

EAST TENNESSEE CHAPTER OF SABR

Vol. 1, No. 1

January, February, March, 2013

A new year, a new beginning. We held our first meeting of the year at the Lawson McGhee Library, part of the Knox County library system. Highlights of the meeting were a discussion of the recent Hall of Fame selections. Not a single attendee was in complete agreement with any other member. But there was some good debate.

Bryan Steverson shared some of the research he's been doing on George Stovey, celebrated black base stealer, who in 1888 safely stole 156 times, according to *The Sun* (New York) some 20 years later.

Mark Aubrey shared some of his research on the University of Tennessee's games with Murphy Collegiate Institute of Sevierville. The Volunteers beat Murphy College, as it is sometimes referred to, in all three games. Unfortunately, Murphy College wasn't a college, but a secondary school. It is Mark's opinion that UT should note in their Record Book that the wins over Murphy College with an asterisk.



L to R - Brian Purvis, Ken Fricke, Lucas Hobbs, Stacey Wade, Mark Aubrey, Bryan Steverson.

A BOOK REVIEW – by Marshal Adesman

The Last Boy: Mickey Mantle and the End of America's Childhood, by Jane Leavy

A few years ago my wife's aunt, after a marvelous run of 96 years, passed away. My wife, as her closest living relative, had agreed to take care of burial arrangements, which included having the body shipped from Florida, where she had lived for many years, back to her hometown in Iowa, where she had requested to be buried.

The night before the funeral there was a public viewing, and our oldest son, who lives in town, came to pay his respects, and he brought his two little girls, possibly as a way to introduce them to the inevitability of death. The girls, ages 7 and 6 at the time, were wary about getting too close to the open casket but were curious about everything and asked some good questions, which we fielded cleanly (I think), until Leah, the six-year-old, asked "can she hear us?"

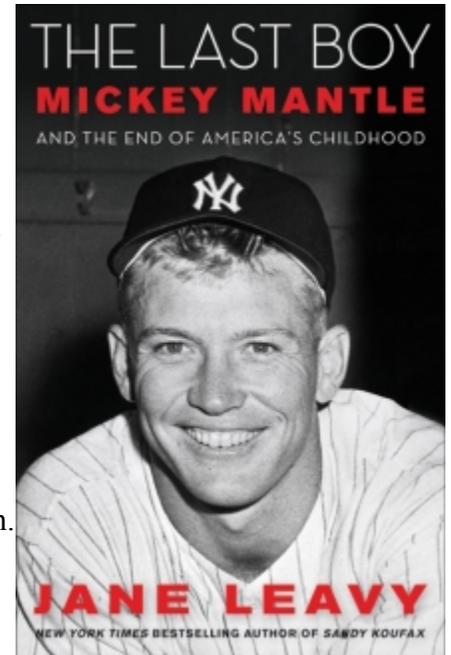
What a metaphysical inquiry, especially from someone so young! I imagine that, if any philosophers had been present, they would have had quite the time with that one, but I simply answered "well, we don't know for sure but we don't think so," and that seemed to satisfy her.

Of course, the matter of life after death, physical life, is a staple of debate in classrooms and barrooms everywhere, and we will never know the truth until someone figures out a way to tweet us from the Great Beyond. (And perhaps Steven Jobs is working on that right now!) But there is most certainly a life after death for famous people, as their lives are recounted in the numerous biographies that are published every year.

Which brings me to Jane Leavy's most recent book, The Last Boy: Mickey Mantle and the End of America's Childhood (HarperCollins, 2010). It has been better than sixteen years since The Mick left us at age 63, and as someone who lived in the public eye for more than forty years, you might think that nothing new could be learned. You would be wrong.

First, for those who may not be familiar with Ms. Leavy, let me tell you a couple of things. Most importantly, she is a brilliant writer who knows her sports – she covered baseball, tennis and the Olympics for the Washington Post, and has contributed pieces to several collections, including Best Sportswriting; Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers on Baseball; and Making Words Dance: Reflections on Red Smith, Journalism and Writing. She also wrote one of the best books of the last decade (in my opinion, at least): Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy, in which she digs deep to explain to us the man behind the myth.

