

# BLACK SOX SCANDAL



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Research Committee Newsletter

## Leading off ...

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### Chairman's Corner

By **Jacob Pomrenke**

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It's been 20 years since Gene Carney — the late founding chairman of this committee — made his first visit to Milwaukee to view the transcript of Shoeless Joe Jackson's 1924 back-pay trial against the Chicago White Sox. In Carney's book, *Burying the Black Sox*, he called it "The Trial Nobody Noticed."

It's been 10 years since Bill Lamb's landmark book, *Black Sox in the Courtroom*, was published, giving readers our first modern and comprehensive legal analysis of that trial.

Now, the world finally has a chance to read through the full trial transcript — an invaluable primary source that only a handful of authors and attorneys have seen since Jackson's case concluded nearly a century ago.

"The transcripts from the Milwaukee trial are a treasure trove of material that will force many assumptions about the Big Fix of 1919 and its aftermath to

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Joe Jackson, left, and Oscar "Happy" Felsch sit together in a Milwaukee courtroom in February 1924. Jackson sued the White Sox for breach of contract after he was banned from baseball in the Black Sox Scandal. The complete transcript from Jackson's civil trial is being made public for the first time in a new book edited by Jacob Pomrenke and David J. Fletcher. (Photo: Mike Nola / BlackBetsy.com)

## Joe Jackson trial transcript now available in new book

### 1924 civil trial pitted White Sox star against owner Charles Comiskey in a Milwaukee courtroom

Eckhartz Press is excited to announce the release of its latest title, *Joe Jackson, Plaintiff, vs. Chicago American League Ball Club, Defendant: The Never-Before-Seen Trial Transcript*, which contains the full testimony from Shoeless Joe Jackson's dramatic 1924 courtroom trial against the Chicago White Sox and team owner Charles Comiskey.

The book will be available in e-book and paperback editions at [shoelessjoecomiskeytrial.com](http://shoelessjoecomiskeytrial.com), along with Amazon.com and other retailers.

It's a scene that is almost impossible to imagine today: One of baseball's biggest stars has sued his team's principal owner, and they both take the stand to testify under oath about their contract

negotiations, revenue and expenses, gambling, bribery, and the integrity of the game.

But this scene really did happen a century ago, when Shoeless Joe Jackson sued the Chicago White Sox for breach of contract, seeking \$16,000 in back pay after he was permanently banned from professional baseball in the aftermath of the Black Sox Scandal.

The full story of what happened in that Milwaukee courtroom in 1924 has remained hidden in the shadows — until now — with the publication of *Joe Jackson, Plaintiff, vs. Chicago American League Ball Club, Defendant: The Never-Before-Seen Trial Transcript*.

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## ► CHAIRMAN

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be re-evaluated,” Carney once wrote.

In all the words spilled about the Black Sox Scandal in the past century, few had paid much attention to the three weeks that Jackson and Charles Comiskey, and their lawyers, spent battling in a Wisconsin courtroom in the winter of 1924.

The banished star slugger and the White Sox team owner each spent parts of three days on the witness stand, testifying under oath about their own actions before, during, and after the 1919 World Series. So too did White Sox executive Harry Grabiner and corporate counsel Alfred Austrian, who provided key insights into the inner workings of a baseball front office.

Eddie Cicotte, Lefty Williams, and Happy Felsch — three other banned Black Sox players — also testified, and they were each cross-examined by Comiskey’s defense lawyers. Sleepy Bill Burns and Billy Maharg, two gamblers and World Series fix co-conspirators, gave depositions in this case, as did J.R. Hunter, a Chicago detective hired by Comiskey to spy on his own ballplayers.

The Milwaukee trial transcript includes all of their stories, and you can now read them yourself with the publication of a new book by Eckhartz Press, *Joe Jackson vs. Chicago American League Baseball Club*, edited by myself and David J. Fletcher.

Fletcher, a longtime SABR member and founder of the Chicago Baseball Museum, acquired one of two known copies of the 1924 Jackson trial transcript from the collection of Jerome Holtzman, the legendary Chicago sports writer. Holtzman had planned to eventually publish his copy of the transcript, but he died before completing the project.

Fletcher accompanied Gene Carney to Milwaukee in 2003 to visit the law offices of Thomas G. Cannon, the grandson of Jackson’s attorney Raymond Cannon. The Cannon family still has the other known copy of the transcript, and they graciously allowed Carney and Fletcher to view it.

But almost no one else had ever laid eyes on the original 1,697-page file produced by the Wisconsin Circuit Court recorder — including me! — until now. It’s an extraordinary document, one that will only help enhance our understanding of the Black Sox Scandal as more people read through it in the coming years.

It was Carney’s hope that the Milwaukee trial transcript would become widely available someday, to help provide important context and analysis for future writers and historians. Now, that wish can be fulfilled.

For more information about SABR’s Black Sox Scandal Research Committee, e-mail [buckweaver@gmail.com](mailto:buckweaver@gmail.com).

## Catch up on Black Sox committee projects, research

Want to dive deeper into the Black Sox Scandal? Here are a few ways to catch up on some of our recent committee projects:

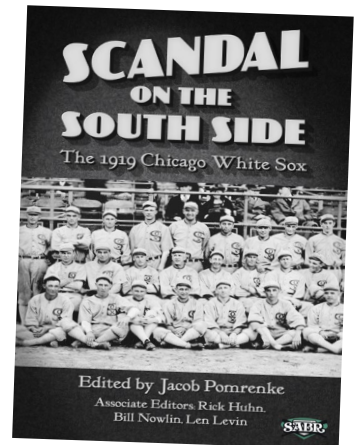
◆ **Scandal on the South Side: The 1919 Chicago White Sox**, edited by Jacob Pomrenke, with associate editors Rick Huhn, Bill

Nowlin, and Len Levin, is available from the SABR Digital Library at [SABR.org/ebooks](https://sabr.org/ebooks). All SABR members can download the e-book edition for free in PDF, EPUB, or Kindle formats. SABR members also get a 50% discount to purchase the paperback edition.

◆ **Eight Myths Out** is a project covering the most common errors and misconceptions about the scandal. View it at [SABR.org/eight-myths-out](https://sabr.org/eight-myths-out).

◆ **2019 Centennial Symposium: Listen to highlights** from the SABR Black Sox Scandal Centennial Symposium, held on September 28, 2019, at the Chicago History Museum to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 1919 World Series.

◆ **Infamous America podcast:** Season 2 of the [Infamous America podcast series](#), produced by Black Barrel Media in 2019, focuses on the Black Sox Scandal, using research from our *Scandal on the South Side* book.



Free download available at [SABR.org/ebooks](https://sabr.org/ebooks)

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**listserv:** <https://bit.ly/1919-sabrgroups>



Left: Joe Jackson is pictured in the courtroom in Milwaukee during his 1924 civil trial. He spent parts of four days testifying in his back-pay lawsuit against the Chicago White Sox. Right: Defense attorneys George B. Hudnall and Frank McNamara listen to testimony along with their client, White Sox owner Charles Comiskey. Comiskey, 64, who was in declining health, spent parts of three days on the witness stand. A jury awarded Jackson more than \$16,000, but the judge set aside the verdict and had Jackson charged with perjury for lying under oath. (Photos: Mike Nola / BlackBetsy.com)

## ► TRANSCRIPT

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Edited by Jacob Pomrenke and David J. Fletcher, this book tells the complete story of the trial, using the real testimony made under oath by key figures in the scandal, including Black Sox players Joe Jackson, Eddie Cicotte, Lefty Williams, and Happy Felsch; White Sox owner Charles Comiskey, team secretary Harry Grabiner, and corporate counsel Alfred Austrian; gamblers “Sleepy” Bill Burns and Billy Maharg, sportswriter Hugh Fullerton, Hall of Fame pitcher Red Faber, and many others.

“Sholess Joe — the iconic ballplayer whose legend was elevated in Hollywood films like *Field of Dreams* — has a real voice in this 300,000-word transcript that reads like a movie script with a dramatic ending,” Fletcher said.

