

# The INSIDE GAME

The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee



VOL. XVIII, NO. 2: "LET'S GET THIS LUMPY LICORICE-STAINED BALL ROLLING!"

APRIL 2018

## THE CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

by John McMurray

### *YOU KNOW ME AL*

One of the great and enduring achievements of the latter part of the Deadball Era was, in fact, literary: the 1916 publication of *You Know Me Al* by Ring Lardner. The book, which could today be categorized as a novel, was a collection of six sublime pieces of baseball fiction originally published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, beginning in 1914. Lardner's mastery in writing true-to-life ballplayer dialogue through the words of pitcher Jack Keefe, his protagonist, also offered the first major turn away from the largely positive characterizations of ballplayers which had been evident in contemporary reporting. In 1963, on the occasion of Lardner's selection as the winner of the J.G. Taylor Spink Award, Fred Lieb cited the endurance of *You Know Me Al*, saying: "These humorous stories which portrayed the American ball player of the 1910-1920 era better than anything else ever written became a part of Americana."

The subtitle of the book—"A Busher's Letters"—suggests the struggles and travails which Keefe, a pitcher battling a host of hurdles to make the Chicago White Sox, would face. All of Keefe's  
***continued on page 28***

## LEEKE'S FROM THE DUGOUTS TO THE TRENCHES WINS 2018 RITTER AWARD

by Doug Skipper

Jim Leeke's engaging and informative historical account of the impact of World War I on the world of baseball, *From the Dugouts to the Trenches: Baseball During the Great War* (University of Nebraska Press), has earned the 2018 Larry Ritter Award. The award is granted annually by the Deadball Era Committee (DEC) of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) to the author of the best book about baseball between 1901 and 1919 published during the previous calendar year. The winner's work must demonstrate original research or analysis, a fresh perspective, compelling thesis, impressive insight, accuracy, and clear, graceful prose.

Meticulously researched, engaging, and well written, *From the Dugouts to the Trenches* opens with American League President Ban Johnson's attempts to embellish Organized Baseball's patriotism and preparedness as America entered the Great War in 1917, nearly three years after it ignited in Europe. Johnson persuaded the teams in his league, and even some in the rival National League, to engage in military drill exercises, brandishing baseball bats

### ON THE INSIDE:

**SABR Baseball Research Awards** ..... page 4  
**Big League Cheating**  
by Mark Halfon ..... page 5  
**A Bedtime Baseball Story: Edd J. Roush**  
by Susan E. Dellinger ..... page 9  
**Erve Beck**  
by David Nemeč ..... page 11

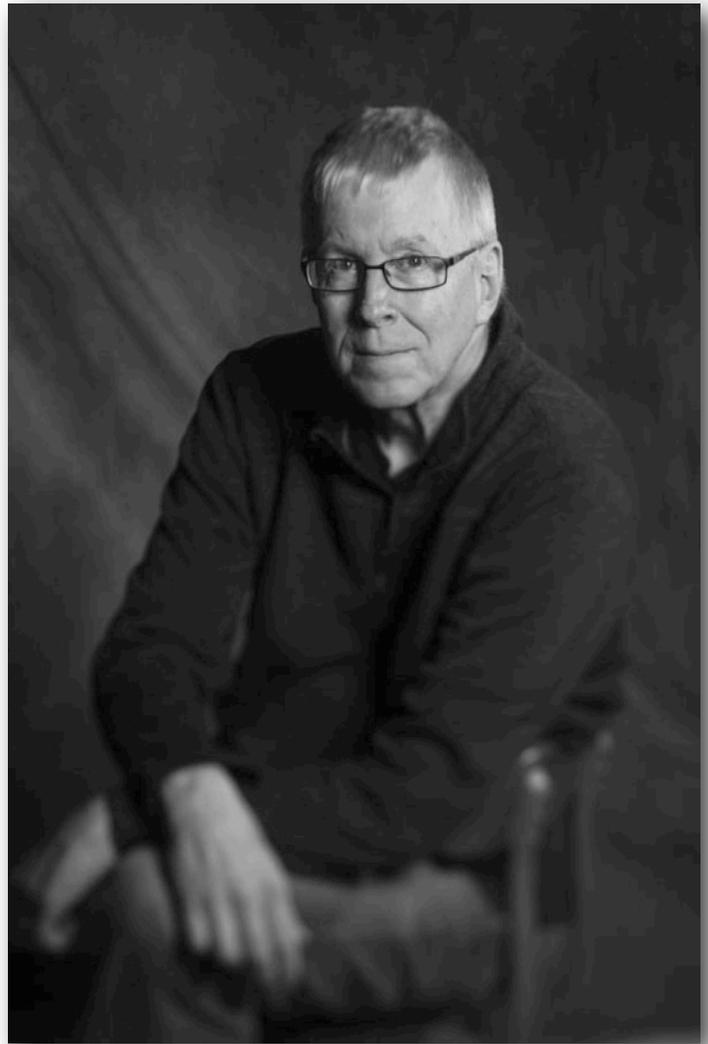
### **The Cooperstown Casebook**

reviewed by Hans Van Slooten ..... page 16  
**The Half-Game Pennant of 1908**  
reviewed by Ben Klein ..... page 17  
**Ballpark Names in the Deadball Era**  
by Ron Selter ..... page 19  
**The Black Hand Threat Against  
the 1907 Chicago Cubs:**  
by Bill Lamb ..... page 25

rather than rifles, a quaint practice not embraced by all players.

As 1917 unfolded, the effects of the war became less ceremonial and more material, as players left the major and minor leagues to serve in the military. Boston Braves catcher Hank Gowdy was among the first to enlist, while Washington Senators owner Clark Griffith initiated a fund-raising program to buy baseball gear for doughboys serving “over there” on the front lines in France. By 1918, the impact of the Great War was acutely felt by baseball. In June, Provost Marshall General Enoch Crowder, the director of the military draft, decreed that all draft-eligible young men must be employed in an occupation essential to the war effort by July 1, or be subject to the draft. Despite efforts by some owners, Organized Baseball was not exempted from the “Work or Fight” order. Although the deadline for baseball was eventually extended, players continued to enlist or were drafted, and more than 1,200 served in uniform before the conflict’s end.

Scores more went to work at steel factories and ship building dockyards, and some represented



*Jim Leeke*

their companies in industrial leagues that rivaled the major leagues. Leeke tells how team owners, including Chicago White Sox magnet Charles Comiskey, openly questioned the patriotism of the players who chose to work (and play) rather than fight, including his star slugger “Shoeless” Joe Jackson, who played for a shipyard team.

Leeke chronicles the challenges to Organized Baseball, as able-bodied young men served in the armed forces or vital service industries. Most minor leagues folded or suspended operations early in 1918, and the major leagues shortened their schedules to finish more than a month early. After the Boston Red Sox defeated the Chicago Cubs in the World Series in September, team owners released their players to serve or work. The 1919 season was in doubt and the future of Organized Baseball appeared to be in great peril.

**The**  
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But in November, with news of a war-ending armistice, owners began to make plans for the 1919 season, and players started to return to their teams. While most continued their careers with minimal interruption, Leeke tells the story of Christy Mathewson and Grover Cleveland Alexander, who were permanently impacted, and of a small number, including former New York Giants infielder Eddie Grant, who were killed in the war.

It is these individual stories of owners, players, and sportswriters who served in uniform at the battlefield and in coveralls on the home front during the Great War that makes Leeke's work so impactful. Using a variety of contemporary sources, including the military periodical *Stars and Stripes*, the U.S. Navy veteran brings these century-old stories to life.

Leeke's own story is also compelling. After his Navy experience and journalism school at Ohio State University on the GI Bill, he worked as a reporter, columnist, and sportswriter, and covered major league baseball for a suburban daily newspaper in Northern California. He now resides in Columbus, Ohio, and works in communications and advertising with clients across North America and worldwide.

*From the Dugouts to the Trenches* is Leeke's third book to be nominated for the Larry Ritter Award. *Nine Innings for the King: The Day Wartime London Stopped for Baseball, July 4, 1918* and *Ballplayers in the Great War: Newspaper Accounts of Major Leaguers in World War I Military Service* were considered in previous years. Leeke is an active SABR member and has written a number of Deadball Era biographies.

"I joined SABR in 2010, specifically to write an account of a nearly forgotten WWI ballplayer, Captain Edward "Doc" Lafitte, for the SABR BioProject," Leeke recalled. "That initial bio led to several others, which eventually led to *From the Dugouts to the Trenches*. SABR members always have been generous, helpful, and encouraging. I believe the 2018 Larry Ritter Award is less about the author than a recognition of the American and Canadian ballplayers who

served in the armed forces during the Great War. I hope soon to read more books and research on this fascinating period in baseball history. I'm tremendously honored to receive an award named for Larry Ritter, especially given the many excellent books on the Deadball Era published over the past year," Leeke said when notified of the award.

*From the Dugouts to the Trenches* edged out three other finalists: *Urban Shocker: Silent Hero of Baseball's Golden Age*, by Steve Steinberg (University of Nebraska Press); *The Half-Game Pennant of 1908: Four Teams Chase Victory in the American League*, by Charles Alexander (McFarland), and *Connie Mack's First Dynasty: The Philadelphia Athletics, 1910-1914*, by Lew Freedman (McFarland).

Conferred annually since 2002, this year's Ritter Award will be formally presented to Jim Leeke at the DEC meeting at SABR 48 in Pittsburgh. The winner was selected by the Larry Ritter Book Award Committee chaired by Doug Skipper, with members Mark Dugo, David Fleitz, Ben Klein, Craig Lammers, DEC Chairman John McMurray, and Mark Pattison.



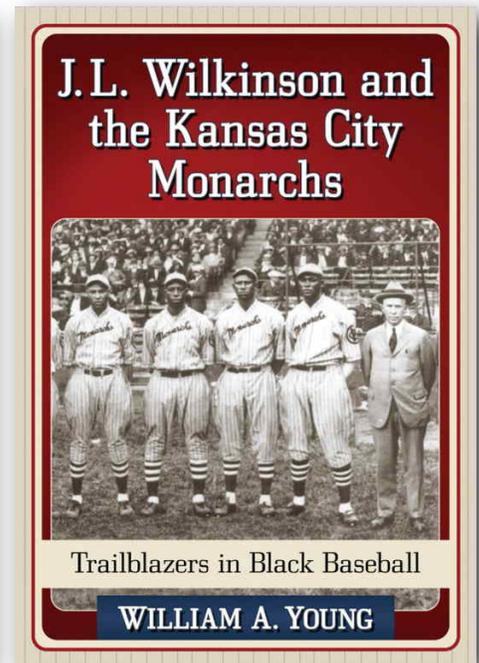
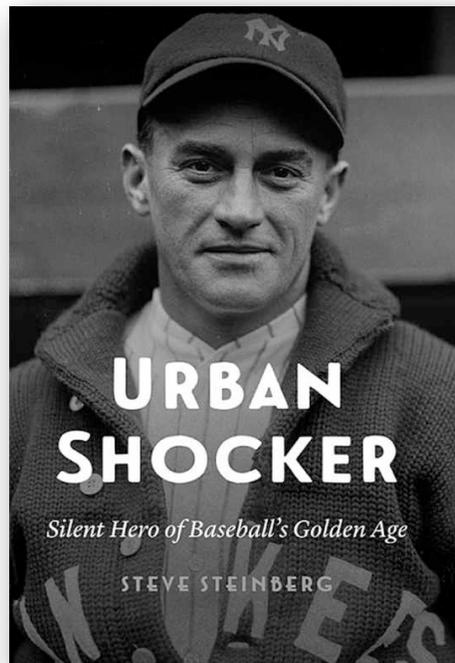
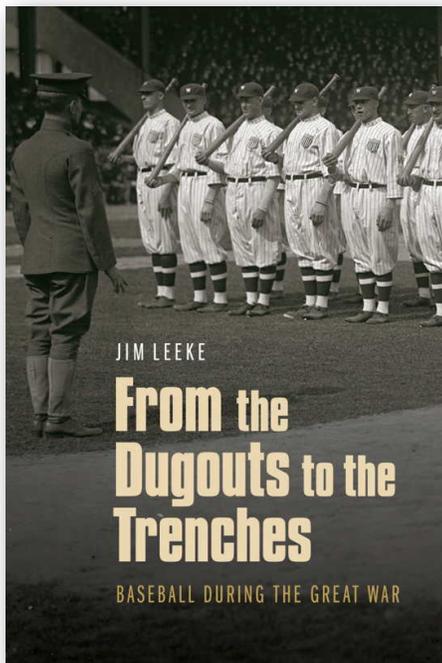
Robert Edgren 1913

## LEEKE, STEINBERG, AND YOUNG WIN 2018 SABR BASEBALL RESEARCH AWARDS

Three accomplished Deadball Era Committee members, including 2018 Larry Ritter Award winner Jim Leeke, are the recipients of the 2018 SABR Baseball Research Award. In making the announcement, selection committee chairman Bill Felber described Leeke's *From the Dugouts to the Trenches* (University of Nebraska Press) as "an illuminating and thorough examination of one of the least understood periods of baseball. Rich in context, the book provides badly needed insight into the factors shaping baseball's survival during the First World War. The work is also well-researched and well written." In a favorable review published in the December issue of *The Inside Game*, Bob Wirz recommended the work for "its historical depth during this time of great uncertainty. Devoted baseball fans will take considerable pride in understanding the depth of involvement since the sport played such a pivotal role in American society." A US Navy veteran and former journalist, Jim Leeke has written two previous books on baseball's involvement in the Great War, and is a contributor to the BioProject.

