

The INSIDE GAME

The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee

Volume 5, Number 3: "Let's get this lumpy, licorice-stained ball rolling!" August 2005

Chairman's Column

By **David Jones**

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In preparation for the upcoming DEC meeting in Toronto, last month I posted a message to the Deadball listserv soliciting suggestions for future committee projects. In response, I received several noteworthy ideas. Though these proposals will be discussed in greater detail in Toronto, I wanted to lay them out here as well, so those attending the convention can have them in mind prior to the meeting, and those who are unable to attend will know what will be discussed at the meeting.

DEC member Nicole DiCicco suggests that the committee could focus its efforts on producing a book that would give readers a feel for what it was like to watch and play baseball during the Deadball Era. Thus, instead of focusing on player biographies as we have done with the Deadball Stars series, this book could include chapters on: equipment (bats, gloves, balls, uniforms, etc); the kinds of fields baseball was played on, including the types of bases used, the slope of the pitcher's mound, the length of the grass, and what the dugouts looked like; pitching (the pitches that were thrown, how often pitchers were used, what kinds of rotations were used, if any, and also relief usage patterns); umpires and playing rules of the time, and the evolution thereof; a glossary of Deadball Era terminology; the fans' experience watching games (seating, construction of bleachers, food, music, scorecards, ticket prices, etc.), and finally a chapter devoted to the baseball journalism of the time, focusing on the major newspapers and writers of the era and the style they used to describe games for their

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Doctorow's Ragtime & Deadball Baseball

by **Tony Bunting**

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E.L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime*—now a generation old and still steaming ahead in print—splendidly evokes the spectacular excess, irrepressible energy, appalling crudeness, and preoccupation with mysticism that pervaded America in the first decade-and-a-half of the 20th century. Doctorow does so while unfolding a tale, set primarily in New York, which integrates the sensational lives of famous figures (escape artist Harry Houdini, explorer Robert E. Peary, activist Emma Goldman, and the scandalous Evelyn Nesbit, to name just a few) with the everyday activities of a less-accomplished--though equally compelling--group of characters. To the delight of a Deadball aficionado, he manages to work baseball into the rich tableau of the book.

Rising from the narrative, in chapter 30, is a brief, yet sensual description of a contest between the New York Giants and the Boston Braves at the Polo Grounds. Told in the third person, the action mostly emanates from the perspective of one of the novel's main characters, a prominent fireworks manufacturer called Father. He, along with his son, observes the battle between the two teams, at times focusing on the movements of Rube Marquard, John McGraw, and Rabbit Maranville, and the heart-tugging, sideline theatrics of Charles Victor Faust. Anticipating more wholesome entertainment, they instead experience the coarse, colorful and vibrant elements of early 20th century baseball—a bloody spiking at second base, a pair of bench-clearing brawls, the riotous behavior of the crowd, the vulgar bench-jockeying of the players, the Braves tapping their midget batboy's head for luck, and more.

Doctorow employs his graceful

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What's Inside...

Ron Selter looks at the South Side Park

Book reviews:

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- *A Woman's Work*, by Dorothy Seymour Mills, reviewed by Cindy Thomson



The Black Prince

Martin Kohout reviews a new book about Hal Chase

South Side Park (Chicago AL) 1901-10

By Ron Selter (r.selter@att.net)

South Side Park was used by the White Sox in their inaugural season (1901) in the American League. The White Sox stayed at South Side Park until the middle of the season in 1910 when they moved into one of the first Classic Era ballparks--Comiskey Park. Previously, the site of South Side Park was used as a cricket grounds and was located only four blocks south of the future site of Comiskey Park. As no dimensional data were found, the dimensions were estimated from an analysis of home run data by field and from ballpark photos.

From game accounts and notes on the White Sox printed in the Chicago Tribune, it was learned that the right field fence was moved back in mid-season 1901 and again before the start of the 1903 season. Configuration No. 1 at the park was in use for 31 games between April and June 1901. The right field fence was moved an unknown distance back in early July. Configuration No. 2 was in use from July 1901 until the end of the 1902 season. Before the start of the 1903 season, the right field fence was again moved back from home plate. Again the distance of the move of the right field fence is unknown. Configuration No. 3 lasted until the White Sox moved to Comiskey Park in mid-season 1910.