While the jury was deliberating its verdict, Judge John Gregory cited Sholess Joe for perjury and had him jailed immediately.

“Jackson stands self-convinced and self-accused of perjury,” the judge said. “You came to the wrong state, to the wrong city, to the wrong court.”

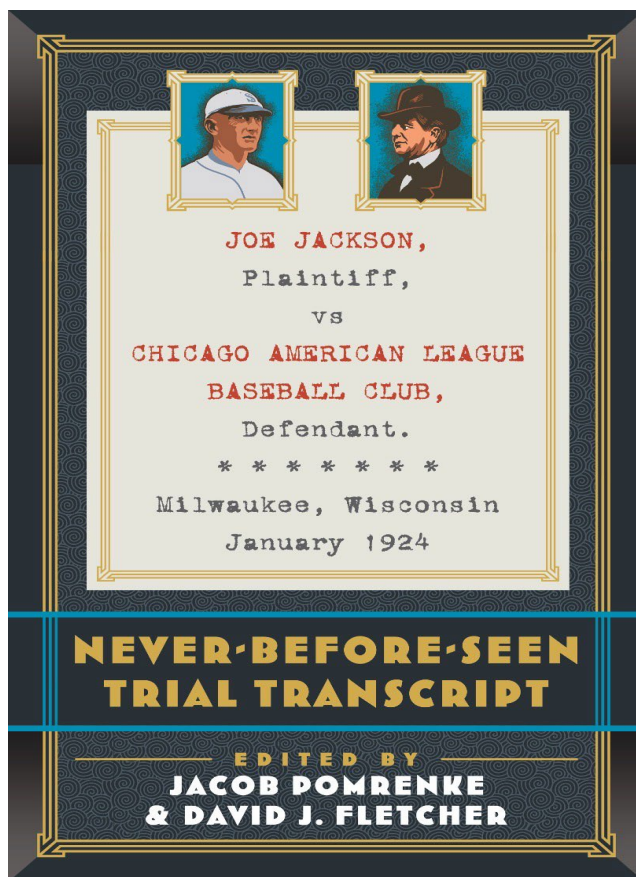
After the jury returned to the courtroom and awarded Jackson with \$16,711 in breach of contract damages, Gregory promptly vacated the award, ruling that the judgment in Jackson’s favor was based on fraud and perjured testimony.

“The trial ends with Judge Gregory throwing Jackson in jail for changing his story under oath,” Pomrenke said.

“This trial marks the final chapter in the complex legal proceedings that would forever become known as the Black Sox Scandal.”

This book explains the historical significance of this never-before-seen trial testimony and the story behind the publication of this rare transcript, one hundred years later.

Jacob Pomrenke is chair of the Black Sox Scandal Research Committee with the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) and editor of *Scandal on the South Side: The 1919 Chicago White Sox*. David J. Fletcher is co-author of *Chili Dog MVP: Dick Allen, the '72 White Sox, and a Transforming Chicago*, which placed runner-up as the best Chicago non-fiction book of the year in 2022, and he manages [clearbuck.com](http://clearbuck.com), a website dedicated to the reinstatement of Black Sox third



baseman Buck Weaver.

For more information, visit the Eckhartz Press website at [eckhartzpress.com](http://eckhartzpress.com).

# Hal Chase: Bit actor or starring role in 1919?

By Bill Lamb

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Slick-fielding first baseman Hal Chase has been described as “the most notoriously corrupt player in baseball history.”<sup>1</sup> Few game-fixing incidents of the Deadball Era were complete without him.

It was predictable that when the corruption of the 1919 World Series was exposed, Chase was implicated in the affair. In this essay, the extent of Chase’s involvement in the Black Sox Scandal will be examined. Was he an important actor in the Series fix conspiracy or merely a bit player? Or was Chase even less than that, just an in-the-know bettor who cleaned up on advance knowledge that the White Sox were going to dump the Series, as Chase himself claimed?

Superimposed upon the degree of Chase’s participation in the fix is his possible status as scandal role model. In 1918, he was officially exonerated by National League president John Heydler on charges that he had fixed games while playing for the Cincinnati Reds. Did this whitewashing embolden the Black Sox conspirators and prompt their belief that fixing the 1919 World Series was a low risk/high reward proposition?



In 1905, Chase began his 15-season career as a major leaguer playing first base for the New York Highlanders. Although a good, if not exceptional, right-handed batter and an excellent baserunner, it was the left-handed Chase’s fielding that attracted immediate attention. Graceful, athletic, quick thinking, and innovative, “Prince Hal” soon revolutionized the way his position was played. Even decades after his departure from the game, Chase was still being cited as baseball’s finest defensive first baseman by qualified observers (including Babe Ruth).<sup>2</sup>

Chase’s psyche was another matter, and one that no essay-length narrative can do adequate justice.<sup>3</sup> Charming, charismatic, self-centered, amoral, and utterly corrupt are descriptors that have been applied to him. Doubts about the integrity of Chase’s playing performance surfaced as early as 1908. But in its beginnings, Chase’s “laying down” has been ascribed to pique, hangovers, sulking over being disciplined, or trying to undermine New York managers, particularly George Stallings (1909-1910) and Frank Chance (1913). Although suspicions to the contrary exist, throwing games for money still lay in a young Chase’s future.

Following his trade to the Chicago White Sox in June 1913, Chase predictably jumped to the new Federal League the following year. He performed well, batting a career-high .347 in 75 games for the Buffalo Blues. In 1915, he led the Federal League in home runs (17).

But there was no great rush to sign Chase when the outlaw circuit collapsed over the winter. By now, Chase’s repu-



**First baseman Hal Chase was implicated in the Black Sox Scandal and the subject of many accusations of game-fixing during his major-league career. But how crucial was his role in the fixing of the 1919 World Series?** (Photo: Library of Congress)

tation for unreliability, sowing discord among teammates, and suspect on-field performance made him anathema to most American and National League clubs. Eventually, the Cincinnati Reds decided to take a chance on him, and the 33-year-old Chase repaid his new team with an outstanding season, leading the NL in base hits (184) and batting average (.339) in 1916.

Meanwhile, world events pushed the country toward the conflict long raging in Europe. Coinciding with formal American entry into World War I in April 1917 was the incidental effect mobilization had on gambling. Horse racing and boxing, the only sports other than baseball that attracted much wagering activity, were promptly affected. Many, although not all, American racetracks shuttered for the duration while boxing matches were also greatly curtailed.<sup>4</sup> In the short run, however, baseball was pretty much unscathed by the war effort, quickly turning major league ballparks into a magnet for professional gamblers. And in short order, long dormant game-fixing returned to major league baseball, largely courtesy of Hal Chase.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps in cahoots with gamblers but more likely on his own initiative, the chronically cash-strapped Chase – he was a compulsive gambler in his own right with an expensive lifestyle to boot – began wagering on ball games, at times against his own team. Measures to ensure that he did not lose such bets included urging Reds teammates, particularly the starting pitcher, not to overexert themselves. Although the extent of Chase game-fixing efforts is modest

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when compared to the 1,919 major league games that he appeared in, his suspicious performance did not escape the attention of Reds manager Christy Mathewson. By June 1918, rumor was rampant that Chase was dumping games.<sup>6</sup> Two months later, Mathewson suspended Chase indefinitely for “indifferent playing.”<sup>7</sup>

A formal hearing on the Chase suspension was conducted by National League president John Heydler in late January 1919. Fortuitously for the defendant, Mathewson was overseas on military duty and Heydler found the testimony of Jimmy Ring, a young Cincinnati pitcher propositioned by Chase, to be inconsistent and unpersuasive. While declaring that Chase had acted in “a foolish and careless manner both on the field and among players,” Heydler found “no proof that he intentionally violated the rules” or engaged in game fixing. Chase was, therefore, acquitted of the charges, with his playing eligibility immediately reinstated.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Prince Hal was signed by New York Giants manager John McGraw, a longtime Chase admirer. In Chicago and elsewhere, both players and the baseball press took notice of this turn of events, a widespread conclusion reflected in a newspaper headline that read “Same Old Game; Hal Chase Gets Whitewashed.”<sup>9</sup>



Late on the afternoon of October 9, 1919, a ground out to second by Chicago White Sox star Shoeless Joe Jackson brought down the curtain on the World Series and made the Cincinnati Reds baseball’s champions. Unbeknownst to fans, that outcome had been prearranged. Indeed, there had been two separate plots to fix the Series — both initiated by Chicago players, not gamblers.<sup>10</sup>

Hard-nosed White Sox first baseman Chick Gandil was the original fix mastermind. Gandil consulted with Boston bookmaker Joseph “Sport” Sullivan on how the throwing of the 1919 Series might be financed. He also recruited teammates, including staff ace Eddie Cicotte, for the fix; presided over pre-Series fix meetings; and acted as fix paymaster while the Series was in progress.