Chairman Felber described Steve Steinberg's biography of Urban Shocker as "biography as it ought to be done." Also published by the University of Nebraska Press, the book combines "attention to detail with feeling." December newsletter book reviewer Allan Wood was similarly impressed, writing that "Steinberg has delivered an informative and emphatic portrait, breathing life into the largely forgotten story of a man who threw his last major league pitch almost 90 years ago." Along with co-author Lyle Spatz, baseball historian Steve Steinberg was also a winner of the prestigious Seymour Medal in 2011 and a previous SABR Baseball Research Award in 2016. In addition, Steve has a 2009 McFarland-SABR Award to his credit. He was a finalist in this year's competition for the Larry Ritter Award.

The selection committee cited William A. Young's biography of Kansas City Monarchs club owner J.L. Wilkinson (McFarland) for "numerous revelatory nuggets, among them new insights into the relationship between the Negro Leagues and Judge Landis, and the league's role in Jackie Robinson's ascension. Most important, it highlighted the central role played by Wilkinson in maintaining the institution of Negro League baseball." The December



newsletter review of Charles R. Crawley focused on similar themes, describing the book's exposition on black baseball as being told in "both an interesting and academically responsible way." Professor emeritus of religious studies at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, Bill Wood is also the author of an authoritative bio of Deadball Era Giants catcher John "Chief" Meyers (McFarland 2012).

Formerly known as The Sporting News-SABR Baseball Research Award, the citation honors research projects completed during the previous calendar year that significantly expanded our knowledge or understanding of baseball. The work must be characterized by factual accuracy and notable insight, and be the product of original research. Chaired by Bill Felber, the award selection committee includes Tara Krieger and Larry Levine.

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## BIG LEAGUE CHEATING

by **Mark S. Halfon**

Pervasive cheating plagued baseball during the Deadball Era. Cutting bases, blocking baserunners, doctored baseballs, lob pitches, indifferent play, bribery, and fixed games found a way into every crevice of baseball. Much of the indiscretion occurred openly, regarded as "part of the game" and caused little concern, but egregious unchecked violations of baseball law threatened the very integrity of the sport. The National Commission led by Byron Bancroft "Ban" Johnson governed the national pastime but routinely ignored, covered up, and whitewashed actions that pushed the limits of honest baseball. The powers-that-be faithfully protected baseball's image at the expense of sanctioning a culture in which dishonesty flourished.

Jack Taylor's performance in the 1903 Chicago City Series provided an early opportunity for baseball's overseers to address corruption. The Chicago Cubs ace tossed a shutout in the opener followed by 10-2, 9-3, and 4-2 thrashings by the weak-hitting White Sox. Suspicious of treachery but absent any proof, Cubs president James Hart traded his star pitcher to the St. Louis Cardinals. The following season, though, compelling evidence of Taylor's guilt surfaced, and it came from his own mouth. After Cubs fans taunted him in his return to Chicago, he responded, "Why should I have won? I got \$100 from Hart for winning and I got \$500 for losing."<sup>1</sup> It sounded like a confession and Hart aired his concern, but no investigation of Taylor followed.



**Jack Taylor**

Taylor predictably continued his shenanigans in St. Louis where teammates accused him of throwing the contest of July 30, 1904 against the Pittsburgh Pirates. The National League Board of

Directors called a hearing in which Taylor claimed that drinking and gambling the night before the contest, rather than misconduct, caused his poor performance. That was good enough for the Board. On February 13, 1905, it acquitted Taylor of throwing the game but found him guilty of “misbehavior” and fined him \$300, which he refused to pay.

One month later the National Commission finally investigated Taylor's performance in the 1903 City Series. Cubs president Hart submitted affidavits from fans attesting to the pitcher's incriminating admission, but on March 17 the Commission ruled that Taylor might have been joking and exonerated him of all charges. Taylor had to be emboldened and later that season Cardinals teammates accused him of throwing two games in the St. Louis City Series. Neither the National Commission nor National League Board of Directors took action. The stage had been set for what would become a troubling pattern over the next two decades.

Baseball officials had an opportunity to condemn brazen corruption in the stretch run for the 1908 National League pennant race. On September 23, New York Giants rookie Fred “Bonehead” Merkle's failure to touch second base turned an apparent win into a tie against the hated Cubs. Giants Manager John McGraw fumed at the perceived injustice and sought redress in his club's eleven remaining games, eight against the Philadelphia Phillies and three against the Boston Doves. New York would have swept Philadelphia if not for three victories by rookie left-hander Harry Coveleski, but did sweep Boston, resulting in a deadlock between the Giants and Cubs atop the National League standings. A replay of the September 23<sup>rd</sup> contest would decide the championship. Prior to the start of the game, New York team physician Joseph “Doc” Creamer offered umpires Bill Klem and Jim Johnstone an envelope containing \$5,000 if they ensured that close calls went the way of the Giants. The umpires refused and Chicago defeated New York 4-2 to win the pennant and later the World Series, but much had been happening behind the scenes.



***Dr. Joseph M. Creamer***

One day after the Cubs victory, Phillies manager Billy Murray accused McGraw of attempting to bribe two of his pitchers while Doves manager Joe Kelley claimed McGraw bribed one of his outfielders and his shortstop. One headline read: “National League Facing Scandal: Managers of Philadelphia and Boston Clubs Openly Charge McGraw with Attempting to Bribe Players to Throw Games in Two Final Series and Demand Investigation by the Board in Control.”<sup>2</sup> The National League Board of Directors thought otherwise. Testimony from two major league managers regarding games that impacted a championship garnered no interest from this board.

Umpires Klem and Johnstone then reported Creamer to National League President Harry Pulliam, who formed a committee to investigate the alleged bribe. But in a move that betrayed

utter contempt for impartiality, Pulliam selected Giants owner and McGraw friend John T. Brush to head the investigation. Without identifying him, Brush's committee banned Creamer from all major league parks for life and never questioned McGraw.

National League authorities cemented a reputation for cunning, but baseball executive extraordinaire, founder of the American League, and charter member of the Hall of Fame Byron Bancroft "Ban" Johnson stood out as the master of deception. Johnson's role in the battle between Ty Cobb and Napoleon "Nap" Lajoie for the 1910 batting title revealed a willingness to cover-up what may have been baseball's most blatant exhibition of cheating. Cobb had a seemingly insurmountable lead heading into the final day of the season, but a doubleheader remained between Lajoie's Cleveland Naps and the St. Louis Browns. In his first at-bat, Lajoie hit a routine fly that center fielder Hub Northern "misplayed" for a triple. The Naps power hitter next legged out a grounder hit toward deeply-positioned shortstop Bobby Wallace for a single. In his final seven at-bats, Lajoie bunted toward rookie third baseman Red Corriden, who had moved to the edge of the grass in short leftfield. Much to the dismay of Browns coach Harry Howell, official scorer E. Victor Parrish ruled one of Lajoie's bunts a sacrifice, with Lajoie taking first on a Corriden fielding error, rather than a hit. So, Howell sent the Browns batboy with a note to Parrish offering him a \$40 suit if he changed his ruling from a sacrifice to a base-hit. Parrish refused, and Lajoie ended the day 8-for-8, with a sacrifice.

What happened that day sparked outrage around the country. "All St. Louis is up in arms over the deplorable spectacle" raged the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.<sup>3</sup> Never before in the history of baseball has the integrity of the game been questioned as it was by 8,000 fans this afternoon" fumed the *Washington Post*.<sup>4</sup> "It was the most farcical and unsportsmanlike exhibition ever recorded in the history of the sport" wrote the *Oakland Tribune*.<sup>5</sup> Johnson summoned Corriden and Browns manager Jack O'Connor to get their

version of what occurred. Corriden said that he followed O'Conner's instructions and did not want to get killed playing in close on Lajoie. All indications are that Corriden played his normal position in the team's four prior meetings but Johnson never asked. Instead, he praised Corriden's honesty and cleared him of misbehavior. The American League president then cancelled his meeting with mastermind O'Conner, who he said would testify "that there was no intentional wrongdoing."<sup>6</sup> Corriden's claim that O'Conner told him to play an extremely deep third base appeared deserving of inquiry, but not to Johnson.

Baseball's czar soon had another chance to probe the batting controversy after official scorer Parrish reported that the bribery attempt he received could "be substantiated by three gentlemen, the integrity of whom cannot be questioned."<sup>7</sup> Johnson never questioned Parrish or the gentlemen. Doing so would have exposed baseball's underbelly.

That same season, Johnson's treatment of Hal "The Black Prince" Chase further confirmed his skill at subterfuge. After Highlanders manager George Stallings accused Chase of fixing games, Johnson instructed club owners Frank Farrell and William Devery to fire Stallings and hire Chase, proclaiming, "Anybody who knows Hal Chase knows that he is not guilty of the accusations made against him."<sup>8</sup> Baseball's dirtiest player had the protection of baseball's most powerful figure.

Chase continued down a wayward path over the next decade but faced a formidable opponent in 1918 when playing for Cincinnati Reds manager Christy "The Christian Gentleman" Mathewson, who suspended Chase after teammates reported he offered them bribes to throw games. National League president John Heydler held a hearing on January 30, 1919 in which Reds pitchers Jimmy Ring and Mike Regan, and outfielder Greasy Neale testified against Chase, while Mathewson, still overseas on WWI military duty, supplied an affidavit. The evidence appeared overwhelming, but Heydler dismissed all charges, saying, "Chase did not take baseball or anything else seriously,

and many of the things he says in joking spirit are construed otherwise.”<sup>9</sup> Mathewson complained of a cover-up but had no recourse. Chase, meanwhile, remained unscathed during the 1919 season. Eddie Cicotte and company had to have taken notice.

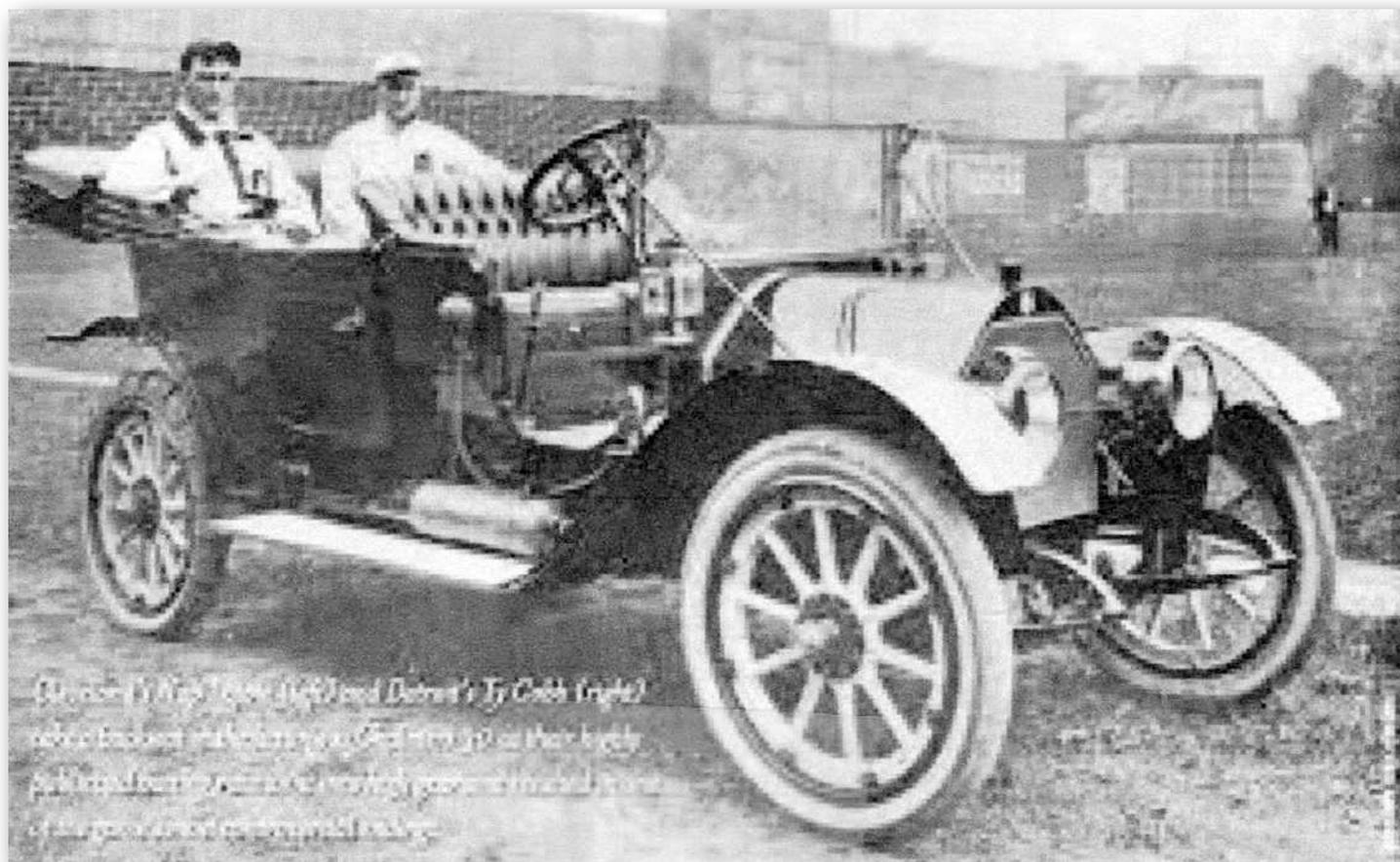
Perhaps the defining moment in Johnson’s tenure came during the 1919 World Series. Prior to Game Three, White Sox manager Kid Gleason informed owner Charles Comiskey that his club may have thrown the first two games of the Series. Comiskey no longer spoke with former friend Johnson but had Heydler relay his concerns to the American League president, which Johnson dismissed as accusations of a “beaten cur.” Baseball’s czar once again had a chance to place honor above profit but remained in character to the detriment of the good name of baseball.

