

Spring Fling

The Official Newsletter of the Spring Training Committee
Of the Society for American Baseball Research

Volume #2, Issue #2, December 2003
Kevin M Saldana, Chairman and Editor

SPRING TRAINING MEMORIES FROM A TIGER-CENTRIC POINT OF VIEW By Mark Pattison

It's not Alzheimer's, but my memories go back only to 1998, when I first went to spring training at Lakeland, Fla., where the Tigers have trained every year since 1934 (with the exception of 1943-45 due to World War II travel restrictions). The Mayo Smith Society, a group of about 1,000 hardcore Tigers fans, has sponsored a spring training trip every year since 1984 -- good for them since they led the AL East wire-to-wire and won the World Series that year, although they finished sub-.500 in exhibition play. And some of those folk have been to virtually every Mayo Smith Society spring trip since.

In 1998 I had to finish my grad school papers early to be able to go relatively guilt-free; had I not done so, those papers would have been late. And, speaking of late, my plane to Tampa that first year was late, and by the time I got to Joker Marchant Stadium, it was the waning innings of a slugfest committed by the Astros against Detroit.

I had come equipped to be a conscientious spring training tripper -- a camera to take pictures of players as they walked the autograph-line gauntlet early in the morning; a glove for post-autograph softball practice; a prediction sheet for the season ahead; and my "M-A-Y-O" parody to the tune of "YMCA." To save money, I roomed with a day sleeper and bought Pop-Tarts for breakfast from the Publix supermarket across the street from the Holiday Inn Central on U.S. 92. It was once the same hotel that the Tigers housed their the players for a generation -- and the hotel the Tigers used to desegregate public facilities in Lakeland.

In 1998, I remember the county-fair atmosphere in Winter Haven for a night game, with Bob Feller signing autographs and a calliope organ playing between innings. I also remember our 40-strong group in Kissimmee shouting "Joe! Joe! Joe!" whenever third baseman Joe Randa made a great stop at the hot corner his only season with the Tigers, as well as shouting exhortations to Bip Roberts in right field (boy, was THAT a waste of breath) and singing "Happy Birthday" to Brian Hunter as he came in from center field between innings. We were having so much fun in a depopulated park that a writer from the New Orleans Times-Picayune came down from the press box to see what all the fuss was about. He said he'd try to fit our group in on a story he might do about spring training the following February. I didn't look that hard to see if we got any ink.

The Mayo Smith Society has always been blessed to have some fine speakers at our "opening night" dinner at the hotel. Each year we've had Ernie Harwell

address the group, as well as Tigers director of player development Steve Boros. Fred Smith, for whom the late, lamented Detroit SABR chapter was named, has also been a frequent guest.

It has indeed been cool to tour the Tigertown facilities both before and after the 2001 renovation of Marchant Stadium. In 2001 I spotted an inside door of a gardener's shed at the stadium still painted with the 1960s-era Tigers logo of an open-jawed Tiger inside a blue circle with the words "Detroit Tigers" emblazoned in white within the circle. Last year, I finally had the light bulb go on over my head and used some of my Florida time to conduct interviews for SABR's Oral History Committee.

But part of the joy of exhibition baseball is being able to spend time with friends -- and not just the friends you make in the tour. I've been blessed to be able to visit with my 88-year-old godfather twice -- he lives about an hour north of Tampa -- and treat him and my cousin and his son to a Tigers-Blue Jays contest in Dunedin. I've done the same with a neighborhood-church-guitar-playing friend of mine formerly from D.C. and his family to a game each year. Last year, I caught a ride to Fort Myers to witness a Twins shellacking of the Tigers with an ex-priest and ex-nun who were my pastor and pastoral associate in Detroit more than 20 years ago -- my treat. (Can you believe the Tigers, with their awful 43-119 mark last season, actually posted an over-.500 mark in our week-plus worth of games?) In the interim, I learned that Judy had sung at Lou Whitaker's wedding, and that she also has a baseball from her mother signed by three dozen or so Tigers from 1946 -- including both parties in the George Kell-for-Barney McCosky trade. To compare, a 1947 Tigers signed ball with fewer names and fewer big names (no Hank Greenberg, for instance) was going for \$1,000 on e-Bay earlier this year.

The hotel we once used changed hands twice since 1998 before it closed sometime in 2001. The Publix gave way to some odd-lots discount store. The softball field we once used has been torn up since early 2002 to squeeze more fields out of the space. So now we have to drive everywhere. No more walks along Lake Parker to get the ballpark and see weird-looking birds on the shore and the occasional alligator in the water along the way. Or walking to softball practice from the park. Things change. We adapt. A microcosm of what's happening on the field, in a sense. A lot of new faces, some replacing old faces we know aren't coming back. And still you hope. You adapt.