Secondly, she was a Mantle fan growing up, but before you think this means she worships at the Altar of #7, let me also say that their paths crossed professionally a couple of times, one of which proved to be memorable for the wrong reasons, and this may have whetted her appetite to get at the real person, the man who lived outside the uniform.



A BOOK REVIEW – by Marshal Adesman (continued)

Mickey Charles Mantle was born to play baseball. His father and grandfather literally groomed him to use athletics as the way to escape the deadly entrapment of the Oklahoma coal mines. After just two seasons in the minors, he impressed Casey Stengel enough in spring training that he broke camp with the New York Yankees in April of 1951, at the tender age of 19. Needless to say he struggled and was sent back to Triple-A for forty games, but eventually returned to play next to Joe DiMaggio and be a member of the team that won their third consecutive World Series (in a streak that would reach five). In the off-season DiMaggio retired and Mantle inherited his centerfield spot and remained there for more than 1700 games, until his oft-injured legs demanded a shift to left field and then, finally, first base.

Ah, the injuries. Part of the reason for this decades-long fascination with Mantle is the fact that he sustained several injuries on the playing field that might have sent a lesser player into early retirement. This was after a high school bout with osteomyelitis, a bacterial infection of the bone. Fans have speculated for years what Mantle might have accomplished if he had been blessed with healthy legs. “Far more than his contemporaries in center field, Willie and The Duke,” Leavy writes, “Mantle fit the classical definition of a tragic hero – he was so gifted, so flawed, so damaged, so beautiful.” (Preface, p. xviii)

It is, though, no different than wondering how many home runs Ted Williams might have hit if he hadn't spent five years fighting in the Marine Corps during World War II and Korea: we'll simply never know.

We can also speculate what Mantle might have accomplished if he had not been such a party animal. Leavy pulls no punches when it comes to discussing his late-night drinking and carousing, activities which continued long after he had retired as an active player and been elected to baseball's Hall of Fame. It would be easy to simply dismiss Mantle as a classic alcoholic who didn't see the light until very late in life, until the writer throws us a curveball worthy of Koufax or Bert Blyleven.