*Mark S. Halfon is a professor of philosophy at Nassau Community College in New York and*

*the author of Tales from the Deadball Era: Ty Cobb, Home Run Baker, Shoeless Joe Jackson, and the Wildest Times in Baseball History (Potomac Books, 2014).*

**ENDNOTES**

- 1 Donald Dewey and Nick Acocella, *The Black Prince of Baseball: Hal Chase and the Mythology of the Game* (Toronto: Sport Classic Books, 2004), 28.
- 2 *Anaconda (Montana) Standard*, October 13, 1908.
- 3 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 10, 1910.
- 4 *Washington Post*, October 10, 1910.
- 5 *Oakland Tribune*, October 10, 1910.
- 6 *Boston Globe*, October 15, 1910.
- 7 *Boston Globe*, October 13, 1910.
- 8 Harold Seymour (and Dorothy Seymour Mills), *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 289.
- 9 *New York Times*, February 6, 1919.



***Nap Lajoie and Ty Cobb seated in 1910 Chalmers automobile***

## A BASEBALL BEDTIME STORY: EDD J ROUSH

by **Susan E. Dellinger**

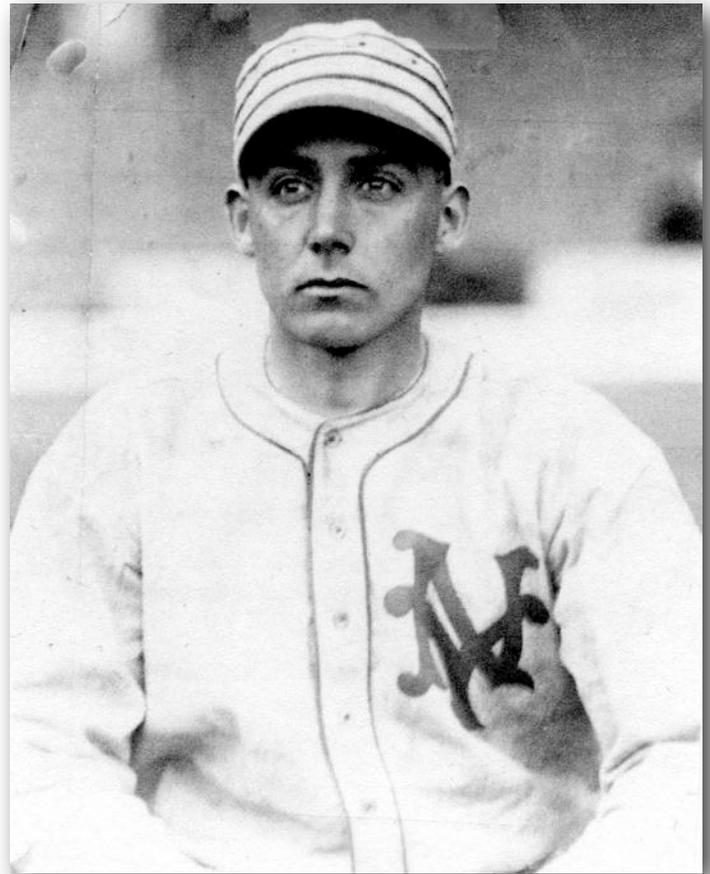
Twas' a century ago he was born  
on a farm in an late Spring storm.  
In the City of "O" he grew up  
on cow's milk from a tin cup.

His toys were a ball and a bat.  
A nail in the end held it flat.  
With major league cities far away,  
in Indiana cornfields he would play.

No TV, radio or Little League ball...  
no special diets, coaches or agents at all.  
After 4 a.m. milkings and chores in the barn,  
throws over the rooftop developed his arm.

From the milkings his arms grew strong;  
like a gazelle, his legs fast and long.  
With his girl, Essie Mae, he would dream.  
The one missing ingredient—a TEAM.

With a lefty glove bought for a buck,  
the poor boy left home to try his luck.



*A young Edd Roush*



*Edd Roush and family*

Six years and six teams later,  
his future didn't seem much better.  
He'd been a WalkOver, a Rexall, a Hen,  
a Puncher, a Hoosier and a Pepper.

He'd had a cup o' coffee with the Sox,  
but they shipped him to Lincoln in a box.  
He's spent a New York minute with McGraw  
and had to get that taste out of his craw.

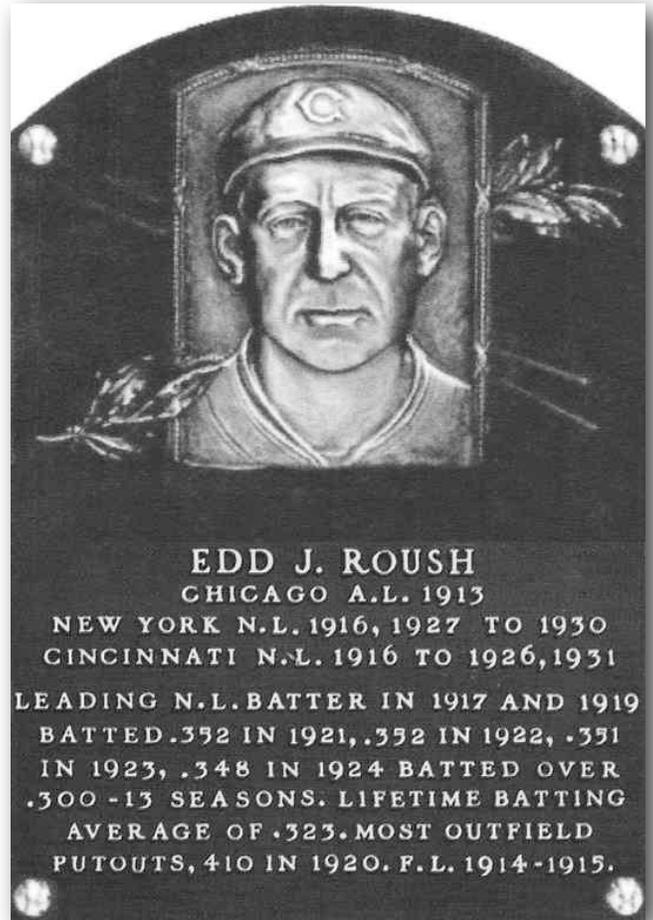
He was, as yet, an unknown commodity—  
a rookie "holdout" considered an oddity.  
In 1916, the athlete's dream seemed dead.  
But fate smiled—the best years were ahead.

On a train from Chicago in the black of night, the boy's flickering dream would again ignite. A man of great stature would take his hand and lead him to glory in a place called "Redland."

The man's name was Matty, coach and great mentor. The player was Eddie. He gardened in center. The team was the Reds in the O River park. A ragamuffin bunch, the team started to spark.

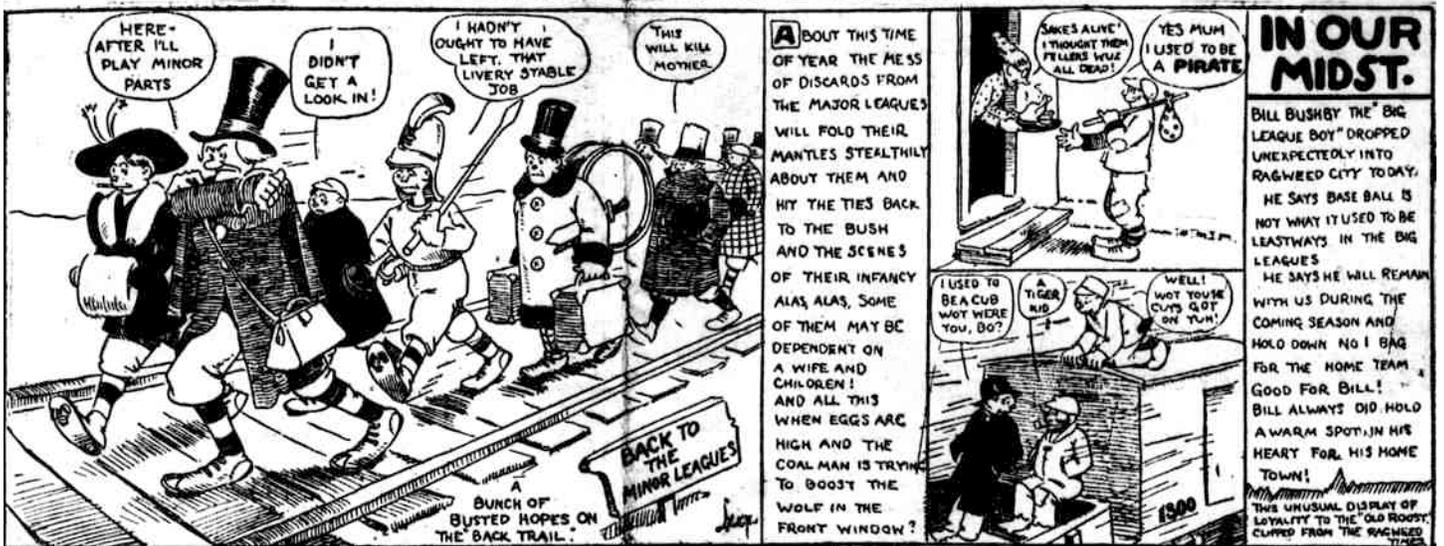
On the distant horizon, a World Series loomed. In the hands of a master, Edd's confidence bloomed. The son of the farmer had followed his dream. On the wall of The Hall, his plaque would soon gleam.

*Susan E. Dellinger is the author of Red Legs and Black Sox: Edd Roush and the Untold Story of the 1919 World Series (Emmis Books, 2006), and the granddaughter of Hall of Famer Edd Roush.*



*Hall of Fame plaque*

**THE ANNUAL PARADE ALMOST DUE**



*The Spokane Press, December 18, 1909*

# ERVIN THOMAS “ERVE” “LIZZIE” “HOME RUN DUTCH” BECK: THE PRINCE OF FORGOTTEN FIRSTS

by **David Nemeč**

On April 24, 1901, the American League’s inaugural day as a major league, Cleveland Blues second baseman Erve Beck collected the loop’s first extra-base hit when he led off the top of the ninth inning with a double off Chicago’s rookie sensation Roy Patterson, in an 8-2 loss. Even though Cleveland lost again the following day to the Windy City entry, 7-3, and eventually finished a dismal seventh, Beck added to his growing collection of Famous Historical Firsts when he banded the AL’s first home run, a solo blast off John Skopec. In addition to his numerous Famous Firsts, Beck also at one time held the professional baseball record for the most doubles in a season — 71 for Toledo in 1900. Known as one of the best bad-ball hitters of his day, the right-handed batter and thrower was especially lethal on pitches up around his neck, but his strength was countered by a stubborn inability to avoid stepping away from the plate on low curves, an observation about him that was first noted by the July 31, 1897, *The Sporting News*.

A lifelong resident of Toledo, Beck was born in that northwestern Ohio city on July, 19, 1878. His family and school history are still sketchy, but the likelihood is that he never made it through high school since his first pro game came at age 16 in 1895 for the Adrian Reformers of the Michigan State League. Among his teammates that season were two fellow pro neophytes that he would later face in the major leagues, pitcher Bill Carrick and the immortal Honus Wagner. In his debut Beck went a nifty 2-for-5 and clubbed his first of 85 home runs as a professional. Owing to the financial collapse of several teams in the eight-club loop, the Class B Michigan State League season was terminated prematurely in early September leaving Adrian alone in first place, three-and-a-half games ahead of the second place Lansing Senators.

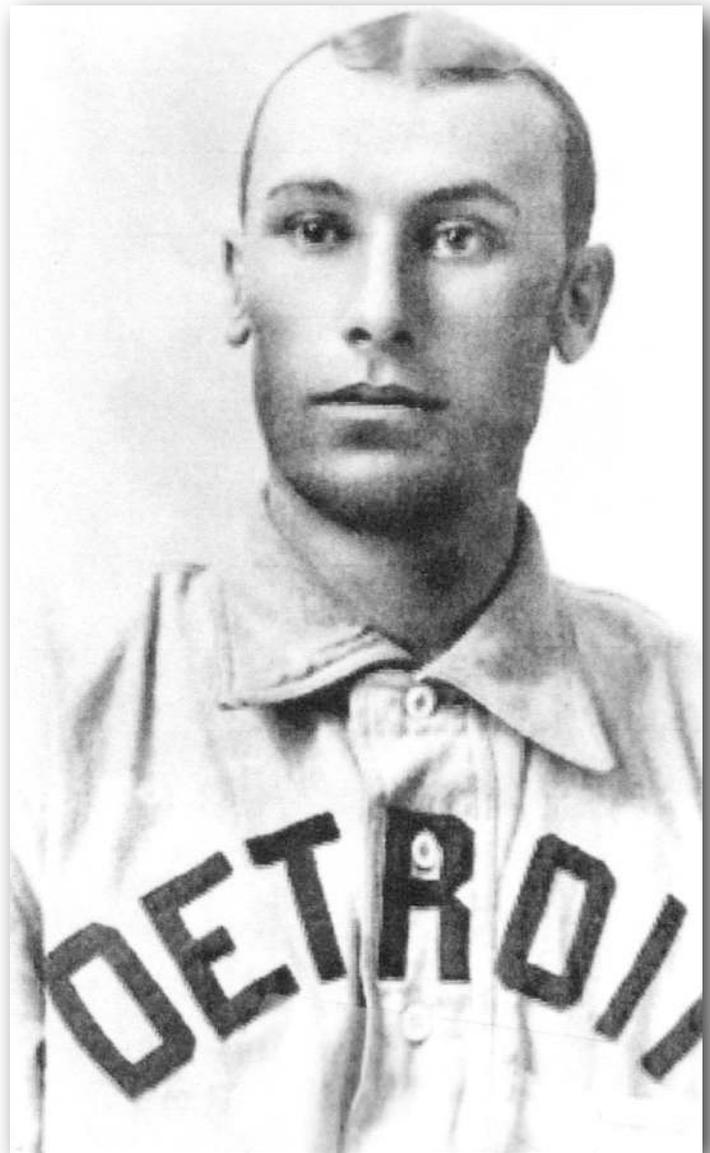
The following year Beck signed with his hometown Toledo Swamp Angels under owner-manager Charley Strobel and was quickly tagged with the nickname “Lizzie” for an unknown reason. At 5’10” and 168 pounds, he was seemingly on the slender side, but *Sporting Life* in its April 12, 1902, issue described him as: “a compactly built fellow, who seems possessed of great strength.” Though Beck’s .371 BA in 1896 not only won the Interstate League batting crown but also was instrumental in sparking Toledo to the loop pennant, perhaps because he was still just 18 at the close of the campaign, he was viewed as too young yet to play against stiffer competition and remained in Toledo the following year.

