



**January 26, 2019**  
**Bryant, Arkansas**

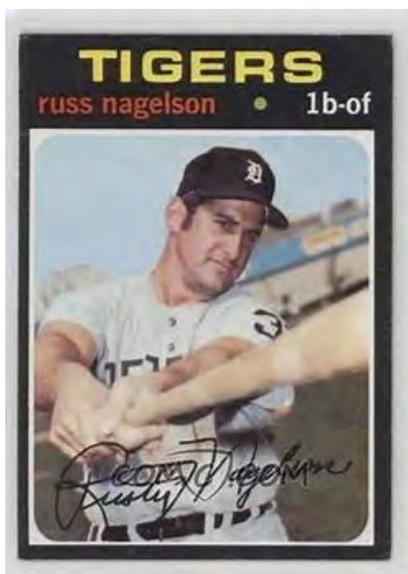


The Robinson-Kell SABR chapter met at the First Southern Baptist Church of Bryant at 12:00 p.m. There were 18 members and guests present.

The guest speaker was former major leaguer Russ Nagelson, who appeared in 62 games for the Indians and Tigers from 1968 to 1970. Mr. Nagelson began by recounting his time growing up in Cincinnati and noted that perhaps a dozen great athletes lived within five or six square miles of him during his youth – including the great Dallas Cowboy



quarterback Roger Staubach who lived two blocks away. He spoke fondly of this days playing Knothole and American Legion baseball under Coach Hal Pennington who was a two-time All-American at Xavier and later the first head coach of the second American Football League's Cincinnati Bengals in 1936 (not related to the current NFL Bengals). He mentioned how Pennington would pick him up and drive him to practices and games and how his father worked seven days a week a local brewery and never saw him play until an exhibition game in Cincinnati before the beginning of one of this major league seasons.



Nagelson told of how he was expecting to play football at Ohio State and was shown around the campus by the team captain Jim Herbstreit (father of current ESPN football analysis Kirk Herbstreit) but when Nagelson and his father met with legendary OSU coach Woody Hayes, he was informed that he would make a “fine guard” on the offensive line - despite being an award-winning quarterback at Deer Park High School. After a disappointed Nagelson walked out of Coach Hayes’ office, Herbstreit suggested that he contact OSU baseball coach Marty Karow - who offered him a full scholarship. While on the Ohio State baseball team, Nagelson helped the

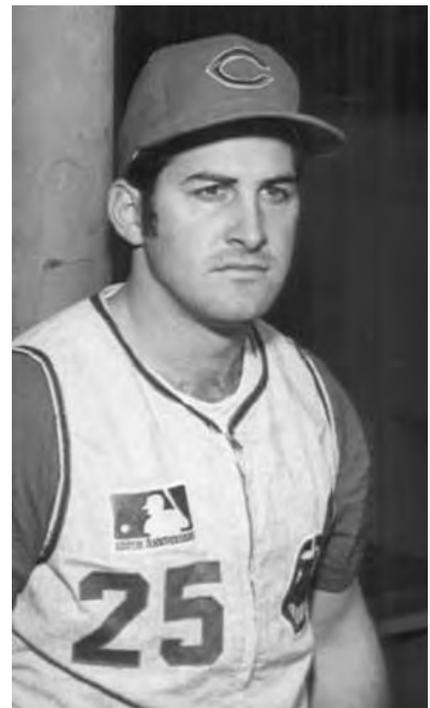
Buckeyes to a runner-up finish in 1965 (when they lost 2-1 to Arizona State when Rick Monday homered in the ninth inning of the final game) and then win the National Championship in 1966 when they beat Oklahoma State 8-2 in the last game. In addition to Nagelson, his teammates Steve Arlin and Chuck Brinkman from that squad also reached the major leagues. When asked to compare the



College World Series then with today's game, he marveled at how many college games were on TV today and told how in the 1965 and 1966 College World Series they had trouble even getting the games broadcast on the radio so that the folks back home could follow the game.

