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Editor: Cecilia M. Tan

Interior design and production: Lisa Hochstein

Assistant editor: Keith DeCandido

Proofreader: Norman L. Macht

Fact checker: Clifford Blau

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Phone: (602) 496-1460

Web: www.sabr.org

Twitter: @sabr

Facebook: Society for American Baseball Research

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From the Editor

If you are a longtime reader of the *Baseball Research Journal*, you know the last time we had a themed issue was in 2011, when I first took over as SABR's Publications Director. That spring, Stu Shea jumped in as guest editor to produce a special issue on the Chicago Cubs, and that fall my first issue as editor carried the theme of SABR's 40th birthday, with each article focused on a post-1971 topic. Since then, the queue of research papers has never been empty. In my eleven seasons on the job as PD, I've read papers on everything from biomechanics to urban planning, from art history to economics. I once heard an author speak and a member of the audience asked what being a professional writer/editor was like. The answer: "Like having homework every night for the rest of your life." The line got a laugh, of course. What was unsaid, though, is how much we writers and editors like it.

It was Scott Bush's idea to solicit articles on the theme of women in baseball, ostensibly to mark the anniversary of Title IX. This landmark legislation is about much more than sports, but expanding and equalizing women's access to college athletics is one of its most visible and impactful legacies. Title IX did not, of course, guarantee that women could play baseball. (Most universities took a page from Little League's playbook, perpetuating a "separate but equal" system that equates baseball for men with softball for women.) But Title IX established a generation of women for whom participation in sports is a given, and when the establishment hasn't provided ways to play baseball, many women have created opportunities for themselves.

I played women's baseball in the early 2000s. At the time there were scattered leagues and organizations around the US and Canada, ranging from outgrowths of Little-League-style youth organizations to pseudo-pro (non-paying) leagues founded by impresarios hoping women's baseball could turn into a money-making endeavor.

I consider it a failure of the American education system that I didn't learn to throw a baseball properly until I was in my thirties. But there I was, having answered an open call for tryouts for the New England Women's Baseball League, wearing my regular Reeboks and carrying a Bucky Dent souvenir glove I'd had since I was a kid. Winter clings on in New England, so the tryout took place indoors at Strike One—a baseball practice facility co-owned by Eric Wedge, who would shortly take the job in Cleveland as skipper of the then-Indians.¹ Strike One was like an indoor tennis facility if you took out the nets and covered all the courts in a foot of packed clay. (In fact, I think that might be what it was.) As I was about to learn, everything in baseball starts with a game of catch. The tryout hadn't officially started, but the women who had played in the previous, impresario-owned incarnation of the league were pairing off and starting to throw. One of them saw me standing there alone and invited me to throw with her. She tossed the ball to me and I caught it, which I considered a miracle at the time: I hadn't been sure the 25-year-old glove wouldn't just fall apart right on the spot. Then I tried to throw the ball back to her and it sailed over her head. Whoops.

She was patient, and kind, and showed me the right way to grip a baseball—across the seams—to make it fly fast and straight. What I didn't know at the time was that I had just met someone who would be a significant figure in women's baseball for decades: Robin "Bama" Wallace. She had already been a pioneer: the only girl in her Little League in Mobile, eventually the "first girl to play [high school] baseball in Alabama."² Later, the only woman on a Division III college baseball team, where she received death threats.³ Eventually, after serving as general manager for an independent (men's) baseball team, playing in the first Women's Baseball World Cup (2004), getting her law degree (2005), and speaking at the SABR National Convention (2013), Robin Wallace would become the first woman hired by the Major League Scouting Bureau (2014).⁴ She told MLB.com at the time, "I am happy that in the process of pursuing my goals and dreams that I might open the doors for other women."⁵

The next wave of pioneering women to come through that door is here now. In November 2019 a slew of promotions and hires were announced, including Andrea Hayden (Twins), Rachel Folden (Cubs), and Rachel Balkovec (Yankees). More quickly followed, including Alyssa Nakken (Giants), Bianca Smith (Red Sox), and of course MLB's first female general manager, Kim Ng (Marlins), now totalling 22 women in MLB coaching or player development roles, with more in minor league front offices, as well.⁶ But minor league contraction and staff layoffs post-pandemic have made jobs in baseball even harder to win and keep than before. It remains to be seen whether the recent spate of female hires is a merely sport-wide fad, or if truly lasting change has come. I expect twenty years from now that someone—maybe one of you reading this—will write about how this moment for women in baseball eventually turned out.

Speaking of expanding access and opportunity, maybe it shouldn't be a surprise that this is the most women authors that a single issue of the *Baseball Research Journal* has ever had. This issue also features numerous first time contributors, in all sections. It seems the *BRJ* is becoming a popular destination for many researchers—so many, in fact, that we've had to close the submission queue, temporarily. The *BRJ* will reopen to article submissions in August. I'm looking forward to having lots more homework.

— Cecilia M. Tan, *May 2022*

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Marvels or Menaces?

How the Press Covered “The Lady Baseballists,” 1865–1915

Donna L. Halper

It wasn't so long ago that sports historians spent little if any time researching the young women who played baseball in previous generations. The best-known histories of the game barely gave them a mention.¹ This is not surprising, since the common wisdom about female ballplayers was that most of them weren't very good at it, and those who tried were only motivated by the desire for some publicity. These women were usually thought of as entertainers rather than athletes.

One other reason so little research was done about women baseball players was the belief that baseball was a man's game, and the women who tried to play it were seen as interlopers. Worse than that, they were seen as unfeminine. In the late 1800s, as baseball (then spelled “base ball”) grew in popularity, the men who reported for the newspapers and magazines regularly expressed the attitude that a baseball club was no place for a lady, nor did the “weaker sex” (as women were often called back then) possess the natural ability needed to play the game. As one reporter put it in 1875, “There are some things a woman can't do! [T]here are a great many essential elements that go to make up a base ball player, and to the best of our knowledge, women check out short on all of them.”² A similar viewpoint was articulated by Albert G. Spalding in his 1911 book, *America's National Game*, in which he asserted that women were best suited for sitting in the stands and cheering for the home team. “[N]either our wives, our sisters, our daughters nor our sweethearts, may play Base Ball on the field... Base Ball is too strenuous for womankind,” he wrote.³ For Spalding and other men of his time, baseball was the epitome of a manly pursuit. It represented “American male vim, vigor, and virility.”⁴

Of course, in the late 1800s, teaching girls to play baseball (or any “masculine” sport) was considered a radical idea. But it was not the only radical idea being considered at that time: there was a contentious debate taking place about how much education girls needed. Many people believed that, since girls were destined to be wives and mothers, they did not require much more

than a basic education, focused on homemaking skills; and there was certainly no need for them to go to college. But at a growing number of women's colleges, instructors disagreed: they defended higher education by insisting their curriculum would turn young women into better wives and mothers, and that college would make them more effective when teaching their children. (And for unmarried women, teaching was one of the few permitted occupations, so why not provide them with the training needed to earn a living?) Meanwhile, some women's colleges began offering students a chance to participate in athletics, as part of an effort to promote good health through exercise. But that too was contentious, since many people of that era, including numerous physicians, believed women's bodies were designed mainly for childbearing and that too much exercise would harm the uterus, rendering the woman unable to conceive. Thus, playing sports was often discouraged.⁵

But at Vassar College, the administration was undeterred by these cultural debates. Young women were given the opportunity to play baseball beginning in 1866, and that first year, at least twenty-three collegians participated.⁶ (There were probably others who were curious, but who hesitated to try out, fearing the disapproval of their parents, or friends, or the society at large.) As time passed, there was always a small group of young women who wanted to play, but subsequent years proved more challenging when it came to keeping the club going. It had to disband several times, but it always came back, and from 1866 to 1876, it was usually able to find enough players.⁷

Eventually, the Vassar club disbanded for good, but other colleges, including Smith, had begun to field baseball teams. And during the 1870s, there was another phenomenon taking place: a few semi-pro female clubs were being formed. They traveled to various cities and played against local teams. Occasionally, the women played against men, but more often, they competed against other women—games featuring the “blondes versus the brunettes” were written about in the newspapers. The talent on these clubs varied,



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Season.	Games Played.	Games Lost.
1892.....	154.....	98.....
1893.....	125.....	76.....
1894.....	167.....	81.....
1895.....	154.....	82.....
1896.....	136.....	72.....
Total games played, 1,377.		

Season.	Games Played.	Games Lost.
1897.....	108.....	89.....
1898.....	177.....	61.....
1899.....	112.....	36.....
1900.....	156.....	51.....
Won, 731. Lost, 646.		

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An advertisement promoting the Bloomer Girls baseball tour and "Famous Lady Pitcher" Miss Lizzie Arlington.

which was also true of the male semi-pro teams. But unlike the male teams, the female clubs were formed in a culture where girls were not taught baseball's fundamentals from an early age, nor given the chance to practice and improve through organized team play. Thus, despite these limitations, the fact that some women managed to learn the game and travel to different cities to play it was noteworthy.

However, the media of that day often did not see these female clubs as noteworthy. Nor did they see the efforts of women who wanted to play baseball as commendable. Reflecting the cultural beliefs of their era, most sportswriters were either dismissive or scornful. Modern fans are accustomed to today's young women successfully playing a wide range of sports (including Little League baseball), and they might find past attitudes disappointing; but for writers who covered sports in the era from the 1870s to the early 1910s, marginalizing women athletes made perfect sense. Back then, nearly all baseball writers were male, and like Albert Spalding, they tended to see baseball as something that only men did. Thus, as a media historian, I expected that reporters from the nineteenth century would either disapprove of women ballplayers or not take their efforts seriously. However, I wondered if any sportswriters wrote positively about women athletes, and I wanted to know if there were any common threads in the way the writers of that time reported about the women "baseballists."

As I often do when performing historical research, I utilized a theoretical framework called *content analysis*; it provides a useful way to evaluate what reporters wrote. Content analysis "has a history of more than 50 years of use in communication, journalism, sociology, psychology, and business... [It is] the systematic,

objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics."⁸ In other words, by categorizing and analyzing the articles that appeared in the newspapers of a given era, it becomes possible to determine which topics were most frequently covered by reporters, as well as which assertions about various trends in society were most often expressed. For this article, I explored a wide range of digitized sources, from more than fifty cities and towns, using three databases: Newspapers.com, Newspaperarchive.com, and Genealogybank.com. In addition, I explored a few books and magazines from the late 1800s and early 1900s. My research was also informed by some scholarly articles about nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century sex roles that I accessed on the JSTOR database. The goal was to get a thorough overview of what was written about women athletes in publications across the United States, since what appeared in print often reflected, and sometimes influenced, public perceptions.

My findings fell into four basic categories: writers who treated women ballplayers as a joke; writers who treated women ballplayers as an offense to traditional morality; writers who were dismissive of the efforts of women to play baseball; and writers who reported on women ballplayers positively (or at least tried to be fair to them). I also noted a fifth category—"star" athletes, specific women who received glowing coverage that other female players did not.

SPORTSWRITERS AS JOKESTERS

For most male reporters of the late 1800s, the thought of women trying to play men's sports was laughable. After all, a female player couldn't throw like a man, or hit like a man, or run the bases like a man, and yet, she thought she was a baseball player? How absurd!

That may explain the number of jokes, quips, and snide remarks about women ballplayers that were printed (and reprinted) in newspapers across the United States. Most newspapers of the late 1800s did not have a sports section, and that meant articles about sports could appear on almost any page; and so could the quips and jokes. It was also very common for a story to be printed in one paper and then picked up by another newspaper's Exchange Editor, whose job was to read newspapers from many cities and then select interesting stories that local readers might find worthwhile. That is how, in that era before radio, TV, and Internet, a story (or a joke) could start in one city and end up being read halfway across the country.

In the case of women baseball players, many of the attempts at humor revolved around common stereotypes: all a woman really wanted was a husband; women were vain and self-centered; women mainly cared about shopping for beautiful dresses; women were only happy in the kitchen. For example, you can find some kitchen humor in this joke in a piece about the Piqua (Ohio) female baseball club: "[The players] appear on the ball ground, each armed with a cook book, and think they know that to make a good batter, a little milk, a few eggs, a thingful of sugar, some salt, and so on, are all that are necessary. They have got their batter mixed, don't you see."⁹ A similar theme can be seen in this one, where the writer uses humor to remind readers of women's "proper" place: "Detroit has a female base ball club. The [New York] World says, if we might suggest our preference, we should say that batter-pudding and milk-pitchers were more in women's field."¹⁰

Similarly, we find puns about a woman's ability to "catch" a husband: "Some of the ladies of this place have organized a female Base Ball Club. The married members are said to be good 'catchers' and are instructing the unmarried..."¹¹ (This attempt at humor is interesting, because it is one of the earlier mentions, even jokingly, that women are playing baseball—from 1867.) Another kind of joke involved the cultural belief that women did not get along with other women. This one, which also contains the implication that female players don't take the game seriously, tells the possibly apocryphal story of two players from "the female base ball club in Cincinnati," where two players got into a fight over a paper fan: "The left fielder went to her position with a fan in her hand. Her captain ordered her to put the fan down, but she persistently used it. The captain seized it, tore it into shreds, and was at once grappled by the angry left fielder. The encounter was short but vigorous."¹² (I believe that this,

and some of the other jokes, may be apocryphal because the players who allegedly did the particular thing are never named, nor can I find any newspapers that give additional details about these incidents.)

One other interesting category of jokes focused on parental disapproval of young women playing ball. A frequently reprinted story tells of a female player who had a "home run" of sorts. "New Lisbon, Ohio has a female base ball club. One of the girls recently made a 'home run.' She saw her father coming with a switch."¹³ In some versions of the story, it was the young woman's brother or mother, but in all versions, it was understood that the family members had every right to force her to stop playing—whether she wanted to or not.

This story takes place in New Orleans (like New Lisbon, the Crescent City actually did have a female club), and while the game was going on, "...a young man darted out of the crowd, and seized one of the young women by the back of the neck" and "started to rush her off the field. 'Police!' shouted the manager, 'Arrest that man!'" But the young man was undeterred. He calmly replied that the girl was his sister, and that he was going to take her home. The story concludes, "And he did."¹⁴

But one snide comment that appeared in an 1886 newspaper best sums up the general attitude of many editors: "Chicago has a gang of riotous Anarchists, and New Orleans has a female base ball club. We pity New Orleans."¹⁵

SPORTSWRITERS AS GUARDIANS OF MORALITY

Contemporary baseball scholars, including Leslie Heaphy, Debra Shattuck, and Jennifer Ring, have written about how women faced cultural and family disapproval for wanting to play baseball. But some of the reporters of the late 1800s and early 1900s objected to female baseball clubs because, in their view, these clubs violated public morality. To them, women who participated in "masculine" sports were a menace; by acting in such a vulgar and un-ladylike way, they set a bad example for other young women, who might imitate these indecent behaviors. As one outraged reporter wrote about the female club in Springfield, Illinois, "However people may differ on the influence of base ball on the rising generation, there is no room for doubt as to the impropriety of women engaging in it. By doing so, they forfeit the respect which is due to [their] sex, and which is all that gives its members a greater moral influence..."¹⁶

The day before, the same newspaper, and perhaps the same writer, had referred to the female baseball

club from Springfield as a fraud, or in the parlance of that era, a “humbug,” and said that people should refuse to attend their games, so that the club would have to disband. In fairness, the writer said they were frauds because they “[did] not know how to catch, pitch, throw a ball, or run”¹⁷—which seems like somewhat of an exaggeration. And given the previous day’s editorial accusing the players of immorality, one wonders how objective the newspaper was in assessing their skills.

Numerous reporters of that period shared the belief that women who played sports were deserving of the public’s scorn. But few were more outraged than this writer (it is unfortunate that the custom back then was for most newspaper reporters to be anonymous; few received a byline, making it difficult for historians to know who wrote what), who referred to the female baseball club that played recently as, not just a fraud, but a “sickening and repulsive fraud,” and, just for emphasis, a “pernicious and putrid” fraud. And the writer also put a question-mark next to the word “lady” when describing the “young lady (?) baseballists.”¹⁸

Equally outraged, and equally certain that no decent woman would ever play baseball, a reporter for the *Knoxville Sentinel* demanded that the police forbid a traveling female club from playing in that city. These women were surely of “notorious character,” and “the worst of their class,” since women who played baseball were not fit to call themselves “ladies.” And the reason they were such vulgar human beings was obvious to the writer: “These ‘ladies’ are from New York, and New York is noted for its curious people and curious customs.”¹⁹

Said another reporter, female baseball clubs were a danger because they attracted “the filthiest elements of the city.” And when some in the crowd began to fight at one of the games, this reinforced the reporter’s belief that the women themselves were low-class. “...the exhibition of common women in the exercise of functions that are not womanly—no matter whether in the name of art or athletics—is both repugnant and dangerous to public decency.”²⁰ It is worth noting that fights broke out at men’s games too, but somehow, anything that went wrong at a game where women were playing meant the women were to blame for it.

The recurring insistence by so many writers that women who played baseball were not “ladies,” may seem like a strange thing to say in 2022, but it was frequently expressed a century ago, when gendered roles were still much more rigid, and women who violated cultural norms were immediately accused of a lack of morals. This again reminds us that the young women

who wanted to play had to be both determined and courageous, since they were constantly facing ridicule from the press, and regularly stereotyped as somewhat less than respectable.²¹

SPORTSWRITERS AS DISMISSIVE

It goes without saying that most female ballplayers of the late 1800s were still learning the game. Few had been allowed to play it as children, and by the time they started, their inexperience certainly showed. But all too often, reporters seemed unwilling to look beyond that inexperience and see potential. This should not have been difficult to do: lots of new players are nervous or awkward when first starting out, as anyone who has covered single-A minor league games can attest. And yet, many reporters seemed focused on pointing out all the flaws of the women players, rather than noting anything good they did. They also described in great detail how the players looked: “The pitcher was a lovely brunette, with eyes full of dead earnestness; the catcher and the batter were blondes, with faces aflame with expectation.”²² And the writers placed considerable attention on every detail of the players’ uniforms, while observing that most of the fans were there to enjoy looking at the young women, not because they expected an actual baseball game.

Few reporters expected an actual baseball game either. One summed up an early July 1879 game between the New York Red Stockings and the Philadelphia Blue Stockings by concluding, “The women worked very hard to gain fame as athletes, but failed miserably. They muffed terribly, and batted in a very weak manner, so much so as to satisfy the crowd that women will never become base ball players.”²³ A reporter for a rival paper came away with the same conclusion about that game: “The match was a farce. Not the least base ball talent have the women. Every fly was muffed, and it was only by chance that a player was put out.” The writer also noted that the majority of the attendees were there due to the “novelty” of women playing baseball.²⁴

Even the reporters who tried to be charitable towards the early female clubs found it puzzling that women would want to play baseball. One reporter wondered why young women would demean themselves and sacrifice their “womanly delicacy” by displaying their lack of talent in front of total strangers. The thought that their talent might improve over time was never considered; based on the numerous critical articles I read, few of the writers believed this was even a possibility. The writer of one article observed that, since other jobs for women paid so poorly,

perhaps these female players saw no other option for making a better salary than joining a traveling baseball club. They possibly felt “forced” to put on a gaudy uniform and attempt to play a game they knew so little about. But while claiming to understand their plight, the writer concluded, “We only wish that the same ingenuity which devised this plan could have pointed out to them some other way,” so that years from now, they would not be embarrassed by what they were currently doing to make a living.²⁵

THE WRITERS WHO TRIED TO BE FAIR

As I studied hundreds of articles about the early female baseball clubs of the 1860s-1890s, I found one article that was very different from the usual mockery and dismissiveness. It was from a Sacramento, California newspaper, but written in Boston on October 9, 1883. The column remarked upon the level of the women’s skills, but it also exhibited empathy towards the women themselves, as they tried to learn and improve, often under difficult circumstances. The author was not a sportswriter; she was a correspondent, on her way to Boston in a horse-drawn trolley; and that was where she met the traveling Philadelphia club. She noted that most of them looked “weary,” and she learned that these players were not living a glamorous life. They had been on the road for about a month, playing in city after city; many carried their belongings in shabby suitcases or even cardboard boxes, and they were booked into “third-rate hotels.” Most had formerly worked in the mills or the factories; a few had slight training in baseball before joining the club, but most did not. The next day, the writer noted a large attendance at their game—mostly men and boys, but more than twenty women; and even when the players made mistakes, the crowd seemed enthusiastic and supportive. She wondered, given the sizable crowd, who was making money from this “experiment,” and whether the players were benefiting in any way from their efforts. And she noted that although their game at this point was “poor and unscientific,” they were working very hard at it.²⁶

The only byline said the piece was written by the *Sacramento Bee*’s “Lady Correspondent,” but after reading her assessment of the “Young Ladies Baseball Club,” I wanted to know more about her. Thanks to some online digging, I discovered the “Lady Correspondent” often went by the pen name of “Ridinghood,” and she was in fact a reporter, who traveled the country seeking stories that would interest the female readers of the paper. Eventually, I discovered her real name: Mary Viola Tingley Lawrence, and while this

seems to have been her only story about female baseball players, her work for the *Bee* and other papers provided an interesting window into the lives of women of the late 1800s.

But while Lawrence was very respectful of the women players, she was not the only one to report on them accurately and fairly. I found numerous articles that were very approving of what female players were doing. In some cases, the positive news reports seemed to result from a well-known local man with a female relative who wanted to play. A good example is the female club that was formed in Peterboro, New York, in 1868. The captain of the club was referred to as the “granddaughter of Gerrit Smith.” (In some newspapers, they spelled his first name Gerritt.) Smith was an abolitionist and a philanthropist, as well as an advocate for women’s suffrage. Newspapers reported that the local young men came out to watch the young women play ball and “enjoy[ed] greatly acting as spectators.”²⁷ As for the un-named granddaughter’s skills as the captain, we were told that she “handles the club with a grace and strength worthy of notice.” And one person who noticed was famed suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who visited Smith and observed the young women playing ball, while the young men “were quiet spectators of the scene.”²⁸

As it turns out, Smith’s baseball-playing granddaughter was named in a different publication: she was Nannie Miller, whose full name was Anne Fitzhugh Miller, later a widely known advocate for women’s rights.²⁹ A few years later, in 1873, another women’s rights advocate, Victoria Woodhull, seems to have weighed in on women’s baseball, according to this brief mention in an Iowa newspaper: “A female baseball club has been organized in Iowa City. Mrs. Woodhull has written a letter to say the girls ought to be free to handle the bat and ball if they want to.”³⁰ It would certainly be interesting to find out if other women’s rights leaders of that era had any views on women’s athletics, especially women and baseball.

I was able to find a small number of positive assessments of women’s baseball in 1880s newspapers, although more often than not, comments about how pretty (or not) the players were intruded upon the coverage of who played well, or who won the game. For example, one report on a rare competition between the Philadelphia female club and a male team from Neenah, Wisconsin, in 1885 frequently digressed into remarks about the looks of the female players—who were referred to as “beauties at the bat.” And individual players were described as “exquisite,” wearing uniforms that were “captivating.” Some of the women

seemed well aware by this time that promotion (and self-promotion) could be useful: one star player was evidently ill that day and couldn't play, but she still "consented to appear in uniform... and distribute tastefully printed score cards" at five cents each to the crowd.³¹

There was also an article that started out mildly negative and was changed into something much more positive by an unknown exchange editor in York, Pennsylvania. The original 1883 article in the *Boston Globe* reported on the arrival of the female club from Philadelphia. At times, the writer seemed sarcastic—for example, he praised the uniforms, which he said were "very pretty" and he then added, "and so were the wearers, at least some of them." He also noted, with some amazement, that one of the players actually caught a fly ball, and he said the fielding was generally "ragged." But at other times, he seemed more favorable—he even pointed out several players who did a solid and professional job. "The two catchers, Miss Evans and Miss Moors, displayed considerable science, and handled the bat in good shape." The attendees had a lot of fun, cheering enthusiastically when good plays were made. "Miss Evans... made two home runs, and was evidently the favorite of the crowd." And despite his observations about the varying skill levels of the clubs, the reporter wrote, "And why shouldn't young women play baseball? There doesn't seem to be any reason that they can't."³² But, interestingly, when the article was reprinted in the *York Daily*, nearly all of the negative and sarcastic comments were stripped out, leaving a far more positive report than the original version.³³ Perhaps the exchange editor knew some of the members of the Philadelphia club or had a daughter who played baseball.

THE WRITERS WHO COVERED THE STARS

As with any sport, some of the stories about the teams focused on problems they were having. In the case of women's baseball clubs, this sometimes meant being victimized by unscrupulous managers who abandoned them and cheated them out of their earnings, as William Gilmore of Philadelphia did: after his players had finished a game in Worcester, Massachusetts, in early August 1879, he stole the gate receipts and their salaries, and left town.³⁴ Or it meant fending off drunken fans who tried to force their way onto the field to talk with them, or make a pass. And while some locales showed the female clubs hospitality, some did not. According to the Associated Press, one traveling female club that came back from Cuba in 1893 was horrified by how they had been treated: "a

mob...attacked the women and tore their clothes," as well as destroying the American flag the club was carrying."³⁵ But at least by this time, there were fewer stories that blamed the women for their plight or insisted that they had no business playing baseball.

In fact, by the early 1890s, some of the male reporters who covered the games gradually seemed to grow more accepting of the existence of the female clubs. I noticed that some articles were less derisive and more focused on the game itself. One article about an upcoming appearance by a female traveling club from New York even defended their morality: "...if any one expects to see any thing objectionable or immoral in either dress or action, they will be disappointed." And the writer issued an invitation for women to come and see the club play, saying they should "lay aside all prejudice or false modesty and see these young ladies play ball, and be convinced that there can be no wrong... for a girl or woman to earn an honest and respectable living in the health-giving game and pastime, the great American National Game."³⁶

There are several possible explanations for the gradual change in tone: women had been playing baseball for about two decades by this time, and the existence of female clubs was no longer the novelty it used to be. Further, some of the women had become more skilled, and their competent play had earned the (sometimes grudging) respect of the sportswriters who saw them. And several players emerged as stars in the eyes of the press, which helped to give women's baseball increased credibility.

One of the best-known female stars of the 1890s was Lizzie Arlington (real name: Elizabeth Stride, born in 1877 in Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania; some assertions that her birth name was Stroud are incorrect, according to documents available on Ancestry.com and elsewhere). In early September 1891, Arlington and her team from Cincinnati played at the Jefferson County (New York) Fairgrounds. Similar to how other reporters had discussed the female clubs, the local reporter noted that "the girls... played ball as well as they knew how, which was not very well," and he stated that few in the crowd expected much from the female players, so nobody was disappointed. On the other hand, the writer had to acknowledge that several members of the club actually knew how to play. He praised the catcher, he praised several of the baserunners, and he stated, "the girl pitcher was really a good ballplayer."³⁷

This favorable assessment would be one of many accolades Arlington would receive during her career, even from men who had previously been skeptical



This illustration of Lizzie Arlington, based on her collectible cabinet card, appeared in 1898 with a caption that read, "Women's inability to throw has long been a fruitful theme for the humorists, but... [Lizzie] is the exception which proves the rule."

about the ability of woman athletes. For example, in a July 1892 game, the reporter was almost totally focused on Lizzie's team and how well it played. There was no mention of the uniforms or who was cute and who was not. The game summary could have been written about any men's team. It featured statements like "Miss Lizzie Arlington, the young lady who has gained considerable notoriety for her phenominal [sic] playing, covered second base... and never did a ball pass that point if it was thrown or batted within her reach. She played with science, and thoroughly understood every rule of base ball playing." And there were some good plays from other members of the club, which caused loud cheers from the crowd that attended. Of course, given the times, it was not surprising for the writer to conclude by mentioning that the female players "were well-behaved and won the admiration of all with their lady like manner."³⁸

In subsequent articles about any team Arlington was on, she became the focus. Praise of her skills often included the expected "for a woman," but at least the reporters acknowledged that she was a good player. For example, "She has a wonderful arm for a woman, and the opposing batsmen could not connect with her wide curves and speedy outshoots."³⁹ In fact, Lizzie was frequently said to be the only female pitcher who could throw a curve ball, and by the mid-to-late 1890s, she was often referred to as the "great female baseball player" or the "phenomenal lady pitcher." Interestingly, this terminology seemed to be used as a branding device in newspaper ads: she had become a drawing card, and in some cities, there were ads letting the

public know that "Lizzie Arlington, the phenomenal lady pitcher" was coming to town.⁴⁰ As further proof of her success, exchange editors in other cities began reprinting articles about her exploits—something they had rarely done about other women ballplayers. Except for stories about things that went wrong, the members of female ball clubs seldom got much traction with the editors, who evidently believed their readers wouldn't be interested...but Arlington was considered interesting and unique, and readers from all over the eastern United States were able to learn what she was up to.

The same was true for the other widely respected female baseball star of that era, Maud Nelson (real name, Clementina Brida),⁴¹ pictured in newspaper ads as "the famous pitcher of the Bloomer Girls Base Ball Company." While the Bloomer Girls attracted some disapproval from traditionalists who objected to women wearing pants, the reporters who covered their games focused mainly on what Nelson did, since she was perceived as the one female player who excelled at baseball. As with Arlington, Nelson was treated with a combination of amazement and admiration by the press. The male reporters were pleasantly surprised that she could pitch so well—"better... than it would ever be supposed any woman could ever become," said one.⁴² It did not seem to alter their generally negative impression of female players, however. Said one writer, remarking on the fact that the Bloomer club played against male opponents, "The Bloomer girls sometimes win by their opponents not trying to play, [by] flirting on the bases, etc."⁴³ But Nelson was the exception: most writers still had little that was positive to say about the female clubs, but they had a lot that was positive to say about her. One writer, after noting that she pitched a full nine-inning game, something many male pitchers could not do, remarked that "She threw the ball like a man, and the local team found it a hard thing to hit. She could field well, run bases and bat, and if the Boston Bloomers had nine players like her, they would have made it interesting."⁴⁴ And another reporter referred to her with adjectives like "expert" and "clever," as he told how she struck out male batters with her "puzzling" curveball. The writer also called Nelson's team "thoroughly professional." But as in most other articles about the female clubs, there was the reminder that the players had good manners, and they were "lady-like in all their behavior."⁴⁵

NEW CENTURY, OLD STEREOTYPES

If we examine the newspapers of 1900–15, we continue to find similar patterns. The new century brought new names: it seems each city had at least

one “lady baseballist” who stood out. But the coverage remained relatively unchanged—it was not as negative as in the 1870s and 1880s, but it still treated the women who played baseball as generally not very talented. Reporters focused on the one or two players who were considered the exceptions—the ones who came closest to the male standards for playing the game. And in this era, there was a young woman who proved to be a strong advocate for women’s baseball: her name was Caroline (spelled Carolyn in some sources) “Carrie” Kilbourne, a “girl pitcher” from New Brunswick, New Jersey, who first attracted press attention in 1910–11 while she was still in high school. The local reporters were very impressed: they often spoke of her “unusual ability to play baseball.” And former major league outfielder Willie Keeler, who had also watched her pitch, stated that she was “the most wonderful girl athlete he ever saw.”⁴⁶

As with the attention paid to Gerrit Smith’s granddaughter Anne, the fact that Carrie’s businessman father Isaac W. Kilbourne was well known locally may have contributed to the positive press attention she received, although certainly her skill as a ballplayer helped. (By some accounts, she wanted to pursue a career with a female baseball club; but her father was opposed to the idea, so she focused on pitching in local exhibition and charity games, as well as doing some umpiring.)

Ultimately, in 1913, Carrie got her chance to pitch for a touring team, which played some exhibition games in Puerto Rico. When she returned, she told reporters she was more convinced than ever that women should play baseball. “Baseball...should be one of the pastimes for the ladies, whether they are young or old,” she said, explaining that it was a healthful way to get exercise. She hoped that from a young age, girls would be able to form their own teams, whether as amateurs or as semi-pro players like the Bloomer Girls. She suggested that aspiring young women could “practice each evening, and in this way, many benefit games could be played for charitable organizations.” And she said she still enjoyed playing. “I would rather play baseball than eat.”⁴⁷

FINAL THOUGHTS

As baseball moved into the 1920s and 1930s, there were new female “stars” who emerged, including Jackie Mitchell and Lizzie Murphy, and they too received considerable attention from the sportswriters. However, the larger question of whether women had a place in baseball remained unanswered. The women who were discussed positively still seemed to be

regarded as exceptions or curiosities. The attitude that baseball was a man’s game persisted, with most baseball writers following the customs of those from fifty years earlier and writing about even the best of the women players in a somewhat patronizing manner. The binary of women ballplayers as either marvels (impressive, with unique talent “for a woman”) or menaces (interlopers, trying to “act like a man”) could still be seen on any sports page. More acceptance might come for women ballplayers one day, but it was wishful thinking to believe it would happen any time soon, wrote one reporter (a woman), who predicted that maybe in another fifty years, there might be some women who could play as well as men. But for now, those women did not exist.⁴⁸

In recent years, I have been encouraged to see more research being done on the Bloomer Girls and other women’s baseball teams; but exploring what the press had to say about female ball clubs and female players, from baseball’s formative years to the present day, is still an under-researched aspect of baseball history. I know that this article has only scratched the surface: it was written about an era when reporters had no bylines, making it difficult to compare the views of certain sportswriters, or see if those views changed over the years. Thus, I am eager to continue analyzing the sportswriters of the 1930s, 1940s, and beyond, to see if any of them came to believe that women players had genuine talent, or if they maintained the belief that a baseball diamond was no place for a woman. And now that an increasing number of newspapers and magazines are being digitized, they are providing baseball historians with a potential goldmine of new information, helping us to learn more about when (and why) attitudes towards female ballplayers changed... as well as showing us the role the media played in how those changes occurred. ■

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Lizzie Murphy

An “All-Star” at Fenway Park

Bill Nowlin

To date, there has only been one woman who played baseball with a team of major leaguers in a big-league ballpark. Her name was Mary Elizabeth Murphy and she played for a team of “all-stars” against the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park. Lizzie Murphy’s team beat the Red Sox, 3–2.¹

The year was 1922, and the date August 14. The occasion was Tom McCarthy Day—an exhibition game played at Fenway Park. The game was scheduled to benefit ailing but very popular former ballplayer Tommy McCarthy. The *Boston Globe* called him “one of the greatest outfielders in the game, and who for many years has been close to the hearts of the Boston fans.”² As it happens, McCarthy died just a couple of weeks before the benefit. Babe Ruth, who had committed to play for the All-Star team, had an operation to remove an abscess from his left leg just a couple of days beforehand; his leg had become infected after a rough slide on the basepaths. Otherwise, Ruth would have played on the same team as Lizzie Murphy. The benefit proceeded nonetheless, repurposed to create a fund to help McCarthy’s daughters. Widely admired among his fellow players, McCarthy was an early Hall of Fame inductee, enshrined in 1946.

Murphy was herself pretty well known in New England at the time. This was an era where women were making great strides in a number of areas. It was in August just two years earlier, in 1920, when the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, granting women the right to vote. Women were active in sports, and newspapers of the day often featured sports page headlines regarding women’s tennis, swimming, and other sports. Murphy was a novelty, for sure, and a gate attraction. She was also a very good baseball player. A Rhode Island native, she’d played with a number of teams for some years, including the Providence Independents. In 1918, she signed with semipro team owner Ed Carr of Boston, who announced on her signing, “No ball is too hard for her to scoop out of the dirt, and when it comes to batting, she packs a mean wagon tongue.”³ With Carr’s All-Stars, she played a hundred games a summer, reports Barbara Gregorich

in her book *Women At Play*.⁴ Murphy played in games throughout all New England and the eastern provinces of Canada. She had a 17-year career and became known as the “Queen of Baseball.”

At Fenway Park, though, it was to be Queen for a day.

Before taking a look at this game, let us learn a bit more about Murphy’s background.

Mary Elizabeth Murphy was born on April 13, 1894, in Warren, Rhode Island, a town on a peninsula on the eastern shore of Narragansett Bay that had a population of 6,585 in 1910. She was the fourth of seven children born to John E. Murphy and Mary Murphy.⁵ John was a native of Massachusetts, born to two parents both listed as natives of England. Mary had come to the United States, a native of Quebec, born to two French-Canadian parents. We believe her to be the Marie Garand who lived in Warren at the time of the 1880 Census and worked in a cotton mill; her surname was presented as “Garant” in the obituary for her famous daughter.⁶ Lizzie was bilingual.⁷

Mary Elizabeth (“Lizzie”) Murphy first appears in the 1900 United States Census, living with the family in Attleboro, Massachusetts, where her father was employed as an overseer in a cotton mill. Her older sister Sarah, 16, worked as a mill spinner. The household also had a boarder from French Canada, Malvina Ledoux, a mill spooler. John Murphy was said to have also been “known as a long distance runner.”⁸

By 1910, John and the family were back in Warren, and he was listed as a store keeper, running a confectionery. All six children in the family were born in Rhode Island. The eldest son, Henry, 20, worked as a baker. Eva, a year older than Henry, was a mill spinner. It is unclear whether Lizzie was also working as a spinner in the mill at age 16. That was written next to her name on the Census form, but then crossed out and written in again next to her 12-year-old sister Lena. A 1913 article in the *Providence Journal* said that Lizzie was “employed in the Parker Mill in East Warren as a ring spinner.”⁹ In researching Murphy’s background, Debra Shattuck found a 1913–14 edition of

The Bristol, Warren and Barrington Rhode Island Directory, which listed Murphy's occupation as "ball player."¹⁰

Lizzie had completed the fifth grade; that was the extent of her formal education.

Her father was an athlete himself. It was Henry who got her hooked on playing baseball when she was around 10 years old. "My brother...used to teach me to throw and catch, and it seemed to come natural to me. I could always throw better than most girls. When I was at the age where kids throw stones at cats and hens I guess I hit the mark as often as any of the boys. When I got a little older I would join the boys playing one o' cat, and a few years ago I had a chance to play in one of the scrub games near home and did well enough so they began to choose me for their teams regularly." At a certain point, she said her father decided baseball wasn't for a girl to play and thought she would quit. "But I went to look on at one of the games and got so excited I couldn't stay out. As a fan I can't keep still."¹¹

She enjoyed playing baseball, but was an accomplished athlete in other areas. The 1913 *Journal* article called her "an expert skater, probably the equal of any man of her age along the east shore and ice hockey is one of her favorite diversions. She has won prizes in various other contests, and there are few forms of athletics she is not able to join."¹² Some 25 years later, she told another writer, "It may sound strange, but do you know that mother never saw me play. She was always afraid I would break a bone or something, but I have never had a bad accident."¹³

It was in baseball that she was able to play professionally, and for many years earned a living doing so.

In 1914, she played for the Warren Shoe team of the Manufacturers League and turns up in Providence's *Evening Bulletin* article as the team's first baseman.¹⁴ Warren Shoe won, 7-6, and "Miss Lizzie Murphy" was singled out in the brief news story, which said she had 12 putouts in the game, including a double play, and that in the fourth inning, with runners on first and second, she "lay [sic] down a fine sacrifice bunt."¹⁵ The team scored three runs that inning. In a game Warren Shoe planned against the Railroad team of the Narragansett Amateur League on August 23, one of the opponents was Miss Margaret Sullivan, also a first baseman.¹⁶ One finds a number of games announced during Murphy's career, but no trace of whether these games actually occurred.

Murphy consistently played first base, but she had been playing for scrub teams in the area for three years. Just the year before she had said that shortstop

It is a baseball adage that the name on the front of the jersey is more important than the one on the back. But Lizzie Murphy was a baseball star of such distinction that her name appeared on the front.



NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME LIBRARY, COOPERSTOWN, NY

was her preferred position. And the *Journal* said she "has gained reputation as a pitcher also."¹⁷

She played for several different semipro teams. On August 29, 1914, she was due to play for the East Providence Moose team. The New York, New Haven and Hartford team also featured a female first baseman, Marguerite Fontaine of Providence.¹⁸

A May 1915 edition of the same newspaper ran a photograph of her, glove on her left hand, saying she would be playing first base for Providence's Independent A.C.¹⁹ She was right-handed, stood 5-feet-6, and said "my best playing weight" was 122 pounds. Her "braided hair was tucked under a baseball cap."²⁰

A game account in Fall River's *Evening Herald* said, "She knocked down hard-hit grounders, gobbled up poor throws that would get away from many players, and at every time showed she knew the game."²¹ She did get thrown out on an attempted steal of second, the throw from the Fall River Independents catcher beating her hook slide.

Providence Journal reporter Carolyn Thornton reports that in 1918, Murphy joined the Boston All-Stars, "a semipro team of former major league players," and that "for the next 17 years she traveled the United States and Canada, playing over 100 games a season."²² By 1920, she had acquired the nickname "Spike."²³

Scattered articles on Murphy turn up on web searches of newspaper databases. On August 8, 1920,

she played first base for Manville Co, in their 2-0 win over J & P Coats of Pawtucket.²⁴ On August 17, she was due to play for the Universal Winding Company team; she was described as the “noted woman ball player of Warren.” And she rated a headline on a small preview a couple of weeks later, when she was playing first base for Warwick A.C. against the Providence Gas Company team.²⁵ On October 17, Murphy’s Providence Stars team lost to the Beverage Hill team, but it was said she “received much applause, especially in the eighth, when she hit over second base for a clean bingle.”²⁶

She was often the only player named as being planned for these games, an indication that her inclusion in the game was seen as noteworthy and marketable. That said, she may have been taken advantage of once, earlier. Thornton explained:

Her only known confrontation occurred with a team manager when she played for a Warren team at the age of 15. In those days, spectators were not charged admission to semipro baseball games. Instead, a hat was passed through the stands and players would share what was collected.

In Murphy’s first game with the team, however, she received nothing. The following Saturday afternoon, as the team began boarding the bus for a game in Newport, Murphy refused to get on until the manager agreed to pay her \$5 for every game, plus an equal share of the collection.

To supplement her small salary, Murphy would work the crowds between innings, selling postcards of herself in uniform for a dime.²⁷

The following year, Murphy played with Eddie McGinley’s Providence Independents. That August, the Independents were scheduled to play against the Cleveland Colored Giants in a game at Rocky Point.²⁸ Murphy was to play first base “and attempt to catch a ball dropped from an aeroplane.”²⁹ The game was played on August 21, and the Independents won, 6-5, but the brief four sentences about the game have no mention of Murphy.³⁰ Whether she actually played in the game remains unknown.

Other articles say she played—perhaps at a different time—for the Cleveland Colored Giants. We were unable to find any trace of a game involving any “colored” ballplayers, with Murphy on one side or the other. Several articles mention such a game, but without specifics. Sportswriter Dick Reynolds, more cautiously, said, “she is believed to have been the first woman ever to play on

a black baseball club.”³¹ One source which provides some confidence that she did play for the Giants is a 1938 article from the *Providence Evening Bulletin*. Author Elizabeth L. Williams spoke with Murphy and reported, “She recalled playing at Rocky Point with the Cleveland Colored Giants, with the Athol Manufacturing Club against the East Jaffrey, N.H. team, and with the Lymanville team under Manager Neil Flynn, also with Jack Cooney, of Cranston, with the Boston Braves of the National League, and with many other outfits.”³²

In a similar vein, we have been unable to find support for Jane Lancaster’s statement that in a later game in New York State, “she was very proud to have gotten a base hit off the legendary Satchel Paige.”³³

McGinley acted as her manager; those wishing to book her were urged to write to him. He was a player on the Independents as well. For a game on September 11 to be played at Moosup, Connecticut, he was listed as the catcher for Roy Rock’s All-Stars and Murphy was listed at first base. The Norwich newspaper said of Murphy, “This young lady has a wonderful record on the diamond. The way Miss Murphy performs on first is remarkable and is worth going miles to see.”³⁴ After the regular season was over, McGinley signed Boston Braves pitcher Johnny Cooney to join him and Murphy on the Independents.

She was clearly seen as a marketing benefit, and her number of appearances increased in 1922. Her uniform was one-of-a-kind, with “LIZZIE MURPHY” Emblazoned across the front instead of a team name.

She had other talents as well. “She keeps in condition by chopping wood and swimming. She also plays the violin.”³⁵ The *Boston Globe* said she was active as both a mile and five-mile runner and swimmer.³⁶ One newspaper said, “When she first began as a regular player, she felt people used to come see her because of the novelty. But as she improved and became a star, the spectators came to see an expert ballplayer at work.”³⁷ Reynolds said, “Teammates did not seem to resent the public attention showered on Lizzie. Bigger crowds meant bigger collections and more money for everybody. Furthermore, Lizzie never flaunted her celebrity status.”³⁸

A novelty she was, but the *Springfield Republican* advised readers, “Miss Murphy is not in the lineup just because she is a woman...She is there because she can play ball. She is hitting .300, no mean record with a fast semi-pro company as she travels with. Her fielding leaves nothing to be desired.”³⁹

She played games in Malden, to the largest crowd ever for a twilight game in South Boston, and before a “huge mob” at Fore River Field, getting the first hit in

a game the Independents lost, 1–0.⁴⁰ A reported 10,000 who turned out at South Boston's Christopher J. Lee Playground saw her execute a squeeze play to help beat Kelly's All Stars, 6–3.⁴¹ She had proven herself to be "one of the best [semipro] first basemen in New England."⁴²

A number of days later, the Independents beat the New York, New Haven, and Hartford All-Stars, 8–1, at Boston's Walpole Street Grounds with Murphy collecting two base hits and said to have "played a strong game."⁴³ It was her double in the top of the ninth that kicked off an eight-run rally.⁴⁴

Her deportment was that of the other ballplayers. A note in the *Post* described her at first base awaiting the pitch with her hands on her knees and ready to spring into action. "Occasionally she spat into her mitt after the manner of other players and kept up a steady stream of talk to the pitcher, her chatter being clearly heard with its light tones."⁴⁵

THE FIRST WOMAN WHO PLAYED AT FENWAY PARK

Tommy McCarthy had most recently served as a Red Sox scout and the team helped organize the day in his honor working with a local committee headed by Jack Morse, Eddie McHugh, and John S. Dooley.⁴⁶ Quite a party was prepared, including a presentation of vaudeville and dancing girls from the Love and Kisses Company prior to the game. Other entertainment came from the Bowdoin Square Theater and the Old Howard. Jimmy Coughlin's 101st Regiment Band played and when the band struck up "Sweet Adeline" the demand for former mayor "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald to sing was so fervent and so persistent that he yielded to the call of the 4,000 or more in attendance, a crowd which included Mayor James Michael Curley and others. Congressman Gallivan was there and so were former ballplayers such as John Irwin and Jerry Hurley.

The program lasted for two hours prior to the 3:30PM game on August 14.

Ballplayer, coach, and entertaining personality Nick Altrock worked the crowd, not only joining in the theatrical numbers but selling scorecards in the stands and shaking hands with several hundred children. Some of the dancing girls joined him in selling scorecards, but Altrock was the star of the show, and the game.

Murphy's appearance had been trumpeted in advance but, given the uniqueness of the situation, not extravagantly so. Paul Shannon, writing in the *Boston Post*, gave her two sentences: "Lizzie Murphy, the famous lady first baseman, will be seen in the game for a while. She won't launch any home runs but lady fans will get a peek at a sister who can cover that

initial sack as many a big leaguer."⁴⁷ Another paper called her "the brilliant woman first baseman."⁴⁸

She was a novelty, of course, but a popular one. *The Herald* observed, "She had her picture taken so often that Nick asked her if she was running for Congress."⁴⁹

As noted, Babe Ruth couldn't make the game, but the All-Star team Murphy joined was otherwise composed of American League ballplayers, with at least one representative from each AL club: Nick Altrock, Donie Bush, and "Sheriff" Earl Smith from the Washington Nationals; Tillie Walker, Ralph Young, Frank Bruggy, Bob Hasty, and Doc Johnston of the Philadelphia A's; Chick Shorten of the St. Louis Browns; Ira Flagstead of the Detroit Tigers; Les Nunamaker and Jim Bagby of the Cleveland Indians; Hervey McClellan of the Chicago White Sox; and Fred Hofmann of the New York Yankees. Murphy started the game at first base, batting third in the order.

She was tested early on. The visitors, of course, were up first. Allen Russell was pitching for the Red Sox and he set down second baseman Young and the shortstop Bush. Murphy stepped into the box. Two outs, no one on base. She hit a grounder to Boston's Johnny Mitchell at short and was retired. Mitchell, though, chose to showboat a bit throwing the ball to the second baseman Del Pratt who then fired to "Tioga George" Burns at first. *Boston Globe* writer James O'Leary took him to task in his game story the next day: "It was rather ungallant of Mitchell to play it this way."⁵⁰

With Boston batting against Bagby in the bottom of the first, her own teammate McClellan chose to challenge her as well. On a sharp grounder hit to him at third base, he fielded it cleanly, but then deliberately held the ball until the last moment and then fired a rocket to Murphy. She caught it for the putout. Gregorich reports that McClellan walked over toward Bush, nodded in the direction of first base, and said, "She'll do."⁵¹

Murphy played just the one inning. The All-Stars scored in the top of the second. The Sox scored twice in the fifth, only to see the All-Stars come back to tie it in the sixth. Altrock cut the clowning, came in to pitch, and held the Red Sox scoreless for the final four innings, the visiting All-Stars winning the game, 3–2 in 10 innings. Doc Johnston, who had taken Lizzie's place at first base, tripled in the winning run. This was not a strong Red Sox team. In fact, they finished the 1922 season in last place, 33 games out of first, with a 61–93 record. No wonder, then, that the *Globe's* sports cartoon the next day depicted Lizzie Murphy making the play and one spectator shouting, "ATTABOY LIZZIE BETTER THAN THE RED SOX."⁵²

The game featured a couple of noteworthy fielding plays and a situation in the seventh when the Red Sox hit two triples but couldn't score. Mike Menosky had tripled down the right-field line, but was soon picked off third by Altrock. Boston catcher Ed Chaplin then followed with another triple, but was left stranded on third.

Altrock got the win. "It seemed difficult, before the game, to visualize a tight, well-played contest," wrote Burt Whitman of the *Boston Herald*. "But it was a good game and each team tried to win."⁵³ The *Post*'s Shannon gave Altrock credit for making the day a memorable success, a subhead on his column reading "Nick the Whole Noise."⁵⁴ The *Post* was, however, patronizing. Shannon wrote that Murphy got a big hand when she came to bat in the first inning, but said, contradicting what almost every other account over the years declared, she "hasn't much of an arm but she is the cutest lady player that the fans have ever seen and her frenzied efforts to hit in response to Nick Altrock's plea of 'Come on, Murphy,' made a hit with the fans."⁵⁵

Murphy hit third in the order. The *Washington Post* said she played two innings, was errorless in the field, and that "In her only time at bat, she grounded out at shortstop."⁵⁶ The *Boston Globe* boxscore presented all the male players by last name, but in Murphy's case presented her name as "Miss Murphy 1b." The exhibition raised between \$5,000 and \$6,000. Among those who could not attend but made a donation was Ty Cobb, who mailed in a check for \$25.⁵⁷

Two days later, Murphy played first base at Kinsley Park in Providence for Eddie McGinley's All Stars.