If you're interested in spending a week-plus with some 40 Tigers fans -- next week's not-yet-etched-in-stone dates are Saturday, March 20-Saturday, March 27 -- get hold of Dave Raglin at dar6884@earthlink.net.

Committee Calendar

There are many exciting events upcoming in the SABR Calendar that will interest committee members in the next few months.

First on February 7, 2004 will be the Baseball Symposium in Fishers, IN hosted by the Oscar Charleston Chapter. For more information on this event contact Bill Madden at WMadden@peoplepc.com

The 11th annual Nine Spring training Conference will be held March 11-14, 2004 in Tucson, AZ. The Keynote speaker will be Eliot Asinof, the author of *Eight Men Out* and *Man On Spikes*. For more information contact Bill Kirwin at bkirwin@Ualberta.ca

Another favorite event among committee members is the Boiling Out II held by the Deadball Committee at Hot Springs, AR. There is more information on the next page.

The sixth annual Seymour Medal Conference will held in Cleveland, OH on May 14-16, 2004. For more information contact the SABR office.

Then of course will be this little get together in the Queen City of Cincinnati, OH on July 15-18, 2004. Our annual committee meeting has not yet been scheduled, I am expecting to hear from the Local Convention Committee soon. I will have more information in the June 2004 Newsletter.

2004 Spring training schedules are now available from <http://www.Springtraining.com>

The SABR Deadball Era Committee presents “Boiling Out II

In some ways, the Deadball Era Committee is a strange group. Our fascination with an era of baseball long gone leads some of us to do strange things. Hot Springs, Arkansas, is a delightful town with plenty of things to see and do: great scenery, sites dripping with history, even a world-class racetrack. Where did seven members of the Deadball Era Committee spend at least an hour in March 2002?

In a parking lot!!!

Not just any parking lot, though. This parking lot was the site of a ballpark where Babe Ruth trained, across the street from an alligator farm where Ruth rode one of the resident gators, not far from another old ball ground where DEC patron saint Dode Paskert once shagged flies and hit fungoes.

The Hot Springs Eight (seven DEC members and one patient spouse) had such a good time frolicking with the ghosts of Cy Young, Honus Wagner and others that we decided to make it a biennial affair. So, we're returning to Hot Springs.

March 18-21, 2004
The Arlington Hotel
Hot Springs, Arkansas

Schedule of events:

Thursday, March 18: arrivals, informal discussion

Friday, March 19: research presentations starting at noon. Presentation proposals are welcome on all aspects of the Deadball Era, spring training or Hot Springs and Arkansas baseball. We will adjourn in time to permit people who wish to partake of the

Arlington's fabulous Friday seafood buffet to do so.
(This is highly recommended.)

Saturday, March 20: noon tour of Hot Springs spring training sites. We will then return to the Arlington for research presentations. In the evening, one of the stars of the Deadball Era comes to life, as Eddie Frierson performs "Matty". Venue to be determined.

* For a preview of the show named by National Public Radio as "One of the Year's 10 Best Plays" a few years back, please see the web site www.matty.org

Participants are encouraged to use the mornings to tour Hot Springs.

Also not to be missed is the fabled Deadball Dice Baseball Tourney, which will probably take place in the evenings. Tom Simon's excellent dice baseball game lets you pit your favorite deadball era stars against each other. Frank Baker dodges Ty Cobb's spikes again!

To make reservations: Call the Arlington at 800-643-1502 by February 18, 2004, to make a reservation at the group rates. Single rooms are \$85/night for us. There are some larger suites reserved for us as well. Be sure to ask for the SABR rate. After February 18, folks have to pay the regular price.

Cost: To be determined. We'll incur some minimal costs for the event.

Contacts:

R. J. Lesch Richard Smiley
rjlesch_usa@yahoo.com smileyr@georgetown.edu
515-991-4858 work: (312)525-3606
home: (773)622-9492

The Arlington: 800-643-1502

Hope to see you there!

Spring Training History

From the Philadelphia Athletics program vs. Boston, April 12, 1909 – The opening of Shibe Park.

The Athletic Training Trip

By Thomas D. Richter

Assistant Editor, Sporting Life

A training jaunt to Dixie land may sound like a pleasure trip in which base ball is only a secondary consideration, but to anyone who has traveled the South with a big league club, the event has a very serious turn. To the players, themselves, it is a very grave matter, something not to be taken lightly.

The youngster just breaking in sees in it the opportunity for which he has long waited, about which he had dreamed, and which mayhap he had begun to believe would never arrive. To the veteran, the player who has gone through many such trips, who has fought for many pennants, it is a chance to get himself into shape for at least one more race, to find out whether he is still as good as of old and whether he can still pass the critical inspection of the manager.