Drafted in the 14th round by the Indians, Nagelson spent the rest of 1966 and 1967 in the Eastern League with AA Pawtucket and 1968 with AAA Portland (where he would lead the league with 23 homers in 1969) before getting called up in

September 1968. He collected his first big league hit in the first game of a doubleheader on September 24 at Yankee Stadium with a ground ball to first base that got by Mickey Mantle (playing in his final season, Mantle would appear in only four more games and collect just on more hit). Nagelson laughed as he remembered being mesmerized standing so close to Mantle that his first base coach couldn't get his attention. Nagelson then recounted the story of how he was told the wrong time for the bus departure and had to scramble to get to Yankee Stadium. Walking into Grand Central Station, he asked a teenage boy for directions and they headed to the ballpark. Upon arrival at the Stadium he told the Yankees usher to give the kid a ticket above the dugout and whatever he wanted to eat and he would take care of it. As the game progressed, Nagelson notice several others sitting with the kid - all of them eating and drinking at Nagelson's expense (which he figured cost him his entire per diem). Called on to pinch hit in the fifth inning for Sam McDowell, Nagelson grounded the single past an aged, immobile Mantle at first and left the game for a pinch runner. Arriving back at the dugout, he was greeted by the kid from the subway (to whom he had given the ticket and food), who leaned over the rail and yelled, "Hey, Nagelson! That was a #!^&\*#@ hit!"



On April 12, 1970, Nagelson hit is only lifetime home run (off Mel Stottlemyer at Yankee Stadium). He recounted how the next day he traded a couple handfuls of baseballs to a kid in the outfield stands. The day before, the kid had taken four pictures of Nagelson's home run, one showing the Yankee Stadium scoreboard reading "Russ Nagelson's first career home run", one showing Nagelson stepping

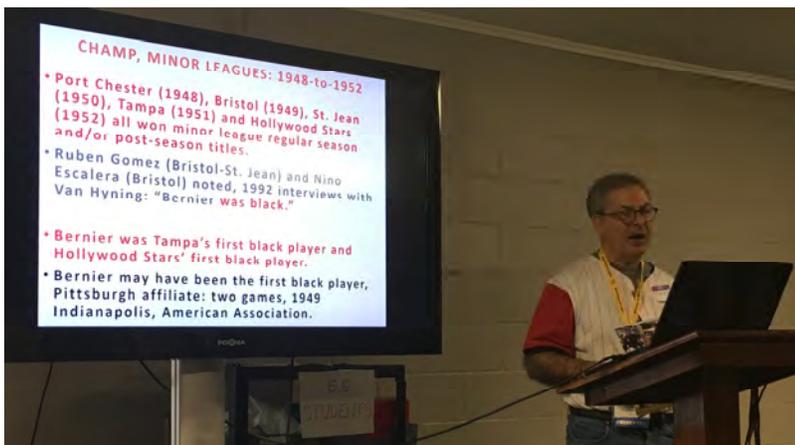
on the plate, one of him shaking manager Alvin Dark's hand at the top of the dugout steps, and the final one of Nagelson being congratulated by his teammates in the dugout.

After 17 games in 1970 he was traded to the Tigers who needed an outfielder because they expected Al Kaline and Norm Cash to retire. They never retired but manager Mayo Smith did and was replaced by Billy Martin, who send Nagelson down without every talking to him. After one year with the Toledo Mudhens, Nagelson decided to retire and use his marketing degree from Ohio State. He noted that since players didn't make much back then that he doubled his income in his first year as a manager at Chrysler Corporation. In 1979, Nagelson moved to Little Rock as a Network Systems Manager for Honeywell. He had his choice of moving to Raleigh, Savannah, or Little Rock. He had never been to Little Rock, but on a trip to look around, he quickly fell in love with the hunting, fishing, and lakes that the area offered as outdoor activities and he never left.