AFTER THE GAME

As a celebrity, opportunities beyond baseball often presented themselves. She and McGinley paired up for a vaudeville sketch entitled "Headin' Home" at the Bangor Opera House in August.⁵⁸

Her fame spread. She played for Ed Carr's All-Stars in 1923. A photograph of her ran in *Canton, Ohio's Repository* the following year and the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran the same photograph, saying she was earning \$300 a week.⁵⁹ She had aspirations to become a major-league ballplayer "in another season or two," according to the *Milwaukee Journal*. The article said she insisted her teammates not call her "Miss" on the diamond, and that she also enjoyed cooking, sewing, films, and reading.⁶⁰

This was hardball and the appeal was that Murphy was playing with, and against, the top semipro and amateur ballplayers around New England. In a July game at Newport, Rhode Island, she suffered a serious hand injury that required several stitches.⁶¹ Back without

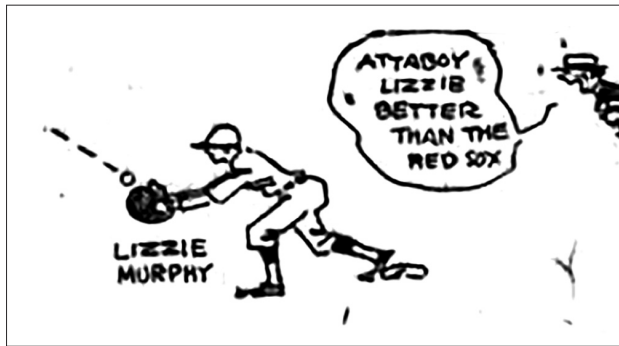
losing too much time, her team beat Dorchester, 9–3, but she was then injured again against the Somerville Civic Club at a game in Medford, Massachusetts. Her hand was spiked in the fourth inning and she had to leave the game.⁶² One wonders if this may have contributed to the "Spike" nickname. Just a week later, she doubled in a game against the G. F. Redmond Co.⁶³

In 1924 and 1925, Carr's team was sometimes billed as Lizzie Murphy's All-Stars, in recognition of her importance as a draw. News accounts did at times offer praise for her play: for instance a *Boston Globe* article that said she "once again proved that she is not a novelty but a clever woman player."⁶⁴ A subheading from the *Patriot Ledger* called her the "Female Sisler" and said, "Only the fact that women are barred from the big show keeps her from wearing major league spangles."⁶⁵ One of her teammates in 1926 was Buck O'Brien, formerly with the Red Sox.⁶⁶ The two were booked to play in Fitchburg against the Philadelphia Colored Giants on July 5.⁶⁷

Fielding was apparently her forte rather than batting. Boxscores typically showed her batting ninth and many showed her having been held hitless. There were more productive games, of course, such as her 2-for-4 game against Salem, Massachusetts, on April 23, 1927, in which she also successfully executed a sacrifice.⁶⁸ One of those who played in the 17-inning game at Newport said, "Lizzie played the entire game and handled some 30 odd chances. As a fielder she was as good as the average man. At bat, she was only fair, though she did not flinch from the fastest pitch."⁶⁹

As one might expect, not all praised her talents. Jim Russell of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* offered a retrospective comment in 1956, while praising athlete Babe Didrikson Zaharias. He wrote, "In the 20's, fancy words flew around the circuit about a first basewoman named Lizzie Murphy, who reached the zenith when she played with a group of major leaguers at Boston's Fenway Park, home of the Red Sox. Not long after that achievement, Liz came to town to play against the local pros, and thousands turned out for a look. They saw a rather awkward girl play one inning at first, take a couple of soft throws from the infielders, and bat once against some delicately slow pitching, while thousands stifled their jeers."⁷⁰

How good was Murphy? Perhaps a more balanced appraisal came from sportswriter Dick Reynolds. "Many who watched Lizzie have contended that she could play first base with the best. That," he wrote, "must remain uncertain. It is certain, however, that her performances produced few, in any, complaints... Even the American League All-Stars, skeptical at first,



Detail of the Gene Mack editorial cartoon about the McCarthy Benefit (from the *Globe sports page*).

applauded her ability to cover ground, scoop up grounders with long, powerful fingers, and throw with an unerring arm. She was not a slugger. But her career hitting average was just below .300 and Carr considered her among his most dependable stickers.”⁷¹

Murphy was said to have played in a 1929 exhibition game involving the Boston Braves and some National League All-Stars (Dick Reynolds says American League All-Stars). As with the stories of her playing against Satchel Paige—whose own appearances were highly promoted—no such games have been found, despite diligent research and appeals to some of SABR’s best researchers. Perhaps it is the case, as one researcher suggested, that these are myths.⁷²

One could posit a number of reasons that she does not turn up as much in newspaper database searches in the later 1920s, but there were at least occasional appearances noted such as in Marlboro, Massachusetts, when Lizzie Murphy’s All-Stars were to play the Marlboro Merchants in late August 1933.⁷³

There was a standout game on July 4, 1932, in Newport, Rhode Island, between the Sunset League All-Stars and the Providence Independents that ran 17 innings. Hank Soar—later an American League umpire from 1950 through 78—was the catcher for Providence. The game was lost when, with runners on second and third, Soar dropped a two-out third strike and then threw to first but “threw the ball over Lizzie Murphy’s head.”⁷⁴

Among those who had played with her All-Stars were said to be Pete Wood, brother of Smoky Joe Wood, and Bill Stewart, who was a scout for the Boston Red Sox in 1925 and 1926 and later a National League umpire from 1933 through 1954.⁷⁵

Gai Ingham Berlage wrote, “Lizzie goes down in history as the first woman ever to have played against a major league team. In 1934 Babe Didrikson would add another first by actually playing for major league teams in major league exhibitions. Babe pitched a few

innings for the Philadelphia Athletics against the Brooklyn Dodgers and for the St. Louis Cardinals against the Boston Braves.”⁷⁶ The distinction was that Didrikson’s play was during spring training exhibition games, not in a major-league ballpark.

After 18 years as a professional, Lizzie Murphy retired from playing baseball when she turned 40 and returned to Warren to work in the mills, and later worked on oyster boats out of Warren. She had other interests as well, and reporter Elizabeth Williams noted “several carved wooden toys, which she said she had made during the Depression.”⁷⁷ On October 30, 1937, Lizzie married Walter Larivee of Warren, said to have been a supervisor in one of the mills. He had been raised there in a mill family, the 1900 Census showing his widowed mother Exilda, and her four oldest children all working as weavers in a cotton mill. Perhaps the Depression had an effect; Walter was listed in the 1940 Census at a laborer doing road construction. He was 11 years older than his wife. The marriage ended when he died six years later.

It was said that Murphy soured on baseball a bit, telling one visitor, “It’s hard to explain why I liked baseball so much. And the more I think about it the less I understand the reason.”⁷⁸ She declined an invitation to dedicate a Little League field, and when some friends began planning a testimonial dinner for her, she said she would not attend.⁷⁹ That said, retired Warren High School baseball coach Charlie Burdge said, “If you met her coming up from the river with a bucket of clams, she’d stop for a few minutes and talk baseball. She never put down the game. But, for some reason, she didn’t want any public appearances.”⁸⁰

Nonetheless, Jane Lancaster quoted her as saying, after her retirement, “Eddie [Carr] used to tell me that I was the first girl to break into baseball with a man’s team as a regular player. You know that makes me feel mighty good.”⁸¹

At the age of 70, Elizabeth Larivee died in Warren on July 27, 1964, and is buried locally at Saint John the Baptist Cemetery. She was survived by brother Henry and sisters Lena Bouffard and Mary Ella Lynch.⁸² A brief note from the Associated Press said she had “gained renown in New England and Eastern Canada 40 years ago as Lizzie Murphy, a woman baseball player in an era when it was unusual to see a woman driving a car.”⁸³

On the 100th anniversary of her birth, Warren declared “Lizzie Murphy Day” with Boston Red Sox VP Lou Gorman presenting a proclamation. The following month, she was inducted into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame. ■

Sources and Acknowledgments

Thanks to Barbara Gregorich, Leslie Heaphy, Jay Hurd, Jane Lancaster, Len Levin, Emily Arnold McCully, and Debra (Shattuck) Burton. Lizzie Murphy's story is one of a woman who chose to be different. She seems to have had a rewarding life. One effort to tell her story to children ages 4–10 is *Queen of the Diamond: The Lizzie Murphy Story* by Emily Arnold McCully (New York: Margaret Ferguson Books, 2015). The game described in this article has been written up for SABR's Games Project at SABR.org.

Notes

1. The biography initially draws on material the author originally had published in 2008. See Bill Nowlin, *Red Sox Threads* (Burlington, Massachusetts: Rounder Books, 2008).
2. Melville E. Webb, Jr., "McCarthy Game Monday," *Boston Globe*, August 12, 1922, 4.
3. Barbara Gregorich, *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball* (San Diego & New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 28. Of Murphy, Carr said, "She swells attendance, and she's worth every cent I pay her. But most important, she produces the goods and, all in all, she's a real player and a good fellow." John Hanlon, "Queen Lizzie Plays First Base," *Sports Illustrated*, June 2, 1965.
4. Gregorich, 29.
5. The Censuses from 1900 and 1910 only reveal six children in the family: Sarah, Eva, Henry (John in 1900), Mary (Elizabeth in 1910), Marylena (Lena in 1910), and Ellen (Ella in 1910). However, contemporary reporter Elizabeth L. Williams said she was from a family of five girls and two boys. "None of my sisters was a tomboy," Murphy told Williams. Elizabeth L. Williams, "Warren Woman Recalls Life as Baseball Star," *Providence Evening Bulletin*, February 2, 1938, 24. John was said to be 9 at the time of the 1900 Census and Henry was not listed; Henry was said to be 20 at the time of the 1910 Census, and John was not listed.
6. "Lizzie' Murphy Larivee, 70, Onetime Ballplayer, Dies," *Providence Journal*, July 29, 1964: 20.
7. This helped her in baseball at one point when playing a game in Canada. She overheard the opposition discussing steal signals in French. She improvised a signal to her catcher and they cut down base stealers "Nailed five of them that way," she is reported to have said. Hanlon.
8. "Woman on First in Game at Ware," *Springfield Republican*, May 30, 1922, 5.
9. "Warren Girl An Expert Baseball Player," *Providence Journal*, July 27, 1913.
10. Debra Shattuck, "Playing A Man's Game: Women and Baseball in the United States, 1866–1954," *Baseball History from Outside the Lines: A Reader*, John E. Dreifort, ed. (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2001), 195–215.
11. "Warren Girl An Expert Baseball Player." The age of 10 was cited in the *Newburyport Daily News*, October 7, 1923, 7. She said, "I used to beg the boys to let me carry the bats. Finally, I was allowed to join the team for only one reason: I used to 'steal' my father's gloves and bats and bring them along, so I was a valuable asset to them when I could furnish some of the equipment." Hanlon.
12. "Warren Girl An Expert Baseball Player." She told Williams, "I used to skate and play hockey on the Kickemuit river down here, and I have a medal that I won for hockey." Williams.
13. Williams.
14. The Warren Shoe team was organized by John Natal, who had a shoe store on Main Street in Warren.
15. "Warren Shoe 7, Railroad 6," *Evening Bulletin* (Providence), July 20, 1914, 19.
16. "Railroads vs. Esmond," *Evening Bulletin*, August 15, 1914, 14. Some of the other women playing baseball at the time who were mentioned in articles read during the research for this biography included Maggie Riley, Nellie Twardzik, Anna Murray, and Milly Hill.
17. "Warren Girl An Expert Baseball Player."
18. "Double-Header at Crescent Park," *Evening Bulletin*, August 24, 1914, 30. In researching Murphy's career, one finds more announcements of games to be played than results of the actual game. This likely reflects promotional efforts before a game intended to bolster attendance. Finding a game story or boxscore of the game has often proven elusive.
19. "Miss Lizzie Murphy," *Evening Bulletin*, May 15, 1915, 15.
20. Jane Lancaster, "R. I. woman was a hit in a man's game," *Providence Journal*, July 12, 1992, E-06. One article mentioned that at the end of a game, she took off her cap and her hair—normally braided during games—tumbled down. A 1920 article in the *Boston Post* put her at five feet tall and 125 pounds. See A.G. Donnell, "'Fans Pan Me, But I Don't Mind,' Says Girl Champ," *Boston Post*, August 1, 1920, 36.
21. "Nine Men and A Lady Beat Marks," *Evening Herald* (Fall River, Massachusetts), August 30, 1915, 6.
22. Carolyn Thornton, "First 'baseman' shone in semi pro ball," *Providence Journal*, March 29, 1994, A-02.
23. Donnell. This article offers Lizzie herself talking at some length about how she first became involved playing ball in Warren and some of the challenges she faced, such as opposing pitchers trying to bean her. How she got the nickname "Spike" remains unknown.
24. "Manville 2, Coats 0," *Evening Bulletin*, August 9, 1920, 18.
25. "Miss Murphy to Play at Point," *Evening Bulletin*, September 3, 1920, 29.
26. "Beverage Hill Team Wins," *Evening Bulletin*, October 18, 1920, 31. This game drew 3,000.
27. Thornton. Having bargained for the compensation she received, she had—suggested Hanlon—been baseball's first woman holdout. The postcards often sold well.
28. "Lizzie to Play," *Evening Herald* (Fall River, Massachusetts), August 12, 1921, 12. The article said, in part, "Manager McGinley will have Lizzie Murphy on first base."
29. "Game Sunday at Rocky Point," *Evening Bulletin*, August 17, 1921, 19. The game against the Giants was postponed at least once due to rain, but advertised in the newspaper for September 4. The ad billed her as the "greatest girl first base player in the east." See *Evening Bulletin*, September 3, 1921, 8.
30. "McGinley's Independents 6, Cleveland Colored Stars 5," *Evening Bulletin*, August 22, 1921, 19. The airplane is not mentioned, either.
31. Dick Reynolds, "Lizzie Murphy, Queen of Diamonds," *Old Rhode Island*, April 1994, 14. Reynolds said that she was believed to have played first base for Giants (who were not a Negro League team, but were possibly a New England-based aggregation using a name that made them sound grander than they were.) There were other teams playing frequent semipro games in relatively small towns in the region, such as the Highland Colored Giants and the Philadelphia Colored Giants.
32. Williams.
33. Lancaster. Researchers trying to find any such game have come up empty.
34. "Rock's All Stars Will Play in Moosup Sunday," *Norwich Morning Bulletin*, September 10, 1921, 11.
35. "Karpe's Comment," *Buffalo News*, June 3, 1922, 16. Murphy later told Williams, "Do you know how I kept in training? You'd never guess—sweeping and beating rugs, and chopping wood, too. Chopping wood keeps one fit for running round the bases, or driving a fly to centre field. Yes, traveling on the road was pretty strenuous, but I was always rough and ready, and could take it. It didn't bother me a bit. In fact, after playing a double-header, I was no more tired than at the start of the game." Williams.
36. "Meet Miss Murphy, 1B," *Boston Globe*, May 24, 1922, 11. A large photograph accompanied the article.
37. "Girl Softball Player Here Recalls 'Lizzie Murphy'," *Fitchburg Sentinel*, July 20, 1966, 10.
38. He added, "Personal publicity never cause her to change the size of her cap. She was polite to the press, but she never went looking for an interview." Reynolds, 13.
39. "Woman on First in Game at Ware." A large photograph of Murphy in a batting stance accompanied the article. The next day's *Republican* had a story and boxscore. Ware pummeled the Independents, 13–1.

- She was 0-for-3, listed in the boxscore as “M’s M’y.” The article said her play had been “excellent” and equal to, if not better than, that of her teammates. See “Providence No Match for Ware,” *Springfield Republican*, May 31, 1922, 5.
40. For some reason, a player named Rivard ran for her but she continued to play in the game. The ovation she received on coming to bat was “the greatest...ever tendered at Quincy. It looked as though the cheering would never stop.” “Lizzie Murphy Stars as Fore River Wins Game,” *Patriot Ledger* (Quincy, Massachusetts), July 7, 1922, 6.
41. “Lizzie Murphys Slam All-Stars,” *Boston Globe*, July 12, 1922, 9.
42. “Newton,” *Boston Globe*, July 15, 1922, 6.
43. “Lizzie Murphy Gets Two Hits, Providence Wins,” *Boston Globe*, July 18, 1922, 7.
44. “Lizzie Murphy Starts Rally with 2-Bagger,” *Boston Post*, July 18, 1922, 11.
45. “Girl Diamond Player Shines,” *Boston Post*, June 18, 1922, 22.
46. John S. Dooley was involved with Boston’s American League franchise since before its inception in 1901. His daughter Lib Dooley was an enduring fan as well, and offered important encouragement to this author right from the start. John Dooley had witnessed the first night baseball game, in 1880. He helped secure the land on which Boston’s Huntington Avenue Grounds was constructed. A member of the Royal Rooters, he was present at the first World Series game ever played, against the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1903. Lib Dooley attended every Red Sox home game from 1944 until her final year, 2000. This author’s season tickets placed him about 12 rows behind her front-row seat. See appreciations of both John Dooley and Lib Dooley in *Red Sox Threads*.
47. Paul H. Shannon, “Nick Altrock Wins His Game,” *Boston Post*, August 15, 1922, 18.
48. “To Honor Memory of Tom McCarthy,” *Boston Post*, August 14, 1922, 14.
49. “For Auld Lang Syne,” *Boston Herald*, August 15, 1922, 10.
50. James C. O’Leary, “Great Benefit Nets More than \$5000 for Tom McCarthy’s Family,” *Boston Globe*, August 15, 1922, 7.
51. Gregorich, 30.
52. Gene Mack, “Highlights at McCarthy Benefit” (sports page cartoon), *Boston Globe*, August 15, 1922, 7.
53. Burt Whitman, “Tommy McCarthy Day Goes Over the Top As Nick’s Stars Win, 3–2,” *Boston Herald*, August 15, 1922, 10.
54. Shannon.
55. Shannon.
56. Robert Facht, “Groundbreaking Woman Finally Gains Spotlight,” *Washington Post*, April 12, 1994, D2. Why did she only play two innings? She said, “I would have liked more time in the game but we had 17 players and they all had to get in.” Dick Reynolds, p. 12. Fifteen players did play for the All-Stars, which included three catchers, three pitchers, and two left fielders.
57. O’Leary.
58. “See Famous Lizzie Murphy at the Opera House Tonight,” *Bangor Daily News*, August 2, 1922, 2.
59. “Lizzie Stars,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 24, 1923, 20. See also “Lizzie Murphy Signs Contract,” *Fall River Globe*, April 13, 1923, 20.
60. “Lizzie Aspires to Major Team,” *Milwaukee Journal*, August 31, 1923, 46. The *New York Times Herald* of Olean, New York, said she “has been making every possible contact to connect with a big league team.” See “Sport SnapShots,” *Times Herald* (Olean), October 24, 1923, 6.
61. “All Stars of Boston Win, Lizzie Murphy Injured,” *Boston Globe*, July 23, 1923, 8. Her team won the game, 6–2.
62. “Lizzie Murphy Spiked, Has to Quit Ball Game,” *Boston Globe*, August 17, 1923, 11.
63. “Lizzie Murphy Hits Double, But Carrs Lose,” *Boston Globe*, August 24, 1923, 10.
64. “Reading Defeats Carr’s All-Stars,” *Boston Globe*, May 31, 1924, 4. The subhead read: “‘Lizzie’ Murphy’s Clever First-Sacking Features.”
65. “‘Liz’ Murphy and Her Gang Coming Here,” *Patriot Ledger* (Quincy, Massachusetts), July 7, 1925, 2.
66. “Lizzie Murphy’s Team Coming Here,” *Evening Gazette* (Worcester, Massachusetts), June 22, 1926, 14.
67. “Fitchburgs Take One, Drop One in Independence Day Tilts; Red Caps Are Good Bell Hops,” *Fitchburg Sentinel*, July 6, 1926, 8.
68. “Lizzie Murphy Gets Two, But Club Loses,” *Boston Herald*, April 24, 1927, 29.
69. “Sports in the News,” *Newport Daily News*, June 25, 1965, 16.
70. Jim Russell, “The Night Babe Threw Her High, Hard One,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 28, 1956, 38.
71. Reynolds, 14.
72. “I do have the articles which mention she was to play versus a Black team, but nothing about her actually playing in that game. I think many of these myths are just that—myths, and as often happens, they have been passed along as fact, from newspaper articles to Lou Gorman’s book *High and Inside*.” Email to author from Jay Hurd, May 27, 2021.
73. “Lizzie Murphy to Play in Marlboro,” *Worcester Evening Gazette*, August 26, 1933, 2.
74. Bill Parrillo, “Oldtime ballpark survives behind glitter and glamour of Newport,” *Hartford Courant*, August 9, 1978, H6D.
75. For Stewart’s extensive professional history, see his Sporting News umpire card on Retrosheet, accessed March 11, 2022. <https://www.retrosheet.org/TSNUmpireCards/Stewart-William.jpg>.
76. Gai Ingham Berlage, *Women in Baseball: The Forgotten History* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1994), 55.
77. Williams.
78. Hanlon.
79. Hanlon.
80. Reynolds, 15.
81. Lancaster.
82. “‘Lizzie’ Murphy Larivee, 70, Onetime Ballplayer, Dies.”
83. “‘Lizzie Murphy’ Rites Today,” *Springfield Union*, July 30, 1964, 44.

Black Women Playing Baseball

An Introduction

Leslie Heaphy

The fiftieth anniversary of the passage of Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 gives us an opportunity to reflect on its impact on women's sports as a whole and on specific sports such as baseball. Women's participation has been overlooked and marginalized in most publications and general discussions about the sport. Title IX improved opportunities and paved the way for the progress we are seeing in 2022. However, before and after the passage of legislation, the contributions of Black women in baseball has been largely overlooked and ignored. Few books or articles exist and those that do focus on the names of only a few owners and players such as Effa Manley, Olivia Taylor, Toni Stone, and Mamie Johnson. Their stories are important but are just the tip of the iceberg.

What is presented here is an introduction to the incredible contributions made by so many Black women as players, owners, coaches, and other baseball personnel. The primary focus centers on those most readers are not familiar with as a result of the attitudes of the times that showed a disdain for women of any color playing baseball. News coverage of women playing baseball was limited and often not complimentary in tone. For Black women the press coverage was worse because they were up against issues due to sex and race.

The recent recognition by Major League Baseball of the Negro Leagues as having major league status raises people's interest in the women who owned and worked for Negro League teams as well as those who played in the Negro Leagues or against Negro League teams. Who are some of these women and on whose shoulders do they stand? Who came before Effa Manley or Toni Stone? The story of Black women in baseball generally begins with the story of the Dolly Vardens and travels all the way to the present with the recent hiring of Bianca Smith by the Boston Red Sox as a coach in their minor league system.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, there were two Dolly Varden teams that played around the Philadelphia area. Little is known about either of

these teams since news stories from the nineteenth century have always been limited in number and coverage. Often the writers talk about the uniforms more than they did the players or the score. Often only first names were given or players were simply called "Miss." This makes it difficult for researchers to track down the players. We know the Dolly Vardens appeared in the papers in 1883 and there is mention of them reorganizing for 1884, though no games have been found to date. When *The New York Times* covered the team in 1883, we are informed that Miss Ella Harris was the team captain. The opposing team missed the train and never showed up. The remainder of the article focuses mainly on the Vardens' red jockey caps and the different-colored calico dresses the players wore. We learn the names of some of the other players: Sallie Johnstone and Molly Johnstone playing first and second base, Lizzie Waters listed as the third baseman, and Ella Waters behind the plate. The three outfielders were Agnes Hollingsworth, Ella Johnson, and Rhoda Scholl. Cora Patten handled the pitching duties. Unfortunately, that is about all we know. These young ladies got a chance to play baseball, but given the way reporters covered women's sports and attitudes towards Blacks at the time, the only other thing learned from the articles is the racism of the day, as shown by the dialect the white writers attributed to the women ballplayers.¹

One of the opponents for the two Dolly Varden clubs also played in Philadelphia and were called the Captain Jinks Base Ball Club. Even less is known about this club, though the three teams seem to have been created by a white man named John Lang. Lang thought the novelty would bring out fans and the clubs would make him some money. The lack of news coverage has made it difficult to recover their games.²

Papers continue their sporadic mention of Black women's ball clubs with a few references appearing in 1902 in Missouri, North Carolina, and Kansas. Beyond mentioning games were planned for the Biddleville (NC) Colored Women's Baseball Club, the details are sparse.³

St. Louis hosted the Black Bronchos in 1910 and 1911 under the leadership of Conrad Kuebbler. His brother Henry played baseball while Conrad appears to have been an organizer. The Bronchos found themselves playing in Tennessee, Missouri, Kansas, Kentucky, and Oklahoma, showing their ability to secure games across the country. Few scores have been found for their games, but they did beat the Nashville Giants 2–1 in one 13-inning contest while losing to the Columbia Cubs 5–3. They also lost two games to the Madisonville, Kentucky club, 10–9 and 6–3. The *Plain Dealer* (KS) in 1911 carried an ad touting the team as the “only Female Negro Team on the road.” The same ad also called the girls “...a novelty attraction but also a strong team of well-behaved girls.” The article captured the general attitudes of the day toward women playing any sport, which was usually not complimentary, hence the need to point out these “girls” behaved well and were playing for the entertainment of the crowd, not because they should be viewed as serious ball players.⁴

The Colored Havana Stars had a new attraction in 1917 with Pearl Barnett playing first base for the club. An article announcing the team’s season opening on May 27 listed Barnett as the only Black female first baseman playing for a colored team in the country. Their owner, Dr. Joseph Plummer, had hoped to put together a solid team to barnstorm the country. No full accounts of her contributions have been found to date.⁵

The most well-documented team in the 1920s was the Baltimore Black Sox Bloomer Girls playing in 1921 and 1922. A featured opponent for the Black Sox were the famous New York Bloomer girls (a White team). In one 1922 game, the visiting New York squad pummeled the Black Sox, defeating them, 48–2. The Black Sox only had two hits, by their pitcher and catcher. The Black Sox lost another contest, 51–2 which suggested they did not get much chance to practice. One of their closest games came in August 1921, when they lost to the Excelsior Sparrows, 17–14, which led to a second contest later in the month. That game ended in a 29–29 tie, highlighted by four home runs, two by each team. The Black Sox finally pulled out a win in early September, coming out on the good side of a 32–31 score. The hitting was led by the right fielder Miss Clark. The two teams played a fourth contest that the Black Sox won, 34–11. The Black Sox relied on four home runs and the pitching of B. Taylor, who struck out six.⁶

Isabelle Baxter joined the Cleveland Giants of the Negro National League in 1932 and parts of 1933. She

played second base and was expected to be there for the two seasons, though it appears she only played for part of 1932, after the Giants left the league to play independently. In the Giants’ first game, which they won over the Canton Clowns, Baxter handled five chances at second base with only one bad throw to first. At the plate Baxter had one hit but also two long balls into the deep outfield.⁷

Women’s baseball had their first and strongest league during World War II with what is now known as the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL).⁸ No Black women played in this league, but seven young ladies from Cuba were invited to play starting in 1948. Mamie Johnson and a friend went to one of the tryouts but were sent away. For Johnson, that led to her being signed to pitch in the Negro Leagues with the Indianapolis Clowns in 1955. She joined the team with outfielder Connie Morgan from Philadelphia. Morgan and Johnson became the second and third women to play professionally in the Negro Leagues. The first was Marcenia (Toni) Stone, who played for the Clowns in 1953 and then for the Monarchs in 1954. When she was traded to the Monarchs, she was replaced by Johnson and Morgan. Desiria “Boo Boo” Robinson and Doris Jackson also appeared on the Clowns’ roster for a short time. The AAGPBL received more coverage than any other women’s baseball in history, mainly because of the timing. Philip Wrigley came up with the idea to keep people entertained during the war because so many male players served in the military. After the war was over, the league was expected to end. When it did not, the coverage and attendance slowly began to decline leading to the league’s demise after the 1954 season.

Stone played baseball all her life. She loved the game and wanted to learn as much as she could. Growing up she got a chance to go to a local camp to better her skills. Her mother was not happy with her playing, as she did not think girls should play baseball with the boys, but Stone continued to play. By 1938 Stone, was playing for a Connorsville team and then she moved to play with teams in California and eventually the New Orleans Creoles. From the Creoles she got noticed and was able to join the Kansas City Monarchs and Indianapolis Clowns. While playing in the NNL in 1953 and 1954, Stone proved she was not just a fan curiosity but could play the game. She was actually voted to play in the East-West Classic as an All Star after hitting .254. A news reporter described her play in 1953: “a sparkling fielder and holds her own at the plate.”⁹ Owner Syd Pollock, who signed her for a reported \$12,000 in 1953, made it clear she was his



Toni Stone speaking to young fans.

starting second baseman and not just a novelty. In recognition of her accomplishments, a field was later dedicated in her honor in her hometown of Minneapolis and a play was written to celebrate her life.¹⁰

Morgan played baseball in the Philadelphia area as a teenager, but was better known as a basketball player for the Philadelphia Rockettes. She played for the Northern Philadelphia Honeydrippers team from 1949 through 1953, where the papers claimed she hit over .300. Morgan played second base under manager Oscar Charleston for 49 games. She proved she was more than just a gate attraction in her first game, making a stellar fielding play and walking twice. Where Morgan seemed to be most recognized was in her ability to lay down a solid bunt.¹¹

Johnson, better known as “Peanut” due to her short stature, pitched on local sandlot teams before being signed with the Clowns. Before joining the Clowns, Johnson had played on many local semi-pro clubs in New Jersey and Washington, DC, where she lived. She compiled a 3–1 record in her one season. Johnson turned the loss of a chance to play in the AAGPBL into an opportunity to be one of the first professional female pitchers in a men’s league. After her playing days ended, Johnson worked as a nurse and later ran a Negro Leagues memorabilia shop in Washington. Johnson got recognized by MLB when they had each team draft a Negro League player. She was taken by the Nationals since she lived in Washington.¹²

In the late 1940s, two other young ladies played for the New Orleans Creoles when they were under the ownership of Allan Page, a Negro Southern League executive. Page signed two university students in Fabiola Margaret Wilson and Gloria Dymond, who played

for the Creoles in 1948. Dymond attended Southern University while Wilson went to Xavier. Dymond was a senior physical education major when she joined the Creoles to patrol the outfield alongside Wilson. Both ladies received praise from their manager Tiny Brown as being as good as any man on the team. Hank Rigney, longtime baseball promoter and owner of the Toledo Crawfords, told reporters the ladies were on the team because of their abilities and not simply as a gate attraction. He said they had great arms and judged fly balls well. Rigney was responding to a common question found in much news coverage of women ballplayers, could they really play or were they signed as a novelty or curiosity?¹³

After the decline of the Negro Leagues and the demise of the AAGPBL, women’s baseball did not appear in any significant news coverage until after the passage of Title IX in 1972. When the Colorado Silver Bullets (a women’s professional team sponsored by Coors) began play in the 1990s, two African American women made the roster, Charlotte Wiley and Tamara Holmes.

Wiley pitched briefly for the 1994 Bullets. A graduate of Richmond High School in 1987, Wiley attended Cal State-Hayward. Holmes was one of two African American players on the Silver Bullets and also one of two African Americans on the USA National team.

Holmes began playing baseball in Little League and also played in high school. Those experiences helped lead Holmes to play for the Bullets in 1996 and 1997 until they lost their support from Coors after the 1997 season. She resumed her baseball play with the USA National team and became their mainstay at the plate and in the outfield since the mid-2000s. Holmes did not join the first team founded in 2004, preferring to play on men’s teams where she thought the overall quality of play would be better. In 2006 she tried out and made the women’s team, playing again in 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016. In her last World Cup, Holmes batted .722 in seven games to lead the team. In 2012 Holmes was named the USA Baseball Sportswoman of the Year. In addition to her playing, Holmes is also a firefighter and owner of a CrossFit gym.

Another African American woman on the USA National team was Malaika Underwood, who joined in 2006 and played in every World Cup since then. Between them Holmes and Underwood own most of the batting records for Team USA. Underwood was twice named to the World Cup All-Tournament team. In 2019, Underwood played in all seven games for the Pan American championship, batting .483 and driving in 14 runs. For the World Cup team in 2016, Underwood

batted .579 in seven games. Underwood also played volleyball for the University of North Carolina.

Just as numbers of male African American ball players have declined, there have also been few Black female players as other sports compete with baseball today.¹⁴

An exception to the lack of coverage most Black female baseball players have received is Mo'ne Davis. Davis made national news pitching and winning in the Little League World Series in 2014. She pitched an 8–0 shutout for the Taney Dragons over Newark, Delaware. After gaining national fame, Davis played basketball at Chestnut Hill Academy and now is attending Hampton University to play second base for the softball team. Davis also had the opportunity to meet and talk with Mamie Johnson on a 4000-mile trip around the country with the Anderson Monarchs in 2015. Johnson came out to see Davis pitch when the team traveled through Virginia. The meeting of the two ballplayers helped popularize Johnson's career fifty years after she had played. Davis received better and more extensive coverage because the emphasis on women's sports in the last two decades has grown in general. As women have continued to make inroads into sports since Title IX the effort to cover their play has also increased in quantity though the quality is sometimes more focused on them as women than as ballplayers.¹⁵

Black women have played baseball since the nineteenth century, though their story is not often part of the baseball record provided by the press. The introduction to their stories as presented here is just that, a chance to understand just how much is missing from baseball history by leaving out the play of Black women as individual players and those playing on all-Black female teams. The story of the Dolly Vardens and the St. Louis Black Bronchos to the recent play of Mo'ne Davis all paint a picture of participation worthy of learning and appreciating. ■

Notes

1. "Miss Harris's Baseball Nine," *The New York Times*, May 18, 1883; *Detroit Free Press*, May 22, 1893, p. 6; "Dolly Varden No. 1," *The Times* (Clay Center, KS), June 28, 1883, 6; some details included in an article in the program for the 2020 Women in Baseball Conference.
2. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 2 May 23, 1883.
3. *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 19, 1902, 1; *Chariton Courier* (MO), July 18, 1902, 5; *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 25, 1902, 2.
4. *Topeka Plain Dealer*, July 7, 21 and July 28, 1911, 6; *Daily Hustler* (KY), August 19, 1911, 3; *The Tennessean*, July 20, 1910, 5; *Columbia Herald*, August 5, 1910, 5; *Leavenworth Times*, August 27, 1910, 8.
5. *Chicago Defender*, May 12, 1917.
6. "Girl Nines Play Ball," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 12, 1921, 2; "Girl Nines Tie in Hot Contest," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 26, 1921, 2; "Girl Nines Fight Another Close Battle," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 9, 1921, 6; "Girl Nines Stage another Game," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 23, 1921, 9; *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 19, 1922, 9; "N.Y. Bloomer Girls Swamp B. S. B. Girls," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 25, 1922, 12; *North Adams Transcript* (MA), June 20, 1923, 8.
7. "Girl Ballplayer Aids Cleveland 9," *Chicago Defender*, June 17, 1933, 11; "Girl 8 to Play 2nd Base," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 27, 1932.
8. The league underwent a few name changes during its existence but is now universally referred to as the AAGBPL.
9. "Pro Negro Teams Meet Here Tonight," *Ponca City News* (OK), August 11, 1953, 9.
10. Alan Ward, "On Second Thought," *Oakland Tribune*, March 25, 1953, 46; "Woman is Star," *The Ponca City News* (OK), August 11, 1953, 9.
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15. Chris Bengel, "Mo'ne Davis, Former Little League World Series Star, Makes College Softball Debut for Hampton," CBS Sports, February 10, 2020, accessed March 8, 2022. <https://www.cbssports.com/mlb/news/monedavis-former-little-league-world-series-star-makes-college-softball-debut-for-hampton/>; Zachary Silver, "Mo'ne Davis Honors 'Peanut' at Mural Unveiling," MLB.com, July 12, 2018, accessed March 8, 2022. <https://www.mlb.com/news/mo-ne-davis-honors-mamie-peanut-johnson-c285500306>.

Babe Didrikson and Baseball

Vince Guerrieri

For most of Babe Didrikson's life, Major League Baseball was closed off to all but white men, but it was possible for African Americans and women to play professional baseball in other venues. Didrikson, technically the first woman to pitch for a major league team, even though she was unable to be signed, was able to partake in professional baseball at various stages in her career, less because of her athletic prowess (which was considerable, as evidenced in other sports) and more because her individual fame as one of the most significant sports figures of her era transcended barriers.

When "the little wild flower of the Lone Star State,"¹ as writer Damon Runyon wrote, was in her prime, people ran out of superlatives to describe her. After watching her beat him on the golf course, legendary sportswriter Grantland Rice—himself a scratch golfer—said she was "without any question the athletic phenomenon of all time, man or woman."² He would be a friend and booster of hers for the rest of his life. "I once shook hands with Miss Didrikson," recalled Ty Cobb in 1945. "A minute or so later I looked at my hand to see if it was still hanging on. It was, but I don't think it has ever been the same."³

Didrikson's athletic career spanned her brief adult life, from the Olympics in 1932 to her premature death at age 45 from cancer in 1956. In that time, she was rarely out of the public eye. Even rarer, she was able to make a living as an athlete in a series of sports, including golf, basketball, pool, tennis and even baseball. She was an instant sensation when she arrived on the national scene, winning medals in all three events she competed in at the Los Angeles Olympics—impressive, considering there were only six women's events at the games, and no woman could compete in more than three events! She would eventually be most noted—and compensated—for her golf career. She helped found the Ladies Professional Golf Association in 1949 and was initially the dominant player in wins and money. But baseball was the dominant sport of the era: it was nearly mandatory that the country's top sportswoman try her hand on the diamond as well.

Mildred Didriksen (she changed the spelling of her name as an adult) was born on June 26, 1911, in Port Arthur, Texas, the sixth of seven children (five sons and two daughters) of Ole and Hannah Didriksen. Mildred, who never let the facts get in the way of a good story, said in her autobiography that her baseball prowess as a girl—including a game where she hit five home runs—led to her acquiring the nickname Babe, for Babe Ruth.⁴ But Don Van Natta's biography *Wonder Girl* notes that her mother called her "Bebe" ("baby" in several European languages) as an infant, at the time when George Herman Ruth himself was acquiring the nickname as one of Jack Dunn's babes with the minor league Baltimore Orioles.⁵

The Didriksens moved from Port Arthur inland to Beaumont when Mildred was a girl. Even as a child, Didrikson distinguished herself as an athlete, and demonstrated no interest in what were regarded as the feminine pursuits of the day. At Beaumont High School, she played basketball, volleyball, tennis, baseball, and golf and was on the swim team. She read stories of the 1928 Olympics and was determined to compete in the next one.⁶

Her athletic prowess attracted the attention of Melvorne McCombs. The Colonel, as he was known, was hired by Employers Casualty to manage the insurance company's athletic department, overseeing a slate of teams in the days when many semi-pro teams had their basis in local businesses. Didrikson would play on the Employers' women's basketball team, known as the Dallas Golden Cyclones, and get \$75 a month for a clerical job with the company. She also lobbied McCombs to revive the company's track team, and then proceeded to set—and repeatedly break—records in the javelin throw, high jump, baseball throw, and hurdles. In the 1932 AAU championships, she competed in an unprecedented eight events, winning five and qualifying for the Olympics in three: high jump, javelin, and the 80-meter hurdles. She had won the meet for Employers Casualty *as the sole member of the team*.⁷

In the Olympics, Didrikson set a record in the javelin throw, set a record in and won the 80-meter

hurdles by an eyelash, and got the silver medal in the high jump.⁸ Rice, who was covering the Olympics, invited her to play golf with him and three other sportswriters, Paul Gallico,⁹ Westbrook Pegler and Braven Dyer. On her first shot off a tee (Rice said he set up the tee for her; she was apparently prepared to hit off the turf, though she played golf in high school), she drove the ball an estimated 240 yards—a glimpse of her skill to come, and her oft-repeated motto on the links: “You’ve got to loosen your girdle and let it rip.”¹⁰

Didrikson returned home to Texas to a hero’s welcome, first in Dallas, the home of Employers Casualty, and then in her hometown of Beaumont. She was driving a new Dodge—evidence that she had received some recompense for her athletic prowess, the Amateur Athletic Union ruled, stripping her of her amateur status.

Undaunted, Didrikson rode the wave of popularity her Olympic medals gave her. She performed on the vaudeville circuit, playing harmonica, and played semi-pro basketball in the winter of 1933–34. Her basketball team, called Babe Didrikson’s All-Americans, included Jackie Mitchell, who’d gained a small measure of fame for striking out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in an exhibition game with the Chattanooga Lookouts.¹¹

Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis reportedly took a dim view of the stunt, voiding Mitchell’s contract because he viewed baseball as too strenuous a sport to be undertaken by women.¹²

Following the basketball season, Didrikson went south for Major League Baseball spring training. (One wonders if her time with Mitchell was an influence.) She stopped first in Hot Springs, Arkansas, to sharpen her pitching skills under the tutelage of future Hall of Famer Burleigh Grimes at the Ray Doan Baseball School.¹³

From there, she headed south, to Florida. Doan touted her as the first woman to play for a major league team when she pitched for the Athletics in a spring training game against the Dodgers on March 20.¹⁴ The Dodgers, best known at the time for their ineptitude, hit into a triple play with Babe pitching, “which was at least a variation of their celebrated eccentricities,” wrote the next day’s Cleveland *Plain Dealer*. “There were no enemy fly balls thudding into Dodger skulls or members of the cast attempting to steal third with the bases populated.”¹⁵

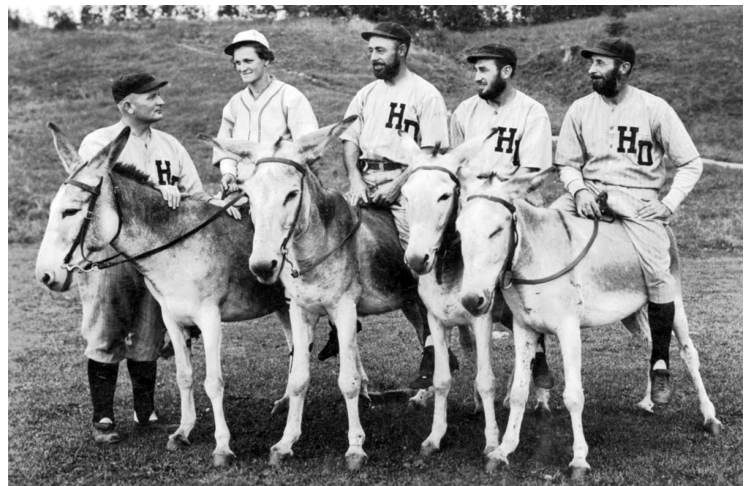
But the next day against the Red Sox on March 22, it appeared she got found out.

Pitching for the Cardinals against Boston, she gave up three runs in an inning’s work, after Max Bishop, who led off for the Red Sox, told his teammates, “Count ten before you swing. This girl does not throw as fast as she runs.” Cardinals manager Frank Frisch was content to play along at first, but then yanked her, saying after the game (which the Cardinals won), “A woman’s place is in or around the home. I was glad to give this dame a lift, but there’s such a thing as carrying a thing too far.”¹⁶

On March 25, she pitched for the Indians against their Double-A farm team, the New Orleans Pelicans, in New Orleans. “Babe Didrickson [sic], Texas’ renowned girl athlete, pitched two scoreless innings against the New Orleans Pelicans, smacked out two line drives, one fair and one foul, and looked as if she had been playing baseball in fast company all her life,” wrote Gordon Cobbledick in the next day’s *Plain Dealer*.

Following her time at spring training, Didrikson signed with the House of David barnstorming baseball team. The House of David was a religious order that had been formed early in the twentieth century in Benton Harbor, Michigan. It encouraged physical fitness—as well as celibacy—and many of the men who were part of the commune played baseball, leading to a traveling team, which also featured major league players in an effort to grab publicity, including at various points Chief Bender and Grover Cleveland Alexander. (Its promoter was Doan, he of the baseball school.) The order was also known for men wearing long hair and flowing beards, and in a game, a woman in the stands asked Didrikson where her whiskers were. The Babe’s riposte? “I’m sittin’ on ’em, sister, just like you are.”¹⁸

Didrikson spent a summer playing with the House of David—and was handsomely paid, making \$1,500



Didrikson with the House of David baseball team (and some donkeys).

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Didrikson meeting one of the major league stars of the day, Jimmie Foxx.

a month. It was estimated that she'd made \$25,000 in the two years following her Olympic performance.¹⁹ Employers Casualty would always take her back, but she wanted to make a living playing sports—and she couldn't do it playing baseball. (Although at that point, many professional ballplayers had offseason jobs as well.²⁰)

Didrikson turned to one of the few sports where women could regularly compete: golf. But at that point, amateurism was still embraced, to the point where the men's golf's Grand Slam was the US and British Opens and the US and British Amateurs.

Didrikson practiced incessantly, learning the game and its rules, and won the Texas Amateur. However, the United States Golf Association determined that Didrikson had played professional sports—even if not golf—and her amateur status was revoked. Of course, there were always the thoughts among the country club set that Didrikson was a woman, but she was not a lady. As a child, she had tomboy tendencies. As an adult, she seemed indifferent to marriage and motherhood, the two primary options for young women of the era.²¹

That changed when she met George Zaharias at a PGA Tour event. Didrikson had started touring, playing golf exhibitions with Gene Sarazen (whom she called Squire in front of adoring and amused crowds). And she and Zaharias, a professional wrestler known as the Crying Greek from Cripple Creek, hit it off. Didrikson had been feminizing her rough-hewn image to begin with, and she and Zaharias had become a couple.²² They married on December 23, 1938, at the St. Louis home of wrestling promoter Tom Packs. Several members of the Cardinals attended the ceremony,

including Joe Medwick and Leo Durocher, who served as Zaharias' best man. (Durocher's wife at the time, the former Grace Dozier, was the matron of honor for Didrikson. A fashion designer, she also made Didrikson's wedding outfit, a powder blue dress and blue hat.)²³

Through her husband, she met Fred Corcoran, a sports impresario who helped put professional men's and women's golf on the map. Corcoran was hired in 1936 as the tournament manager for the PGA, at the time an organization that promoted a series of winter tournaments in warm-weather locales to keep club pros sharp in the offseason.

But he'd also served as an adviser to individual athletes—including the new Mrs. Zaharias. Then as now, baseball players liked spending their off time on the golf course, and Corcoran developed contacts there as well. He'd set up a series of exhibitions between Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb, both well into retirement from baseball,²⁴ and was an unofficial agent for Ted Williams, having met the Splendid Splinter through his brother, who sold Williams a car.

Corcoran's contacts in the world of baseball kept Babe Zaharias in and around ballparks and ballplayers. She'd tour ballparks regularly for exhibitions, taking a few cuts at the plate pregame and possibly pitching as well—maybe even hitting golf balls off home plate to try to clear the outfield fence.

In her autobiography, she recalled an exhibition at Yankee Stadium before a game. She showed off her golf prowess, then played third base during infield practice—and talked Joe DiMaggio into facing her at the plate.

I went over to the Yankee dugout to get him. "Come on, Joe," I said. "I'm going to pitch to you." He didn't want to come, but I took him by the arm, and I grabbed a bat and handed it to him. I walked Joe out to home plate and bowed low.

All I was afraid of was that I might hit him with a pitch, or that he might hit me with a batted ball. "Whatever you do, please don't line one back at me!" I said to him just before I went to the mound. I did hit him right in the ribs with one pitch, although I don't think it hurt him. But I guess he was being careful about his batting. He skied a few, and then finally he took a big swing and missed and sat down.²⁵

Corcoran even got Didrikson to visit Williams in Florida, where they put on a hitting exhibition—golf

balls, not baseballs. Williams outdrove her, but not by much, and once, when he hit a worm-burner off the tee, Didrikson joked, "Better run those grounders out, Ted! There may be an overthrow."²⁶

Ultimately, Didrikson continued to perform at exhibitions, but was able to regain her amateur golf status in 1943. (It was possible to do so with the USGA by not playing professionally for three years.) She then won 14 straight tournaments, but had her sights on bigger things.

In 1949, Didrikson, Corcoran and several other women golfers gathered to form the Ladies' Professional Golf Association. Patty Berg was the inaugural president, and she was succeeded by Didrikson. For the tour's first four years, Didrikson was also the leading money winner. Between golf and endorsements, Didrikson was making \$100,000 a year.

She was the most famous woman athlete in the world, and in 1950 was named the Best Woman Athlete of the First Half of the 20th Century by the Associated Press, which would eventually name her female athlete of the year six times—five for golf and one after her Olympic performance in 1932.²⁷

In May 1952, her hometown doctor, W.E. Tatum, performed surgery on Didrikson, repairing a strangulated femoral hernia. That fall, Didrikson started to tire in golf matches. She seemed sicker, her husband recalled, and was passing blood. But she deferred seeing a doctor, telling George, "Just let me get a good hot bath and a rubdown, and I'll be ready to bust loose again in the morning."

The following year, after winning her namesake tournament in her hometown of Beaumont, she eventually made it back to Dr. Tatum, who diagnosed her with colon cancer—and noted that her delay in visiting the doctor was a fateful one. "Well, that's the rub of the greens," she said laconically.²⁸

Didrikson underwent surgery, including a colostomy. George Zaharias said she made sure her clubs were in her recovery room, saying, "I want to be able to see them every day because I'm going to use them again."²⁹

And she did. She was on the course competitively in 10 months, and won the 1954 Women's US Open. Not only that, in an era where cancer was feared as a death sentence (and some patients weren't even told they had cancer³⁰), Didrikson became not just a visible high-profile patient, but one who was open about her diagnosis, urging others to get regular checkups. She made PSAs for cancer organizations and started her own foundation. And she visited children in cancer wards. "She gave people hope," Patty Berg said.³¹

The following year, she underwent surgery for a ruptured disc, and doctors discovered the cancer had spread to her spine. There was no coming back this time, and early on September 27, 1956, Didrikson died.

Her career earnings on the LPGA Tour were \$66,237, with wins in 72 tournaments.³² But that was an era when professional golfers—both male and female—used tournament wins as a selling point for endorsements, where the real money was. Beyond her pro golf career—her second act—she was hailed as one of the greatest female athletes ever, with skills in basketball, track and field and yes, baseball. At her funeral, the Rev. C. A. Woytek read "The Answer," a poem written by Grantland Rice, who'd died two years earlier, writing up until the very end:

*The loafer has no comeback and the
quitter no reply
When the Anvil Chorus echoes, as it will,
against the sky;
But there's one quick answer ready
that will wrap them in a hood:
Make good ■*

Notes

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2. "Personal Glimpses: The World-Beating Girl Viking of Texas," *Literary Digest*, August 27, 1932, 26.
3. "Take a Quote, Please," *Yank Magazine*, February 16, 1945.
3. Babe Didrikson Zaharias, as told to Harry Paxton, *This Life I've Led* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co, 1953) 11.
5. Don Van Natta Jr., *Wonder Girl* (New York: Little, Brown & Co, 2011) 20. Didrikson also gave her birthdate variously as 1913 or 1914, which makes her story about being nicknamed for Babe Ruth as a girl slightly more plausible.
5. *This Life I've Led*, 28.
6. Larry Schwartz, "Didrikson was a woman ahead of her time," ESPN.com. <https://www.espn.com/sportsculture/features/00014147.html>.
7. Didrikson won the hurdles in a judgment call against Evelyn Hall in what seemed to be a photo finish. In a balancing of the cosmic scales, judges' ruling that she had fouled on her jump gave her the silver instead of the gold. Van Natta, 105–12.
8. Didrikson won the hurdles in a judgment call against Evelyn Hall in what seemed to be a photo finish. In a balancing of the cosmic scales, judges' ruling that she had fouled on her jump gave her the silver instead of the gold. Van Natta 105–12.
9. Gallico, better known for his fiction, including the novel *The Poseidon Adventure*, wrote an article about Didrikson calling her a "muscle moll," offering descriptions of her as mannish and contributing to rumors about her sexuality that dogged her all her life and persisted after her death. Van Natta, 140–45.
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Bernice Gera and the Trial of Being First

Amanda Lane Cumming

On June 24, 1972, Bernice Gera became the first woman to umpire a professional baseball game. Immediately after the game ended, she quit. She fought baseball for five years for the chance to umpire a professional game. Why fight so long for an umpiring career, just to give it up after one game?