New York underworld financier Arnold Rothstein, using Sullivan and trusted business associate Nat Evans as a buffer between himself and the corrupted White Sox players, bankrolled the plot, likely to the tune of \$80,000.

No evidence connects Hal Chase to the Rothstein-financed fix scheme. Rather, Chase is implicated in a different World Series fix plot that revolved around Sleepy Bill Burns, a former major league pitcher who had turned to dabbling in oil leases.

Burns’s true avocation was gambling. In September 1919, Burns was informed by Cicotte that White Sox players were amenable to throwing the upcoming World Series when the two encountered each other at the Ansonia Hotel

in New York City. Burns himself, however, could not meet the \$100,000 price tag that Cicotte placed on the fix proposal, and attempts by Burns sidekick Billy Maharg to raise the necessary cash from gambling interests in Philadelphia proved fruitless.

Thereafter, Burns and Maharg approached Rothstein about underwriting the fix scheme, first at Aqueduct Race-track and thereafter in the grill room of a Manhattan hotel. But Rothstein brusquely turned them down.

While all this was going on, Hal Chase was sitting on the bench for the New York Giants, a leg injury having confined him to sporadic pinch-hitting duty. During an unplanned late-September encounter with Burns at the Polo Grounds, Chase was informed of the World Series fix proposition and offered his assistance. Shortly after, Chase connected Sleepy Bill to a figure whose reputation was about as unsavory as his own: former featherweight boxing champ Abe Attell, an occasional Rothstein bodyguard and a full-time hustler constantly on the lookout for a score.

According to Burns, he met Chase, Attell, and a gambler introduced as “Bennett” in the Ansonia Hotel lobby shortly before the World Series began. Attell falsely informed Burns that Rothstein had changed his mind and would now bankroll the fix.<sup>11</sup>

From that point on, Burns worked in tandem with Attell and “Bennett” (Des Moines gambler David Zelcer). But there is little evidence that Hal Chase did anything after that to advance either Series fix scheme.

For example, Chase was not in attendance when Sullivan and Nat Evans (using the alias “Brown”)<sup>12</sup> met with Gandil, Cicotte, Lefty Williams, Buck Weaver, and Happy Felsch at the Warner Hotel in Chicago to solidify the Rothstein fix. Nor was Chase present when the Black Sox (minus Joe Jackson) conferred with Burns and Attell at the Hotel Sinton in Cincinnati on the eve of Game One.

While the World Series was taking place, Chase was far removed from the action, having accompanied New York Giants teammates on a postseason barnstorming tour of upstate New York and New England. Long-distance betting on the Series, however, reputedly put some \$40,000 in Chase’s pocket.<sup>13</sup>



The public exposure of Hal Chase’s game-fixing proclivities had nothing to do with the Black Sox Scandal. Rather, he had Cincinnati Reds teammate Lee Magee to thank for that.

Back in 1918, Magee and Chase had placed substantial bets with Boston bookie James Costello, wagering that the Reds would lose a July 25 game to the Boston Braves. The two had then done their worst to deliver that result. When Boston won anyway, Magee provided Costello with a \$500 personal check to cover his bet, but then stopped payment on the check before Costello could collect.<sup>14</sup>

In time, Costello brought his collection problems to

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baseball authorities, whose inquiries into the matter led to the uncovering of the fix attempt and the discreet cashiering of Chase and Magee from the game.

The first inkling that something scandalous was afoot emerged when Chase, penciled in as the Giants' first baseman for the 1920 season, failed to appear at spring training camp. Soon it was revealed that Prince Hal had been quietly dropped from the New York roster.

The Chicago Cubs, Magee's employer in 1919, unconditionally released him. Accompanied by noise about being unfairly blackballed by baseball, Magee retaliated by filing a hare-brained lawsuit against the Cubs. After testimony from Costello revealed Chase and Magee's perfidy, a jury required only 44 minutes to no-cause the Magee suit.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile out on the West Coast, Chase was up to his old tricks, including an attempt to rig a Pacific Coast League game. By mid-season, he was persona non grata, unemployable anywhere in professional baseball.<sup>16</sup>

In September 1920, Chase's troubles mushroomed when a grand jury in Chicago impaneled to investigate other baseball-related matters shifted its inquiries to the long-rumored corruption of the 1919 World Series.<sup>17</sup> Early proceedings, scattershot and largely direction-less, segued into alleged game-fixing in the National League.

Considerable attention was devoted to testimony by pitcher Rube Benton, recently a teammate of Chase with the Giants. According to Benton, Chase and Chicago Cubs second baseman Buck Herzog offered Benton a bribe to throw an August 1919 game between the Giants and Cubs,<sup>18</sup> an accusation that Herzog adamantly denied in the press.<sup>19</sup> For good measure, Herzog alleged that Benton had also won \$3,800 betting on the 1919 World Series, his wagering guided by tips from Hal Chase.<sup>20</sup>

When it came to the World Series fix, the incoherence of early grand jury proceedings led two of the nation's leading newspapers to identify different villains as the font of the corruption. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, Hal Chase and Abe Attell were the fix masterminds,<sup>21</sup> while the *New York Times* placed Attell and Chick Gandil, assisted by Bill Burns, in that role.<sup>22</sup>

Days later, however, clarity and focus were supplied to the proceedings by a Philadelphia newspaper interview of fringe fix operative Billy Maharg. According to Maharg, Games One, Two, and Eight of the Series were thrown by eight White Sox players in return for a promised \$100,000 payoff from gamblers.<sup>23</sup> Eddie Cicotte, Bill Burns, Abe Attell, Arnold Rothstein, and Maharg himself played the principal parts in this telling of the Series fix.

Hal Chase went unmentioned in the Maharg exposé. And the absence of Chase's name would become a minor but noteworthy feature in the confessions of scandal actors



**While playing with the Cincinnati Reds, Hal Chase was accused of bribing teammates by his manager, Christy Mathewson. Chase was investigated by National League president John Heydler, who declined to punish Chase in any way.** (Photo: SABR-Rucker Archive)

that followed.

One day after Maharg's interview was published, first Eddie Cicotte and then Joe Jackson were swiftly summoned for interrogation at the law office of Alfred S. Austrian, corporate counsel for the Chicago White Sox. Both men testified before the Cook County grand jury and admitted to accepting a cash payoff in return for agreeing to participate in the World Series fix. This author's forensic analysis of the Cicotte and Jackson statements/testimony can be found elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> For our purposes here, it is significant that no mention of Hal Chase can be found in either Cicotte's or Jackson's accounts of the fix.

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The interrogation process subsequently repeated itself the next day with Lefty Williams, who also failed to mention Chase's name in his grand jury testimony. Like Jackson, Williams identified Chick Gandil, Bill Burns, and Abe Attell as the fix promoters in Cincinnati. And earlier at the Warner Hotel in Chicago, Williams said, Sox players had been propositioned by Sullivan and Brown, the gamblers from New York.<sup>25</sup> Chase appears in neither scenario.

Later that week, Happy Felsch in a newspaper interview confessed to his involvement. Felsch knew little about the World Series fix financing, but was willing to believe published reports that Abe Attell (whom he did not know) was behind the plot. But like Cicotte, Jackson, and Williams, Happy made no mention of Hal Chase being involved.<sup>26</sup>

However inexact and tenuous the evidence against him before the grand jury, Chase was among the five gamblers charged with World Series-related conspiracy and fraud in the original Black Sox indictments returned in late October 1920. And he remained among the accused when superseding indictments expanding the roster of gambler defendants were filed in March 1921.