The first presentation of the meeting was *Carlos Bernier, A Pittsburgh Pioneer 65 Years Ago* by Tom Van Hyning. Born in Juana Diaz, January 28, 1927, Bernier was the left fielder with Mayaguez in 1948-49, the first team from Puerto Rico to play in the Caribbean Series. He still holds the record for most at-bats (4,126) and triples (85) in 19 winter seasons. He was a five-time stolen base leader and finished runner-up nine-times. In the minors, he played for Port Chester (1948), Bristol (1949), St. Jean (1950), Tampa (1951) and Hollywood Stars (1952) all of whom won minor league regular season and/or post-season titles. There is some discussion on whether Bernie should be considered "black". If so, Bernier was the first black player for both Tampa and the Hollywood Stars. Bernier was certainly the first player from Puerto Rico and the Caribbean to play for Pittsburgh. If considered



"black" Carlos Bernier would also be Pittsburgh's first black player as his April 22, 1953, major league debut preceded Curt Roberts's first game, April 13, 1954, by nearly one year. Carlos Bernier was Pittsburgh's first player facing discrimination-segregation, and the team's lone rep at a black Little League Opening Day Ceremony in Pittsburgh, May 29, 1953. In his only major league season, Bernier appeared in 105 games, collecting 66 hits, including 8 triples and three homers. On May 2, 1953, Bernier achieved the rare feat of hitting three triples in one game. Bernier, Roberto Clemente and



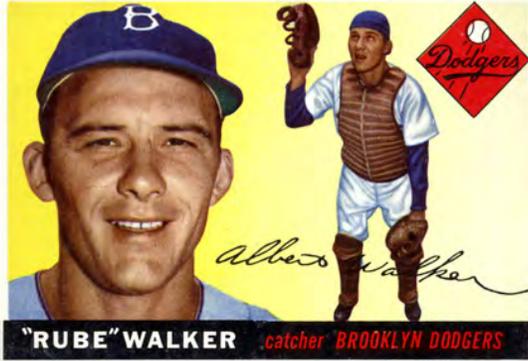
Roman Mejias comprised the first major-league All-Caribbean black outfield: Bernier and Clemente from Puerto Rico; Mejias from Cuba. When Clemente was guaranteed a roster spot with the 1955 Pirates, Bernier accepted his demotion and fate and continued an outstanding Pacific Coast League career with the 1955 Hollywood Stars. In 11 PCL seasons he hit .302 with 147 home

runs, 777 RBIs 1,005 runs and 308 stolen bases. He was elected to the Roberto Clemente Professional Baseball League Hall of Fame in 1992 and the PCL Hall of Fame in 2004. He finished his career with 895 stolen bases - 594 minor league stolen bases (tenth all-time), 15 major-league stolen bases, and 286 stolen bases in 19 Puerto Rico seasons.

Fred Worth followed with a report on his latest baseball grave-hunting trip in which he drove 7,997 miles from Arkansas to Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York and then after returning home, all the way to Arizona and California. During the trip, Fred visited 241 graves to bring his total to 6,215. Notable graves that he saw on this trip included those of major league players Sam Crawford, Bob Meusel, Lyman Bostock, Don Wilson, Lou "The Mad Russian" Novikoff, Bobby Wallace, Jim Gilliam, Chuck Connors, Curt Flood, and Gil Hodges, as well as Cristobal Torriente and Biz Mackey (Negro League players, both of whom were elected to the Hall of Fame in 2006). Hector Wagner, who was 1-3 in seven career starts with the Kansas City Royals in 1990 and 1991, had the distinction of being grave #6,000 visited by Fred.



Next was Johnny Mullens who presented *The Search for the Two Rube Walkers*. Johnny began by telling the group that he originally did the research for a friend, Linda Walker, whose late husband Sid was a cousin of Rube Walker. Linda had asked him to help her find a baseball card of the older Rube when Johnny made the trip to Pequot Lakes, Minnesota in August 2016, to participate in a golf scramble and 5K in memory of her daughter, Dru Sjodin.