We think of pioneers as being stoic, strong, and preternaturally gifted at the thing they are pursuing. Although she was the first woman umpire, Gera's story isn't really about her determination to become an umpire. She was just a woman standing in front of organized baseball, asking it to accept her.

BELONGING AND BASEBALL

Bernice Gera was born Bernice Marie Shiner on June 15, 1931, in Ernest, Pennsylvania. Her parents divorced when she was two years old and abandoned their five children. Bernice and her siblings moved frequently growing up, being passed from relative to relative. Baseball became an anchor for her throughout her childhood tumult.

"Wanting to belong is one of the most powerful things in the world," she said. "That's why sports are so popular. Just rooting for a team makes you feel part of it."¹ The first team she wanted to join was her older brothers' team. She got a chance when she was eight years old. One of the players didn't show up for a game and the boys reluctantly allowed her to fill in for him in the outfield. One of her brothers, Henry Shiner, said years later, "Eventually after we saw her hit, we let her on the team. She became quite a hitter. Then everybody wanted her."²

There weren't any opportunities for her to play baseball as she got older, so she began playing softball. After graduating from high school in Erath, Louisiana, in 1949, she married Louis Thomas Jr. and moved to New York. She worked as a secretary, but baseball was never far from her mind. She said of balancing her work and baseball life, "No matter where I worked as a typist, I would always be more interested in what was happening to the Dodgers. Quite a few times I was almost fired because of it. Instead of

cranking out a letter, I'd have the drawer of my desk open, listening to the Dodgers on the radio."³

Her childhood gave her a lifelong love for baseball and imbued in her a desire to help children. After her day job, she taught kids to play baseball in parks and community centers. She participated in events to benefit children's charities. During these events, she would get a chance to flex her own baseball muscle, putting on hitting demonstrations with male baseball players, including major leaguers Roger Maris, Cal Abrams, and Sid Gordon.⁴

A newspaper in Louisiana printed a picture of her with Roger Maris, following a demonstration they participated in at Coney Island in 1961.⁵ Several newspapers crowed that she could hit a baseball 350 feet.⁶ One anointed her "The world's foremost female baseball player."⁷ She hit the newspapers again in 1966 and Ripley's Believe It Or Not in 1967, after she was banned from the concessions at Rockaway and Coney Island for cleaning out the prizes in the throwing booths. Her prowess won more than 300 stuffed animals, which she donated to children's hospitals and charities. "Everything I do in baseball is aimed at helping children," she explained.⁸

At some point she divorced Thomas. In 1964, she married Steve Gera, a photographer, and settled in Jackson Heights, Queens. Before their marriage, he didn't know much about baseball, but Bernice changed that. "We watch it and talk about it night and day," she said of his conversion into a baseball fan.⁹

Gera fostered an intense desire to be part of baseball. She sent inquiries to every major league team, asking for a job. Every team declined. "At first I just tried to get a job with any club, doing anything," she said. "I would have sold peanuts if they wanted me to. But the answer was negative all the way around. I waited three months for one team to answer. And would you believe that I stayed up nights praying for it to come through? When they said no, I decided to become an umpire."¹⁰

BECOMING AN UMPIRE

At 2 o'clock one morning in 1966, Bernice Gera sat up in bed. She had been feeling dejected about not finding a job in baseball, when it suddenly hit her. She would become an umpire. Steve, she said, "choked on his coffee when I told him the next morning."¹¹

The list of women umpires before Gera was short. The first professional female umpire was Amanda Clement, who worked semi-pro games in the early 1900s. In 1943, the National Baseball Congress, a semi-pro league, hired a woman named Lorraine Heinisch to umpire one game of their national tournament.¹² Otherwise, baseball officiating remained a male bastion.

Her first obstacle was to get into an umpire school. She applied to, and was accepted at, the Al Somers School for Umpires in 1967. Somers had interpreted her first name as "Bernie." When she called to ask a question, he realized his mistake. Gera said, "He blew his cool. He told me there never had been a woman in his umpire school, and there never would be."¹³

Gera was finally accepted at the National Sports Academy in West Palm Beach, Florida. She was initially dismissed because the school didn't have any accommodations for women. She called them, agreed to live away from the school, and begged them to accept her. Eventually, she was accepted to the academy.¹⁴

Her acceptance into umpire school launched a thousand sexist newspaper columns from sportswriters objecting to a woman breaking into baseball's masculine stronghold. Many writers tried their hand at fiction and imagined what baseball would look like with a woman umpiring. One example from Will Grimsley with the Associated Press imagines Gera arriving late because she had been at the hairdresser. Then, she admonishes Carl Yastrzemski for cursing after a strike call, reminding him he is in mixed company. She blows kisses to the crowd, pauses the game to re-apply lipstick, and gets all the ball and strike calls wrong.¹⁵

Red Smith wondered about, and guessed at, her measurements.¹⁶ Lance Evans, sports editor of *The Express*, fretted about how ball players could possibly keep their eyes on the ball when the batter "is going to have to start looking at the curves that are attractively arranged behind him."¹⁷ One of the more bizarre entries came from Dick West who, in a UPI wire story that ran in papers across the country, addressed the emergence of a woman umpire by imagining a pre-game interview with William Shakespeare. In a question-and-answer format the Bard commented on Gera's foray into umpiring and offered a little advice to managers dealing with a woman umpire: "That man that hath a tongue,

I say, is no man if with his tongue he cannot win a woman."¹⁸

In June 1967, Gera began umpire school. After her first week in the six-week program, the *Miami News* sent a reporter to write a feature on her. The story paints a picture of Bernice as being somewhat naive, but quickly learning the umpiring trade. Her instructor, Jim Finley, had nothing but praise for her abilities and said, "I'll certainly recommend her for a professional job."¹⁹

The story didn't offer a perspective on the difficulties Gera was facing. Umpiring school for her wasn't just about mastering the rules of baseball or learning how to position herself for plays. She was the only umpire training at the baseball school, which made her doubly alone, as both a woman and an umpire. After two weeks of driving 50 miles round trip each day, she was given permission to live in a dormitory on campus with about 40 male baseball players and coaches. At night, the men would throw beer cans and bottles at her door. She tried to tough it out but spent the last week of her session living off campus to escape the torment.²⁰

While living away from the school, she had to put her umpiring gear on in the parking lot, trying to shield herself in the car. "Once a bunch of men stood on the hoods of their cars to take pictures."²¹ They also made learning difficult for her on the field. She said, "When I first started in umpire school, I used to just say 'strike', but the men went prancing around saying, 'Oh my goodness, a strike!' So I learned to bawl it out: STEE-RIKE!"²² The players and umpires hired to assist in games would catcall her and badger her. "Other umpires and players ask me to go out after the games," she told a reporter in 1969. "Some are just trying to shake me up. But if an umpire asks me before the game and I refuse, I worry about them not working with me on the field."²³

"The first day at umpire's school was the roughest I ever had," she recalls. "They put me out there in a game before I knew what to do. The kids put six or seven balls in play and they would try to hit me with the warmup balls when my back was turned."²⁴ Players would tease her after calls. She recalls runners winking at her after she called them safe and saying, "Bad call. I was out."²⁵

"I got all the curse words in the book," Gera said. "And a lot not in the book. Four letter words. They didn't want me on the field. It all hinged on whether I could take it. I took it. But after, I'd go home and cry like a baby."²⁶ She got through school by repeating her umpiring mantra to herself: "Keep cool all the time."

“Things changed when I learned what I was doing, but there still was an awful lot of resentment.”²⁷

The men in umpire school weren’t the only hostilities she encountered. The chest protector also became a point of contention. Due to her small stature, she needed to wear a chest protector that was strapped to her, rather than holding one in front. But the chest protectors were all made with men in mind. Finding one that would fit passably was a battle, and one that male sportswriters spent a lot of time and column inches discussing.

She graduated from umpire school in July 1967. All the minor leagues were underway, so while she looked for umpiring work for the 1968 season, she began a series of umpiring jobs to get experience outside of school.

Her first appearance was at the National Baseball Congress Tournament—the same tournament that hired Lorraine Heinisch in 1943—that August. The tournament organizers saw the publicity benefit of having her umpire a game, so they brought her in for the opening game and promoted her appearance. She was assigned to work third base on a full four-umpire crew and only had to make a few calls before her duties were done. Later that summer she would umpire for the American Legion, Little League, and the semi-pro Bridgeton Invitational Tournament.

Between her graduation and first umpiring gig, she appeared on *The Tonight Show*, *The Johnny Carson Show*, and as a guest of Joe Garagiola, the former major league catcher turned TV host, on *The Today Show*. It was clear the public was fascinated by the woman barging into baseball.

THE LEGAL FIGHT BEGINS

With an umpire school diploma in hand and umpiring game experience under her belt, Bernice Gera applied for jobs in professional baseball. She wrote to Ed Doherty, the head of umpire development.²⁸ When she did not receive a response, she wrote again. She never heard back, so she contacted the Commissioner of Baseball, William D. Eckert. She wrote to him, then followed up by phone. Eckert simply washed his hands of the situation, telling her Doherty oversaw umpires.²⁹

Having been rejected by baseball before, Gera was determined to succeed this time. She knew they were ignoring her because she was a woman. She decided to take her case to the courts. In April of 1968 she retained the services of Mario Biaggi, who would be elected to represent the Bronx in the US House of Representatives later that year. He filed the case with the New York State Division of Human Rights on April 30, 1968. The

complaint charged that Commissioner Eckert “stated in words or substance and by his acts and his comportment that he objects to a female umpire in organized baseball.”³⁰

The Commissioner’s office responded with a statement that the Commissioner did not handle the hiring of umpires and that she must contact the president of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues (the minor leagues) or the American and National League presidents to seek employment as an umpire. In June 1968, the Human Rights Division found Commissioner Eckert not guilty of discriminatory hiring practices because he was not directly in charge of umpire employment.³¹

The legal action touched off another round of sports columns. Bill Bondurant, sports editor of the *Fort Lauderdale News*, begs in a column titled “Baseball Threatened by Female,” “Please, Bernice, don’t sue. What have men left to themselves? You women are in our saloons and on our golf courses. You wear trousers just like ours and some crazy guy on television keeps offering you cigars. Let us keep baseball. It isn’t much, we know, but it’s almost all we have left.”³²

An unattributed item in many papers opined, “If women started umpiring, players might feel constrained to start acting like gentlemen...Baseball can do without that. It needs more rhubarbs and catcalls, more discontent and threats of mayhem; it needs that old Gas House Gang spirit. But with a lady umpire...?”³³

Bill Clark wrote in a column that ran in the *Montana Standard*, “Suppose you had to put the run on Durocher. You could, huh? Baby, you don’t know what rhubarb is til you’ve sampled his recipe. And you couldn’t exercise the time-honored feminine prerogative and change your mind every two minutes.”³⁴

Bob Quincy suggested in *The Charlotte News*, “If Bernice wants to associate with baseball players, the least she can do is shower with them. This, in itself, would bring about a speed-up of the game. The real fun would develop in the locker room.”³⁵

Bill Hodge, sports editor of *The Wichita Eagle* argued, “Sometimes a little discrimination is a good thing...They need a woman umpire in the major leagues right now like our barber shop needs a male manicurist.”³⁶

In the *Chicago Tribune* David Condon whined that “Mrs. Gera is entitled to invade the domains of umpires only after the courts rule that Gale Sayers, Ron Santo, Tony Skoronski, and Ziggy Czarowski are fairly entitled to employment as Playboy Bunnies.”³⁷

The *Star Tribune*’s Charles M. Guthrie went to a dark place: “If women ever become umpires it will

mark the doom of baseball...the game will get pallid and fans will stay home." An unattributed item in the *El Paso Herald-Post* agrees, "Should ladies take up position behind home plate, the game perhaps would survive. But it would no longer be recognizable as baseball."³⁹

It was simply unfair to men for a woman to become an umpire, argued John P. "Moon" Clark in *The Daily Republican*, "Calling strikes and fouls and balls has always been a man's job because he never gets a chance to do anything like that in his own home. Umpiring baseball games has always been left to a man. It gives him the one big chance to take over and boss the field, so to speak."⁴⁰

While the columnists typed their sexism, Gera contacted every minor league to seek employment. After receiving either a rejection or no response from each, she zeroed in on the New York-Pennsylvania League, a Class A league close to home. The NY-P League president Vincent M. McNamara had rejected her request by writing that she would not be considered for a job because the ballparks did not have appropriate dressing rooms for her to use. Furthermore, in baseball "tempers sometimes reach the boiling point" that results in language that "beyond the hearing of the spectators, is of a nature that one would not relish having one's mother or sister or any lady exposed to."⁴¹

Doherty, the aforementioned head of umpire development, offered the defense that she was ineligible for hire because the umpire development program required "applicants be 21 to 35 years old, a minimum of 5-10 tall, and weigh at least 170 pounds, with perfect vision of course."⁴² At the time, Gera was 37 years old, 5' 2", and weighed about 125 pounds. These were an odd pair of reasonings to avoid hiring a woman. McNamara's seemed to be a clear-cut case of gender discrimination and Doherty's would require a robust justification. It would have been an easier path to simply dismiss her qualifications or give her a tryout and say she didn't measure up.

The tide in the broader sports world was beginning to change at the same time. In February 1969, Diane Crump became the first woman jockey to ride in a pari-mutuel (gambling) race. It required track officials to threaten suspensions to any male jockeys who boycotted the race, and a police escort from the jockey's quarters to the paddock at Hialeah Park in Florida.⁴³ Later that month, Barbara Jo Rubin became the first woman jockey to win a race. The walls were coming down, but baseball was determined to brace them.

THE FIRST CONTRACT

With McNamara's rejection, Biaggi went back to the Human Rights Division with a new complaint on March 19, 1969. A hearing in the case had been postponed several times when McNamara contacted Gera in June 1969 to offer her the opportunity to formally apply for a job. He warned her that all the umpires had been hired for the season, so she wouldn't be considered until 1970. Then, McNamara changed his mind and sent her a contract and offered her employment for the last month of the short season.

Gera found out she was being offered the job as she watched Apollo 11 land on the moon on July 20, 1969.⁴⁴ The league usually used two-man umpire crews, but she would be added as a third umpire. She began to make plans to head upstate with her husband and a few friends for her professional debut.

If it seems like that happened too easily to be true, it's because it was. Later court documents indicated that McNamara only sent her a contract to take some of the pressure off himself. He said "he felt that he had to execute the contract despite her lack of qualifications knowing that [Phil] Piton (the President of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues) would have to make the final decision."⁴⁵

On August 1, 1969, Gera was supposed to make her umpiring debut. The sports pages ran stories about Smokey Drolet considering legal action after being denied an opportunity to drive in the Indy 500⁴⁶ and Elinor Kaine fighting to be allowed in the press box to cover a football game as a reporter.⁴⁷ But instead of carrying the story of Gera's debut, they broke the news that she would not be making history after all. Her contract had not been accepted by the National Association.

"I disapproved her contract with the NY-P League," Phil Piton told reporters. "I don't wish to comment further at this time."⁴⁸ McNamara didn't express any remorse for the change of events. "I'm not the final word. Mr. Piton only exercised the duties of his office and acted within his right. It's his job to uphold professional baseball and the national agreement...This is professional sports, and in professional sports you have your ups and downs and you have to take a few lumps along the way."⁴⁹

Gera was dejected. "I just can't get to first base... It's a strike out, but I will come up again. The game's not over."⁵⁰

THE LEGAL BATTLE CONTINUES

The latest twist in Gera's quest caught the ear of Representative Samuel Stratton of New York. Incensed at what he saw as clear discrimination, he told reporters

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Bernice Gera umpired many amateur league games while honing her umpiring craft.

he would request that the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the US Department of Justice look into the disapproval of her contract.⁵¹ He warned on the House floor that baseball's refusal to end sex discrimination "could have devastating economic effects on baseball itself."⁵²

Gera's lawyer, Mario Biaggi, also a member of Congress, threatened further investigations into the sport's business: "Due to the conduct of baseball in this matter, which tends to be illegal, there might be other areas that also are illegal."⁵³

Still another member of Congress got in on the action. Rep. Martha W. Griffiths, who championed anti-discrimination laws based on sex (and would introduce the Equal Rights Amendment to the House), joined the chorus of powerful voices in support of Gera. At a press conference, Gera was asked if she could handle a Casey Stengel or a Leo Durocher, famously grumpy major league managers. Griffiths answered the question for her, snapping, "The real question is whether Casey or Leo could hold their own against her. Baseball is protecting them, and losing a chance to increase attendance and make some money."⁵⁴

Attendance had become a big concern in baseball, as the NFL in particular, began to grow in popularity.⁵⁵ Baseball resisted changing with the times and burrowed into tradition rather than evolve. Gera was a threat to tradition, so rather than admit baseball needed to change, critics claimed she was out to destroy baseball. In response, Gera could only reiterate, "I wouldn't do anything to hurt baseball. All I want is a chance."⁵⁶

Even newspaper columnists had to reluctantly admit that the law was not on the side of baseball remaining exclusively male. But the economic argument, they felt, was on their side. Particularly in the minor leagues,

with small budgets and the line between success and financial failure always thin, how could teams take on the added expense of providing appropriate accommodations for a woman?

Bob Whittemore, a columnist for the *Oneonta Star*, pointed out that "special arrangements were made for her to travel, for her to have a private room instead of sharing one, for special showers and locker facilities in each park. And for a three-person umpiring team with which she was to work...It stands to reason, therefore, that the additional expense involved with Mrs. Gera's becoming an umpire in the NY-P league could mean the difference between each club's writing with red or black ink in their ledgers."⁵⁷

Stratton wrote to the paper after reading Whittemore's column. In addressing the problems of economics, he said those same issues were used to discriminate against women from World War II all the way up to the women jockeys. "It may cost a bit more to end discrimination, either by color or sex. But in the long run it is worth it, and it also happens to be the law of the land."⁵⁸

For Gera, something that had begun as a way for her to be involved in baseball had become much bigger. Women's organizations began to take notice. They sent her support, and asked for hers in return. Gera, however, wasn't interested in officially joining. "I want to win this without marches. I do not believe in it. I love baseball too much to give it a bad name," she said.⁵⁹ "I don't agree with them on a lot of things. I don't believe in putting men down."⁶⁰

Gera's hearing before the Human Rights Appeal Board was postponed several times and it wasn't until April 1970 that the case began to move forward again. The National Association argued that she was not eligible for employment as an umpire because she did not meet the required 5' 10" and 170 pound size. The Appeal Board ruled that the physical size requirements were arbitrary and directed the National Association to revise the standards within three months. Then, they were to reconsider Gera based on the revision.

But the National Association continued to fight the case. It appealed the case up the legal ladder to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of New York. There, the National Association argued in February 1971 that she "wouldn't be hired even if she were a man."⁶¹ They also said the umpire school she attended wasn't accredited at the time she was a student.

A month after those arguments, Gera announced that she was filing a \$25 million lawsuit against organized baseball, separate from the complaint to the Human Rights Division. Biaggi told a press conference

that baseball had “virtually destroyed her career as a baseball umpire.”⁶² The suit named Commissioner of Baseball Bowie Kuhn, the New York-Pennsylvania Baseball League and Vincent M. McNamara, its president; and the National Association of Professional Baseball leagues and its president, Phillip Piton.

Then 39 years old, Gera told reporters, “I’ll keep trying until I’m 80.”⁶³

In April 1971, the Appellate Division issued an opinion in the case of *New York State Division of Human Rights v. New York-Pennsylvania Professional Baseball League*. The appeals court confirmed the previous order of the Human Rights Appeal Board that organized baseball had indeed discriminated against Gera because of her sex.

Once again, the NY-P League and the National Association appealed the ruling. On November 22, 1971, both sides submitted written arguments. Baseball continued to argue that Gera was not discriminated against because of her sex, although they still argued baseball was no place for a woman. It was mainly her physical size and because she had demonstrated a “proclivity for publicity” which made her “temperamentally unfit for professional umpiring.”⁶⁴

She certainly was a fixture in the press. Reporters called constantly, and she patiently sat through interview after interview, explaining her qualifications and her deep desire to work in baseball. She was also hired for many speaking appearances. She said she always donated her speaking fees to help kids in need. But baseball wasn’t concerned about her financial compensation for speaking, nor did it matter to them that a woman fighting the patriarchal baseball machine was media fodder, whether she wanted the publicity or not. Her very presence in the media showcased baseball’s indefensible stance that they were purposely keeping women out of the game, so they had to turn it around on her.

On January 13, 1971, the appeals court affirmed the order of the lower court that baseball was engaging in sex discrimination and needed to revise its physical standards for umpires.⁶⁵ Baseball had twice appealed the ruling of the Human Rights Division, and twice been denied. They still had the option of continuing to appeal, but decided it wasn’t worth it.

In April 1972, the NY-P League sent her a one-year contract. This time, the contract was approved by the new National Association President Henry J. Peters. She would make her umpiring debut when the New York-Pennsylvania League season opened in June, a week after she turned 41, and nearly five years after she graduated from umpire school.

ONE FIGHT ENDS, ANOTHER BEGINS

“All through this case my heart was broken. I’ve always wondered if this was worth it,” Gera said, reflecting on the legal fight.⁶⁶ “You’ve come a long way, baby, I tell that to myself. But it hasn’t been easy.”⁶⁷

Although she was happy to have won the opportunity to finally become an umpire, she was exhausted. “It’s cost me about \$30,000 in income I never made,” she told reporters. “I had been doing secretarial work until I started umpiring, so that’s five years at a minimum of \$5,000 a year, plus my phone bills and other expenses. My legal fees I don’t know yet. Mario Biaggi, the Bronx congressman, took the case because nobody else would...right now I’m broke financially and I won’t get rich as an umpire.”⁶⁸

Gera said her hair had turned gray, and she had lost patches of hair from the stress of fighting baseball. She tried to be fair to baseball when talking to the press, saying, “They were strong in their beliefs that baseball was and is always going to be a man’s game. I believed just as strongly that baseball is our national pastime, and that means for women as well.”⁶⁹

She didn’t have much time to dwell on that as the game approached. In addition to constant interview requests, Gera received stacks of letters every day. Many people were writing to send her support, others were young girls who wanted to work in baseball someday too. And then, there were the telephone calls. She would answer the phone and hear, “Don’t you dare take the field.”⁷⁰

She worried about whether the other umpires would accept her. “Umpiring is a team job. I keep asking myself, ‘Are the guys going to work with me as a team?’ They can hang you if they want to.”⁷¹ She was confident, however, in her ability to handle managers and players. “I’ve asked for the job and feel I’m capable of handling myself. I’m not afraid to thumb a manager or player if they get abusive.”⁷²

She was assigned to umpire the opening game between the Geneva Rangers and the Auburn Phillies on June 23, 1972, at Shuron Park in Geneva, New York. Geneva sold 3,000 tickets, a sellout, for the opening game after her assignment was announced. She was set to umpire games in Williamsport and Oneonta after her stint in Geneva, and those parks saw increased ticket sales as well.⁷³

On June 21, Gera was invited to attend the season-opening welcoming dinner for Geneva. She gave a short speech, saying to the crowd, “I’m grateful to God, grateful to baseball and Friday night is going to be the happiest moment of my life.”⁷⁴ One of her sisters and her husband, Steve, had accompanied her to Geneva,

planning to spend a week of vacation watching her umpire games. "I'm happy for Bernice. It's been a long struggle for her. She loves baseball so much and wanted so much to be a part of it that she went for umpiring. It isn't going to be a bed of roses but I feel she'll make the grade," Steve proudly predicted.⁷⁵

The attention was starting to feel a little overwhelming. "I'm trying not to get overly excited," she said, "but NBC is here now, and CBS and ABC are coming, plus all those reporters. One of them told me I'll be getting more coverage than President Nixon."⁷⁶ (And much like Bernice, even more media scrutiny was on its way for Nixon; burglars had just been caught breaking into the Watergate complex.)

On June 23, the morning of the game, Gera attended an umpires' meeting. Although she had fought for five years to get there, the meeting brought the enormity of the remaining journey crashing down on her. She said later, "I could sense their resentment. They acted like they didn't want me around baseball. It was that old male chauvinism once more."⁷⁷

After five years, she was tired of fighting baseball, tired of trying to convince baseball that she belonged. After the six hours with the other umpires, she decided she was done fighting. She felt overwhelmed with frustration and the barriers that still firmly stood, even though she had legally knocked them down. "I could beat them in the courts, but how do you change peoples' attitudes?" she wondered.⁷⁸

Unfortunately, her historical moment would have to wait a day. Remnants of Hurricane Agnes (then the costliest hurricane in US history) had been ravaging the eastern US. The Geneva area was heavily affected by rain and flooding. The opener was delayed and would be made up the next day in a doubleheader.

Friday night in her motel room, she heard men outside drinking and causing a commotion, talking about the woman umpire. If she had any doubts about her decision to stop umpiring after the first game, this drove it home. "I wasn't scared off," she explained. "I was just disgusted. I was fed up with it."⁷⁹

THE GAME

The next morning, Gera packed her bags and considered not working the game at all, "but friends and relatives talked me into it because I'd come that far."⁸⁰ Her umpiring partner, 24-year-old Doug Hartmayer, picked her up at the motel so they could drive to the game together. Gera said she tried to discuss signals and the game with him, but he refused to speak with her.⁸¹

At the ballpark, she declined pre-game interviews with the menagerie of press in attendance. Several

reporters noted that she was visibly nervous before taking the field. Assigned to work the bases, Gera ran out to her place on the field as the sellout crowd cheered. A group of girls in the bleachers held up a banner made from a bedsheet with "Right on, Bernice" printed on it.⁸² Television cameras and photographers were squeezed in down the foul lines.

Because of the doubleheader, the games were each scheduled to go only seven innings. Although she was nervous, the first three innings of the game went fairly smoothly. She made a handful of calls at first and second base. Each call was cheered by the crowd. So far, it was a benign beginning.

With one out in the top of the fourth inning, the fears of Bernice and the warnings about allowing women into baseball converged. With a runner on second base, the batter hit a line drive to the second baseman. The second baseman threw to the shortstop covering the base and caught the baserunner off the base. Forgetting the force play, Gera signaled safe. Then, realizing her mistake reversed her call and indicated the runner was out.

Auburn Phillies manager Nolan Campbell came storming onto the field for an explanation. Gera told him she had made a mistake and forgotten about the force in effect for the runner going back to second base. "He came yelling," Gera said later, "but he didn't curse me. I let him go on because he was right, no question about it. I made a mistake and I admitted it."⁸³

"That's two mistakes you've made!" Campbell yelled. According to Campbell, he followed up with, "The first one was putting on your uniform." Gera remembers it differently. In an interview a few days after the game, she said he yelled, "The first mistake was you should have stayed in the kitchen peeling potatoes."⁸⁴

Gera immediately ejected him from the game, explaining, "Then he was judging me as a woman, instead of as an official."⁸⁵ Campbell exploded, "Why throw me out because you made a mistake?" he shouted. He refused to leave the field and stalked behind her as she went back to her post on the first base line. "You're not only a woman, but you've got a quick temper. You can't run somebody out of a game just giving you a little guff."⁸⁶ He eventually stomped off to the dugout, refusing to go into the clubhouse as he was supposed to. "I was going to make her come and throw me out," he explained later.⁸⁷

Throughout the dispute, Gera's partner Hartmayer stayed behind home plate and did not intervene. "That was her problem," he shrugged later.⁸⁸ After Campbell refused to go into the clubhouse, Hartmayer finally intervened. His only involvement in the dispute was to

put an arm around Campbell and assist him in leaving the game.

After the excitement of the ejection, the game went on. After Gera called out a Geneva baserunner for oversliding the base, she drew complaints from Geneva manager Bill Haywood. Then, after calling a runner safe at first base, the Auburn pitching coach, who had taken over for Campbell, gave her an earful. She was ridiculed for not understanding the procedures for assisting with pitching changes.⁸⁹

If she had ever doubted her decision to only umpire one game, Campbell's comment about peeling potatoes and her umpiring partner's refusal to work with her must have reinforced the decision. When the game ended with a 4-1 Geneva win, she was ready to leave baseball.

She walked straight off the field and found Geneva general manager Joseph McDonough. She told him she was done. "I've just resigned from baseball. I'm sorry, Joe."⁹⁰ She hurried out of the ballpark, into a waiting car, and away she went, her umpiring career over.

As she drove back to Queens, the ballpark in Geneva was thrown into chaos. McDonough went to her motel to intercept her, only to discover she had already checked out. An announcement was made to the shocked crowd before the second game of the doubleheader. An umpire happened to be in the stands and agreed to work the bases so the game could go on.⁹¹ In the middle of the first inning, the game was postponed when it began to rain. It was just as well because all the press cared about was figuring out what had happened to Gera.

Auburn manager Campbell was eager to talk about her game. "I hardly did anything. I used 'hell' once or twice and I was out of the game. I told her 'you're not only a woman, but you have a quick trigger, too'. They should never have let her in the league," he pontificated. "Women don't have the strength to withstand the pressure. This is a man's game and it always will be."⁹²

Campbell, who had been ejected nine times the previous season, commented to Frank Dolson of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (who referred to him as "Noley" in his column), "I hope nobody blames me for her quitting. I think she made up her mind, the first person who came out, she was going to run him. It had to be me, that's all. I sure as hell don't want to be made the scapegoat."⁹³

Gera's partner, Hartmayer, couldn't wait to chat with reporters about her performance. "It didn't surprise me that she quit. I don't even know why I want to be an umpire," he joked, "let alone why a woman would. She was just scared to death."⁹⁴

"It wasn't a hard game to umpire, really. You could see she just didn't have it. I've been chewed out more than that in Little League," Hartmayer said, referring to Campbell's tirade.⁹⁵ "Saying you've made a mistake is very unethical in our profession. That's one thing you never do. You never reverse yourself," he chided, then charitably added, "Otherwise I don't want to say too much about her game. I don't want to come down too hard on her."⁹⁶

In response to her quitting, the newspaper columns shifted away from hand wringing over a woman daring to break into baseball into hand wringing over the ways she had harmed the women's movement. *The Journal News* wrote, "The battle for acceptance was not finished, but just beginning, and she let down a lot of people—not only women—by not persisting through the main event."⁹⁷

The *Charlotte Observer* was disappointed, writing:

...she carried the hopes of many who feel that women deserve the right to work in any job where the qualifications are, or ought to be, based on ability, not sex. She was a pathfinder, a barrier-breaker...

To the skeptics, all she proved was her own instability. She showed the world a quitter and gave those who question the emotional capabilities of women who try to work in a "man's world" more ammunition to use in their resistance to equal rights for women.

Many people take their baseball games too seriously to pardon Mrs. Gera's erratic behavior. We only hope they do not equate her umpiring antics with the more serious and significant advances being made by women in business and politics.⁹⁸

Other papers trotted out the examples of Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby to exploit and distort their struggles in order to illustrate Gera's failures and place the blame for failing to single-handedly change society on her own weakness. *The Star Tribune* wrote, "We wish Mrs. Gera hadn't given up so quickly. After all, if Jackie Robinson had quit under pressure in his rookie season, think of what a serious blow this would have been to the efforts of black players to break the Jim Crow tradition in baseball."⁹⁹

There was no introspection, no contemplation over how baseball could be more welcoming to people who weren't allowed inside. Vinny DiTrani of *The Record*

was typical of those who brought up Robinson. “There are a lot of deep-rooted prejudices in baseball, just as in any institution. They have to be eliminated, of course, but it takes time.”¹⁰⁰

Time, it only takes time. And, apparently, a pioneer willing to endure abuse while time ticks by.

The week after her game, Gera finally spoke to the press. She gave her side of what happened in Geneva, from the umpires meeting to the confrontation with Campbell, and admitted she had planned to quit after the first game that day.

She tried to explain the exhaustion she felt and the way her fight against baseball had utterly worn her down. At one point she said, “If they don’t want women in baseball, women should not go to the games.”¹⁰¹ After having disparaged the women’s movement for so long, she had decided to become involved with the National Organization for Women (NOW). Her comment raised the question: was she calling for women to boycott baseball games? “Every woman should think for herself,” was all she said in reply.¹⁰²

“Baseball has fought me for years,” she said. “In my heart I feel they have truly gone out of their way to hurt me because I am a woman.”¹⁰³

“People have been calling me a quitter, but if I was a quitter I never would have fought it so long,” she declared. “I’m just frustrated and disappointed in baseball. My whole life has been baseball... I would have shined the ball players’ shoes if they had let me.”¹⁰⁴

“In a way, they succeeded in getting rid of me,” she said. “But in a way, I’ve succeeded too. I’ve broken the barrier. It can be done. I don’t care what people say now. People haven’t gone through what I’ve gone through. You have to experience it to understand it.”¹⁰⁵

WHAT CAME NEXT

Baseball may have been smug at running her out of the game, but even in the wake of Gera’s resignation from baseball there was simmering hope. The day before she became the first woman umpire in professional baseball history, Richard Nixon signed the Higher Education Amendments of 1972, which included the Title IX legislation that prohibited sex discrimination at publicly funded institutions, opening the door for more opportunities for girls and women to participate in sports.

That same weekend, the San Diego Padres had a woman manager in the dugout. Marcia Malkus was the high bidder in a charity auction, winning the chance to manage for one inning. The team scored two runs against the San Francisco Giants before she handed the team back to regular manager Don Zimmer. Zimmer

confirmed that Malkus actually made all the decisions during the first inning, saying, “Women usually do.”¹⁰⁶

Bernice Gera would likely disagree with that statement.

Two years later, in 1974, Lanny Moss was hired as the general manager of the Portland Mavericks, becoming the first woman general manager in professional baseball. Several other women were hired for the same position in her wake. Also, in 1974, lawsuits on behalf of Maria Pepe and Kim Green opened Little League Baseball to girls. In 1975, Christine Wren became the next woman to umpire in professional baseball, making her debut about three years after Gera’s game.

Wren was initially derisive of Gera, saying, “I have heard about this Bernice—I don’t know her last name and I don’t care to know. She dragged baseball through every court she could find and when she got a job she umpired one game and then quit. I feel I have a lot to overcome because of what she did.”¹⁰⁷

However, Wren eventually hit the same wall as Gera. “In a roundabout way, it was made clear to me there was no path (to the majors),” she told the *Seattle Times* in 2020. “They were afraid of it. Baseball was afraid of it. They were afraid it wouldn’t look good.”¹⁰⁸

For the men in baseball who were afraid an avalanche of women umpires would follow and feminize the sport, that hasn’t happened. After Wren, Pam Postema took a run at it. Postema spent 13 years umpiring in the minor leagues. She became the first woman to umpire a major league spring training game in 1982. In 1989, her career ended due to the time limits on umpires working without being called up to the major leagues. A handful of other women umpires followed, but only one, Ria Cortesio, made it as far as the AA level or as far as working a major league spring training game. Beating discrimination in baseball—and elsewhere—isn’t as easy as simply winning a court ruling.

LIFE AFTER UMPIRING

Gera always insisted that everything she did in baseball, she did to help children. Her last umpiring gig was not the painful game in Geneva. It was a charity softball game in Monticello, New York, that featured former Yankees outfielder Joe DiMaggio. It may have felt like a fitting end; she would never umpire in the major leagues, but she got to call balls and strikes for one of the all-time greats.

Her lifelong desire to work in baseball was finally fulfilled in March of 1975. The team right in her own backyard, the New York Mets, hired her for their promotion and sales department. She did community outreach work to draw people to the games.

After all those years of fighting to get into baseball, what was there to say about finally being part of a major league team? She said, simply, "It's a dream come true."¹⁰⁹

She worked for the Mets for several years before her position was eliminated. She and Steve moved to Pembroke Pines, Florida. She died there in 1992 from kidney cancer at the age of 61.¹¹⁰

The mixed legacy she left—having broken the legal barrier on one hand but being unable to go further on the other—means her contributions are viewed with caveats. It was easy for newspaper columnists to condemn her for quitting when they were part of the system that kept her from success.

Several months after her game, Nora Ephron interviewed her for a feature in *Esquire Magazine* that ran in January 1973. Ephron explored the unique burdens of being the first, of being a pioneer, writing:

I cannot understand any woman's wanting to be the first woman to do anything...I think of the ridicule and abuse that woman will undergo, of the loneliness she will suffer if she gets the job, of the role she will assume as a freak...of the derision and smug satisfaction that will follow if she makes a mistake, or breaks down under pressure, or quits.¹¹¹

Of all the perspectives and admonishments offered in the sports pages, it was Ephron who found the essential element that had been ignored in the first woman umpire in professional baseball. Breaking through the grandeur and worship we place upon our firsts, Ephron saw Gera beneath the legal battles, the symbolism, and the ugliness associated with quitting. Buried in the middle of her feature is a sentence that sums it all up: "Bernice Gera turned out to be only human, after all, which is not a luxury pioneers are allowed."¹¹²

And as a human, all Gera wanted was to belong in baseball. ■

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The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League

Frontiers and Femininity in America's Favorite Pastime

Jameson Cohen

The 2014 Little League World Series left baseball fans everywhere awestruck. With her 70-mph fastball, a 13-year-old girl by the name of Mo'ne Davis pitched a complete-game shutout to lead her team, the Taney Dragons, to a 4–0 victory. In doing so, she was the first girl ever to pitch a winning game in the Little League World Series, and soon afterward, she also became the first Little League athlete to appear on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. One might wonder, though, why the world of baseball was so shocked by Mo'ne Davis's shutout. The main reason is likely that Mo'ne's story was the first account of a female playing baseball that received so much recognition since *A League of Their Own* was released in 1992.

The popular film, starring Tom Hanks and Geena Davis, tells the story of a female professional baseball league that existed in the World War II and post-World War II eras. While the plot of the film was largely fictionalized, the league certainly was not. The league, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL), existed from 1943 through 1954 and was the first, and to date, only time that American women have ever had the chance to take part in a formal professional baseball league.¹ The AAGPBL provided the women who played in the league with several new rewards and opportunities both during their time in the league and afterwards. However, the success of the league, and therefore its ability to provide the players with such benefits, was predicated upon maintaining a feminine image consistent with the preferences of the dominant American culture at the time.

The AAGPBL was founded in 1943 by the owner of Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company and the National League's Chicago Cubs, Philip K. Wrigley.² The league was started when major league baseball rosters started rapidly losing players as they were drafted and sent to fight for the Allied forces in World War II. Wrigley, along with several other baseball executives, was determined to keep the sport alive, partly to keep fans content, but also to maintain revenue. He sent scouts around the United States and Canada to search for talented female softball players, and, in May 1943, the

AAGPBL officially began play. Games were played among four teams: the Kenosha Comets, Racine Belles, Rockford Peaches, and South Bend Blue Sox. The league grew tremendously in popularity—even after the former male baseball players returned to the game when the war ended in 1945—and continued to expand, then under the ownership of Wrigley's advertising executive, Arthur Meyerhoff. By the time the AAGPBL came to an end in 1954 due to economic difficulties, it had given over 600 women the novel opportunity to play professional baseball, it had welcomed nearly one million fans, and, at its peak, it had included teams in ten different Midwestern cities.

For the women of the AAGPBL, playing professional baseball provided various opportunities that were rarely available to women in the World War II and post-World War II eras. The players earned stable salaries that were significantly higher than those with working-class backgrounds had access to. With the financial stability their baseball earnings gave them, after the league ended, AAGPBL players were able to take advantage of new opportunities, including college or graduate education that gave them entry to more lucrative professions. Finally, playing in the AAGPBL gave these women a sense of empowerment and personal autonomy throughout both their years of playing and their lives afterward. In short, the AAGPBL created lasting changes in the courses of its players' lives.

Firstly, women who played in the AAGPBL were compensated at high rates. Throughout its existence, the AAGPBL needed to offer quite competitive salaries by the standards of the time in order to entice talented women to join and remain in the league, rather than return home or switch to a professional softball league such as Chicago's Metropolitan Girls Major Softball League. In her book, *The Origins and History of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League*, Merrie Fidler presents records from various league board meeting minutes, detailing the player salary ranges and league salary policies each year. These records indicate that players were compensated anywhere from \$40/week to \$85/week, and in some cases \$100/week.³

Fidler further discusses how, while teams were bound by the league to salary limits, at least in the league's later years, "some evidence suggest[s] that certain players received under-the-table payments for their play" in addition to their contract salary, which, in one particular case, reached an additional \$30/week.⁴ Admittedly, these contracts were worth far less than those of male major league baseball players, who, according to economist Michael Hauptert, were paid annual salaries of anywhere from the minimum of \$5,000 to \$65,000, and by the late 1940s, in Joe DiMaggio's case, \$100,000.⁵ However, the AAGPBL players still made far more than most non-athletic, skilled female workers and many skilled male workers, who, in 1944, made average weekly wages of \$31.21 and \$54.65, respectively.⁶ In fact, in a 2008 interview with historian Kat Williams, Maybelle Blair, who played in 1948, recalled, "...I made more money than my father, and that money changed my life and the lives of my family."⁷ Blair's appreciation of the impact her wages had on her life reflects how many AAGPBL players felt.

In addition to earning such relatively high salaries, the AAGPBL players retained their occupations much longer after the men returned from World War II than their non-athletic counterparts. During the war, with the disappearance of many skilled workers from the workforce, working- and middle-class women throughout the United States, including the AAGPBL players, took over various vacant, previously male-dominated occupations. For most women, though, the end of the war in 1945 and the influx of returning male veterans meant the end of these professional advances and a return to the low-paying, "pink-collar" jobs they had held prior to the war. According to historian Sharna Berger Gluck, women's pay dropped about 40 cents in the years following the war, from 85–90 cents per hour to 45–50 cents (nearly 50%) per hour.⁸ However, in *The All-American Girls After the AAGPBL*, Kat Williams argues that scholars of the postwar years have failed to realize how the AAGPBL players were largely exempt from this loss of work. In fact, she claims that the years following the war were when "the league saw its greatest growth," and her argument seems to be quite sound.⁹ In the postwar years, the league developed junior leagues for young girls throughout its host cities, and in 1946, the league acquired franchises for teams in Peoria, Illinois, and Muskegon, Michigan. According to the AAGPBL records, teams sometimes attracted two to three thousand fans per game in the three years after the war, and, in 1948, the league peaked in attendance, as ten teams

attracted 910,000 paid fans.¹⁰ The relative longevity of the AAGPBL, along with their comfortable salaries, provided the players an increased financial stability that would later allow them to pursue various other opportunities after their time in the league.

One of the most significant of these opportunities for the AAGPBL players was access to higher education. Because the women in the league could rely on good pay for a relatively long period of time, many of them could now afford further education, specifically a college and, in some cases, graduate education. In her article "Baseball, Conduct, and True Womanhood," Carol Pierman reports that, after their playing years, 35 percent of the AAGPBL players acquired a college degree and 14 percent went on to achieve a master's degree.¹¹ Granted, by today's standards, 35 percent may seem like quite a small number. However, according to Pierman, an average of only 8.2 percent of women in the AAGPBL players' generation were receiving college degrees, meaning that the percentage of players who completed a college education was more than four times that of their peers.¹² Moreover, as it often can today, access to higher education had lasting impacts on the women of the AAGPBL. As Williams writes, education allowed many of the players to "[move] from being uneducated and working class to educated and middle class."¹³

One can further see just how important education was for a woman at the time through the words of the players themselves. Delores Brumfield White, who played for seven years and later went on to receive a doctorate, shared in an interview, "[education] was so important to a lot of the girls who played in the league," and, "if it had not been for that opportunity [to play baseball], there would not have been a college education for many of us."¹⁴ Without baseball, the doors to higher education, and then various professional achievements, would never have opened.

Many of the AAGPBL players were able to use their educations to later earn professional positions that allowed their financial stability to continue beyond their baseball careers. As today, most lucrative jobs in the workforce required workers to have at least a bachelor's, and in some cases, a graduate degree in their particular field. Because so few women at the time were receiving college degrees, many of these positions were reserved for men. However, many of the AAGPBL players were able to make their way into various male-dominated industries after they had finished playing that likely would not have been available to them otherwise. These former players became lawyers, managers, college professors, doctors, and so much

more. According to Pierman, some of the league members made it into top positions in the medical field, with five of them becoming doctors and two, dentists.¹⁵ As one might expect, professions in law, medicine, business, et cetera, provided the women who held them with a sense of economic empowerment, similar to that they had felt as professional athletes. At another point in her interview with Williams, Blair articulates this feeling of autonomy and its significance to the former players: "I was the first woman in charge of a division at Northrup Aircraft and that not only made me proud but gave me independence. Nothing was more important than that."¹⁶ In addition to earning good wages in their professions after baseball, the women of the AAGPBL were proud trailblazers in many of their industries and positions. Their occupations, largely made possible by their baseball careers, allowed them to remain uniquely financially independent beyond their time in the league.

Another important benefit was a sense of personal independence. As Williams writes, "[n]othing challenges the presumptive dominance of masculinity more than female baseball players."¹⁷ The simple notion of being the first women to play professional baseball provided the members of the league with a lasting sense of empowerment. One particularly interesting study, conducted by historians Brenda Wilson and James Skipper in 1990, discusses this idea of autonomy that resulted from participation in the AAGPBL through the frequency of nicknames in the league. In this study, Wilson and Skipper report that 35.6 percent of the AAGPBL players had nicknames during their career, and they indicate that, at the time, male and female baseball players had a similar nickname prevalence. They suggest that nicknames are given by people in power, and, as a result, conclude that the AAGPBL players were empowered by their time as professional baseball players.¹⁸ The opportunity to break the sex barrier in professional baseball provided the women of the AAGPBL with a special sense of self-confidence and autonomy to which they held on long after their baseball careers were over.

One of the most common ways in which the league members expressed their independence beyond their playing careers was through a sense of marital autonomy. At the time in which the AAGPBL existed, marriage, or more specifically heterosexual marriage, was a heavily emphasized institution. According to the National Center for Family & Marriage Research, from 1880 to 2011, the rate of marriage among women was highest in 1950 at approximately 65 percent.¹⁹ However, only about 45 percent of former AAGPBL

players who responded to a National Baseball Hall of Fame Library survey reported to have married.²⁰ Furthermore, in interviews with Williams, when asked about their desire to get married, former players' responses included, "Hell no," "No way," and, "Well, if I had to have a husband, I'd just as soon he was in another state."²¹ These strong aversions to marriage display the personal autonomy that most AAGPBL players felt. While several players did marry, there appears to not have been the feeling of necessity, or even pressure, among the AAGPBL players to marry that was so common among women at the time.

However, while the AAGPBL was indeed quite successful and, as a result, was able to provide its players with many new rewards, the league's success was dependent upon maintaining an acceptable public image of femininity. When the league was created, Wrigley insisted on marketing the AAGPBL players' femininity on an equal, if not greater, plane with their athletic ability. He did so largely to avoid the negative image associated with female softball players at the time. Despite the decent popularity of women's softball before the AAGPBL was founded, in the popular press, softball players were often portrayed as, in the words of historian Gai Ingham Berlage, "masculine, physical freaks or lesbians."²² Aware of how important public acceptance would be to the league's success, Wrigley and his fellow executives strived to establish an image as far from the perception of softball as possible and, in doing so, make the AAGPBL far more popular than professional softball. According to an associate of Wrigley's, he expected the AAGPBL players to exhibit, "the highest ideals of womanhood."²³ In order to accomplish these goals, Wrigley and the other members of the league's leadership followed several specific principles in their governance of the league, such as excluding players based on race and perceived masculine appearance, using traditionally-feminine uniforms and team names, requiring players to attend charm school, and implementing a strict player code of conduct. The league marketed their players as feminine above all else and therefore to assure its success in the social climate of the 1940s and 1950s.

One of the clear ways in which Wrigley and his fellow executives worked to promote the acceptable image of femininity at the time was by preventing women of color, particularly black women, from playing. From its outset to its eventual demise, the AAGPBL excluded African American women from joining the league, even though many already had playing experience, either in professional softball leagues or, in a few cases, alongside men in the Negro Leagues. In 1948, as

writer Jean Hastings Ardell describes in *Breaking into Baseball*, a woman named Toni Stone requested a try-out with the AAGPBL's Chicago Colleens. After not hearing back for a while, she went on to play in the Negro American League for several years, and despite her doing quite well playing among men, the AAGPBL never reached out.²⁴ Even after the National League began racial integration with the Dodgers' signing of Jackie Robinson in 1945, the AAGPBL continued to exclude black women from playing. The closest the league ever came to the inclusion of black players was in 1951, when, as Carol Pierman discusses, they allowed two black women to practice with the South Bend Blue Sox, but neither player was ever actually given a contract.²⁵ Throughout the league's existence, the only women of color who were ever allowed to join the AAGPBL were "a few light-skinned Cuban ballplayers," while, continually, "darker-skinned, home-grown talents...were ignored."²⁶ The exclusion of African-American women and most other women of color from the AAGPBL indicates that whiteness was part of the acceptable image of femininity used by the AAGPBL executives.

The AAGPBL also excluded women from the league whose physical appearances were deemed too masculine. To avoid the reputation of professional softball, league officials would often cut current players or

disregard talented prospective players simply for a supposedly masculine physical attribute. One instance of this was when, according to Susan K. Cahn's book *Coming on Strong*, Josephine D'Angelo was cut from the Blue Sox roster in the middle of her second season because she got too short of a haircut.²⁷ Another striking example occurred when, as Pierman discusses, sisters Frieda and Olympia Savona, softball players for the Jax Brewing Company team in New Orleans, were overlooked by the AAGPBL for several years because of their large, masculine build.²⁸ With Olympia having been described in a 1942 *Saturday Evening Post* article by Robert M. Yoder as "built like a football halfback," but still "frail compared to Miss Frieda," the Savona sisters were prime examples of softball players who were negatively perceived as overly masculine.²⁹ The AAGPBL never offered the sisters a place in the league, despite their being so talented that, in the same 1942 article, Yoder also claimed that "had the flighty little genes produced a Luigi and Giovanni instead of an Olympia and Frieda, the name 'Savona' might be as well-known as 'DiMaggio.'"³⁰ Their story, along with those of several other women, demonstrates clearly how, feminine image took precedence over athletic ability when it came to scouting for the AAGPBL.

The AAGPBL continued to control the appearance of their players after they had been signed to the league by designing traditionally feminine uniforms for them to wear in games. To distinguish themselves from the softball teams that wore shorts or pants, the AAGPBL designed uniforms that consisted of a one-piece dress with a short, flared skirt and satin shorts below the dress. The uniforms were modeled off the uniforms of other sports that included women, like figure skating, tennis, and field hockey.³¹ As one might expect, these uniforms were quite impractical for baseball. When the players would slide, their skirts would fail to protect them, and they would frequently get abrasions they referred to as "strawberries." Additionally, as former player Dottie Schroeder recounted in an interview, oftentimes, "pitchers would do the wind-mill wind-ups and the skirts would get in the way."³² Wrigley and his fellow executives wanted traditional women first, athletes second.