Any inquiry into Chase's connection to the Series fix that might have been pursued during a trial, however, was stymied by Cook County prosecutors' inability to procure Chase's extradition from California. Applications to that end were denied.<sup>27</sup> As long as he stayed out of Illinois, Chase was effectively immune from prosecution.

Hal Chase was virtually a cipher during the Black Sox criminal trial proceedings. The only apparent mention of his name came during the testimony of gambler defendant-turned-State's star witness Bill Burns. Sleepy Bill placed Chase at the hotel meeting where Abe Attell and Bennett/Zelcer represented themselves to Burns and Billy Maharg as the fix agents of Arnold Rothstein.<sup>28</sup> Otherwise, nothing.

Notwithstanding presentation of a strong and unrefuted prosecution case against defendants Eddie Cicotte, Joe Jackson, and Lefty Williams, and substantial, if largely circumstantial, proof against Chick Gandil, Swede Risberg, and gambler David Zelcer, the Black Sox jury returned swift not-guilty verdicts on all charges against all the accused on August 2, 1921.<sup>29</sup>

Days later, Cook County State's Attorney Robert E. Crowe administratively dismissed the indictments still pending against Hal Chase and the other fugitive defendants. Chase was not among the ballplayers banished from organized baseball by the draconian edict of Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis, and he was never formally placed on baseball's permanently ineligible list either.

Nevertheless, Chase was an untouchable, forced to play out the waning days of his career in forsaken outlaw baseball circuits. He then slipped into near-oblivion. Suffering from the effects of alcoholism and other maladies, Chase

died in California in May 1947. He was 64.



Given the passage of time and gaps in the historical record, some aspects of the 1919 World Series fix will forever remain unsettled. This applies to the role of Hal Chase in the Black Sox Scandal. But from the available evidence, it is difficult to assign Chase anything other than a modest supporting role in the corruption.

If viewed in theatrical terms, the leading parts in our drama would belong to Chick Gandil and Arnold Rothstein, the two indispensable actors in the fix. Without Gandil (and perhaps the counsel of Sport Sullivan), there would have been no player conspiracy to lose the 1919 Series. It was also Gandil who recruited his teammates, most importantly staff ace Eddie Cicotte, to join the cabal. Gandil served as payoff paymaster during the Series, and it was Gandil who kept the fix operational, notwithstanding the post-Game Two collapse of the collaboration with the Burns/Attell syndicate.

As for Rothstein, he was likely the only one with the ready-cash bankroll necessary to finance the fix of the World Series on relatively short notice. In short, Rothstein made the Gandil-Sullivan fix proposal a reality, supplying the seed money needed to cement enlistment of the skittish Cicotte before the Series commenced and the post-Game Four cash (probably about \$40,000) that kept the fix going when the corrupted Sox may have gotten restless.

Major supporting roles, obviously, must be allotted to Cicotte and Sullivan, and to malleable Lefty Williams, as well. With the 1919 Series elongated to a best five-of-nine match, two White Sox starting pitchers, not just one, were needed if success of the fix plot was to be assured.<sup>30</sup> And having Williams join the fix conspiracy achieved that goal, as he and Cicotte managed the five necessary World Series game losses entirely between themselves.

Another significant scandal actor is Bill Burns – not because of his part in the secondary conspiracy to fix the Series result, but his status as star prosecution witness at the Black Sox criminal trial. Without the Burns testimony, even less of the fix dynamics would be known than is the case now.

That said, even if the Burns/Attell conspiracy had never been hatched, the 1919 World Series would still have been corrupted. Remember, prior to accepting the fix proposition of Bill Burns and Abe Attell, eight Sox players had already joined a conspiracy to throw the Series in return for payoffs offered by agents of Arnold Rothstein. And once those players took Rothstein's money, the fix could not be undone as AR was not a man lightly to be double-crossed.

This reality reduces Hal Chase to, at most, a subsidiary role in the Black Sox Scandal. Though Chase may have facilitated the short-lived Burns/Attell conspiracy, that plot had relatively little effect. The Rothstein-financed plot was the scandal's main event. If the players followed through

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on their agreement with the Rothstein forces, the World Series fix die was cast. The White Sox would lose the Series regardless of any secondary fix agreement mediated or brokered by Chase. Again, in dramatic terms, this reduces Chase's role to that of a secondary actor in a Series corruption spinoff.

The fact that Chase, like other fix insiders, may have profited handsomely from informed Series wagering does not change this assessment, or elevate him to a position of importance in the hierarchy of Series fix figures. Same for the notion that Chase served as a fix role model and/or that his exoneration by NL President Heydler in February 1919 inspired the ensuing Series fix. That is no more than fanciful speculation, unsupported by any tangible evidence.<sup>31</sup>

The historical record provides no basis for attributing the corruption of the 1919 World Series to anything other than player/gambler greed and the assumption that corruption of the Series outcome was a low risk/high reward venture. In the final analysis, and however fascinating a character he may have been, Hal Chase played no more than a bit role in the Black Sox Scandal.

### Notes

1. Martin Kohout, "Hal Chase," SABR BioProject, accessed online on May 5, 2023. An earlier version of the Chase profile originally appeared in *Deadball Stars of the American League*, David Jones, ed. (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2004).

2. Babe Ruth, Cy Young, Bill Dinneen, Ed Barrow, and Pants Rowland were among the baseball peers who considered Chase the best fielding first baseman that they had ever seen, per Kohout.

3. Fuller treatment of Chase is provided in Donald Dewey and Nicholas Acocella, *The Black Prince of Baseball: Hal Chase and the Mythology of the Game* (Toronto: Sports Classic Books, 2004), and Martin Donell Kohout, *Hal Chase: The Defiant Life and Turbulent Times of Baseball's Biggest Crook* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2001). Also of interest is Ed Dinger, *A Prince at First: The Fictional Autobiography of Baseball's Hal Chase* (McFarland, 2002).

4. Reigning heavyweight champion Jess Willard for example, was absent from the ring after his March 25, 1916 successful title defense against Frank Moran until his third-round knockout by challenger Jack Dempsey on July 4, 1919.

5. The ebb-and-flow of game fixing is best left for another essay. For here, suffice it to say that after the expulsion of four Louisville players for game-fixing during the 1877 National League pennant race, verifiable instances of major

league game fixing became few and isolated until 1917.

6. Dewey and Acocella, 263-268.

7. "Matty Suspends Hal Chase for Indifferent Playing," *Chicago Tribune*, August 8, 1918: 14; "Hal Chase Suspended by Christy Mathewson," *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, August 8, 1918: 10; and elsewhere.

8. "Chase Not Guilty," *Baltimore Sun*, February 6, 1919: 9; "Hal Chase Cleared of Gambling Charge," *Chattanooga News*, February 6, 1919: 12; and elsewhere.

9. (Lima, Ohio) *Times-Democrat*, February 6, 1919: 10. A baseball gambling scholar has described the Heydler ruling as "without a doubt the greatest whitewash in the history of baseball." Daniel E. Ginsburg, *The Fix Is In* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1995): 92.

10. This does not include reputed mid-Series efforts to reinvigorate the fix by a coterie of Midwestern gamblers after the White Sox unexpectedly won Game Three.

11. Deposition of Bill Burns for Joe Jackson's civil breach of contract lawsuit against the White Sox, October 5, 1922.

12. The true identity of "Brown" was long a mystery. Neither the corrupted Sox players nor Chicago prosecutors knew who he was. In October 1920, this shadowy figure was indicted under the name "Rachael Brown," the pseudonym of Abraham Braunstein, a small-time Manhattan gambler unconnected to the fix. That "Brown" was actually Rothstein lieutenant Nat Evans only came to light decades later. For more, see Bruce Allardice, "Nat Evans: More Than Rothstein's Associate," *Black Sox Scandal Research Committee Newsletter*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (June 2014), 14-18; William F. Lamb, "A Black Sox Mystery: The Identity of Defendant Rachael Brown," *Base Ball: A Journal of the Early Game*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Fall 2010), 5-11.

