

The INSIDE GAME

The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee

Volume 8, Number 1: "Let's get this lumpy, licorice-stained ball rolling!" February 2008

Chairman's Column

By **John McMurray**
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A couple of months ago, SABR Executive Director John Zajc remarked to me that he was surprised that the Deadball Era was not receiving more attention in the press given the recent steroids scandal facing baseball. As John noted, the Deadball Era provides perhaps of the best example of how teams can win games without the assistance of steroids, by playing strategic baseball rather than hitting the ball out of the park. Moreover, he pointed out that there is a link between the rulebreakers of today and those who did everything from throwing games to getting into various on-field scrapes during the Deadball Era.

One Deadball Era Committee member who is trying to get a handle on a particular aspect of on-field misbehavior throughout baseball history is Alain Usereau, who is a French television sports broadcaster in Montreal. During the past year and a half, Alain has been vigorously compiling a 'Brawl Database,' which he hopes will ultimately chronicle every on-field brawl in major league history. Usereau classifies a fight between Troy and Brooklyn in 1871 as the first 'real' brawl, and his project has grown to the point that it now contains information on more than 2,300 on-field brawls in baseball history.

From a Deadball Era perspective, Ty Cobb's beating of New York fan Claude Lueker in the stands at Hilltop Park in May 1912 is one of the most well-known brawls that Usereau has

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The Larry Ritter Award: Writing Deadball Excellence

By **Gabriel Schechter**
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As the new year dawns, nine members of the Deadball Era Committee are well under way in their labors to determine the winner of the committee's most prestigious award, the Larry Ritter Award. The 2008 honoree, to be announced at the SABR convention in Cleveland, will be the seventh winner of the Ritter Award, which was created in 2002 to honor each year's best book on a Deadball Era-related subject.

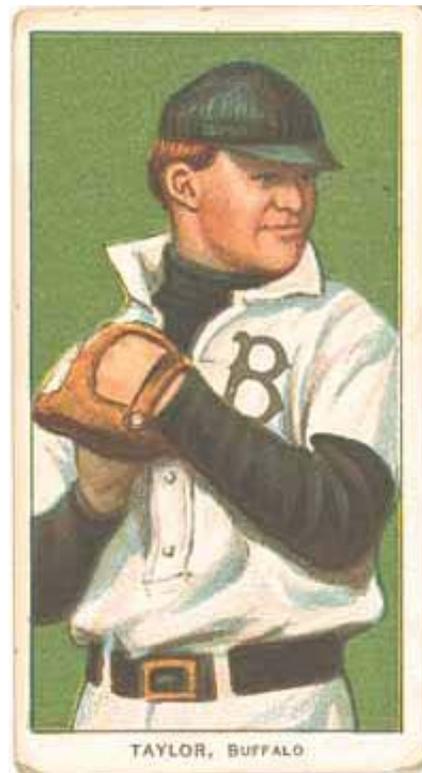
I was honored to be asked a year ago to join the subcommittee which judges the award, and even more honored to assume the reins of chairman for the next award. Larry Ritter played a vital role in my book on Victory Faust. He encouraged my research, provided me with audio tapes of the interviews he did with Faust's teammates, and wrote the foreword to the book. In 1998, I spent a memorable evening with him in Manhattan, meeting him outside his apartment

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Book Signing at Indiana Baseball Hall of Fame

by **Cindy Thomson**

On October 3, 2007, baseball authors Pete Cava, Susan Dellinger, W.C. Madden, Scott Brown, and Cindy Thomson appeared at the Indiana Baseball Hall of Fame in Jasper, Indiana, for a book signing. SABR member Dan O'Brien was also in attendance and took photographs. The signing was part of the celebration of the hall's grand reopening, which doubled its size. The signing hosted a small gathering, but those in attendance were impressed to see the hall's expansion.