On May 9, 1897, during at game at Toledo’s Casino Park, while everyone in attendance watched in horror as a squall of wind capsized a yacht in the bay outside the ball yard, Beck leaped the outfield fence along with teammate Melville Smith. The two then grabbed a boat and rowed out in time to rescue Professor Mathias, a prominent Toledo musician and teacher, a heroic act that only amplified his mounting baseball laurels. Though Beck’s batting average slipped to .343 in 1897, he again carried Strobel’s Toledo club (now known as the Mud Hens) to a repeat Interstate League flag. In mid-September, unbeknownst to Beck, as per *The Sporting News* of September 25, 1897, Phillies manager George Stallings, in need of a second baseman, came to a Toledo game to scout Beck, only to spurn him when he got into a row with a spectator and was ejected for vile language. Stallings instead purchased the less volatile Kohly Miller, a second baseman on New Castle, a rival Interstate League team, who proved a poor choice and was released by the Phils after just three games.

Following the 1897 season, Beck was sold to the National League Cleveland Spiders along with several Toledo teammates. In January 1898 accusations flew in Midwestern sporting papers that the sale was a ruse staged by Strobel to avoid losing any of his key players in the annual draft to teams of a higher classification. Strobel vehemently denied that Toledo’s transaction with Cleveland was a sham deal and offered to

show papers to prove it but then undercut his credibility by saying, "I would rather take my men and throw them into the lake than to stoop so low as to take \$300 (the draft price for Interstate League players that year) apiece for them." In the July 23, 1898, *The Sporting News*, it finally emerged that at close of the 1897 season Toledo released the players it most wanted to retain to Cleveland, which reserved them for 1898 in return for the one Mud Hen it really wanted, pitcher George Kelb, and then released all of them but Kelb in spring of 1898 to Toledo. The clandestine arrangement between Toledo and Cleveland was similar to one that Cincinnati had with Indianapolis of the Western League, and though both *The Sporting News* and *Sporting Life* decried the practice, as did baseball writers in most major league cities, it was quasi-legal in a time before minor league teams openly became affiliates of major league clubs.

As a result, by 1898 Beck had begun to feel he was trapped in Toledo and responded by slumping to .297 as the Mud Hens lost the Interstate pennant by half a game to Bill Armour's Dayton Old Soldiers. By the end of that season, though barely out of his teens, there were also intimations that Beck was developing a serious problem with alcohol. When he rebounded in 1899, his fourth straight year with Toledo, to hit .320 and top the Interstate League in hits, home runs, total bases, and doubles, on peripatetic baseball scout Ted Sullivan's recommendation Brooklyn manager Ned Hanlon purchased the young second sacker for \$1,000 and ordered him to report to Hanlon's Superbas that year as soon as Toledo's season ended. In Beck's major league debut on September 19, 1899, at Brooklyn after the Superbas had sewn up the National League pennant, he played second base and went 0-for-4 in a 4-3 loss to Chicago's Jimmy Callahan. After an eight-game trial under Hanlon in which he hit just .167 with no extra-base hits, Beck became Toledo property again, when it developed that Brooklyn had remitted only \$150 of his purchase price and refused to pay Toledo the rest. While Strobel celebrated Beck's return to Toledo, Sullivan



***Erve Beck***

predicted that Brooklyn had made a bad mistake, as Beck would prove in the next 10 years to be one of the greatest hitters in the game.

Few disputed Sullivan when Beck won his second Interstate League batting crown in 1900 and set a new pro record for doubles with 71 that lasted until Lyman Lamb slammed 100 two-baggers for Tulsa of the Western League in 1924. Cleveland skipper Jimmy McAleer happily grabbed Beck to join with three former National League stalwarts — first baseman Candy LaChance, third baseman Bill Bradley and shortstop Frank Scheibeck — and form what promised to be one of the American League's better infields in its maiden major league season. *The Sporting News* noted

in its first issue in 1901 that upon learning that he would finally be earning big league money, Beck revealed to his fellow employees at his job that winter at the Byrnes Bowling Parlor in Toledo that he'd secretly married his sweetheart Mamie Hilsenbock about a year earlier.

Soon after the end of the 1901 season in which he hit a solid .289 and led the Blues in homers and RBIs, Beck made another, less joyful revelation: There was no way he would sign with Cleveland again after he learned that McAleer was leaving the team and he would have to play under its new manager, Bill Armour. The ill will was mutual — the two had a contentious history dating back to 1897 when Armour managed the Dayton Interstate League team — and despite Beck's strong rookie numbers, Armour, an enemy of players troubled by alcoholism, made no effort to retain him. No sooner had Beck jumped to the National League, signing with Cincinnati for \$3,000, than Armour hired Frank Bonner to replace him. Bonner became a benchwarmer when Cleveland, for legal reasons, was made the happy recipient of the Philadelphia A's star second sacker Nap Lajoie shortly after the 1902 season began. Meanwhile, Beck, after opening the season batting fifth for Cincinnati and logging the first home run in the Reds' new Palace of the Fans park on Opening Day, April 17, off Jack Taylor of the Chicago Orphans, injured his knee, cutting his range at second base. After being tried unsuccessfully both at first base and in the outfield, he was released in mid-July even though he was among the team's leading hitters at .305. *Sporting Life* reported on July 22, 1902, that his walking papers officially came the afternoon before the Reds headed off to St. Louis, but he "heard the whisper '23' when they handed him the screw number several days before and started for the East to join Grandpa (Frank) Dwyer's luckless Tigers, who have quit eating raw meat and are now down to a milk diet." On arrival Beck signed with the Detroit American League club, replacing injured rookie first baseman Pete Lepine. By the time Lepine recovered, a Motor City observer wrote: "Detroit fans have taken so kindly to Erve Beck that they would hate to see him relegated to the bench."



**Bill Armour**

Though Lepine never regained his job, Beck failed to impress Detroit brass enough to be retained despite hitting .296 for the seventh-place Tigers after falling below .300 in his major league coda on September 27, 1902, at Detroit when he played first base and went 0-for-4 in a 2-0 loss to Cleveland's Gus Dorner in the second game of a season-ending doubleheader. After working that winter in a Toledo lumberyard, he joined Shreveport in 1903 and led the Southern League in hits. Beck's .331 batting average also lead all SA players with 400 or more at-bats, although Little Rock's Jim Delahanty was officially awarded the hitting crown by dint of his .383 mark despite just 345 at-bats. Beck's bad knee continued to plague him, however, especially since speed had never been one of his assets.

Beck played for Portland of the Pacific Coast League in 1904, also acting as team captain, and then returned to the Southern League in 1905 as the first baseman and captain with New Orleans. The following season, after being released, first by New Orleans and then by Nashville, Beck played one game with the Augusta Tourists of the

SALLY League on August 6, 1906, and then abandoned pro ball although still just 28 years old. He returned to Toledo where he worked in a tavern for the remainder of his short life. Beck died at his home on 717 George Street in Toledo on December 23, 1916, after being bed-ridden for more than two months with a combination of hepatic cirrhosis and articular rheumatism. Given its insidious nature, the latter condition in all likelihood began to haunt him even as he was reaching the zenith of his baseball career and probably contributed heavily to his beginning to drown his pain in alcohol at an early age. In any case, after leaving the game he loved, Beck's athletic endeavors were limited for the remaining 10 years of his life to bowling.

Beck is best remembered for hitting the first home run in American League history. Most of his other feats are recognized only by early-day baseball researchers and mavens. One that had previously gone unnoted by all except Toledo baseball historians came to light fairly recently. In 2007 when Mike Hessman, the current reigning minor league career home run king, slammed his 68th jack in a Mud Hens uniform, Toledo sportswriters, after digging deep through their files, observed that he had just surpassed Beck, who had last worn a Toledo uniform over a century earlier, as the franchise's all-time home run leader. Hessman's Toledo record blow earned him the nickname "King Hessman," which stuck with him ever afterward.

Of even greater significance, on May 23, 1901, in a battle between two of the weaker clubs in the American League, Beck played a prominent role in what still remains the greatest ninth-inning two-out rally with the bases empty in major league history. Visiting Washington, an eventual sixth-place finisher, led Cleveland 13-5 with two down in the bottom of the ninth frame. Senators rookie southpaw Casey Patten had been operating on cruise control for most of the game after his teammates pummeled Blues starter Bill Hoffer, MLB's last rookie 30-game winner six years earlier with Baltimore, for five runs in the second inning. Patten began the final inning by retiring the first two Blues before suffering a minor blip when three straight hitters singled to

deliver Cleveland's sixth run. After Bob Wood, the next batter, was hit by a pitch to load the bases, Patten began to waver, surrendering a two-run double to shortstop Frank Scheibeck.

When centerfielder Frank Genins drove in the Blues' fourth run of the inning, reducing Washington's lead to 13-9, Senators manager Jimmy Manning had seen nearly enough. He squirmed on the bench only until Patten ran the count to 2-1 on Truck Eagan, playing second base that day in place of Beck, who was out with a minor injury, and then brought in another rookie southpaw, Watty Lee, in relief. Lee proceeded to walk Eagan and reload the bases. Cleveland manager McAleer then called Beck off the bench to pinch hit for Hoffer, who had hurled the entire game to that point. Beck promptly sent a rocket to deep left field that grazed the glove of Pop Foster before rattling off the fence and clearing the bases. Beck's double cut the margin to 13-12. Moments later right fielder Ollie Pickering drove in Beck with a seeing-eye single through the left side of the Washington infield to tie the score that prompted many in the Blues' sparse crowd of 1,250 fans to race deliriously out on the field in the mistaken belief the game was over. Once the field was finally cleared again for play, left fielder Jack McCarthy, whose innocuous two-out single had begun the rally, came to bat for the second time in the inning. Lee magnified his predicament by wild-pitching Pickering to second base. McCarthy's second single of the inning then scored Pickering with the walk-off run in a 14-13 triumph. The following day, the *Washington Post* reported the "Cleveland players were carried to their dressing rooms by the frantic crowd ... after the Garrison finish, and one that is seldom witnessed." Remarkably, despite 27 runs of combined offense, the game was finished in under two hours.

While Beck's talents would almost undoubtedly have brought him a longer stay in the major leagues were it not for his progressively worsening rheumatoid condition and the bad imprint he made on Stallings in 1897, which cost him a chance to join the Phillies at age 18 and fill a weakness at second base that lingered until Nap Lajoie nailed down the job, there were other

problems that plagued him. Never more than an adequate fielder or base runner, he became a liability everywhere but at the plate after damaging his knee in 1902. There are also other hints that he might have been something of a management issue besides his ejection on the day Stallings chose to scout him, the enmity he incurred with manager Bill Armour, and his appearance with four different teams in just two and a fraction major league seasons.

For one, Beck narrowly escaped a grievous injury shortly after leaving baseball as per the August 10, 1907, *Sporting Life*, which related: "Erve Beck, the ball player formerly with Toledo, Cleveland, Detroit and Cincinnati, and last year in the South, was shot at recently in Toledo by a man who claimed Beck threatened him. The shooter's aim was poor, and the bullet hit a bystander in the back. The wound was not serious. The principals were discharged in Police Court." The previous year, the July 7, 1906, *Augusta* (Georgia) *Chronicle* reported that Beck "created a sensation in the clubhouse" after his

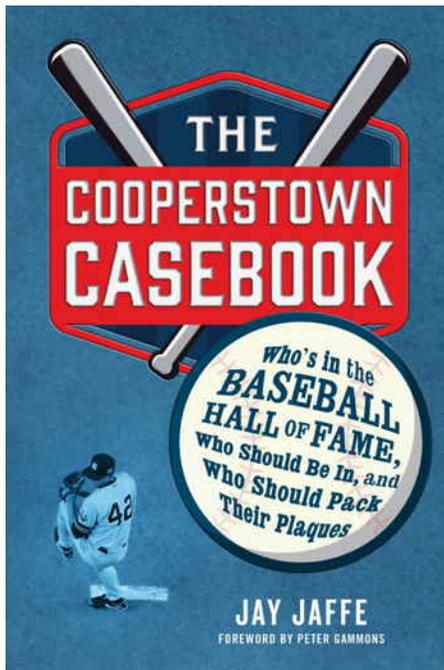
lone appearance with the Augusta club yesterday, scaring most of his teammates into fleeing the place and the team to summarily release him. The following day, while under the influence, he jumped from the third floor window of the Augusta hotel where he was residing but landed in a rose bush and was able to skip down an alley and into a vacant store front before being caught by a policeman and a Tourists teammate and hauled back to his hotel room. Reporting on the incident, *Sporting Life* assured its readers Beck was not crazy or dangerous but merely on a drunken spree. There evidently had been many of them by then. At issue is only whether his rheumatoid ailments led to his frequent bouts of overimbibing or the latter more commonly exacerbated the former.

