

# ***THE SQUIBBER***

**October 2021**

*The Squibber* is the Bob Davids Chapter's newsletter. It is emailed to chapter members roughly every three months. If you're a Bob Davids Chapter member and are not getting the Squibber, please check that your email address and chapter affiliations listed on the SABR site are correct. Please send submissions for future editions to Squibber editor Walt Cherniak at [wcherniakjr@aol.com](mailto:wcherniakjr@aol.com).

## **IN THIS ISSUE:**

- REMEMBERING DAVE PAULSON, By Walt Cherniak
- THE PLAY'S THE THING: A Review of 'Toni Stone,' By Mary Kno
- MYTHS OF BASEBALL: True or False?? By Charles Pavitt
- A LOOK AT FORFEITS: Expansion Senators' Last Game Not the Only One, By Andrew Sharp

**TRIVIA QUESTION:** Who were the six players lost by the Washington Senators in the 1968 expansion draft? (See answer below)

## **REMEMBERING DAVE PAULSON -- By Walt Cherniak**

SABR and the Bob Davids Chapter lost a treasured contributor and beloved friend on Sept. 23, when Dave Paulson passed away at his home in Columbia, Md. Dave was 89.

It's impossible to overstate Dave's contributions to SABR. He was the treasurer for the Bob Davids Chapter, and in 1999, he founded Talkin' Baseball, a monthly gathering in Columbia that brings together baseball fans and aficionados for presentations by the author of books about baseball.

Dave was especially proud that Talkin' Baseball continued without skipping a beat in the spring of 2020, moving to a Zoom format that drew some of the biggest audiences ever.

He also chaired SABR's Oral History Committee, interviewing dozens of former baseball players, scouts, coaches, managers and umpires.

Dave enjoyed anything having to do with sports, especially baseball and tennis, and was a lifelong fan of Washington sports teams. He achieved a dream in 2019, attending a World Series game at Nationals Park, and was ecstatic when his beloved Nationals brought a championship to D.C. for the first time in 86 years.

Dave was born in Baltimore in 1931 to Aaron and Rosalie Paulson, and the family soon moved to Washington, D.C, where his father owned a pharmacy at 4th and Rhode Island Ave. N.E.

He attended McKinley Tech, graduating in 1950, and then attended George Washington University where he received his Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy in 1954. Dave then served in the Army from 1954-56, stationed in Hawaii and mustering out as a first lieutenant before returning to practice pharmacy in Washington.

He married Barbara Doranne Garfield in 1966, and they moved to Columbia in 1971, where they raised three children. After working for several pharmacies in Washington and Maryland, he retired in 1997.

In addition to his SABR activities, Dave had numerous interests, both personal and philanthropic. He served on the Columbia Tennis Committee for decades. He supported Jewish causes and had a strong ethical core that encouraged him to frequently give of his time.

He often drove other seniors to medical appointments, served as a volunteer tax counselor at the Florence Bain Senior Center in Columbia, and was an unflagging Red Cross blood donor, donating 32 gallons in his lifetime.

A devoted family man, he is survived by his three children: Melyssa Paulson, Michael Paulson (Jennifer), and Rebecca Fields (Barry), and his two brothers: Franklin (Jackie) and Daniel (Yelena). He was a loving grandfather to Talia, Matthew, Avi, and Kieran, and a loving uncle and cousin to his extended family.

The Bob Davids Chapter extends its deepest sympathies to his family. Dave was a wonderful man and an irreplaceable friend. We will miss him.

(With Dave's passing, plans for upcoming Talkin' Baseball meetings are under development. Please watch your email and future issues of the Squibber for updates).

### **THE PLAY'S THE THING: A Review of 'Toni Stone,' By Mary Knox**

A free simulcast at Nationals Park on Sept. 26 brought Arena Stage's production of "Toni Stone" to a wider audience. Theater goers and baseball lovers joined people just interested in a night out on a clear, cool evening.