If you are ever near Jasper, Indiana (a beautiful part of the country), stop in and see the Hall of Fame. It's located on the Vincennes University campus and boasts a new 1,000 + square foot addition. Some of the Hall of Famers included there are Mordecai Brown, Edd Roush, Max Carey, Amos Rusie, Billy Herman, Bubbles Hargrave, Gil Hodges, Carl Erskine, and Don Larsen. Visit the website at: <http://indbaseballhalloffame.org>. ♦



Emmett McAuliffe, main speaker from the Browns Historical Society, and the St. Louis University Billiken Baseball Team at the commemoration of Handlan Park in St. Louis

Handlan Park Marker Dedicated in St Louis

By **Catherine Petroski**
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I was delighted to be in St. Louis on October 17, 2007, when SABR's Bob Broeg Chapter dedicated the third in their series of markers commemorating the location of historic ballparks in the city. Federal League Park, aka Handlan Park, home of the Federal League Terriers in 1914 and 1915, was commemorated on that day.

On a pretty grassy slope at the corner of Grand and Laclede—now on the St. Louis University campus—St. Louis SABR members and guests gathered for the 2:30 ceremony at which the plaque was unveiled. Joan Thomas and Jim Rygelski had invited descendants of the Handlan family and Terrier players to attend. Handlan and Bob Groom descendants were present, as was a Mordecai Brown relative; other players' descendants and family members sent their written greetings. The St. Louis University Billiken Baseball Team suited up for the ceremony and attended in force with their coaches.

As I flew into St. Louis at 9 AM that morning, the rain was starting, and by noon, it was absolutely pouring! But by 1:30 PM, the rain had stopped, the Terriers' site was dedicated without a rain delay, and it seemed as though all those old Sloufeds were smiling down on us. As I left Lambert at 5:50 PM, the rain was back in torrents—what timing!

Congratulations to St. Louis SABR and thanks to all for a wonderful day! ♦



Scott Brown and Cindy Thomson sign copies of *Three Finger* at the Indiana Baseball Hall of Fame

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The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee

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Memorial for Luther Taylor

By **Dave Anderson**
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I am working on putting together a memorial for Luther Haden "Dummy" Taylor. He is buried at Baldwin City, Kansas, along with his first wife.

Dummy Taylor was a New York Giant and Cleveland Indian and during his career that lasted from 1900 to 1908 he won 117 games. He was a key member of a Giant pitching staff that included Hall of Famers' Christy Mathewson, Joe "Iron Man" McGinnity and Richard "Rube" Marquard.

When John McGraw came to the team in 1902, the only players he kept were Mathewson, Taylor and a catcher, Frank Bowerman.

While with the Giants, his teammates embraced him as family and learned sign language so that they could communicate with Taylor. Taylor would take it as an affront if you did not learn signs. McGraw would use some of the sign in games, and Taylor would use them as well when he coached first base.

The Kansas School for the Deaf was his alma mater and he returned after his playing days were over. He coached five sports. In 1923 he moved on to a deaf school in Iowa where he coached football and baseball. In 1933, he began working at the Illinois School for the Deaf in Jacksonville as a House Father. He discovered Dick Sipek and helped him get into the major leagues. Sipek played outfield for the Cincinnati Reds in 1945.

He lived out his life in Jacksonville. He stayed active, working out regularly in a gym and would box with anyone he could coax to box with him.

He died on August 22, 1958. We plan to place a bench on his gravesite with details of his career. What ever you could donate would be appreciated. Please send any inquiries or donations to Dave Anderson, 17934 West 158th Court, Olathe, KS 66062. If you need to call me please do so at 913-254-9646. I would like to have this done and installed on May 24th, 2008.

Thank you. ♦

AL Deadball Stars: Hardcopies still available

The SABR office still has hard copies of the *Deadball Stars of the American League* for sale at \$39.95 each. You can buy them online at the SABR store or by sending payment to the SABR office in Cleveland. ♦

Chairman's Column, cont. from page 1.