The effect on home runs of the first move of the right field fence was both immediate and substantial. In the original configuration, April-June 1901, home runs at South Side Park amounted to 19 in 31 games. In the remaining 41 home games of the 1902 season, only six home runs were hit. Of these, four were Over-the-Fence (OTF) home runs. In summary the mid-season 1901 relocation of the RF fence led to a tremendous reduction in the rate of OTF home runs to right field. (See table following). The second move of the right field fence led to a further fall in total home runs per season and to a drop in the rate of OTF home runs to right field. The home run data for three configurations of the park is shown in the following:

Configuration	G	Total HR	OTF HR*	OTF HR to RF	OTF HR to RF/G
1 Apr-Jun 1901	31	19	14	11	0.355
2 Jul 1901-02	112	13	5	3	0.027
3 1903-10	575	31	18	10	0.017

* Excludes OTF-Bounce HRs

From a study of photos of South Side Park (from Library of Congress, American Memories), configuration information was obtained. The covered grandstand (wooden single deck) extended a short distance across the left field foul line at an angle until meeting the left field bleachers which were about parallel to the right field foul line. Thus, the short distance at the left field foul pole increased rapidly as the fence angled towards the left field bleachers. The left field bleachers extended into center field and then hooked towards right-center. The scoreboard was mounted above the right-centerfield fence (about 10 feet in height) and was in play. There were bleachers extending from the right field foul area into fair right field territory. A review of ballpark books found no data on dimensions. From the home run data and the study of photos of South Side Park, the following dimensions and average outfield distances were estimated.

Dimensions

Configuration	Time Period	LF	LC	CF	RC	RF
No. 1	Apr-Jun 1901	300	381	399	323	280
No. 2	Jul 1901-1902	300	381	399	364	315
No. 3	1903-1910	300	381	399	392	340

Average OF Distances

Configuration	Time Period	LF	CF	RF
No. 1	Apr-Jun 1901	343	392	295
No. 2	Jul 1901-1902	343	396	332
No. 3	1903-1910	343	402	358

These dimensions must be considered rather rough estimates. The right field dimensions are consistent with the number of OTF home runs to right field at two other American League ballparks in the 1901-03 seasons. Right field at Sportsman's Park in St. Louis was 300 feet and OTF home runs (excluding Bounce) to right field averaged 6.1/season (1902-08). While at Hilltop Park in New York with the short right field (estimated at 300 feet or less) configuration produced 12 OTF home runs in the only season with this configuration at Hilltop. Thus in the early 1901 configuration, right field at South Side Park must have been about 280 as home runs to right field were on a pace to hit about 25 OTF home runs for the 1901 season. In the late 1901-02 configuration which averaged about 2 OTF home runs to right field per season, the right field distance must have been more than at Sportsman's or at Hilltop and was estimated to be 315. In the 1903-10 time period (7.5 seasons) at South Side Park, OTF home runs to right field averaged 1.3 per season. The rate of home runs was more than at Bennett Park in Detroit, where OTF home runs to right field were known to be less than one per season (1903-10). Bennett Park had an average right field distance (1903-10) of 363, thus the greater rate of OTF home runs at South Side Park is consistent with the lesser right field average distance of 358.◆



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Ragtime and Deadball, continued from page 1.

prose and ability to distill information down to its most essential details to convey the sights, sounds, smells and overall atmosphere of a Deadball Era ballpark and game (or at least how we imagine it must have been). The scene both inside and outside the Polo Grounds springs vigorously to life. He allows us to view the fans perched in trees atop Coogan's Bluff, see the spit resting on the infield dirt, smell the cigar smoke wafting in the air, and hear the abrasive McGraw--"the paternal figure and commander of his team...unleashing the most constant and creative string of vile epithets of anyone. His strident caw could be heard throughout the park." Likewise, the description of the physical features and demeanor of the players attains a sharpness and palpability that equals Charles M. Conlon's magnificent photographs: "...indeed, they seemed to be clearly from the mills and farms, rude-featured, jug-eared men, sunburned and ham-handed, cheeks bulging with tobacco chew, their intelligence completely absorbed in the effort of the game."