13. According to the grand jury testimony of New York Giants pitcher Rube Benton.

14. More detail on the Magee fiasco is contained in Kohout, *Hal Chase*, 227-234. See also, Ginsburg, 93-96, and Dewey and Acocella, 263-264.

15. See William F. Lamb, *Black Sox in the Courtroom: The Grand Jury, Criminal Trial and Civil Proceedings* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2013), 25-26.

16. See Dewey and Acocella, 314-320; Ginsburg, 264-265.

17. The original subject of grand jury investigation was the report that a meaningless late August 1920 game between the Chicago Cubs and Philadelphia Phillies had been rigged. The panel was also charged with probing Chicago's lucrative baseball pool selling rackets.

18. The wholesale disregard of the mandate that grand jury proceedings remain confidential allowed publication of Benton's testimony, as well as newspaper revelation of virtually everything else said behind closed doors.

19. *Chicago Daily Journal*, September 23, 1920. A story about crookedness in baseball with a Rube Benton byline appeared the same day in the *Chicago Evening American*.

20. As reported in the *Chicago Daily News*, *Chicago*



## ► CHASE

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*Evening Post*, and elsewhere, September 24, 1920.

21. "Inside Story of Plot to Buy World's Series," *Chicago Tribune*, September 25, 1920: 1.

22. "Grand Jury Hears World Series Plot," *New York Times*, September 25, 1920: 19.

23. James C. Isaminger, "Gamblers Promised White Sox \$100,000 To Lose," (Philadelphia) *North American*, September 28, 1920: 1.

24. See William F. Lamb, "Reluctant or Ringleader? Eddie Cicotte's Role in the Fix," *Black Sox Scandal Research Committee Newsletter*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (December 2020), 3-9; "An Ever-Changing Story: Exposition and Analysis of Shoeless Joe Jackson's Public Statements on the Black Sox Scandal," *SABR Baseball Research Journal*, Spring 2019, 37-48.

25. See transcript of Williams grand jury testimony at GJT 26-29 to GJT 27-17; GJT 28-11 to GJT 29-4; and GJT 31-30 to GJT 32-8 in Chicago History Museum, Black Sox Scandal Collection.

26. "'I Got Mine, \$5,000' – Felsch," *Chicago Evening American*, September 29, 1920: 1.

27. The Cook County State's Attorneys Office forwarded a copy of the indictment rather than the requisite governor's warrant to authorities in California, and then inexplicably failed to cure this defect in their papers during ensuing courtroom proceedings. The request to extradite Chase to stand trial in Chicago was therefore denied by a California Superior Court sitting in San Jose.

28. Only fragments of the Black Sox criminal trial record have survived, but verbatim accounts of the testimony of prosecution star witness Bill Burns were published in newspapers nationwide. See e.g., "Burns Now Says Sox Formulated Sell-Out Plan," *Albuquerque (New Mexico) Morning Journal*, July 2, 1921: 4; "Baseball Players Made Sell-Out Proposition," *Norwich (Connecticut) Bulletin*, July 21, 1921: 1.

29. The writer's view regarding certain of the acquittals is explained in "Jury Nullification and the Not Guilty Verdicts in the Black Sox Case," *SABR Baseball Research Journal*, Fall 2015.

30. The writer is among the Black Sox Scandal researchers who believe that corruption of the 1919 Series would have been difficult, if not impossible, had 1917 World Series standout Red Faber been healthy and able to assume the spot of the White Sox's number two starter instead of Lefty Williams.

31. A September 28, 1920 affidavit prepared for but never signed by Eddie Cicotte alleged that discussion of the Series fix was prompted by "talk that somebody offered" \$10,000 to Chicago Cubs players to throw the 1918 World Series to the Boston Red Sox. Cicotte's statement in Alfred Austrian's office and his subsequent grand jury testimony do not make this assertion.



## Coming soon: *After the Black Sox* booklet series

SABR member and acclaimed artist **Gary Cieradkowski** introduces a new booklet series on the lives of the eight banished Black Sox players after their professional baseball careers ended. Pre-orders are now available at [studiogaryc.com](http://studiogaryc.com); the full series will be released in July 2023. Quantities are extremely limited, since each booklet is hand-made by the artist.

The series of eight booklets include an original illustrated baseball card of each player, along with a hand-numbered and signed booklet that reveals what each Black Sox player did post-scandal. The card depicts each player with one of their "outsider baseball teams": the Universal City Film Stars, Fort Bayard Veterans, Chino Twins, and more.

This new series will pick up where most history books end, for these ballplayers did not disappear into obscurity, but continued to play the game they betrayed — far beyond the reaches of Major League Baseball in the murky world of Outsider Baseball. Some continued playing ball as a mercenary-for-hire on small town teams, while others plied their trade alongside other notorious baseball outcasts in outlaw leagues in frontier mining towns of the Southwest.

You can read a preview of Booklet Number 1 of the series, on pitcher Eddie Cicotte and his "Ex-Major League Stars" barnstorming team, at [studiogaryc.com](http://studiogaryc.com).

Dozens of other individual booklets, covering the likes of Stan Musial to Alta Weiss to Jimmy Horio, are also available for sale on Cieradkowski's website.

# Join us in Chicago for SABR 51 convention

All baseball fans are invited to join us at the SABR 51 annual convention on July 5-9, 2023, at the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago.

Full registration or single-day tickets are available online at [SABR.org/convention](http://SABR.org/convention) or on-site at the Palmer House during the convention.

Our annual committee meeting will be scheduled for 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, July 8 in the Grand Ballroom (4th floor) at the Palmer House Hilton.

This meeting will be a panel discussion about the 100th anniversary of Shoeless Joe Jackson's lawsuit against the Chicago White Sox, which went to trial in Milwaukee in 1924.

The SABR 51 convention will also include several research presentations that should be of interest to Black Sox



committee members:

◆ **Steven A. Riess** on “Gambling and the National Pastime, 1935-1950” (1:00 p.m., Thursday, July 6)

◆ **Rob Garratt** on “A Fresh Scent of Scandal: The O’Connell-Dolan Affair” (1:30 p.m. Thursday)

◆ **Sharon Hamilton** on “Ernest Hemingway: Chicago Baseball Mysteries” (2:30 p.m. Thursday)

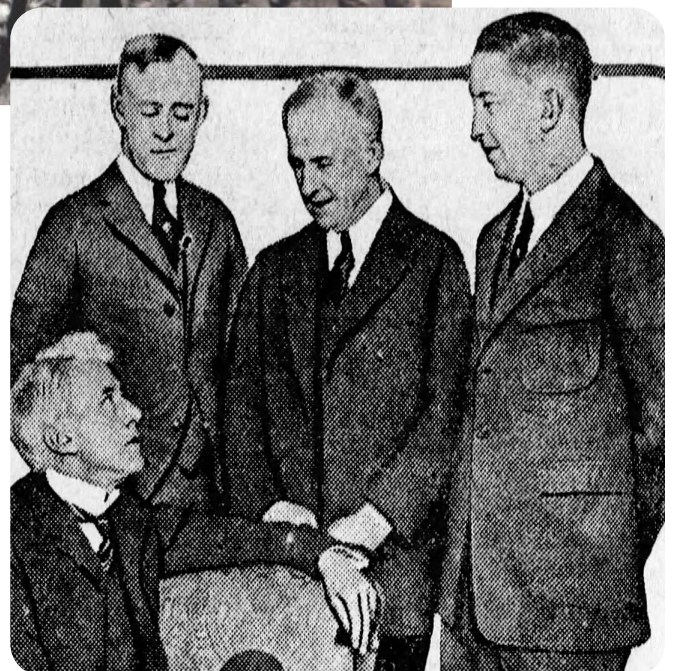
◆ **Bruce Allardice** on “The Ultimate Tear Down and Rebuild: The White Sox, 1921-28” (9:00 a.m. Friday, July 7)

In addition, a walking tour of historic baseball sites in the downtown Chicago Loop will take place on Wednesday, July 5, led by Jacob Pomrenke. Space is extremely limited; [click here to RSVP](#).