Playwright Lydia R. Diamond's play "Toni Stone" tells the story of the second baseman of the Indianapolis Clowns, Marcenia Lyle "Toni" Stone, whose great love of the game propelled her to become the first woman to play professional baseball in the Negro Leagues.

After Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, the Negro Leagues' fan base started declining. To increase gate receipts, Clowns owner Syd Pollack invited Toni to play during the 1953 season. She jumped on the opportunity.

The play consisted of Toni directly addressing the audience with a series of incidents from her life. Players on the Clowns roster took on all the roles as Toni reminisced about her life, how she came to play baseball as a little girl and her challenges as the only woman on a bus full of men.

This versatile group of actors embodied individuals as varied as Toni's mother, a Catholic priest and a wise and generous prostitute. Santoya Fields as Toni made the heroine's enthusiasm for baseball clear.

Nats Park had a good crowd of several thousand on the third base side between Section 108 and the Nats dugout. Arena Stage volunteers joined forces with Nats ushers to welcome patrons, and the host organizations did their best to supply attendees with a good experience.

This included bobblehead and play ticket giveaways, access to a limited number of concessions, and even a rendition of the National Anthem. Before the play, a video introduced the audience to Toni's life and to the Negro Leagues Museum.

Unfortunately, during the performance, no one solved the problem of the sound system. At least in Section 109, the dialogue in the play was difficult to understand and the subtitles were often unreadable.

If these problems were overcome, the Nats and Arena Stage could use this format again for a beneficial arts and public relations partnership.

### **MYTHS OF BASEBALL: TRUE OR FALSE??, By Charles Pavitt**

This is the 12th in a series of Squibber contributions intended to report the truth (as far as present data suggests) of the tidbits of "conventional wisdom" that TV analysts and comparable pundits make without any true knowledge about their validity. This is the first dedicated solely to one issue; the infield shift.

Myth #34 – The infield shift has had a profound impact on the game

First, we must distinguish between full infield shifts, with three infielders on the same side of second base, and partial shifts, in which infielders are placed noticeably differently from their usual position and/or one infielder is playing in the outfield. Both have increased since the early 2010s, going from a combined 2,357 in 2011.

Based on the fact that one or the other occurred during more than half of plate appearances in 2020, there would have been more than 68,000 if that rate had continued in a full season.

Full shifts have certainly succeeded in decreasing the number of singles hit against it. Sports Info Solutions' Joe Rosales and Scott Spratt determined that batting average on grounders and short liners was .258 with no shift, as compared to .212 with full shifts between 2010 and 2015, saving 4.8 runs per 100 shifts

This led Joe and Scott to conclude that "teams should commit to using full shifts as much as possible to maximize the value they get out of their defensive shifting."

Although not totally wrong, this conclusion has been shown to be misleadingly simplistic. By 2017, Russell Carleton noticed that from 2012 to 2016 pitchers had thrown more balls and fewer strikes with the shift than without it, and as a consequence walk rates were high enough to more than make up for

the decrease in singles that the shift was producing.

These trends continued unabated in subsequent seasons. For example, from the start of 2017 until the release of Mike Petriello's May 15,, 2018 post, 201 batters who saw at least 100 pitches with and without shifts against them walked in 9.8 percent of plate appearances with a shift and in 9 percent without it, canceling out the shift's impact on singles.

Going into more detail, 2015 to 2019 PITCHf/x data examined by Russell Carleton revealed that pitchers were throwing more to the inside of the plate with the shift than not, likely to take advantage of the infield being stacked that way and also to discourage hitting to the opposite field. This resulted in more inside pitches that were called balls.

Along with this was a tendency for more high pitches that were also called balls, which seems counterproductive. For these reasons, Russell's early work led him to question the overall value of shifting, although he did believe it to be useful for a minority of batters. Of the 318 batters with at least 250 PAs in 2017, Russell estimated that the shift would have been helpful against 147.

