuttals, Kavanagh has Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis on his side, citing the commissioner's comment to Fred Lieb (p. 204) that the Series might be "the highest point of what we affectionately call our national sport".
- 2) Johnson's extraordinary salary negotiations for the 1915 season—perhaps the most bizarre of all time, involving both the

Washington Senators and the Federal League, with both of whom he signed contracts—also earn a chapter and provide us with a glimpse into the way baseball operated. Kavanagh asserts the universal resentment of the reserve clause among ballplayers and notes (p.103) that Johnson's resentment "was particularly bitter". The more we learn about the stars of the early 20th century, the more bitterness emerges. Even the amiable Honus Wagner, whom Bill James characterizes (*The Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, 1986, p.372) as the player most worthy of his admiration, while never compaining, had the disconcerting habit of holding his contracts until the last minute and later in his career developed the alarming habit of announcing his retirement after each season.

Kavanagh's treatment of the tragedy of Johnson's life—the premature death of his wife, Hazel—also deserves mention. Kavanagh begins by stating simply (p.253) "it would haunt him forever". Then he suggests that Hazel's death had a fundamental effect on his career as a manager (p.255): "The frustration of near misses, of season-long pennant chases which fell short, changed Walter Johnson. He managed more, left less to the judgement of the players, began to call pitches from the bench, and displayed a coldness toward the failures of others, which replaced the forgiving shrug that had characterized his playing years."

Kavanagh concludes (p.264): "The missing element in his life was his wife. Hazel had been the balance wheel and he now [1935] seemingly spun out of emotional control. His problems in Newark were not the result of his approach to his team. The dissonance in Washington did not begin until after Hazel's death midway through 1930. Only when he lost her counsel did he begin to slide from contemporary public favor." Thus, Johnson's life has its tragedy as well as its triumph.

And speaking of tragedies, there's the life of Alexander. Ol' Pete is rather brief, maybe too brief: Kavanagh writes in his acknowledgments that he was too ill to finish the book himself and had to rely on his editor. Alexander is worth more attention than this book is able to give. I'm sure Kavanagh was thorough in his pursuit of sources, but I wish I knew more about what they were. In fact, neither of Kavanagh's books provides a bibliography, though Kavanagh often makes clear in his text the sources of his information.

Part of Kavanagh's intent is to reinforce the idea that Alexander's achievement as a ballplayer is on a par with those of Johnson and Mathewson. The title of the book eloquently suggests the quality of the man (p.9): "You could stand Grover Cleveland Alexander among a group of farm laborers and he would blend right in." Kavanagh quotes (p.12) a sportswriter who characterized Alexander early in his career as "homely in his ways, always a fair man, lots of sense and a regular feller". On his skills as a pitcher, Kavanagh cites Burleigh Grimes (p.65):

"I used more effort winding up than he did in pitching nine innings. He threw a sinker and a curve. Always kept them down. He was fast, too. ... That thing would come zooming in there and then kick in about three inches on a right-handed batter. He'd throw you that curve, and you couldn't tell which was which because they didn't do a thing until they were right on top of you. And once they showed you what they were going to do and where they were going to do it, your bat was somewhere else."

Babe Ruth, too, was impressed (p.105): "Just to see old Pete out there on the mound, with that cocky old undersize cap pulled down over one ear, chewing away at his tobacco and pitching baseballs as easy as pitching hay is enough to take the heart out of a fellow." The apparent ease with which Alexander delivered his pitches unites these two responses.

The main focus of Kavanagh's book, though, and its principal strength, is his treatment of Alexander's demons: alcoholism and epilepsy. He treats their role throughout his major-league playing career and after his playing days were over (when "the road would run downhill, [and] drop away to oblivion" [p.106]), and—most interestingly—during the 1926 World Series. Kavanagh's handling of the conflicting evidence is remarkably sure; his understanding of

how these demons worked in Alexander's life is best summarized in the following quotation (p.92): "Ol' Pete knew he had a problem with alcohol. The trauma of front-line service [in World War I] had changed him from a cold-beer-after-the-game casual drinker to one who would hide bottles of booze and drink to ward off epilepsy. It was his opinion that an alcoholic edge held the sneak attacks of his ailment at bay."

Kavanagh follows Alexander's career after his departure from the major leagues, detailing various efforts to provide him with a subsistence income, describing him finally (p. 167) as "broke, seriously ill with cancer, and longing to teach kids how to play ball". Perhaps these phrases sum up Alexander's tragedy.

Alexander's triumph—his performance in the 1926 World Series—unites all the strands of the book. Kavanagh states his thesis (p.100): "[Alexander's] ultimate success in the World Series found him accused of winning despite his weakness. A realist would size up Grover Cleveland Alexander as a man too proud of his pitching ability and too committed to friendship, loyalty, and a supportive woman to let them down." Kavanagh claims that Alexander was neither drunk nor hung over when he struck out Tony Lazzeri with the bases loaded in the seventh game. He cites evidence (p.103–104) from Alexander's wife, Amy, and more recently, Bob Meusel's wife, as more convincing than contrary evidence. Whether he changes the reader's mind—surely the image of a drunk or hung-over Alexander is more pervasive—Kavanagh's treatment of the evidence is quite admirable. We are lucky to have Jack Kavanagh write this first extended treatment of Alexander.