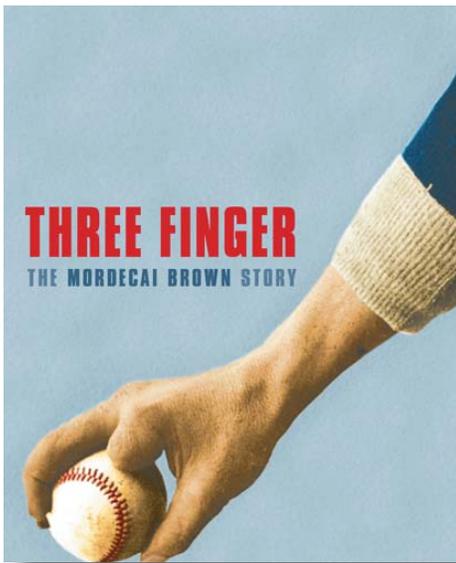
chronicled. Of course, there are the repeated altercations between Arthur 'Bugs' Raymond and John McGraw, as well as the fights between Ty Cobb and Boss Schmidt. Cobb participated in more brawls than any other player in any era, including one in which he fought with Buck Herzog and Art Fletcher in a 1917 game after Herzog made a hard tag of Cobb on the head. As one might expect, McGraw, Joe Tinker, and Johnny Evers are cited frequently in the database. Members of Boston Red Sox during the second decade of the 20th century were also involved in several brawls, which are generally believed to be due to religious differences among teammates.

Usereau's cataloging of brawls is not limited to on-field incidents. For instance, there was an August 23, 1911 row in which pitcher Tom Hughes, who was on his way to an 11-17 record with Washington that season, was being needled by a fan in a bar. When Hughes invited the fan to settle their differences outside, the fan allegedly retorted with: "If you can't fight any better than you pitch, I'll win easily!"

Usereau notes that while managers' roles in brawls decreased in the Deadball Era relative to the 1800s, Deadball Era managers frequently had short fuses and were often involved in brawls. In fact, Usereau catalogs every time a player, manager, coach, general manager, player, owner, umpire, and so on was ever involved in a brawl. As a consequence, his project may prove to be particularly useful for researchers trying to locate information about unruly Deadball Era managers. Also, Usereau notes that fans became less involved with on-field incidents in the early 20th century, particularly when stadiums with closed fences were introduced near the beginning of the Deadball Era.

Of course, this brawl database is a work in progress. So far, Usereau has cataloged 160 Deadball Era brawls as well as 76 more which need additional supporting information. In many cases, Usereau--who has compiled much of his information using ProQuest, the archives of *The Sporting News*, and the Internet--needs to pin down the exact date of a particular incident, the names of everyone involved, or exact details of what happened. Usereau notes that he does not condone violence on the playing field, but he does point out that the way baseball has dealt with these brawls over time typically mirrors contemporary society's reaction to them. He would welcome anyone who has an interest in furthering the project to contact him at althetiger@hotmail.com. Certainly he is to be commended for undertaking such an ambitious task by himself!

Ever since Hobe Ferris kicked Jack Hayden in the face during a 1906 game, resulting in the first ejections of teammates from the same team for fighting each other, baseball kept up a wild and unpredictable history of on-field incidents. In conducting his research, Alain Usereau has helped to make a distinctive contribution to this colorful aspect of the Deadball Era. ♦



Three Finger: The Mordecai Brown Story

By Cindy Thomson and Scott Brown
University of Nebraska Press, 2006.
[ISBN: 0-8032-4448-7]. \$26.95,
hardcover.

Reviewed by **Mark Dugo**
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It is clearly evident when you read a biography of an individual as to whether or not the work was a labor of love, a quick “let’s make a buck” ploy, or a serious, analytical attempt at explaining the purpose of an individual’s being. Three Finger definitely and resoundly falls into the first category, while also dabbling in the third.

Familial ties notwithstanding, Cindy Thomson and Scott Brown portray an extremely interesting narrative of the man and the legend that has become Three Finger Brown. Saddled with a disadvantage at a youthful age due to a farming mishap, Brown didn’t allow the negative ramifications to slow him down or to shatter his dreams. He picked himself up, matured, and mastered his craft as almost nobody who has ever played the game before, during or since has been able to do.

Richly illustrated with the standard photos that we have all seen before but also some rare family keepsakes, Three Finger weaves the story of the courageous Brown from

boyhood throughout his Hall of Fame career. I’ve always stated that the baseball biographies that tend to be mostly recaps of box scores detailing ad nauseam accounts of game after game tend to bore me, so Three Finger proved itself to be a successful and entertaining read.