*Baseball historian David Nemecek is a leading authority on the 19th century and early-Deadball Era game. This article is expanded from his bio of Erve Beck in Major League Player Profiles, 1871-1900, Vol. 1 (University of Nebraska Press, 2011).*

#### FRED CLARKE'S TEN "DON'TS" TO PIRATES

- (1) DON'T SMOKE CIGARETS [sic]. If you must use tobacco select a good Pittsburgh stogie or a pipe.
- (2) DON'T DRINK. Alcoholic stimulants used in moderation may do little harm; they can do no good, and they are dangerous. Better to be a teetotaler.
- (3) DON'T KEEP LATE HOURS. "Early to bed and early to rise" is still a good maxim.
- (4) DON'T GAMBLE. Worrying about an ace full that was beaten last night, or wondering how the horses are running while play is in progress, are alike distracting.
- (5) DON'T BE A GROUCH. Cheerfulness is a very desirable quality in anybody—a ball player in particular. Sharp answers and displays of temper on the field interfere with successful team work, and often cause enmities.
- (6) DON'T PROCRASTINATE. If anything interferes with reporting on time, cut it out. Tardiness sets a bad example.
- (7) DON'T BE A BACKBITER. If you have an idea that the club is not being conducted properly, tell the manager about it. If your suggestions are good, he'll appreciate them.
- (8) DON'T BE A QUITTER. If you are getting a bad break in the luck, brace yourself and fight all the harder.
- (9) DON'T SULK. If you've been called down the chances are that you deserved it, and you'll gain nothing by showing your teeth.
- (10) DON'T BAIT THE UMPIRE. Baseball law gives him the advantage over you at all times, so that it doesn't pay to oppose him. The captain will attend to any necessary kicking.

*The (Pittsburg) Gazette Times, March 9, 1912*



## THE COOPERSTOWN CASEBOOK

By Jay Jaffe

2017, Thomas Dunne Books  
[ISBN: 978-1250071217, 464  
pp. \$25.99 USD. Hardcover]

Reviewed by

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Many pages have been written about the qualifications of different players for the baseball Hall of Fame, but Jay Jaffe is one of the few to layout a framework for objectively determining which players are deserving and which are lacking. Without falling back on a dry recitation of statistics, *The Cooperstown Casebook* is an engaging read that reviews the historical standards (and lack thereof) for Hall enshrinement while strongly presenting a case for using statistics as a starting point for

determining who deserves to be in the Hall.

With *Part I: Battles and WARs*, Jaffe begins with an overview of the Hall of Fame, it's voting procedures, and the statistical foundation of his system known as JAWS, the Jaffe WAR Score System, which is essentially a player's career WAR (as determined by Baseball-Reference.com) averaged with his seven-year peak WAR. He then reviews the issues with Hall of Fame voting since its creation with a special focus on the controversies of the last 20 years: the rise of statistical analysis, ballot reform, and PEDs.

The most controversial stance that Jaffe takes is clearly his opinion on PEDs. Much ink has been spilled arguing for and against players that used those substances and whether they deserve to be in the Hall. Jaffe spells his case out clearly: that any players found or presumed to be using PEDs prior to 2004, when MLB instituted formal testing, should not have it held against them in the voting. This is because the use of PEDs was an institutional failure whose responsibility falls not just on the players but also the teams, the owners, and the media. Especially with the induction of Bud Selig in 2017, who oversaw MLB while home run totals were skyrocketing after baseball viewership slumped following the strike of 1994, excluding players suspected of PED use seems unwarranted.

In *Part II: Around the Diamond*, Jaffe takes each position individually and first discusses, in detail, the Hall of Fame case for one or two players who haven't been inducted yet at that position. And these aren't just statistical case studies. Jaffe provides the career history of each player, interesting events that happened in their careers, and the details of their Hall of Fame candidacy. The individual players that Jaffe discusses in detail are Ted Simmons, David Ortiz, Bobby Grich, Lou Whitaker, Alan Trammell (since inducted), Dick Allen, Tim Lincecum (also since inducted), Minnie Minoso, Andruw Jones, Larry Walker, Curt Schilling, Mike Mussina, and Mariano Rivera. Then, in each *The Roundup* section, he provides capsules for every player already in the Hall as well as the cases for strong future candidates. These capsules try to capture the highlights of their careers and their Hall cases. He breaks this section into the best, the merely great, and the players that probably don't deserve to be in the Hall.

*The Cooperstown Casebook* is a modern baseball book that doesn't shy away from assuming that readers have an understanding of the foundations of modern baseball analysis while also addressing most of the concerns that readers may raise. Jaffe was in the trenches of the "Stats vs. Scouts" arguments of the 2000s and

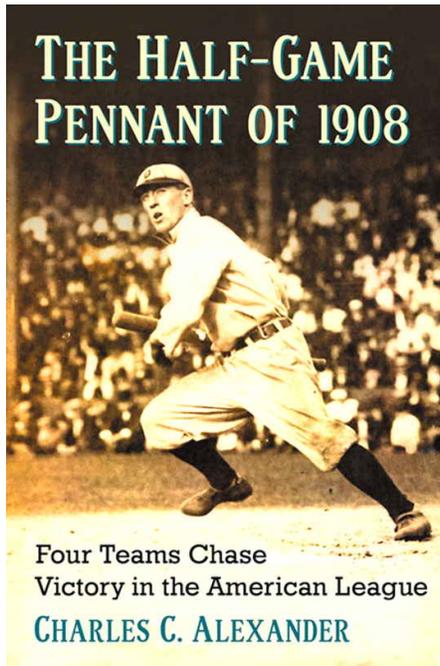
knows what complaints will arise as well as how misguided a lot of those debates were. He digs into the details of how WAR and JAWS are built and explains why they provide the best way of evaluating player value, but he also knows how to write a compelling narrative. One could read the entire book with only a basic understanding of baseball statistics and still find it very enjoyable and informative. Jaffe has spent the past 20 years studying the Hall of Fame and it shows.

While many writers have seemingly washed their hands of the Hall in recent years, Jaffe clearly has a love for the Hall, even with its flaws. His system allows for an objective view of players across eras and his writing style makes it easy to digest the numbers and to follow along with his narrative. Ultimately, *The Cooperstown Casebook* should be placed on your bookshelf alongside *The Politics of Glory* (later titled *Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame?*) by Bill James. It will serve as a reference for years to come about who does, and doesn't, belong in the Hall of Fame.

*Hans Van Slooten is a longtime SABR member from St. Paul and is currently manager of Baseball Operations for Sports Reference.*



Pete Gurwit 1914



## THE HALF-GAME PENNANT OF 1908

By Charles C. Alexander

2017, McFarland  
[ISBN: 978-1476665061, 173 pp. \$29.95 USD. Paperback]

Reviewed by  
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When baseball fans ponder a down-to-the-wire, four-team American League pennant race, their minds may be immediately inclined to think of the 1967 race won by the “Impossible Dream” Red Sox. And when baseball fans ponder the 1908 baseball season, their minds may be immediately inclined to think of Fred Merkle’s “Boner,” and the role it played in the National League pennant race between the Cubs and Giants. Charles C. Alexander’s *The Half-Game Pennant of 1908* challenges both of these inclinations by

focusing on the overlooked 1908 American League pennant race between the Detroit Tigers, Cleveland Naps, Chicago White Sox, and St. Louis Browns. In so doing, the book reanimates many of the central characters of the Dead Ball Era, and paints a tableau of American life in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Coming off their American League pennant in 1907, the 1908 Detroit Tigers were led by their colorful skipper Hughie Jennings, and anchored by Ty Cobb. Although the prognosticators of the era predicted that the Tigers most formidable rivals would come from the east in the form of the up-and-coming New York Highlanders, or perhaps Connie Mack’s Philadelphia Athletics, it was Detroit’s fellow western teams — Cleveland, Chicago, and St. Louis — that provided the greatest challenge to the Tigers. Although Cleveland featured legendary player-manager Napoleon Lajoie, Detroit’s principal rivals did not wield offenses that equaled that of the Tigers. Instead, dominant pitchers were the engines of Cleveland, Chicago, and St. Louis, and each team relied on their respective Hall-of-Fame aces: Addie Joss, Ed Walsh, and Rube Waddell.

The book begins by transporting the reader to 1908 by highlighting what would have been on the minds of American baseball fans. The Panic of 1907 and the recession

that followed would have been a primary concern. Baseball offered a much needed diversion to such stresses, and the 1908 season, with the excitement that characterized both the National and American League pennant races, served as a tonic.

The book proceeds to dive right into the day-to-day highlights of the American League. Moving sequentially from Opening Day, the book summarizes nearly every meaningful series. From rainouts to no-hitters, the reader is given a thorough recounting of the season. Beginning in late June of 1908, the four western teams had solidified their position in the first division, and from then on the book increasingly focuses on the exploits of those four contenders.

Just as the mid-summer rhythms of baseball tend to a comforting monotony, the book flirts with lulling the reader in a similar fashion with what is essentially a digest of the season. However, this lull is interrupted — and the reader's engagement sustained — with a sprinkling of interesting anecdotes featuring some of the stars of the era. For

example, Ty Cobb ditched his team for a week in the middle of August to get married. Also in August, the entire American League took a pause in a prototypical All-Star break to allow its stars to play in an exhibition on "Cy Young Day" in Boston. And the book is chock full of Rube Waddell shenanigans, such as when he went missing before a scheduled start, only to be found at a nearby race track selling hot dogs.

Just as the excitement and tension of a pennant race snaps the monotony of the mid-season, the book's treatment of the late stages of the epic 1908 season brings the book to a compelling conclusion. The book recounts how the Tigers, already under the burden of maintaining their lead and repeating as American League champions, were further stressed after Jennings and the players were arrested in late August for playing on the Sabbath — a violation of Detroit's ban on "Sunday commercial amusements." The book nicely highlights the efforts put forth by the players down the stretch — in one example, detailing the events of Friday, October 2, when

Addie Joss squared off against Ed Walsh. Walsh was magnificent, fanning fifteen and allowing four hits, but he lost the 1-0 decision to Joss, who pitched a masterful perfect game. Although Joss's perfect game allowed Cleveland to keep pace with Detroit on October 2, the Naps were unable to overtake the Tigers by October 6, the final day of the season.

*The Half-Game Pennant of 1908* is a welcome addition to the literature of baseball's Dead Ball Era. Not only does the book fill a gap in the literature by focusing on the overlooked American League pennant race, but the book leaves the reader with a vivid impression of the players who partook in the race, and of the times in which they lived.

*Ben Klein is a SABR member who has contributed to works on the 1970 Orioles and 1965 Twins. Ben serves on both the Larry Ritter Award and Ron Gabriel Award committees. He lives in Rockville, Maryland.*

### PUBLISHER ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*The Cooperstown Casebook* was published by Thomas Dunne Books and can be obtained via amazon.com or through other book retailers. *The Half-Game Pennant of 1908* is published by McFarland and can be ordered via email (info@mcfarlandpub.com) or telephone (800-253-2187). These works were generously supplied to our reviewers by their publishers and your patronage is encouraged.

Convicted of playing baseball on Sunday, Jake Daubert, first baseman for the Dodgers, was released on a suspended sentence yesterday in the court of special sessions of Brooklyn. Daubert was arrested by policemen in civilian clothes while a baseball game was in progress on Sunday, April 12.

*New London Day, May 7, 1914*

## BALLPARK NAMES IN THE DEADBALL ERA

by **Ron Selter**

This article seeks to identify the origin of each major league park name and classify the park names by category. Three obvious categories come to mind: (1) team names (e.g., Angel Stadium), (2) location (e.g., Huntington Avenue Baseball Grounds in Boston), and (3) owner's name (e.g., Ebbets Field in Brooklyn). Included are all regular use major league ballparks in the AL, NL, and FL in the Deadball Era (1901-19). Excluded are neutral site ballparks used for very few games such as Rocky Point Park in Warwick, Rhode Island, used for only one major league game in 1903. The ballparks are organized by city and the cities are listed alphabetically.

**Baltimore:** There were four ballparks in the city called Oriole Park, and these were in use by the major leagues from 1883 to 1902. The first major league ballpark in the Deadball Era in Baltimore was Oriole Park IV. This park was built for and became the home of the AL Baltimore Orioles for the 1901 and 1902 seasons. The park had the same name as the team that used it: the Orioles. Thus, the park was clearly named after the team. When the Federal League put a team in Baltimore for the 1914-1915 seasons, a new ballpark was built near the location of Oriole Park IV. This ballpark was named Terrapin Park after the FL Baltimore team, the Terrapins. The ballpark was built before the 1914 season, construction starting in January. The name Terrapin comes from a turtle found in the region. Again, the ballpark was named for the team that used it.

**Boston:** At the start of the Deadball Era, the home park of the National League Boston Braves was South End Grounds III, used by the Braves from May 1894 until August 1914. This ballpark designation came about as it was the third ballpark on the same site called South End Grounds. The ballpark was called by that name as it was located in the South End section of the city of Boston. It is clear that the name South End Grounds was based on the park's location.



***Huntington Avenue Baseball Ground***

The next major league ballpark in Boston was Huntington Avenue Baseball Grounds, built for the AL team in 1901. In 1901, the team was called the Boston Americans. It later became known as the Red Sox. The park site had previously been used for and known as an exhibition grounds located on Huntington Avenue. Plainly, the basis of the park's name was its location. The third major league ballpark in Boston was the now-famous Fenway Park. It was used by the Red Sox upon its opening in 1912, and by the NL Braves for selected games in 1913-1914, and as the Braves home park from August 1914 to August 1915. The name Fenway Park came from its location in the area adjacent to the Boston Back Bay known as the Fens. Thus, the name Fenway Park signifies its location. Boston's final Deadball Era ballpark was Braves Field. This ballpark was built for the NL Braves and opened in August 1915. Again plainly, the ballpark was named after the team that played there.

