

August 2009 (09—3)

©2009 Society for American Baseball Research

Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect the position or official policy of SABR or its Bibliography Committee.
Editor: Ron Kaplan (23 Dodd Street, Montclair, NJ 07042, 973-509-8162, Ronk23@aol.com)

Comments from the Chair

Andy McCue
Riverside, CA

For those of you who missed it, shame! The SABR convention this year was simply excellent (with the exception of the bus ride to Baltimore).

At the committee meeting Friday, we talked about:

- Helping Rich Arpi with Current Baseball Publications: Alert him to publications he might not otherwise see. You'll be getting Rich's CBP along with this newsletter to remind you of how useful it is. Rich has few problems finding the books published by the big boys, or McFarland. But we can all help him with publications by our local teams, small local publishers such as Historical Societies and the other odd things that might not stir up much notice outside their home area. If you find something you can reach Rich at rich.arpi@comcast.net.

- Working with Skip McAfee on indexes: Skip's been heading up our project to produce indexes for important baseball books published without them, and also provide publishers of new baseball books with indexes. Skip's always interested in new volunteers and Jim Lannen has ensured that our guidelines for book indexing and a list of the completed indexes are posted at our committee website, <http://www.sabr.org/sabr.cfm?a=cms.c.874.5.5>.

- Doing book reviews or other articles for Ron Kaplan and the newsletter: The reviews such as the ones you see in this issue also get posted to the SABR website and some will be appearing in *The Baseball Research Journal*. Ron can be reached at ronk23@aol.com.

- Bob McConnell's proposal for a project to locate and his description of where microfilm exists of early baseball newspapers, many of which were short-lived. Bob (homerbobmcc@aol.com) has some information for anyone who'd like to pick up the torch and Noel Milan (noeljmilan@comcast.net), who works at the National Endowment for the Humanities, can provide information on the endowment's project to preserve American newspapers.

- The Baseball Index: Elsewhere in this newsletter you'll see information about some of our committee mem-

bers remarkable work in getting over 10,000 *Sporting News* obituaries into TBI.

We also talked about some other possible projects for getting more entries into the database. Suggestions include:

- 1) Team publications (yearbooks, game programs, media guides) from your favorite team either through your collection (or someone else's), the team or a local library.
- 2) *Baseball Digest*. I have several years' worth and there's a complete collection in the library at Cornell University.
- 3) Take on a year's worth of books I've heard about but haven't been able to find a copy of. This is a project for someone who likes to sleuth as many of these books will be hard to find (and probably not worth reading). But interlibrary loan, eBay and other sources could turn up copies of these recent books.
- 4) The *TSN* obituaries stopped 15 years ago. They've been replaced by *Baseball America*. They're waiting to be cataloged.
- 5) So are multiple years of such publications as *Baseball America*, *Collegiate Baseball*, *The Sporting News*, and others.
- 6) Comb academic journals for articles about baseball.
- 7) Find baseball books published with good bibliographies, especially of articles, and put that data into TBI.
- 8) As we did with the obituaries, focus on one piece of *TSN*. Maybe you could read and catalog just the one or two articles about your favorite team that appeared each week. Doing this over a long stretch would give you a pleasurable run through your team's history while increasing the information TBI has about that team.
- 9) How about the more analytical fantasy publications that come out each spring? *Hardball Times*, *Baseball Prospectus* and Ron Shandler have all been producing for a number of years, and producing analysis that goes far beyond any fantasy draft.

This ought to keep all of you busy for a while.

Anyway, thanks to all of you who came. And shame on those of you who missed it. Atlanta next summer should be another excellent experience.



TBI Obituary project complete

It took 25 years of work by half a dozen committee volunteers, and it's resulted in 10,093 new entries for The Baseball Index. The Index now contains all the baseball-related obituaries that appeared in *The Sporting News* Obituary/Necrology columns from 1933 to 1991.