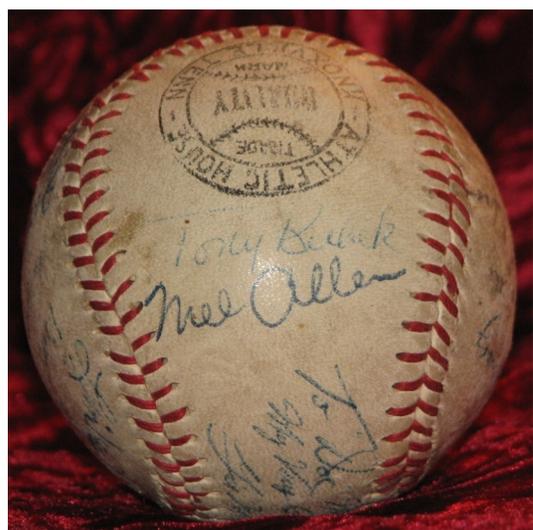
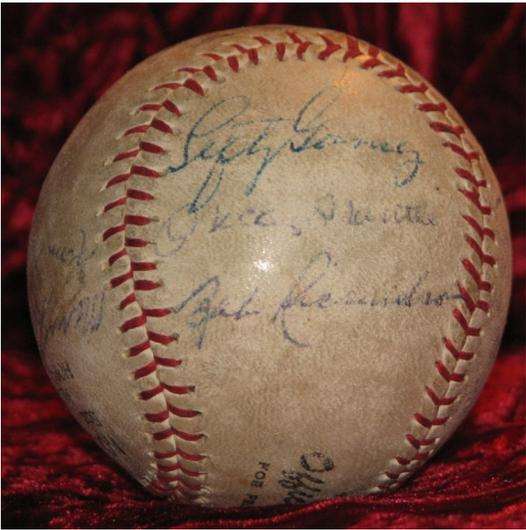
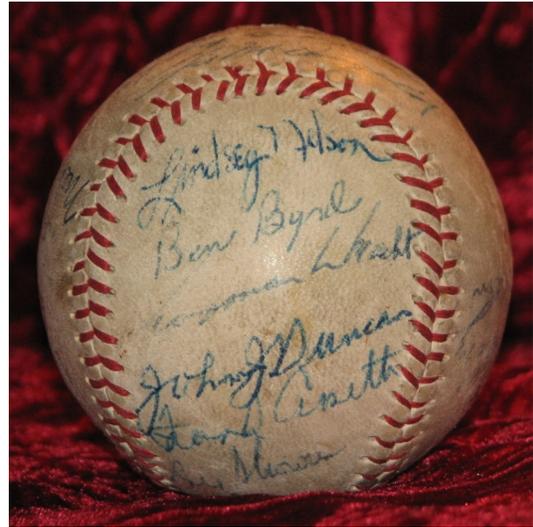
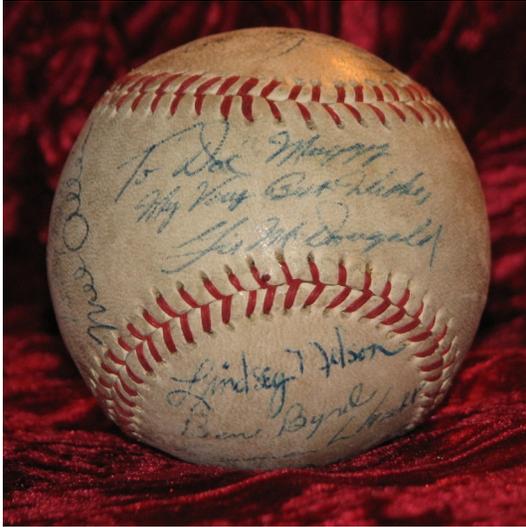
For better than three hundred pages we alternate between loving and loathing The Mick. We revel in his glories on the field and are revolted by the person he could, at times, become. We attribute it to drink, to his father, to bad influences, to never really growing up (hence the title, The Last Boy). And then Ms. Leavy gives us one more possibility, an option not heretofore mentioned, as far as I know, and the reader is jolted, lifted off the couch as if by an earthquake. Maybe she has uncovered the root cause, maybe she hasn't, but it's enough to bring this remarkable tale, and life, to a climax.

This book is marvelous for the depth of its research and the quality of its writing. As she did with Sandy Koufax, Jane Leavy goes far beyond the playing field to bring us the bittersweet tale of someone who, she concludes, “...parallels the transformation of American culture from willful innocence to knowing cynicism. To tell his story is to tell ours...” (Preface, p. xxiii)



Friend of SABR, Ed Ripley, owns a ball signed by many members of the New York Yankees.

Here's what Ed says: *I think this is a 1956 Multi Signature (Yankees) Ball Personalized to "Doc" Muggy. Signed at an exhibition game at Bill Myers Stadium in Knoxville during the off season. On an Athletic House, Knoxville, Ball. It was signed by: Mickey Mantle, Bob Richardson, Mel Allen, Lefty Gomez, Billy Martin, Gil McDougald, Norm Seibern, Tony Kubek, Ben Byrd, Frank Crosetti, Lindsey Nelson, John J. Duncan. There might be others I can't identify.*



Maybe the game was a post spring training game when the Yankees were headed north. Can anyone shed any light on the date of this game? Or who they played?

Where'd you find that? Or a quick look at online research.