The AAGPBL also used the team names to project a traditional female stereotype. As scholarly studies have discussed, femininity in athletics can often be reinforced through team names with feminine markings.³³ Throughout the league's existence, the executives chose team names that were, as professor Laura Kenow writes, "'dignified', but also perpetuated the image of femininity."³⁴ In fact, eight of the twelve team names



Alice Haylett of the Grand Rapids Chicks.

used at some time by the AAGPBL, namely the Peaches, Belles, Chicks, Millerettes, Daisies, Lassies, Colleens, and Sallies, appear to be quite deliberately feminine. While this tactic may seem simple at first, when one considers how frequently the team names would have been used, particularly in articles and the score sections of newspapers, on the scoreboards, in conversations about the games, and in various other situations it proves to be quite effective. Feminine team names ensured that baseball fans everywhere instinctively associated the league with the perception of proper womanhood.

The AAGPBL also worked to promote the femininity of their players off the field by requiring players to attend charm school and beauty training. In 1943, Wrigley contracted Helena Rubinstein's Gold Coast Salon to operate a charm school for the players, and in 1944 he switched to the Ruth Tiffany School. The charm schools taught the players about, as a *Time* magazine article put it, "makeup, posture, and other whatnots usually neglected by lady athletes."³⁵ They would teach the players the ladylike way to get in and out of a car, how to enunciate properly, and even how to charm a date.³⁶ For the first few years of the league, players were required to attend charm school both during spring training and in the regular season after practices and games. Although official charm school was discontinued after two seasons, the league still enforced the principles. According to another essay by Pierman, the league issued players an eleven-page guide entitled "A Guide for All American Girls: How to Look Better, Feel Better, Be More Popular," along with an extensive beauty kit.³⁷ This guide included specific beauty instructions, including "After the Game" and "Morning and Night" beauty routines, and rules and suggestions about what clothing to wear in public, proper etiquette and manners, tone of voice, and more.³⁸ As Pierman also points out, some players believed charm school to be beneficial because it taught them how to "survive in a new social class," the teachings of charm school gave these women little to no freedom of expression, as they were forced to look and act like the traditional, "all-American" woman.³⁹

The final method through which the AAGPBL controlled the appearance of its players off the field was a strictly enforced code of conduct. These rules of conduct lasted and remained largely unmodified throughout the league's entire existence. There were fifteen rules in the code of conduct. The players were always to wear feminine attire when not playing baseball, "boyish bobs" were not permissible haircuts, and drinking and smoking were not allowed in public.⁴⁰ The



THE RUCKER ARCHIVE/SABR

Edythe Perlick of the Racine Belles.

AAGPBL took extensive measures to enforce these rules. At the end of the code of conduct, in capital letters, was the penalty for breaking a rule, namely that "fines of five dollars for first offense, ten dollars for second offense, and suspension for third, will automatically be imposed."⁴¹ These punishments were quite harsh, especially considering that \$5 and \$10 fines could be up to a tenth or more of the players' weekly salaries, and, were a player to be suspended from the league, they would lose access to any salary at all. Furthermore, every AAGPBL team had a chaperone, who, in addition to handling several administrative team duties, was meant to supervise the players. Chaperones would make sure players adhered to rules like curfew and the dress code, and they would even approve players' dates. As former chaperone Helen Hannah Campbell wrote, her job was largely to make sure the "girls presented the right public image at all times."⁴²

Although the AAGPBL's efforts to promote their players as traditionally feminine were seen as key parts of the league's success by Wrigley and other league executives, those efforts did not prevent the league's eventual 1954 demise. Right around the end of the 1940s, a wide increase in postwar conservative attitudes among the dominant American population began to occur. At about the same time, in 1950, the league's individual franchise owners bought out Arthur Meyerhoff and instituted several structural changes that, while meant to increase revenues, actually led to large drops in fan attendance. (It is worth noting that men's

professional baseball also saw attendance drop at this time.) Some AAGPBL team owners began organizing exhibitions against men's teams, which, as Williams writes, "put the league in direct competition with men, thereby altering the image of the women's league."⁴³ It no longer mattered how feminine the league tried to make their players appear. The idea that the AAGPBL players could play on the same field as men bothered fans and led them to stop attending games. Additionally, as Cahn describes, "virulent homophobia" around women in previously-masculine activities, like baseball, "accompanied the conservative shift in gender roles" of the late 1940s and early 1950s.⁴⁴ As a result, the league's efforts to "combine sport and femininity...were at odds with the cultural current."⁴⁵ Negative views of women in baseball spread quickly, and many fans stopped coming to games. Moreover, the switch to individual team ownership meant that publicity, promotion, and player recruitment were no longer centralized for the league, and less effective ownership led to a further loss in fans. As attendance and revenues began to fall in the early 1950s, the league became less alluring to players, and some even returned to playing softball. Teams rapidly began to close down operations each year until, at the end of the 1954 season, only five teams remained, and the AAGPBL officially shut down.

Unfortunately, although the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was far more successful than Philip Wrigley would have ever imagined in terms of popularity during its 12-year run, there has yet to be another attempt as successful at providing American women with professional baseball opportunities. Following the end of the AAGPBL in 1954, women largely disappeared from professional and even much of amateur and youth baseball. While there were several attempts to revive women's baseball in the United States, many of them were prevented by baseball officials. In 1984, former Atlanta Braves executive Bob Hope (not the famous comedian) created a female minor league team called the Florida Sun Sox and tried to enter the Class A Florida State League, but the league did not allow him to do so. Later, in 1988, Darlene Mehrer founded the American Women's Baseball Association in Chicago, and while she fielded a couple teams in Chicago, the league was never much more than a "park" league. Dozens of other regional women's park leagues have existed in the US and Canada. Impresarios such as Nick Lopardo and John Stabile, the owners of independent Can-Am League teams, attempted to field a semi-professional women's league known as the North American Women's Baseball League (NAWBL) from 2003–08, but the league

ultimately folded. Today, women in the United States still lack opportunities to play baseball and, in most cases, talented young girls interested in playing baseball end up having to play softball. Mo'ne Davis, despite being such an incredible Little League pitcher, was no exception. While she stuck to baseball (along with soccer and basketball) for a while after her success in Little League, today, she plays second base on Hampton University's softball team (having changed positions because of how different the pitching motion in baseball is from that in softball).

One might wonder why it has been so difficult for women to find opportunities in baseball, especially considering how successful the AAGPBL was during and after World War II. It seems odd that, since the AAGPBL, there has not been another successful professional women's league in the United States. Cahn presents a compelling argument as to why that is, in fact, directly connected to the AAGPBL. She claims that Wrigley and the AAGPBL executives' efforts to market femininity "blunted the challenge that women's baseball posed to the gender arrangements of American society."⁴⁶ In other words, the AAGPBL's principles of promoting their players' femininity entrenched a belief that only white women who appeared and acted "all-American" could play baseball and therefore lessened the effect the league might have had on integrating women into baseball. Consequently, while far fewer Americans today hold the conservative views about gender roles of the 1950s that led to the end of the AAGPBL, it seems that the effect of these views has lasted into today. The reason why the AAGPBL came to an end may just be the same reason why women today have so few opportunities to play baseball.

However, while there are still few ways in which women can play baseball, there has been some significant progress in expanding women's baseball. When *A League of Their Own* was released, many Americans gained new interest in women's baseball. In 1994, Hope tried again to give women a chance at professional baseball and, with financial support from Coors Brewing Company, created a team called the Colorado Silver Bullets. This team was far more successful than the Sun Sox and played for four years against men's amateur teams across the country. In 2004, the USA Baseball Women's National Team was established and is still active today as an opportunity for women with a desire to play baseball to try to do so at a high level. In 2010, Justine Siegal, the first woman to coach a men's professional baseball team, founded Baseball For All, a non-profit dedicated to providing girls with opportunities to coach and play. In 2016, when she

was unable to find an all-girls baseball league in Toronto for her daughter, Dana Bookman started Toronto Girls Baseball, the only all-girls league in Canada. She initially recruited 42 girls to play for four teams, but the league soon grew to 350 girls with four teams and four ballparks throughout Toronto. She has since founded leagues in Manitoba and Nova Scotia and created the Canadian Women's Baseball Association, which is still active today. In 2019, alumnae of the AAGPBL itself created American Girls Baseball, a non-profit that organizes camps, clinics, and other events to give women the chance to play baseball from a young age. Finally, in 2020, *A Secret Love*, a Netflix documentary about the lasting lesbian relationship, which was kept secret until recently, between Pat Henschel and former AAGPBL player Terry Donahue, was released. Hopefully, in addition to continuing the work of *A League of Their Own* in widely portraying women in baseball to the public, this documentary will inspire young female ballplayers and show them that baseball should be available to everyone.

And in 2021, Amazon Studios began filming a new television series "reboot" of *A League of Their Own*, expected to begin streaming in late 2022. As the women of the AAGPBL have demonstrated, professional baseball has the ability to provide women with so many educational, financial, personal, and other benefits. While there still is no formal professional baseball league for women in the United States, there has been much inspiring progress, including a professional league in Japan. One can only hope that this progress is headed in the direction of a professional women's league so that, like various other popular sports, professional baseball, and all the rewards that can result from it, can once again be available to women around the country, and the world, who are passionate about baseball. ■

Notes

1. At different points in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League's existence, the league adopted several different names. In 1943, the league was founded as the All-American Girls Softball League. About halfway through the 1943 season, the league's board of trustees changed its name to All-American Girls Baseball League (AAGBBL) to signify that it was different from softball. At the end of the 1943 season, the name changed again, this time to the All-American Girls Professional Ball League (AAGPBL), which remained the title until 1945, when AAGBBL again became the league's name and remained the name until 1950. In 1950, the name officially changed one last time to American Girls Baseball League (AGBL), but popularly remained AAGBBL. For lack of confusion, hereafter in this paper, the league will be interchangeably referred to as "the league," "the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League," and, "the AAGPBL," which is how most scholars, the league's Players Association, and the National Baseball Hall of Fame refer to it. Moreover, out of all the previous names, AAGPBL most accurately recognizes what the league was—a women's professional baseball league.
2. While the AAGPBL was the first professional baseball league, there had already been several instances of women playing baseball, both at women's colleges and on informal professional teams. The first two organized all-female baseball teams were formed at Vassar College (an all-female college until 1969) in 1866. Soon after, teams also arose at other women's colleges, including Smith, Wellesley, and Mount Holyoke. There were also several semi-professional and professional teams that were begun beyond college. These included the Philadelphia Dolly Vardens, an all-black female team formed in 1867, the so-called Blondes and Brunettes, who, in 1875, played against each other for the first time in Springfield, Illinois, and several successful "barnstorming" teams, like the Boston Bloomer girls, who were popular beginning in the 1880s and 1890s and through the 1930s and would travel around the country playing exhibitions against local men's and women's teams. However, these teams rarely played one another and never formed a formal women's professional league like the AAGPBL.
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17. Williams, 12.
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19. Julissa Cruz, "Marriage: More than a Century of Change," National Center for Family & Marriage Research, Bowling Green State University, 2013, accessed March 12, 2022. <http://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/BGSU/college-of-arts-and-sciences/NCFMR/documents/FP/FP-13-13.pdf>
20. Pierman, 78.
21. Williams, 23.
22. Gai Ingham Berlage, *Women in Baseball: The Forgotten History*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 34.
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24. Jean Hastings Ardell, *Breaking into Baseball: Women and the National Pastime* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 113.
25. Pierman, 73.
26. Ardell, 113.
27. Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 186.

28. Pierman, 72.
 29. Robert M. Yoder, "Miss Casey at the Bat," *Saturday Evening Post*, August 22, 1942, 48.
 30. Yoder, 48. The last name "DiMaggio" is a reference to Joe and Dom DiMaggio who were, like the Savonas, talented baseball-playing siblings. Joe played for the New York Yankees for 13 years in the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s, while Dom played for the Boston Red Sox between 1940 and 1953.
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Four Girls in Spring 1974

The First Foot-Soldiers of Female Inclusion in Little League Baseball

Charlie Bevis

The names of Jenny Fulle, Amy Dickinson, Elizabeth Osder, and Janine Cinsneruli are rarely, if ever, mentioned in the existing literature regarding the integration of female ballplayers into Little League Baseball. These four girls were pioneers on the ground in the first wave of judicially authorized females to play in the renowned youth baseball organization that, at the time, was only open to 8-to-12-year-old boys.¹

Fulle, Dickinson, Osder, and Cinsneruli were among the dozens of aspiring preteen female baseball players in Spring 1974 who experienced firsthand the tribulations of cracking the all-boy barrier that had been national policy in Little League Baseball since 1951. These four girls provide real-world context to the principle-based legal ruling in New Jersey that opened the door to sex integration on March 29, 1974. That ruling ignited raging ideological battles in local leagues across the country until the national office of Little League Baseball consented on June 12, 1974, to allow girls and boys to compete together.

These early foot-soldiers were a trial group for Little League sex integration. They put into live action the dry legal arguments to demonstrate that female inclusion could occur without negative consequences to athletic competition or societal mores. These efforts in Spring 1974 helped to accelerate the eradication of sex discrimination, resulting in a timeline of ten weeks rather than the months or years that an absolute focus on legal arguments could have taken to obliterate this barrier in youth baseball.

What distinguishes Fulle, Dickinson, Osder, and Cinsneruli from the other 1974 foot-soldiers is the deeper historical record of their experience, which extends beyond a short snippet in 1974 newspaper articles that most of their compatriots typically received. The stories of these four girls have been pieced together in this article not only from material contained in contemporaneous newspaper accounts (by both national wire services and local writers), but also from archival images, periodical articles during the ensuing two decades, and recently published retrospective thoughts as an adult.

BACKGROUND ON EARLY FEMALE PIONEERS

History has largely focused on Kathryn Johnston and Maria Pepe as the pioneers of Little League sex integration. Their actions provided a foundation for the landmark 1974 legal decision, thirty-five years following the establishment of Little League Baseball in 1939.

Johnston was the first girl to appear in an official Little League baseball game. Playing in 1950 for the King's Dairy team in Corning, New York, she disguised herself as a boy and went by the nickname "Tubby." In 1951 the national office of Little League Baseball promulgated its all-boy, sex-exclusionary rule stipulating that "girls are not eligible under any conditions," precipitated by its discovery of Johnston's participation.²

The bedrock principle underlying the barring of female players, as captured in the existing literature, was the preservation of Little League's perceived role "in the power of sport to shape society and groom males for leadership roles in political, business, and social realms." This was a continuation of the male-focused patriarchal vision of America, with its preconceived notions of a subservient feminine role and masculine role in sports, especially the one termed the national pastime. "It was not surprising that the organization battled the admission of girls," Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano observed in *Playing with the Boys: Why Separate Is Not Equal in Sports*. "But it was surprising how little the actual fight had to do with athletic ability and how much it had to do with preserving male power and tradition."³

In 1964, Little League Baseball, originally incorporated in the state of New York, was granted a federal charter as a non-profit corporation through a federal law passed by Congress. The charter included the following corporate objective beyond imparting baseball skills: "assist boys in developing qualities of citizenship, sportsmanship, and manhood." This clause re-enforced the 1951 rule prohibiting girls and firmly established the organization as an all-male bastion. As Marilyn Cohen noted in *No Girls in the Clubhouse: The Exclusion of Women from Baseball*, before 1974, under the guise of this federal charter, "it was the standard

practice of Little League Headquarters to threaten the revocation of the charter of any local league allowing girls to play.” In 1973, the organization successfully used this tactic in court to revoke the charter of a league in Ypsilanti, Michigan, that had allowed Carolyn King to be a player.⁴

Maria Pepe inspired the New Jersey litigation that ultimately led to the dismantling of the Little League sex barrier. In 1972 she participated in the Little League tryouts in Hoboken, New Jersey, acknowledging she was female, and was selected to play for the Young Democrats team. After playing in three games, Pepe was dismissed from the team after the national office of Little League Baseball employed its tried-and-true threat of charter revocation to influence local officials to drop Pepe from the league.⁵

In May 1973, the National Organization of Women (NOW) pursued Maria’s legal case by filing a complaint with the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights. NOW argued that Little League Baseball was a public accommodation and thus could not discriminate on the basis of sex. Little League Baseball defended its position by focusing on a two-pronged argument: (1) the physical difference between boys and girls, which would result in injury to girls, and (2) its federal charter that required a single-sex program for the betterment of boys.⁶

On November 7, 1973, an examination officer in the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights dismissed Little League Baseball’s arguments and ruled that local leagues in New Jersey had to accept girls. Little League Baseball exercised its right to appeal to the Appellate Division of the New Jersey Superior Court, which on March 29, 1974, upheld the ruling of the Division on Civil Rights. These legal decisions enabled girls in New Jersey to officially participate in baseball tryouts in Little League during Spring 1974, and set the stage for court cases in other jurisdictions across the country.⁷

News coverage of girls at baseball tryouts initially focused on Hoboken, the hometown of Maria Pepe, now 14 years old and ineligible for Little League, where fifty girls reportedly tried out in late March. A photographer captured the image of five girls with baseball gloves sitting underneath a Hoboken Little League sign as they awaited tryouts. That picture is now in the Library of Congress photo archive.⁸

During the ten-week period following the March 29 decision, pending further legal appeal by Little League Baseball, several local leagues nationwide accepted girls under court order. The following sections detail the stories of Fulle, Dickinson, Osder, and Cinsneruli, amplified by long-forgotten newspaper reports of their youth and more recent life-lesson reflections as an

adult. Their baseball experiences also illustrate the endemic issues noted above that precluded rapid expansion of female inclusion during the next several decades.

JENNY FULLE IN CALIFORNIA

On April 10, 1974, reporters from San Francisco-area newspapers and national wire services gathered to watch 11-year-old Jenny Fulle at her first baseball practice in the Mill Valley Little League, after a judge signed a court order preventing the league from keeping her out of the league. Mill Valley is located in suburban Marin County across the bay from San Francisco.

As reported in her local newspaper, the *Daily Independent Journal*, Fulle “finally took her place on a league team yesterday and began batting balls over her teammates’ heads.” Most of her teammates on the Bears team seemed satisfied with her progress as a ballplayer. “I thought we’d have a crappy girl, but she’s good,” one boy commented. Because she was joining the league late, she couldn’t try out for the major-league division. “But I’m happy being on a minor-league team,” Fulle said. “And I’m glad to get to play at least one season with the Little League.” She would turn 12 years old that summer and not be eligible to play the following year.⁹

Both Associated Press and United Press International released a photo of Fulle, dressed in bell-bottom jeans and swinging a bat, which newspapers nationwide printed. She perhaps would have received greater acclaim for her effort in baseball history had her name not been misspelled as Jenny Sulle in the caption to the wire-service photograph. Unfortunately, it was not the first time that the wire services bungled the spelling of her surname.¹⁰

The press had been interested in her story since 1973 when Jenny received a reply to her letter to President Nixon that had complained about sex discrimination, after she had been turned away from Little League tryouts in 1972. Fulle had played in pickup baseball games for several years with the boys in her neighborhood and naturally just assumed she could sign up to play in the local organized league.

“Jenny Fulle [sic], a 10-year-old fifth grader from Mill Valley, California, got so peeved she wrote a letter to the White House,” the Associated Press wrote about Fulle’s situation, misspelling her last name. The Department of Justice replied to Jenny, saying it was “preparing guidelines to handle this type of discrimination.” As Fulle told the AP reporter, “It made me so mad. There are lots of girls who want to play and lots of boys who want us to play.” Fulle punctuated her thoughts by

adding, “I agree with almost everything I know about women’s lib.”¹¹

The local chapter of NOW pushed Fulle’s case with the Mill Valley City Council, arguing that the Little League should be stopped from using a public baseball facility for its games unless girls were allowed to play and thus end its sex discrimination. While the City Council initially concurred, later in 1973 it reversed its decision after Little League Baseball threatened to revoke the league’s charter, which councilmen argued would deprive 350 boys of playing baseball in 1974. “They shouldn’t have backed down on the decision. I didn’t like it,” Fulle told a reporter from the local *Daily Independent Journal*. “Last spring I watched a lot of games. Maybe I’ll do the same thing this spring. And after I turn 12 they might let me be umpire.”¹²

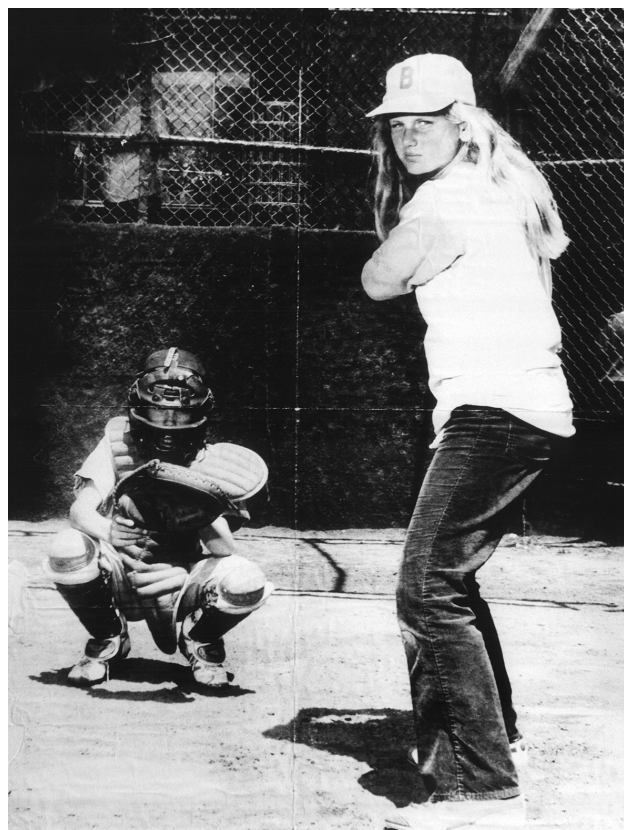
Years later, Fulle gave an extensive oral history interview in June 2017 to add some color to the facts of her effort to introduce female inclusion into Little League in Mill Valley. As she recounted, the City Council meetings had their ugly moments, with hecklers shouting nasty statements about Fulle, and she was teased by some of her classmates. But the ACLU then took her case to federal court, where she received a favorable ruling in April 1974. After her one year of Little League, Fulle played in the local Babe Ruth League in 1975 before moving on to girls-only softball, after inspiring a number of girls in Mill Valley to pursue baseball in Little League.¹³

In interviews she gave as an adult, Fulle was sanguine about her baseball adventure. “I definitely loved playing, and at a young age, having that victory set me up to break through roadblocks for the rest of my life and to believe that anything is possible.” Since her adult occupation was film executive, Fulle expressed her thoughts about a certain youth-baseball movie. “The *Bad News Bears* came out a few years later, and I always thought, OK, that’s not fair, I played for the [Mill Valley] Bears,” she jokingly recalled. “I thought the Tatum O’Neal character should have been me.”¹⁴

Fulle may be the only sex-integration foot-soldier from 1974 with a monument erected to commemorate her feat. In 2017 a plaque was embedded in a boulder at the public park in Mill Valley where she had played baseball. The first sentence of the plaque reads: “On this field on April 20, 1974, Jenny Fulle became the first girl across America to officially play in Little League.”¹⁵

AMY DICKINSON IN NEW JERSEY

In the earliest days of the 1974 Little League season in Tenafly, New Jersey, two New York City newspapers published photographs of nine-year-old Amy Dickinson.



JENNY FULLE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Jenny Fulle went on to play baseball in Babe Ruth League after playing in the Little League baseball program.

She was shown swinging a baseball bat in the *New York Daily News* and standing beside her much shorter teammates in *The New York Times*.¹⁶

At the Tenafly tryout session, 27 girls and 349 boys displayed their batting and fielding skills indoors to team coaches. “There was a smothered chuckle from the gym stage when Amy Dickinson, a 9-year-old green-eyed redhead, punched her fist into a mitt and easily caught the high and low ones sent her way,” the *Daily News* reported. “It was nothin’ really,” Dickinson said afterward. “I just wanted to play and I play with boys all the time, anyway.”¹⁷

Dickinson stood out among the 150 kids assigned to a minor-league team, as the first draft choice by team coaches. “She was superior to all the boys,” one coach told the *New York Times* reporter. Later in the season, Dickinson said that most of the boys on her team “don’t really care” about whether girls play, adding that “most of them don’t pay any attention.”¹⁸

She was a good baseball player, an all-star for three years at the minor-league level. In 1976 she had a 4–2 record as a starting pitcher and compiled a .382 batting average as a hitter. However, Dickinson had concerns about moving up to the major-league level as a 12-year-old in her final year of eligibility.¹⁹

The concerns were not just with baseball skills, though, that led Dickinson to her second thoughts about baseball. “She doesn’t want to be a tomboy anymore and may well hang up her sneakers,” Jane Leavy wrote about Dickinson in a 1977 article in *women-Sports* magazine, excerpts of which were printed nationwide in wire-service newspaper articles. “She wants boys to think of her as a pretty little girl, rather than a no-hit pitcher. She is worried that if she is too good a ball player, those same boys won’t think of her as a girl.”²⁰

Dickinson had bittersweet memories of her Little League experience, as she said in an interview in 1989 upon the fifteenth anniversary of female inclusion in Little League. “I liked the game very much. But in retrospect, I don’t think I had such a good time,” she said. “The first time I saw myself on the TV news, I started to cry. I didn’t want all the attention.”²¹

In 2004, Dickinson continued to be remembered for her selection as a top draft choice in 1974, at the death of her Little League coach, Donald Miller. “Mr. Miller broke an unwritten rule by choosing Amy Dickinson, but not because he was an activist,” Miller’s son noted in an obituary. “He did it because she could hit. He realized it was a big deal, but he was focused on her hitting. It worked out great. He didn’t lose many games.” Dickinson added: “I know he got a lot of guff for picking me. But he was very proud of that. I think he kept the picture of us in the newspaper hanging in his bakery. He was very modern-minded.”²²

ELIZABETH OSDER IN NEW JERSEY

On April 21, 1974, the *New York Daily News* published on its front page a photograph of nine-year-old Elizabeth “Bitsy” Osder standing in the batter’s box at the season-opening Little League game in Englewood, New Jersey. Osder’s image shared the front page of the tabloid newspaper with the banner headline “A New Hearst Kidnap Mystery,” referring to millionaire heiress Patty Hearst and her unclear role in a recent bank robbery, either as coerced hostage or knowing participant with her kidnappers.²³

An article about Osder’s play during that game appeared on page 3 of the *Daily News*. Bitsy, “who, to her chagrin, also is known as Elizabeth,” showed her spunk on the ball field, not intimidated by being the only girl on the field in the otherwise all-male cast of Little League. After striking out in her first at-bat, she slammed down her bat in disgust, but she then drew a walk in her next at-bat and scored a run. In the dugout, “Bitsy was all mouth, first complaining of a cramped arm, then challenging the umpire’s calls, and finally

giving instructions to fielders.” Despite her exuberance, the *Daily News* reporter observed that the coaches and players openly accepted Osder as a teammate.²⁴

Daily News photographer Bill Stahl Jr. snapped several pictures of Osder as second baseman in the field, as well as other photos of her in the batter’s box. Two more of Stahl’s photographs of Bitsy from that game accompanied the *Daily News* article, which were reproduced in newspapers nationwide a few days later, providing a small degree of national acclaim for young Bitsy.²⁵

What makes these photos from April 21, 1974, most remarkable, though, is their current existence online (along with several other photos from that day) in the extensive Getty Images archive. These photos are the sharpest images publicly accessible for one of the first wave of girls to play baseball in Little League during 1974.²⁶

In 1975, 10-year-old Osder moved up from the minors to play on a team in the major-league division. “I’m glad I’m in the majors, but I’ll probably be benched a lot more,” she told a *Daily News* reporter. “I like second base, but I don’t know where I’ll play this year,” she added. The reporter termed Osder’s demeanor in the interview as “total professionalism.”²⁷

The front-page photograph in 1974 ironically inspired Osder’s career choice as a website designer. “Osder became fascinated with the process of how that image could be transmitted and published in such a short period of time,” Christopher Harper wrote in the 1998 book *And That’s the Way It Will Be: News and Information in a Digital World*. Osder went on to study photography in college and deploy her creative juices in designing web sites in the then-revolutionary world of the Internet.²⁸

As for her four years of Little League, “It was the first big thing in my life I had really wanted to do, and no one said ‘no, you can’t,’” Osder explained in an interview in 2000 as an adult. “I loved baseball, and had the answer been ‘no,’ I think it would have changed my take on life. Now, I never approach anything with the assumption that the answer will be no.”²⁹

“It gave me a love for team sports and the camaraderie of teammates,” she recalled in a 2021 interview. “There were no conflicts with my playing and my team celebrated our little bit of celebrity status together and has stayed close over the years. Teamwork has always been the heart of my work and sense of community, and it was cemented in my experience in Little League.”³⁰

JANINE CINSERULI IN MASSACHUSETTS

On May 19, 1974, 10-year-old Janine Cinsneruli was finally granted a tryout for the Little League in Peabody, Massachusetts, a suburban town thirteen miles north of Boston. Although Cinsneruli “missed the first five pitches thrown to her,” the *Boston Globe* reported that she “hit the next ten pitches, and impressed one coach, who called her ‘the best performer on the field.’”³¹

Cinsneruli’s tryout was the culmination of a month-long legal wrangle, following the rejection of her application by the Peabody Little League based on her sex. “I didn’t think I was doing any trailblazing at 10 years old,” she recalled in an interview in 2014 as an adult. “But the thing that threw me the most was when I went to sign up and a guy said, ‘You can’t play,’ and I said, ‘Why?’ and he said, ‘Because you’re a girl.’ I was not that smart or worldly, but I knew right then it was the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of. I remember I said, ‘But I can play, I’m really good.’”³²

The ACLU worked with her parents to take her case to court and obtained a temporary restraining order. Amid extensive coverage by the *Boston Globe* and other newspapers in New England, the Peabody Little League resisted for weeks. In mid-May the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination ruled that

the Peabody Little League was a place of public accommodation and therefore could not legally exercise sex discrimination. Cinsneruli testified at the MCAD hearing that she “sincerely desired to play baseball on Little League teams” because baseball was her sport and she flatly rejected the idea of a “separate but equal girls league.”³³

In addition to the newspaper coverage, Cinsneruli also appeared in a television interview, which aired on Boston station WCVB, channel 5. A video of that three-minute TV interview has survived to today and is publicly available at the PBS Learning Media website.³⁴

The May 1974 video opens with a shot of Cinsneruli hitting a ball out of her hand over the heads of several boys, before she is asked if she is concerned about boys being stronger than girls. “Not really,” she replied. “A lot of kids are kind of weak but they can play okay.” She added that “most boys didn’t care” about girls playing with them in Little League “as long as they can play.” One boy interviewed vouched for Cinsneruli’s baseball skills. “She’s good. She can hit good,” he said, then sheepishly admitted, “She’s almost better than me.”³⁵

In the TV interview, Cinsneruli’s mother acknowledged that the family received a lot of hate mail. “Most of the letters I couldn’t even repeat [on TV] because they were obscene, that’s just what they were,” she said. “But I feel they come from small-minded people and I just burn them, throw them away.” There were also nasty telephone calls and Cinsneruli remembered that “people drove by the house and yelled things at my mother, insulting things like ‘What kind of mother are you? Put a dress on her. Teach her to type.’”³⁶

On May 21, 1974, the board of directors of the Peabody Little League voted to accept girls, although the board reserved its right to appeal and remove the girls if they won the appeal. “Their decision will allow Janine Cinsneruli, 10, and 35 other girls to join a team in one of the city’s three leagues,” the *Boston Globe* reported. “Cheryl Andrews, daughter of former Red Sox star Mike Andrews, is among the applicants.”³⁷

After she won the right to play baseball in Little League, though, the newspaper reporters and cameramen continued to swarm to Peabody. “I just wanted to play baseball. The same with my parents. They knew I was a natural athlete, they just wanted me to play,” Cinsneruli said, reflecting back on the experience in 2014. Because many people in Peabody hoped that she would fail, “I was always the center of attention, which I didn’t want. The town kids were supportive because they knew I was good, but I knew I had to bring it every day. There was a lot of pressure.”³⁸

JANINE CINSERULI



Janine Cinsneruli was not only a prolific hitter once she was allowed to play Little League baseball, she also struck out 16 batters in a single game.

Cinseruli was not only a prolific hitter in her first year of Little League, but she was also a proficient pitcher. When she struck out 16 batters in one game, a United Press International photo appeared in newspapers throughout the Northeast region, showing Janine in her pitching form.³⁹

"It wasn't the greatest thing in the world at the time," Cinseruli recalled four decades later in 2014, when the Peabody Little League enthusiastically welcomed her back to celebrate the 40th anniversary of its sex integration. "I was almost embarrassed by it for a lot of years. I shied away from it until I hit my 30s. Then I started looking at it like, 'Hey, you know what? It's a good thing that happened. It changed lives and it changed the way people look at girls playing sports.'"⁴⁰

She also applied those baseball life lessons to her adult pursuits as a chef and restaurant owner. "I loved being on a team. I run my restaurant like a team. When things go haywire, I call a meeting and say, 'Let's get back to fundamentals.' I give them pep talks all the time. I got a lot out of sports."⁴¹

OFFICIAL END OF SEX DISCRIMINATION

On June 12, 1974, Little League Baseball capitulated on the sex issue and officially modified its position concerning female inclusion in baseball, announcing that it would "defer to the changing social climate" and adopt a policy that the "acceptance and screening of young girls, following registration procedures, should be adjudged by the local leagues and not by the international body." There was no guaranteed acceptance of girls, though, who had to prove to local managers and coaches that they were "of equal competency in baseball skills, physical skills and other attributions scaled as a basis for team selection."⁴²

To mark this end of sex discrimination, *The New York Times* and the Associated Press immediately produced newspaper articles containing vignettes about a few of the on-the-ground foot-soldiers during the initial ten weeks of court-ordered sex integration in Spring 1974. Later that summer, similar articles appeared in two magazines targeted to a largely female readership, *Ms.*, in its third year of publication by noted feminist Gloria Steinem, and *womenSports*, a startup launched that year by tennis star Billie Jean King.⁴³

No one, though, attempted to tabulate the number of girls who played baseball on a Little League team during the 1974 season. "How many of the two million youngsters involved nationally are girls is difficult even to guess," one New Jersey official told the *New York Times* in April 1975, "since sex is not listed on

application blanks." Based on anecdotal information, the number was certainly in the dozens, perhaps several hundred nationwide. This was but a tiny percentage of the two million boys that then played baseball in Little League.⁴⁴

In October 1974, Congress accelerated its effort to amend the federal charter of Little League Baseball, after the New Jersey Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal of the March court decision. The amended federal charter, which changed "boys" to be "young people" and deleted reference to the "manhood" objective, was signed into law in December 1974.⁴⁵

The end of active discouragement of girls from playing baseball, though, did not equate to the beginning of encouragement. While it had lost this particular legal battle, Little League Baseball planned to win the overall war by emphasizing its recently launched Little League Softball program for girls, which the organization had authorized in 1973 following the Ypsilanti, Michigan, court ruling. Under this separate-but-equal strategy, softball was not just a feminized version of the sport of baseball, but also functioned as a siphon to sway girls away from playing baseball in Little League. As McDonagh and Pappano observed in *Playing with the Boys*, "Creating female-only sports was viewed as a way of keeping girls out of boys' sports" and thus maximized the male nature of the baseball program. Consistent with this patriarchal mindset, Jennifer Ring noted in *Stolen Bases: Why American Girls Don't Play Baseball* that there was also no attempt to organize a separate baseball program only for girls.⁴⁶

During Little League's inaugural softball season in 1974, 50,000 girls reportedly participated, a figure later revised downward to 30,000. Either number dwarfed the estimated volume of girls in the baseball program. Softball would always be a substantial deterrent to girls participating in the baseball program. As Cohen wrote in *No Girls in the Clubhouse*, there was an unspoken policy "at almost every Little League sign-up, if you are female you are sent to the softball line and never told you have a choice [to play baseball]. The choice is made for you."⁴⁷

INCREASE IN FEMALE PLAYERS, 1975–2004

While the pluck and persistence of Fulle, Dickinson, Osder, and Cinseruli advanced the timing of Little League Baseball's official acceptance of sex integration, societal change within the organization only slowly evolved to supplant its historical patriarchal attitude with a more modern sex-equality ideology. Measuring the impact of the pioneering 1974 foot-soldiers through the number of girls who played

baseball in Little League during the thirty years from 1975 to 2004 is frustratingly difficult to assess.

Not only did no one count the number of female baseball players in 1974, a quarter-century later in 1999, still no one was counting. “Little League Baseball has never asked its local leagues for figures on the number of girls who have played in the baseball programs over the years,” one close observer noted in 2001. “So there is no way to determine the exact figure.” Little League Baseball could only offer vague guesstimates at the number of girls in the baseball program.⁴⁸

“In 1989, it appears that resistance to having girls play on Little League teams, at least for younger age groups, has faded. But the number of girls playing hardball remains small,” Felicia Halpert reported in *The New York Times*. “The organization did not know how many of the 2.5 million youngsters who play baseball—youngsters from 33 countries—were girls. The group estimates, however, that there is one girl per league in the 6-to-12-year-old range” among the 7,000 leagues worldwide. The 7,000 number included girls in T-ball, structured for six-to-eight-year-old kids, which usually had the highest percentage of girls. “The numbers drop in the 9-to-12-year-old programs,” Halpert observed, “and girls are scarce in the 13–15 and 16–18 age brackets.” The estimated 7,000 girls in

the baseball program paled in comparison to the 200,000 girls participating in the softball program of Little League.⁴⁹

By 2004, after 30 years of sex-integrated baseball, Little League Baseball was more accepting of girls in the program, arranging for Pepe to throw the ceremonial first pitch at that year’s Little League World Series. Still, the organization tended to obfuscate its data about the female participation rate by combining softball and baseball numbers together to give the appearance of a larger number of girls in the baseball program.

In an August 2004 press release, Little League Baseball stated: “In 1974, nearly 30,000 girls signed up for the softball program. One in 57 Little Leaguers that year was a girl. Today, about one in seven Little Leaguers is a girl. Nearly 360,000 girls play in the various divisions of Little League Softball...[and] Little League estimates the number of girls currently participating in Little League Baseball programs to be about 100,000. Approximately 5 million girls have played Little League Baseball and Softball in the past 30 years.”⁵⁰

The “about 100,000” statistic specified above was actually the high end of the “somewhere between 20,000 and 100,000” range of the in-house guesstimate. The median of that range—60,000 girls—might be a better representation, which would be nearly nine times the estimated 7,000 participation rate in 1989 for

Another Pioneer in 1974

On June 23, 1974, Carolyn Yastrzemski was one of the first female players in the annual Father-Son Game at Fenway Park. Carolyn was the 5-year-old daughter of Red Sox star Carl Yastrzemski.

The Father-Son Game had been a ritual staple of the Red Sox promotional calendar since the inaugural event in 1958, typically held on Father’s Day or another Sunday in June. During the 1960s, Carolyn’s older brother, Mike, was often the subject of newspaper photos from the game.

Coming less than two weeks after the announcement that girls would no longer be barred from Little League, Carolyn’s appearance on the Fenway Park field was newsworthy beyond Boston. A UPI photograph of Carolyn swinging a bat, with Red Sox catcher Bob Montgomery in the background, was reproduced in newspapers across the country.¹

The 1974 event was rechristened the Red Sox Fathers, Sons, & Daughters Game. “Yes, women’s liberation has reached the Fenway tots,” wrote *Boston Globe* columnist Ernie Roberts, previewing the upcoming event, noting “there will be 13 girls among the 37 kids participating.”²

Rhode Island sports columnist Elliott Stein imagined a hypothetical post-game interview with Carolyn. In the satirical column “Yazette Proves a Clutch Hitter,” Stein interspersed serious baseball questions with ones geared to a child:

Stein: How did you do today, Carolyn?

Carolyn: Hit for the cycle...single, double, triple and home run. This game is a piece of cake.

Stein: You like cake?

Carolyn: What kid doesn’t? Make mine chocolate marble and put a big scoop of butterscotch ice cream on top.³

NOTES

1. For actual photograph, see “Carolyn Yastrzemski Batting Photograph, 1974 June 23,” National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum <https://collection.baseballhall.org/PASTIME/carolyn-yastrzemski-batting-photograph-1974-june-23-0>; for newspaper reproduction examples, see *Manchester (CT) Journal Inquirer*, June 24, 1974, 44; *Shenandoah (PA) Evening Herald*, June 24, 1974, p. 15; *Burlington (NC) Times-News*, June 24, 1974, 40.
2. Ernie Roberts, “What Is [TV Channel] 38 Without Bruins?” *Boston Globe*, June 23, 1974, 21.
3. Elliott Stein, “Yazette Proves a Clutch Hitter,” *Newport (RI) Daily News*, June 25, 1974, 23.

girls in the baseball program. The low end of the range—20,000 girls—would equate to almost tripling the 1989 approximation.⁵¹

The most reliable female-inclusion statistics released by Little League Baseball have been the number of girls playing on teams qualifying for the Little League World Series. Two girls participated in the 1980s, five girls in the 1990s, and eight girls in the 2000s. These statistics show that in this elite category of ballplayers, the ratio of girls to boys more than doubled from the 1980s to the 1990s, and then remained roughly constant in the 2000s (the World Series expanded from eight to 16 teams in 2001).⁵²

CONCLUSION

The contribution to female inclusion in the Little League baseball program made by Jenny Fulle, Amy Dickinson, Elizabeth Osder, and Janine Cinsneruli was significant. Along with dozens of other unremembered 1974 pioneers, they fought head-on an all-male organization that actively resisted the inclusion of girls under court-ordered sex integration during two and a half months in Spring 1974. Their efforts not only helped to advance the timeline for Little League Baseball to officially end sex discrimination, but also inspired young girls to leverage their pre-teen foundational skills to progress into early-teen and high-school baseball and for some to advance into the ranks of college and professional baseball during the subsequent decades. ■

Notes

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8. Richard Phalon, "50 Girls Join 175 Boys at Tryout for Little League," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1974, 83; Bettye Lane, "Little League Tryouts for Females, New Jersey," Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, accessed August 28, 2021. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2013650078>.
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“It’s Like Coming Back to Paradise”

Willie Mays and the Mets

David Krell

Mother’s Day, 1972. Willie Mays had just smacked his 647th home run. For the 35,505 fans braving the rain at Shea Stadium on Mother’s Day in 1972, it signaled that, for a brief moment, the aging Mays could still delight fans. The 5–4 victory for the home team over the San Francisco Giants was Mays’s first game in a New York Mets uniform.

Mets owner Joan Payson and her counterpart in the City by the Bay, Horace Stoneham, concocted the deal to let Mays fill out the rest of his playing days in the city that gave him his major-league start and maintained its adoration; Stoneham got Mets pitcher Charlie Williams and a reported \$100,000 bounty in exchange for the icon.¹

But returning to New York had already been a goal for the Say Hey Kid, now 41 years old and a member of the Giants squad since 1951.

Former manager Herman Franks revealed, “It was two years ago that Willie and I talked about his playing out the string in New York. So, we have done some thinking about it together. The Mets’ deal is a good one for him, because, knowing the kind of man Willie is and how he thinks, is to know how unhappy he’d be away from baseball.”²

Though Mays was at the end of his playing career, donning a uniform for a New York team again brought excitement, anticipation, and nostalgia to the city’s National League fans. Those of certain ages—from their mid-20s upward—remembered the glory days of the Alabama native who graced outfielders, pounded pitching, and emerged as a team leader in the NL. When the Mets began in 1962, they had inherited fans of the Dodgers and Giants, who had left for California after the 1957 season.

Mays coming to the Mets created nostalgia that pacified the team’s fan base, who had not only endured national tragedies in recent years—assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr.—but also epic challenges that had tested the resolve of New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs. Strikes by transit workers, garbage workers, and teachers threatened the daily business of America’s largest

city. New York’s financial status declined towards bankruptcy. Plus, the dissolution of exemplary newspapers reduced options for daily learning of the city’s goings-on.

On top of these pressures, Mets fans were in mourning in 1972. Mays’s link to 1950s baseball in New York—often referred to as the “Golden Age of Baseball”—provided an emotional balm of sorts, arriving a little more than a month after the passing of skipper Gil Hodges, who had led the Mets to their first World Series victory in 1969. A mixture of disappointment, grief, and anger had pervaded Mets Nation when Hodges died from a heart attack two days shy of his 48th birthday in early April; Yogi Berra, a Mets coach since 1965, took over as manager.

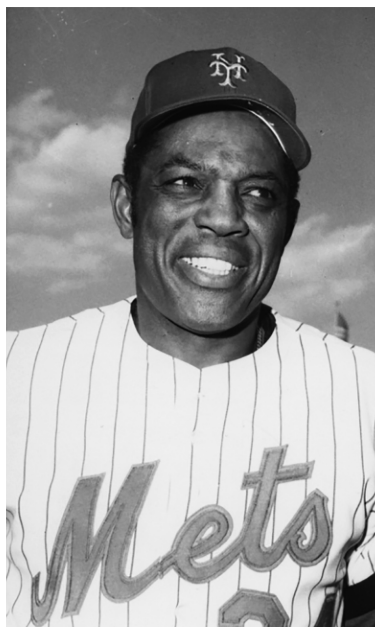
Hodges was a fixture on the gloried Brooklyn Dodgers teams of the late 1940s and 1950s. Same with Berra and the New York Yankees. From 1947 to 1957, the city was represented 10 of 11 times in the World Series.³

San Franciscans’ memories were steeped in the team’s formidability during Mays’s tenure: when MLB initiated the ’72 schedule, San Francisco hadn’t endured a losing season since the team arrived in 1958. Mays et al. began 1972 with the status of being NL West champions.

After the Giants edged out the Dodgers by one game to win the NL West in 1971, Pittsburgh took the NL flag and beat Baltimore in seven games in the World Series. Mays had ended the season indicating his stamina, skills, and instincts were still potent—if not overpowering as in days of yore—to NL pitchers: the two-time Most Valuable Player played in 136 games in ’71, leading the senior circuit in walks (112) and on-base average (.425).

But optimism for San Francisco’s ’72 prospects waned quicker than the winds shifted at Candlestick Park—the team was 8–16 at the time of the Mays trade. Mays, too, had a downslide, with a batting average of .184 over 19 games when he left for New York.

It mattered not to Payson, who had a fondness for the center fielder dating back to her tenure as a former minority owner of the Giants before the team abandoned



Willie Mays' final stop in his long career was with the New York Mets.

subway trains for cable cars. Fueled by sentiment rather than necessity—the Mets were 13–6 at the time of the trade—signing her favorite player recalled the newest entry in America's movie lexicon from the recently released epic *The Godfather*: "I'll make him an offer he can't refuse."

Though Mays might have been a sentimental choice for Payson, there was a similar tether as strong as Samson between him and Stoneham: Mets chairman Donald Grant acknowledged this but also noted the opportunity for the Giants owner to show generosity towards his iconic player. "The club isn't drawing and its [*sic*] down in the standings. He can say 'I've done the greatest favor I can do for Willie. I'm sending him home where he wants to be. I'm sending him to the Mets.'"⁴

Mays confirmed Grant's description. "When you come back to New York, it's like coming back to paradise," said the four-time major-league leader in slugging percentage at the press conference announcing the trade.⁵

Despite his '72 stats to date, Mays had confidence in his value. Or so he claimed. "It's a wonderful feeling and I'm very thankful I can come back to New York," said the slugger. "I don't think I'm just on display here. There's no doubt in my mind that I can help the Mets if I'm used in the right way."⁶

And so, he did.

The Mets vaulted to a 4–0 lead in the bottom of the first when Rusty Staub hit a no-out grand slam after Sam McDowell walked Mays, Bud Harrelson, and Tommie Agee. The San Francisco lefty settled and struck out Cleon Jones, Jim Fregosi, and Ted Martinez.

McDowell's cohorts tied the game in the top of the fifth. Ray Sadecki walked Fran Healy; Giants skipper Charlie Fox sent Bernie Williams to pinch hit for McDowell. Fox's decision proved wise when Williams tripled and scored Healy. Chris Speier doubled home Williams; Tito Fuentes homered—one of his seven dingers for the year.

Mays led off the bottom of the fifth with a homer off reliever Don Carrithers. His solo bash gave the Mets a slim but sufficient one-run lead that sustained the victory. Although the veteran must have been feeling sentimental with New Yorkers cheering his round tripper, there was a palpable wistfulness: "It's a strange feeling to be batting against the club I played with for 20 years. You look up and see 'Giants' written on their shirts, and feel you should be out there."⁷

Mays's performance was a joyous occasion, but Mets fans knew that it was an anomaly. The slugger's skills were fading. Ken Samuelson recalled positive energy contrasting sad facts in Peter Golenbock's oral history *Amazin': The Miraculous History of New York's Most Beloved Baseball Team*: "Even though we were getting Willie Mays, we realized we really weren't getting the Willie Mays. The season before Willie had begun to slow down, and so the idea [of him] was probably more than the reality. But I was real excited. It was just the idea of him coming back and having such a magical player in our lineup."⁸

Greg Prince—author of several Mets books and co-founder of the Faith and Fear in Flushing web site—was a nine-year-old in Long Beach, New York, when he learned about the Giants legend coming to Queens. "I found out from reading an article in the *New York Post*, which my father read," says Prince. "It was shocking because Willie Mays was the best living ballplayer at the time. The Mets were in first place. After the Mother's Day game, it seemed like everything was working out."⁹

The victory on May 14 was the third victory in an 11-game winning streak; the Mets went 21–7 in May and finished the 1972 season in third place with an 83–73 record. The Pirates were dominant, though, winning the NL East with a 96 wins and 59 losses.

Mays played in 69 games for the Mets in 1972, batting .267 with eight home runs. His average dropped to .211 in 1973. Mays smacked six homers and played in 66 games. After nearly winning the World Series in 1973—New York lost to Oakland in seven games—the 42-year-old Mays retired.¹⁰

But the nostalgia at seeing #24 back in a New York uniform was not felt universally in the Mets clubhouse. In his 1975 book *The Miracle at Coogan's Bluff*,

Thomas Kiernan cited the frustration of an unnamed Mays teammate at the end of the '72 season: "If he walks, say, then gets sacrificed to second—if the next hitter doesn't get a hit and give Willie a chance to score, he gets booed. It's all Willie Mays, and that's not the way it should be. I wish to hell he'd hang 'em up. He had his day in the sun here, now he should go out gracefully and let us be a baseball team again."¹¹

Thomas Wolfe was wrong. You can go home again. But some of the new residents might not be as welcoming as the old ones. ■

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2. "With Friend Like Franks, Mays Needn't Worry," *Daily News* (New York), May 14, 1972, 123.
3. The Yankees won seven titles. The Dodgers and Giants each won once.
4. United Press International, "Mets Await Visit Today from Stoneham," *Daily News* (New York), May 9, 1972, 16.
5. Steve Cady, "'Like Coming Back to Paradise,' Says Mays—And Fans Agree," *The New York Times*, May 12, 1972, 35.
6. Durso, "Mays Back in Town and Mets Have Him".
7. Joseph Durso, "Mets Win on Mays's Homer, 5-4," *The New York Times*, May 15, 1972, 47.
8. Peter Golenbock, *Amazin': The Miraculous History of New York's Most Beloved Baseball Team* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 289. Emphasis in the original.
9. Greg Prince, telephone interview with writer, January 26, 2020.
10. Babe Ruth began his major league career with the Red Sox and returned to Boston for his final season, playing in 28 games for the Braves in 1935. Hank Aaron delighted Wisconsinites by closing out his career in Milwaukee. He started with the Milwaukee Braves in 1954 and stayed with the organization through 1974. But the Braves had moved to Atlanta in 1966, leaving Milwaukee without a major league team until the Seattle Pilots moved after their inaugural season and became the Brewers in 1970. Aaron had a two-year tenure: 1975–76. His sentiments matched Mays's: "I am thrilled to come back to the city where I started my baseball career and I am happy that the Atlanta Braves saw fit to work so closely with me to meet my request." "Brewers Bring Hank Back to Milwaukee," *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 3, 1974, 25.
11. Thomas Kiernan, *The Miracle at Coogan's Bluff* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1975), 161–62.