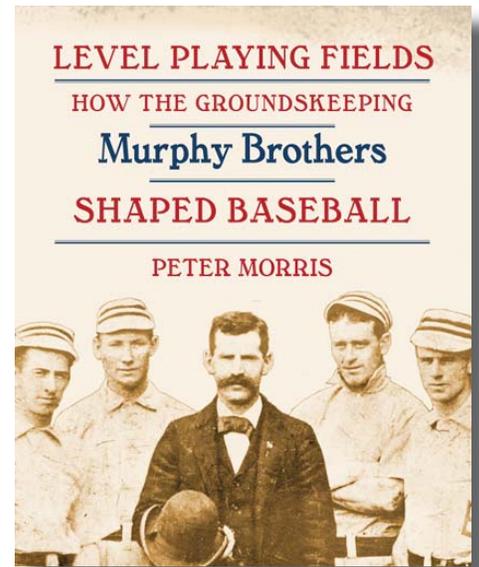
Brown, of course, was pitching during the time frame when the Cubs actually won World Series titles (we can still hope and dream this year Cubby fans!) and was, in fact, one of the reasons they seemed to contend year in and year out. Brown was used much in the same manner as another Hall of Famer playing during the same time span—Chief Bender of Connie Mack’s Philadelphia Athletics was—simply put, Brown pitched when the Cubs had to win.

Brown’s domination in head to head appearances when matched against Christy Mathewson proves the point that not only was he able to succeed against the other’s very best, but also when the other’s very best was perhaps the greatest pitcher of all time. This was why he was selected again and again when the Cubs desperately needed a win.

Brown’s jump to the upstart Federal League as he wined down his career was a major coup for the promising yet doomed third league, yet he continued his mastery and dominance over the Feds just as he had the National League. As such, Brown still maintains top twenty listings in many of both the Chicago Cubs and Major League baseball record books including lifetime earned run average and shutouts.

Privy to facts of Brown’s life that others might not have been able to dig up, Thomson and Brown provide incite to the disfigured child, the player, the burgeoning legend, and the retired successful business man. Brown used his unfortunate disfigurement to his great advantage, not just in the ability to make a ball move funny and therefore become hard to hit, but especially in his grit and determination. Brown proved time after time that any unfortunate incident can be overcome with hard work, but especially with a positive attitude and most importantly, belief in you. That is a lesson that we can

all learn from. Deadball aficionados, baseball fans in general, and those loving a well written story should read this great book. ♦



Level Playing Fields: How the Groundskeeping Murphy Brothers Shaped Baseball

By Peter Morris
University of Nebraska Press, 2007.
[ISBN : 978-0-8032-1110-0]. \$24.95,
hardcover.

Reviewed by **Ron Selter**
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Noted baseball author Peter Morris (*A Game of Inches*, two volumes) has a recent book out from the University of Nebraska Press that is at first glance a biography of two little known turn-of-the-century groundskeepers: brothers John and Tom Murphy. Both brothers were employed by several pennant-winning teams -Tom by the Baltimore Orioles of the 1890s and later by the Detroit Tigers, and John by the Pittsburgh Pirates and New York Giants. The Murphy brothers have here-to-fore been largely forgotten; to such an

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extent that most previous books assumed the brothers to be a single person.

One interesting aspect of the game detailed in this book is the origin of the pitcher's mound. The purpose of the pitchers mound was not to provide an advantage to the pitcher, but for drainage! Clearly with pitchers on the mound for the entirety of the game, grass in that area would never survive. In this era, a dirt pitcher's box without sufficient drainage would end up as so much mud. Thus, groundskeepers, not managers, owners, or league executives were responsible for the origin of the pitchers mound that is now a vital element of the game.

This book on a deeper level argues that the role of the Murphy brothers and other pioneer groundskeepers paved the way for baseball to reach new levels of acceptance and prosperity. This was achieved in part by their ability to take waterlogged plots of land like the Polo Grounds and Pittsburgh's Exposition Park and make them into useable playing fields. The Murphy brothers were also involved in developing such key innovations as pitching mounds, permanent spring training sites, new irrigation techniques, and infield tarpaulins. The larger impact on the game was the introduction of the concept of a level playing field (in the modern sense) that was fair to both teams. In the Deadball Era, the game of baseball evolved into a widely accepted sport by expanding its appeal to include middle- and upper-class fans. The level playing fields (both physical and conceptual) built by the Murphy brothers and other groundskeepers contributed to the evolution of the game of baseball from the rowdy liquor-laden game of the 19th Century into the National Pastime of the first half of the 20th Century.