The work began in the 1980's when Bibliography Committee founder Frank Phelps started to record the obituaries in his usual painstaking fashion. Frank, who had a full run of TSN, started in 1933, when the newspaper began a formal obituaries column. Frank recorded the information by hand on ruled paper, starting with William "Kid" Gleason, who appeared on Jan. 5, 1933. It was a trail that ended with James "Cool Papa" Bell on March 18, 1991, the last formal obituaries column in TSN. You can see Frank's sheets at www.sabr.org/sabr.cfm?a=cms.c.2146.55.214.

Frank's work rested on those sheets for over 20 years, until the SABR office scanned the sheets and posted them on the organization's website.

Then the volunteers took over. Brad Sullivan already had put most of the 1970-80s *Sporting News*, including the obituaries, into TBI. But there was plenty more to do.

A canvass of the committee produced data-entry offers from Phil Bergen, Mike Grahek and Bill Nowlin. Grahek started the parade by doing 1933 to 1935 and then 1940-41, while Nowlin did 1936-37. But it was Bergen who proved to be the MVP of the project, producing 8,695 (86 percent) of the new entries. This was tedious work, typing Frank's handwriting into a spreadsheet and all the researchers who use TBI in the future should appreciate the work of these volunteers.

Peter Garver, SABR's staff computer guru in Cleveland also provided yeoman service getting the data into the project's creaky administrative software.

The obituaries themselves provide a collage of the first century of professional baseball in the United States. The early years of the Necrology column were filled with 19th Century players, organizers, managers and umpires. The later years recorded the passings of those who peopled the widespread minor leagues of the mid-20th Century.

For most of this period, *The Sporting News* functioned like a small-town newspaper for the baseball industry. And, as at small-town newspapers everywhere, recording the town's doings was a major source of news. The obituaries columns strayed far from the greats. Honus Wagner or Walter Johnson might get a couple of pages, but an amazing range of people earned a paragraph.

It wasn't merely the players, the managers, the umpires, scouts or even the owners who made the list. Ushers, ticket takers, Western Union telegraphers, Pullman car porters, trainers, fans, and (it seems) every sportswriter who ever pounded the typewriter keys of the smallest sports page in Wyoming all had their moment. And, so did wives, ex-wives, children, mothers, fathers, grandparents, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and in-laws.

The columns reflected the world outside baseball as well. In March 1945, an obscure island named Iwo Jima popped up as the place of death for Lt. Robert D. Holmes, who'd pitched in the minors in 1942-43. Iwo Jima would be listed as the place of death for eight more names over the

next two months. In the early years, Negro League greats were missed, or mentioned only in passing. By the end, they were getting obituaries worthy of the Hall of Famers they had become.

The obituary entries increased the size of the TBI database to just under 239,000 entries – books, articles, and other items of research interest. It is free to all and available at www.baseballindex.org.

Andy McCue



Convention 2009: A Literary Recap

Ron Kaplan
Newsletter Editor

One of the more pleasant aspects of the Convention for me was visiting the Vendors Room, set aside for authors and memorabilia merchants. It gave me a chance to meet many of the writers in person whom I had previously known only through e-mails and phone calls.

Among those authors who offered signings were representatives of the book lists from McFarland & Company Publishers, Pocol Press, Potomac Books, the University of Nebraska Press, and the University of Pennsylvania Press. There were several "independent" authors in attendance such as Bruce Weber (*As They See 'Em: A Fans Travels in the Land of Umpires*) and S.L. Price (*Heart of the Game: Life, Death and Mercy in Minor League America*). Weber addressed the umpire's committee. Curt Smith (*Pull Up A Chair: The Vin Scully Story*) and Lee Lowenfish (*Branch Rickey: Baseball Ferocious Gentleman*) were also on hand to make presentations on their latest subjects. (And my apologies to those authors I have inadvertently overlooked herein.) Audio interviews with Price, Weber, and Lowenfish can be found on my blog, Ron Kaplan's Baseball Bookshelf (Rksbaseballbookshelf.wordpress.com).

