



# The Johnson Journal

- SWEET LOU JOHNSON LEXINGTON CHAPTER -

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## BASEBALL BARONS CONTINUE TO ROLL

*by Dave Allen*

The Bluegrass Barons Vintage Base Ball Club is celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of professional baseball in a way that the original Cincinnati Red Stockings would have appreciated: piling up runs and putting up wins against the competition. Since their season began in April, the Blue-

grass Barons have amassed a record of 11-2 against the vintage baseball competition. They started off the season with a pair of wins against the Indianapolis Blues at Waveland before drop-



*Photo courtesy of the Bluegrass Base Ball Barons Facebook page.*

ping both games at the Pioneer Festival tournament in Waynesville, Ohio. It has been all-Barons ever since, going undefeated in the months of May and June. They won both ends of a double-header against the original vintage baseball team, the Ohio Village Muffins, at Waveland on May 18, and then traveled to Pioneer Park in Covington, Ky., to play the Cincinnati Reds Hall of Fame 1869 Red Stockings the next day. Battling

the Red Stockings and the rain, the Bluegrass Barons returned to Lexington with a pair of wins.

The Barons kicked off the month of June in the Hoosier State, traveling the three hours to Greenwood, Indiana, for matches against the Blackbottom 9 and the Indianapolis Blues. The Barons outlasted the Blackbottom 9 in a slugfest, 23-15. Both teams seemed to be swinging for the parking lot, and it was close until the Barons pulled away late. The second game of the day (against the Indianapolis Blues) was much closer: a near shutout at 8-1.

The Cincinnati Reds 1869 HOF Red Stockings traveled to Shaker Village for a single nine-inning game against the Barons on June 15. In front of a large crowd, the Barons poured it on against their rivals and won the game by the astounding score of 42-2.

The Barons' June schedule would end on a sunny, sweltering day at Waveland on June 23 as the team hosted the Dayton Clodbusters and the Blackbottom 9 in the third annual Waveland Cup tournament. After defeating the Dayton Clodbusters, the Barons earned a trip to the championship game against the winner of the Blackbottom 9-Clodbuster contest. Facing the Blackbottom 9 for the trophy, the Barons played a barnburner of a game that was tight the whole way. Down 16-15 in the bottom of the 7<sup>th</sup> inning, the Bluegrass Barons rallied back and won the Waveland Cup on a two-out walk-off single that went into the trees in right field and scored the winning run from third. The victory earned the host Bluegrass Barons their first Waveland Cup championship trophy.

It would be an understatement to say that "these guys are good". The Bluegrass Barons are *really* good. There isn't a soft spot in the lineup, and the defense has been stellar. Ben "Pops" Clouse and Brian "Big House" Baum have been keeping opposing "strickers" off-balance with their pitching this season, and when the other team does put the ball in

play it has to get past a defense that is surehanded, to say the least. TJ “Hotspur” Olmstead holds down third base, making plays, catching pop flies, or jumping barrier tape and running down foul balls off one bounce in the parking lot. Travis “Ami” Wise has been flying around at shortstop, often snagging the ball with one hand and firing the ball to first. On the other end of those throws, Ryan “Tugboat” Douglas is holding on to everything that comes to him for the put-out. Adam “Rooster” Cocke stops the ball on the right side of the infield at second base. Kevin “Ace” Garland has been an absolute acrobat behind home plate this season, flipping, diving, and tumbling to catch foul balls on one bounce for the out. At one point, Ace caught the ball *with his legs while rolling on his back!*

Opposing strikers who hit the ball into the outfield are just as likely to be disappointed, as fly balls are hauled in for outs. Tom “Kraut” Clouse, Jason “Speedy” Wells, TJ “Hooker” Hall, Ryan “Duke” Williams, and Juan “Carlos” Perez Martinez all have the range to run down fly balls and the sure hands to make the catch without an unfortunate bounce.

It’s a tough lineup to crack, but at least there are “extra hitter” spots for guys like Alex “Capone” Clouse, Brian “Casper” Wallace, and yours truly when the full Barons squad shows up—or to fill in when a sub is needed.

It takes skill to catch and field the ball barehanded, and it’s a learning curve to adapt to the subtle rule changes that existed in the 1860s—but these guys make it look easy. They’re getting the well-timed hits and “hitting ‘em where they ain’t” to move the runners around and put runs on the board.