An immediate impulse is to try to establish the exact year of the ballgame. And here's where it's important to remember the book is fiction, not a scholarly historical account. We are told the Giants eventually win the pennant and that Faust pitches in an actual game, later that season—which would place the contest firmly in 1911. Events leading up to the New York-Boston meeting and a run-down of the Braves players (Maranville, Perdue, Schmidt, Cocrehan (sic), Moran, Hess, Rudolph) contradict 1911, however. Maranville's big-league career, for example, didn't even begin until 1912. Herbie Moran didn't arrive in Boston until 1914. Suffice it to say that the game is a hybrid of years 1911-1914 (the list of Giants players does jibe with 1911).

The ardent Deadball enthusiast will no doubt take issue with other aspects of the chapter. Near the end, it's difficult to imagine Red Murray's foul ball landing as gingerly in the boy's hands as it does. The passage would have also benefited from a sequence of game action highlighting the prevailing offensive style of the day—i.e., "inside baseball"—to contrast it from the coming home-run explosion of the post-World War I era. Yet, these are minor knocks and do not detract from Doctorow's feat of transmitting the gritty essence of the time.

Those keenly interested in America from the turn of the 20th century through World War I—and with a taste for fiction—are encouraged to read Doctorow's superb novel from cover to cover. For the rest of you, the next time you visit your library, pick up *Ragtime*, flip to the last paragraph of chapter 29 and read to the end of chapter 30 (McGraw and the Giants also make an amusing appearance late in the book). In exchange for your efforts, you will be transported to the Polo Grounds in the Deadball Era for an exquisite ten minutes.◆

From the Chairman, continued from page 1.

readers.

Another DEC member, Gene Carney, would like to find volunteers to go to the Baseball Hall of Fame Library in Cooperstown and transcribe information on player salaries and transactions which are currently stored on index cards in the Library. This project would require a great deal of work, but the information culled from the project could be put into a database, thus becoming a very valuable reference tool for baseball researchers.

Finally, DEC member Ron Selter would like to see more work done on inside-the-park home runs during the Deadball Era. As Selter states, the incidence-rate of inside-the-park home runs is generally understated in the SABR home run log. This can be corrected by returning to contemporary newspaper reports and determining whether the home run was an inside-the-park job, a ball that bounced over the wall, or a ball that cleared the fence on the fly. Additionally, individuals conducting this research could also track down other information missing from the Home Run database, including how many outs there were when the home run was hit, and the batting order position for the player who hit the home run.

These suggestions are in addition to my proposal, which I discussed in this space earlier this year, to do a Deadball Stars book for the Negro Leagues during the Deadball Era. Because we are fortunate to be a part of a committee as large and active as this one is, we don't need to look at these various proposals as exclusionary. With more than 200 members, the DEC is more than capable of tackling multiple projects at once. In my ideal world, I'd like to see the DEC do ALL the things outlined in this column. Working together, I believe we can. I look forward to seeing many of you in Toronto!◆



Patsy Flaherty of the Chicago White Sox warming up in foul area near dugout, South Side Park.

Photo Courtesy of the Chicago Daily News Negatives Collection, Chicago Historical Society, SDN-001976A.

The Black Prince of Baseball: Hal Chase and the Mythology of the Game, by Donald Dewey and Nicholas Acocella. Toronto: SportClassic Books, 2004. ISBN: 1894963296. Hardcover, \$23.95, 448 pages.

Book review by **Martin Kohout**
(mako@austin.rr.com)

First, a confession: as the author of an earlier biography of Prince Hal, *Hal Chase: The Defiant Life and Turbulent Times of Baseball's Biggest Crook* (2001), I may not be capable of a truly objective review of *The Black Prince of Baseball*. (And I confess I was surprised not to see my book mentioned in the bibliography.)

Dewey and Acocella have established their bona fides by coauthoring 14 generally excellent baseball books. *The Black Prince of Baseball* is a well-written and detailed biography of a fascinating character, though it is far from perfect.

The good news is that the authors have done some serious digging into court documents, personal papers, unpublished sources, and the like, and have unearthed some fascinating details of Chase's tempestuous life. They follow him from his birth in 1883 in California through his years as a major league star (and notorious cheater) and his long, alcoholic decline, culminating in his lonely and premature death in 1947.

