

The Wood Pile

Newsletter of the Smoky Joe Wood Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research

Fall 2023  Volume 3  Issue 5

Stephen Krevisky (President) - Alan Cohen (Vice President/Treasurer)

Stan Dziurgot (Membership Director) - Stan Osowiecki (Wood Pile Editor)



LEADING OFF

By: Steve Krevisky

Greetings, SABR-ites! We continue to be a busy chapter! We had a hybrid spring meeting at Middlesex Community College, my home campus, featuring both in person and virtual speakers. In spite of a few technical glitches, I think it went well, with about 20 participants. We held a chapter luncheon at Rein's Deli on July 1, with 7 people, and we enjoyed that as well.



A number of us went to Chicago for the annual SABR convention, where a few of us presented there. We enjoyed seeing old friends, and we went to the White Sox Cardinals game, as the Chisox came back from a 5-0 deficit to win the game.

After the convention, I headed west, taking the train through Iowa to Omaha, then driving north, through Nebraska, South Dakota and North Dakota. I saw Bison and Native American sites, which I enjoyed, along with the landscape. I was pleased to see 2 books about baseball in the Dakotas and Minnesota! Both were written by SABR members! One that especially interested me was about the 1897 Red River Valley League, with teams from both North Dakota and Minnesota involved. The Red River is the border between Minnesota and North Dakota.

There is currently a Northwoods League, with teams from both states, and I am intrigued by doing a road trip next year to see games involving teams in that league! While in Fargo, ND, I had to visit the museum for Roger Maris, who grew up in Fargo, and starred at Shanley High School. I grew up with Maris and the 61 Yankees, so I was very moved to see the artifacts, and reminiscences about Roger!

On August 6, 16 of us attended the Hartford Yard Goats and Reading Phillies game. We enjoyed being there, and the fellowship of being together there, and the home team prevailed, 4 to 3. After the game, the children were able to run the bases!

See you soon at one of our events! Thanks!

Regards, Steve

EDITOR'S NOTE

By: Stan Osowiecki

In July 2015, I had the privilege of working with Karl Cicitto in developing the Wood Pile that you have been receiving since that time. At first, Karl was doing the article collection and editing and I was doing the layout. A few years later, I took over the work that Karl had been performing and continued my layout work as well.

Over these eight years, I have always been thankful to be a part of the newsletter with the high quality articles and contributions that many of you have provided.

Unknown to almost everyone until now, when I would finish an issue of the newsletter, I would share it first with my Dad who shared with me my love of baseball. When my Dad passed three years ago, a void was left for me.

While I still love going to baseball games with my daughter, the extended commercialization of the game and with attending games being more like a rock concert than a nice day at the ballpark, my passion for baseball has waned. Due to this, I have informed Steve Krevisky and Karl Cicitto that this issue of the Wood Pile will be my last.

Wishing you all the best and dreams of World Series Championships for your favorite teams,

Stan O.

NEW MEMBERS

New chapter members (since February 05, 2023)

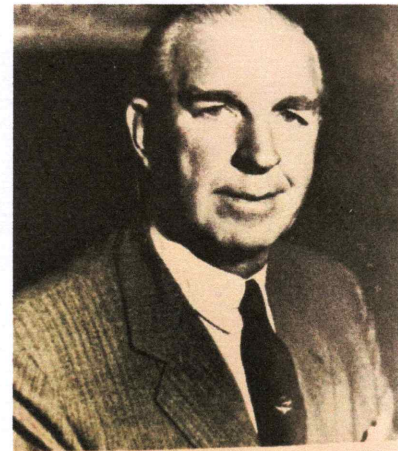
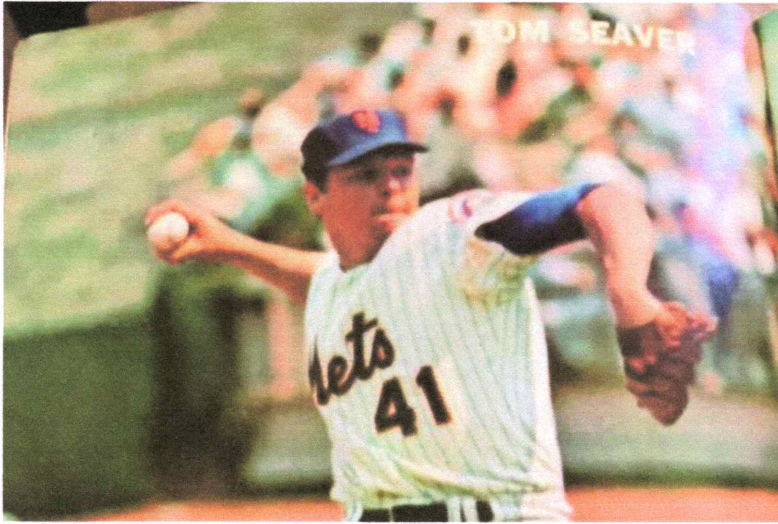
- Greg Battersby (Westport)
- Norman Bender (Woodbridge)
- Jared Broadman (Groton)
- Michael Conches (Old Lyme)
- John DaDalt (Stafford Springs)
- John Grabar (Cheshire)
- Eric Harrington (Suffield)
- Max Strubel (West Hartford)