There's also a conversation I enjoyed with Gary Mitchem, acquisitions editor for McFarland Publishing, who discussed his job and the process of selecting new titles for consideration. As any serious baseball reader knows, McFarland is perhaps the "go-to" house for esoteric titles on myriad aspects of the game, from statistical theory to the origins of the games, from the majors to the minors to baseball across the ocean.

Mitchem discussed the processes he goes through in selecting and working on the myriad baseball titles his company publishes. While the company is not exclusively baseball-oriented, the national pastime does account for about half of its annual titles with as much as 70 percent of the manuscripts come



from SABR members, not all of whom, he admits, are polished writers. But that's one the favorite parts of his job: Some of the books need a lot of development, he said, which he enjoys providing, although with so many new titles coming in each year, the time and energy devoted becomes more of an issue.

We discussed the bugaboo of factual and statistical errors popping up in McFarland books. Some titles from mainstream publishers hit the bookstores with major mistakes, such as attributing a quote at an event to a ballplayer that had been dead for more than a decade. With so many readers who are so invested in the national pastime, McFarland couldn't get away with such goofs. Mitchem was sensitive to the need to turn out a product that is as accurate as possible but admitted that it's hard to find copy editors who are well-versed in both baseball and language issues.

The McFarland tables were piled high with all sorts of baseball books, ranging from statistical analyses to team- or event-driven titles. Mitchem was proud that McFarland has done some its best work in 19th-century and Deadball era topics. "Most of the trade publishers won't touch it," he said. In addition to the books, they published *Base Ball: A Journal of the Early Game*, a semi-annual peer-reviewed journal, as well as *Black Ball: A Negro Leagues Journal*.

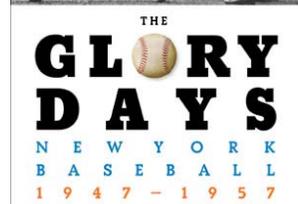
Economics have not caught up to McFarland, Mitchem said, since a good portion of the sales goes to libraries, whose budgets were set last year. It may be that the Jefferson, NC-based company takes a bit of a hit in 2010.



Reviews

The Glory Days: New York Baseball 1947-1957, edited by John Thorn. New York: Museum of the City of New York/Harper Collins, 2007.

First and foremost, *The Glory Days* is a picture book "published to coincide with an exhibition of the same name at the Museum of the City of New York." Editor John Thorn calls it "a companion" to that exhibition "that far flung readers, many of them Gotham alumni, may not be able to visit" and "a museum of memories." As a sort of Gotham alumnus (I grew up in the New York suburbs, aged eight in 1947 when Jackie Robinson debuted with the Dodgers) who has spent the past thirty-six years in North Carolina, I am especially happy to have this museum of memories. Looking at the book, I learned of the exhibition for the first time.



Though there's a good deal of color photography, for this reader the black and white photographs set the tone for the book, beginning and ending with the endpapers with their photos of Yankees, ber 7 central, and the Giants, number 24 central. For some, the color photographs may be

central, both portraits of players and shots of game action.

Most importantly, there are many photos – both black and white and color – of the artifacts of the culture of the game: yearbooks, advertisements, trading cards, magazines. These are what encourage readers to imagine 1947-1957, part of "the whole weather of our lives," as editor Thorn quotes Thomas Wolfe in the book's preface. There's plenty of visual material extending backward and forward from these years too. It's easy, looking over these photos, to wax nostalgic over those glory days.