My main objection to the book is that it smacks of having been done on the cheap. For example, anyone plunking down \$23.95 for a big, thick, clothbound book of this sort, encompassing 417 pages of text, has the right to expect at least a smattering of illustrations, yet it contains not a single one except for one photograph on the dustjacket and another on the frontispiece. I mean, Chase was a good-looking guy, and plenty of pictures of him are available from the National Baseball Library in Cooperstown and other sources.

The book also seems carelessly edited, and it abounds with stylistic infelicities such as: "Chase was so prey to lying that it became the *sine qua non* of more ambitious larcenies..." (ix) and "It didn't even enable him to inscribe his name in some luminous statistic the historically challenged have made the only signpost of baseball respectability" (417). I found myself having to go back and reread such sentences two or even three times before I could begin to guess at their meaning.

I also found tiresome the authors' determination to maintain a flip, even sardonic tone, as reflected in such chapter headings as "Captain Outrageous," "Fibbers and Magee," "The Wild Bunch," "Still Crazy After All These Years," and "The Nuclear Family and Other Meltdowns."

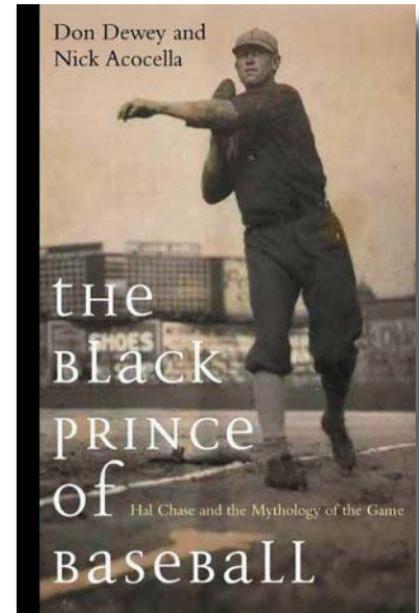
Also, for all their impressive research, Dewey and Acocella occasionally fail to cite their sources. They claim, for example, that Chase may have stolen from his teammates and employer alike while playing for the Mayer Brothers semipro club in 1902, and that James Morley, the head of the Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League, succeeded in signing Chase away from the rival San Francisco Seals by giving him a rifle that the player had admired in a store window. Both these anecdotes are perfectly plausible, given what we know of Chase, but Dewey and Acocella neglect to tell us where they found them.

The authors also rely heavily on a source even they acknowledge to be somewhat less than unimpeachable: the unpublished portions of the sportswriter and military historian S.L.A. Marshall's memoirs. Marshall recounts a number of engrossing, even hair-raising, anecdotes, but the reader is not sure whether to believe them.

My personal favorite is the claim that Chase tried to blackmail the evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson in 1926, when she turned up in Douglas, Arizona, claiming to have escaped from a ring of kidnappers who had held her in Mexico. (In reality, she had run off with her radio engineer.) Dewey and Acocella try to have it both ways; they point out several flaws in Marshall's account, but only after

devoting three-plus pages to it.

Still, such quibbles aside, this is a good read and an in-depth look at a truly remarkable character. I hope everyone who bought my book buys this one as well—and vice versa!♦



A Woman's Work, by Dorothy Jane Mills. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004. ISBN: 0786418486 Price: \$24.95. Postpaid price: \$28.95. Order information: www.mcfarlandpub.com or 1-800-253-2187.

Book review by **Cindy Thomson**
(cindy@cindyswriting.com)

Dorothy Jane (Seymour) Mills, wife of late baseball historian Harold Seymour, has written a memoir that not only explains in detail how she contributed to Dr. Seymour's work but which also paints a picture of the life of the author who could jointly be described as journalist, researcher, editor, teacher, and baseball fan.

Mills would dispute the last term, as she does several times in her book. She says an historian of the game must view it disinterestedly. However, on

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the same page where she makes this statement, there appears a photograph of Mrs. Mills and Bob Feller. In the caption she says, "Having grown up in Cleveland, of course I watched Bob pitch at Cleveland Stadium." Later in the book, she recalls watching a women's baseball tournament in 2002. She says, "... watching them almost made me into a baseball fan." And in the last chapter, she seems to have had an epiphany. "Perhaps I'm becoming a fan after all."