**Brooklyn:** The Washington Park III ballpark had been used by the NL Brooklyn Bridegrooms (later Dodgers) since 1898, and was in use at the start of the Deadball Era. This park was designated Washington Park III because there had been two earlier major league ballparks called Washington Park located in the same area of Brooklyn. These Washington Parks were named after the Revolutionary War site that had served as General George Washington's headquarters during the Battle of Long Island in 1776. Washington Park III was used by the NL



### ***Washington Park***

team until the end of the 1912 season, and reflected a historical location, not a then-current location. The Dodgers built a new ballpark for the 1913 season. At the time, the principal owner of the Dodgers was Charles H. Ebbets, and he named the park after himself. The Dodgers stayed in Ebbets Field until moving to Los Angeles after the 1957 season. The ballpark name was simply the club owner's name. When the Federal League began operating as a major league in 1914, the league placed a team in Brooklyn. The FL team (called the Brook-Feds or Tip-Tops) took over the old Washington Park III and made substantial changes, including moving the infield and building a new steel-and-concrete grandstand. The remodeled ballpark is known as Washington Park IV. As with Washington Park III, the name of Washington Park IV was based on the historical location of George Washington's headquarters during the Battle of Long Island in 1776.

**Buffalo:** The only Twentieth Century major league ballpark in Buffalo was the Federal League's International Fair Association Grounds, used by the Buf-Feds in 1914 and 1915. The park's name came from the former use of the site as fair grounds. Thus, this ballpark name was derived from its former use.

**Chicago:** The NL Cubs used West Side Grounds as their home park from 1893 to the end of the 1915 season. Obviously, the park's name was based to its location on the west side of Chicago. The AL Chicago White Sox began big league play in 1901, using a ballpark located on the city's south side. South Side Park III was named for its

location, as were the two earlier major league parks situated on Chicago's south side. In mid-season 1910, the White Sox moved into a brand new steel-and-concrete ballpark named Comiskey Park. This ballpark has since been labeled Comiskey Park I, as a later Sox ballpark (opened in 1991) was called Comiskey Park II for a time. The original 1910 ballpark was named for himself by White Sox club owner Charles Comiskey. For the 1914-1915 seasons, Charles Weeghman, the owner of the Federal League Chicago Whales, built a ballpark on the north side that he named Weeghman Park after himself. That ballpark name survived after the NL Cubs moved into the park in 1916, but was changed to Cubs Park three seasons later. In the mid-1920s, however, the name Wrigley Field (for the Cubs owner William Wrigley) began to be used. But during the Deadball Era years 1914-1918, the ballpark was called Weeghman Park for the FL club owner who built it.

**Cincinnati:** The first Deadball Era major league park in Cincinnati was called by the very non-original name of League Park. Because, an earlier ballpark was also called League Park, the Deadball Era ballpark was called League Park II. The park's name was based on the fact that the National League's Cincinnati team played there, not the American Association club in Cincinnati during 1884-1889 and 1891 seasons. After the 1901 season, the NL Cincinnati Reds moved into the newly built Palace of the Fans, located on the same park site as League Park. This ballpark got its name from its ornate architecture, similar to that of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The Reds used the Palace of the Fans from 1902 to 1911. A new ballpark named Redland Field was built on the same site as the prior Reds parks, and opened in 1912. The name was derived from that of the team, the Reds. In 1934, the name of the ballpark was changed to Crosley Field after the club's acquisition by a new owner, Powel Crosley Jr.

**Cleveland:** The first Deadball Era ballpark in Cleveland was League Park III. This ballparks opened in 1891, and was used by the NL Cleveland Spiders until the end of the 1899 season. After that season, the national league

contracted from 12 to eight teams, with the Cleveland Spiders being of four clubs dropped from the NL. Cleveland baseball fans were not saddened with the extinction of the NL Spiders, maybe because the 1899 Spiders set the all-time major league record with 134 losses and attendance for the SEASON was 6,000. The ballpark name reflected the fact that the National League team (and not an American Association team as had played there in 1887-88) was the occupant of the grounds. In 1900, when the AL was a minor league, Cleveland was an AL member and represented by a team called the Lake Shores. League Park III was used by the major league AL team (called the Blues starting in 1901) until the end of the 1909 season. The park continued to be called League Park, as there was only one league operating in Cleveland – the American. After the 1909 season, League Park was torn down and replaced on the same site by a steel-and-concrete structure called League Park IV. The names of both League Park III and League Park IV were based on their occupants being league teams.

**Detroit:** The Deadball Era's first major league ballpark in Detroit was Bennett Park, a small wooden ballpark located on the same park site as the later Navin Field/Briggs Stadium/Tiger Stadium. Bennett Park opened in 1896 and was used by the minor league Western League Detroit Tigers for 1896-1899 seasons. The league used the park again for the 1900 season, but changed its name to the American League in 1900 (although it was still a minor league). The ballpark was named for former Wolverines (NL Detroit) player-catcher Charlie Bennett. In the early years of the 20th Century, the playing of Sunday professional baseball was illegal in the city of Detroit. As most urban residents in America worked a six-day week, Sunday was the day of peak attendance for baseball games where it was legal. Just outside the city limits of Detroit in 1900 was Springwells Township where there was no prohibition of Sunday baseball. Hence in 1900, the Tigers had a small wooden ballpark built there just for Sunday games. This ballpark, Burns Park, was named for then-Tigers owner James D. Burns. This Sunday only ballpark was

used for only 23 major league games in 1901-1902. Bennett Park was used by the AL Tigers (except on Sundays) until the end of the 1911 season. Starting in October 1911, a new steel-and-concrete park was built on the same site but with a different orientation. This park was named Navin Field, after the Tiger's owner Frank Navin. Of the three Detroit Deadball Era major league parks, two were named after the team owner and one for a former local player.

**Indianapolis:** The Federal League had a team in Indianapolis for both the 1913 and 1914 seasons. That first year, the Federal League was only a minor league, and its Indianapolis Hoosiers played in Riverside Park. For the 1914 season, the now-major league Hoosiers used the newly-built Federal League Park. After the 1914 season, the FL Indianapolis franchise was relocated to Newark, NJ, and played the 1915 season as the Newark Peppers. The Federal League Park in Indianapolis got its name from where its Federal League team played.

**Kansas City:** The Packers, the 1914-1915 Federal League team located in Kansas City, used Gordon & Koppel Field. The club was owned by a consortium of local businessmen, with its playing grounds named for S.S. Gordon and R.M. Koppel, partners in a prosperous Kansas City clothing manufacture business and investors in the FL club. In this case, therefore, the ballpark was named for important financial backers of the team.

**Milwaukee:** The only Deadball Era major league ballpark in Milwaukee was the one used by the 1901 AL Milwaukee Brewers, the Lloyd Street Grounds. During the five previous seasons, this wooden ballpark had been used by local minor league teams. As a major league park, it was used for only one season by the Brewers before the AL transferred the Milwaukee franchise to St. Louis, where it became the Browns. The ballpark was called Lloyd Street Grounds because it was located on Lloyd Street in Milwaukee.

**Newark:** The Federal League moved the Indianapolis franchise to Newark for the 1915 season. Harrison Park, the ballpark used by the

Newark Peppers, was not actually located in the city of Newark, but in nearby Harrison, NJ, just a bridge across the Passaic River from downtown Newark. The city of Harrison, in turn, was named for US President William Henry Harrison. The name of the ballpark referred to its location in the city of Harrison.

**New York:** There were three major league parks in New York in use during the Deadball Era: Polo Grounds IV, Hilltop Park, and Polo Grounds V. The fourth of a series of ballparks called the Polo Grounds was built in 1890 for the Players League New York team, and originally named Brotherhood Park. This ballpark was located directly adjacent to and just north of Polo Grounds III (later called Manhattan Field), the ballpark built for use by the NL Giants in 1889. After the Players League folded at the end of the 1890 season, the National League and Players League clubs merged, with the surviving NL Giants moving from Polo Grounds III next door into Brotherhood Park, which then promptly became Polo Grounds IV.

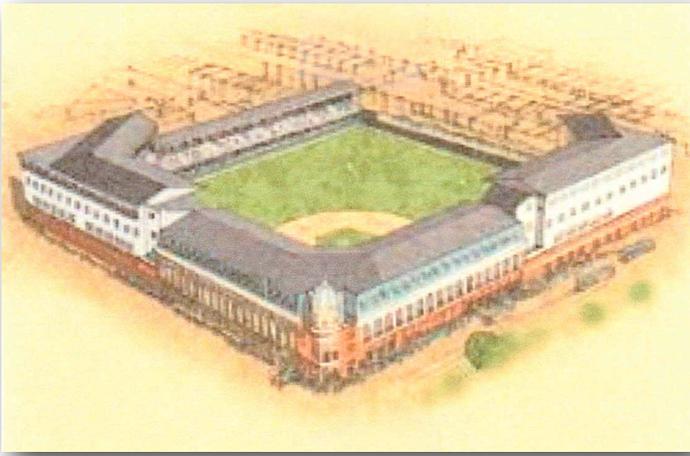
The American League moved its Baltimore franchise to New York for the 1903 season. A new ballpark was built on the west side of upper Manhattan on a bluff overlooking the Hudson River. The ballpark got the name Hilltop Park in its later years. While in use in during 1903-1912 seasons, the park was officially titled the American League Park of Greater New York. In the time period that the ballpark was in use, the term Hilltop referred to a location (as in a game at the Hilltop) not the name of the ballpark. A fire in early April 1911 destroyed the wooden grandstand and part of the RF bleachers of Polo Grounds IV. While the structure was reconstructed, the NL Giants shared Hilltop Park with the AL Highlanders/Yankees. After about six weeks, the Giants returned to their own ballpark (now known as Polo Grounds V), a rebuilt in steel-and-concrete stadium. This facility, later renamed Brush Stadium after John T. Brush, the Giants recently deceased owner, was used by the Giants, and starting with the 1913 season, by the AL Yankees until 1923. The name Brush Stadium, however, was ignored by baseball press and fans, and soon forgotten.



***Polo Grounds IV***

Why were the three ballparks (Polo Grounds III, IV, and V) called the Polo Grounds? Because when the NL Giants moved from their upper mid-town Manhattan (Polo Grounds I and II) home in mid-season 1889 to Polo Grounds III in far-north Manhattan, the team took the name Polo Grounds with it because club management wanted New York baseball fans to know that the relocated Giants were the same team that had played at Polo Grounds I & II (where on occasion in the late 1870s, the game of polo had been played). However at the three Polo Grounds sites (III, IV, and V) in far-north Manhattan, polo was never played. Thus, the name of the later Polo Grounds was a special case, and not one based on the club owner's name, the league's name, the ballparks' location, or any prior usage of these park sites. In summary, the names of two of New York's Deadball Era ballparks (Polo Grounds IV, and V) were a special case, while Hilltop Park referred to its location.

**Philadelphia:** In 1901, the NL Philadelphia Phillies were using Baker Bowl, and had been since the park opened in 1895. Before the start of the 1901 season, the AL began operation as a major league, placing a team in Philadelphia. For eight seasons (1901-1908), the Athletics used a new and quickly-built wooden ballpark called Columbia Park. Earlier, there had been a major league ballpark site named Centennial Park about five blocks away on Columbia Avenue. That old park had been used by the National Association Philadelphia Centennials in 1875. In 1903, the NL Phillies also played 16 home games



***Shibe Park***

at Columbia Park while repairs were made to Baker Bowl after the tragic collapse of a part of the stands. Shibe Park, the first of the classic ballparks, opened in April 1909. The ballpark was named after the A's owner Ben Shibe, and was the first steel-and-concrete major league ballpark. Baker Bowl was named after the Phillies owner William F. Baker. Columbia Park's name was based on its location on Columbia Avenue.

**Pittsburgh:** There were two ballparks in Pittsburgh in the Deadball Era: Exposition Park III, and Forbes Field. Exposition Park III was the third ballpark located on the same site near downtown Pittsburgh. This park was used from 1890 until mid-season 1909 by the Players League Pittsburgh Pirates (1890) and the NL Pirates (1891-1909). Exposition Park III was also later used by the FL Pittsburgh Rebels for the 1914 and 1915 seasons. Exposition Park III was named for the prior use of the park site as an exhibition grounds for traveling circuses and other expositions. Newly built Forbes Field (the first NL steel-and-concrete ballpark) opened in late June 1909, and was used by the Pirates until 1970. The ballpark was named for British general John Forbes who served during the French and Indian War (1754-1763) and built a fort about which the city of Pittsburgh grew up. Thus, Forbes Field was named for a Pittsburgh historical figure.

**St. Louis:** The first of four Deadball Era ballparks in St. Louis was Robison Field, used by the NL Cardinals since the park opened in 1893.

In addition, the park was used by the NL Cleveland Spiders for two neutral site games in 1898 and one in 1899. The NL Cardinals used Robison Field until mid-season 1920. The park was named for Frank de Haas Robison and M. Stanley Robison, the streetcar magnate brothers who owned the NL St. Louis Cardinals (and Cleveland Spiders until its liquidation following the 1899 season). The AL moved the Milwaukee franchise to St. Louis for the 1902 season and the team took the name St. Louis Browns. They Browns used a new wooden ballpark called Sportsman's Park II. There had been an earlier Sportsman's Park at a different location in the same part of the city of St. Louis. After the 1908 season, the Browns built what is considered a new ballpark (Sportsman's III) with a steel-and-concrete grandstand in a different corner of the park site and retained the old wooden grandstand of Sportsman's II to use as LF bleachers in the new park. The name Sportsman's Park derived from newspaper usage, likely related to the fact the parks were used for sports. In 1914, the Federal League began operating as a major league with a franchise in St. Louis. The FL team, the St. Louis Terriers, played their 1914-1915 games in a new ballpark called Handlan's Park. That ballpark was named for Terriers owner Alexander H. Handlan.