FUTURE EVENTS

Events for Connecticut and National Events can be found online at:

www.smokyjoewood.com/events (Connecticut)

www.sabr.org/events (National)



M. DONALD GRANT
Chairman of the Board

METS GET LUCKY WITH SEAVER (THEN LOSE HIM TWICE)

By: Stan Dziurgot

Tom Seaver was called the Franchise and Tom Terrific while pitching for the New York Mets but without some fortunate circumstances he never would have pitched for them.

Branch Rickey said "Luck is the residue of design" but the Seaver situation pertained more to the Lefty Gomez quote "I'd rather be lucky than good". Seaver was pitching in college for the University of Southern California when he was drafted by the Braves in 1966 and agreed to a contract to sign with them. Unfortunately for the Braves, Major League Baseball rules prohibited an organization from signing a player whose college season had already begun. The contract was voided by Commissioner William Eckert and Seaver's services were offered to any team that would match the Braves' offer. Three teams - the Phillies, Indians and Mets matched the Braves' offer. The three teams names were put into a hat and the Mets who weren't very good at the time, were selected as the lucky organization to sign a player whose name would be connected to a team that went from last place to World Champions.

Seaver made his debut with the Mets in 1967. He pitched in the All-Star Game for the National League and at season's end was named National League Rookie of the Year. A number of key acquisitions in 1968 including a new manager in Gil Hodges changed the culture of the team from a losing team to a winning culture and a World Series Championship in 1969.

When a team wins a championship there are always memorable events. For the Mets they were a black cat walking near the opponent's dugout, a 15-5 run in August, shoe polish on a baseball and great catches in the outfield in the World Series. The most memorable moment of the regular season may have been on July 9th against the first place Chicago Cubs when Seaver retired the first 25 batters he faced. With two outs needed for a perfect game, Jim Qualls broke it up with a single with one out in the ninth inning. The game happened a week or so before Apollo 11 launched and man first set foot on the moon, Vietnam raging and

"Seaver" continued on Page 6

QUOTABLE BASEBALL

By: Jim Mizera

Play ball! Means something more than runs or pitches thudding into gloves! Remember through the summer suns, this is the game your country loves. - Grantland Rice

A baseball fan has the digestive apparatus of a billy goat. He can, and does, devour any set of diamond statistics with insatiable appetite and then nuzzles hungrily for more. - Arthur Daley

When you think of natural ballplayers, only two come into mind, Babe Ruth and Willie Mays. - Arnold Hano

SEAVER (continued from page 2)

Ted Kennedy and Chappaquiddick. In August the Mets knocked the Cubs out of their first-place orbit. They won the NL East, beat Atlanta in the NLCS and the Orioles in the World Series. Seaver won the Cy Young Award with 25 wins and finished second to Willie McCovey for NL MVP. It was a good time to be a sports fan in New York with the Jets winning the Super Bowl in January of 1969 and the Knicks winning the NBA championship in May 1970. When the Mets returned to the World Series in 1973 the Knicks won their most recent NBA title that year.