The Nationally Televised Major League Baseball Game That Wasn't

Robert D. Warrington

This story is about the first nationally telecast spring training game in major-league baseball history. It describes events that enabled this groundbreaking expansion in televising baseball games to occur. It then examines why the broadcast is best remembered for being suddenly and inexplicably stopped while the game was in progress, leaving TV screens dark and viewers bewildered—an outcome the major leagues and the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) never anticipated and certainly never wanted.

“GAME OF THE WEEK” PROGRAM BEGINS ON TELEVISION

In 1953, ABC executive Edgar J. Scherick proposed broadcasting a Saturday “Game of the Week” (GOTW) program as TV sport’s first network series aired during MLB’s regular season. Scherick’s bosses were initially skeptical, wondering exactly how many TVs across America the program would reach and how many viewers they would draw. To make matters worse, MLB barred the program from airing within 75 miles of any cities where its ballparks were located to protect local broadcast coverage.¹

Believing “most of America was still up for grabs,” as Scherick put it, ABC executives gave GOTW a green light.² The network was only able to get the Philadelphia Athletics, Cleveland Indians, and Chicago White Sox to permit their games to be aired on the program. With that as a starting point, ABC began selling broadcasting rights to affiliate stations in non-restricted areas across the nation. GOTW became the nation’s fourteenth-highest rated program—an impressive feat for a non-prime-time weekend series on a weak network that was shown only in non-MLB markets.³

Other baseball clubs noticed the program’s ratings success. In 1954, four teams—the Philadelphia Phillies, New York Giants, Washington Nationals, and Brooklyn Dodgers—joined in selling ABC the right to broadcast their games nationally.⁴ (It should be noted for clarity that although GOTW was televised nationwide, these broadcast contracts were not “national” since clubs negotiated individually to televise games from their respective ballparks.)

TELEVISIONING THE FIRST BASEBALL EXHIBITION GAME NATIONALLY

In addition to signing up more clubs for 1954, ABC took the unprecedented step of adding to GOTW’s broadcast schedule exhibition games played during spring training. Only games played on Saturdays would be carried on the program. The game selected to inaugurate this coverage was scheduled on March 13, 1954, at Clearwater, Florida, featuring the Phillies against the visiting White Sox.⁵ The clubs were paid \$2000 for the rights to air the game.⁶

The importance of this groundbreaking expansion in television’s relationship with MLB was acknowledged in an article that appeared in the sports section of the March 13 edition of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, which announced:

Phils, Chisox Vie on Video Today

Clearwater, Fla., March 12 (UP) – Big league baseball—Florida style—hits the Nation’s television screens tomorrow in the first network TV transmission of a spring training game in history. The game is between the Phillies and Chicago White Sox. There could be an audience of close to World Series proportions as the telecast will go to 137 stations from coast to coast, including all but two major league cities. (The game is not scheduled by any Philadelphia station.)

The telecast over the American Broadcasting Co. network will be the first of a season-long series of “Game of the Week” productions on Saturday afternoons, but the audience will be larger in games that are handled in spring training because major league cities have not yet begun to handle their own TV games.⁷

Expanding TV coverage to include spring training games was pioneering enough, but the fact the game would be aired in all but two MLB cities was even more novel. GOTW airings of regular season games in 1953 were forbidden within 75 miles of any MLB city; yet, the *Inquirer* article stated only two major

league cities would not receive the March 13 broadcast, signifying the prohibition would not be enforced fully for exhibition games.

The article suggests the more relaxed broadcast regimen may have been attributable to the fact major league clubs had not yet contracted with networks to have games televised in 1954. The comment also implies restricted zones would be reinstated in contracts to air regular season games. Philadelphia is identified as one of the cities where the game would not be shown, presumably because the Phillies wanted to safeguard broadcasts by local radio stations from any encroachments by a national telecast.⁸

Despite the promotional hype contained in the *Inquirer* article about the expected viewing audience, it was far from certain an exhibition game would draw national interest on a level similar to regular-season games. Ratings data showed the number of TVs tuned to GOTW grew as the regular season progressed and league pennant races came down to the wire. Airing a preseason game could very well be a dubious venture in terms of viewership. ABC was counting on the large number of households normally off-limits to GOTW to give the program a ratings boost. What the network could not anticipate, nor could MLB, was this outcome: “In 1954, it was a spring training game from Clearwater, Florida, that received more attention than any regular season contest.”⁹

PREPARATIONS TO AIR THE GAME

Television broadcasts of Phillies’ regular season home games began on a limited basis in 1947.¹⁰ No Phillies exhibition games had been televised by 1954, however. Those games were carried on radio, which would later figure prominently in the controversy surrounding the March 13 game.¹¹ Since Clearwater Athletic Field—where the club conducted spring training—had never hosted a televised game, ABC, in cooperation with the Phillies, had to undertake extensive preparations to make the telecast possible. The photo accompanying this article shows an example of those preparations.

Steps taken to televise the game included:

- Building a wooden platform under the grandstand to hold the television camera, which as the photo shows, was big, bulky, and heavy.
- Cutting a hole in the wire screening behind home plate to provide the camera an unimpeded view of the ballfield.
- Attiring the cameraman with a catcher’s mask and vest should a foul ball strike him through

the opening in the screen. (It is unclear what ABC would have done had the camera been struck by a foul ball and rendered inoperable, or the cameraman had been injured by an errant ball and unable to continue his duties.)

- Creating a sign—leaning against the camera’s tripod base—to hold in front of the camera as advertising for the station during breaks in the game. The entire sign is not visible, but it promotes a “Band Booster Program” on which local bands would perform. According to the sign, “Proceeds” from appearing on the show “Go to Members and Your Band.”

The station identified on the camera—WITV Channel 17—was an ABC affiliate located in Ft. Lauderdale.¹² Because the network had no affiliate station in Clearwater, all of the equipment and personnel needed to make the broadcast possible had to be transported 270 miles between the cities—a time-consuming and costly journey seven decades ago.¹³

The camera in the photo was the only one used to televise the game. A single camera behind home plate limited visual coverage, although the attached elongated lens allowed clearer views of plays in the outfield. Despite these drawbacks, the broadcast would have satisfied mid-1950s standards—a somewhat grainy and fuzzy black and white picture sufficient to let viewers follow the action.¹⁴

A SUDDEN HALT TO THE TELECAST

Preparations were successful, and ABC began broadcasting the first major league exhibition game nationally. The program proceeded smoothly, but stopped abruptly after three innings of the game had been shown. GOTW did not resume, and stations airing it offered no explanation for its sudden cessation.¹⁵

DENYING FAULT AND POINTING FINGERS

In the immediate aftermath of the truncated telecast, the National League (NL) was compelled to deny rumors its club owners demanded the plug be pulled. Because the broadcast emanated from an NL ballpark, NL owners had the authority to prevent the telecast from proceeding. The owners had gathered on March 12 in a scheduled meeting to discuss various issues, and reports surfaced that owners voted at the meeting to nix telecasts of exhibition games. League president Warren Giles issued a statement later in the day on March 13 denying those rumors, while a Phillies official offered an alternative explanation for the situation.



Frank Lane of the White Sox.

An article reporting these comments appeared in the March 14 edition of the *Inquirer*, and it reads in part:

**Exhibition Game Telecasts Not Banned,
Giles Says**

St. Petersburg, Fla., March 13 (AP) – The major leagues have not banned telecasts of exhibition games to major league cities, Warren Giles, National League president, said today, adding that a report that owners decided to prohibit such telecasts was the result of a misunderstanding.

Absolutely no such thing was voted on or discussed at the meeting, said Giles. This is exactly what the Federal Communications Commission would prohibit. It would be collusion. It wasn't even discussed formally at the meeting.

Giles' denial followed a mix-up in which stations were forced to stop today's Phillies-White Sox game telecast while it was underway.

A Phils' spokesman said the Chisox asked permission to telecast from the Phils' camp and that it was granted under the impression that only a Chicago station was involved—then withdrawn when it was discovered an ABC Game of the Week hookup was involved.¹⁶

Other than the denial, Giles provided no insights regarding why the broadcast had been allowed to proceed initially before being stopped abruptly, or who was responsible. It was left up to Frank Lane—general manager of the Chicago White Sox—to play baseball's point man in explaining the mixup, and he did it by blaming ABC: "Under our contract with ABC, the Game of the Week must not be piped into any major league city. Nor must it reach areas within 75 miles of

any major league city. These restrictions were definite and explicit. However, ABC went ahead with the sale of the program in prohibited areas. Well, when I discovered that the March 13 telecast was going into major areas, I stopped it from entering those areas. That's all there was to it."¹⁷

George Fletcher—Phillies club secretary who handled radio and television contracts—echoed Lane's version of events noting: "An overly enthusiastic ABC network which took things for granted and accepted the permission of the White Sox as including major league cities caused the misunderstanding."¹⁸

CONFLICTING PERCEPTIONS EMERGE

Although the White Sox and ABC signed a contract to televise the March 13 game and the Phillies agreed to the arrangement, the above newspaper quotations reveal the three parties had sharply conflicting perceptions from the outset about the scope of the telecast. ABC intended GOTW to air in all but two MLB cities; the White Sox thought it would not be shown in any MLB cities; and the Phillies—unaware of GOTW's involvement—believed only a Chicago station would carry the game.

Such inherently incompatible expectations represented a serious problem that subsequently worsened when the fissures that separated the parties' beliefs were not discovered until the day the program was to air. It is not known why they did not surface earlier. The contract doubtlessly was signed a week or more before game day to allow ABC employees and Phillies' staff sufficient time to complete the extensive preparations to broadcast the game—a task made all the more challenging by the fact no telecast had ever originated before from Clearwater Athletic Field.

That these preparations were completed shows all parties mistakenly assumed they agreed on the broadcast's intended audience between the time the contract was signed and the day of the game telecast. Had the White Sox or Phillies become aware of ABC's broadcast plans during that period, one call from the Phillies' front office to Clearwater would have stopped the work.

Objections to the GOTW telecast were first raised by the Phillies and White Sox on March 13, and it is almost certain they were precipitated when Phillies officials read that morning's *Inquirer* newspaper. The article's detailed description of ABC's grandiose plans for the program—137 stations from coast-to-coast—quickly disabused club officials of their notions of the telecast's reach.

Adding to the Phillies' dilemma was the fact others with a vested interest in the broadcast also read the

Inquirer. According to *Sporting News*, “When local radio stations, which were carrying the game, learned of the scheduled telecast, they are said to have protested.” Although no Philadelphia-based station would televise the game, other stations—with transmission signals that penetrated the 75-mile exclusion zone around the city—would, and presumably diminish radio listening audiences. There can be no doubt when local radio stations “protested,” their complaints were expressed to the Phillies, whom the stations held responsible for protecting their exclusive rights to air exhibition games—rights for which they paid the club.²⁰

The Phillies acted quickly in contacting Lane, whose club had signed the broadcast contract. In his statements, the White Sox general manager confirmed he first became aware of the problem when Phillies president Bob Carpenter called and “hollered with me.”²¹ Doubtlessly upset by the unwelcomed news of ABC’s intentions, Carpenter’s and Lane’s irritation was exacerbated by the realization they learned about the plan from a newspaper. From their perspective, ABC furnished information to the *Inquirer* it had not shared with the clubs.

A FULL OR PARTIAL CANCELLATION?

According to Lane, he and a Phillies official—either Fletcher or Carpenter who had consented to the broadcast—told ABC the ban on televising GOTW in major league cities was in effect.²² ABC faced two choices in responding to MLB’s objections. The first was to cancel GOTW entirely. While the simplest option to implement, it was also the most financially painful for the network. All rights fees the 137 TV stations had paid to air the program would have to be refunded. Moreover, MLB never insisted the telecast be terminated completely, only that it not enter exclusion zones around major league cities. Not airing GOTW would be like throwing out the baby with the bath water...monetarily speaking.

The earnings downside to terminating the telecast persuaded ABC to embrace the second course—cancel the program on stations whose broadcast signals violated the exclusion zones while allowing it to be shown in the rest of the country. The challenge then became ensuring only permissible stations telecast GOTW.

Time was ABC’s enemy in implementing the selective cancellation strategy. GOTW aired at 1 PM. After speaking, Lane and Carpenter most likely contacted the network mid-to-late morning to demand prohibited areas be excluded from the broadcast. This gave ABC, at best, a couple of hours to notify stations affected

by the ban while preserving the ability of the rest to show it.

How many of the 137 stations scheduled to air GOTW were now banned from doing so is unknown. ABC’s effort to identify them was simplified by the relative ease of identifying stations physically located within major league cities. Pinpointing stations outside cities whose signal range encroached on the 75-mile exclusion zones, however, must have been a greater challenge. According to Lane, Les Arries—sports director of the network—wired affected stations to cancel the telecast.²³

THINGS GO AWRY

The selective cancellation approach did not work. According to *Sporting News*, “In some places, there was a mixup and several innings were screened before the stations learned of the cancellation.”²⁴ The nature of the “mixup” was not clarified, but there are two most probable explanations:

- The wires did not arrive until after the broadcast started.
- The wires arrived but were not acted upon—perhaps not even examined—until after GOTW went on the air. It was Saturday morning, and stations were not fully staffed during weekends. Program managers may not have even been present at the stations.

MLB and ABC were best positioned to offer detailed assessments of the errant telecasts, but ABC maintained a stony silence in the aftermath of the incident, and MLB used vague terms like “mixup” and “misunderstanding” to characterize what happened. In all likelihood, both were embarrassed by the fiasco and eager to put it behind them without prolonged public scrutiny.²⁵

Consequently, much mystery surrounds the particulars of GOTW’s premature termination. The number of unauthorized TV stations that began broadcasting the game is unknown. The only specific stations identified as among the offenders were WBKB in Chicago and an unnamed station in Milwaukee.²⁶ *Sporting News*, as noted, left the number ambiguous by stating it occurred at “some” stations.

Another uncertainty involves how the network learned of the unauthorized broadcasts. There is no evidence anyone from MLB alerted ABC the program was showing inside exclusion zones. Lane and Fletcher made clear in their statements they strove to stop

GOTW from reaching major league cities *before* it began. None of their comments suggest they contacted ABC a second time to complain the program was airing in banned areas *after* it was underway.

PULLING THE PLUG

What is certain is that once ABC became aware its selective exclusion approach had failed, it acted quickly and decisively to prevent a bad situation from becoming worse. Only one option remained. The network canceled the broadcast to all stations—sacrificing those allowed to air the game to deny those that were not. Adoption of this draconian solution was reflected in the *Inquirer* article's statement that stations were “forced” to terminate the telecast after it had started. The cutoff was accomplished by stopping the transmission at its source in Clearwater. Viewers were left to wonder what happened.

CAUSES FOR THE FIASCO

White Sox and Phillies officials pointed the finger of guilt at ABC. But the reasons for its occurrence are more complex, and blame extends beyond the network. The causes can be identified by looking at the motivations of MLB and ABC as well as their actions.

The discord that erupted on the day GOTW broadcast had its origins in the contract that was signed to telecast the game. Because it was the first exhibition game ever televised nationally, a contract prototype did not exist. It might seem obvious the same contract that had been used to air regular season games in 1953 would be employed on this occasion, but it was not. The contract ABC drafted to telecast the March 13 game, according to *Sporting News*, did *not* include the exclusion zones provision that had been present in the previous year's contracts.²⁷

When Lane criticized ABC for ignoring “restrictions that were definite and explicit” in prohibiting GOTW broadcasts from reaching “any major league city, nor must it reach within 75 miles of any major league city,” he was referring to the contract that had been used to air regular season games in 1953. Lane never acknowledged the clause was missing from the contract to televise the March 13 game. To do so would have meant admitting the White Sox failed to practice due diligence in inspecting the contract before signing it. Whether he was unaware of the oversight or chose to feign ignorance, Lane unjustly condemned ABC for failing to abide by provisions the contract did not contain.

Why, then, did ABC decide to remove the exclusion zones clause from the contract, and why did the network not inform the White Sox of its absence when



ABC cameraman wearing catcher's protective equipment while broadcasting the Phillies-White Sox exhibition game in Clearwater.

the contract was signed? That ABC innocently forgot to include it strains credulity, given the importance MLB attached to the clause in the previous year's regular-season broadcast contracts. The most likely explanation is the network deliberately deleted the clause to increase the number of stations that could carry GOTW, thereby enriching ABC's coffers. By doing so and not informing the White Sox of the omission when club officials signed the contract, ABC set the stage for the surprise Phillies executives experienced when they read the sports pages of the *Inquirer* newspaper on the morning of March 13.²⁸

ABC officials may have convinced themselves, conveniently so, that MLB would have a more indulgent attitude about the need for exclusion zones when televising spring training games:

- Exhibition games did not impact league standings or pennant races. Their importance, beyond player training and evaluation, was negligible.
- No club had ever been paid a rights fee to televise one of its preseason games nationally. This was an additional source of revenue for MLB that clubs would eagerly embrace.

- ABC may have presumed (or hoped) MLB would agree televising preseason games represented a new chapter in their broadcast relationship, not merely an extension of the existing relationship; hence, different rules could be applied to airing exhibition games.
- Showing games from spring training would whet the appetite of baseball fans for the upcoming season. The resulting heightened interest would be manifested by increased traffic through ballpark turnstiles and growing audiences for TV and radio stations that broadcast games. It was a win-win for ABC and MLB.
- There was no requirement that provisions in 1953 contracts must carry over to 1954 contracts. The latter had to be negotiated and agreed upon anew. ABC, therefore, had no obligation to place an exclusion zones clause in the March 13 game contract.
- If the absence of the clause was so objectionable, as MLB would later contend, why did White Sox officials not protest its absence when they signed the contract?

Clearly, all of these rationales were self-serving for the network. Without exclusion zones, the number of viewers tuning in to watch GOTW would increase significantly. A projected audience “of World Series proportions” was not an exaggeration, nor were the network’s expected profits from having an unprecedented number of stations pay to carry the telecast.

However persuasive this line of thinking was to ABC officials in selecting their course of action, it proved unsuccessful. Perhaps to their surprise, and certainly to their consternation, the leagues acted swiftly and resolutely in demanding GOTW not be shown in any prohibited areas. The network failed to appreciate adequately that major-league owners valued local coverage of baseball over the game’s national appeal. That attitude would change, but only over time. Missteps left ABC with two disagreeable, albeit differentiable, choices: cancel or scale back the broadcast.

This resulted in another serious error by the network—devising a flawed scheme to save as many stations as possible originally scheduled to air the program while dropping those forbidden to show it. ABC’s quick fix was to wire the prohibited stations not to televise the game before the broadcast began. Nonetheless, some did, indicating that sending the wires alone was insufficient to ensure full compliance.

The network should have taken more proactive and

aggressive action by telephoning the affected stations individually and instructing the senior manager present not to show GOTW. Placing the calls from ABC headquarters and ensuring the message was acknowledged at each station would have provided a greater level of confidence in the implementation of the selective cancellation plan. That ABC ultimately was compelled to abandon the entire broadcast under publicly embarrassing circumstances was an outcome largely of the network’s own making.

THE GAME

Although the telecast ended early, the baseball game continued. The White Sox emerged victorious, beating the Phillies, 6–3.²⁹ And it wasn’t just the rest of the game viewers did not get to see. According to one report, “Incidentally, among the attractions missed by TV fans was the sight of two dozen pretty girls, attired in shorts, tossing oranges to the more than 2,000 spectators at the Clearwater exhibition game.”³⁰

AFTERMATH

In addition to lambasting ABC for its attempt to televise GOTW in prohibited markets, Frank Lane said, that he was “quite certain that ABC would not again make the mistake of forgetting the restrictions in its contracts with participating clubs.”³¹ Lane was right. There were no additional instances of GOTW being yanked from the air while a broadcast was underway.

Nevertheless, conjecture appeared in the immediate aftermath of GOTW’s cancellation that MLB might institute stricter, leaguewide controls governing baseball game telecasts to prevent future incidents. One reporter wrote: “The mixup led to speculation that Commissioner Ford Frick might take a firmer hold on aircast policies. The television affairs of the 16 major league clubs are regarded as their own private business just so long as they do not violate laws. However, if mixups continue, it was believed possible that Frick would have to move in and delegate someone to act as television and radio monitor for the game or handle the work himself.”³²

Frick had made no secret of his desire for a unified approach across both leagues to negotiating broadcast contracts with the major TV networks, believing this approach would be more lucrative overall.³³ Club owners, believing baseball’s business should remain locally focused, reacted skeptically to notions that all clubs would benefit if the commissioner’s office controlled telecast negotiations and contracts. Moreover, owners loathed relinquishing any of their near-monopolistic control over revenue deals for their clubs.³⁴

Change came in the form of the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961. In this legislation, Congress granted all professional sports leagues an antitrust exemption for the purpose of selling the broadcast rights of their members as packages. This allowed baseball for the first time to negotiate television contracts under a central authority rather than as individual franchises. The Act has been called “one of the most important pieces of sports law ever promulgated.”³⁵

WHITHER GAME OF THE WEEK?

Despite the notoriety of the March 13 gaffe, GOTW continued to thrive, with CBS taking it over in 1955. Since that time, the program has gone through many iterations in format and ownership, and also experienced varying levels of viewership. The Fox Broadcasting Company began telecasting GOTW in 1996 and continues to do so today.³⁶ ■

Notes

1. James R. Walker and Robert V. Bellamy Jr., *Center Field Shot: A History of Baseball on Television* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 102.
2. Dizzy Dean and Buddy Blatter were the GOTW announcers for ABC in 1953–54. The sponsor was Falstaff Beer. Stuart Shea, *Calling the Game* (Phoenix: Society for American Baseball Research, 2015), 369.
3. Walker & Bellamy, 29, 100, 102. The authors note CBS and NBC were the dominant networks in the 1950s, while ABC and DuMont struggled for affiliates and survival.
4. Walker and Bellamy, 102.
5. “Phils, Chisox Vie on Video Today,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 13, 1954, 15.
6. C.C. Johnson Spink, “Game of the Week Picture Clears,” *The Sporting News*, V. 137, #8 (March 24, 1954), 1, 6.
7. “Phils, Chisox Vie on Video Today.”
8. The second major league city not scheduled to receive GOTW was never identified.
9. Walker and Bellamy, 102.
10. Rich Westcott and Frank Bilovsky, *The Phillies Encyclopedia*, 3rd edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 663. The broadcast station was WPTZ (Channel 3) in Philadelphia.
11. Westcott and Bilovsky. Radio broadcasts of Phillies’ games started in 1937. Only home games were aired for the first 13 years.
12. WITV-17 started as a TV station in Ft. Lauderdale in December, 1953. Roger Simmons, “Florida TV History,” RogerSimmons.com: Orlando Television News and History, accessed February 24, 2022. <https://rogersimmons.com/florida-television-history> WITV-17 started as a TV station in Ft. Lauderdale in December, 1953.
13. Walker and Bellamy, 33. According to the authors, about ten crew members were needed for a typical telecast. Required equipment included a production van, camera control unit and monitor, off-the-air receivers, a microwave relay transmitter, audio amplifier, several telephone headsets, and other assorted equipment including hundreds of feet of cable.
14. Baseball executives were worried television could eventually provide a better viewing experience than watching a game at the ballpark, resulting in reduced attendance at games. Walker and Bellamy, 111–12 and Stevie Larsen, “The History of Baseball Broadcasting: Early Television,” *Baseball Essential*, accessed February 24, 2022. <https://www.baseballessential.com/news/2015/12/19/the-history-of-baseball-broadcasting-early-television>.
15. Contemporary newspaper reporting does not specify how much of the game had been televised before it was stopped, using phrases such as, “a few innings” and “several innings.” Walker and Bellamy write three innings had been aired. Walker and Bellamy, 102.
16. “Phils, Chisox Vie on Video Today.”
17. Spink. Interest in cancelation of the GOTW telecast while the March 13 game was in progress became so intense that Spink’s article addressing the incident made the front page of *The Sporting News*.
18. Spink.
19. Spink.
20. Spink. Carpenter also agreed to a second broadcast of a Phillies-White Sox game at Clearwater that was scheduled for March 20. Given the club’s imperative to protect the broadcast rights of local stations, he would have never agreed to TV coverage of Phillies exhibition games had he known exclusion zones were not in effect.
21. Spink.
22. Spink. Lane did not explain how he and the Phillies official contacted ABC to convey their unhappiness. Presumably, it was by telephone.
23. Spink. Although not identified by name, Lane presumably spoke with Arries to register MLB’s complaints about GOTW’s intended audience. Once informed, it is likely Arries, perhaps in consultation with other senior ABC executives, decided to opt for the selective cancelation approach. The wire Arries sent to affected ABC affiliate stations around the country would have originated from the network’s headquarters building in New York.
24. Spink.
25. Walker and Bellamy, 103. The authors judge GOTW’s cancelation caused “a minor embarrassment for ABC.”
26. Spink.
27. Spink.
28. If White Sox officials noticed the absence of an exclusion zones clause, ABC representatives could have innocently attributed it to a simple oversight, thereby concealing the network’s true intentions.
29. Stan Baumgartner, “White Sox Rally for 5 in 7th to Down Phils, 6–3,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 14, 1954, 77.
30. Spink.
31. Spink.
32. Spink.
33. Walker and Bellamy, 110.
34. Walker and Bellamy, 230.
35. Walker and Bellamy, 229. The authors discuss the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961 and its consequences for professional sports leagues on pages 229–30.
36. Walker and Bellamy, 161–62.

Swepsonville Ballpark

A Step Back in Time to North Carolina's Textile Leagues

Mark Cryan

As Major League Baseball cuts out the lower rungs of the minor-league ladder, author David Lamb's observations on the nature of the minors become ever more poignant: "Although on the surface, the minors may seem like a quaint relic of America's mom-and-pop era, the truth is that in the past decade, they've moved into the big time."¹ As minor league baseball is driven farther from its small-town roots by economics and MLB fiat, it becomes even more important to remember the small communities from which baseball's grassroots grew—places like Swepsonville, North Carolina.

INDUSTRIAL LEAGUE BASEBALL

More than sixty cities and towns in North Carolina have fielded professional minor league teams at some point in their history. There are also towns like Asheboro, Roxboro, and Swepsonville that have never hosted professional ball, but nonetheless boast a long and proud baseball history.² The cities listed above, and many others, hosted textile league or mill teams. While this was not technically considered "professional" minor league baseball, there were definitely players being paid to play for these teams and large numbers of people paid admission to see games. In fact, the competition may have been more fierce, due to the fact that these teams existed only to win games, and not for the purpose of developing players to be sold to higher level leagues.^{3,4} During the Great Depression, for example, players in the Northwest Georgia Textile League might make \$12 to \$17 per week for working in the mill, but would be paid an additional \$4 to \$7 to play baseball.⁵ Likewise, it was also well-known that for some mill team players in North Carolina's Piedmont region, "their real job was playing baseball."⁶

It's also worth noting that minor league baseball in North Carolina was rigidly segregated from its beginnings. Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers' top minor league team in Montreal in 1946, but the first black player didn't appear in a professional game in North Carolina

until 1951, when Percy Miller Jr. was signed by the Danville (VA) Leafs, and played games in North Carolina.⁷ The textile leagues of the 1940s and 1950s, like virtually all aspects of life in the South during this time period, were likewise segregated by race, and the opportunity to play for the mill team was available only to white male employees.^{8,9}

Piedmont area mills also recruited players from outside the area, and engaged in hiring practices that prioritized baseball success over talent at working the mills. The better local ballplayers could also often negotiate a better position with another mill, creating a level of agency and power that was not available to most textile workers.¹⁰ The level of play in many of these textile leagues rivalled that in many minor leagues.¹¹ Consider the "outlaw" Carolina League of 1936–38. Textile league baseball was so competitive in the area around Kannapolis and Concord that the team operators declared themselves a professional league, but one without the sanctioning of the National Association, the governing body of minor league baseball. In this period, the Carolina League was competing with official National Association leagues for talent, and at one point, the head of minor league baseball, Judge Bramham, offered the Carolina League sanctioned status if they would come into the fold.¹²

There were also leagues that had roots in textile baseball like the Bi-State League, with teams in North Carolina and Virginia. That loop was accepted into "organized baseball" in 1934 and competed until 1942.^{13,14} The line between textile league baseball and minor league baseball was blurry at best.

SWEPSONVILLE AND ALAMANCE COUNTY TEXTILE INDUSTRY

For generations, Alamance County was defined by the textile industry that grew up along the banks of the Haw River. The first mill was established in 1832 by John Trollinger.¹⁵ Within a few years, E.M. Holt had opened the first mill for what would become one of the area's most important textile companies.¹⁶ These mills were often in locations that originally housed the grist mills built by early settlers, some as early as 1745.

The ready availability of water power from the Haw helped the industry grow in the region. Eventually, Alamance County became something of a brand in the textile industry, as dyed yarns became popular and the resulting distinctive patterns became known as the “Alamance Plaid.”¹⁷

Among the early mills was a production facility south of Graham, North Carolina, in a settlement that derived its name from the original owner of the mill, George William Swepson. Despite the location on the banks of the Haw, the mill was originally known as the Falls Neuse Mills, owing to Swepson’s prior ownership of a paper mill located alongside the Neuse River near Raleigh.

The Falls Neuse Mill was producing the distinctive Alamance Plaid in 1870. By 1883, though, Swepson was dead, amid rumors he may have committed murder and arson before his death. The mill was taken over by Ashby L. Baker, who was married to Swepson’s niece, Virginia McAden. Baker renamed the mill in her honor shortly after her death in 1893.¹⁸ The Virginia Cotton Mill continued to be the centerpiece of life in Swepsonville for decades. It thrived during World War I, but the Great Depression took its toll, leading to bankruptcy and reorganization in 1933.¹⁹ The Depression affected all areas of the economy, and baseball was not immune. There were 26 professional minor leagues across the country in 1929, but by end of the 1933 season, only 14 were still operating.²⁰

Mill teams in Piedmont communities like Swepsonville, though, were able to continue playing ball. In fact, like many area mills, the leadership of Virginia Mills looked to provide their workers more recreation as a distraction from both a struggling economy and nascent unionization efforts that were taking hold in North Carolina. “Big companies of every kind promoted baseball for their workers. Management believed it promoted teamwork, provided a healthy way to fill spare time that might otherwise be devoted to labor agitation and taught immigrant workers how to be ‘real Americans.’”²¹

Virginia Mills built a ballfield just down the road from the mill, at the end of West Main Street, in 1926.²² This was happening as Alamance County saw growing unrest between labor and management. Some of these tensions dated back to the turn of the century, moving into a critical period following the “stretch-out” of the 1920s, when mill workers were faced with increasing automation and higher production quotas.²³ This unrest included the declaration of a general strike by the United Textile Workers in 1934, and the arrival of union activist “Flying Squadrons,” causing some mill owners

to call on the National Guard to protect their mills.²⁴

Against this backdrop, many mill owners across the South offered various enticements to reduce the attraction to unions. These included free housing and diversions like mill baseball teams.^{25,26} Union organizers were not able to make much progress in the mill villages. Life in North Carolina continued with little change, as workers lived in housing provided by the mill and shopped at the company store. Their children attended schools provided by the mills, and their recreation and social opportunities were largely provided by the mill.²⁷ There are newspaper accounts of Swepsonville teams competing in a circuit called the Central Carolina League as far back as 1934, playing against teams from Glencoe, Burlington, and Graham.²⁸ Accounts from 1935 show Central Carolina League standings including teams from Graham, “Greensboro (Prox)” (denoting Proximity Manufacturing, the predecessor of textile giant Cone Mills), Swepsonville, and Burlington.²⁹

As the 1930s turned into the 1940s, World War II created tremendous demand for textiles, and brought prosperity and growth to many local manufacturers, including Virginia Mills. In fact, Swepsonville’s Virginia Mills added 90,000 square feet of additional space between 1934 and the end of the war.³⁰ In 1943, the mill’s owner created the Baker Foundation, which was established for the promotion of social and recreational activities in the village.³¹ The foundation’s works included building a community center, a playground, adult softball leagues, and a junior baseball program. The foundation also constructed a covered grandstand and installed lights on what had been just a ballfield since play began there in 1926.³²

Remarkably, this grandstand is still in place today. Aside from repairs and maintenance work, this is essentially the same ballpark where mill workers sat to cheer on their coworkers over seventy years ago. It’s a simple wood grandstand, built of boards, poles, and planks, with just five rows of simple bench seats beginning at ground level, and a total capacity of roughly two hundred people. Unlike the typical design, made up of one section of seats directly behind home plate, and two flanking sections angled down the lines, this grandstand is composed of just two sections that meet directly behind home plate. The resulting shape is like a very shallow “V.” The secret to its survival is likely the size of the roof, which completely overhangs the entire seating areas and has protected the structure from the damaging elements for many decades. For a small-town mill team in the 1940s, it was a state-of-the-art facility.

The grandstand project included lighting, ushering in night baseball. The park also was surrounded by a board fence designed to prevent people from watching the mill team's games without paying.

The teams that played in Swepsonville and the Central Carolina League may not have been as strong as the best industrial teams, like the Bi-State League that moved up to Class D status in 1934, or the aforementioned Carolina League, which fielded teams studded with former minor- and major-league players.³³ Despite that, there was a healthy competitive scene in the central part of North Carolina, not only with teams from Alamance County playing one another in the Central Carolina League, but also a yearly tournament that was billed as a "Semi-pro State Championship" for these teams and others, held in Roxboro.^{34,35} Like many of the industrial leagues, this team operated in territory that eventually included minor league professional teams. The Central Carolina League, which was an organized entity by the 1930s, centered around the Burlington area, which also fielded teams in the Bi-State and Carolina Leagues in 1942, 1945–55, and 1958–72.³⁶ By the 1950s, Swepsonville and other mill towns were still sponsoring semi-pro teams, but many were also fielding community youth teams filled with sons of the mill employees.³⁷

THE ROAD TO THE SHOW

Most area textile teams were made up of some talented local players who happened to work at the mill, as well as a handful of players who were recruited to work at the mill specifically to play baseball. But some years, these teams would include players who were on their way to the big leagues, like Tal Abernathy of the 1940 Burlington Mills team that won the state semi-pro championship.³⁸ The Alamance County area had produced notable ballplayers decades before, including Tom Zachary, a successful major league pitcher from 1918 to 1940, who unfortunately became best known for surrendering Babe Ruth's record-setting 60th home run.³⁹ The Swepsonville community and the surrounding areas produced their share of talent as well. Dusty Cooke was born in Swepsonville in 1907, and made his major league debut with the New York Yankees in 1930. He was a lefthanded-hitting outfielder who played in 608 big league games before returning to the minor leagues after the 1938 season.⁴⁰ Don Thompson went from the Swepsonville ballpark to the majors. He spent four years in the big leagues, including the 1953 season with the Brooklyn Dodgers. He played 96 games that year, sharing left field with

Jackie Robinson, who split time between the outfield and second base. The Dodgers won the National League pennant that year before falling to the Yankees in the World Series.^{41,42} Floyd Wicker from nearby Burlington was another Alamance County product who played at the Swepsonville Ballpark on his way to the big leagues. He played 81 games for Montreal, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and San Francisco between 1968 and 1971. He originally signed with the Cardinals after playing a single season for East Carolina University (then College), helping the Pirates to the NAIA World Series championship.⁴³ Among the most well-known hometown teams was a group of 12–13-year-old youths from Swepsonville known as the "Overall Boys," who won a state championship in 1947. This team, playing in overalls while competing against teams from larger, more affluent communities in full uniforms, became a crowd favorite during the tournament.^{44,45}

A player who was recruited to play ball for the mill, Bob Vaughn became such a favorite son of Swepsonville that one of the roads leading to the ballpark was named for him. He also recorded an early version of the "Splash Home Run" that Barry Bonds made famous in San Francisco. Playing for the Swepsonville mill in the 1950s, he hit a mammoth home run down the right field line, which carried beyond the outfield fence and another fifty feet, landing in the neighboring Haw River.⁴⁶

LIFE BEYOND THE MILL; YOUTH BASEBALL, HIGH SCHOOL AND SUMMER COLLEGE BALL

World War II was an era of great prosperity and growth. But, like many of the mills in the area, Virginia Mills saw decline in the postwar period, as textile production migrated out of North Carolina in search of lower wages. Virginia Mills was closed in 1970. In 1989, the mill complex was destroyed by what is said to be the largest structure fire in the history of North Carolina.⁴⁷

This was also an era of increasing competition for locally-oriented entertainment like mill team baseball. Television was growing in popularity and air conditioning was beginning to appear in homes.⁴⁸ Posing even more immediate competition just up the road, the city of Burlington opened a new concrete and steel ballpark in 1960 with a capacity of several thousand fans to house their MLB-affiliated minor league team, the Alamance Indians of the Carolina League.⁴⁹

The site of Virginia Mills is now a large open field dotted with brick and concrete foundations. One can only imagine the noise and activity level while the mill complex was still operating, as it cranked out textiles for the U.S. efforts in both world wars. As late as 1969,

the mill was still running three shifts, with roughly 1200 people employed. The death of Walter M. Williams, who led the mill and had strong ties to the garment industry in New York City, was identified by many in the community as a death blow to the mill as well, as it closed shortly thereafter.⁵⁰

Although the mill is no more, the ballpark lives on, and currently hosts baseball at a variety of levels. Of course, even when the mill was in its heyday, the field was used for more than textile league games. Youth baseball and adult softball sponsored first by the mill, later by the Alamance County Recreation Department, has continued to be played there.

Nearby Southern Alamance High School used the field for baseball and softball games prior to construction of fields on their campus. One of those Southern Alamance High School players was Raymond Herring, who played outfield for Southern when they won a state championship in 1965.

It was during his high school years that Herring met a girl from Swepsonville who became his wife, and the couple moved there after they were married. While running a successful construction company, Herring spearheaded Swepsonville's efforts to become an incorporated town, and then served as mayor for 22 years, from 1997 to 2019.⁵¹

During that time, he led the way on a number of projects. One was the Swepsonville River Park, a part of the Haw River Hiking and Paddle Trail that sits on the opposite bank of the Haw River, within sight of the ballpark. But the ballpark was always especially close to Herring's heart, and even before he took over as mayor, preservation of this gem was a priority for him and other concerned citizens of Swepsonville.

Shortly before the mill closed down, the Swepsonville Community Development Association, a group of civic-minded local residents, took over the ballpark, community center, and playground from the Baker

PHOTOS BY MARK CRYAN



Current photos of the ballpark in Swepsonville show the wooden grandstand still standing. The roof likely aided the structure's longevity.



Foundation. A lease was signed in 1967, giving all the community's facilities over to the association for \$3 a year.⁵²

Over the years, the association undertook renovations, including a major round of work in the early 1990s. The group built a picnic area, walkways, handicapped accessible bathrooms, and a modern concession stand. Herring was hands-on with much of this work, including pouring "every bit of the concrete" in the ballpark.⁵³

The association also oversaw a replacement of the lighting system in the late 1980s, funded by a distribution of money resulting from the closing of the Graham Savings Bank. While the association kept the facility in operation and were able to undertake some repairs, the town took over management and ownership of the ballpark in the late 1990s.⁵⁴

Recently, the Old North State League, a summer college baseball league based in North Carolina, approached the town about using the Swepsonville Ballpark as the home field for a team. The Swepsonville Sweepers took the field with a roster consisting mostly of players from North Carolina, representing schools like Greensboro College, Guilford Tech, North Carolina Central University, Fayetteville Tech, and Catawba.⁵⁵

The Old North State League also sponsors a showcase league for high-school-age players. The league also played Old North State League tournament games in Swepsonville, making this ballpark a very busy place.⁵⁶ In exchange for the use of the field for the college team and the showcase ball, the Old North State League improved and repaired fencing, and invested in improving the playing surfaces.

This was a tremendous benefit to a small municipality like Swepsonville, which has no property tax and relies on their pro-rated share of the county's sales tax for all its funding, according to Town Administrator Brad Bullis. He grew up in the area and remembers playing youth baseball in the Alamance County Recreation Department's recreation leagues at the Swepsonville Ballpark. Bullis was pleased with both the improvements, and the visitors it brought to Swepsonville and the county.⁵⁷

"A REAL GEM"

This ballpark is hidden away in a modest residential neighborhood just a few blocks from the traffic light at Swepsonville's main crossroads, Main Street and Swepsonville-Saxapahaw Road. Nestled between the Haw River and a large pond, with only trees and the river beyond the outfield wall, this ballpark is a true step back in time. With the pop of the glove and the

sound of the ball hitting the bat, attending a game here can give visitors a glimpse into the history of the game, and perhaps, an ever-rarer glimpse into its heart. ■

Author's Notes

This research project was greatly aided by Mayor Robert Herring, a former local ballplayer and fan who has been termed the "George Washington" of Swepsonville, as well as Burlington Recreation Director Tony Laws, and Swepsonville Town Administrator Brad Bullis.

Additional Reading

Anyone who is interested in learning more about textile league baseball and the early history of minor league baseball in North Carolina should pick up Hank Utley and Scott Verner's meticulously researched and eminently readable book, *The Independent Carolina League, 1936–1938: Baseball Outlaws*.

Few counties have such a thorough and well-written history available as *Shuttle & Plow: A History of Alamance County* by Carol Troxler and William Vincent.

The Minor League Baseball Encyclopedia by Miles Wolff and Lloyd Johnson, even in the Internet age, remains an invaluable resource, just as it was when I was scouting cities for the Coastal Plain League.

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Radar (Gun) Love

Douglas Jordan, PhD

For baseball fans who are no longer young, it is easy to conjure up the once-common image of a man behind home plate with a radar gun pointed at the pitcher. But as technology has advanced, the once cutting-edge radar gun has been replaced by new and better equipment. Today, advanced systems, such as TrackMan and Hawk-Eye, provide more, and better, data about what happens on the field than the radar gun did, and one no longer sees the familiar gun at major league games. Does this mean that radar guns are outdated and no longer useful? The somewhat surprising answer is no. Just like cell phones, radar guns are becoming more, not less, common in the world of baseball. This article will discuss three aspects of the current radar gun phenomenon: what is driving the demand for radar guns, factors affecting the accuracy of a radar gun reading, and a comparison of velocity results from widely used guns.

WHAT IS CREATING DEMAND FOR RADAR GUNS?

In today's data-driven baseball environment, one of the most important data is the speed of a pitch. Baseball commentators regularly discuss the speed of a pitcher's fastball and the difference in miles per hour between his fastball and changeup, and the pitch speed appears on most big-league scoreboards. The speed, flight, and location of every pitch thrown in a major-league stadium is tracked. Some of the tracking data are made available to fans via websites such as Baseball Savant and Brooks Baseball. But this very useful information is routinely recorded only at big-league ballparks. Increasing demand for radar guns is coming from other participants in the world of baseball who have the same need for velocity data that major league players do.

Two large groups of players who need velocity data are pitchers at the college and high school level who aspire to pitch in the big leagues. It's no secret that one of the primary things big-league scouts look for is velocity. This quotation from a scout emphasizes that idea: "You hate to say it, but velocity is kind of the first thing that jumps out at you. There are plenty of kids out here that can pitch but are throwing 80 and that

just isn't going to work."¹ Thousands of pitchers at these levels need radar guns to know where they stand from a velocity perspective.

In addition to providing aspiring big-league pitchers with peak pitch-velocity numbers, radar guns can also be useful in training. Radar gun data can show if these pitchers are improving their velocity over time. Mike Reinold of Elite Baseball Performance says that radar gun data can help a player with power development and can be used as a way to monitor the intensity of training.² Players who use a medicine ball in order to increase power can use radar gun measurements of the medicine ball to improve power output over time. In terms of intensity of training, radar guns can be used to develop a preseason program that slowly increases the capacity of the arm to handle the stress of the regular season and can be used during the season to carefully monitor workload.

The intensity of training load on the arm is also important after arm surgery. Post-surgery recovery programs have historically tried to limit the load on the recovering arm by asking the player to throw at 50 percent or 75 percent effort. But it is difficult for the player to know what these levels of effort are with any precision. This can result in higher-than-intended arm load. A recent study shows that radar guns can help with this issue. Players can easily target a pitch velocity when they know the pitch speed from a radar gun. This reduces the chance of overloading the surgically repaired arm unintentionally.³

Although radar guns have traditionally been used to measure pitch speed, other parameters from the action on the field are also valuable. For example, the exit speed of the ball coming off the bat is an important parameter for hitters. A common rule of thumb is that each additional mile per hour of ball exit velocity results in four to six feet of additional flight distance, depending on the launch and spray angles (dead center field is zero spray angle).⁴ Given the emphasis on home runs in today's game, this gives hitters (at every level) an incentive to measure (and to try to increase) their batted-ball exit velocity.

The need for data is not limited to baseball. Pitchers and hitters in fast-pitch softball want data for the same reasons as baseball players. Ball exit velocity is also important for players improving their skills in slow-pitch softball. The participants in these sports form another large group who want to be able to measure pitch speed and ball exit velocity.

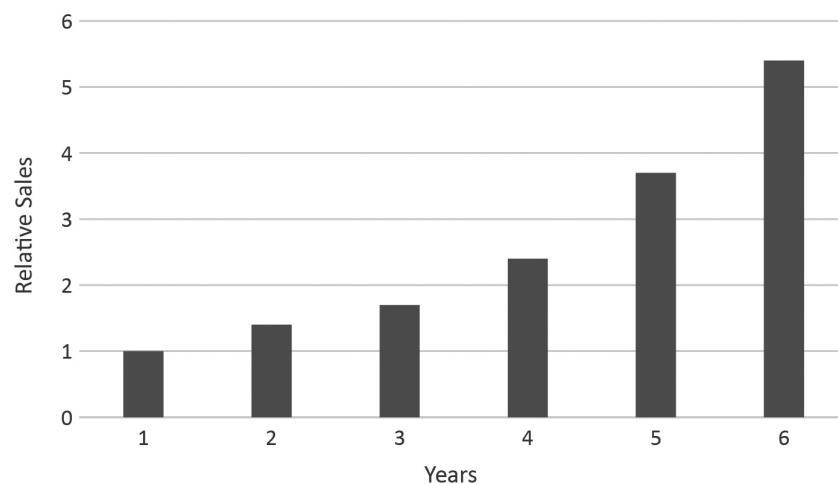
These examples show that there is strong demand for ball-related data both inside and outside of major league baseball. This has resulted in the tremendous growth in radar gun sales that can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows the relative year-over-year growth in radar guns sales during the past five years for a leading radar gun provider. The company provided the data in Figure 1 on the condition that specific numbers of units sold would not be released. But the data still allow us to see that the compound annual growth rate over this period is 40 percent. It's not an exaggeration to say that radar gun sales are booming for this firm. Although industry-wide data are not available, it is likely that demand has increased across the industry and not just for this one manufacturer.

THE ACCURACY OF A RADAR GUN READING IS CRUCIAL

Radar guns appear to be easy to use. You just point the gun at the target to get a reading, right? But if a radar gun reads 94.2 mph, is that the end of the story? Was that pitch velocity exactly 94.2 mph? How much confidence can you have that the reading is accurate? Could the true velocity be lower or higher? Given the importance attached to high-velocity readings, the purpose of this section of the article is to examine some of the issues associated with the use of radar guns in order to better understand how these issues can impact the accuracy of the reading.

Figure 1. Radar Gun Sales Growth



1) What a drag it is getting home

After a pitcher releases a pitch there are three primary forces that act on the ball. Gravity pulls the ball toward the ground, spin on the ball creates what is referred to as Magnus force, and air resistance creates drag which slows the ball. All three of these forces are important in order to fully understand what happens to a pitched ball as it travels toward the plate, but from a radar-gun usage perspective, the most important parameter is drag. The force of drag on a pitched baseball is proportional to the square of the velocity that the ball is traveling. This means that drag on the ball increases significantly as pitch speed increases.

The magnitude of the drag effect on a pitched baseball is surprising. A pitch released at 100 mph will be 12 mph slower when it crosses home plate.⁵ A 90 mph pitch will lose 10 mph before it crosses the plate. This is roughly a ten percent decrease in speed between the mound and the plate. A ten miles per hour decrease in the 0.4 seconds it takes the ball to reach the plate is an average of 25 mph/sec deceleration of the ball. *Motor Trend* magazine reports that the 2015 Porsche 918 Spyder goes from zero to 60 in 2.4 seconds.⁶ It's hard to believe that the average deceleration of the baseball is equivalent to the average acceleration of a top-end sports car, but it is. The car accelerates at an average rate of 25 mph/sec. It is also interesting to note that 25 mph/sec is about 37 ft/sec². The acceleration due to gravity is roughly 32 ft/sec². So the deceleration of a pitched ball—and the acceleration of the sports car—are roughly equivalent to the acceleration of a ball that is dropped with zero initial velocity. Because the ball decelerates so quickly, where a radar gun picks up the pitch along its flight has a big impact on the velocity reading.

This discussion of the deceleration of a pitched baseball leads naturally to an exploration of the history of pitch-speed measurement and then to the question of who was the fastest pitcher ever. Although this is an interesting topic in itself, the subject is tangential to the main points of this article, so the digression will be brief. (A detailed discussion of the topic can be found at the website eFastball.com.)

The question of who threw the fastest pitch is worthy of an entire book and Tim Wendel has written a good one on the subject. Wendel's book, *High Heat: The Secret History*

of the Fastball and the Improbable Search for the Fastest Pitcher of All Time, describes his quest to figure out who threw the hardest. The issue is also explored in the interesting documentary film *Fastball*. In both the book and the documentary, three of the leading candidates are Walter Johnson, Bob Feller, and Nolan Ryan. But because pitch speed was measured differently for each pitcher, how each measurement was made has bearing on the answer.

Lindsay Berra provides a good summary of the results in her review of the documentary.⁷ Johnson's fastball was measured at a munitions laboratory and was clocked at 83.2 mph. Feller's fastball was measured at 98.6 mph using Army equipment (Feller also famously tested his fastball velocity by comparing it to a speeding motorcycle and the documentary shows film of the test) and Ryan's fastball was measured at 100.9 mph using a Rockwell laser device. This makes Ryan the fastest, right? Not necessarily. The readings were not all taken at the same distance from the release point. Johnson's speed reading was taken behind where home plate would have been, Feller's was measured at home plate, and Ryan's reading was taken about ten feet in front of home. After adjusting for the loss of speed due to drag, Wendel, the film, and eFastball.com all conclude that Ryan threw the hardest. After adjustment for ball deceleration, Ryan's fastball is considered the fastest of all time at 108.1 mph.