**Washington DC:** There were three Deadball Era major league parks in the city of Washington. The first park used by the new AL team in 1901 (the Washington Senators) was American League Park I. The name simply identified the park where the AL played. In the 1890s both the major league AA and the NL had teams in Washington, but that NL franchise was dropped after the 1899 season when the NL contracted from 12 to eight teams. After the 1903 season, the stands at AL Park I were dismantled and the lumber used to build stands at a new ballpark (AL Park II) located on the site of Boundary Field, a NL ballpark that had last been used in 1899. Again, the American League Park II name meant the place the AL played their games. During spring training in 1911, AL Park II burned down. The site was then used to build a

new ballpark, Griffith Stadium, put into use starting with the 1911 season. This ballpark was named for the AL Senators owner Clark Griffith

**Summary:** Nearly half (17 out of 40) of the Deadball Era ballpark names were based on either the parks' location or a club owner's name. The two Polo Grounds situated in far-north Manhattan are special case as their names refer to a former usage at a prior location. The least typical name was Cincinnati's Palace of the Fans where the name reflected the style of the ballpark's construction. The two parks called Sportsman's Parks in St. Louis seem named that due solely to the use of that name by sportswriters. Surprisingly, none of the parks in the Deadball Era used the name of the city where they were located. The complete tabulation is shown below:

<u>Name Category</u>	<u>No. Ballparks</u>
Team Owner	9
Location	8
League	6
Team	4
Prior Use	2
Historical Location	2
Newspaper Usage	2
Special Case	2
Former Local Player	1
Park Owner	1
Park Site Owner	1
Historical Figure	1
Park Style	1

*Ron Selter is the author of Ballparks of the Deadball Era: A Comprehensive Study of Their Dimensions, Configurations and Effects on Batting, 1901-1919 (McFarland), the 2009 winner of both the Larry Ritter Award and the SABR Baseball Research Award.*

Larry Miller, the young Brooklyn outfielder, is a son of Sebastian Miller, the famous professional strongman. Larry is a chip of the old block.

*Williams (Arizona) News, June 1, 1916*



*The Tacoma Times, December 8, 1910, contributed by Tom Flynn*

Baseball

To-morrow

July 4

---

Washington League Park

Two Games

10:30 A. M.    3:30 P. M.

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Nebraska Indians

-vs-

Champion  
Duesseldorfers

---

Al Whittridge formerly of St. Paul, is a member of the Duesseldorfers and will pitch against the Indians.

*Indianapolis News, July 3, 1906, contributed by Tom Flynn*

## THE BLACK HAND THREAT AGAINST THE 1907 CHICAGO CUBS

by **Bill Lamb**

By mid-August 1907, the defending champion Chicago Cubs were cruising toward another National League pennant. Their nearest pursuers, the New York Giants and Pittsburgh Pirates, were a distant 14½ games behind in the standings and had little hope of catching the frontrunners. But when the Cubs arrived at the Polo Grounds on August 17 to begin a four-game set against the Giants, an altogether different kind of threat awaited them: a menacing letter addressed to Cubs playing manager Frank Chance. “If you not let the Giants from the first place this year, Gang of Black Hands will see you after,” the missive warned, awkwardly. “We will use bomb on your players team on train wreck. ... New York must have Pennant this year from your club. We are cranky on Giants.”<sup>1</sup> At the bottom, the letter contained the drawing of a “bony hand with clawlike fingers” and the ominous valediction “Yours Truly, Black Hands.”<sup>2</sup>

In a peculiar way, the letter’s arrival drew together two entities approaching the zenith of their power and influence on contemporary society. In the world of professional baseball, the Chicago Cubs were tops, the epitome of Deadball Era playing competence. Bereft of a .300 hitter in the lineup, the club combined defensive prowess and an extraordinary pitching staff to dominate the opposition. In August 1907, the Cubs were in the midst of a three-year run that would yield a scintillating 322-136 (.703) overall log, good for three consecutive NL crowns and World Series triumphs in 1907 and 1908.<sup>3</sup> As the Cubs climbed the heights in baseball, a sinister preeminence in the world of crime was being attained by the Black Hand, the scourge of the Italian immigrant community in New York City and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the criminal organizations that would spring from Prohibition and, later, the formal crime families founded in the 1930s, the Black Hand did not possess any central leadership or hierarchical structure. Rather, Black Hand-style criminality was



*Typical Black Hand Image*

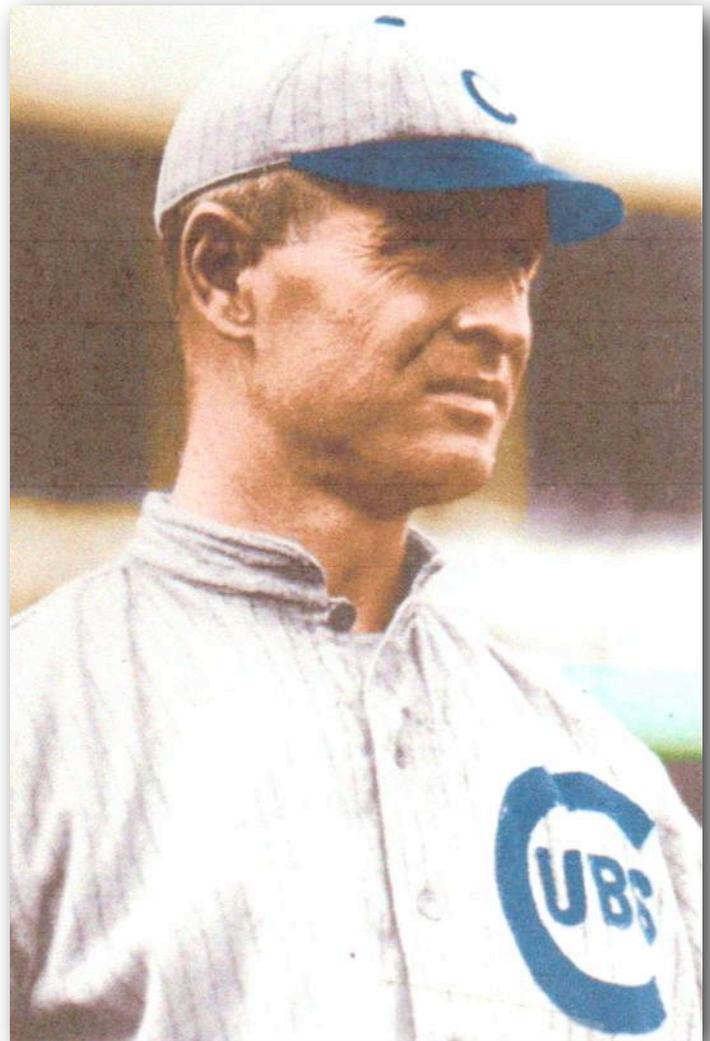
uncoordinated, “practiced by individuals, small groups of criminals and sometimes more established larger gangs, that all worked without need of knowledge of other Black Handers. It was a phenomenon born of imported criminals and the unique immigrant situation at the time.”<sup>5</sup>

By 1907, extortion by means of the kidnapping (and sometimes murder) of children, bombings, and other crimes of violence had garnered the Black Hand a fearsome reputation. But with few exceptions, the victims of Black Hand predation were prosperous shopkeepers, community bankers, and successful small business owners living among recently-arrived Italian immigrants. Black Handers were not given to targeting outsiders.<sup>6</sup> And the objective of their crimes was a simple one – the obtaining of money from the victim. The Black Hand was not involved in sports betting, and had no visible interest in the outcome of National League pennant races or, indeed, American professional athletic contests of any kind.

While the Chicago Cubs were not a likely Black Hand target, the threat upon his club presumably gave manager Chance at least

momentary pause. Should he take the letter's content seriously or treat it as a prank? The letter's pseudo-politeness and pidgin English were consistent with Black Hand missives previously published in the press, and the "bony hand" drawing at the bottom was a familiar feature of such mailings. But these characteristics of Black Hand letters were common public knowledge, and the letter delivered to Chance could have come from anyone. Although Chance himself did not render explicit judgment on the bona fides of the missive, ensuing events suggested that he shared the view that the letter was bogus, its language deliberately fractured to impart the misimpression that "the writer was an illiterate foreigner"<sup>7</sup> bent on extortion. Whatever the case, Chance elected to disclose the letter to the press and then sent his charges out to face the Giants.

The series opener on Saturday August 17 featured a renewal of the game's foremost mound rivalry: Christy Mathewson of the Giants versus the Cubs' Mordecai (Three Finger) Brown. In the top of the first, Jimmy Sheckard got things going for Chicago with a one-out single. Cubs bats then went silent, as Mathewson quickly put out the side and then pitched hitless ball for the next seven innings. The Giants, meanwhile, scratched out a pair of runs off Brown. Singles by Spike Shannon and Cy Seymour sandwiched around a sacrifice plated a Giants tally in the bottom of the first. Two frames later, Shannon scored the second New York run on a Johnny Evers throwing miscue. With Mathewson staked to a 2-0 lead and seemingly untouchable, many of the 20,000 spectators originally in attendance had already made their exit when the Cubs suddenly struck back in the ninth. With one out, Artie Hofman recorded only the Cubs' second base-hit, a single to center. Frank Schulte's double to left promptly tallied Hofman. Manager Chance then brought in Schulte with a double over third base to knot the score, 2-2. Thereafter, the clubs battled into overtime until a long Johnny Kling drive into the left field stands gave the Cubs a 3-2 victory in 12 innings.



**Frank Chance**

Press accounts of the game focused on the dominance of Mathewson's hurling and the unexpected ninth-inning Cubs rally. Certain newspapers accompanied reportage of game action with mention of the *Black Hands* letter received beforehand by Cubs manager Chance, with the *Chicago Tribune* (and later *Sporting Life*) re-printing its text verbatim. But most newspapers ignored the letter.<sup>8</sup> Nor did New York police pay it any heed.<sup>9</sup> In the end, most observers dismissed the letter as a fraud, a nasty hoax most likely concocted by some malevolent Giants fan, and no further notice was taken of it.<sup>10</sup> In the ensuing days, the Giants and Cubs resumed their series. By Wednesday evening, a split of the four games left the two clubs exactly where they had started, with New York still 14½ games behind league-leading Chicago. That gap

would only widen as the 1907 season wore on, uninterrupted, by the way, by any kind of bombing, train wreck, or other violent retribution against the Cubs from the Black Hands letter writer and/or confederates. At the close, New York (82-61) had slid all the way to fourth-place, 25½ games behind the NL champion Chicago Cubs (107-45). The following year, the Cubs three-peated as league champions before beginning a gradual slide back to the pack. The Black Hand, meanwhile, continued its reign of urban terror for another half-dozen years before tougher criminal sentencing, restrictive immigration policy, and the rise of more sophisticated underworld organizations rendered it an anachronism.

*Retired NJ prosecutor Bill Lamb is the editor of The Inside Game. This article was inspired by mention of the Cubs-Giants game in Stephan Talty, The Black Hand: The Epic War Between a Brilliant Detective and the Deadliest Secret Society in American History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).*

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 From the letter as published in the *Chicago Tribune*, August 18, 1907, and *Sporting Life*, August 24, 1907, mangled syntax and language verbatim.
- 2 Ibid.

" Manager Chance, Chicago National League of the Baseball Club—Dear Sir: Your club must not get again Pennant this year 1907 from the New York, and you will let New York club will have Pennant championship of the year 1907 from your club. Your club are too coward, but ' Poor Giants.'

" If you not let the Giants from the first place this year, Gang of Black Hands will see you after, will help you for your life. Look out for danger life. We will use bomb on your players team on train wreck and we will follow your team travelling.

" No fear to tell Policemen, but my powerful than them.

" New York club must have the Pennant this year from your club.

" We are cranky on Giants.

" Yours truly, BLACK HANDS."

#### *Text of Letter*

- 3 The Cubs were upset by the AL champion Chicago White Sox in 1906, but defeated the Detroit Tigers handily in the 1907 and 1908 World Series.
- 4 For more, see Stephan Talty, *The Black Hand: The Epic War Between a Brilliant Detective and the Deadliest Secret Society in American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).
- 5 Per The Black Hand – Gang Rule, at [www.gangrule.com/gangs/the-black-hand](http://www.gangrule.com/gangs/the-black-hand).
- 6 In April 1908, a Black Hand threat upon the family of John D. Rockefeller was publicly scorned by the oil company billionaire. Nevertheless, Rockefeller took the private precaution of dismissing the Italian immigrants who worked on the grounds of his Pocantico Hills estate in Westchester County, replacing them with non-Italians. See Talty, 158-159.
- 7 Per commentary in the *Boston Herald, Chicago Tribune, Grand Rapids (Michigan) Press*, August 18, 1907, and other dailies that published the literal text of the letter.
- 8 See e.g. the *New York Times*, August 18, 1907.
- 9 The NYPD Italian Squad headed by the relentless and incorruptible Lt. Joseph Petrosino was dedicated to combating the Black Hand but appears to have devoted no attention whatsoever to the threat to the Cubs reposed in the "Black Hands" letter to Chance.
- 10 Per Talty, 145.

#### COLLEGES BURY HATCHET

WASHINGTON—The strained athletic relations between Georgetown and Harvard, so far as football is concerned, have been overcome and arrangements have been completed for two games of baseball to be played on Georgetown field next spring, probably during Easter week. Since the spring of 1902, when Georgetown administered a 2 to 1 defeat to the crimson, and when their captain, Sam Apperious, refused to play on the same field with the Harvard negro star, Matthews, relations between the two universities have not been over cordial. However, Manager Hughes Spalding of Georgetown, and Manager D. S. Brigham, of Harvard, have overcome the breach.