To the manager, the man who chooses the players and directs the policy, it is the chance to size up his material, to find out whether the men whose records he has carefully watched in the preceding [SIC] season, are about to fulfill his expectations; whether the young men he has been carrying will come to their own this season and whether the older players will still retain their cunning. Yes, to the manager it is an anxious period. To the fans at home, hungry for base ball news and particularly that which concerns their favorites, the trip provides an excellent opportunity to feast on their favorite delicacy.

Of course there are pleasures in a training trip that offset in a great measure the suspense, the worry and the hard work, else there would be no good in the trips. No result would be accomplished if it was all work and strain and nothing to relieve the mind. Enough strain is to come in the championship race.

The traveling in strange parts of the country for many, the renewing of old acquaintances for others, the opportunity to get out in the warm air and the bright sun after a cold winter in the North, the frequent little excursions by land and water, and the many pleasant little exchanges of wit and humor that brighten life, all these compensate for the hard work and strike the balance that makes the Southern training trip an assured success and a pleasure to player, manager, director, newspaper war correspondent, and artist.

The Southern training trip of the Athletics this spring was such an event. It contained all of the above and maybe a little more. All the work and worry were there with all the pleasure probably multiplied, for never in the experience of the writer has he seen such a fine lot of clean, wholesome, hustling and conscientious ball players in any one squad as marked the squad which Manager Mack, Business Manager John Shibe, and Director Samuel Jones led through the train gate on Track 13 at Broad Street Station, on the night of Monday, March 8th.

For almost two weeks Manager Mack labored away under very favorable weather conditions. Twice daily the players journeyed out to the ball park, the afternoon work consisting [SIC] of a contest either between the two teams, the Regulars and "Yanigans," or between the Regulars and New Orleans. The Young Men's Gymnastic Club was used as the dressing room for the players, and they also took advantage of the use of the salt-water swimming pool to get into shape.

Manager Mack and John Shibe could not have chosen more wisely their training ground. The men worked into shape rapidly and with comparatively few injuries. The sprained ankle of "Danny" Murphy, a dislocated little finger for "Rube" Oldring, and a lame back for Ira Thomas were the only drawbacks. The struggle for supremacy between Manager Samuel Erwin's "Yanigan" team and the Regulars, whose sponsor was Samuel Jones, resulted in a tie at two games each, the fifth game ending in a tie.

Just before the date set for the team to leave New Orleans for Mobile, the second place on their trip, Manager Mack announced his plan of splitting the team. He took the members of the "Yanigan" team with him for a trip through the South and Middle West. Meanwhile members of the Regular team proceeded to Mobile, arriving there early in the morning of March 22nd.

The players whom Manager Mack chose to accompany him on the trip were catchers Blue and Kocher; pitchers, Salve, Stowers, Flater, Files, and Krause; infielders, Barr, Lynch, McInnes, and Collins; outfielders, Hoffman, Jackson, and Strunk. Sam Erwin also went along as business manager.

The itinerary of the players was as follows: Montgomery, March 22, 23; Birmingham, March 24, 25; Nashville, March 26, 27; Louisville, March 28, 29; Indianapolis, April 1, 2, 3; Terre Haute, April 4; Columbus April 5, 6; Wheeling, April 7, 8; Harrisburg, April 9, and Reading, April 10.

Meanwhile the Regulars were encamped at Mobile for a week, leaving there on March 28th for a three-day stay in Atlanta, after which they went directly home, arriving on April 2d in time for the Spring Series with the Phillies.

Such was the spring training trip of the Athletic Club, and whether it shall be rated as a big success will be determined by the result of the championship race which is about to begin.

A Few Notes From the Chair...

It has been an excellent year for the committee. About 30 people attended the committee meeting at the convention in Denver. I really enjoyed meeting a lot of you.

In August we started an 18 part discussion on where each of the older MLB teams have gone to spring training on the committee website at <http://yahoo.groups.com/group/sabrspring/>. The discussion was quite fruitful. We were able to solve some of our mysteries, however many mysteries remain for us to solve in the coming year.

Speaking of the coming year, 2004 should be one of the most exciting for our committee and for all of SABR. The <http://www.sabr.org> website has many new features for all to enjoy. I firmly believe that this will foster a greater exchange in the research throughout all of SABR. This will help our committee achieve a number of our objectives.

For those of you who are new to the committee this year, I say welcome. To those who have been on the committee, I thank you for your hard work during 2003. To all I say, Thank you and Happy Holidays!!!

A special thank you to Mark Pattison for sharing his spring training memories, to R J Lesch for his column on Boiling Out II and to Jack Morris who provided the Spring Training History column.