Playing vintage baseball is a blast. Games are definitely competitive, as both teams are trying their hardest to win; however, the sportsmanship and the respect for the opponent and the game itself are more important than winning and losing. It’s about playing the game

simply for the love of the game and having fun while doing it. And it's ultimately a chance to pay homage to the very first players who took to the pastures and sandlots to play what would become "America's game".

*Upcoming Bluegrass Barons schedule: Sunday, August 11<sup>th</sup>: Moscow Monarchs at Bluegrass Barons, Whitaker Bank Ballpark, Lexington*

## GET TO KNOW 'SWEET' LOU



*Photo from truetothelblue81.blogspot.com.*

- Sweet Lou was the first African American from Lexington to play in the majors.
- He has a street and a park in Lexington named after him.
- He played in the Negro League for the Indianapolis Clowns.

- During his career he played for 6 major league teams.
- He hit 2 home runs for the Dodgers during the 1965 World Series.
- His nickname is "Sweet Lou" but he is also known as "Slick".



*Photo from facebook.com.*

# BASEBALL GOES WEST

*by Don Boes*

The main argument of Lincoln Mitchell's entertaining book, *Baseball Goes West: The Dodgers, the Giants, and the Shaping of the Major Leagues* is that the move the Dodgers and Giants made to the west coast for the 1958 season was positive (and perhaps necessary) for major league baseball. The conventional narrative has always been that the owners of the Dodgers (Walter O'Malley) and Giants (Horace Stoneham) were "bad guys" for uprooting their teams and ruining the "Golden Age of Baseball" (roughly the 1950s.) However, Mitchell points out that baseball during this time was a minor industry, challenged by low attendance, changing demographics, and the relatively small geographical footprint of the sport (at the beginning of the decade the St. Louis teams, the Browns and Cardinals, were the southern and western limits of the major leagues).

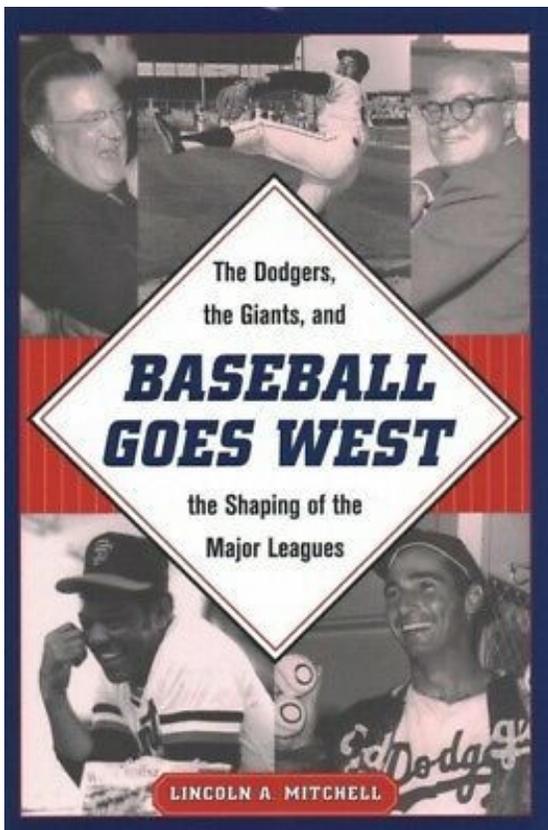


Photo from [usspsportshistory.com](http://usspsportshistory.com)

Mitchell's book uses the Dodger-Giant rivalry to discuss the decades leading up to the move of the two teams, the pivotal decade of the 1950s, and the "post-move" years. He points out the teams have played in California almost as long as they played in New York. Since the book is new (2018) he also discusses more recent topics such as PEDs, the influx of Asian and Dominican players, and the Giants' new ballpark. Mitchell's book is an entertaining and informative account of American history through the lens of baseball.

Note: The Lexington Public Library has one copy of this book in its collection.

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## *Lucinda Baker*

Cindy Baker is the driving force behind the Sweet Lou Johnson Lexington Chapter of SABR. She has been a passionate baseball fan since early childhood. Growing up, Cindy would attend Cincinnati Reds games with her family. She especially enjoyed hot summer days spent at the ballpark watching back-to-back double headers from the cheap seats. She watched, reveling in the on-field antics of players like Johnny Bench, Pete Rose and the rest of the Big Red Machine. Those years spent watching the game at Riverfront Stadium instilled in her a deep love for the game. While she still has a soft spot for her hometown team, through the years (and because her son was a rabid fan) she has come to love everything Chicago Cubs, helping support them all the way to their first World Championship title in 108 years!