More recently, the rapid deceleration of the baseball is the primary reason there can be a difference in radar gun readings. A gun that measures the speed of the ball soon after it leaves the pitcher's hand will register a higher speed than a gun that measures the speed of the ball as it nears home plate. Where the radar gun measures the speed is a function of the physics of the signal emitted by the gun, the reflected signal received at the gun, and the sophistication of the measurement algorithms inside the radar. In the early days of radar gun usage, you would often hear references to "fast guns" versus "slow guns." The JUGS gun became known as a fast gun because it measured the speed of the ball midway along the flight path. Another early gun, the Decatur RAGUN, measured the speed near home plate. There was often a four-mile-per-hour difference between readings from the two guns.⁸ The Stalker guns that came out in the 1990s measured pitch speed closer to the release point than either of these others. The JUGS gun then became the "slow" gun compared to Stalker gun readings.⁹

2) The accuracy of radar guns is impacted by the margin of error
The accuracy of any given radar gun reading is a

function of the margin of error associated with that gun. For example, one popular model, the Stalker Sport 2, has a performance specification that the gun's accuracy is $\pm 3\%$ of the reading.¹⁰ This means that the true speed of a pitch that reads 100 mph on the gun could range from 97 to 103 mph. This isn't necessarily bad, but it is something else to be aware of when using a radar gun and utilizing the output. The margin of error means that one cannot put too much stock in any single velocity reading. A series of readings at roughly the same velocity is more likely to be correct than a single reading.

One of the guns with a small margin of error is the Pocket Radar Smart Coach. This gun has a margin of error of ± 1 mph.¹¹ A reading from the Smart Coach of 100 mph means that the actual velocity could be anywhere between 99 mph and 101 mph. But some radar guns display the velocity reading to the tenth of a mile per hour (94.2 mph, for example). Because of the margin of error associated with any reading, a display to the tenth of a mile per hour is misleading the user. Users are being given a false sense of accuracy when the gun displays the velocity to the tenth of a mile per hour when the margin of error is much larger.

3) Angle error or cosine error

In order to get the most accurate measurement of ball speed, a radar gun must be placed directly in line with the direction the ball is moving. It doesn't matter if the gun is in front of the ball or behind the ball, as long as the radar beam is aimed along the line of travel. All radar guns direct radio waves into a narrow, focused beam. If the radar beam is aimed at an angle relative to the flight path of the ball, a measurement error is introduced. This error, known as cosine error, is proportional to the cosine of the angle between the radar beam and the line of travel. The measured speed of the ball will be equal to the actual ball speed times the cosine of the angle. This means that the measured speed will be lower than the actual speed if the gun is not properly positioned. That's why radar gun operators were always placed in the area behind home plate in the early days of radar gun usage in major league baseball.

Cosine error is relatively insignificant at small angles. For example, at a five-degree angle to the line of flight, cosine error reduces the measured speed by only 0.4 percent. That means a true 100 mph pitch will read 99.6 mph on the gun. But cosine error becomes more significant at larger angles. The error increases to 1.5 percent at 10 degrees and 3.4 percent at 15 degrees. Ten degrees seems like a pretty small angle. But the

gun operator needs to be only about 12 feet off the line of travel at a distance of 70 feet from the mound to be at an angle of 10 degrees. In this case, a true 100 mph pitch will read 98.5 on the gun because of cosine error.

Cosine error is not difficult to avoid, and some guns can adjust for cosine error if the radar gun operator inputs the angle to the line of travel. But it is something for both radar gun operators and users of the data to be aware of.

4) Interference

Radar guns can give spurious and erroneous readings. The police refer to these as “Ghost Readings.” These readings can be caused by interference from other devices that operate in the same frequency range as the gun. Possible sources of electrical interference include cell phone towers, fluorescent lights, television monitors, and power transformers. It’s also possible that nearby moving objects like fans, motors, or blowing debris can cause an improper reading. The use of multiple guns in the same area can also cause interference! As with cosine error, interference is something an operator needs to be aware of when using a radar gun.

COMPARISON OF VELOCITY READINGS FROM COMMONLY USED RADAR GUNS

The accuracy and consistency of a radar gun’s readings are important. Both of these parameters can be tested by comparing readings of the same pitch from different radar guns. If both radar guns produce the same reading, that suggests that the two guns are accurate. Conversely, a wide variation in the readings suggests that one or both guns are not accurate. This portion of the paper describes the results of pitch-velocity readings from three pairs of guns.¹²

There are a number of companies that sell radar guns. These include (but are not limited to) Stalker, JUGS, Pocket Radar, and Bushnell. The Stalker Pro II is widely considered to be the gold standard in radar guns.¹³ But it’s expensive, costing well over \$1400. The Stalker Sport 2, which enjoys a similar reputation, is less expensive at roughly \$600. Velocity readings from these two Stalker guns are compared first.

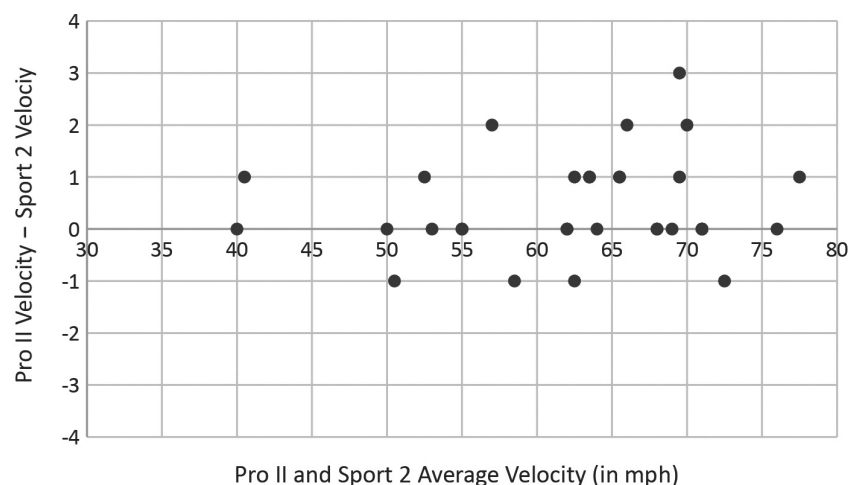
The experimental setup was simple. The pitcher stood about 40 feet away from a net and threw about 35 pitches toward the net. The guns

measured the pitch speed from behind the net. A common technique for comparing readings of the same datum from different devices is a Bland-Altman plot. In this type of plot, the average of the two readings is shown on the X-axis and the difference between the two readings is plotted on the Y-axis. Bland-Altman plots are good at showing systematic error: in this case, systematic error means one gun is consistently slower, or faster, than the other and excessive variability between measurements. A Bland-Altman plot for the two Stalker radar guns is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows that all but four of the velocity readings between the two Stalker guns were within one mile per hour of each other. This shows that these two guns don’t vary too much and can therefore be considered reliable. Three of the readings differed by two miles per hour and one reading differed by three miles per hour. Given the Stalker Sport 2 and the Stalker Pro II both have a margin of error of $\pm 3\%$ (which is about two miles per hour at a pitch speed of 70 mph), all of the readings are within the margin of error.¹⁴ However, more of the readings differed from each other (18 total) than were the same (15 total). These data show that there can be considerable differences in radar gun readings even from reliable guns from the same manufacturer. This test demonstrates why it is unrealistic to believe any radar gun is accurate to within 0.1 mph in a real-world setting.

Pocket Radar (PR) is a relatively recent entry into the radar gun field. The PR devices do not have the traditional radar gun shape and look more like a smart phone than a gun. The firm’s main line has two products for baseball, the Ball Coach at about \$300 and the Smart Coach at about \$400. The accuracy of both

Figure 2. Bland-Altman Plot: Stalker Pro II versus Stalker Sport 2



devices is ± 1 mph. Figure 3 shows a Bland-Altman plot for the PR Smart Coach compared to the Stalker Sport 2.

Figure 3 shows that there is good agreement between these two guns. All of the readings but one are within one mile per hour. As with the two Stalker guns, this shows that the PR devices are reliable radar guns. The single reading with a difference of two miles per hour is within the Stalker's $\pm 3\%$ margin of error. In this comparison, 16 of the pitches had the same reading while 15 of the pitches had a different reading. As with the results from the two Stalker guns, this shows why you can't count on any single radar gun reading as being exactly accurate.

The final comparison is between the Stalker Sport 2 and an older Bushnell radar gun. Bushnell guns are less expensive than the other models. This comparison shows what can happen in terms of accuracy with lower-priced guns. Figure 4 shows the Bland-Altman plot for these two radar guns.

Figure 4 shows that there is a persistent lower-velocity reading bias for the Bushnell gun compared to the Sport 2. The overall average velocity for the Bushnell pitch data is 68.0 mph. The overall average velocity for the Sport 2 for the same set of pitches is 70.2 mph. This bias is clearly evident in the Bland-Altman plot. The Bushnell readings are consistently one to two miles per hour slower than the Sport 2. In addition, the range of the readings on the plot is wider, and there are more data points at the top and bottom of each range, than on the previous Bland-Altman plots. This shows that this less-expensive model is more likely to register an inaccurate reading than the higher-priced guns.

CONCLUSION

Intuition suggests that the technological advances that have led to the plethora of data now available from a major league baseball game would have made radar guns obsolete. It's true that radar guns are no longer necessary at big-league ballparks. But the need for data extends beyond the 30 teams in MLB.

Players and coaches at all levels of the game, from the minors to high school and college, have the same desire for data. Advances in technology have lowered the price of radar guns to where participants in baseball at all levels can afford to satisfy their desire for data with their own radar guns. This has led to tremendous demand for radar guns and the boom in radar gun sales shown in Figure 1.

It is also important to be aware of two simple facts about radar guns. First, because of the physics associated with the way guns work, there is always a margin of error associated with every radar gun reading. The true velocity could be higher or lower than the reading. Second, accuracy varies from gun to gun. In general, the more expensive guns are reputed to be more accurate than the least expensive guns. However, just because a radar gun is more expensive does not necessarily mean it is more accurate. Both of these points are demonstrated in the Bland-Altman plots shown in Figures 2, 3, and 4. ■

Figure 3. Bland-Altman Plot: Pocket Radar Smart Coach versus Stalker Sport 2

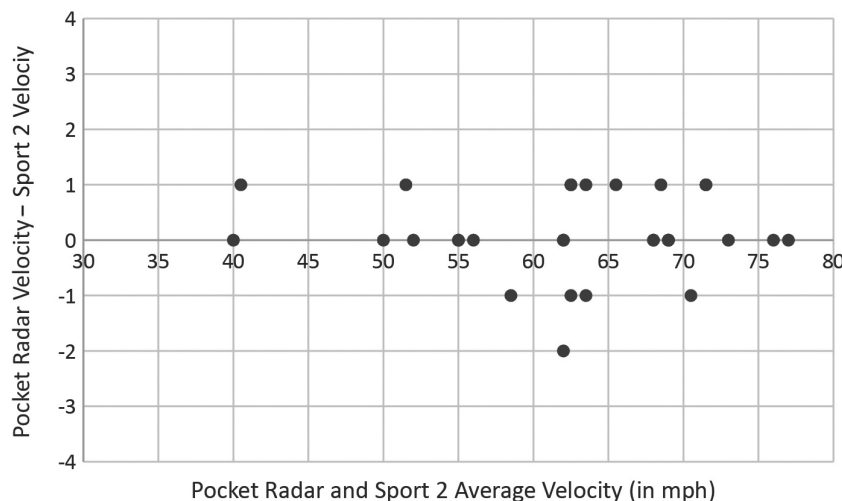
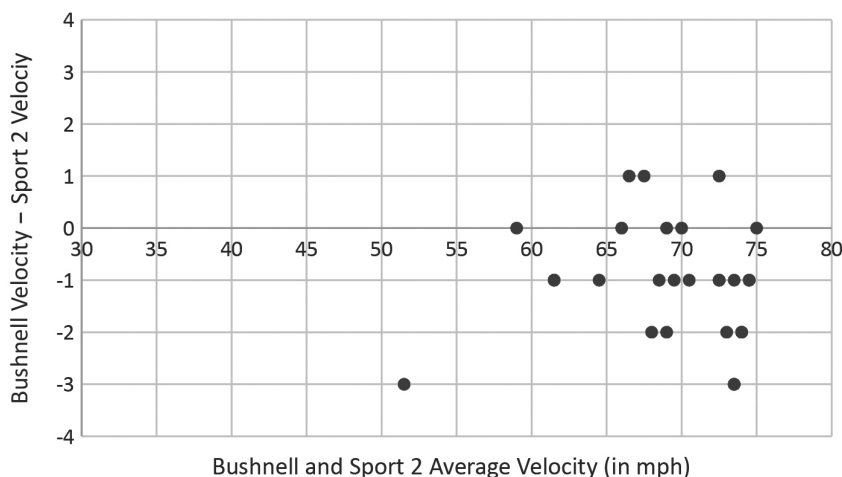


Figure 4. Bland-Altman Plot: Bushnell versus Stalker Sport 2



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I gratefully acknowledge the assistance I received from several individuals in the baseball community while researching this paper. I could not have written the article without their input and advice. I also need to thank three anonymous peer reviewers who provided comments on the original draft of the paper. The final result is significantly improved because of their input.

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12. The comparison of radar-gun readings section of this article is based on Zac Morain's Pitcher Lyfe blog. Mr. Morain generated the data and generously allowed it to be used in this article. The web site is: <https://pitcherlyfe.wordpress.com/2019/07/13/radar-gun-fun-part-3>.
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Baseball, Hot Dogs, and ToxPi

An Approach for Visualizing Player Performance Metrics

Benjamin J. Dertinger and Stephen D. Dertinger, PhD

Major League Baseball (MLB) is awash in advanced metrics that more reliably describe key aspects of players' offensive and defensive performance compared to "traditional" statistics. PITCHf/x and Statcast greatly contributed to this. The power of the original Statcast system came from its effective integration of high-definition video cameras and Doppler radar.¹ Whereas cameras were useful for following player movement, the radar system's strong suit was tracking the baseball, including velocity off the bat, spin rate, and myriad other metrics that had previously resisted accurate quantification. The second-generation Statcast technology was put into operation in 2020, and it employs 12 high-resolution and high-frame-rate video cameras to detect and track player and ball movement. (For more information about the hardware and software components of the updated system, interested readers are directed to a review by Ben Jedlovec.²)

It has been reported that even the first-generation Statcast system was capable of supplying teams with 70 fields times 1.5 billion rows of data per season.³ Yes, a billion with a b! This flood of information has supercharged MLB teams' and the sabermetric community's development of ever-more useful statistics for describing player performance. However, this amount of data brings significant challenges. Perhaps chief among them is the ever-growing number of player performance metrics that have become lost in a sea of impenetrable tables. For example, at the time of this writing, the FanGraphs website provides MLB position players' statistics across 20 tables.⁴

Overreliance on numerous, dense tables is a recognized problem that fosters inaction. This has been elegantly described by Professor David Olusoga and Dr. Steven Johnson in the BBC television special *Extra Life: A Short History of Living Longer*.⁵ They presented the case of physician Ignaz Semmelweis, whose investigation revealed that death among women giving birth plummeted when doctors washed their hands before assisting with delivery. Tragically, Dr. Semmelweis's findings languished for decades in dense, inelegant tables that failed to influence his Venetian colleagues.

The BBC special's counterpoint was Florence Nightingale. Nightingale's mid-1850s data indicated unsanitary conditions at Crimean War field hospitals and consequential infections were responsible for the vast majority of fatalities. Her body of work rapidly transformed hospital practices, and saved untold thousands of lives in her lifetime. Professor Olusoga and Dr. Johnson credited the rapidity and remarkable progress in preventable deaths to the information Nightingale presented as visually arresting graphics that became known as Rose Diagrams.

Addressing MLB's data deluge and overreliance on tables of numbers is obviously not of the same import as the life-saving work described above. That said, the same lesson applies: potentially actionable information is more likely put to use when it is freed from tables and transformed into readily interpretable visuals.⁶

When contemplating MLB's data volume and visualization challenges, it occurred to us that there are certain similarities to the discipline of safety toxicology, where the use of high-information content assays for characterizing chemicals' toxicological profiles has exploded.⁷ Interestingly enough, one tool that toxicologists have turned to has a certain family resemblance to Florence Nightingale's Rose Diagram: the Toxicological Prioritization Index, or ToxPi for short.⁸ ToxPi is an analytical software package that combines multiple sources of evidence by transforming data into integrated, visual profiles.

The ToxPi interface is based on a Java-executable script that is freely available at <http://toxpi.org>. (A version based on the R statistical programming language became available in February 2022, and can be found at the same site.) In addition to the main Java script, the single, compressed download includes a user manual, all libraries, and example data files. Visually, ToxPi is represented as component slices of a unit circle, with each slice representing one piece of information. For each slice, distance from the center is proportional to a user-defined metric (in our use case, some performance statistic), and the width indicates the relative weight of that metric in an overall ToxPi

score calculation. Figure 1 shows two prototypical profiles and is provided to familiarize readers with the basic ToxPi structure. Besides the software's ability to distill complex statistics into informative summary graphics, it provides quantitative results in the form of slice scores, which corresponds to an individual performance metrics, and an aggregate ToxPi score, which represents the normalized sum of the slice scores.

Toxicologists have found that the ToxPi program has several compelling features that make it ideal for communicating results to wide audiences: ability to incorporate diverse data types into one integrated model; ability to easily share models and add new data; capacity for differential weighing of factors; quantitative analyses that are accompanied by informative graphics; transparency in score derivation and graphing; dynamic data exploration; depiction of model uncertainty in the form of 95% confidence intervals; and extreme flexibility.

Taking advantage of the platform's flexibility, this paper describes the repurposing of ToxPi software to synthesize multiple MLB player performance metrics into summary graphics and statistics. Over the following pages several illustrative case studies are provided: i) a model that describes Bryce Harper's offensive and defensive skills over several consecutive years; ii) a comparison of 24 position players over the seasons

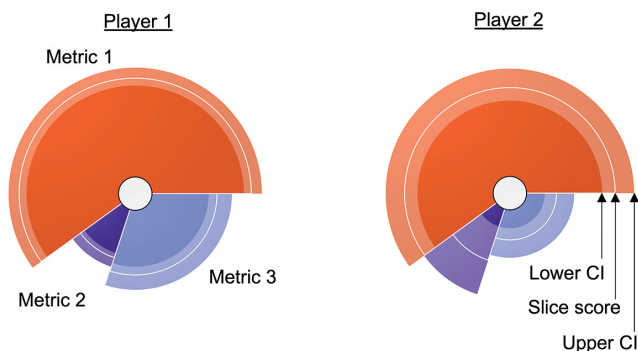


Figure 1. Here is the anatomy of a ToxPi profile. Profiles for two players are shown for a model comprised of three statistics (metrics, in ToxPi parlance). In this particular example, each metric represents a different statistic that was measured over several consecutive years. For each pie slice, the distance from the origin to the thin white line represents the slice score (i.e., longer protrusion=better performance). The radial angle (width) of each slice indicates the statistic's weight in the overall model. Optional lower and upper bounds 95% confidence intervals are indicated as the lighter-shaded area at the boundary of each slice arc. In this example, the two players show relatively similar performance for Metric 1 on average. However, the player on the right exhibits a wider lighter-shaded band. This is indicative of greater model uncertainty, and is the result of greater variation in the player's performance over the years the statistic was tracked.

2016–19; iii) an analysis that models Mike Trout's splits with respect to pitch type; and iv) multifactorial pitcher models that highlight a useful data transformation step as well as an alternative factor-weighting technique. These are not intended to be definitive analyses and do not represent the only ToxPi use cases. Rather, these examples are offered to introduce the sabermetrics community and other stakeholders to the flexibility and merits of this simple but powerful data synthesis and visualization platform.

METHODS

The Methods section is provided to support data analysts that are interested in applying ToxPi analyses to their own research. Casual readers may wish to skip to the Results and Discussion section.

ToxPi Score, Slice Score

There are two key quantitative metrics associated with each ToxPi profile: slice scores and an overall ToxPi score. To obtain slice scores, player performance metrics (e.g., batting average, on-base percentage, etc.) are summed for each player, then normalized to the interval zero to one by dividing each player result by the slice maximum across all players. Values closer to the maximum translate to higher performance relative to all other players, whereas values closer to the origin (equal to 0) translate to poorer performance. The overall ToxPi score is the sum of each slice, which is also rescaled to the interval zero to one in order to facilitate score interpretation across different models.

Data

All data are from Fangraphs. A list of Fangraph-sourced statistics and their abbreviations follow:

AVG: batting average.

ERA- ERA minus is a park- and league-adjusted version of earned run average. League average is 100, and each point above or below 100 is one percentage point better or worse than league average.

BABIP: batting average on balls in play.

BsR: base-running runs above average. This statistic converts stolen bases, caught stealing, and other base-running plays into runs above and below average.

FIP- FIP minus is the park- and league-adjusted version of fielding independent pitching. This statistic estimates a pitcher's run prevention independent of the performance of their defense. League average is 100, and each point above or below 100 is one percentage point better or worse than league average.

Innings: innings pitched in a given season.

K%: strikeout rate, how often a hitter strikes out on a per-plate-appearance basis.

K/BB: strikeout-to-walk ratio, a measure of a pitcher's ability to control pitches.

OBP: on-base percentage, a measure of how frequently a batter reaches base.

SLG: slugging, represents the total number of bases a player records per at-bat.

UZR/150: ultimate zone rating, a comprehensive defensive statistic that puts a run value to defense; 150 signifies UZR has been scaled to 150 games.

WAR: wins above replacement. This statistic summarizes a player's total contributions to their team in one value, and represents a useful reference point for comparing players.

WHIP: walks plus hits per innings pitched, measures how many baserunners a pitcher allows per inning.

wRAA: weighted runs above average, measures the number of offensive runs a player contributes to their team compared to the average player. A wRAA of zero is league-average, so a positive wRAA value denotes above-average performance and a negative wRAA denotes below-average performance.

The ToxPi user manual describes data file formatting requirements. Therefore, we will only briefly describe our file structures for the work described herein. All analyses used season-level statistics and were entered into Microsoft Excel for Mac (v16.16.14). In order for ToxPi to recognize the files, they were exported as comma separated value (csv) files. For the purpose of this presentation, we will refer to one data-entry format as time series. For time series models, a single column was used to record player and season information (e.g., Bryce Harper 2015, Bryce Harper 2016, etc.). Other columns were used for each of the statistics included in the model (e.g., wRAA, BsR, etc.). In this manner, each row captured a different season's worth of statistics. This format allowed us to assign one statistic to a unique ToxPi slice. These time series-formatted files were used to create one ToxPi profile for each year studied.

We refer to a second data-entry format as inter-player comparison. For this type of model, one column was used to record the player name (e.g., Mookie Betts, Mike Trout, etc.), and one column was dedicated to each statistic/year combination studied (e.g., wRAA 2015, BsR 2015, wRAA 2016, BsR 2016, etc.). Each row therefore captured an individual player's statistics over multiple years. This format allowed us to assign

multiple years of one statistic to a unique ToxPi slice, and thereby generate one ToxPi profile for each player studied, summarized across the specified years. Note that several position players contributed less than 72 games during 2016 (e.g., Aaron Judge), and in these cases that season was not studied.

ToxPi requires non-negative numbers. Therefore, some statistics such as BsR, wRAA, and UZR/150 required offsets. In Excel, before creating a csv file for uploading into ToxPi, seven was added to each BsR value, and twenty was added to each wRAA and UZR/150 value.

Regardless of the format used, once a csv file was uploaded into the ToxPi program, statistics were assigned to particular slices and then repositioned, given different weights, and assigned a shade of grey (for the printed journal) or a unique color (for electronic versions of the article). The resulting models were exported as new csv files which encoded these choices so they did not have to be re-specified when new data were entered.

We appreciate that the data-formatting descriptions may be somewhat abstract to readers that do not have experience running Java-executable scripts. That being said, we can attest that ToxPi is a very user-friendly interface, and data formatting becomes intuitive after a short period of first-hand experience. For readers interested in learning more about ToxPi, we will make the files and models used herein available upon request (bdertinger23@gmail.com; sderting@rochester.rr.com).

ToxPi Analyses: Position Player Comparisons

Three comprehensive statistics were used to evaluate 24 position players' performance over the years 2016–19: BsR, wRAA, and UZR/150. After exploring several approaches for assigning weighting factors, we achieved adequate performance for the purpose of demonstrating ToxPi's main features by considering the relationship between players' WAR values vs corresponding years' BsR, wRAA, and UZR/150 values. Specifically, three coefficient of determination (R^2) values for 24 players were calculated: WAR vs BsR, WAR vs wRAA, and WAR vs UZR/150. The WAR vs wRAA R^2 value was approximately eightfold higher than the other two coefficients, and it was this relative relationship to WAR that formed the basis of the ToxPi weighting. Thus, BsR, wRAA, and UZR/150-associated R^2 values became ToxPi weighting factors of 10%, 80%, and 10%, respectively. The inter-player comparison file format described above was used, and the resulting model allowed us to generate a ToxPi profile for each player that summarized performance for the three or four years studied.

To evaluate the performance of the three-factor model, a metric was needed to represent ground truth. We chose WAR, summed over the four-year period under study. We plotted each player's WAR value against their corresponding ToxPi score, and the R^2 value was calculated with Excel. This statistic was used to assess how closely the three-factor ToxPi model correlated with WAR and, by extension, how well the model performed.

ToxPi Analyses: Bryce Harper Time Series

The same three-factor model described above (BsR, wRAA, and UZR/150 weighted at 10%, 80%, and 10%, respectively) was used to evaluate Bryce Harper's performance over four consecutive years, 2016–19. In this case, we used the time series-type format. Executing this model allowed us to generate a ToxPi profile for each of four years under consideration. In combination with Bryce Harper results from the inter-player comparison format described above, this example highlights the ability of ToxPi to depict results on a per-season basis, as well as summarized results across multiple years.

ToxPi Analyses: Mike Trout Pitch-Type Splits

A four-factor ToxPi model was built to study Mike Trout's performance against six pitch types over eight years, 2012–19. Three metrics were the slash line statistics: AVG, OBP, and SLG. The fourth metric was the comprehensive offensive statistic wRAA. We weighted each of the slash-line statistics at 16.67%, and wRAA at 50%. Rather than generating a ToxPi profile for each year and each pitch type (six pitches x eight years = 48 profiles), we included each of the season's statistics into the four ToxPi slices. This is analogous to the inter-player comparison format described above, but with a different pitch type appearing in each row instead of a different player. Given this format, ToxPi distilled the number of profiles down to six, one per pitch type, summarized across eight years.

ToxPi Analyses: Pitcher Comparisons

A seven-factor ToxPi model was built to study nine different pitchers' performances over the years 2016–19. One pitcher was represented a second time, over an earlier four-year span (i.e., Clayton Kershaw's historically great performance from 2012–2015 was added as an interesting frame of reference). Six statistics included in the model were: WHIP, ERA-, FIP-, BABIP, K%, and K/BB, which were all weighted equally. A seventh statistic, innings, was incorporated in an alternate manner: Each of the six aforementioned metrics was multiplied by the corresponding year's innings value.

To conduct these analyses, data were entered according to the previously described inter-player comparison format. This model was not constructed to produce a ToxPi profile for each year and each pitcher (four years x 10 pitcher comparisons = 40 profiles). Rather, ToxPi distilled the number of profiles down to 10, one per pitcher, summarized across four years.

Pitcher performance modeling provided an opportunity to highlight an important data transformation requirement. Specifically, whenever a statistic signifies better performance with a lower value as opposed to a greater value, a data transformation step is required. Therefore, for the statistics WHIP, ERA-, FIP-, and BABIP we used a reciprocal transformation (e.g., $1/\text{WHIP}$, etc.).

To evaluate the performance of the model, a ground truth-type metric was required. As with the position player models, we used the sum of WAR for the years under consideration. The R^2 value was used to assess how closely the ToxPi model correlated with WAR.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bryce Harper time series

ToxPi profiles that describe Bryce Harper's overall performance over the years 2016–19 are shown in Figure 2. ToxPi scores for these years were 0.4455,

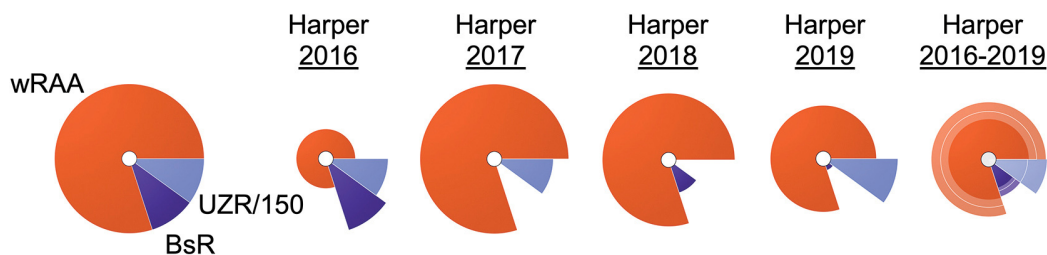


Figure 2. ToxPi profiles for Bryce Harper using a three-factor model that includes wRAA, BsR, and UZR/150. The four individual-year profiles are instructive, as they show a precipitous dropoff in fielding for the 2018 season. The profile to the far right distills these four years of data into one figure. Its use of 95% confidence intervals (lighter-shaded bands at the periphery of each wedge) conveys the model's level of uncertainty in each of the slice scores.

0.8769, 0.7425, and 0.6508, respectively. The graphic representations of the four individual years are instructive, as they show a precipitous dropoff in fielding for the 2018 season. The profile to the far right concisely synthesizes these four years of play into one information-rich figure. While in some respects the four-year view lacks some of the granularity of individual-year profiles, one can appreciate its advantages for research questions that involve many players over numerous years. The aggregate image also provides us with the opportunity to showcase a key advantage of ToxPi, that is, its ability to convey model uncertainty in the form of 95% confidence intervals (i.e., the lighter-shaded bands at the periphery of each wedge). In the current Harper example, the wide UZR/150 confidence interval emphasizes the large variation in defensive performance over the four years under consideration. While this was apparent across the four individual per season profiles, it is more efficiently conveyed in the single figure that includes confidence intervals.

Position Player Comparisons

ToxPi profiles from a three-factor model that describes position player's overall performance over the years 2016–19 are shown in Figure 3. These results are for 24 players with a wide range of abilities, from below average to exceptional. A league average profile is included for reference. This figure illustrates one of ToxPi software's graphical output options, where the highest overall score appears in the upper left, and successively lower scores continue in a left-to-right, top-to-bottom manner. Along with the graphical results, it is possible to include ToxPi scores with confidence intervals (as done here), as well as individual slice scores (not shown).

A second graphical output option is shown by Figure 4. Here, each ToxPi score is plotted against the corresponding rank-order value. This illustrates the continuous nature of the scores, and provides an interactive view of the player data. That is, when data points are selected on the graph, the appropriate ToxPi

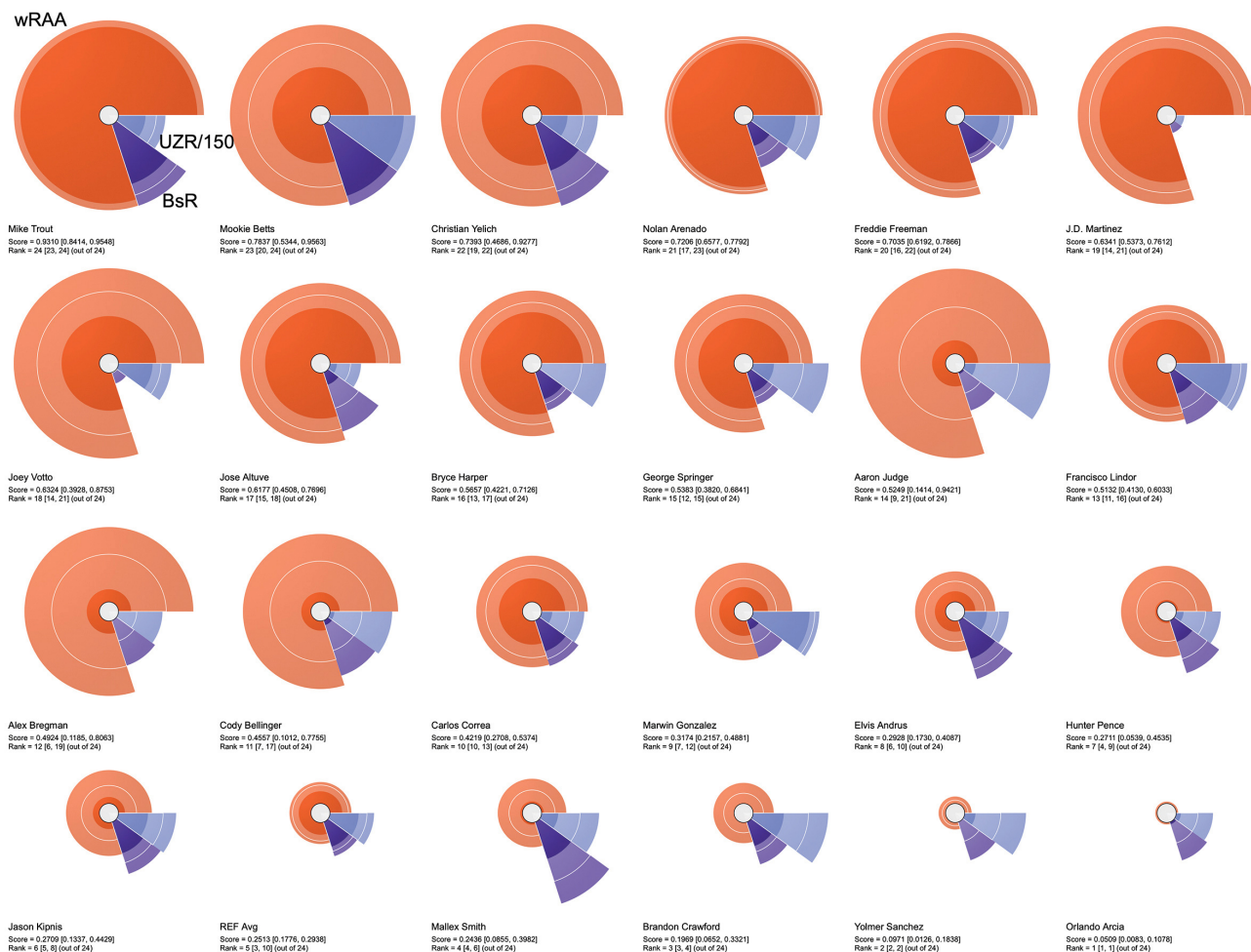


Figure 3. ToxPi profiles for 24 players (years 2016–19) using a three-factor model that includes wRAA, BsR, and UZR/150. The model converted these three statistics into an overall rating, with the ToxPi score, with 95% confidence intervals, appearing in brackets. The aggregate values are automatically arranged from highest to lowest as one would read a page—left to right, top to bottom.

images are shown, along with associated quantitative data.

A third graphical output option is shown by Figure 5 (page 89). Here, we made use of ToxPi's unsupervised hierarchical clustering algorithm, which automatically groups similar profiles. This powerful analysis makes several distinct categories apparent: a group of elite, average, and below-average players. Note that these high-level descriptions do not capture all the information that is generated by the clustering algorithm. For instance, given his historically great performance over the years 2015–19, Mike Trout forms a unique subgroup within the elite player grouping (denoted by “A1” in Figure 5).

In an effort to objectively evaluate the reliability of our provisional three-factor model, we compared ToxPi scores to respective WAR values (Figure 6 on page 91). The resulting R^2 value of 0.85 suggests that the ToxPi model is working, at least to a first approximation. While there is certainly room for improvement, these results suggest the current modeling is sufficiently reliable for demonstrating the ToxPi platform's attributes and capabilities.

Mike Trout Pitch-type Splits

Figure 7 (page 91) shows ToxPi output describing Mike Trout's performance according to pitch type based on the 2012–19 seasons. Here, as elsewhere, whenever slices summarize results over multiple years, we chose to show confidence intervals. This provides an indication of model uncertainty, which translates to variability in a player's performance. Whether one considers the

slash-line statistics or the advanced wRAA metric, this modeling exercise suggests that even the game's premier hitter has some room for improvement—less so for fastballs, more so for breaking balls.

Pitcher Comparisons

ToxPi profiles from a seven-factor model that describes pitcher's overall performance over the years 2016–19 (and 2012–15 in the case of Clayton Kershaw) are shown in Figure 8 (page 91). These results are for 9 players with a wide range of abilities, from average to multiple-year Cy Young winners. Among other things, this figure shows how remarkable Clayton Kershaw's 2012–15 seasons were, with dominating performances across each of the metrics studied. Recall that we multiplied each of the six statistics by innings. This resulted in a higher correlation to WAR values ($R^2 = 0.92$, Figure 9 on page 92) compared to a model that included innings as a seventh-slice metric instead of a multiplier ($R^2 = 0.81$). Of course, using innings as a multiplier had the effect of increasing the overall score for pitchers who regularly contributed high numbers of innings per season, like Justin Verlander; conversely, it penalized a pitcher like Blake Snell, who was utilized quite differently by his team (i.e., much briefer outings).

Hierarchical clustering results are shown by Figure 10 (page 92). This provides an opportunity to discuss an important advantage of the ToxPi platform. It is easy, and indeed human nature, to interpret graphics and point-estimate scores, such as those presented in Figure 9 as highly accurate and precise depictions of

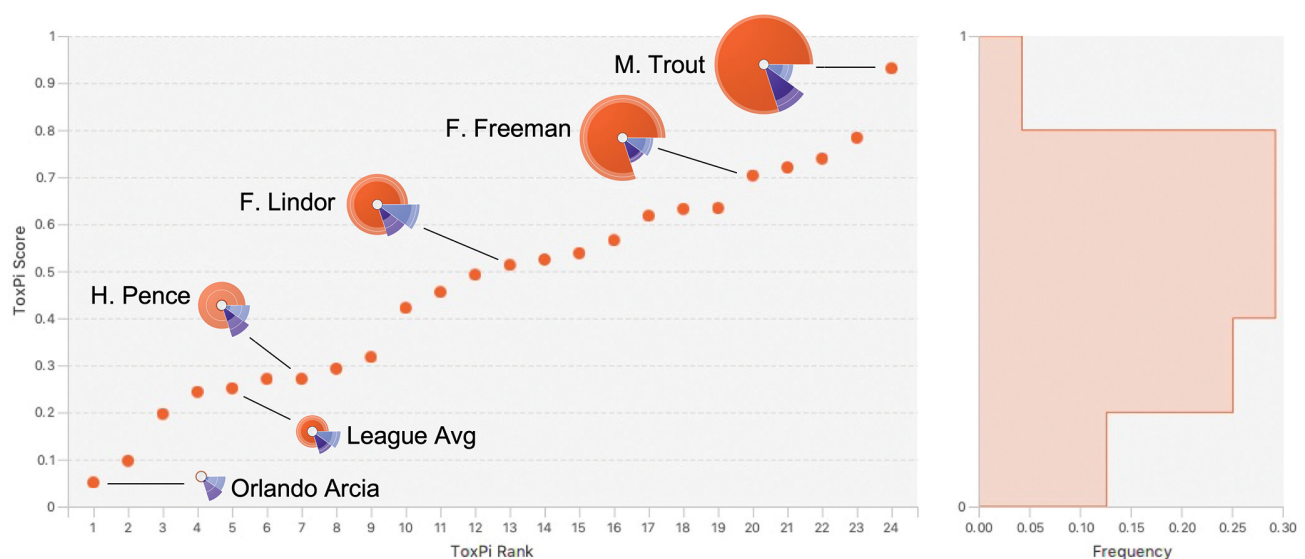


Figure 4. ToxPi scores for 24 players (years 2016–19), using the same model and values shown in Figure 3. This interactive graph orders the players from lowest (Orlando Arcia) to highest (Mike Trout). Whenever a user clicks on a data point, the respective player's ToxPi profile and associated slice and aggregate score information appears for further study.

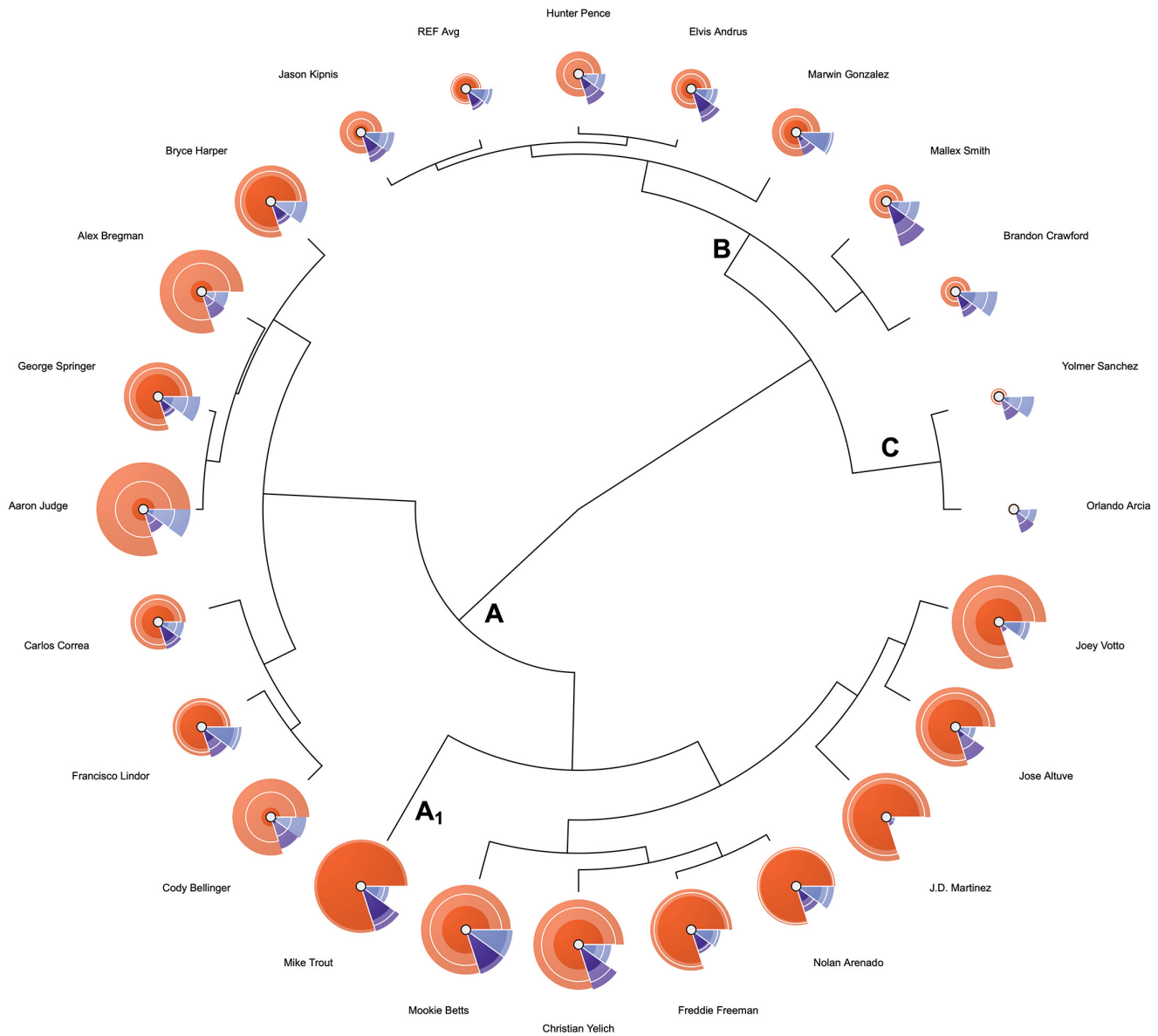


Figure 5. ToxPi profiles for 24 players (years 2016–19), using the same three-factor model shown in Figures 2–4. This graph was generated by ToxPi's hierarchical-clustering algorithm that automatically groups similar profiles. Several distinct categories are apparent: a cluster that might be described as elite players (A); average players (B); and below-average players (C). Given his historically great performance, Mike Trout forms a unique subgroup within the elite player grouping (A1).

rank order: early Kershaw (ToxPi score 0.9650) is superior to Verlander (0.8554), which is superior to Scherzer (0.8158). However, it is more appropriate to consider modeling results such as these with measures of uncertainty in mind. For instance, in the context of confidence intervals, the hierarchical clustering algorithm and associated graphics are helpful in this regard. In the current example, it places Kershaw, Verlander, and Scherzer in the same group; meaning, their performances were distinctly superior to the other pitchers. On the other hand, assessments about rank order within this group of three should be made with caution, and appropriately qualified.

CONCLUSIONS

ToxPi is an analytical software package that is useful for combining multiple types and sources of data into integrated, visual profiles. There are two key characteristics of the software that we found particularly useful when applied to MLB statistics. First, the platform allowed us to easily synthesize disparate data into high-information content images. While WAR and other summary-type metrics are certainly valuable, they are not transparent. When WAR values are discussed, it is not obvious which aspect(s) of a player's performance are contributing and detracting from the numerical score. On the other hand, when one studies

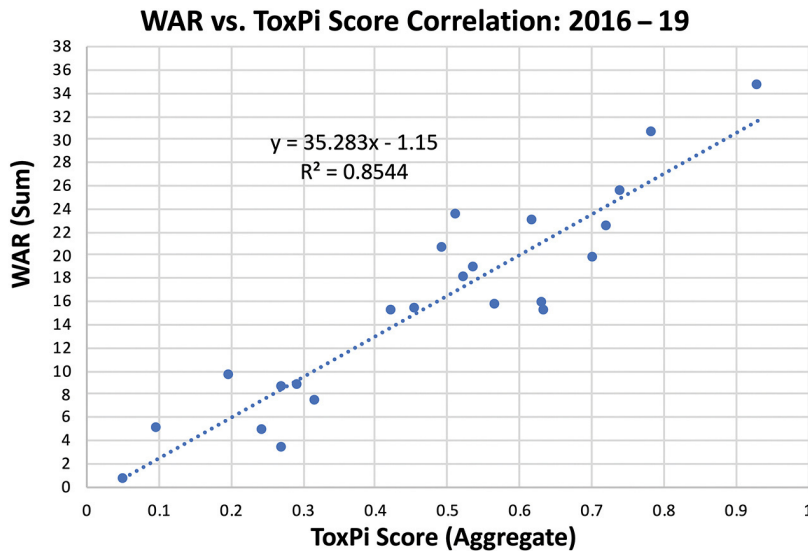


Figure 6. Each of 24 player's WAR values, summed for years 2016–19, are plotted against their respective ToxPi score (same 3-factor model described in Figures 2–5). The R^2 value of 0.85 is indicative of a good correlation between these two statistics.

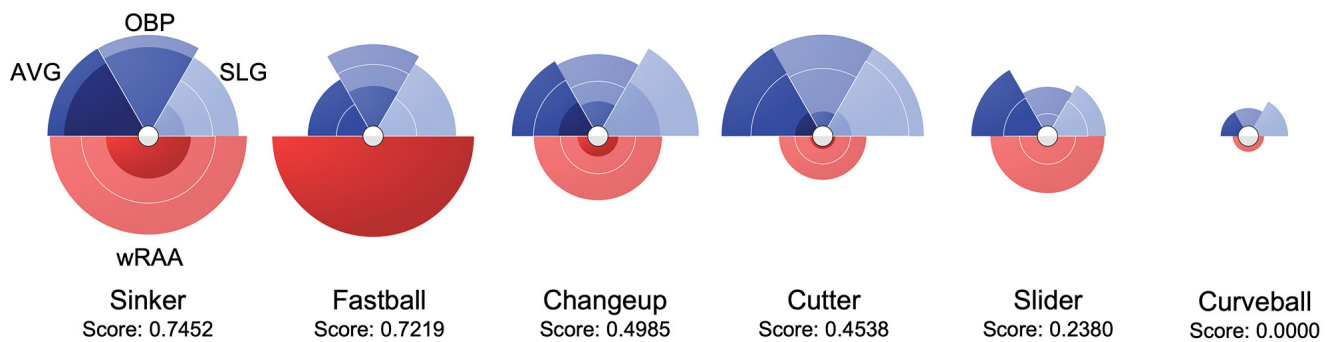


Figure 7. ToxPi profiles describe Mike Trout's performance according to pitch type (based on the years 2012–19). The upper half of each profile shows the traditional slash-line statistics: AVG, OBP, and SLG. The lower-half slice is wRAA. The six ToxPi profiles each correspond to a different pitch type. The use of 95% confidence intervals (lighter-shaded band at the periphery of each wedge) conveys the model's level of uncertainty in each of the slice-score values.

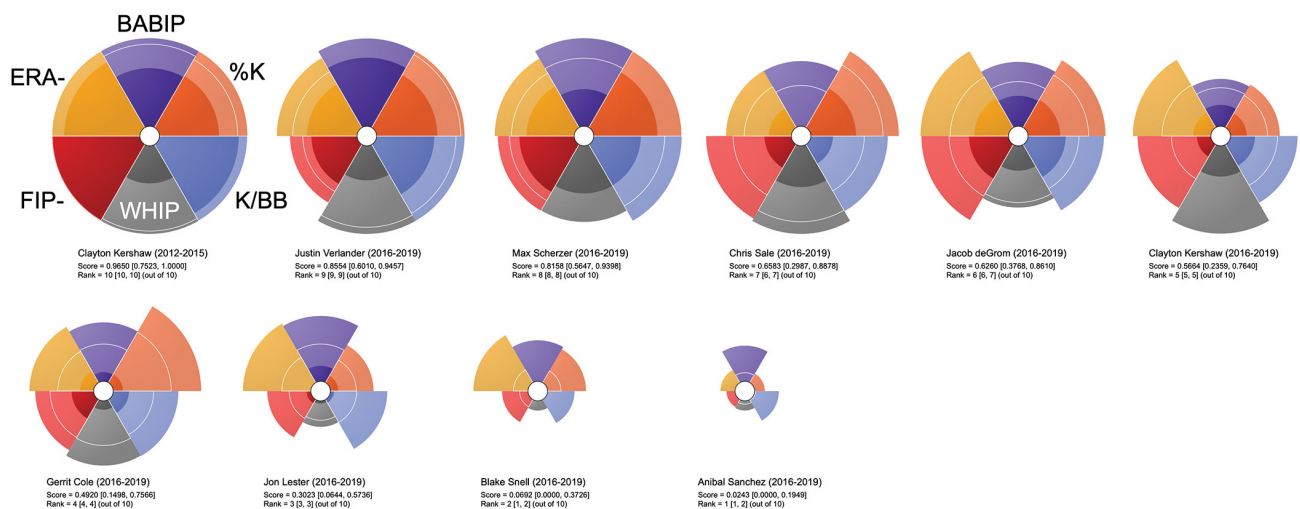


Figure 8. ToxPi profiles for 9 pitchers using a six-factor model that includes BABIP, K%, K/BB, WHIP, FIP-, and ERA-. A seventh factor, innings pitched per season, was incorporated into the model by multiplying it against each of the other six statistics. The model converted these statistics into an overall rating, the ToxPi score, with 95% confidence intervals appearing in brackets. The aggregate values are automatically arranged from highest to lowest as one would read a page—left to right, top to bottom.