In this era there was a fundamental change from a mindset that revolved around trying to gain home-field advantages (or as practiced by the old NL Orioles-plain old cheating) to one of sportsmanlike competition. The old attitude was symbolized by some of the tricks Tom Murphy played as groundskeeper for the 1890's Orioles. This attitude was

replaced by the modern concept of a level playing field (best represented by the new steel-and-concrete classic ballparks).

In summary, the book is well written and thoroughly researched. Morris' smooth and free-flowing writing style adds to the book's attractiveness. *Level Playing Fields* is a worthy addition to one's baseball library. ♦

The Official Rules of Baseball Illustrated

By David Nemec

The Lyons Press, 2006. [ISBN: 978-1592288441]. \$16.95, 288 pages.

Reviewed by **Peter Gordon**
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David Nemec's *The Official Rules of Baseball Illustrated* is an entertaining book that will appeal to both the casual fan and the baseball fanatic. The book also contains a great deal of material that would specifically interest members of the Dead Ball Committee.

Nemec's book follows the structure of the baseball rule book. It begins with the description of the field, and the definition of various baseball terms. He then covers the starting and ending of games, and the roles of the batter, runner, pitcher and umpire. Each section begins by stating the basic rule, and then follows with an essay illustrating how the rule has been applied over time.

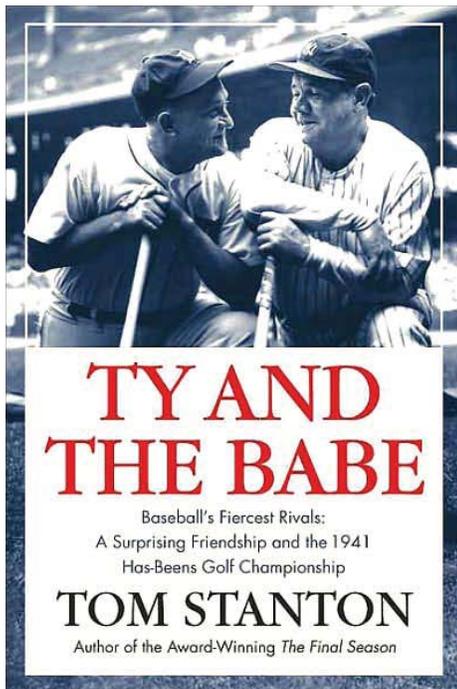
David Nemec is an experienced baseball writer, and he is equally at home describing the events of the infamous Pine Tar game which he uses to illustrate rule 1.10 (c) as he is the overflow crowds of the 1915 World Series (to illustrate rule 3.13). He uses minor league and major league examples, but since this is a book about the rules of professional baseball he eschews examples from amateur rules.

Mr. Nemec's history of how the strike came to be defined illustrates his wide-ranging approach. At first he discusses the early history of the fair-foul rule as something that would not be familiar to the casual fan. He describes how a ball hit during the

mid-19th century would be called fair as long as it first bounced in fair territory. He then illuminates the history of how a bunt that went foul after two strikes was ruled a third strike, and ends up discussing the redefinitions of the strike zone throughout history.

The book includes a great many stories to interest members of our Committee. For example, Nemec uses a story about Fred Clarke walking home with the bases loaded to illustrate rule 9.02 (c) and of course uses the story of Germany Schaefer stealing first base from second to show why baseball adopted rule 7.08 (I). For readers who want more details, Nemec includes an appendix containing the official rules of baseball, as well as a rules and names index to make things easier for readers and researchers who want to review specific points.

The prose is light and entertaining throughout, but nonetheless is a significant addition to baseball history and research. Many young people (and, it seems, some sportswriters) grow up thinking that baseball's rules were carved in stone tablets for all time. Nemec's book shows that isn't so. Rules change, and some rules have changed a great deal. Reading *The Official Rules of Baseball Illustrated* is a very entertaining way to learn how that happened. ♦



Ty and the Babe: Baseball's Fiercest Rivals; a Surprising Friendship and the 1941 Has-Beens Golf Championship

By Tom Stanton

Thomas Dunne Books, 2007. [ISBN:
978-0312361594]. \$23.95, Hardcover

Reviewed by **Mark Pattison**
MPattison@catholicnews.com

For a guy whose competitive juices were always sizzling on his interior skillet, it must have galled Ty Cobb to have been bested by that punk kid Babe Ruth when the overgrown lug was pitching for the Boston Red Sox. And also again when this Ruth guy switched to the outfield and started hitting home runs over the fence—hardly the “scientific” method of scoring.