*Photo by Ginger Baker taken at Whitaker Bank Ballpark, summer 2018.*

Her love of baseball and the Cubs led her to find SABR in the fall of 2016. She was sad that the season was over and SABR provided a way for her to have baseball all year round. Since then, she has become a loyal and committed advocate for the organization. After attending a chapter meeting in Louisville, Cindy recognized the need for a local SABR chapter in Lexington. From that point forward, she has worked tirelessly to bring more baseball to the people of Lexington through SABR. She has been instrumental in the creation of the Sweet Lou Johnson Chapter from its very inception. Cindy also heads the effort to schedule guest speakers, coordinate events, and keep members engaged in chapter activities. Currently Cindy is the Chapter Liaison acting as a contact between our chapter and the national organization. She loves meeting new people and spreading the word about the chapter. Everyone would agree that her excitement is infectious! Her latest project was to serve as the inspiration behind the creation of this newsletter! How cool is that?

# UPCOMING EVENTS

- ▶ **Legends & Barons** : SUNDAY August 11. Legends game at 2:30. Barons game immediately after.
- ▶ **Chapter Meeting**: 1 pm SATURDAY August 17. : Tates Creek branch Lexington Public Library.
- ▶ **Chapter Meeting**: 1 pm SATURDAY September 21. : Tates Creek branch Lexington Public Library.

# BE PREPARED

A sixth-grader's baseball savvy, by his proud father, **Robert S. Tannenbaum**

My son Peter loved to play baseball when he was a boy. He once was given an assignment in school to write a paper explaining how to do something complicated. The assignment was intended not only as an exercise in language (spelling, grammar, paragraph structure, etc.). It was intended to teach logical thinking and expression – to learn how to provide instructions and explanations in written form.

Peter decided that he would write about what he called “the first and third play.” It is not uncommon for an offensive team to have runners on first and third bases. It is also not uncommon for the runner on first to threaten to steal second in the hopes that such a move will allow the runner on third to score. So, what does the defensive team do?

Peter's essay discussed in detail the various options available to the defense under a wide range of circumstances. First, they must consider the score and the inning at the time. For example, if they are way ahead, conceding the run from third is not a problem. If the score is close, then that run could be decisive. Also, they must consider who the runners are. If the runner on first is rather slow, that would be different from one who is jack rabbit fast. Likewise, the speed of the runner on third may be a consideration, but not quite as important.

Another variable is who is pitching. A pitcher with a slow windup or a slow delivery or both, would be quite different from a fast baller who fires with no pause. Also, the pitcher's move to first is a factor. One with a good move to first will be keeping that runner closer to the bag than one who allows big leads.

Then, they must figure in who is at bat and the number of outs. For example, if there are two outs and the batter is rather weak, they may just concede second base in the expectation that they are quite likely to get the batter out for the third out. However, a strong batter or fewer than two outs will certainly change the equation.

After explaining all of these details and offering his conclusions, he then explained the various options for the catcher, the pitcher, and the other infielders.

For example, does the catcher throw through to second base in the hopes of getting the out; which middle infielder should take the throw and should he/she throw back to the catcher or throw to third base; does the pitcher cut off the throw and try to pick off the runner on third base, or throw him/her out at the plate; does the catcher fake a throw to second and then throw to third in an attempt to pick off that runner; or does the catcher simply hold onto the ball and concede the steal of second?

And then, there is the case in which the runner on first merely fakes a steal. Should the catcher try to throw behind him/her in a pickoff attempt; should the catcher fake a throw to first and then throw to third to try to catch that runner leading off too far; or, should the catcher just ignore the antics at first and return the ball to the pitcher?

All of these options, and some more that I cannot immediately recall, were clearly explained in the essay and related to the various conditions initially described (the score, the inning, the characteristics of the runners, etc.). It was an amazingly complicated and complete essay for a sixth grader, but that was how his baseball mind worked.

Here is one more example of his analysis and preparation. Peter was playing first base for his Little League team. There were runners on first and second with nobody out. Peter was not holding the runner on first; he was playing well into the hole between first and second.

The batter hit a hard line drive over second base. The runners took off, thinking that it was sure to go through for a base hit. Because he had prepared for this eventuality in his mind, Peter immediately broke for first. When the shortstop made a leaping stab of the ball and landed on second base to double off the runner who had been on second, Peter was already on first awaiting the throw that completed the triple play by doubling off the runner from first, too.

When I was congratulating him after the game, he matter-of-factly told me that he had foreseen the possibility of that play and was prepared to get back to first before the runner.

Do you detect a bit of paternal pride?