The first part of the presentation focused on the older brother Albert "Rube" Walker, born on May 16, 1926, in Lenoir, North Carolina. He was given the nickname as batboy for Lenoir of Class D North Carolina State League because his idol was Rube Robinson, the star of the team. His major league career was with the Cubs (1948-1951)

and Dodgers (1951-1958). Despite being considered one of the slowest runners of his day, on May 21, 1952, he had two hits and scored two runs in an inning against the Boston Braves. He also hit two of his three career triples that day against Johnny Sain. Rube was the backup to Hall-of-Fame Dodger catcher Roy Campanella but was behind the plate for the Dodgers when Bobby Thomson hit his famous 1951 homer to win the National League pennant. After his playing days, Walker managed the Houston Buffaloes (American Association) in 1959 and AA teams in the Yankees and Mets farm systems from 1960 to 1964. He then was a long-time pitching coach with the Washington Senators (1965-1967), New York Mets (1968 to 1981) and Atlanta Braves (1982 to 1984, sharing the duty with Hall of Famer Bob Gibson). He then served as a scout for the Atlanta Braves and St. Louis Cardinals until his death in 1992.



The second part focused on younger brother Verlon Walker, born March 7, 1929, who was also nicknamed "Rube" after his older brother. He was a Cub minor leaguer from 1948 to 1960 before serving as a member of the Cubs infamous "College of Coaches" from 1961 to 1965 and bullpen coach

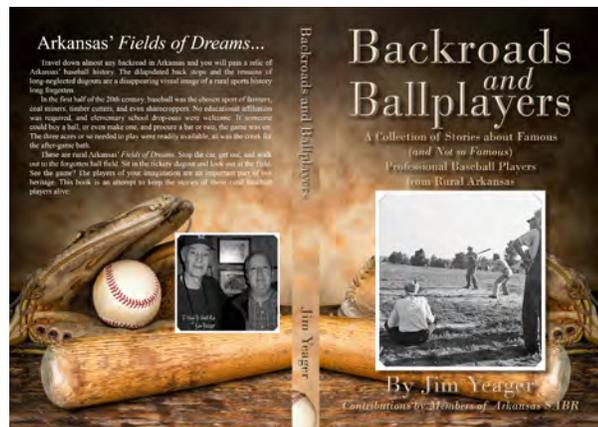


from 1966 to 1970. He was set to become the Cub pitching coach in 1971 but died of leukemia on March 24, 1971. Upon his death, the Cubs established the Verlon "Rube" Walker Leukemia Center at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, which still exists today as the Rube Walker Blood Center. The town of Lenoir later renamed their local ballfield in honor of the Walker brothers.

The presentation closed with the story of Leigh Ann Walker's search to learn about her father's life and his baseball coaching legacy (she was three years old at the time of this death), including several complimentary quotes about Rube from his former teammates and players.

Jim Yeager concluded the meeting with a brief recap of the journey which resulted in the recent publication of his book *Backroads and Ballplayers*, a compilation of biographies of professional ballplayers from rural Arkansas. He began by mentioning that although baseball began as a city game, many of its first stars were from rural America.

He also touched on the first major league stars from Arkansas, including Raymond Powell, the "Rabbit of the Ozarks". After appearing in two games (but no at-bats) with the 1913 Detroit Tigers, Powell was signed by the Boston Braves in 1917 to use his speed to cover the large outfield of Braves Field. He had his best year in 1921 when he led the American League with 699 plate appearances and 18 triples while compiling 191 hits and driving in 74 runs. Next, he talked briefly of the 1924 Western Arkansas League, which consisted of approximately 125 players, four of which went on to reach the major leagues. Jim went on to tell how this and other research sparked his interest in publishing a book on the often-forgotten star of rural Arkansas baseball. He concluded by thanking his fellow Robinson-Kell members who contributed to his book.



Earlier in the meeting, on behalf of the chapter, Jim Kreuz presented Madison McEntire an Astros jersey as a token of their appreciation for his service as the Robinson-Kell chapter president since its inception in May 2004.

The next meeting of the Robinson-Kell chapter will be Saturday, August 3, 2019, at Dickey-Stephens Park in North Little Rock, Arkansas. Following the meeting, there will be burgers and hot dogs to enjoy before the Arkansas Travelers take on the Springfield Cardinals. Save the date - more details will be provided later.