## 100 YEARS AGO



Above: Shoeless Joe Jackson (in white socks, 7th from left) spent the summer of 1923 playing semipro baseball with a team in Americus, Georgia. Jackson started the season in Bastrop, Louisiana, but after opponents there objected to his presence in mid-July, Jackson and most of his teammates moved to Americus and began playing in the South Georgia League. Jackson mentored three future major-leaguers: pitcher Ernie Wingard (5th from left) and outfielder Verdo Elmore (9th from left), who signed with the St. Louis Browns in 1924, and outfielder Otis Brannan (10th from left), who also played with the Browns in 1928-29. (Photo: Mike Nola / BlackBetsy.com)



Right: In January 1923, Johnny Evers, Kid Gleason, and Eddie Collins visited the office of baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis to plead for the reinstatement of pitcher Dickey Kerr, who was suspended for signing with an independent team during a contract dispute with White Sox owner Charles Comiskey. Landis kept Kerr on the sidelines for nearly three seasons until 1925. (Photo: Clafin Clarion / Newspapers.com)

# Billy Maharg's 1915 Phillies sign-stealing 'scandal'

By Bruce Allardice

[bsa1861@att.net](mailto:bsa1861@att.net)

After the Black Sox Scandal was publicly exposed in the fall of 1920, longtime Philadelphia sports reporter Edgar Forrest Wolfe, writing under the pseudonym "Jim Nasium," related a story of how Black Sox fixer Billy Maharg had participated in a "spying" operation for the Philadelphia Phillies — sort of a low-tech version of what the Houston Astros did a century later.

The article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of September 29, 1920, is reprinted below:

Billy Maharg, former boxer of this city, whose confession that he acted as a go-between the Chicago White Sox players and gamblers in connection with the fraud perpetrated in the World's Series last fall, when the White Sox players "threw" the games to the Cincinnati club, acted in a secret capacity in previous pennant races.

In 1915, when the Phillies won the only pennant they have captured in the thirty-eight years of their existence, Maharg acted as the secret emissary of Manager Pat Moran in "stealing" the signals and plays of the Phillies' opponents.

It will be remembered that in the spring of that year the Phillies suddenly changed their players' bench to the first base side of the field, the visiting teams occupying the bench at the third base side, which had always been used by the home team.

When they changed players' benches, they had a small door at the back of their old bench which was not to be used by the visiting team closed up so that it was impossible to get from the players' bench under the stands without going around by way of the bleacher entrance.

Behind this all, under the grandstand, a hole was dug in the soft ground, and Maharg was used as a spy to hide in this hole with his ear to the cracks of the nailed-up door so he could hear the conversation of the visiting players and catch their signals and plays. He would then report this information to Manager Moran by returning under the grandstand to the Phillies' bench, the door to which had not been closed, with the result that the Phillies usually knew every play their opponents were about to pull in advance. ...

The use of these signal-tipping tactics by Maharg was partly the reason why President [William] Baker decided to release Pat Moran as manager of the Phillies, as Mr. Baker only became cognizant of the facts late in the



**Clockwise from top left: boxer-turned-ballplayer Billy Maharg, Phillies manager Pat Moran, Phillies owner William Baker, coach Cozy Dolan.** (Photos: Public Domain)

season of 1915. ...

Later Mr. Baker ordered Groundkeeper Sam Payne to fill up the hole.

Local fans will remember the difficulty the Phillies always had to beat the St. Louis team that year, though they invariably beat much stronger clubs and then would lose the majority of games of a series to the lowly Cardinals.

This was explained to the writer by "Cozy" Dolan the following season, after Dolan had left the St. Louis team<sup>1</sup> and was playing in Indianapolis.

It appears that "Cozy," then a player with the Cardinals, had wandered around the back of the visiting players' bench at the Phillies' Park and had observed Maharg hiding in his "listening post" under the grandstand.

Without Maharg knowing it, "Cozy" had then slipped back and quietly told the rest of the St. Louis players, after which they devoted the balance of the season to "double-crossing" Maharg on their signals when they played at the Phillies' park, with the result that the Phillies were always playing the wrong "tip." ...

A great story about sign-stealing shenanigans. But is it

► **Continued on page 12**



SABR member Peter J. Wilt recently completed his quest to see all eight Black Sox gravesites on a trip to Northern California, visiting the final resting places of Chick Gandil (left) at St. Helena Cemetery in the Napa Valley and Swede Risberg (right) at Mt. Shasta Memorial Park near the Oregon border. Wilt’s journey began in 1984 when he first visited Shoeless Joe Jackson’s grave in South Carolina. He is also credited with the discovery of Lefty Williams’ unmarked grave in Anaheim, California. [Click here](#) to read Wilt’s article in the December 2021 issue of the Black Sox committee newsletter. (Courtesy of Peter J. Wilt)

## ► MAHARG

Continued from page 11

true? Or just another colorful anecdote from the Deadball Era?

First, the article seems to claim that Phillies president William Baker fired manager Pat Moran after the spying was detected — presumably after the end of the 1915 season. That makes for a good morality play, but in fact Moran wasn’t fired until 1918. And the reason was Philadelphia’s poor record that season.<sup>2</sup>

Second, the claim is that the Phillies’ spying was a great success against every team but St. Louis. Here again the facts tell a different story. The Phillies’ 1915 home-road splits showed no decisive advantage compared to their rivals. The Phillies went .645 at home and .539 on the road, a .106 home field advantage. The second-place Boston Braves had a much greater home field advantage (.198), as did third-place Brooklyn (.280).

Third, it doesn’t appear the Phillies struggled much against the seventh-place Cardinals in 1915. The Phillies won 15 of 22 games against the Cards that year, outscoring their opponents 95 to 65. Just counting games played at Philadelphia’s Baker Bowl, where one would expect Dolan’s “spying” exposé to cause trouble for the Phillies, the home team won seven out of 10, outscoring the Cards 45-31. This home record matches the record of the two teams when playing in St. Louis. Dolan’s alleged “double-

crossing” doesn’t seem to have helped his team in any significant way.

Fourth, the reason given for the Phillies switching the side of their bench is contradicted by contemporary newspapers. An article in the *Philadelphia Ledger* on April 23, 1915, reports that Moran switched the benches to help his players’ vision. That way, said Moran, the background they saw would be the green right-field wall, not the bleacher stands in left field full of fans with varied colored clothing. Of course, this could have been a cover story to conceal the chicanery.

The Phillies’ 1915 “Spygate” scandal certainly makes for an interesting story. But there is little reason to believe it’s actually true. One is reminded of the newspaper editor’s famous line in John Ford’s film, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*: “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.”

### Notes

1. Cozy Dolan did leave the Cardinals after the 1915 season and later became a coach with the New York Giants. Nearly a decade later, he was banned from professional baseball by Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis for his role in a game-fixing scandal involving New York Giants outfielder Jimmy O’Connell.

2 Daniel R. Levitt, “Pat Moran,” SABR BioProject, accessed online on May 11, 2023. See also the *Philadelphia Ledger*, December 10-11, 1918, for more on the unexpected firing.

## AROUND THE WEB

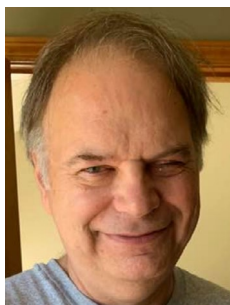
SABR members **Rick Huhn** and **David Fleitz** were the first two guests of the SABR Deadball Era Committee’s new virtual “Book Talk” interview series this spring. The series is hosted on Zoom by Seymour Medal-winning author Dan Levitt and available to all SABR members.



Rick Huhn

Huhn was interviewed on February 15. He is the author of *Eddie Collins: A Baseball Biography*; *The Chalmers Race: Ty Cobb, Napoleon Lajoie, and the Controversial 1910 Batting Title That Became a National Obsession*; and *The Sizzler: George Sisler, Baseball’s Forgotten Great*.