Whether or not Mrs. Mills can accept the title of fan, SABR members will enjoy reading the details of how the research was conducted. The reader learns which libraries were used, how the data was recorded and organized, and the names of those who aided the research.

There are a few tidbits that may surprise some people. Dorothy Seymour once slept on the floor in a motel room because Seymour (that's how she referred to him) had a flea-ridden bed. Since he had a television interview the next day, he needed a good night's sleep. (Is chivalry dead?) Also interesting is that they lived in Ireland in a remote cabin during the time they were conducting American baseball research. (What were they thinking?)

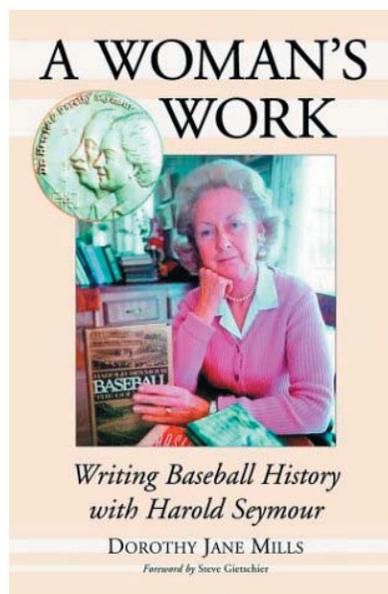
Some will enjoy reading about the couple's first trip to the *Sporting News* research room in 1949. Dorothy Seymour arrived, as all women in public did in those days, wearing an outfit complete with hat and white gloves. "... rough-looking men in tieless shirts turned from their typewriters to gaze at me in surprise." Taylor Spink, then editor of the *Sporting News*, wrote Harold Seymour later, "... I wondered why a man who had such a nice-looking wife was hauling her around to a baseball publication office to check some records." The truth is, Dorothy Seymour loved research. She says that it never occurred to her that helping her husband with what was at that time a doctoral dissertation was inappropriate.

Deadball Era enthusiasts will be most interested in Mills' recollection

of research on the Black Sox Scandal (hats off to DEC member Gene Carney whom she mentions) and Chapter Seven where she describes the research and organization that went into *Baseball: The Golden Age*.

Before the third volume, *Baseball: The People's Game*, was completed, Dr. Seymour's health deteriorated. Mrs. Mills recalls that time and remembers that she, although having published books and articles in her own right, desired to be recognized as the co-author of the Seymour baseball series. Her husband would not hear of it. Perhaps he thought to do so would cause him to lose some credibility. But she was never bitter. She says that women were (and still are) supposed to be helpmates to their husbands. She enjoyed the process and credits it with training her for future projects. She is the author of children's books, a cookbook, historical novels, and several shorter works.

This book is valuable for anyone wishing to learn about how the Seymour books were compiled as well as for those wishing to learn more about Dorothy Mills who is, in my opinion, a baseball fan. ♦



Honus Wagner: The Life of Baseball's Flying Dutchman, by Arthur D. Hittner.

Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press. ISBN: 0786418117. \$29.95, paperback. 306 pages.

Reviewed by **Mark Dugo**
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With some renewed interest in Wagner's underappreciated life due to TNT's fictional account of Wagner's romance and playing days broadcast this summer, Wagner perhaps has received as much attention as he has since either his peak playing days, his death, or since one of his tobacco baseball cards fetched in the millions of dollars at a recent auction.

As all SABR aficionados know, Wagner was perhaps the premier player in all of baseball for nearly two decades at the onset of the 20th century. Due to multiple consecutive batting titles, power, speed on the basepaths, cunning ingenuity in regards to game play, and superb fielding skills, Wagner was as celebrated during his heyday as any player before, during, or since. The immortal Ty Cobb once lauded Wagner as "the greatest ball player that ever lived." Knowing Cobb's ego and stature and that he was in his prime when he made the declaration is as telling of an indication as possible as to the nature of Honus' abilities.