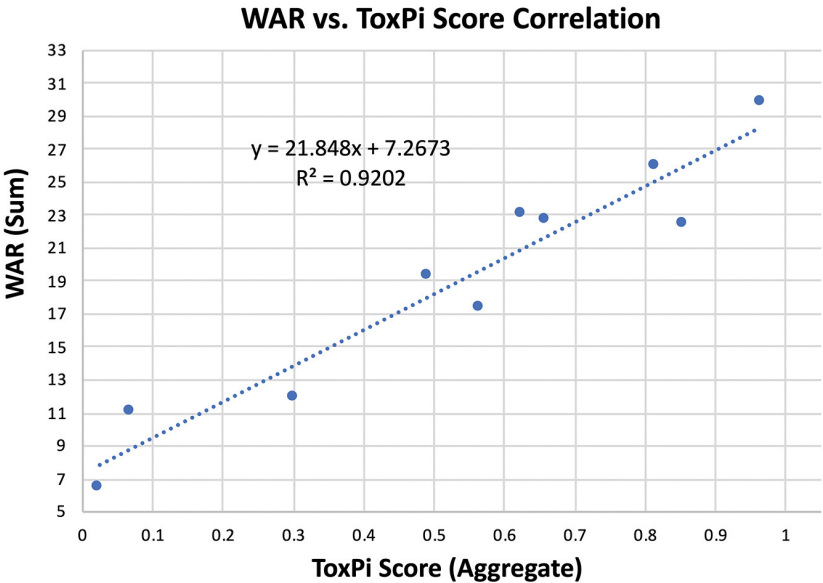


Figure 9. Each of ten WAR values, summed over four consecutive years, are plotted against the respective pitcher's ToxPi Score (same model described in Figure 8). The R^2 value of 0.92 is indicative of a good correlation between these two statistics.

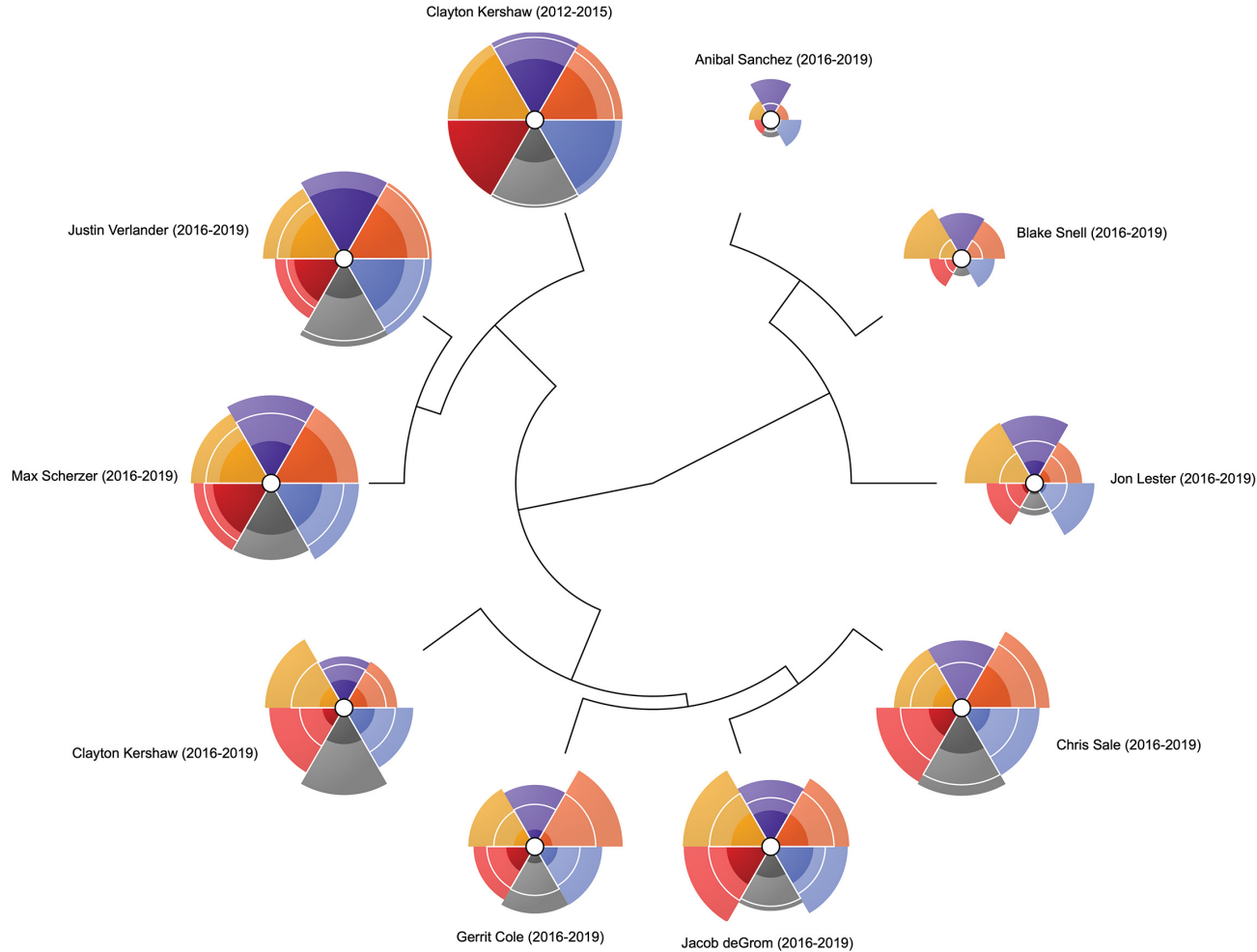


Figure 10. ToxPi profiles are shown for nine pitchers using the same model from Figure 8. This graph was generated by ToxPi's hierarchical-clustering algorithm that automatically groups similar profiles. Particularly exceptional performances are grouped together: Verlander, Scherzer, and early Kershaw.

player performance with ToxPi software, the aggregate scores are always accompanied by visuals that convey information about each component of the underlying model. For instance, our example with 24 position players clearly showed that Mookie Betts's high ToxPi score is attributable to stellar performance across hitting, fielding, and baserunning. Conversely, his teammate at the time, J.D. Martinez, exhibited a high aggregate score that was strictly attributable to hitting prowess. We suspect that many teams' front-office personnel, fans, and other stakeholders would benefit from this level of granularity.

A second key feature of ToxPi is that it has a mechanism for conveying model uncertainty into the graphical and numerical output. This is important, as it helps guard against human nature, which tends to interpret point estimates and player rankings as accurate and precise to the many decimal points provided by the algorithms. This is an erroneous way to interpret results, and models such as ToxPi that provide confidence intervals or other indications of uncertainty help guard against these temptations to over-interpret results.

In summary, we have showcased key advantages of using the ToxPi software platform to convert MLB player-performance metrics into integrated models. We contend that moving data out of dense tables and into dynamic data exploration platform(s) such as ToxPi will facilitate the acquisition of actionable insights. In the future, we hope to read about new, interesting analyses sports analysts accomplish with this versatile data synthesis and visualization tool. ■

Acknowledgements

This work benefited from countless conversations and advice from MLB-loving family and friends, especially Bill Dertinger, Jeff Travis, Scott and Maria Engel, Chuck Korb, Jack Falter, and John Filippini. Thank you all!

Notes

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A Baseball Statistic from the Fourth Dimension

John F. Scoggins, PhD

How does one assess an individual player's contribution to his team's score? Baseball statisticians have attempted to answer this question countless times. It's not just the runs he scores himself because that often relies on who batted him in. And it's not just the runs he bats in, because that depends on who batted previously.

To solve this riddle, statisticians invented the concepts we associate with baseball scoring today. For example, the idea of a base hit versus an error has nothing to do with the rules of baseball. If the batter puts the ball into play on the ground and beats the ball to first base, he is safe. Whether it's scored a single or an error is irrelevant. These designations are statistical contrivances to facilitate measuring the productivity of an individual batter.

The originators of baseball scoring did what all statisticians are supposed to do, compress an unwieldy amount of data into a usable set of information. But as with all data compression, there is a loss of fidelity, and for baseball statistics, I fear the loss is unnecessarily high. Sometimes a walk is just as good as a single. Sometimes it isn't. There is no official designation that distinguishes these two kinds of walks.

Traditional, summary batting statistics, such as batting average (BA), on-base percentage (OBP) and slugging percentage (SLG), suffer from well-documented flaws of their own. BA weights all base hits equally but ignores bases on balls and advancing baserunners. OBP counts bases on balls but still counts a single as much as a home run. SLG weights doubles more than singles and so on; however, the weights (i.e., four for a home run, three for a triple) don't correlate well with runs.

Modern summary statistics, such as Runs Created (RC), Weighted Runs Created (wRC), Weighted On-Base Average (wOBA), Linear Weights (LWTS), Base Runs, Equivalent Runs (EqA), and Wins Above Replacement (WAR), significantly improve upon the traditional summary statistics in terms of accuracy.¹ However, they still rely on the same flawed scoring contrivances and come at the cost of greater complexity. For example,

Baseball Reference uses six components to calculate WAR for position players, one of which depends on weighted Runs Above Average (wRAA) and wOBA, the latter of which is a combination of several estimated parameters and traditional statistics.²

Complexity is a serious drawback to any statistic. It limits the statistic's utility and general acceptance by the average baseball fan. A popular remedy is to simply add OBP and SLG together (OPS).³ Although easy to understand, this calculation has the potential to compound the flaws of the traditional statistics rather than eliminate them.

What is needed is a statistic that recognizes how the game is designed and does not rely on subjectively scored events, like errors and base hits. It should not be prone to confounding, the bias that results from ignoring relevant factors. And most of all, it should apply simple arithmetic.

THE SIX DIMENSIONS OF BASEBALL

There are basically three types of team sports. There is baseball and its variations (e.g., softball and cricket), net sports (e.g., volleyball and tennis) and then there are goal sports (e.g., football, soccer, basketball, hockey, rugby, polo, lacrosse, and ultimate frisbee).

That last group might seem oddly diverse, but each of those sports is just a variation of the same basic game. Each team tries to put an object through goals on either side of a rectangular space within a fixed time limit. Anticipating when a team is likely to score is simple. The closer the object is to the goal, the more likely the team is going to score. Besides time, these sports have one continuous dimension for scoring. I believe this simplicity is key to their popularity.

Baseball, however, is anything but simple. Anticipating when a team is likely to score depends on not one, but six different dimensions and they are discrete, not continuous: (1) the number of outs; the disposition of (2) first base, (3) second base, and (4) third base; and the counts of (5) balls and (6) strikes.

It is generally understood that the closer a base runner is to home the more likely he is to score, all

things being equal. However, is a team likely to score more runs when there is a man on first and there is none out or when there is a man on second and there is one out? Is a team likely to score more runs when the count is empty (no balls or strikes) or full (three balls and two strikes)?

The answers to these questions are not obvious to the uninitiated. It is much more complicated for the baseball spectator to anticipate when a team is about to score as compared to a basketball or football spectator. I believe this is one reason why the popularity of baseball has waned over time.⁴

INDIVIDUAL RUN PRODUCTION

Knowing the count of balls and strikes is essential to anticipating when a team is about to score in baseball; however, when measuring an individual's contribution to a team's score, we are only interested in the difference from the beginning of an individual's plate appearance (PA) to the end. Exactly what happens during the PA is not relevant to measuring individual run production (IRP).

Each PA starts with an empty count. Consequently, when we assess the change in the team's prospects for scoring from the beginning of one PA to the beginning of the next, we need only consider four dimensions (i.e., outs and the three bases). Within these four dimensions there are 24 discrete "locations," eight configurations of the three bases times three values of outs ($2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3 = 24$).

Table 1 shows the average additional runs scored for the 24 starting locations of a PA. The raw data used to create Table 1 were obtained from Retrosheet. They cover 13,099,124 PAs by 13,174 batters in 173,947 games played from 1918 to 2019. This amounts to all American League, National League, and AL-NL inter-league games played since 1932 and approximately 75% of those games played from 1918 to 1931.

Suppose a batter is first up in a half-inning. The starting location of the PA is at the bottom right-hand cell. The number of outs is zero and no one is on base. Under average conditions, the team at bat would be expected to score 0.49 additional runs by the end of the half-inning.

Just what impact on the team's expected runs can the individual batter make? There are exactly five possible locations by the end of this PA. He can reach first, second, or third safely, score a run, or be out. That's it. None of the remaining 19 locations is possible.

Table 2 shows the possible IRP values from this starting location. If he reaches first base safely, he increases expected additional runs from 0.49 to 0.86

(i.e., 0.37) runs. Reaching second increases expected runs by 0.61 (1.10–0.49) and reaching third increases it by 0.83 (1.32–0.49). If he is out, expected additional runs decrease from 0.49 to 0.27 or by 0.22. A home run doesn't change expected additional runs at all (i.e., the next batter starts at 0.49 also), but a run is scored so that is the best possible outcome from the PA.

Notice that the IRP difference between a home run and an out ($1.00 + 0.22 = 1.22$) is approximately

Table 1. Average Additional Runs by the End of the Half-Inning (1918–2019)

		Outs		
		2	1	0
On Base	• • •	0.76	1.57	2.27
	• • °	0.62	1.42	1.94
	• ° •	0.51	1.19	1.72
	° • •	0.44	0.94	1.48
	• ° °	0.39	0.97	1.32
	° • °	0.33	0.70	1.10
	° ° •	0.22	0.53	0.86
	° ° °	0.10	0.27	0.49

Table 2. IRP Values: Bases Are Empty and No Outs (1918–2019)

		Outs		
		2	1	0
On Base	• • •	0.76	1.57	2.27
	• • °	0.62	1.42	1.94
	• ° •	0.51	1.19	1.72
	° • •	0.44	0.94	1.48
	• ° °	0.39	0.97	1.32
	° • °	0.33	0.70	1.10
	° ° •	0.22	0.53	0.86
	° ° °	0.10	0.27	0.49

Change in Location	+	Runs Scored	=	IRP
1.32–0.49		0.00		0.83
1.10–0.49		0.00		0.61
0.86–0.49		0.00		0.37
0.49–0.49		1.00		1.00
0.27–0.49		0.00		-0.22

double the difference between a single and an out ($0.37 + 0.22 = 0.59$). Remember that slugging percentage assumes this ratio is four, not two. Of course, this is true only for the special case when the bases are empty and there are no outs. But even under different conditions, a home run is worth far less than four singles, on average closer to three.

How about when the bases are loaded and there are no outs? That's more complicated because there are a lot more than five possible outcomes in that scenario. The total number of possible outcomes from this starting location is 24. Table 3 shows the IRP values of 23 of the 24 ending PA locations. If the batter hits into a double play, there can be no more than two runners left on base. Therefore, bases-loaded-and-two-outs is not a possible ending location from this starting location. Also, if the batter hits into a triple play, the half-inning is over, but a run sometimes scores. The average IRP for a triple play equals -1.63.

From Table 3, we can see that relative to a hitter recording an out where no one scores (i.e., -0.70), a home run is worth 2.92 ($2.22 + 0.70$) runs and a single is worth at least 1.7 ($1.00 + 0.70$) runs. The ratio of a home run to a single is less than 2. Consequently, we can see how much slugging percentage overvalues home runs relative to singles.

The above discussion establishes the basis for the 4-D statistic. Every time a batter comes to the plate, he is at one of the 24 starting locations. Each starting location has from 5 to 24 possible ending locations for a total of 293, each with an associated IRP value. The IRP value equals any runs that score (RBI +) plus the change in the game location (ΔGL).

Table 3. Average IRP Values, Beginning Location: Bases Loaded and No Outs*

	Outs				
	2	1	0		
On Base	• • • -	-0.70	1.00		
	• • ° -1.66	0.15	1.67		
	• ° • -1.76	-0.09	1.45		
	° • • -1.84	-0.33	1.21		
	• ° ° -0.89	0.70	2.05		
	° • ° -0.94	0.43	1.82		
	° ° • -1.06	0.25	1.59		
	° ° ° -0.18	0.99	2.22		

* If the batter hits into a triple play, the average IRP equals -1.63.

For example, suppose the game location is the bases are loaded and there is one out. According to Table 1, expected runs are 1.57 (top row, second right-hand column). This is a very favorable location for the batter, the fourth highest out of 24.

Suppose the batter hits a fly ball to right field. The runners on third and second tag up. The third-base runner scores a run and the runner on second advances to third. The batter is out, but one runner scores and another is closer to home. Many consider this to be a good outcome for the batter's team, but is it really?

The game location moves from 1.57 in Table 1 to 0.51, two outs and runners on first and third. The IRP of that PA is therefore 1.00 (the run batted-in) $+ 0.51 - 1.57$ (the change in the game location) $= -0.06$.

The negative value might be interpreted by some to mean that a sacrifice fly is not a good outcome for the batter, but we need to put this outcome into context in order to judge. The batter could have hit a grand slam with an IRP of 2.7 ($4 + .027 - 1.57$) or into a double play with an IRP of -1.57, or several possibilities in between. Compared to that worst-case scenario, the -0.06 IRP is a big improvement. An above-average batter might be disappointed with the outcome, but a below-average batter would be happy to hit the fly ball to right field.

The creators of the traditional statistics didn't have a good solution to measuring the value of a sacrifice fly. They excluded it from BA and SLG completely. OBP is even worse. A sacrifice fly is counted in the denominator of the OBP. So as far as OBP is concerned, a sacrifice fly is just as bad as hitting into a double play.

AVERAGE IRP

Each hitter has his own average IRP: total IRP divided by the number of plate appearances. Every time a batter comes to the plate, he either adds to the actual score or changes his team's expected score or both.

Although I used average outcomes over a 102-year period in Table 1 to explain the IRP concept, actual IRPs should be calculated using annual averages. A change in the way baseballs were manufactured and the banning of the spitball in 1920 inflated run production during the 1920s and 1930s. Run production reached its nadir in 1968, which induced MLB to lower the pitcher's mound, whereas there was a scoring surge in the 1990s and 2000s. So, when calculating Ted Williams's IRPs in 1957, for example, I used the average runs for each game location in 1957.

For each season, the overall IRP is zero. The extra runs produced by above-average hitters are exactly offset by the run deficits produced by below-average hitters. A convenient result is that each season the

weighted-average IRP is also zero. This provides a natural reference value when assessing a batter's average IRP compared to the overall average.

There are 24 starting location values and 293 IRP values for each of the 102 years for which we have data. Obviously, I cannot share all 29,886 (i.e., 293×102) IRP values in this article. I can, however, provide an illustrative example.

Table 4 shows the 24 starting location run averages and the corresponding IRP values when the bases are empty and there are no outs during the 1936 and 1968 seasons, respectively. I chose those two years because they produced the maximum and minimum runs per half-inning during the time span for which we have data from every game played, 1932-2019. In 1936, 0.584 runs per half-inning were scored. In 1968, the runs per half-inning were only 0.380, a 35% decrease. By 2000, runs per half-inning had increased to 0.577.

In both seasons, the IRP value of a leadoff home run was one run. The IRP of a leadoff triple was greater in 1936 (0.82) than in 1968 (0.72) because once the baserunner reached third base during 1936, he was more likely to eventually reach home than in 1968. On the other hand, leading off a half-inning with an out had a greater opportunity cost in 1936 (-0.28) than in 1968 (-0.18). So, the weighted-average IRP per PA in both seasons was exactly zero.

Notice there is no reliance on walks, singles, doubles, triples, home runs, errors, sacrifices or fielder's choices. All plate appearances count. Nothing is excluded. Batters who hit into double and triple plays are fully penalized. Batters who advance base runners are given proportional credit.

CAREER-AVERAGE IRP vs. OPS

Table 5 on the following page ranks the top 25 players by career-average IRP. Only players with at least 3,000 plate appearances during the 1918-2019 timespan are ranked. For comparison's sake, the right-hand column ranks each player's OPS for the games covered. As with any large dataset, minor discrepancies exist. That is why the average IRP value over the entire dataset is 0.001, not zero.

The first thing to note is how similar the two rankings are. The top seven players are the same in both rankings. Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, and Lou Gehrig are at the top of both lists. Several other familiar names also appear in both top 25 lists: Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, Stan Musial, Willie Mays, etc.

The next things to notice are the players that fare better with this new ranking as compared to their ranking by OPS. Hank Aaron rises from 33rd by OPS to 22nd by average IRP. Ty Cobb jumps from 47th to 15th. And this was for only a fourth of his career plate appearances.

Table 4. Expected Runs and IRP Values (1936 and 1968)

	On Base	Outs			
		2	1	0	
1936	• • •	0.86	1.58	2.46	
	• • °	0.72	1.54	2.10	
	• ° •	0.62	1.31	1.84	
	° • •	0.51	1.07	1.62	
	• ° °	0.45	1.06	1.41	
	° • °	0.38	0.76	1.29	
	° ° •	0.24	0.59	0.98	
	° ° °	0.12	0.31	0.58	
	Change in Location	+	Runs Scored	=	IRP
	1.41-0.58		0.00		0.82
1968	• • •	0.66	1.32	1.95	
	• • °	0.53	1.19	1.75	
	• ° •	0.44	1.05	1.53	
	° • •	0.38	0.77	1.24	
	• ° °	0.34	0.83	1.10	
	° • °	0.30	0.60	0.93	
	° ° •	0.17	0.42	0.72	
	° ° °	0.08	0.20	0.38	
	Change in Location	+	Runs Scored	=	IRP
	1.10-0.38		0.00		0.72
	0.93-0.38		0.00		0.55
	0.72-0.38		0.00		0.34
	0.38-0.38		1.00		1.00
	0.20-0.38		0.00		-0.18

There are a few players who fare relatively poorly and are not shown in Table 5. For example, Vladimir Guerrero drops from 29th by OPS to 121st by average IRP. Alex Rodriguez drops from 32nd to 47th.

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

The purpose of this new statistic is to measure an individual's contribution to the team's run production while minimizing the confounding that plagues traditional, summary baseball statistics. This was done using simple arithmetic.

To satisfy the more ambitious goal of comparing the individual run production of batters from different eras, however, there are still a couple of adjustments needed that add to its complexity. The first deals with calibration. Calculating a different set of IRP values for each year guarantees that the average IRP will be zero. But that does not affect the variation of IRP values over

time. When runs per game are high, so is the variance of runs per game.

Notice from Table 4 that during the high-scoring 1936 season the range of IRP values when the bases are empty and there are no outs is -0.28 to 0.82, a difference of 1.1 runs. During the low-scoring 1968 season, the difference is only 0.9 runs or from -0.18 to 0.72.

When we calculate the yearly IRP standard deviation (SD), we see a pattern similar to that of average IRP. SD peaked in 1936 at 0.407 runs and then declined to 0.298 runs in 1968. There was a precipitous drop in the yearly SD in 1973 when the American League adopted the designated hitter rule. It has remained low by historical standards ever since.

To fully calibrate average IRP for temporal changes in the distribution of scoring, we need to standardize it, not just by its mean value, but also by its standard deviation. As shown by Table 6, this is done by dividing

Table 5. Top 25 Average IRP with at Least 3,000 PAs, 1918–2019

Name	Plate Appearances	Beg. Loc.	Avg. RBI+	Change in Loc.	Avg. IRP		OPS	
					Value	Rank	Value	Rank
Babe Ruth*	8,686	0.564	0.223	-0.067	0.156	1	1.186	1
Ted Williams	9,774	0.540	0.196	-0.055	0.141	2	1.115	2
Lou Gehrig*	8,997	0.593	0.217	-0.092	0.125	3	1.080	3
Rogers Hornsby*	6,208	0.563	0.189	-0.079	0.110	4	1.024	6
Jimmie Foxx	9,526	0.578	0.210	-0.108	0.102	5	1.030	5
Barry Bonds	12,488	0.514	0.165	-0.067	0.098	6	1.046	4
Hank Greenberg	6,081	0.583	0.230	-0.131	0.098	7	1.018	7
Joe DiMaggio	7,672	0.551	0.214	-0.118	0.096	8	0.977	12
Mickey Mantle	9,853	0.471	0.161	-0.066	0.094	9	0.980	11
Tris Speaker*	5,327	0.543	0.154	-0.063	0.091	10	0.950	20
Mike Trout†	5,228	0.470	0.147	-0.057	0.091	11	1.003	8
Stan Musial	12,658	0.500	0.164	-0.076	0.088	12	0.975	13
Charlie Keller	4,589	0.531	0.176	-0.090	0.086	13	0.930	36
Johnny Mize	7,360	0.545	0.191	-0.107	0.084	14	0.960	16
Ty Cobb*	3,317	0.552	0.160	-0.078	0.082	15	0.913	47
Manny Ramirez	9,687	0.549	0.194	-0.113	0.081	16	0.997	9
Mel Ott	11,038	0.553	0.170	-0.091	0.080	17	0.940	26
Willie Mays	12,411	0.459	0.162	-0.086	0.077	18	0.944	22
Frank Thomas	9,927	0.523	0.175	-0.098	0.076	19	0.974	14
Mark McGwire	7,550	0.503	0.189	-0.113	0.076	20	0.982	10
Harry Heilmann*	4,170	0.577	0.193	-0.117	0.076	21	0.951	19
Hank Aaron	13,835	0.464	0.175	-0.100	0.075	22	0.931	33
Earl Averill	7,130	0.574	0.172	-0.098	0.074	23	0.928	38
Joey Votto†	7,338	0.476	0.133	-0.059	0.074	24	0.942	25
Jeff Bagwell	9,336	0.540	0.170	-0.096	0.073	25	0.944	23
All Batters	13,099,124	0.500	0.118	-0.117	0.001	—	0.725	—

* Does not cover all career games

† Active player

NOTE: Even accounting for the seasons not included in the Retrosheet dataset, the play-by-play data from Retrosheet do not always agree with the official baseball statistics.

average IRP by that year's SD. The units are no longer runs; they are standard deviations.

Even though Babe Ruth played during an era when the mean and variance of scoring were at their highest, he still leads the pack—and as always, it seems, just ahead of Ted Williams—with an average IRP that was nearly 0.4 standard deviations above the average during his career. Standardizing average IRP has its greatest impact on batters who played during the low-scoring 1960s, e.g., Frank Robinson, Dick Allen, and Willie McCovey.

The second necessary adjustment addresses the difference in starting location. Batting at a favorable starting location—for example, with runners on base and especially with runners in scoring position, is a definite advantage to the batter. Pitchers will locate more pitches in the strike zone. The infielders must move from their optimal fielding positions to prevent

the runners from stealing bases and to increase the chances of turning double plays.

To see just how much of an advantage batting from a favorable starting location is, I fitted a weighted least-squares regression model with the standardized average IRP as the dependent variable and average starting location (ASL) as the independent variable. The result is:

$$\text{Avg. IRP} = -0.734 + 0.527 \times \text{ASL}.$$

(-28.2) (28.4)

The figures in parentheses are t-statistics. The observation weight is career PAs. The number of observations is 13,174 (i.e., the number of major league batters from 1918 to 2019) and the coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.0576.

For every 0.1 increase in ASL, average IRP increases 0.0527 standard deviations. Using this equation, we can estimate the amount a batter's actual average IRP

Table 6. Top 25 Standardized Average IRP with At Least 3,000 PAs, 1918–2019

Name	Plate Appearances	Beg. Loc.	Avg. RBI+	Change in Loc.	Avg. IRP		OPS	
					Value	Rank	Value	Rank
Babe Ruth*	8,686	1.423	0.563	-0.167	0.395	1	1.186	1
Ted Williams	9,774	1.476	0.535	-0.150	0.385	2	1.115	2
Lou Gehrig*	8,997	1.492	0.546	-0.232	0.314	3	1.080	3
Rogers Hornsby*	6,208	1.424	0.478	-0.201	0.277	4	1.024	6
Mickey Mantle	9,853	1.365	0.464	-0.192	0.272	5	0.980	11
Barry Bonds	12,488	1.422	0.457	-0.186	0.270	6	1.046	4
Mike Trout†	5,228	1.364	0.427	-0.165	0.262	7	1.003	8
Jimmie Foxx	9,526	1.467	0.532	-0.274	0.258	8	1.030	5
Hank Greenberg	6,081	1.515	0.597	-0.343	0.254	9	1.018	7
Joe DiMaggio	7,672	1.445	0.561	-0.310	0.251	10	0.977	12
Stan Musial	12,658	1.388	0.456	-0.213	0.243	11	0.975	13
Charlie Keller	4,589	1.434	0.475	-0.243	0.232	12	0.930	36
Tris Speaker*	5,327	1.381	0.391	-0.161	0.230	13	0.950	20
Willie Mays	12,411	1.349	0.477	-0.251	0.226	14	0.944	22
Hank Aaron	13,835	1.370	0.519	-0.295	0.223	15	0.931	33
Johnny Mize	7,360	1.431	0.503	-0.281	0.222	16	0.960	16
Manny Ramirez	9,687	1.496	0.528	-0.308	0.220	17	0.997	9
Joey Votto†	7,338	1.365	0.382	-0.168	0.214	18	0.942	25
Mark McGwire	7,550	1.400	0.526	-0.316	0.210	19	0.982	10
Frank Robinson	11,653	1.422	0.504	-0.295	0.209	20	0.928	39
Frank Thomas	9,927	1.427	0.477	-0.268	0.209	21	0.974	14
Dick Allen	7,272	1.392	0.500	-0.293	0.207	22	0.911	48
Ty Cobb*	3,317	1.400	0.405	-0.198	0.207	23	0.913	47
Mel Ott	11,038	1.420	0.437	-0.233	0.205	24	0.940	26
Willie McCovey	9,640	1.410	0.511	-0.307	0.205	25	0.890	70
All Batters	13,099,124	1.401	0.332	-0.328	0.004	—	0.725	—

* Does not cover all career games

† Active player

exceeds the average batter's from the same beginning location.

For example, at 1.515, Hank Greenberg had the highest average starting location of the 1,550 ranked batters. Unsurprisingly, he also had the highest number of runners on base per plate appearance, 0.83. The major league average of this statistic over the last 102 years is 0.63. From our regression equation, we know that the IRP for an average batter from that starting location would be $0.527 \times 1.515 - 0.734 = 0.064$. Hank Greenberg's average IRP was 0.254. So, one fourth of his individual run production was due to his favorable beginning location.

Now look at Willie Mays. His average starting location was only 1.349, well below the major league average of 1.401. According to our regression equation, the IRP of the average batter from that beginning location would be $0.527 \times 1.349 - 0.734 = -0.023$. Mays's unfavorable beginning location lowered his run production (0.226) by nearly 10%.

Table 7 ranks the top-25 average IRP values after adjusting for beginning location. Hank Greenberg (not shown in the list) falls to 29th. Willie Mays rises to eighth overall, the highest-adjusted IRP among right-handed batters for whom we have complete data and who have completed their career. Notably, Billy Williams rises all the way from 145th by OPS to 23rd by adjusted IRP.

CONCLUSION

Much has been written about the decline of baseball's popularity. I believe this is due in part to the reliance on bad statistics. More than any other team sport, baseball relies on individual player statistics to measure the ebb and flow of a game, not to mention players' compensation. So, it's important that these statistics accurately measure individual run production in a way that is comprehensible to the average spectator.

Using play-by-play data is one way to diminish the confounding that plagues baseball statistics. It

Table 7. Top 25 Standardized Adjusted-Average IRP with at Least 3,000 PAs, 1918–2019

Name	Plate Appearances	Beg. Loc.	Avg. RBI+	Change in Loc.	Avg. IRP		OPS	
					Value	Rank	Value	Rank
Babe Ruth*	8,686	1.423	0.016	0.395	0.380	1	1.186	1
Ted Williams	9,774	1.476	0.044	0.385	0.342	2	1.115	2
Mickey Mantle	9,853	1.365	-0.015	0.272	0.287	3	0.980	11
Mike Trout†	5,228	1.364	-0.015	0.262	0.277	4	1.003	8
Lou Gehrig*	8,997	1.492	0.052	0.314	0.262	5	1.080	3
Rogers Hornsby*	6,208	1.424	0.016	0.277	0.260	6	1.024	6
Barry Bonds	12,488	1.422	0.015	0.270	0.255	7	1.046	4
Willie Mays	12,411	1.349	-0.023	0.226	0.250	8	0.944	22
Stan Musial	12,658	1.388	-0.003	0.243	0.246	9	0.975	13
Tris Speaker*	5,327	1.381	-0.006	0.230	0.236	10	0.950	20
Hank Aaron	13,835	1.370	-0.012	0.223	0.236	11	0.931	33
Joey Votto†	7,338	1.365	-0.015	0.214	0.229	12	0.942	25
Joe DiMaggio	7,672	1.445	0.027	0.251	0.223	13	0.977	12
Jimmie Foxx	9,526	1.467	0.039	0.258	0.219	14	1.030	5
Charlie Keller	4,589	1.434	0.021	0.232	0.211	15	0.930	36
Dick Allen	7,272	1.392	-0.001	0.207	0.208	16	0.911	48
Mark McGwire	7,550	1.400	0.004	0.210	0.206	17	0.982	10
Eddie Mathews	10,020	1.376	-0.009	0.195	0.204	18	0.886	77
Ty Cobb*	3,317	1.400	0.004	0.207	0.203	19	0.913	47
Johnny Mize	7,360	1.431	0.020	0.222	0.202	20	0.960	16
Ralph Kiner	6,257	1.375	-0.009	0.191	0.200	21	0.942	24
Paul Goldschmidt†	5,359	1.383	-0.005	0.194	0.199	22	0.916	45
Billy Williams	10,466	1.352	-0.022	0.176	0.198	23	0.854	145
Willie McCovey	9,640	1.410	0.009	0.205	0.196	24	0.890	70
Frank Robinson	11,653	1.422	0.015	0.209	0.194	25	0.928	39
All Batters	13,099,124	1.401	0.004	0.004	0.000	—	0.725	

*Does not cover all career games

†Active player

emphasizes the predicament in which the batter finds himself when he comes to bat and thus allows us to isolate his individual impact on the team's score.

There is a cost to this method, however. It requires more information than traditional summary statistics. Play-by-play data currently don't exist for the most part for the first twenty years of the twentieth century and earlier. Until that statistical record is rebuilt, the full impact of players like Ty Cobb, Rogers Hornsby, and Honus Wagner will likely never be measurable using this method. ■

Notes

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2. "Baseball-Reference.com WAR Explained," Baseball Reference, accessed February 6, 2022. https://www.baseball-reference.com/about/war_explained.shtml.
3. Pete Palmer, "Why OPS Works," *The Baseball Research Journal*, Vol. 48 #2, 2019, 43–48.
4. David Waldstein, "Baseball, Popular but No Longer Dominant, Seeks to Reclaim Its Cool," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2021.
5. The data were obtained free of charge from Retrosheet. Interested parties may contact Retrosheet at <http://www.retrosheet.org>.
6. Other published works that rely on play-by-play data include George R. Lindsey, "An investigation of strategies in baseball," *Operations Research* Vol. 11 #4 1963, 477–501; Jim Albert, "Beyond runs expectancy," *Journal of Sports Analytics* Vol. 1 #1 2015), 3–18; and Jim Albert and Jay Bennett, *Curve Ball: Baseball, Statistics, and the Role of Chance in the Game*, Copernicus Books, 2001.

Caught Looking

How Responsible Are Pitchers For Called Strikes?

Connelly Doan, MA

The strikeout is one of the few outcomes ascribed to a pitcher's control, as indicated by metrics such as Fielding Independent Pitching (FIP) and Skill-Interactive Earned Run Average (SIERA). However, overall pitcher success is typically attributed to generating swinging strikes¹—without considering the ability to induce called strikes. Although discussions around called strikes from the pitcher's perspective are infrequent, discussions about other actors' perspectives, including the umpire and catcher, are abundant within the baseball community. Technology has been working its way into baseball over recent years, and one feature that has been debated and tested has been introducing an electronic strike zone to reduce human error in called balls and strikes.² Further, general conversations and specific metrics have advanced around called strikes from the catcher's perspective in the form of pitch framing, implying that the catcher holds an important role in inducing a called strike.^{3,4}

While a large proportion of called-strike analyses have been from perspectives other than the pitcher, there have been several useful developments directed towards understanding pitchers' contributions. A Called Strike Above Average (CSAA) metric now exists on Baseball Prospectus, which identifies the additional called strikes created by a particular pitcher in relation to the average among all pitchers.⁵ Additionally, Alex Fast and Nick Pollack of Pitcher List developed a Called Strikes + Whiffs (CSW) metric in an attempt to understand a pitcher's value beyond the proportion of swinging strikes they generate.⁶

These more nuanced metrics can help us understand called strikes from beyond the outcome seen from a singular, non-pitcher perspective. Relatively little has been done in terms of attempting to isolate how much each actor (pitcher, catcher, umpire) contributes to a called strike.⁷ This paper will add to these analyses by studying pitch-level data from 2015 through 2019. Using logistic regression, the effect of the pitcher, catcher, and umpire on a given taken pitch will be measured in relation to the probability of that pitch being called a strike. Not only will this analysis help create a more

complete understanding of how each party influences a called strike, but it will also shed light specifically on how a pitcher affects the generation of a called strike.

DATA OVERVIEW

The raw pitch-by-pitch data for this article were scraped from MLB's BaseballSavant.com using RStudio code and packages based on Bill Petti's BaseballR.⁸ Specifically, the raw data comprised pitch-level events from every game of the 2015 season through the 2019 season where the pitch outcome was either a ball or a called strike. Each pitch outcome also included the pitcher who threw the pitch, the catcher behind the plate, and the home-plate umpire, along with other descriptive features. Pitcher and catcher CSAA data were taken from Baseball Prospectus.⁹

The data were then filtered for adequate sample sizes. Data were only included for: catchers with at least 500 framing chances in a given season, umpires with at least 500 called-strike chances in a given season, and pitchers who pitched at least 100 innings in a given season. The decision to limit the data to pitchers who threw at least 100 innings in a given season was determined considering the varying overall strike rates for starters and relievers; the standard for a strong strike rate for a starting pitcher is different from that of a relief pitcher.¹⁰ The role and definition of a starting pitcher has changed over recent years with the introduction of openers and nominal starters being used as long-relief pitchers,¹¹ hence the decision to use 100 innings pitched as the cutoff, rather than a slightly higher mark.

VARIABLES AND DATA MODEL

Because the goal of this analysis was to understand how each actor individually impacts the probability of a called strike, a fixed-effects logistic regression model was implemented. The dependent variable was measured as a dichotomous variable, whether or not the taken pitch was called a strike. Several control variables were also included. The count of the particular pitch was included, as research has shown that the

general probability of called strikes varies in different counts.¹² Same pitcher-batter handedness was included to account for potential relative obscurity of the umpire's view of a pitch. An umpire may be able to see a pitch more clearly depending on the handedness of the pitcher in relation to the batter, which could give the umpire more confidence in calling the pitch a strike.¹³

The pitcher's and catcher's individual impact was measured using Baseball Prospectus's respective CSAA metrics. Practically, the catcher CSAA metric captures a catcher's pitch-framing ability, while the pitcher CSAA metric captures a pitcher's level of command, or the ability to precisely locate pitches, in or out of the strike zone, with the goal of keeping pitches out of the middle of the plate.¹⁴ These CSAA metrics were calculated using a mixed-effects model in order to isolate the most likely individual contributions of each actor, while controlling for their relative effects on each other.¹⁵ The home-plate umpire's individual impact was measured using each umpire's called-strike percentage on eligible pitches in a particular season. If the umpire's called-strike percentage fell above the third quartile of data, they were labeled a generous umpire; if the umpire's called-strike percentage fell below the first quartile of data, they were labeled a tough umpire.

The model used can be represented by the formula: $Y = \beta_0 + \sum \beta_k X_k + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 U_1 + \beta_4 U_2$, where Y is the probability of an eligible pitch being called a strike. β_0 is the constant intercept, in this case the log odds of an eligible pitch being called a strike in a different-handed pitcher-batter matchup in a 0-0 count with a league-average pitcher, catcher, and home-plate umpire. Effects of k control variables are denoted by $\sum \beta_k$. β_1 is the coefficient of a pitcher with a CSAA of X_1 , and β_2 is the coefficient of a catcher with a CSAA of X_2 . β_3 is the coefficient of having a tough umpire behind the plate, and β_4 is the coefficient of having a generous umpire behind the plate.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Tables 1 and 2 present descriptive statistics for the categorical and continuous variables in this analysis. Approximately one-third of the 1.2 million pitches in this dataset were called strikes, with 41.5% of those pitches occurring in same-handed pitcher-batter matchups. Approximately one-third of the pitches occurred in a 0-0 count, with an overall larger percentage of called-strike-eligible pitches occurring in earlier counts. Umpire called-strike data were normally

distributed; as such, roughly one-quarter of the pitches occurred with a generous home-plate umpire, one-quarter with tough umpires, and half with average umpires.

Both pitcher and catcher CSAA showed similar distributions; the average pitcher CSAA was 0.003196 with a standard deviation of 0.010191, while the average catcher CSAA was 0.003028 with a standard deviation of 0.012168.

Model Results

Table 3 (see page 104) presents the intercepts, standard errors, Z scores, and P values for the logistic regression model. Logistic regression centers around log odds, as

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Categorical Variables

Variable	N (%)
Called Strike	1,232,129
Yes	400,949 (32.5%)
No	831,180 (67.5%)
Same Handedness	
Yes	511,372 (41.5%)
No	720,757 (58.5%)
Count	
0-0	428,089 (34.7%)
0-1	160,424 (13.0%)
0-2	75,608 (6.1%)
1-0	132,213 (10.7%)
2-0	42,574 (3.5%)
3-0	19,968 (1.6%)
1-1	110,261 (8.9%)
1-2	95,285 (7.7%)
2-1	49,705 (4.0%)
2-2	66,903 (5.4%)
3-1	20,720 (1.7%)
3-2	30,379 (2.5%)
Umpire Status	
Average	619,329 (50.3%)
Tough	301,240 (24.4%)
Generous	311,560 (25.3%)

Data descriptive statistics, categorical variables.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Continuous Variables

Variable	Mean	Median	St. Dev.
Pitcher CSAA	0.003196	0.003	0.010191
Catcher CSAA	0.003028	0.002	0.012168

using log-odds results in symmetry around zero. Table 4 shows some conversions of probabilities to log odds for reference.¹⁶

The constant intercept value of -0.244 is the log odds of an eligible pitch being called a strike in a different-handed pitcher-batter matchup in a 0-0 count with a league-average pitcher, catcher, and home-plate umpire. All counts except 2-0 had statistically-significant log-odd coefficients; indicating that, controlling for all other variables, all counts other than 2-0 affected the probability of a taken pitch being called a strike. The count with the largest impact on increasing the log odds of a called strike was 3-0. Counts with the largest impact on decreasing the log odds of a called strike were 0-2, 1-2, and 2-2. While other research has been done on the size of the strike zone in different counts or for particular types of pitches, this article focused on the impact of each actor in the generation

of a called strike; the impact of the count simply groups the recorded outcome of each pitch in general (ball or called strike).¹⁷

The log-odds coefficient for same-handedness (0.152) was statistically significant, indicating that, controlling for all other variables, having a same-handed pitcher-batter matchup slightly increased the probability of a taken pitch being called a strike.

The log-odds coefficients for pitchers (2.151) and catchers (3.811) were both statistically significant. This indicates that, controlling for all other variables, each one-unit increase in pitcher CSAA increased the log-odds of a taken pitch being called a strike by 2.151. Likewise, controlling for all other variables, each one-unit increase in catcher CSAA increased the log-odds of a taken pitch being called a strike by 3.811.

The log-odds coefficients for having a tough umpire behind the plate (-0.0751) and a generous umpire behind home plate (0.0908) were both statistically significant. This indicates that, controlling for all other variables, having a tough umpire slightly decreased the probability of a taken pitch being called a strike. Likewise, controlling for all other variables, having a generous umpire slightly increased the probability of a taken pitch being called a strike.

DISCUSSION

Overview

A logistic regression model was run using data from roughly 1.2 million taken pitches from the 2015 through 2019 seasons to understand how various factors and actors impact the probability of a pitch being called a strike. All counts except 2-0 had a statistically significant impact on the probability of a taken pitch being called a strike. The probability of a called strike increased in 3-0 counts, while all other counts exhibited a decrease in the probability. These results match previous research on the changing of called strike zones in different counts.¹⁸ Additionally, taken pitches in same-handed pitcher-batter circumstances had a higher probability of being called a strike compared to different-handed matchups. This suggests that umpires may be more

Table 3. Model Results

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	Z Score	P Value
Intercept	-0.244262	0.004145	-58.923	***
Count				
0-1	-1.163927	0.006846	-170.004	***
0-2	-2.293584	0.013734	-167.005	***
1-0	-0.181955	0.006378	-28.527	***
1-1	-0.969364	0.007652	-126.674	***
1-2	-2.021709	0.011126	-181.705	***
2-0	0.013319	0.010211	1.304	0.192
2-1	-0.681851	0.010261	-66.449	***
2-2	-1.610612	0.011374	-141.601	***
3-0	0.815667	0.015221	53.59	***
3-1	-0.269351	0.014576	-18.479	***
3-2	-1.160546	0.01442	-80.481	***
Same Handedness	0.151924	0.00411	36.964	***
Pitcher CSAA	2.151226	0.198826	10.82	***
Catcher CSAA	3.81074	0.166823	22.843	***
Umpire Status				
Generous	0.090829	0.004914	18.485	***
Tough	-0.07512	0.005036	-14.917	***

Logistic regression model results. P values less than .001 denoted with ***.

Table 4. Statistical Conversions

Probability	Odds	Log Odds
0.100	0.111	-2.197
0.200	0.250	-1.386
0.300	0.428	-0.847
0.400	0.667	-0.405
0.500	1.000	0.000
0.600	1.500	0.405
0.700	2.333	0.847
0.800	4.000	1.386
0.900	9.000	2.197

Probability to log-odds conversion table.

comfortable viewing the delivery of a pitch if the pitcher is releasing the ball on the same side of the plate as the batter. The result aligns with research that suggests a bias is held towards calling outside pitches strikes given how umpires set up behind the plate, particularly in same-handed pitcher-batter matchups.¹⁹

Regarding the actors involved, catchers had the most influence over the probability of a taken pitch being called a strike. Specifically, the log-odds coefficient for catcher CSAA was roughly 75% greater than that of pitcher CSAA. However, pitchers also had a sizable influence over the probability of a taken pitch being called a strike. While this result may not be surprising to some, it supports the assertion that pitch framing alone is not the sole factor in generating called strikes; a pitcher's command plays a non-trivial role as well. Further investigation and discussion around pitchers' contributions to generating called strikes should continue. As for umpires, having either a tough umpire or generous umpire (based on called-strike percentages) behind the plate affected the probability of a taken pitch being called a strike, with tough umpires decreasing the probability and generous umpires increasing the probability. The relative effect of generous umpires was slightly more than tough umpires; meaning that the increase in probability of a called strike with a generous umpire was greater than the decrease in probability of a called strike with a tough umpire.

Limitations

Several limitations exist in this analysis. First, batters were not considered in this model. It is clear that the batter is an actor in the generation (or not) of a called strike, and some research has been conducted in terms of showing the effect the batter may have.²⁰ However, data capturing a batter's independent impact on a taken pitch being called a strike are not currently publicly available. Further, a clear explanation for how a batter impacts such an outcome is not as obvious as that of a pitcher, catcher, or umpire. The pitcher's impact can be attributed to their command, the catcher to their pitch framing, and the umpire to the fact that they are in charge of making the call. A number of possible explanations could be attributed to the batter, such as stance or location to home plate, their height, individual swing mechanics, general reputation as a player, and plate discipline, etc.²¹ It would make sense to attempt to capture the batter's effect in a model only if said effect could be fully understood and explained.

The second limitation was the level of nuance of the metric used to represent the effect of the umpire. Ideally, an umpire CSAA metric (similar to the pitcher

CSAA and catcher CSAA metrics used)²² would be publicly available for usage. However, such a metric is not present on Baseball Prospectus. That being said, the effect of the umpire was still captured adequately in the model for the purposes of this analysis.

NEXT STEPS

This article provides support that pitchers are an important actor in the generation of called strikes, and that further investigation, much like that of understanding pitch framing for catchers, would provide valuable insight. In that vein, there are several logical avenues of study that could follow this article.

The first could be a deep dive into better understanding why pitchers have the level of command that they do. In other words, it would make sense to attempt to understand what characteristics pitchers with high CSAA possess and the same for pitchers with low CSAA. Characteristics of interest could include velocity, pitch spin rate, handedness, and arm angle or delivery mechanics.²³ Analyzing which aspects of pitching a pitcher can improve upon to maximize their effectiveness—beyond swinging strikes or “raw stuff”²⁴—would allow for better theoretical understanding and practical results.

The second could be the investigation of the relationship between a pitcher's ability to generate swinging strikes and their ability to generate called strikes. Little has been done in terms of analyzing a pitcher's overall value in terms of generating both called and swinging strikes, other than the recent introduction of the CSW metric.²⁵ This is not surprising, as pitchers who have the ability to make batters miss with high velocity or devastating breaking pitches (such as Randy Johnson, Clayton Kershaw, Aroldis Chapman, etc.) make a greater impression than those who have the ability to pitch around batters with strong command (such as Jamie Moyer, Kyle Hendricks, etc.). The relative lack of analyses on pitchers impacting called strikes was the motivation behind this article, so it would make sense to attempt to understand how valuable that aspect of a pitcher's game is in relation to other aspects. ■

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What Baseball Team Does PageRank Say Was the Best Ever?

Michael Krebs and Gwen Ostergren

Charles Dickens may well have written about baseball's American League East in 2018 that it was the best of teams, it was the worst of teams. This grouping of only one-sixth of all Major League Baseball (MLB) clubs contained both baseball's winningest team that season (the Boston Red Sox, 108 wins) as well as its losingest (the Baltimore Orioles, 47 wins). Nearest to Boston was the Houston Astros with 103 wins, and behind them, the New York Yankees with 100. Baltimore's nearest competitor for fewest wins was the Kansas City Royals with 58, and the Chicago White Sox finished third-to-last in this category with 62 wins. Neither the Astros, White Sox, nor Royals belong to the American League East division. With rare exceptions, every team plays exactly 162 games each season. (The Brewers in 2018 were one of those rare exceptions, playing 163, but this has a negligible impact on our analysis.)

Table 1 shows the regular-season win-loss record for all MLB teams in 2018. Based on this evidence alone, baseball aficionados could conclude that the Red Sox were a better team than any other in 2018, and that every other team was better than the Orioles. Most players would also surely agree that their objective each season is to win as many games as possible, as each division winner advances to the playoffs.

The 30 MLB teams are grouped into two "leagues" (American and National), and each league is grouped into three divisions (East, Central, and West). Each team plays only 20 interleague games, and only against select opponents. For example, in 2018 the Atlanta Braves (NL) faced the Tampa Bay Rays (AL) only four times, and they did not play any games at all against the Los Angeles Angels (AL). Moreover, each team will play others in the same division more frequently than those in other divisions. For example, the NL West's Arizona Diamondbacks played 19 games against division-mates the San Diego Padres, but only six versus the NL East Philadelphia Phillies. The Orioles and Red Sox took each other on 19 times, and the Red Sox emerged victorious on 16 of those occasions.