#### GROUND RULES: Baseball and Myth

Deeanne Westbrook. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1996. \$20 paper

MAKING THE TEAM: The Cultural Work of Baseball Fiction Timothy Morris. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1997. 208p. \$34; \$14.95 paper

GOD IN THE STADIUM: Sports and Religion in America Robert J. Higgs. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1995. 400p. \$15.95 paper

These three books comprised my heavy summer reading. Each is an academic book: Westbrook and Morris are writing to students of literature, Higgs to cultural historians. All three are of limited, but genuine, value to SABRites. But you have to want to find out what others think your favorite stories *mean*, and that can be traumatic.

Westbrook sets baseball literature in the context of myth. She treats mostly fiction but extends her analysis to drama and poetry. She sees baseball literature as having basically two plots (p.65):

"One is that of Oedipus, the tale that obsessed Freud, yet the story also of Jesus—that of a stranger—son who comes to town, with dire, if redemptive, results for himself and society; the other is the tale of Odysseus, representative of all wanderers and seekers who set out on a long journey and attempt the difficult passage home. The intriguing fact of baseball—its progress and scene—is that it is peculiarly crafted to reflect and imitate such plots and to provide a space for apparently endless transformations, visions, and revisions of them."

Westbrook shows how your favorite baseball novel embodies one, another, or both of these mythic stories. There are separate chapters on Bang the Drun Slowly (the best reading in the book), The Iowa Baseball Confederacy, and Ironweed, The Celebrant, and The Universal Baseball Association. Many other works are treated substantially. Particularly interesting is Westbrook's treatment of women in baseball literature. A limitation may be her concern for issues of theory. There's lots of talk about the nature of myth itself, and if the reader doesn't pay strict attention, the analysis of a particular fiction is likely to appear unintelligible.

Morris has the same problem, but I found his book easier to read because his context is not myth, but American culture. The treatment, though, is quite theoretical. Westbrook, for instance, gets through a 40-page chapter on *The Natural* without mentioning Eddie Waitkus. Morris doesn't mention Waitkus either, but his purpose (p.3) is to examine four themes that appear both in baseball literature and American culture: assimilation, heterosexuality, language, and meritocracy. *Bang the Drum Slowly* gets a treatment rather different from Westbrook's in Morris' chapter on heterosexuality.

Most interesting is Morris' contention (p.3) that "the cultural work and ideological constructions of adult baseball fiction are continuous with those of juvenile baseball fiction" and "there is no essential difference between adult and juvenile series heroes". As a John R. Tunis enthusiast, I loved reading someone else willing to take Tunis' baseball novels seriously. Morris ends up, I'm afraid, unable to take children's literature as seriously as is necessary. He seems to enjoy making fun of Tunis and concludes (p.158) by asserting "the formula and sameness of children's tastes". Without denying the notion that children enjoy formula fiction, I would question the assumption that this separates their tastes from those of adults. Check the best-seller lists.

Higgs' book contains little about either literature or baseball, though one might want to look at his serious comparison (p.150 –156) of the Frank Merriwell and Baseball Joe series. Higgs wrote his book to show why sport has become such a prominent element in American life: sports and religion (p.1) "are in many ways incompatible". Why, then, do they seem so compatible in the minds of public figures such as Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell? Higgs argues (p.3) that in the history of Western civilization there occurs a "transformation of the ideal of the Good Shepherd into the Christian Knight, of a social and nature gospel emphasizing play and festival into a gospel of wealth and worldly success emphasizing competition and conquest".

Higgs examines the rhetoric of many public figures, mainly from sport, politics, education, and religion. He's particularly interested in the role of educational institutions in promoting sport, and this naturally leads him to focus on football and basketball rather than baseball. Billy Sunday and A.G. Spalding do come in for some analysis, though. Higgs is concerned at the end of his book to clarify his distinction between the Good Shepherd and the Christian Knight, and he makes a long list of qualities—opposites in many cases—characteristic of each. I was happy to find baseball listed in the Good Shepherd column and football under Christian Knight. I suspect anyone who has loved baseball and hated football can find out why by reading this book.

# **Baseball Fiction**

Committe Chair Andy McCue has updated his Macmillan-SABR Award-winning Baseball by the Books (1991), the definitive bibliography and history of baseball fiction. The 66-page update includes 378 new titles as well as corrections to the original 1414 entries.

To obtain a copy of the update, send \$12 to Andy McCue, 4025 Beechwood Place, Riverside, CA 92506.

Editor. Skip McAfee, 5533 Colts Foot Court, Columbia, MD 21045 410/730-5847