After three seasons in the Big Leagues Tom, a native of Fresno, CA, and wife Nancy bought a house in Greenwich, CT. In 1970 he struck out 19 San Diego Padres in a game including the last 10 hitters. In April of 1972 Gil Hodges died of a heart attack and Yogi Berra took over as manager. In 1973 the national headlines were about Watergate and the Mets were 8 ½ games out of first place in late June. Mets Chairman of the Board of Directors M. Donald Grant appeared in the clubhouse to give the team a pep talk. Tug McGraw coined the phrase "Ya Gotta Believe" and "noone" was sure if he was inspired by Grant's speech or was poking fun at Grant. Whatever the case, the Mets came back to win the National League East, beat the Reds in the NLCS (highlighted by Bud Harrelson's fight with Pete Rose) before losing the World Series to Oakland in seven games. Seaver now had the highest salary of any pitcher in baseball and had won 3 Cy Young Awards.

Cattfish Hunter of Oakland had been declared a free agent and signed with the Yankees. In 1975 an arbitrator declared pitcher Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally free agents, thus making the reserve clause obsolete. To the chagrin of M. Donald Grant, Seaver knew that his current contract was outmoded. Meanwhile the Yankees signed Don Gullett and outfielder Reggie Jackson to free agent contracts after the 1976 season. Joe McDonald, Mets General Manager, tried to extend Seaver's contract making it comparable to the free agent signings. He also was rumored to be looking for trade possibilities (specifically with the Reds) in case the negotiations failed. M. Donald Grant united with the New York Daily News writer Dick Young who wrote that Tom was jealous of the contract that former teammate Nolan Ryan had just signed and that Tom's wife and Nolan's wife were good friends. Tom and Young had never gotten along with Young calling Tom surly and an agent of discontent. Grant didn't make things easy by stating that big money contracts meant that ticket prices would go up so the cost would be paid by the fans.

Tom's relationship with Grant had also gone downhill with Grant a buttoned up conservative calling Tom a California liberal and an ingrate. The fact that Tom was the Mets player rep in the player's union didn't help matters. The two met at the Greenwich (CT) Country Club and Grant couldn't believe that Tom was a member. He didn't think that management (employers) should mingle with the workers (employees). Seaver described Grant as having a "plantation mentality". His celebrity status plus the fact that his father Charles played in the Walker cup may have landed Tom to be accepted into the country club.

Mostly because of the Young article, dragging Tom's wife into the negotiations, he told GM McDonald he wanted out and to trade him. On June 15, 1977 (the trading deadline back then) Tom was traded to the Reds for four young players. The Mets also traded Dave Kingman on the same day. The summer of 1977 in New York was known for Son of Sam and a NY City blackout but for Mets fans it was known as the Midnight Massacre as the Mets had traded away a pitcher who had won 3 Cy Young Awards and had struck out at least 200 batters in nine consecutive seasons. By the way, the manager of the Mets at the time was Joe Torre.

Urban Planner Robert Moses had changed the landscape of New York and now M. Donald Grant had changed the landscape of baseball in New York. The Yankees thanks to free agency won back-to-back World Series in 1977 and 1978. The Mets went into a downward spiral until the 1980's when Grant was gone and Frank Cashen was in charge with young players like Gooden and Strawberry coming up and trades for Gary Carter and Keith Hernandez.

Losing and low attendance followed the Seaver trade with Shea Stadium being referred to as Grant's Tomb. The Reds did not make the post season in 1977 and Tom started a broadcasting career that would be resumed after he retired. He worked for both ABC and NBC in the late 70's and early 80's when his team was not in the post season.

["Seaver" continued on Page 4](#)

SEAVER (continued from page 3)

He was in the ABC booth for the 1977 World Series with Keith Jackson and Howard Cosell, with Cosell taking over the microphone when Reggie Jackson hit his third home run of the game in Game 6. Tom never made the post season with the Reds but two highlights were a no-hitter in 1978 and his 3,000th strikeout (Keith Hernandez) in 1981. Following the 1982 season the Reds traded him back to the Mets for Charle Puleo and two minor leaguers. He pitched for them in 1983 and with M. Donald Grant retired and Dick Young not having the power in the press as he once did everything seemed back to normal. Tom Seaver was once again a New York Met.

In a resolution of the 1981 player's strike there is a pool of players that the teams can then select from after having free agent loses. Mets GM Frank Cashen left Seaver unprotected assuming that at age 39 no one would select him and the Mets could protect some young prospects. The Chicago White Sox, winners of the 1983 AL Western Division title lost pitcher Dennis Lamp to free agency and hoping to take another step forward selected the veteran Seaver. The White Sox didn't make the post season in 1984 or 1985 but Tom got his 300th victory on August 4, 1985. Fittingly it happened in New York, not at Shea Stadium but across town in the Bronx at Yankee Stadium. It happened on a day that the Yankees were honoring Phil Rizzuto. Seaver would work with Rizzuto in the Yankees broadcasting booth from 1989 – 1993.