[Click here](#) to watch Rick Huhn’s interview on YouTube.



David Fleitz

Fleitz was interviewed on May 15. He is the author of 10 books on baseball history, including biographies of Deadball Era stars Napoleon Lajoie, Shoeless Joe Jackson, and Eddie Cicotte. His newest book, to be published in September 2023, is *Schnozz: The Baseball Life of Ernie Lombardi*.

[Click here](#) to watch David Fleitz’s interview on YouTube.

◆ **Dan Taylor’s** newest book, *Baseball at the Abyss: The Scandals of 1926, Babe Ruth, and the Unlikely Savior Who Rescued a Tarnished Game*, covers the infamous game-fixing incidents that sent Ty Cobb and Tris Speaker to a new team and put Chick Gandil and Swede Risberg back in the spotlight after the Black Sox Scandal. Taylor [gave a virtual presentation](#) about his book to SABR’s New York City chapter on March 13.

◆ Gambling scandals in college baseball have cost multiple coaches their jobs this season. **Michael Baumann** of FanGraphs asks [what legalized sports betting might be costing baseball](#).

◆ **Sharon Hamilton** takes a look at the [critical Cubs-Phillies game on August 31, 1920](#), that led to a grand jury investigation at the SABR Games Project.

◆ **Joseph Wancho** explores a [pivotal White Sox vs. Indians game](#) on September 24, 1920 at the SABR Games Project.

◆ **Stephen V. Rice** has two interesting new articles at the SABR Games Project, [on a 1905 minor-league game](#) involving a young Ty Cobb and Eddie Cicotte with the Augusta Tourists and a [1925 pitching duel in Montana](#) between Swede Risberg and Black baseball star John Donaldson.

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Edited By Cecil M. Tan

This summer’s edition of *The National Pastime*, SABR’s annual convention journal, features Eddie Cicotte on the cover and includes articles by Bill Lamb on Buck Weaver’s role in the Black Sox Scandal, David Krell on the actors in *Field of Dreams*, Tim Newman on 1919 World Series managers, and Bill Savage and S.P. Donohue on the endurance of Black Sox mythology. The e-book edition will be sent to all SABR members in early July 2023.

◆ **Gary Cieradkowski’s** new [illustrated baseball card of Jimmy O’Connell](#) tells the story of an “outlaw” player who later became teammates with Chick Gandil and Lefty Williams.

◆ A 1989 interview of *Eight Men Out* director **John Sayles** by **Dick Johnson**, originally published in *The SABR Review of Books*, is [newly available online at SABR.org](#).

◆ In character as Shoeless Joe Jackson, *Eight Men Out* actor **D.B. Sweeney** helped his friend, Boston sports writer **Rob Bradford**, announce his Hall of Fame ballot for the class of 2023 [in this amusing video clip](#).

◆ **Richard Heusel**, who was instrumental in establishing the Shoeless Joe Jackson Museum and served on its Board of Directors for nearly 15 years, [died at the age of 88](#) on May 19 in South Carolina.

# English Tommy: a new Philadelphia connection

By Bruce Allardice

[bsa1861@att.net](mailto:bsa1861@att.net)

One of the great unanswered questions of the Black Sox Scandal is that of the Philadelphia gambler who *passed* on the fixing of the 1919 World Series.

This gambler is most prominently mentioned in Black Sox fixer Billy Maharg's December 1922 deposition, part of the pre-trial discovery process in lawsuits filed by banned players Shoeless Joe Jackson, Swede Risberg, Happy Felsch, and Buck Weaver for back pay against the Chicago White Sox.

In the deposition — which was later included as testimony during Jackson's 1924 civil trial in Milwaukee — Maharg mentions that after he and Bill Burns first met with the White Sox players at the Ansonia Hotel in New York, Maharg went home to Philadelphia and approached a gambler he knew named "Chrissy" or "Rossy" to ask who might be able to put up the money to pay off the Black Sox:

"A fellow named Rossy. His name is Chrissy. 'Chrissy' or 'Rossy,' they always called him. ... I knew him around Philadelphia for years. He is a gambler."

Rossy/Chrissy told Maharg that "there was only one man in the country that could handle that" kind of a deal — Arnold Rothstein. According to Maharg's deposition, Rossy/Chrissy then gave Maharg a "letter of introduction" and also made a personal phone call to Rothstein to connect them. He instructed Maharg to immediately go to Considine's restaurant/saloon in New York that night to meet Rothstein.

Maharg went to New York, but Rothstein wasn't there. Maharg returned home and waited for Bill Burns so the two of them could go back to New York together to find Rothstein.

Maharg's 1922 deposition was in fact the third — and most detailed — version of his story about meeting this unknown Philadelphia gambler.

In the first version, related in a newspaper interview in September 1920 with James Isaminger, Maharg stated that after returning to Philadelphia he "saw some gamblers [*note the plural*] there and they recommended me to Arnold Rothstein, a well known and wealthy New York gambler."

At the 1921 Black Sox criminal trial in Chicago, Maharg expanded on this incident and mentioned a name, testifying that after returning to Philadelphia he "went to see a man named *Rossie*." As with many other possible lines of inquiry in the scandal, the prosecution did not attempt to delve further and discover the identity of this gambler or gamblers.<sup>1</sup>

Maharg's testimony in court did not name the gambler. This is absurd — he clearly knew the man's name. You don't try to line up financiers to underwrite a scam this huge, and not know the name of the man you're approach-



**Thomas Gilchrist was a prominent Philadelphia gambler who likely was approached by Billy Maharg about fixing the 1919 World Series. Gilchrist sent Maharg to New York City with instructions to go find Arnold Rothstein.**

(Photo: Philadelphia Inquirer, June 13, 1926)

ing. It appears Maharg used, or made up, nicknames for the gambler he consulted. For obvious reasons, Maharg may have promised never to reveal the gambler's name.

The gambler decided not to take up Maharg's offer himself. We can easily speculate why:

Consider things from a moneybag gambler's point of view. You know Billy Maharg, or know of him at least. He's a factory worker; a nickel-and-dime gambler; an ex-boxer and a hanger-on at the fringes of baseball.<sup>2</sup> You also know he's never fixed anything more important than a carburetor. And he's coming to you with perhaps the most far-reaching, earth-shattering fix in sports history — assuming what he's saying about the White Sox players is true.

Why would any self-respecting gambler jump at this proposal? Maharg was asking for the use or loan of tens of thousands of dollars, at a minimum, to bribe the players and to possibly lay down wagers of his own. This from a man who had no record of large wagers or fixes, and who had no obvious connections with the White Sox. You're potentially trusting him with an awful lot of money.

The fact that Maharg referenced Sleepy Bill Burns as his partner would hardly help matters. He wasn't nicknamed

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## ► ENGLISH TOMMY

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“Sleepy Bill” for nothing. One newspaper article on the scandal recounted how Burns’ baseball buddies rejected the idea of him fixing games because Burns, in their words, lacked “the mental energy and astuteness” to arrange anything so complicated.<sup>3</sup>

As a gambler, your caution would be on two levels. First, why believe what Maharg (or Burns) said the White Sox players were willing to do? There’s nothing that would lead you to believe what these two men — accurately dismissed as “ham-and-egggers” in the film *Eight Men Out* — were claiming.

A word from Eddie Cicotte or one of the other players involved might be persuasive. After all, that would be firsthand evidence of the fix. But a secondhand story related by two relative nobodies? Hardly.

Secondly, even if you believed the two had stumbled onto a scheme that big, would you trust them to handle the fix? Of course not. They were clearly minor league gamblers. It would be as if a petty thief came to you with a plan to rob Fort Knox. Even if the plan was sound, the fix was far beyond their abilities. They’d fail to keep it secret, they’d mess up the betting, they’d be double-crossed by the players. The trail would always lead back to you as the principal financier. And subsequent events confirmed that the fix was, indeed, far beyond the abilities of Burns and Maharg alone.