Author Kittner does a fabulous job in portraying Wagner's life through exhaustive research of local papers, box scores, and game summaries. Wagner's life and talents splash across the pages in a manner that, while thorough and in-depth, never seems boring or minute. Kittner also wins praise in my mind as he just as meticulously details Wagner's errors, scraps with umpires and players, and his unusual shyness and awkwardness when dealing with the adulation and love toward him that was prevalent as his career skyrocketed and then wound down.

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A portrait of Wagner that I had not previously come to understand in reading other biographies on the Flying Dutchman was made evident through additional research by Kittner as it relates to his being able to peruse family scrapbooks and even through the use of Wagner's own notes that he detailed daily in vest pocket diaries which Kittner fortunately had access to. These personal notebooks and scrapbooks detail Wagner's thought processes and attitudes as he was thinking them, bringing the reader much closer to the man than ever before.

Kittner details such little-known activities that were a part of Han's life such as gambling on games (not by Wagner, but by many a Wagner contemporary), Wagner's determination to avoid the mundane chore of the spring training ritual year after year, and even death threats on Wagner's life. It is Kittner's exceptional skills in uncovering these little-known or never before known details that separates this Seymour Medal Award winner's account of Wagner from others currently available to baseball historians.

It must be a tireless chore attempting to encapsulate a person's life where there was so much achievement and so many accolades, and whereby the greatest supporting material to be found is ancient newspaper accounts and game

summaries, all the while still being able to present it in such an interesting manner as to leave the reader looking forward to each succeeding chapter. Kittner, a longtime member of SABR, succeeds flawlessly. ♦

Joe Jackson: A Biography,
by Kelly Boyer Sagert.
Westport, CT: Greenwood
Press, 2004. ISBN:
0313329613. \$29.95,
hardcover, 216 pages.

Reviewed by **Mark Dugo**
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Will Shoeless Joe Jackson ever be exonerated for the things that he did (or possibly) did not do? Sagert's *Joe Jackson, a Biography*, is part of the Baseball's All-Time Greatest Hitters series of books that details the life of the very best hitters of our or any other time. Included along with Jackson in this series are Cobb, Hornsby, Ruth, Gehrig, DiMaggio, Williams, Musial, Mays, Aaron, Rose and Bonds (will Bonds join Jackson and Rose in being ineligible for the hall in light of his admitted steroid use?). Sagert does an exceptional job in detailing Joe's place amongst these legendary hitters.

By now, Jackson's life starting in the South Carolina mills, advancing on to the mill ball games, to the failed Philadelphia A's experiment, towards fame in Cleveland and ultimately shame in Chicago is well-detailed. Sagert does an excellent job in covering Jackson's ability and personal life and interweaving the two with quotes from Joe and those who had an influence in Joe's life. Sagert also is successfully able to detail concise, short chapters that ably and capably document a part of Joe's life that makes for very interesting, easily understandable reading. It has been my experience that often biographies of early major league baseball players are often no more than encapsulated box scores over the course of a season translated into words and game summaries that provide scant information as to who the player was and what he was able to accomplish outside of the white lines.

The debate on whether Jackson was innocent or deceitful will forever go on and will never be solved. Sagert lays out the information from many other source books, papers of the times, and in interviews with Joe and his contemporaries and allows the reader to use his/her own judgment. In doing so, Sagert also provides in-depth information on the many facets of the debates as to Joe's possible Hall of Fame enshrinement. I found this portion of the book the most interesting as it allows you to determine in your own mind, from a wealth of collected material, whether Joe should be placed in the Hall or should not be.

Coming in at a rather brief 170 pages or so, there is not a chapter or paragraph wasted. Sagert has done excruciating research and uses other notable books on Jackson as not only reference material but also to make an assertion as to the many differing opinions of Jackson's life, ability, intelligence and integrity.

I do believe, and the stats prove it, that Jackson was certainly worthy of the Hall through his accomplishments and abilities. However, just as I wouldn't vote for Bonds, an admitted cheat, I would not vote for Jackson. Baseball is an American institution that deserves recognition and association by those that played the game to win at all times and placed the "team" concept over the "me" concept. I have yet to read one summary of Jackson's life that convinced me, if nothing else, of Jackson's total belief in this simple idea. ♦