Wanting to be closer to his Greenwich, CT home Tom asked for a trade and the White Sox obliged – trading him to the Boston Red Sox for Steve Lyons during the 1986 season. After an injury plagued season, he was left off the post season roster as the Red Sox won the AL pennant. He was in the dugout but inactive as the Red Sox lost to his old team the Mets in the World Series. A free agent after the season he had an aborted comeback with the Mets in 1987 before calling it a career. A year later the Mets retired his uniform number 41. He ended his career with 311 wins (198 with the Mets) and 3640 strike outs. Election to the Baseball Hall of Fame followed in 1992 with Tom receiving a then record 98.8 percent of the vote. He would move into the Mets broadcast booth from 1999-2005 and also moved back to his native California with his wife Nancy and 2 daughters and opened a winery in Calastoga. He came back for the closing of Shea Stadium in 2008 and a part of Roosevelt Avenue near the new stadium, Citi Field, was renamed 41 Tom Seaver Way. Tom had Lyme disease for almost 3 decades. In March 2019 his family said that he was retiring from the public eye after being diagnosed with dementia. There had been talk of putting a Seaver statue outside of Citi Field. The statue finally happened and was unveiled at Citi Field in April 2022 with Seaver in his drop and drive delivery with dirt on his right knee. Unfortunately, Tom never saw it – he died on August 31, 2020 of Lewy Body Dementia and Covid-19. He was 75 years old. Whether fans are old enough to have seen Tom Seaver pitch, his statue is there to celebrate the legacy of the “Franchise”.

Sources:

1. SABR Bio Project – Tom Seaver by Maxwell Kates
2. SABR Bio Project – M. Donald Grant by Rob Edelman
3. Baseballreference.com
4. Baseballalmanac.com
5. MLB.com
6. Statmuse.com
7. New York Times article 9/2/2022 “Tom Seaver Pitcher who led Mets to glory dies at 75
8. New York Times article 4/22/2022 “Tom Seaver's statue stands 10 feet tall, just like Seaver” by Jay Schreiber
9. The Power Broker – Robert Moses and the Fall of New York – 1974, Knopf Publishing

QUOTABLE BASEBALL

By: Jim Mizera

Every player, in his secret heart, wants to manage one day. Every fan, in the privacy of his mind, already does. - Leonard Koppett

The Phillies in the 1960s had shortstop Bobby Wine and second baseman Cookie Rojas, a period known as the Days of Wine and Rojas. - Tim Kurkjian

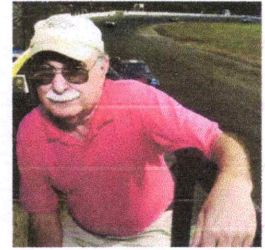
Managers tend to pick a strategy that is the least likely to fail, rather than to pick a strategy that is most efficient. - Michael Lewis

In MLB, you live one day at a time because the mental burden of facing 162 games is more than you can carry. Even Earl's (Earl Weaver) just trying to get through the weekend. - Tom Boswell

SABR PROFILE:PETE ZANARDI

By: George Pawlush

Pete Zanardi has a lifetime interest in baseball that goes back to his teenage years in the 1950s, when he enjoyed listening to stories told by fellow Chester resident Paul Hopkins, a former major league pitcher. Hopkins holds the distinction of having served up Babe Ruth's record-tying 59th homerun during the 1927 season.



Baseball was in the back of Zanardi's mind when he graduated from Boston University in 1964. "I wanted to be a political writer but after finishing college the only job that I could find was as the assistant sports editor at the *Manchester Evening News*," he remembers.

Zanardi worked briefly at the newspaper before being drafted into military service. Upon his discharge he returned to the *Evening News* for a short time before moving on to the *Hartford Times*, where he worked from 1967 to the folding of the afternoon newspaper in 1976.

During his time at the *Times*, Zanardi covered college sports during the academic year and in the summer concentrated on auto racing and the Greater Hartford Twilight Baseball League. "Covering the Twilight League was a major joy for me because the circuit included talented guys in their 20s and early 30s; some of whom had minor league experience and others who had excelled in college and high school," he says.