It’s undoubtedly for these same reasons that Arnold Rothstein also rejected the offer when the duo first approached him. And it’s easy to see why the Philadelphia gambler also passed on the fix. The Philadelphia man didn’t even *try* to line up the financing himself.



So who was this Philadelphia gambler who turned Maharg down, suggested he contact Rothstein, and gave the duo what amounted to a letter of introduction?

Several factors can be inferred:

- 1) He must be prominent in Philly gambling circles;
- 2) He must have some money — although not enough to finance the scheme on his own;
- 3) He must have some connection to baseball and to baseball gambling circles;
- 4) He must have a fairly close connection to Rothstein, close enough to have the “Big Bankroll’s” phone number, and to be trusted by the New York underworld figure as a referrer.

Is there someone who fits all these criteria?

In 1919, Philadelphia rivaled New York City as a gambling hub. As one local newspaper wrote that fall, “Philadelphia, under the Thomas B. Smith administration, has been practically wide open as far as far as gambling is concerned.”<sup>4</sup> Maharg could contact any number of gamblers. But only a handful were big enough operators for Maharg to



In the 1988 film *Eight Men Out*, gamblers Sleepy Bill Burns and Billy Maharg were portrayed by Christopher Lloyd, left, and Richard Edson. (Photo: Trading Card Database)

approach with a proposal of this size.

Logically, the gamblers Maharg solicited would have used their inside knowledge and wagered on the Cincinnati Reds during the World Series. Thus, the two prime suspects must be the only two Philadelphia gamblers who were mentioned in contemporary newspapers as wagering heavily on the Reds: “English Tommy” Gilchrist and “Red” McGoldrick.

Dr. Thomas Gilchrist was born in Bradford, England, in 1881. Emigrating to America in the 1890s, he settled in Philadelphia. He graduated from the University of Maryland Medical College in 1909, and started a medical practice.

But in the words of contemporary newspapers, while practicing medicine by day, at night he gambled. He soon owned a string of pool halls in Philadelphia, pool halls that doubled as gambling dens. Accounts described him as “the one-time partner of Arnold Rothstein and colorful figure in Philadelphia’s gambling circles.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1918, Gilchrist was tried for “larceny and receiving,” and in 1926 he was convicted on gambling charges. In 1928 he was convicted of peddling narcotics at his pool halls. After serving his two-year sentence, he moved to Reno, Nevada, to take care of his ailing wife. He died there on July 5, 1931.

After the Black Sox Scandal was publicly exposed in the fall of 1920, the *New York Times* published an interview on September 30 with a “prominent gambler” from Pittsburgh, who asserted:

The first intimation that we had last year that there was any suspicion in regard to the games between the White Sox and the Reds was a visit here of two Philadelphia men, one by the name of Gilchrist, I believe, who placed bets amounting to \$5,000 for the first two games, taking Cincinnati for their end. As the White Sox at the time

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## ► ENGLISH TOMMY

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were the favorites in the betting, this aroused suspicion here ...

The *New York Daily News* of the same day cites a “prominent Pittsburgh attorney” for a story claiming that after Abe Attell departed Pittsburgh for Cincinnati to watch Game One, “English Tommy Gilchrist and another gambler appeared here and ... placed thousands of dollars on Cincinnati.” The two gamblers showing up in Pittsburgh right after Attell left town implies a possible prior connection to the fix.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* on October 1, 1920, reported that Gilchrist and McGoldrick were the only two prominent Philadelphia sportsmen to wager (and win big) on the Reds. Gilchrist claimed that he bet the Reds “on form” — a claim that should be taken with a grain of salt. The article noted that both claimed to be good friends of Kid Gleason, the manager of the White Sox.<sup>6</sup>

John Joseph “Red” McGoldrick was born in Philadelphia in 1872, the son of Irish immigrants. Living mostly in the Philadelphia suburbs, he established a prosperous real estate and contracting business. In late 1920 his Wheel Pump Hotel, which he had owned for several years, was raided by the police, and McGoldrick was convicted of keeping a gambling establishment. After release from jail, he operated a tavern. McGoldrick died July 23, 1953.<sup>7</sup>

Assuming McGoldrick and/or Gilchrist were the ones first approached by Maharg, they would have had (at a minimum) advance knowledge of a fix attempt, and more probably learned via Rothstein or Attell that the fix was on.

Certainly, what they must have heard through the grapevine — there’s no evidence that they traveled to Cincinnati or Chicago during the World Series — confirmed their prior knowledge. They could see the odds on the Reds rising, they could hear of Burns and Maharg betting on the Reds, they could hear of known associates of Rothstein such as Abe Attell and Nat Evans laying down huge wagers.

McGoldrick and Gilchrist fit the profiles listed above for the gamblers who could have been contacted by Billy Maharg. They were both prominent in Philly gambling circles, with Gilchrist “nationally known” and McGoldrick a local player. They were knowledgeable about baseball, being described as (among other things) friends of the White Sox manager. They were able to place \$5,000 bets in Pittsburgh, which argues they were known in baseball gaming circles and were also known to have the resources to place that level of bets. And in the death notices for Gilchrist, he is often described as a “pal” or even “partner” of Rothstein.<sup>8</sup>

While we lack evidence that Gilchrist ever was a formal partner in any of Rothstein’s gambling or business ventures, it is possible that Gilchrist did business with Rothstein in some fashion. And while we can’t prove a direct connection between Maharg and Gilchrist, at least one newspaper

article reported in 1920 that Gilchrist was seen in a Philadelphia pool hall with a “former pugilist” who now ran pool halls. Perhaps that was Maharg.<sup>9</sup>

For all these reasons, it seems probable that the more prominent Gilchrist, the one with the known connection to Rothstein, was the gambler who sent Maharg to New York with a telephonic letter of introduction. It may very well be that McGoldrick, a mid-level gambler, introduced Maharg to Gilchrist, or that Gilchrist cut McGoldrick into the deal as a junior partner.

And it may or may not be a coincidence in Maharg’s nicknaming, but the Italian for “Red” is “Rossi,” and the last part of Gilchrist’s name sounds a lot like “Chris.”

### Notes

1. James Isaminger interview in the *New York Tribune*, September 28, 1920. Billy Maharg’s testimony in the Black Sox trial was reported in the *Philadelphia Ledger*, July 27, 1921. The author’s search of Philadelphia newspapers failed to find anyone with these names associated with gambling.

2. Bill Lamb, “Billy Maharg,” SABR BioProject, accessed online on May 11, 2023.

3. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 27, 1920.

4. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 17, 1919. Among the prominent names in Philly gambling circles were the Kaelker brothers and “Boo Boo” Hoff.

5. For Gilchrist, see the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 11, 1900; January 31 and December 31, 1916; December 25, 1918; August 26, 1919; April 15 and July 4, 1920; October 1 and 27, 1920; June 5, 13, 14, 1926; December 5, 1928; July 6, 1931; *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger*, January 11, 1918; *New York Times*, September 30, 1920; December 29, 1928; July 7, 1931; *Baltimore Sun*, June 1, 1909; *Brooklyn Standard Union*, July 6, 1931; *Harrisburg Telegraph*, September 4, 1930; *Boston Herald*, July 7, 1931; *Collyer’s Eye*, July 18 and August 15, 1931; World War I Draft Registration for him and his brother (who managed one of his pool halls); 1919 Passport Application; various US Census reports.

6. The article also notes that agents of Attell and Sullivan mulcted local Philadelphia bettors of \$60,000. One prominent Philadelphia gambler, pool hall owner Charles Mosconi, heard the fix rumors and passed that information along to White Sox manager Kid Gleason.

7. For McGoldrick, see various US Census reports; *Conshocken Recorder*, April 11, 1913, October 6 and 18, 1921; July 27, 1953; *Chicago Daily National Hotel Reporter*, November 26, 1920; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 9, 1920; August 20 and 23, September 24 and 25, October 18, 1921; *New York Morning Telegraph*, August 2, 1923; Pennsylvania death certificate.

8. For the Rothstein-Gilchrist connection, see *New York Daily News* and *New York Times*, July 7, 1931.

9. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 4, 1920.