Even with a decade in the spotlight as the American League’s (if not all of pro baseball’s) marquee player, Cobb found it hard to relinquish that title. That’s what forms the basis for Tom Stanton’s newest book, *Ty and the Babe: Baseball’s Fiercest Rivals: A*

Surprising Friendship and the 1941 Has-Beens Golf Championship.

Stanton (*The Final Season, The Road to Cooperstown, The Detroit Tigers Reader*), hones his deliberate yet languid prose style to detail the origins of the bad blood between Cobb and the upstart Ruth—a clash of titans, if you will, between the deadball era represented by the Georgia Peach and the sluggers’ era ushered in by the Sultan of Swat.

There are the occasional—and unfortunate—racial allusions from Cobb that tried to diminish Ruth’s standing and his accomplishments. There are also instances what could be described as professional jealousy, although Cobb would never admit to as much. It burned, just burned him that Ruth could thwart him and his designs at the plate and in the field. The friendship that ultimately emerged, and very slowly, may have been genuine, but it could best be described in modern terms as man-talk: concisely worded observations, even more concisely worded replies of assent.

One story Stanton has slipped into the “fiction” file is the one where Cobb ordered an intentional walk to Ruth, and two pitchers whistled three straight strikes down the middle to an unsuspecting Bambino. Perhaps his greatest service is an appendix detailing each of the 200-plus games in which Ruth and Cobb faced each other, and how they fared.

The book’s final third deals with the 1941 Has-Beens Golf Championship of Nowhere in Particular, a three-match series in New Hampshire, New York and Michigan that pitted, as fate would have it, Cobb’s brand of small ball against Ruth’s penchant for the long ball. Cobb, a dozen-plus years removed from baseball, found how to turn on the competitive burners to take Ruth in the climactic match.

Cobb lived long enough to see not only his brand of baseball fade into obscurity, but his own standing in the sport downgraded with the passing of time. After Ruth’s death, though, he paid perhaps the greatest compliment to his old foe: “I wish I could have been more like the Babe. When he died, an entire nation mourned.”

Speaking in an area with which I am familiar, Stanton’s put together a pretty good baseball book. And, speaking in an area where I do not share the same level of competence, he also seems to have written a half-decent golf book. ♦

**Larry Ritter Award, cont.
from page 1.**

building and joining him for dinner. He also signed the first edition of *The Glory of Their Times* which my father bought me when I was a kid so I’d learn more about the players *he* grew up watching. The Faust story was told in that volume by Fred Snodgrass, starting me on a baseball odyssey which resulted in the book. So he helped me in many ways, and I’m glad to have this chance to honor him.

The award subcommittee’s work is both arduous and rewarding. Last year ten books were eligible, and this year’s reading list is already longer, if only because of the presence of Norman Macht’s massive volume on Connie Mack. That is one of six biographies on the list; other subjects are Tris Speaker, Red Faber, August Herrmann, Sam Rice, and the groundskeeping Murphy brothers. Deadball Era biographies are more plentiful than ever thanks to the efforts of Gary Mitchem of McFarland & Company.

Also being considered are Cait Murphy’s book about the incomparable 1908 season, William Wilbert’s examination of the creation of the American League, Paul Batesel’s biographical dictionary of players from 1916, and John Simpson’s book about the 1908 Nashville Vols. You see the wide variety of subjects and approaches we’ll be considering, from Hall of Famers and famous events to more neglected corners of the rich tapestry of Deadball Era baseball. All nine subcommittee members are returnees from last year, and we consider ourselves lucky to have this excuse to learn more about all aspects of this era. Our group includes Al Blumkin, Mark Dugo, Jan Finkel, Scott Flatow, David Fleitz, John