He particularly remembers a story as told to him by Gene Johnson, a former Twilight star and New York Giants farmhand. As Johnson recalls, "We were scheduled to play the first interracial minor-league baseball game in Louisiana. As Andre Rogers, a shortstop from the Caribbean and I got on the field, the crowd went wild. Fearing a confrontation, our manager Gene McCormick, gave everyone on our team a bat and told all of us to get back to the bus anyway you can."

In addition to the Twilight League, Zanardi covered a few Boston Red Sox games each year, especially when a Connecticut native was playing, and also Eastern League games in Waterbury and Bristol. For his coverage of Greater Hartford Twilight baseball, Zanardi was voted into the media section of the league's hall of fame.

His final newspaper destination was with the New Haven Register where he spent three years and covered several beats including the Eastern League West Haven Yankees which featured outfielder Buck Showalter, the most recent manager of the New York Mets. Zanardi was also worked with two others writers in producing a Sunday weekly feature focusing on people from Greater New Haven who had made their names in baseball. One day he received a call from a fan suggesting a person for the series. Before ending the conversation, the caller related about his involvement in SABR. This immediately piqued Zanardi's interest and he quickly joined.

According to Zanardi, joining SABR in 1979 was one of the smartest moves of his writing career. It has been an immeasurable experience that served him well after leaving the Register and starting a 20-year tenure as a freelance writer, specializing mostly in motor sports and baseball.

As a SABR member, Zanardi enjoys the camaraderie of talking baseball history and research with fellow chapter members. He has written two articles for the SABR Bio-Project - one on Chester native Paul Hopkins, who at the time of his death in 2004, at 99 years, was the oldest living former major league player and Dick Tettlebach, who as a sophomore at Yale University in 1948, played on the same team with former US President George H. W. Bush. Tettlebach later made his major league debut in 1957 with the New York Yankees. Zanardi also contributed a chapter to our 2019 book "Jeff Bagwell in Connecticut," writing about Bagwell's collegiate baseball years at the University of Hartford.

Since retiring from sports writing in 2013, Zanardi has kept busy as a volunteer, working with the Chester Historical Society on a project that will relate how the large Italian population of Chester has contributed to the life and growth of the community. He and his wife, Jane, are the parents of two grown children, Mark, a local landscaper; and Lynn, an epidemiologist, who lives in Vermont.

BASEBALL CONJECTURES & SPECULATIONS

By: Ezra Count

Answer these questions to the best of your imagination.

1. How long should new baseball stadiums last?
2. How can major league and minor league baseball increase attendance?
3. On a 1 - 100 scale, what is the Hall of Fame worthiness of each of these ballplayers?
 - a) Bill Mazeroski
 - b) Bill Madlock
 - c) Al Oliver
 - d) Enos Slaughter
 - e) Jim Bunning
 - f) Phil Rizzuto
4. True or False: Starting pitchers can pitch 225 - 250 innings per season in today's game without hurting their arms.
5. Overall, how well have Japanese baseball players done in the U.S. major leagues?
6. How much does bringing a minor league player up at the end of the major league season change his chances of making it to the majors to stay?
7. Baseball is _____% analytics and _____% aesthetics.
8. How does keeping a scorecard change the way fans see a baseball game?

WRITING OPPORTUNITIES

Baseball Biography Project

The lofty goal is to write a high-quality journal-length biography of every player who ever played in the major leagues. Nearly 6,100 biographies have been written by 500+ SABR members as of October 21, 2023. Your subject can be anyone who ever played in the major leagues and has been retired for at least 5 years, or any manager, executive, umpire, scout, or broadcaster. In fact, we welcome your ideas for any subject who impacted the history of the game — someone from the Negro Leagues, the minor leagues, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, and even Japan.

Web-site: sabr.org/bioproject

Request an assignment: Lyle Spatz at lspatz@comcast.net

SABR Games Project

The SABR Baseball Games Project is a new initiative to research and write articles on major-league and Negro League regular, postseason and All-Star Games. These game accounts will complement Retrosheet and Baseball-Reference box scores as well as BioProject essays on the players involved. All games, regardless of their historical significance, are eligible to be written up.

Web-site: sabr.org/gamesproject

Things you should know: sabr.org/content/sabr-games-project

Request an assignment: Bruce Slutsky at bruce@bruceslutsky.com

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