Again, this conclusion was misleadingly simplistic, as Russell had failed to consider batter handedness until he discovered two web posts by Russell Eassom that had. In the first (2018), Eassom noted that for batters with at least 100 ABs facing both shifted and unshifted infields in 2018, right-handed hitters fared better against shifts than against normal alignments overall when facing left-handed pitchers, and against all pitchers with the bases empty.

In the second (2019), Eassom discovered that left-handed batters swung more often and right-handed batters less often at pitches on the edge and outside of the plate with a shift than without one. As a consequence of their relative patience, right-handed batters were getting more pitches in the heart of the strike zone than lefties, leading to better walk versus strikeout rates for the former

Similarly, Dean Connelly (2019), reporting in SABR's own Baseball Research Journal and using data from 2017 and the first half of 2018, noted that when facing shifts righties hit .259 and slugged .477, lefties .232 and .429.

Since then, Russell (among others) has noticed differential effects due to batter handedness. Based on 2015-2019 data, left-handed batters both swung and struck out more often and had a lower exit velocity on batted balls against opposite-handed pitchers (one of the few factors in which pitcher handedness mattered) than they would have otherwise. Righties achieved the opposite on all of these events.

As compared with righties, lefty hitters facing shifts hit fewer singles, doubles, triples and homers, had a worse contact rate per swing, and overall lost .007 Linear Weight Runs per plate appearance against shifts, whereas righties gained .018 LWR per PA.

Bottom line: Shifts work overall against left-handed batters and are a mistake against right-handed batters.

There appear to be two explanations for this discrepancy. The first follows from above; although both walk at about the same rate when facing shifts, more often than otherwise, righties do a better job of making contact with authority than do lefties. The second is complex and will take a lot of detail to get across

I begin with a long quote from one of Russell Carleton's 2020 web posts at Baseball Prospectus:

“The one possibility that I entertained was that there’s a small difference of geometry in the game. Because there’s always a force play at first base, there always needs to be a fielder within sprinting distance of first base to receive a throw on a ground ball.

“Right-handed batters pull to the left side of the infield, and while there may be three infielders on duty over there, the fourth must stay home, leaving the right side of the infield mostly unguarded. As a result, the third infielder (normally the one playing “second base”) shades a bit more up the middle. For left-handed batters, they are pulling to the right side of the field, and even with the third infielder over on the right side, because there’s rarely a need to cover third base right after the ball is hit (with a runner on second, you do have to worry about an opportunistic steal of third), you can pull the fourth infielder most of the way over toward second.

“It occurred to me that a shift against a right-handed batter is more like what is defined as a ‘partial shift’ where a fielder is playing significantly out of position, but hasn’t crossed the midline. In general, I’d found that these partial shifts didn’t end up doing much for the defense. I looked to see whether partial shifts against left-handed batters looked like full shifts against righties. It turned out that partial shifts against lefties were actually just junior varsity full shifts. They were net positive (for the defense), though not as powerful as a full shift.”

If Russell is correct about shifts against right-handed batters being in effect only partial, it would follow that BABIP on grounders against shifts would be closer to BABIP on grounders with no shift against them than against lefties; and that is indeed born out in relevant data.

At the same time, right-handed batters gain more advantage for than lefties for hitting to the opposite field with shifts than with not, which is likely due to the fact that first basemen must stay close to first, meaning a big hole on the right side of the infield even with only a partial shift when righties are up.

As a consequence of all this, for right-handed batters the advantage for the defense with the shift on for pulled grounders (-.036) is counterbalanced by the disadvantage for the defense with the shift on for grounders not pulled (+.039). In contrast, lefthanded batters are hurt more by the shift on pulled grounders (-.046) and have a smaller advantage on center/opposite field grounders than righties (+.025).

The bottom line is that righties who pull a lot into shifts were hurt less by it than are lefties doing the same.

Myth #35 – Batters can beat infield shifts by hitting to the opposite field.