The photos themselves work both for and against this impulse, and the writing included in the book does so most emphatically. The writing is of two kinds. First, there are eleven essays in the book, beginning with Jules Tygiel's "More than Jackie, More than the Dodgers," which contains in its title the insistence that the race problem was one for all three New York clubs, not to mention the country. Of the eleven, this reader had several favorites. Lee Lowenfish writes about New York Giants' owner Horace Stoneham, giving him "credit for his role in integrating not only the playing field but also the front office of the New York Giants franchise." Andrew Zimbalist and Steven Riess take particularly steely-eyed looks at the owners' business practices. The best of all for this reader is Jane Leavy's "Forever Mick," an essay that seeks to untie the Gordian knot of who was the city's best center fielder during those years: Mickey, Willie, or the Duke. As a National Leaguer, I was not convinced by her argument for Mantle, but she certainly shows very clearly what Mantle meant to us, whether we thought him better than Mays or Snider or not. Hats off to Jane!

A second kind of writing appears off and on among the visuals. These are quotations from several kinds of people – players, fans, historians, broadcasters – on various aspects of the decade. Most astonishing for those used to seeing Dodgers' owner Walter O'Malley as part of a triptych featuring Adolph Hitler and Josef Stalin, is this one from editor John Thorn: "In a strange twist, the architect of the move [of the Giants and Dodgers of California], Walter O'Malley was (and in the East, still is) widely seen as the snake in baseball's version of the Garden of Eden, responsible for ending the game's paradisiacal age. Yet the placement of franchises in California, as distressing as it was for Brooklyn and Manhattan, and as roundly condemned as it was by traditionalists, may now be seen as the best thing to happen to baseball in the decade. And Walter O'Malley, if you will permit your mind a considerable stretch, may be viewed not as the snake offering baseball the mortal apple but as a latter-day Johnny Appleseed (in the footsteps of Alexander Cartwright, who in 1849 also headed for California in pursuit of gold, yet who is remembered not for his venality but for bringing the New York Game to the West).

This comment should take care of any lingering feelings of nostalgia. *The Glory Days* should appeal not just to those who happened to be on the scene when these events transpired but to everyone interested in this fascinating period of baseball history.

Leverett T. Smith, Jr.
Rocky Mount, NC

The Fall of Roger Clemens and the Rise of Steroids in America's Pastime, by Teri Thompson, Nathaniel Vinton, Michael O'Keefe, and Christian Red. Knopf, 2009.

The theme of the early-to-mid 2009 season seemed to revolve around performance enhancing drugs. No less than four major titles consider those who use them and several others at least include the issue within their pages a main theme.

American Icon kind of flew in under the radar. A collective work by a quartet of *New York Daily News* reporters cobbled this research-intensive expose on Clemens and his "partner in crime," Brian McNamee, who supplied and injected him with the drugs. Clemens denied all the allegations long and loud.

In the opening author's note, they write:

We stand by the sources, *both on and off the record*, we've chosen [emphasis mine] to believe. And we feel strongly that anyone who reads this book carefully and objectively will come to the same conclusion.

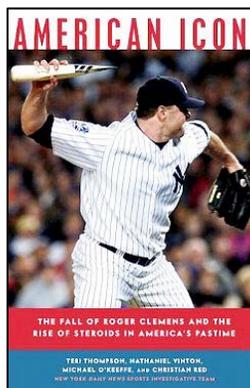
Sorry, but no.

This book preaches to the choir. Those who believe Clemens guilty have no need to read, save to claim "conclusive proof" of the pitcher's guilt and lies; those who still have faith in his innocence and those on the fence will not be convinced.

The writers — who form a macho sounding "sports investigative team" — spend the majority of the book in McNamee's corner. Sure, he may have supplied the drugs, just doing what his boss (Clemens) wanted him to do, but he was just trying to get along, not really doing any harm to anyone. It's not like he was standing on a street corner dealing crack.... Several times the authors refer to McNamee's time as a former police officer, as if that alone would indicate what a standup guy he is (what, there are no crooked cops?).

Like Selena Roberts in her biography on Alex Rodriguez, *American Icon* relies too much on unnamed sources, those who might have a professional or personal axe to grind against Clemens. They also have a tendency towards the over-dramatic: "McNamee had become a drug delivery man on the same streets he'd once policed as an undercover cop."