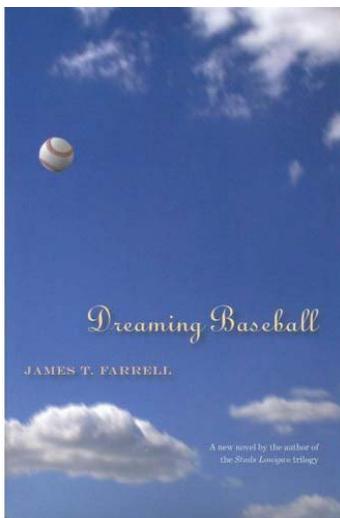
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**Larry Ritter Award, cont.
from page 6.**

McMurray, Tom Simon, and Doug Skipper. We will conduct a first round of voting by mid-March, narrowing the field down to three or four finalists. A second round of voting on the finalists should reveal the next winner. That is, one author will win the seventh Larry Ritter Award. All the rest of us will be enriched by the process of exploring and evaluating the latest offerings in what is becoming one of the most written-about periods of baseball history. ♦



Pete Cava and W. C. Madden talk baseball (what else is there?) at the Indiana Baseball Hall of Fame



Dreaming Baseball
By James T. Farrell

Kent State University Press, 2007.
[ISBN 978-0-87338-897-9].
Hardcover, 316 pages, \$28.00.

Reviewed by **Cindy Thomson**
(cindy@cindyswriting.com)

Dreaming Baseball is a novel not about dreaming, but about being awakened from a dream. The narrator is a fictional character reminiscing about his days with the Chicago White Sox. He was a rookie second baseman during the infamous 1919 season and played for years after. The author, James T. Farrell, is better known for his *Studs Lonigan* trilogy and was a prolific writer for five decades. Known for his social activism, Farrell



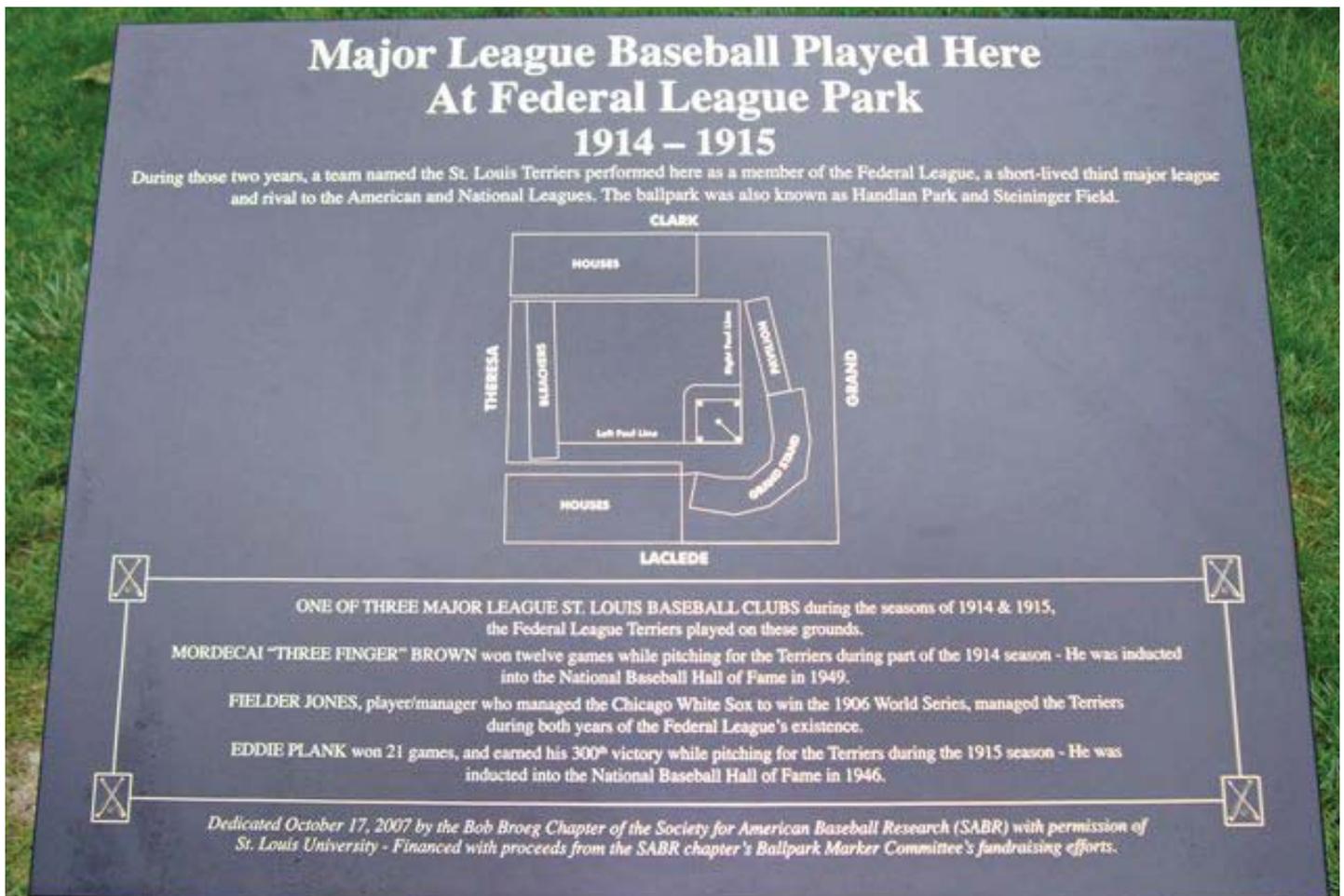
Susan Dellinger prepares to sign her book on Edd Roush at the Indiana Baseball Hall of Fame