Absolutely, as the figures above show. And overall at least some batters are attempting to do just that. Travis Sawchuk has noted that pull rate on flies decreased against shifts from 31.5 percent in 2010 to 26.2 percent in 2018.

Myth #36 – Batters can beat infield shifts by bunting.

This is probably true. Here is data from 2013 to 2017, again presented by Russell Carleton. Overall, batters attempting to bunt were able to get a fair ball down about 45 percent of the time in those seasons, with little difference between those who tried three or fewer times and those who tried more

than 50 times.

When successful, these bunts resulted in singles 58.2 percent of the time. Given these percentages, if the typical low-average left-handed pull hitter (Russell used Joey Gallo as an example) bunted every plate appearance against a shift, he would end up ahead offensively compared with always swinging away.

Of course, if the hitter did so the opposition would stop shifting, but for me the point is clear; you can beat the shift by bunting at least part of the time. It would be an interesting game-theoretical task to estimate the best proportion of times to attempt it.

### **A LOOK AT FORFEITS: Expansion Senators' Last Game Not the Only One, By Andrew Sharp**

The expansion Senators famously had to forfeit their final game, Sept. 30, 1971, at Robert F. Kennedy Stadium. The Senators, already scheduled to move to Texas for the 1972 season, were an out away from beating the Yankees, 7-5, in an otherwise meaningless final game of the season. Angry fans stormed the field and made off with the bases and anything else they could.

The last MLB forfeit before this game had been in 1954. Four teams have had to forfeit games since 1971, the last coming in Los Angeles in 1995, but in none of those games was the team that had forfeit ahead. (One of the four games didn't even take place.)

Yet the last Senators' game was not the first time a Nats' team had to forfeit what would have been a win in Washington.

On Aug. 15, 1941, a light drizzle became a downpour at Griffith Stadium. The Nats were ahead, 6-3, with the Red Sox batting in the top of the eighth. After 40 minutes, umpiring crew chief George Pipgras called the game based on the condition of the playing field.

Boston's player-manager Joe Cronin, who was on first base when play was stopped, told Pipgras that the Red Sox would file a protest because, according to Shirley Povich's story in the next day's Washington Post, the grounds crew was lackadaisical in getting the field covered.

On Aug. 27, after American League President Will Harridge heard from both teams, he declared the game a forfeit in favor of Boston. He held that Washington broke the rules by not having a groundskeeper and assistants immediately available to roll out the tarp when the umpires asked that the field be covered.

The Giants, in September 1942, were the last team before the '71 Senators to forfeit a game in which they were leading. Hundreds of children donating scrap metal for the war effort had come onto the field in the eighth inning of the second game of a double header.

The original Senators franchise was involved in two other forfeits, losing one in Philadelphia in 1914 and being declared the winner of one in Detroit in 1905. Both outcomes were likely anyway, given the scores.

The 1914 forfeit featured future Senators super scout Joe Engel pitching for Washington and the two managers exchanging some fairly nasty comments about each other, especially given their long

relationship.

“(Clark) Griffith has no real place in the league and should be run out of it,” Philadelphia’s Connie Mack said of the Senators’ skipper, in comments recounted in the 2014 volume, *Forfeits and Successfully Protested Games in Major League Baseball* by David Nemecek and Eric Miklich. Griffith, in turn, called Mack “the cheapest ’skate in baseball.”

Retrosheet.org (<https://www.retrosheet.org/forfeits.htm>) has an interesting list of all the forfeits, going back into the 19th century, with brief summaries of why they happened..

**TRIVIA ANSWER:** Who were the six players lost by the Washington Senators in the 1968 expansion draft?

The six players lost were all pitchers. The Kansas City Royals took left-hander Steve Jones and right-hander Ike Brookens, while the Seattle Pilots grabbed right-handers Gerry Schoen, Dick Bates and Robert Richmond and southpaw John Miklos. Only Jones (38 career games) made more than a brief appearance in the major leagues.