The book follows a chronological format; the latter chapters cover in great detail Clemens' appearance before Congress in February, 2008. Much of the information was covered in great detail at the time. The biggest revelation for me came in the Congressional testimony part of the book. That the federal government has nothing better to do with its time and our money is appalling, even for one who loves the game so much and wants to see justice prevail. But that the



politicians would use this as a means to build their own agendas is even worse (although not, unfortunately, surprising).

Recently sports pundits such as the crew on ESPN's *Pardon The Interruption*, have opined that it comes down to an age thing when discussing how to handle Clemens and all these players under the steroids cloud. Those over forty, they say, are much more strict as to who to let in while those under 40 just don't care. *American Icon* tries hard to be the definitive book on Clemens, the fallen hero. If it becomes so, it will only because the fans just don't care any more to warrant further discussion.

Ron Kaplan

* * *

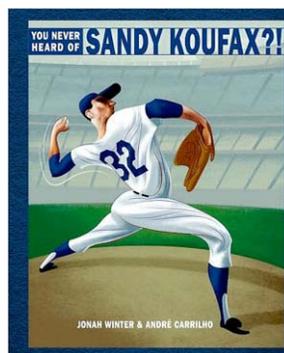
Author profile: Jonah Winter

It seems all sports fans hear these days are stories about steroids or other scandals. Parents have to explain to their young kids why their heroes have been arrested, banned for dozens of games, or criticized in the press when it comes time for Hall of Fame voting.

Such events made children's author Jonah Winter long for a more innocent time. That's the impetus behind his latest book, *You Never Heard of Sandy Koufax?!*

"Part of what makes Sandy Koufax an interesting topic for a children's book — or for any book — is not just his baseball statistics, but who he was as a person" Winter said in a telephone interview.

The title might sound like an old Jewish man marveling over the ignorance of modern fans, but that was not Winter's intention. The inspiration for his narrative style came



via Ring Lardner, the legendary sportswriter and author of *Alibi Ike* and other works of baseball fiction in the early 20th-century. Winter also cited Jane Leavy's *Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy*, which he adjudged "the only really good biography on him."

He was intrigued by "the challenge of writing about someone who's such a mysterious figure.... The first half of his career was utterly unremark-

able; the second half, brilliant. It just really caught my imagination, trying to write a story about someone who is such a mystery."

Winter collaborated with an unlikely partner for *You Never Heard*: artist Andre Carrilho, a native of Lisbon. "He turned out to be perfect as the beautiful, stylized approach he used really fit the subject matter," Winter said. "I don't think he had ever been to a baseball game before he illustrated this book."

Winter could have served as his own illustrator but both he and the publisher (Schwartz & Wade) thought it better to look elsewhere. "My style is photo-realism," he said, "It's quite time consuming."

Although Winter is not Jewish, he understood the need to highlight Koufax's religion, including his decision not to play in the opener of the 1965 World Series.

"It's a huge part of the story," Winter said. "You talk to practically anyone — Jewish or non-Jewish — about Sandy Koufax and if they know anything about baseball history they'll say 'Oh, yeah. That's the pitcher that didn't pitch on Yom Kippur.' Even if they don't know anything about the holiday, they know the religious implications. I just didn't see how that could have been left out."

Winter had written two other baseball books for kids: *Roberto Clemente: Pride of the Pittsburgh Pirates* and *Beisbol!: Latino Baseball Pioneers and Legends*. Both, he said, reflect his desire to pay tribute to old legends by bringing them to a new audience. "Most children knew little about them," he said. "I think they need to learn about the struggle some of these players have had, whether it's the Negro Leaguers or some of the early Latinos."

And now, Koufax.

"I think the decision he made not to pitch,...that drew a lot of attention to him and it also showed the world what mattered to him in addition to striking people out."