The mere fact that Baltimore and Boston went up against one another so often casts doubt on the assertion that Boston was the best and Baltimore was the worst in 2018. Surely the Red Sox benefited from having a weak team like the Orioles to beat up on with disproportionate frequency. Conversely, did not the Baltimore Orioles suffer for having to contend so often with the likes of the Red Sox?

In 2018, the Chicago White Sox beat the Red Sox four times. They also beat the Orioles four times. MLB's standard accounting method treats those eight wins

Table 1. 2018 MLB Divisional Standings

American League East			American League Central			American League West		
Team	Wins	Losses	Team	Wins	Losses	Team	Wins	Losses
Boston Red Sox	108	54	Cleveland Indians	91	71	Houston Astros	103	59
New York Yankees	100	62	Minnesota Twins	78	84	Oakland Athletics	97	65
Tampa Bay Rays	90	72	Detroit Tigers	64	98	Seattle Mariners	89	73
Toronto Blue Jays	73	89	Chicago White Sox	62	100	Los Angeles Angels	80	82
Baltimore Orioles	47	115	Kansas City Royals	58	104	Texas Rangers	67	95
National League East			National League Central			National League West		
Team	Wins	Losses	Team	Wins	Losses	Team	Wins	Losses
Atlanta Braves	90	72	Milwaukee Brewers	96	67	Los Angeles Dodgers	92	71
Washington Nationals	82	80	Chicago Cubs	95	68	Colorado Rockies	91	72
Philadelphia Phillies	80	82	St. Louis Cardinals	88	74	Arizona Diamondbacks	82	80
New York Mets	77	85	Pittsburgh Pirates	82	79	San Francisco Giants	73	89
Miami Marlins	63	98	Cincinnati Reds	67	95	San Diego Padres	66	96

equally. Somehow, though, we would like to weight the four victories over Boston, a strong team, more heavily than the four victories over the Orioles, a weak team. More generally, we wish to weight each win according to the prowess of the defeated team. How can we assign these weights?

THE PageRank ALGORITHM

The PageRank algorithm provides one method for determining these weights. Consider, for example, only three teams from 2018: the Orioles, the Red Sox, and the White Sox. Let x_1 , x_2 , and x_3 be values assigned to those three teams, respectively. Our goal is to determine x_1 , x_2 , and x_3 .

The Orioles had 16 losses in 2018 to the Red Sox and 4 to the White Sox, for a total of 20 against those two teams. Also, the White Sox had 3 losses each to the Red Sox and to the Orioles. So, 4/5 of the Orioles' losses and 1/2 of the White Sox's losses (against the teams under consideration) were to the Red Sox. PageRank then assigns a weight to the Red Sox by taking 4/5 of the Orioles' weight plus 1/2 of the White Sox's weight. That is:

$$\frac{4}{5}x_1 + \frac{1}{2}x_3 = x_2$$

We can interpret this equation as follows. Each victory over the Orioles contributes $x_1/20$ to the value of x_2 , and each victory over the White Sox contributes $x_3/6$.

In the same vein, we obtain two more equations for the other two teams. We can consolidate this system of equations into the following matrix equation:

$$(1) \quad \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 3/7 & 1/2 \\ 4/5 & 0 & 1/2 \\ 1/5 & 4/7 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \\ x_3 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \\ x_3 \end{pmatrix}$$

Solving, we find that every solution is a multiple of $x_1 = 50$, $x_2 = 63$, and $x_3 = 46$.

Observe that because these values assigned by PageRank reflect the team's strength, we thereby obtain a new way to rank teams: in order of PageRank values. In our example, then, first place goes to the Red Sox (score of 63), second place to the Orioles (50), and third place to the White Sox (46).

We can view equation (1) as saying that $(x_1, x_2, x_3)^T$ is an eigenvector with eigenvalue 1 for the given matrix. More generally, given any collection of n teams, let A be the matrix whose (i, j) entry equals the number of times team i defeated team j divided by the total

number of losses suffered by team j . (We ignore the possibility that a team may be undefeated—this has never happened in major-league history.) Then we find the corresponding PageRank values x_1, \dots, x_n by requiring that $(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n)^T$ is an eigenvector for A with eigenvalue 1. We can uniquely determine the x_i by additionally requiring that $x_1 + \dots + x_n = 1$.

One may well ask whether 1 is always an eigenvalue for A , and if so, if the corresponding eigenspace always has a single basis vector with only positive entries, as in our example. As to the first question, the answer is yes. That's because, by construction, the columns of A sum to 1. Consequently, $vA = v$, where $v = (1, 1, \dots, 1)$. Taking transpose of both sides, we get that $A^T v^T = v^T$, so v^T is an eigenvector for A^T with eigenvalue 1. The result follows, as a matrix and its transpose have the same eigenvalues.

The second question is a bit deeper, but equally crucial. Without one-dimensionality, PageRank will not produce a unique ranking of teams. Even in the case that the eigenspace is one-dimensional, if a basis vector v for it contains both positive and negative entries, we will not know whether to use v or $-v$ for our solution. Choosing $-v$ instead of v will reverse the rankings. Fortunately, the Perron-Frobenius theorem answers this question by providing conditions under which things work the way we want. We will not discuss this theorem further here—see, for example, C.R. MacCluer's work for more about it¹—but rest assured that throughout this paper, whenever we use PageRank, these conditions are met, so our rankings are indeed well-defined.

Originally, PageRank was developed not to rank sports teams, but so the Internet search engine Google could rank websites.² In this application, websites take the place of baseball teams, and one website does not defeat another, but rather is pointed to by a hyperlink from it. To deal with issues such as "islands" of websites which cannot access other parts of the Internet via hyperlinks, one typically introduces a *damping factor*, as we shall discuss later.

In the case of Internet searches, the values x_i have an intuitive meaning. First we limit ourselves to a collection of websites related to a given search term, say, those that contain this term or are linked to by a page containing it. We then imagine a "random web surfer" who begins by selecting one of these websites at random. Our Internet addict then randomly picks one of the links on that page and follows it. The process continues *ad infinitum*. The value x_i equals the limit, as the number of steps goes to infinity, of the probability that the surfer will be at website i .

Many publications have previously discussed the use of PageRank to rate sports teams.³ Moreover, as discussed there and elsewhere, there are many other rating and ranking systems, including Elo, PowerRank, Pythagorean expectation, and more.

NPR: NORMALIZED PAGERANKS

We applied the PageRank method to the 2018 MLB season—and lo and behold!—the Astros, not the Red Sox, emerged as the top-rated team. Moreover, the Kansas City Royals had the lowest PageRank score, despite the Orioles having eleven fewer wins. Why? Perhaps because the Houston Astros play in the AL West, which overall seems to have been a tougher division. While Houston had fewer wins than Boston, those wins were on average weighted more heavily, enough for PageRank to crown the Astros best in baseball in 2018. On the other end of the spectrum, the Royals play in the AL Central, a notably weak division whose best team in 2018 (Cleveland) was ranked by PageRank as 20th out of 30 MLB teams.

PageRank also ranked the Chicago White Sox above the Detroit Tigers and the Philadelphia Phillies above the Washington Nationals, even though the Tigers had more wins than the White Sox and the Nationals had more wins than the Phillies.

We now apply this method to every baseball season beginning, somewhat arbitrarily, in the year 1900. Our analysis includes all teams 1900 through 2018. If we assign PageRank scores x_1, x_2, \dots, x_{30} to the 30 2018 MLB teams while imposing the condition that $x_1 + x_2 + \dots + x_{30} = 1$, then the average PageRank score will be $1/30$. In 1918, however, there were only 16 teams (eight in each league), so the average for that year would be $1/16$, nearly twice as high as the average score a century later. Simply doing a head-to-head comparison would give the earlier teams an unwarranted edge.

Even worse, teams from different leagues did not face one another prior to 1997. So the American League and National League form separate “islands,” in which case the Perron-Frobenius theorem will no longer guarantee a unique solution. From 1900 to 1996, we therefore apply PageRank separately to the two leagues. But then in 1918, for example, the average score would be $1/8$.

To compare between years and leagues, then, we define the *Normalized PageRank* (NPR) as the number of sample standard deviations the PageRank score is above the sample mean of PageRank scores of teams within a comparison group. From 1900 to 1996, the comparison group is the set of all teams in the

same year and in the same league. From 1997 to 2018, the comparison group is the set of all teams in the same year.

In 2018, we expect the Astros and Red Sox to have a positive NPR (they were almost certainly better-than-average teams) and the Royals’ and Orioles’ NPRs to be negative (below average). This is indeed the case. The 2018 Houston Astros had an NPR of 1.324, just barely edging out the Boston Red Sox, with their NPR of 1.316. The Kansas City Royals had an NPR of -2.079 , worse than the Baltimore Orioles’ -1.948 .

SOME ADDITIONAL NOTES

When interpreting a t-statistic such as NPR, it is useful to confirm that the underlying distribution is normal. For this purpose, we created Q-Q plots (not shown here). Based on these, we are confident that the PageRank scores are normal, and we may therefore interpret the NPR scores accordingly.

Unlike soccer, where games frequently end in ties, baseball teams generally play until one is victorious. However, it is rare but not impossible for an MLB game to end in a tie. This can happen, for example, when a game ends early due to weather conditions and is late enough in the season that it is not subsequently completed. In fact, more than one thousand MLB games have ended without a winner. When computing NPR scores, we disregarded these games. We also considered only the American and National Leagues. We did not analyze the short-lived Federal League, for example.

The 2012 Cincinnati Reds are an interesting case study. They won 3/5 of their games and had a winning percentage of 0.599. (To refer to this as a winning “percentage” is a standard misnomer in baseball; it simply means number of wins divided by number of games played.) By this measure, they were a much better than average team. However, their NPR was -0.02 . So PageRank regards them as a below-average team, albeit just slightly. How can this be? In the National League that year, only the Braves and Nationals had positive NPRs. PageRank seems to have determined on the basis of the interleague games that year that the AL on balance was considerably better than the NL that year.

In general, though, NPR correlates positively with winning percentage, as one would expect. We can see this in Figure 1, which shows a scatterplot of winning percentage versus NPR. We performed a simple linear regression and found that $r^2 \approx 0.6769$.

NPR2: COMPARING TEAMS ACROSS YEARS

In the procedure described in the previous sections,

we effectively formed a directed multigraph by representing each team in a given season as a vertex, and representing each game as a directed edge from the loser to the winner. Let G be the (undirected) multigraph obtained by disregarding orientation of edges. The resulting graph is highly disconnected. Indeed, each connected component of G corresponds uniquely with either a season since 1997 (when interleague play started) or with a league and a season prior to 1997.

One can easily find a path, for example, from the 2018 Atlanta Braves to the 2018 Los Angeles Angels. Although those two teams never faced one another directly, the 2018 Braves did play the 2018 Tampa Bay Rays, who in turn played the 2018 Angels. But no path exists between teams from different seasons. Nor can one find a path between an American League team and a National League team prior to 1997, as teams then played only other teams in the same league.

NPR, therefore, does not account for variation in average team strength from season to season, or from league to league pre-1997. During World War II for example, many players, including several superstars, took a hiatus from baseball to serve in the armed forces. The first players were inducted into the military in 1941. It is plausible, therefore, that although the 1940 Chicago White Sox and the 1941 Boston Red Sox had roughly equal NPRs (1.032 and 1.045, respectively), the former team was stronger. Likewise, expansion years, when the major leagues added teams, may have diluted the talent pool. The year 1962, which introduced new teams in Houston and New York, exemplifies this phenomenon. The 1962 New York Mets have an NPR of -2.406 , the 10th lowest out of the 2,504 teams in our database.

In an attempt to address this issue, we now add several new vertices and edges to our directed graph. Each new vertex will represent not a team in a single season but rather a team over the span of two seasons. For each game, we add directed edges from the loser to the winner, where both endpoints represent one-year or two-year teams. We chose to insist, however, that at least one of the two endpoints should be a one-year team. For

example, then, a game in 1940 in which the White Sox beat the Red Sox would show up as five edges in our new graph:

- an edge from the 1940 Red Sox to the 1940 White Sox
- an edge from the 1940–41 Red Sox to the 1940 White Sox
- an edge from the 1940 Red Sox to the 1940–41 White Sox
- an edge from the 1939–40 Red Sox to the 1940 White Sox
- an edge from the 1940 Red Sox to the 1939–40 White Sox

Continuing this example, we additionally factor in a game in 1941 in which the Red Sox beat the Yankees. For now let's consider only that outcome together with the aforementioned 1940 White Sox victory over Boston. Within our graph, then, we will have a path from the 1941 Yankees to the 1940 White Sox, as shown in Figure 2.

This path has the effect of giving the 1940 White Sox “points” for beating a team that beat the 1941 Yankees. In this way we can account for “strength of schedule” across seasons—or even, by taking longer and longer paths, across eras.

Figure 1. Winning Percentage Versus NPR

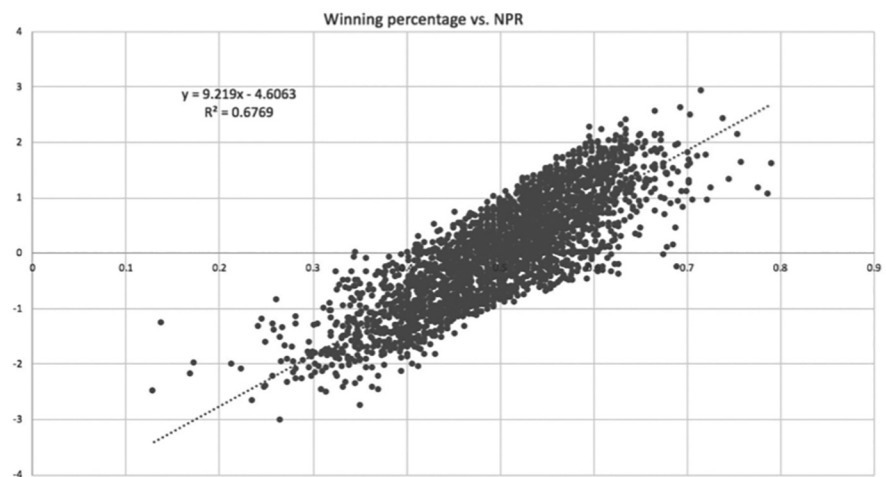


Figure 2. A Path Between Teams from Different Seasons



We include a vertex for a two-year team only when the team existed both years. We have no vertex for the 1961–62 New York Mets, for example, as the Mets were founded in 1962.

The two-year vertices serve as bridges from one season to the next. Consequently, in our new graph, there is a path from any one-year team to any other one-year team. In the case of teams in different leagues before 1996, one must take a somewhat circuitous route, first making one's way to 1997, then switching leagues via an interleague game. Given a directed multigraph, the PageRank method produces a matrix A with 1 as an eigenvalue, as described in Section 2. Using this new, connected graph, PageRank provides a means for comparing teams in different seasons.

We applied the PageRank method to this matrix A but found the results to be unsatisfactory. In the results, the top 100 teams were all in the National League. That seems unrealistic. We speculate that PageRank may have found the National League in 1997 to be stronger on average than the American League that year, and due to the structure of our graph, this deficit may have been impossible to overcome. In other words, although the two-year teams eliminate islands, the graph is still fairly “clumpy.”

Fortunately, we have a standard technique to deal with this situation. Namely, we introduce a *damping factor* α , where α is a value between 0 and 1. Let B be a square matrix of the same size as A . Let $C = (1 - \alpha)A + \alpha B$. We then find a positive-valued eigenvector for C with eigenvalue 1 and assign scores to teams accordingly.

The damping factor takes a small portion of the score assigned to each node and redistributes them evenly throughout the graph, thereby mitigating the clumpiness. In the random web surfer model, we can view α as the probability that the user does not follow a link from the current page, but rather simply selects an Internet page at random to visit next.

We took $\alpha = 0.15$ as our damping factor, as this is a standard, frequently used value. As with NPR, we then normalize by computing the number of sample standard deviations above the sample mean. We call the resulting value the team's NPR2 score. The “2” refers to the inclusion of two-year teams.

Because the NPR2 eliminates islands, we use the set of all teams from all years when computing mean and standard deviation. By contrast, with NPR, we calculated separately for separate comparison groups.

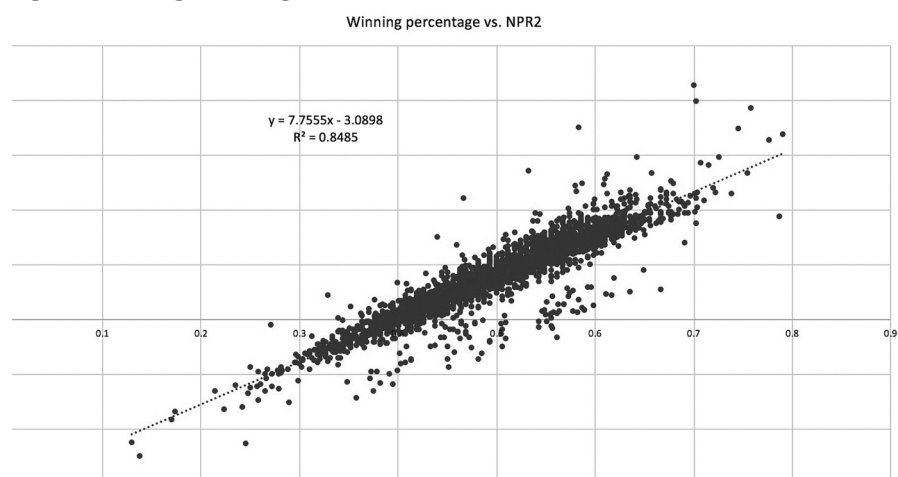
As with NPR, we also have that NPR2 correlates positively with winning percentage. Figure 3 shows a scatterplot of winning percentage versus NPR2. We performed a simple linear regression and found that $r^2 \approx 0.8527$. So NPR2 correlates more closely with winning percentage than does NPR. This may be partly due to the damping factor we included with NPR2. It may also be partly because, with regression to the mean, we would anticipate less of a spread in the weights attached to victories for two-year teams than for single-year teams.

A JUSTIFICATION FOR THE METHOD

Adding nodes for two-year teams makes little sense unless a team's performance one year correlates with its performance the following year. Intuitively, we expect that it should, as teams usually retain most of their players from year to year. We consider it a good habit to back up intuition with data, however.

Towards this end, we used a permutation test to compare the mean absolute difference between a team's winning percentage one year and its winning percentage the following year against the absolute difference between a team's winning percentage and a randomly selected other team. Our specific procedure went as follows. Between 1900 and 2017, we identified 2,506 teams that continued to exist the following year. Let w_1, \dots, w_{2506} be the winning percentages of these 2,506 teams, and let u_1, \dots, u_{2506} be the respective winning percentages of these teams the following year. For example, our first team under consideration is

Figure 3. Winning Percentage Versus NPR2



the 1900 Brooklyn Superbas. So the Superbas' winning percentage in 1900 is $w_1 \approx 0.603$, and their winning percentage in 1901 is $u_1 \approx 0.581$. We then take the absolute differences $|w_1 - u_1|, \dots, |w_{2506} - u_{2506}|$. The sample mean m of these 2,506 absolute differences is approximately 0.060. In other words, on average, a team's winning percentage changes by about 6 percentage points from one year to the next.

We claim that this is a smaller change than one would expect by choosing two teams randomly. To test this claim, using *Mathematica*, we randomly selected a set P of one hundred elements from S_{2506} , the symmetric group on 2,506 letters. For each element $\sigma_j \in P$, we calculate the mean m_j of the absolute differences $|w_1 - w_{\sigma_j(1)}|, \dots, |w_{2506} - w_{\sigma_j(2506)}|$. Taking the set $\{m_j | 1 \leq j \leq 100\}$ as our sample, we find that the sample mean is about 0.095, and the sample standard deviation is about 0.001.

So m is approximately 34.6 standard deviations below the mean of the m_j . A Q-Q plot (not depicted here) shows the m_j to be distributed approximately normally. We may therefore state with confidence that a team's winning percentage one year is far closer to its winning percentage the following year than one would expect due to randomness alone.

RESULTS

So far, we have discussed three scores we can assign to a given team in a given year: winning percentage, NPR, and NPR2. We may briefly describe these three rating systems as follows. Winning percentage gives the fraction of games won. NPR describes how much better or worse than average a team fared, taking into account the strength of its opposition that season. NPR2 does the same as NPR, but also considers the opponents' strength across a two-year period.

Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the top 50 modern-era MLB teams with respect to these scores. Note that the same team has both the highest NPR and the highest NPR2 score ever: The 2001 Seattle Mariners. For that reason, we regard the 2001 Seattle Mariners as the answer to this paper's title question.

In fact, only three teams appear amongst the top 10 in all three lists, namely, the 1902 Pirates, the 2001 Seattle Mariners, and the 1998 New York Yankees.

Many consider the 1927 Yankees to have been the best team ever. Neither NPR nor NPR2 agrees with this assessment, however. Despite having the sixth-best winning percentage since 1900, they rank 21st by NPR2 and only 19th by NPR.

Table 2. Teams with the 50 Highest-Winning Percentages

Rank	Team	Winning Percentage	Rank	Team	Winning Percentage
1	1906 Chicago Cubs	0.763		1942 Brooklyn Dodgers	0.675
2	1902 Pittsburgh Pirates	0.741	27	1946 Boston Red Sox	0.673
3	1909 Pittsburgh Pirates	0.724		1961 New York Yankees	0.673
4	1954 Cleveland Indians	0.721		1969 Baltimore Orioles	0.673
5	2001 Seattle Mariners	0.716	30	1942 New York Yankees	0.669
6	1927 New York Yankees	0.714		1911 Philadelphia Athletics	0.669
7	1931 Philadelphia Athletics	0.704		1915 Boston Red Sox	0.669
	1998 New York Yankees	0.704		1954 New York Yankees	0.669
	1907 Chicago Cubs	0.704	34	1936 New York Yankees	0.667
10	1939 New York Yankees	0.702		1970 Baltimore Orioles	0.667
11	1932 New York Yankees	0.695		1975 Cincinnati Reds	0.667
12	1995 Cleveland Indians	0.694		1986 New York Mets	0.667
13	1929 Philadelphia Athletics	0.693		2018 Boston Red Sox	0.667
	1904 New York Giants	0.693	39	1913 New York Giants	0.664
15	1912 Boston Red Sox	0.691	40	1937 New York Yankees	0.662
16	1942 St. Louis Cardinals	0.688		1930 Philadelphia Athletics	0.662
17	1919 Cincinnati Reds	0.686	42	1903 Boston Americans	0.659
	1905 New York Giants	0.686	43	1928 New York Yankees	0.656
19	1912 New York Giants	0.682		1931 St. Louis Cardinals	0.656
	1944 St. Louis Cardinals	0.682		1934 Detroit Tigers	0.656
	1953 Brooklyn Dodgers	0.682		1953 New York Yankees	0.656
	1943 St. Louis Cardinals	0.682	47	1998 Atlanta Braves	0.654
23	1909 Chicago Cubs	0.680		1941 New York Yankees	0.654
	1910 Philadelphia Athletics	0.680		1940 Cincinnati Reds	0.654
25	1910 Chicago Cubs	0.675	50	1933 Washington Nationals	0.651

Table 3. Teams with the 50 Highest NPR Scores

Rank	Team Name	NPR	Rank	Team Name	NPR
1	2001 Seattle Mariners	2.931	26	1947 New York Yankees	2.007
2	1995 Cleveland Indians	2.608		1995 Boston Red Sox	2.007
3	1986 New York Mets	2.548	28	1913 New York Giants	1.990
4	1998 New York Yankees	2.482		2008 Tampa Bay Rays	1.990
5	1902 Pittsburgh Pirates	2.411	30	2004 St. Louis Cardinals	1.982
6	1999 Atlanta Braves	2.391		1934 Detroit Tigers	1.982
7	2001 Oakland Athletics	2.305	32	1975 Oakland Athletics	1.969
8	1958 New York Yankees	2.259	33	1929 Philadelphia Athletics	1.967
9	1959 Chicago White Sox	2.225	34	1974 Los Angeles Dodgers	1.964
10	1968 Detroit Tigers	2.219	35	2010 Tampa Bay Rays	1.960
11	1906 Chicago Cubs	2.141	36	1905 New York Giants	1.933
12	1918 Chicago Cubs	2.140	37	2017 Cleveland Indians	1.922
13	1946 Boston Red Sox	2.138	38	1993 San Francisco Giants	1.914
14	1970 Baltimore Orioles	2.135	39	2007 Boston Red Sox	1.912
15	2009 New York Yankees	2.125	40	1984 Detroit Tigers	1.906
16	1994 Montreal Expos	2.110	41	1993 Atlanta Braves	1.899
17	1936 New York Yankees	2.108	42	1957 New York Yankees	1.897
18	1988 New York Mets	2.102	43	1978 Boston Red Sox	1.890
19	1984 Chicago Cubs	2.083	44	2014 Baltimore Orioles	1.885
20	1976 Cincinnati Reds	2.067	45	1980 Kansas City Royals	1.884
21	1961 New York Yankees	2.033	46	1941 New York Yankees	1.881
22	1980 New York Yankees	2.027	47	1976 Philadelphia Phillies	1.879
23	1997 Atlanta Braves	2.017	48	1969 Baltimore Orioles	1.873
24	1980 Baltimore Orioles	2.014		1963 New York Yankees	1.873
25	1992 Atlanta Braves	2.011	50	1951 New York Yankees	1.870

Table 4. Teams with the 50 Highest NPR2 Scores

Rank	Team Name	NPR2	Rank	Team Name	NPR2
1	2001 Seattle Mariners	2.809	26	1917 Chicago White Sox	2.136
2	1906 Chicago Cubs	2.671	27	1995 Cleveland Indians	2.134
3	1954 Cleveland Indians	2.394	28	1970 Baltimore Orioles	2.130
4	1993 San Francisco Giants	2.356	29	1980 Kansas City Royals	2.116
5	1901 Boston Americans	2.328	30	1946 Boston Red Sox	2.115
6	1998 New York Yankees	2.325	31	1904 New York Giants	2.111
7	1909 Pittsburgh Pirates	2.315	32	2008 Tampa Bay Rays	2.106
8	1969 Baltimore Orioles	2.311	33	1910 Chicago Cubs	2.071
9	1902 Pittsburgh Pirates	2.299	34	2017 Houston Astros	2.070
10	1953 Brooklyn Dodgers	2.285	35	1998 Atlanta Braves	2.067
11	1993 Atlanta Braves	2.270		2008 Anaheim Angels	2.067
12	1932 New York Yankees	2.248	37	1902 Philadelphia Athletics	2.051
13	1980 New York Yankees	2.246	38	1931 Philadelphia Athletics	2.044
14	1954 New York Yankees	2.241	39	1999 Atlanta Braves	2.039
15	1903 Boston Americans	2.220	40	1937 New York Yankees	2.026
16	2009 New York Yankees	2.215	41	1917 New York Giants	2.024
17	1907 Chicago Cubs	2.212	42	1919 Cincinnati Reds	2.013
18	2001 Oakland Athletics	2.211	43	1928 New York Yankees	2.007
19	1961 New York Yankees	2.199	44	1993 Philadelphia Phillies	1.997
20	1927 New York Yankees	2.171	45	1908 New York Giants	1.990
21	1980 Baltimore Orioles	2.151	46	1939 New York Yankees	1.970
22	1905 New York Giants	2.149		1943 St. Louis Cardinals	1.970
	1912 Boston Red Sox	2.149	48	1934 Detroit Tigers	1.969
24	1942 St. Louis Cardinals	2.148	49	1953 New York Yankees	1.835
25	1968 Detroit Tigers	2.146		1942 New York Yankees	1.835

POSSIBLE VARIATIONS

There are innumerable ways to vary the techniques discussed in this paper, and we make no claim that our choices were optimal. In this section, we mention a few, but by no means all, potential alternative paths.

We chose to count all victories equally. We could have taken the margin of victory (that is, runs scored minus runs allowed) into account. It would be interesting to know how that would affect the results.

We also opted to use only regular-season games. We excluded all postseason games, including the World Series. Because World Series games are played between one AL and one NL team, this would have provided a bridge between leagues, even before interleague play.

For NPR2, we added two-year teams, but we just as easily could have added three-year teams, four-year teams, and so on. For that matter, instead of having additional nodes that encompassed entire seasons, each added vertex could instead represent a team during the last half of one season and the first half of the next season.

PageRank, of course, is only one of many methods that account for “strength of schedule.” We like it because of its mathematical elegance. The main novel idea of this paper—namely the introduction of two-year teams in order to compare across eras—can however be used with other such techniques as well. ■

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Notes

1. C.R. MacCluer, “The many proofs and applications of Perron's theorem,” *SIAM Review* 42 (3), 2000, 487–498.
2. Sergey Brin and Lawrence Page, “The anatomy of a large-scale hypertextual web search engine,” *Computer Networks and ISDN Systems*, Vol. 30 (1–7), April 1998, 107–17.
3. Previous investigations of PageRank in sports include T.P.E. Chartier, E. Kreutzer, A. N. Langville, and K. E. Pedings, “Sensitivity and stability of ranking vectors,” *SIAM J. Sci. Comput.* 33(3), 1077–102; A.Y. Govan, “Ranking theory with application to popular sports,” Thesis (PhD 2008) North Carolina State University; L.R. Zack, R. Lamb, and S. Ball (2012). “An application of Google's PageRank to NFL rankings,” *Involve* 5(4), 463–71.

2022 CHADWICK AWARDS

The Henry Chadwick Award was established by SABR to honor baseball's great researchers—historians, statisticians, analysts, and archivists—for their invaluable contributions to making baseball the game that links America's present with its past.

Apart from honoring individuals for the length and breadth of their contributions to the study and enjoyment of baseball, the Chadwick Award will educate the baseball community about sometimes little known but vastly important contributions from the game's past and thus encourage the next generation of researchers.

The contributions of nominees must have had public impact. This may be demonstrated by publication of research in any of a variety of formats: books, magazine articles, and websites. The compilation of a significant database or archive that has facilitated the published research of others will also be considered in the realm of public impact.

JAMES E. BRUNSON by Todd Peterson

James Edward Brunson III (1954–) is one of the very few historians who can rightfully claim to have written the definitive work on their subject. His 1,393-page, three-volume work, *Black Baseball, 1858–1900: A Comprehensive Record of the Teams, Players, Managers, Owners and Umpires* (2019), is not only one of the very first books on nineteenth-century Black baseball, but the tome's sheer encyclopedic range and depth makes it very unlikely to ever be surpassed. In 2021, SABR deemed Brunson's opus to be one of the 50 greatest baseball books of the last 50 years.

A native of Chicago, Brunson is a lifelong White Sox fan. His favorite players growing up included Don Buford, Roberto Clemente, Willie Mays, and Sandy Koufax, and his top baseball moment remains the Sox's 2005 World Series sweep over the Astros. He was raised on Chicago's South Side in the Bronzeville neighborhood and, like many other youngsters, played baseball, football, and basketball. James attended Du Sable High School, and later graduated from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, where he received Bachelor of Fine Arts, Master of Arts, and Master of Fine Arts Degrees in studio painting. He then matriculated to the University of Chicago, eventually earning both a Master of Arts Degree and a PhD in Art History.

Brunson's journey down the Black baseball rabbit hole began in 1985, while the esteemed watercolorist was working on a suite of 57 paintings called "Renaissance," five of which were dedicated to the Negro Leagues. Poring over microfilm while researching the series, Brunson came across the tragic story of Isaac Carter, a ballplayer for the St. Louis Black Stockings,



who was shot and killed in 1884, while being reportedly mistaken for a burglar. His interest piqued, Brunson photocopied the newspaper page and filed it away. A year later, during his young family's annual Memorial Day pilgrimage to St. Louis, Brunson dug deeper into the incident at the St. Louis Public Library on Olive Street, eerily located near the site of Carter's death. Brunson photocopied everything he could about the Black Stockings, filling up two three-inch

thick notebooks, and after coming across more Black St. Louis squads, began collecting their stories as well. Realizing that very few books covered the history of the Black Stockings or their peers, and that nobody else seemed to be pursuing the subject, Brunson decided to do it himself.

Over the course of the next 35 years, whether at university conferences or family vacations, the historian carved out time in his busy schedule to visit microfilm rooms, sometimes taking weekend trips to libraries throughout the United States. When he began his project, neither the Internet nor digital newspaper repositories existed. Leaning into his obsession, Brunson developed an individual philosophy that any new piece of information was worth garnering, travel costs be damned. The historian's personal credo also demanded that no part of a newspaper was to be left unexamined. His organizational approach consisted of photocopying relevant newspaper articles, then jotting down information on numerous legal pads and composition notebooks, using multi-colored ink pens to differentiate between dates, teams, and states.

For Brunson, the main challenge was making sense of it all. He began synthesizing his research and

publishing his findings in periodicals and journals such as *NINE*, *Base Ball*, and *Black Ball*. For his first book, *The Early Image of Black Baseball: Race and Representation in the Popular Press, 1871–1890* (2009), Brunson critically examined how early Black ball was (mis)represented in the mainstream culture of the day; via inflammatory articles, racist cartoons, and “true crime” pictorials that mocked and demonized African Americans. The book also explored how the “colored sporting fraternity” was portrayed by a burgeoning Black press and, perhaps most significantly, documented the devastating impact White blackface minstrelsy and dialect had on Black culture and baseball.

Greatly aided by the emergence of online genealogical and historical newspaper databases—and with the encouragement of editor Gary Mitchem—Brunson began working in earnest on *Black Baseball* in 2011. Leaving no stone unturned (or seemingly no newspaper unread), the master historian crammed his three-volume set with over 1,300 team histories and 9,000 player biographies, as well as lists of African American umpires, manager/owners, and ball-playing families. Upon its publication, *Black Baseball* exponentially exploded the knowledge base of the early Black game, with Brunson detailing over 1,600 team rosters alone. (The previous high number for published nineteenth-century Black lineups was 63.) By finding and tracing the paths of players as they moved from one club to another, Brunson demonstrated how sophisticated and widespread (42 states and the District of Columbia boasted squads) early Black baseball was.

In 2011 Brunson was selected by MLB to serve on the Baseball Origins Committee, whose 12 members (including such heavyweights as John Thorn, Ken Burns, George Will, and Doris Kearns Goodwin) were tasked with researching the inception, growth, and evolution of early baseball. For his Herculean efforts on *Black Baseball*, Brunson received the 2019 Robert Peterson Recognition Award by the Jerry Malloy Negro Leagues Conference, and the 2020 Ray and Pat Brown Award for Best Edited Reference/Primary Source Work in Popular and American Culture by the Popular Culture Association.

James married his high-school sweetheart Kathleen and they remained together for nearly 50 years until her untimely death in 2018. Even though Kathleen passed away before the publication of Brunson’s masterwork, her encouragement certainly made it possible. (Sometimes, however, in the middle of the night, she would yell at the author to get off the computer and come to bed.) Before his retirement in 2012, Brunson was employed by Northern Illinois University for 37 years, teaching art history and drawing, while also serving as the university vice-president of Diversity and Equity in Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. James and Kathleen raised two daughters: Takkara, who teaches Cuban History, the African Diaspora, and gender studies at Texas A&M, and Tamerit, who is a visual rehabilitation specialist at the Center for Sight and Hearing in Rockford. Brunson is very devoted to his two granddaughters, Amaya and Efoma, and continues to write about the cultural history of Black baseball from his home in DeKalb, Illinois. ■

JANE LEAVY by Mark Armour

Jane Leavy (1951–) was born in a now defunct hospital in The Bronx, about a mile north of Yankee Stadium. She was conceived, according to her mother, on the day that Mickey Mantle hit his first big-league home run. She was raised in Roslyn, on Long Island, and visited her grandmother’s apartment two blocks from the Stadium as often as possible. Not surprisingly, she became a devout fan of the Yankees and especially Mantle. Honing her pitching delivery with daily tosses against her family’s garage door, she pitched briefly and poorly for the Blue Jays in the Roslyn Little League. Alas, her contributions to the sport she loved would have to come off the diamond.



Leavy studied Renaissance iconography and the music of the spheres at Barnard College, before earning her master’s degree at the Columbia University School of Journalism. She wrote her master’s thesis on Red Smith, the legendary sports columnist, with whom she tagged along on assignments. She had found her life’s work.

She worked as a staff writer for *womenSports* and *Self* magazines before being hired in 1979 by the *Washington Post*, where she soon inherited the Orioles beat from Tom Boswell. She was at the *Post* for nine years, covering sports (baseball, tennis, the Olympics), politics, and popular culture.

In 1990 Leavy published *Squeeze Play*, a comic novel about a young woman who is the beat writer for a new (fictitious) Washington Senators baseball team. The book is a very adult look at the life of ballplayers and the men and women of the press box.

Leavy's first book of nonfiction was 2002's *Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy*, about the legendary Dodgers pitching star who had retired at age 30 in 1966. Weaving a more traditional biography around a detailed account of his 1965 perfect game, Leavy shows us a man who was not reclusive, as often described, but simply did not wish to talk about himself. Leavy talked to 400 friends, associates, and opponents, and got as close to Koufax as we likely ever will, or will ever need to.

In 2010 she took on the story of her boyhood idol (*The Last Boy: Mickey Mantle and the End of America's Childhood*), a man whose life, unlike Koufax's, seemed to be an open book. There had already been 30 Mantle biographies; what more was there to say? Backed by 563 interviews, Leavy found plenty, including a devastating profile of his hometown of Commerce, Oklahoma, heartbreaking details about his childhood and family life, surprising new insights into his famous 565-foot home run, a forensic investigation of his litany of injuries, and illuminating and unflattering descriptions

of his roles as husband and father. Leavy lays it all out, along with a disturbing account of her own adult encounter with the Mick, and allows readers to reach their own conclusions about this generational hero.

In 2018, Leavy published *The Big Fella: Babe Ruth and the World He Created*, a biography of the man who may have invented sports celebrity. Or perhaps co-invented, along with his agent Christy Walsh, who also plays a starring role in this book. Like Leavy's other biographies, it takes a nonlinear approach to the story and uncovers some fresh angles on one of the more famous Americans of the twentieth century. For her efforts she was awarded SABR's Seymour Medal for the best book of history or biography published in 2018.

She still attends baseball games when it is safe to do so—at Nationals Park, or at Yankee Stadium, when she is in New York. One of her all-time highlights came on September 21, 2018, when she threw the ceremonial first pitch at Yankee Stadium.

Leavy has two adult children: Nick and Emma Isakoff. She splits her time between Washington, DC, and Truro, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod, where she roots fiercely for her beloved Orleans Firebirds. Her dog Bette is the mascot. ■

DANIEL OKRENT by John Thorn

Until now, the Chadwick Award has been intended to recognize writers and researchers who have done most of their best work in the background, enriching the game with dogged effort but little notice. One could argue that **Daniel Okrent** (1948–) has been amply honored in public, so why would this consummately nerdy award be right and proper for him, and for SABR?

I suggest that, like Chadwick, his idiosyncratic views of the game came to shape the attitudes of the mainstream. Bill James and sabermetrics were largely unknown to fans before Okrent's writing about them appeared in *Sports Illustrated* in May 1981. Fantasy sports, a \$4 billion industry today, was Dan's innovation after years of Strat-O-Matic play. He was a featured player in Ken Burns's *Baseball* and other documentaries about the game, notably *Silly Little Game*. And then there are his baseball books—innovative books that have filled our hearts with joy.

Where to begin? At the University of Michigan? Or in New York, where he was regarded as a boy wonder



among book editors, moving on to *Esquire*, *Life*, and *Time*? Or with *The New York Times*, where he served as the newspaper's first public editor?

He has always been, it seems now, after five decades of accomplishment, ahead of the game. In a speech on "The Death of Print" a quarter-century ago, Dan noted in our recent email exchange: "I predicted that we would have portable objects that would receive satellite downloads (not quite right, but not quite wrong, either) of all our reading material, and we'd be given a choice of paying for much of it or getting it free if we were willing to look at ads. Not nearly as troublesome a development as the DH in the NL, but interesting nonetheless."

How to wrap up? With museum consultancies and advisory boards, or *Old Jews Telling Jokes*, an Off-Broadway production with Peter Gethers that ran for 552 performances? With the book-length and film forays into Prohibition (*Last Call*), Rockefeller Center (*Great Fortune*), and American protectionism (*The*

Guarded Gate)? Amid all of it, baseball (along with family) may be seen as the constant.

In *Nine Innings* (1982), Okrent dissected a single baseball game, play by play. In his foreword, Wilfrid Sheed wrote, “The midseason baseball game must be the closest thing in sports to a grain of sand...which is to say, it’s easy to lose sight of and forget forever, but if properly studied can tell you almost all you need to know about the rest of the beach.”

This granular approach to the game was in sharp contrast to the classic pictorial anthology he had created three years earlier with Harris Lewine: *The Ultimate Baseball Book*. Nine essays by nine great writers, along with a running historical text by SABR icon David Nemec, plus hundreds of spectacular photos.... It is not too much to think that this book, and Dan himself, spurred Ken Burns to document the history of baseball. (The companion book to the 18-hour film used the very same structure, with Geoff Ward’s history stitching the essays together.)

The fantasy baseball story is familiar to many who are reading this profile. The game began among only Okrent and his friends, who met over lunch at a midtown New York restaurant called La Rotisserie Française. They called their league the Rotisserie League, and an original member, Glen Waggoner, wrote an annual guide beginning in 1984 (subtitled “the greatest game for baseball fans since baseball”). Twenty years later, according to the Fantasy Sports Trade Association, 15 million adults were playing in some fantasy sports league, whether in baseball, football, basketball, or even NASCAR. Today that figure is 60 million worldwide. Okrent never made a penny from his innovation,

nor did he win a league in which he took part (as the Okrent Fenokees or the Dan Druffs).

It was in May 1981 that his article about Rotisserie Baseball appeared in *Inside Sports* and launched that particular revolution. But in the very same month his full-length profile of Bill James (“He Does It by the Numbers”) appeared in *Sports Illustrated*, after having been mired in editorial politics for two years. Okrent had bought the self-published 1978 *Baseball Abstract* after seeing the ad in *The Sporting News* and, he recalls, “[I] couldn’t believe my eyes. I was stunned. A whole new world opened up for me. I began a correspondence with Bill: ‘Who the hell are you? Where did you come from?’”

By then James’s sales had grown by word-of-mouth from an initial 75 books in 1977 to about 2,600, but Okrent’s feature won him a contract with Ballantine Books. (The commercially distributed *Abstract* sold more than 100,000 copies and made James a star and, among baseball insiders, a pariah. “Sabermetrics,” Bill called his approach to the game.)

As Dan wrote in our email exchange, “Whenever people tell me how my role in the creation and spread of fantasy sports was an incredible (or nefarious, or just inescapable) contribution to the game, or whenever I’m given credit for WHIP (deserved, but relatively inconsequential), or flattered with comments on *Nine Innings* or *The Ultimate Baseball Book*, I think: those were nothing compared to my biggest contribution, which was bringing Bill James to the attention of the world. It would have happened without me, no doubt, but World War I would’ve started even if the archduke hadn’t been assassinated in Sarajevo.”

You’ve earned that Chaddie, Dan. ■

Contributors

MARK ARMOUR was elected as the president of SABR's Board of Directors in 2019. He is the founder and longtime director (2002–16) of SABR's Baseball Biography Project. He was the recipient of SABR's highest honor, the Bob Davids Award, in 2008 and the Henry Chadwick Award, honoring baseball's greatest researchers, in 2014. His book *Joe Cronin: A Life in Baseball*, published by the University of Nebraska Press, was a finalist for the prestigious Seymour Medal in 2011, as was *In Pursuit of Penants*, also published by Nebraska, which he co-wrote with Dan Levitt in 2015. Mark has written or cowritten several other books and many articles for publication. In 2016, he and Chris Dial resurrected SABR's Baseball Cards Committee.

CHARLIE BEVIS is a retired adjunct professor of English at Rivier University in Nashua, New Hampshire, and a member of SABR since 1984. He is the author of eight books on baseball history, most recently *Baseball Under the Lights: The Rise of the Night Game*. His research interests focus on the history of game scheduling in the pre-expansion era (notably Sunday baseball, doubleheaders, night games, and promotions) with its related impact to audience composition at the ballpark. He writes baseball from his home in Chelmsford, Massachusetts.

JAMESON COHEN is a current First-Year at Harvard College and recently graduated from Trinity School in New York City. He has been fascinated with baseball and its history from a young age and recently undertook a project for his American History class on the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. He has been a SABR member since 2020 and is excited to share his work with the baseball research community. He can be reached by email at jamesoncohen@college.harvard.edu by any SABR members who might wish to contact him about his research.

MARK CRYAN is an assistant professor of sport management at Elon University. He previously served as the general manager of the Burlington (NC) Indians in the Appalachian League, helped found the Coastal Plain League, and was athletic director for the Burlington (NC) Recreation & Parks Department. He is the author of *Cradle of the Game: Baseball and Ballparks in North Carolina*.

AMANDA LANE CUMMING is a long-suffering Seattle Mariners fan. To cope, she wrote for Lookout Landing for five years, where she wrote historically-focused pieces on the Mariners and local Northwest baseball. She is interested in the intersection of baseball and the broader world, particularly women in baseball and semipro and amateur teams in the early 20th century, and can often be found reading old newspapers for fun. Contact her at amandalanecumming@gmail.com or Twitter @Amanda_LaneC.

BENJAMIN DERTINGER is a third-year year college student at High Point University where he is a three-season track athlete. He is a majoring in business administration and this baseball statistics project encouraged him to pursue a minor in data analytics. Ben is looking forward to fielding questions and receiving suggestions about his research at bdertinger@gmail.com.

STEPHEN DERTINGER is director of research at Litron Laboratories, a company that specializes in genetic toxicology. His day job has taught him the importance of synthesizing multifactorial data into readily-interpretable visuals that include information about uncertainty. Steve is looking forward to fielding questions and receiving suggestions about his research at sderting@rochester.rr.com.

CONNELLY DOAN, MA is a data analyst in Las Vegas who has applied his professional skills to the game of baseball, both personally and for RotoBaller.com. He has been a SABR member since 2018. He can be reached on Twitter (@ConnellyDoan) and through email (doanco01@gmail.com).

VINCE GUERRIERI is a journalist and author in the Cleveland area. He's the secretary/treasurer of the Jack Graney SABR Chapter. He has written about baseball history for a variety of publications, including *Ohio Magazine*, *Cleveland Magazine*, *Belt Magazine*, and *Deadspin*, and League Park is his happy place. He can be reached at vaguerrieri@gmail.com, or found on Twitter @vinceguerrieri.

DONNA L. HALPER is an associate professor of communication and media studies at Lesley University in Massachusetts. She joined SABR in 2011, and her research focuses on women and minorities in baseball, the Negro Leagues, and "firsts" in baseball history. A former radio deejay, credited with having discovered the rock band Rush, Dr. Halper reinvented herself and got her PhD at age 64. In addition to her research into baseball, she is also a media historian with expertise in the history of broadcasting. She has contributed to SABR's Games Project and BioProject, as well as writing several articles for the *Baseball Research Journal*.

LESLIE HEAPHY was elected to the SABR Board of Directors in 2010. She has been a member of SABR since 1989 and chair of the Women in Baseball Committee since 1995. She is on the board for the International Women's Baseball Center. Leslie is an associate professor of history at Kent State University at Stark and publishes in the areas of the Negro Leagues and women's baseball. In 2008, she became the founding editor of the journal *Black Ball*, published by McFarland. She lives in Canton, Ohio. She was the 2014 winner of the Bob Davids Award, SABR's highest honor.

DOUGLAS JORDAN, PhD is a professor emeritus at Sonoma State University in Northern California. He's been a regular contributor to *BRJ* since 2014. He enjoys hiking and playing chess when he is not watching or writing about baseball. You can contact him at jordand@sonoma.edu.

MICHAEL KREBS conducted this research while at California State University, Los Angeles, where he has been a professor of mathematics since 2005.

DAVID KRELL is the chair of the Northern New Jersey Chapter of SABR. He joined SABR in 2012. David is the author of *1962: Baseball and America in the Time of JFK* and *Our Bums: The Brooklyn Dodgers in History, Memory and Popular Culture*. He also edited

the anthologies *The New York Mets in Popular Culture* and *The New York Yankees in Popular Culture*.

BILL NOWLIN has enjoyed researching baseball and writing for SABR for nearly 20 years, and has also been active in editing or co-editing a good number of SABR books. He's an active member of the Boston chapter, and spends a lot of time at Fenway Park.

GWEN OSTERGREN has previously collaborated on projects in pure mathematics (more specifically, geometric graph theory) with Michael Krebs at California State University, Los Angeles. Collectively, they have published several articles in that field.

Visual artist, historian, and teacher **TODD PETERSON** lives in Overland Park, Kansas. He is a two-time winner of the Normal "Tweed" Webb Lifetime Achievement Award for outstanding

research, and was a contributor to and editor of *The Negro Leagues Were Major Leagues* (McFarland, 2019). Peterson is currently working on a book about the Negro League playoffs.

JOHN F. SCOGGINS, PhD is an economist, statistician and consultant. Although he specializes in the economics of healthcare, he has had a life-long passion for the study of baseball. His professional email address is john@scogginsconsulting.com.

JOHN THORN is the official historian of Major League Baseball and a SABR member since 1981. He has written many books and essays.

ROBERT D. WARRINGTON is a native Philadelphian who writes about the city's baseball history.



Women in Baseball
CONFERENCE

2022 SABR/IWBC Women in Baseball Conference

The fourth annual Women in Baseball Conference, hosted by SABR and the International Women's Baseball Center, takes place **September 16-18, 2022** in Rockford, Illinois.

With featured speakers, panel discussions, and research presentations celebrating women in the game, the conference will also examine the lasting impact of Title IX in recognition of the landmark legislation's 50th Anniversary.

**Registration opens this summer at
sabr.org/women-in-baseball-conference**



SABR's 50th National Convention is ON!

SABR 50 will take place on August 17-21, 2022, in Baltimore, and we are beyond thrilled to celebrate with you in person!

The Hyatt Regency Baltimore Inner Harbor hotel, our host for the convention, sits on the waterfront and is conveniently located within walking distance from Camden Yards. Our host hotel is also close to many area museums, historic landmarks, and other attractions like the National Aquarium.

This is an event well worth the two year wait, with an All-Star lineup of featured speakers and exciting events already planned, including:

- Keynote address by Tim Kurkjian, winner of the BBWAA's 2022 Career Excellence Award
- Opening Remarks by Sig Mejdal, VP & Asst. General Manager, Analytics, Baltimore Orioles
- Oriole Park at Camden Yards panel with Bill Stetka (Orioles Team Historian), Greg Bader (Orioles Senior VP, Administration & Experience), and Joe Spear (founder of Populous)
- Women in Leadership panel with Orioles executives Eve Rosenbaum (Director, Baseball Development), Nicole Sherry (Director, Field Operations), Jennifer Grondahl (Senior VP, Community Development & Communications), & Lisa Tolson (Senior VP, Human Resources)
- Baltimore Orioles vs. Boston Red Sox game on Friday, August 19

Of course, there is a lot more on the way — innovative panel discussions, ground-breaking research presentations, and more opportunities to make and renew cherished baseball friendships.

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