There are some great online resources for baseball research, especially old newspapers. On the local level there is the [Tennessee Newspaper Digitization Project](http://www.lib.utk.edu/tndp/) (<http://www.lib.utk.edu/tndp/>), part of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. There are almost 24,700 issues from 40 papers comprising almost 99,200 pages. From their website:

The Tennessee Newspaper Digitization Project (TNDP) -- a partnership between the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and the Tennessee State Library and Archives -- is part of the National Digital Newspaper Project (NDNP). Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities in partnership with the Library of Congress, NDNP is a long-term effort to develop an Internet-based resource providing access to selected digitized historical newspapers (1836-1922) and a searchable database of descriptive information for all US newspapers (1690-present). As newspapers are digitized, the papers are made available through Chronicling America. Access is free to the public - no subscription or registration required.

A simple search for "baseball" gave me quite a few hits. I was able to easily navigate the results to find a local paper, the *Knoxville Weekly Chronicle*. The April 13, 1870 issue had an article about a proposed "match game of base ball", among other happenings on the campus of East Tennessee University. One can download a pdf, text, or grab a screenshot of the article.

Knoxville Weekly Chronicle, Volume 1, Number 2, 13 April 1870

The screenshot displays the digital interface for the Knoxville Weekly Chronicle. On the left, a table of contents lists pages 1 through 8. The main content area shows the title 'College News' under the heading '[COMMUNICATED.]'. The text of the article, dated April 9, 1870, discusses military drill at East Tennessee University and mentions a 'match game of base ball' between two clubs, 'Shoo Fly' and 'Cumberland'. The word 'base ball' is highlighted in yellow in the original image.

Issue Contents Comments (0)

Issue ← →

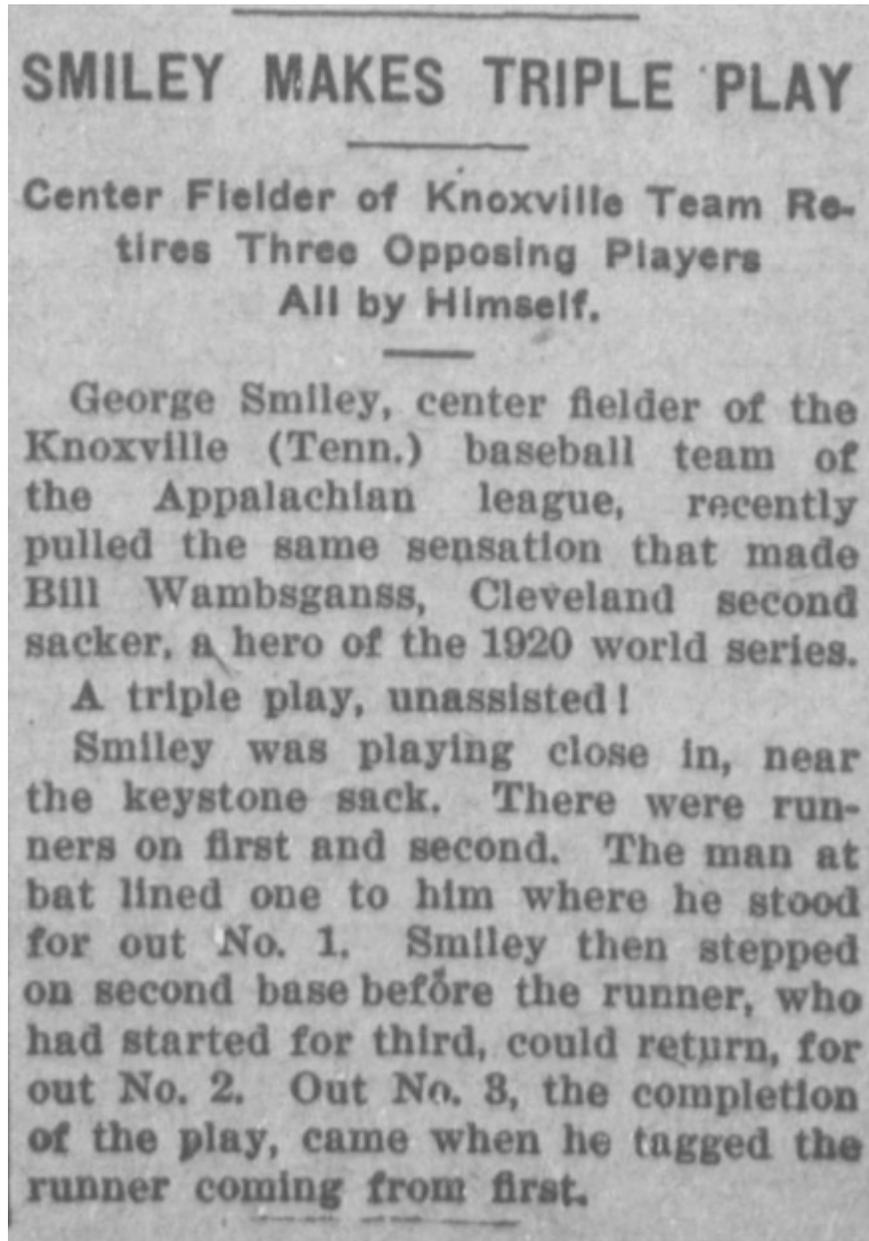
[COMMUNICATED.]
College News.