Ron Kaplan

(This article originally appeared in the *New Jersey Jewish News*.)

* * *

Congratulations to SABR award winners

- Ron Selter for *Ballparks of the Deadball Era*;
- Andy Strasberg, Bob Thompson, and Tim Wiles for *Baseball's Greatest Hit: The Story of Take me Out to the Ball Game*
- Jim Walker and Rob Bellamy for *Center Field Shot: A History of Baseball on Television*.

The winners received their awards at the SABR convention in Washington, DC in July.

The Sporting News-SABR Baseball Research Award recognizes outstanding baseball research published in the previous calendar year in areas other than history and biography. The Award is designed to honor projects that do not fit the criteria for The Seymour Medal or the McFarland-SABR Baseball Research Award. *The Sporting News* sponsors the \$200 cash awards that accompany the honor.

Ballparks of the Deadball Era is Selter's comprehensive study of Deadball Era-ballparks and park effects, in which he shows the extent to which ballparks determined the style of play. Organized by major league city, this fact-filled, data-heavy commentary includes all 34 ballparks used by the American and National Leagues from 1901 through 1919.

In *Baseball's Greatest Hit*, Strasberg, Thompson, and Wiles present the complete story of the third-most frequently sung song in America. The book features countless photos and illustrations, providing a pictorial history of the song's influence on the game and American culture. A bo-

nus CD is also included, which features many rare and classic recordings of the song from artists such as Dr. John, the Ray Brown Trio, Carly Simon, and George Winston.

In *Center Field Shot*, Walker and Bellamy trace the sometimes contentious but mutually beneficial relationship between baseball and television, from the first televised game in 1939 to the contemporary era of Internet broadcasts, satellite radio, and high-definition TV. Ultimately, the association of baseball with television emerges as a reflection of American culture at large.

This year's award committee consisted of Monica Nuciarone, Alex Skutt, and Rodney Johnson, with Steve Gietzschier as non-voting committee chair.

* * *

Elysian Fields Quarterly: where it all began

For baseball, and for me, as a freelance writer.

My first major published piece was a review of *Shoeless Joe and Ragtime Baseball*, by for *Elysian Fields Quarterly* in 1993, which you'll find after the break.

I wax nostalgic because I learned at the Convention that *EFQ* might be forced to cease publication for a number of reasons. Rather than go into it myself, I'm recreating the press release/flyer from publisher/editor Tom Goldstein:

"Baseball Journal seeks Publisher/Partner to Revive Literary Gem"

For more than twenty-five years, *Elysian Fields Quarterly* (and its predecessor *The Minneapolis Review of Baseball*) has been the preeminent journal of record for baseball literature, poetry, essays, and commentary.

As one has described it, "*EFQ* is a wonderful little magazine that's edgy, entertaining, rebellious, contrarian, nostalgic — and mostly just damn good writing about baseball."

Unfortunately, publishing a baseball journal has proved extremely challenging in a marketplace that has never been kind to small press publications even in the best of times, and with mass market chains dominating the landscape and appreciation for the printed word perhaps at an all-time low, *Elysian Fields Quarterly* has been forced to go on hiatus during the 2009 season.

Will *EFQ* return to the playing field next year? That may be up to you. Do you have the business acumen, publishing background, fundraising experience, or financial backing to take *EFQ* from a little gem of a magazine to something much bigger? If so, we should talk. Opportunities include everything from a business partnership or working agreement to an outright purchase of the journal and inventory of back issues. Serious inquiries only.

Please contact: Tom Goldstein, publisher and editor, at 651-644-8558 or info@efqreview.com, *Elysian Fields Quarterly: The Baseball Review*, PO Box 14385, St. Paul, MN 55114.

Please send articles, reviews, and suggestions to: Ron Kaplan at Ronk23@aol.com. Appropriate topics include books, magazines, blogs, etc. Please put "For SABR Newsletter" in the subject line.