published non-fiction, short stories, and novels. He died in 1979. *Dreaming Baseball* is the second Farrell novel to be published posthumously, the other being *Sam Holman*.

I had quite a bit of trouble finishing this novel, and had I not been writing a review for *The Inside Game*, I would have set it aside long ago. I discovered the reason for this when I read the editor's note at the end of the book. There were two drafts

and several notes and the editors had to piece it together and make major editorial decisions. The first of which was to decide the beginning of the book. It seems Farrell had written two. The one they used is very effective. I did enjoy the beginning. The character, Mickey Donovan, is an aging scout at a baseball camp in

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Plaque from the commemoration of Handlan Park in St. Louis. See page 2 for story.

***Dreaming Baseball, cont.
from page 7.***

Florida hoping to discover a great player, one who would achieve in his career what Mickey had not been able to do in his own. He overhears a radio announcer reporting the death of Buck Weaver. This sends Mickey into reminiscing about his baseball career and the Black Sox scandal of 1919, which lasts for the length of the book.

One interesting scene is when Donovan is following Buck Weaver and Happy Felsch out of the clubhouse. A crowd of fans follows along and shouts, "It ain't so, Joe." This event weighs heavily on Mickey Donovan as it did on James Farrell when he was a fifteen year old and witnessed this in real life after a game in Comiskey Park in 1920, just as the public was beginning to hear of the scandal.

The true strength of the book is its cultural realism. Farrell grew up on the South Side of Chicago, was a Sox fan, played baseball in Washington Park (as did his character Mickey Donovan) and attended Catholic school (again like his character). When Farrell talked about his memories of his father attending a White Sox-Cubs World Series game in 1906, or of his high school coach at St. Basil's, or of his first date with his future wife Mary, I was drawn into the story. These glimpses showed me the talent of the writer. Unfortunately, the book as a whole didn't live up to my expectations.

The story bogs down in the middle. The author repeats himself continuously, especially when he leaves the topic he knew most about, his neighborhood. As the story progresses into the Major League Baseball seasons, it begins to read like a newspaper accounting. It seems Mickey Donovan does a lot of reading and then reports it to the readers, rather than actually living the story. Much of the narrative does sound like an old baseball player recounting his past, but that doesn't necessarily make for good reading. He waffles between thinking that something is "up" during the 1919 World Series to not knowing anything. But what is clear is that the character, and probably the author, is disillusioned about baseball, and that was clearly the public's reaction at the time.

Eliot Asinof, author of *Eight Men Out*, wrote the foreword. Asinof visited Farrell in 1960 while researching his book. Asinof says that Farrell encouraged him to tell his story in the light of the lives of the eight banned players. In *Dreaming Baseball*, Farrell described Buck Weaver's story as a tragedy and Mickey Donovan's as a struggle to hold on to his dream of playing baseball.

It struck me that this novel was never really finished, never polished, and that I think is a tragedy because it had the potential of being a tender, touching story. ♦