*The Salt Lake Tribune, October 13, 1907*

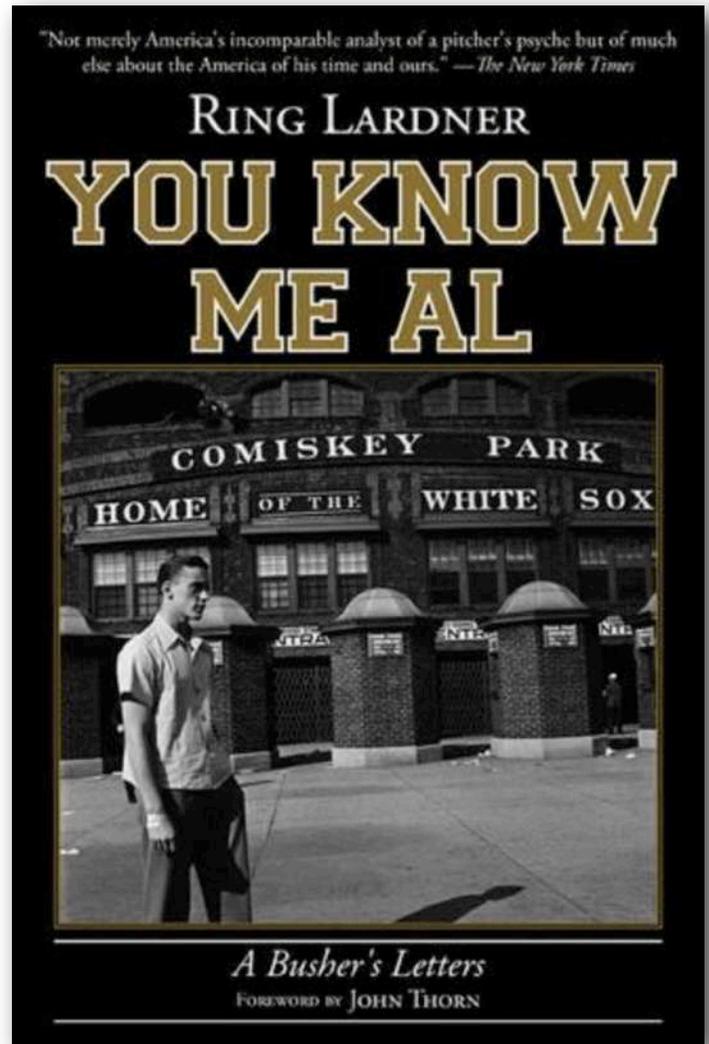
## CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

*continued from page 1*

letters are to his steadfast friend, Al Blanchard, back home in Bedford, Indiana. Keefe, though, is himself a caricature, failing into hole after hole of his own making while buoyed by an overconfidence and optimism that never leaves him. The book's title derives from a phrase which Keefe repeats, always without a comma, usually at some critical moment of cluelessness. Uncompromisingly cocky but somehow eminently endearing, the Sisyphean Keefe climbs to the majors, gets sent back down, and makes it back — all while convinced he is an underappreciated phenom on the verge of superstardom.

Lardner is well-known as a master satirist, and his reputation as a writer would still be unblemished even if *You Know Me Al* had never been written. A 1985 *Chicago Tribune* tribute said in the title that he “was the man who made the ‘20s roar with laughter.” His skill as a humorist was so well-developed that it is easy to forget Lardner's work as a more traditional baseball reporter, including for *The Sporting News* and the *Chicago Tribune*, the latter of which allowed him to form personal relationships with the White Sox players. James T. Farrell, writing in *The New York Times* in 1944, suggests that *caveat emptor* rules in any Lardner story, whether in social relationships or even in matters of the heart. “Thus the satire of Ring Lardner reveals the working out of the mechanisms of American civilization.”

It is the words themselves that Lardner uses in Keefe's letters which make all the difference. Broken grammar and improperly spelled words abound (“not saw” for “not seen” or “She made me sware (*sic*)...”, etc.). Hardly a paragraph exists without some incorrect phrasing or a misconjugated verb. But to get lost in the imperfections is to miss the work's essential rhythm, where notorious syntax almost becomes a language unto itself. As Donald Elder, in his 1956 biography *Ring Lardner*, offers with respect to *You Know Me Al*: “It is easy to write



English badly, but very hard to make a literary style out of bad English.”

In *20th Century American Sportswriters*, Pete Cava notes that “Lardner listened carefully to the spoken language and tried to replicate its rhythms in print. (He once explained to H.L. Mencken how ballplayers who invariably dropped the *g* sound on the ends of the words *nothin* and *somethin* almost invariably enunciated the words *everything* and *anything*.) He often wrote ungrammatical, first-person narratives that reflected the clumsy speech of an unlettered midwesterner.”

Keefe's letter writing, while haphazard, is also readily understandable. A case in point, from Keefe's third letter in the book (December 16), where he negotiates with owner Charles Comiskey following his promotion to the major leagues:

DEAR FRIEND AL: Well I will be home in a couple of days now but I wanted to write you and let you know how I come out with Comiskey. I signed my contract yesterday afternoon. He is a great old fellow Al and no wonder everybody likes him. He was Young man will you have a drink? But I was to smart and wouldn't take nothing. He was You was with Terre Haute? I says Yes I was. He says Doyle told me you were pretty wild. I says Oh no I got good control. He says well do you want to sign? I says Yes if I get my figure. He asks What is my figure and I says three thousand dollars per annum. He says Don't you want the office furniture too? Then he says I thought you was a young ballplayer and I didn't know you wanted to buy my park.

Elder notes that Lardner “was not the first to use the language of uneducated people. Mark Twain had done it in *Huckleberry Finn*. Nor was he the first to use slang; George Ade had written *Fables in Slang*: “There was nothing new either about stories in letter form. The medium and the devices were commonplace enough; all Ring brought to them was genius.” Perhaps most critically, suggests Elder, “no imitator ever matched [the authenticity] of Lardner’s dialogue,” which included the “vocabulary of his ballplayers” and also “the rhythm of their speech; their hesitations and outbursts of fluency suggest the workings of their minds. He also solved the difficult problem of writing dialogue and also keeping it readable. His style is the perfect instrument.”

Through *You Know Me Al*, in particular, Lardner spoke both truth about what ballplayers — at least in his experience — were really like and portrayed them, through Keefe, as flawed, insecure, confused, and sometimes despondent. If Christy Mathewson was the so-called ‘golden god of baseball’s true golden age,’ Keefe was his diametric opposite, an overconfident, barely-capable fringe ballplayer with dubious morals, a superabundance of relationship problems, and flaws aplenty — yet whose personality and vigor make the reader root for him anyway. Such a characterization was the seldom-seen other side



**Ring Lardner**

of the coin, but for all of Keefe’s inner turmoil, it is hard to pull away from following him.

One of the fun parts of *You Know Me Al* is the many mentions of contemporary Deadball Era figures. As Keefe is sold to the Chicago Americans to begin the book, he boldly compares himself to Ed Walsh. Most contemporary players of prominence, from Napoleon Lajoie to Shoeless Joe Jackson, receive some mention. Keefe (cluelessly) mentions how Ty Cobb and Sam Crawford would be intimidated by his pitching prowess.

Lardner himself was coy in offering which real ballplayer was the inspiration for the fictional Keefe; Lardner claimed in a 1925 introduction to the book that readers had guessed everyone from Noah to Bucky Harris and that “the original of Jack Keefe is not a ballplayer at all, but Jane Addams of Hull House, a former Follies girl.” Less tongue-in-cheek observers believe that

Walsh, albeit infinitely more stellar on the mound, provided a direct inspiration. Cava wrote: “Keefe was probably a composite of several ballplayers, including not only the illiterate ‘Jake Gibbs,’ (an alias used by Lardner in his writings for an anonymous player from the 1908 White Sox, who apparently served as one inspiration for Keefe) for a model player’ but also Joe Benz and Ping Bodie. The “boastful” Benz, Cava notes, was also an Indiana native, like Keefe, while Bodie was “brash and garrulous.” John Thorn, in his 2014 introduction to the book, cites Walsh, himself a farmboy, as the primary inspiration for Keefe, while also suggesting that there are some traces in Keefe of Rube Waddell — “a dope and a braggart,” just like Lardner’s creation.

Lardner, perhaps most influentially, changed the way baseball players were perceived, by portraying them fully while not treating them with scorn or derision. Cava, citing noted Lardner scholar Matthew J. Brucoli, emphasizes that baseball fiction up to that point was “hero-worship stuff for boys.” Brucoli points out that Lardner’s work had an “inside quality” to it, even by offering a portrayal of something as simple as Keefe getting on the wrong side of manager Kid Gleason by ordering too much food. Even while being more clueless than evil and usually endeavoring to do the right thing, Keefe is, according to baseball historian John Thorn, “No wiser on the last page than the first, he is an enduring American anti-hero.”

Keefe, too, outgrew the pages of *You Know Me Al* and became a figure of his own, one who has far outlived the Deadball Era. “He has the traits of many ballplayers in him, but he is a created character and he is also a type,” said Elder. “People did not know that he was an American type before they read Ring Lardner, any more that it had occurred to them that Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer were types of American boys until Mark Twain had created them. After that everyone recognized them. ”And it is through this type that Keefe today endures, with hints of him in generations to follow. Says Elder: “Ring’s ball player became so familiar that Heywood Broun would write, ‘Dizzy Dean wasn’t born; Ring Lardner invented him.’”

The most unique thing invented in recent years is a device intended for pitchers to use during the winter and at other times when not actively engaged in the game. It is a wooden baseball that has been sawed in two. A strong spiral spring holds two of the ends together within a quarter of an inch of each other. The other two ends are an inch apart and a bit of leather keeps these ends from flying wider apart.

By grasping the ball in the hand and exerting a pressure on it the ball may be made to close up. The moment the pressure is released it flies open again to its regular designed shape. The object of the inventor is to give pitchers a ball that may be used to strengthen the muscles of the fingers, hand and arm. It is on the plan of physical culture. By taking this ball, which is the regulation league size, and going through the motions used to pitch curves or drops, and squeezing the ball each time the arm is moved forward, the muscles used in pitching are worked and strengthened.

The device was patented this year by a ball player named Aydelott, who hails from Marion, Ind. Aydelott has used this ball for some years and he was always in prime condition to go in and pitch without any regular practice. He has had no “sore” or “glass” arm, and never has had to bother to limber up before a game. His record in pitching games against strong nines shows the ball has been of great benefit to him. He has an exceptionally large number of strikeouts to his credit, and when playing against teams composed of the best talent in the State of Indiana he has shut them out repeatedly. In two seasons he has lost but one game in which he pitched.

*Editor’s note: Inventor Jacob S. Aydelott played in the American Association with 1884 Indianapolis and 1886 Philadelphia. The device’s patent is US749147A.*

*The St. Louis Republic, April 24, 1904*

## GAMES AND BIOPROJECT

Recent Deadball entries in the Games Project include accounts of a 19-inning contest won by the American Association Milwaukee Brewers; the opening of Navin Field in Detroit; and the lone major league appearance of Moonlight Graham. Meanwhile, the BioProject has posted profiles of Bruno Betzel, Lena Blackburne, Leon Cadore, Pop Lloyd, Nick Cullop, Milt Stock, Gene Krapp, Dike Varney, and Bill Phillips which should prove of interest to newsletter readers. As always, we urge you to check out these offerings if you have not already done so.

## NEW COBB BIO AVAILABLE

The latest biography of Ty Cobb is an e-book recently published by DEC member Norm Coleman. The author describes *The Life and Times of Ty Cobb* as written in an "entertaining, humorous, historical, and narrative style, with many anecdotes and stories about Ty not previously told." The e-book is priced at \$7.75, and can be ordered through Pay Pal via the website [www.ncoleman.info](http://www.ncoleman.info).

## NEW DEADBALL ERA COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*The Inside Game* is pleased to welcome to the committee the following SABR members who have expressed interest in the Deadball Era:

**Matt Aber**  
**Michael Ackerman**  
**George Altemose**  
**Mike Wayne Anderson**  
**James Arciold**  
**William Atkison**  
**Pamela Bakker**  
**Jon Barnes**  
**Edward Bartholemey**  
**Michael Bass**  
**John Bauer**  
**Thomas Baxter**  
**Joey Beretta**  
**Jay Berman**  
**Thomas Biblewski**  
**David Biesel**  
**Dennis Bingham**  
**Richard Bogovich**  
**Stephen Boren**  
**Maurice Bouchard**  
**Thomas Bourke**  
**Jeffrey Bozovsky**  
**Richard Bozzone**  
**Ryan Brecker**  
**Bill Brewster**  
**Skylar Browning**  
**Timothy Brownlee**

**Anthony Bush**  
**James Carmody**  
**Dennis Christensen**  
**Norm Coleman**  
**Ron Coleman**  
**Jorge Colon-Delgado**  
**Peter Cottrell**  
**Scott Richard Crawford**  
**Strom Dahlgren**  
**Aaron Davis**  
**John DiFonzo**  
**Robert Drudy**  
**Steve Dunn**  
**Jim Dunphy**  
**Adam Foldes**  
**Robert Frazier**  
**John Freyer**  
**Eddie Frierson**  
**Sam Gazdziak**  
**Douglas Gladstone**  
**Stephen Greyser**  
**Joe Guzzardi**  
**Paul Hallaman**  
**Paul Hofmann**  
**David Lee Jensen**  
**William Johnson**  
**Adam Klinker**

**Sean Kolodziej**  
**Mary Kusmirek**  
**Kevin Larkin**  
**Shawn Manning**  
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**Brian O'Malley**  
**Dwight Oxley**  
**Don Petersen**  
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**Gary Rosenthal**  
**Ruth Sadler**  
**Ken Samelson**  
**Blake Sherry**  
**Keith Sherwood**  
**David Smolnycki**  
**Jayson Stark**  
**Allen Tait**  
**Wayne Towers**  
**Alain Usereau**  
**Kenny Wagner**  
**Michael Philip Wagner**  
**John Wickline**  
**Kris Willis**  
**Ira Frank Wolins**  
**Mike Worley**  
**Michael Zolno**

We look forward to their active participation in committee endeavors. These new committee members, as well as our newsletter contributors, can be contacted via the SABR directory.