E. T. UNIVERSITY, April 9, 1870.

Editor Chronicle:—Knowing that your readers are the friends of education, it has occurred to me that they, and especially our alumni, would kindly greet a word of news from old East Tennessee University. Military drill is now the source of some excitement. In view of an election, the canvass for company officers has been a warm one. The prominent candidates for captain were Shields, of Grainger, and Charles, of Hawkins, both men of acknowledged ability, and backed by numerous and ardent supporters. The election did not come off. The captaincy was decided by lot, and the other officers were appointed, as follows: Captain, Charles; 1st Lieutenant, Liles, of Anderson; 2d Lieutenant, Craig, of Knox; Adjutant, Karns, of Knox. A company in the preparatory department will be next in order. By the first of May, all cadets are to be in uniform, and attend a picnic, at which there will be a dress parade, and a match game of base ball, between our two clubs, "Shoo Fly" and "Cumberland." Some over-zealous cadets have brought an old dismantled 12-pounder from Fort Saunders, and mounted it on College Hill. All this was done under cover of night. It has since been spiked, it is suspected by order of President Humes, who is more anxious to preserve the windowpanes than to shell the Holston river.

Where'd you find that? (continued)

On a national level, try the Library of Congress's site, Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>). Over six million pages available covering the year 1836 to 1922. Searching only Tennessee newspapers for the term "base ball" I gathered 1,912 results. I can then sort by relevance, title, or date. I decided to broaden my search. All states for the terms: Knoxville baseball. This time only 20 results were returned. The first one was The Kenna Record from Kenna, New Mexico. This article is from July 22, 1921 edition.



You can save the page as text, a pdf, or a high quality JP2 image. I just grabbed a screenshot. Another site is Google News (<http://news.google.com>) where I was able, by searching for: Knoxville baseball, found a December, 1950 article describing Branch Rickey coming to Knoxville to have lunch and a talk with Bill Meyer. Mr. Rickey wanted to let Bill know that he was being retained as manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates. Information is out there. Go and find some.

Upcoming Events:

- East Tennessee Chapter of SABR meeting on April 6, 2013 at the Main Branch of the Knox County Library.
- The Rickwood Classic on May 29, 2013 in Birmingham, AL. The Birmingham Barons will host the Tennessee Smokies in the 18th Annual Rickwood Classic.
- The 16th Annual Jerry Malloy Negro Leagues Conference will be held in Newark, NJ on June 13-15, 2013.
- The Franklin Farriers and the Nashville Maroons, clubs of the Tennessee Association of Vintage Base Ball (<http://tennesseevintagebaseball.com>), will be playing nine matches in the Franklin and Nashville area this summer.

