

THE SQUIBBER

November 2022

The Squibber is the SABR Bob Davids Chapter's newsletter. It is emailed to chapter members roughly every three months. If you're a Bob Davids chapter member and are not getting The Squibber, please check that your email address and chapter affiliations listed on the SABR site are correct. Please send submissions for future editions to Squibber editor Walt Cherniak at wcherniakjr@aol.com.

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TRIVIA QUESTION: The Washington Senators' first two No. 1 picks in the amateur draft were from the same state. Which state was it? Also, do you know what other distinction they share? (See answer below).

CHAPTER MEETING: Save the Date! -- By Mark Pattison

Mark Saturday, January 28, 2023, on your calendars. It will be the date for our next Bob Davids Chapter annual meeting. We are not yet at liberty to say just where, but the chapter board is very close to sealing the deal at a downtown D.C. venue -- with underground parking and within a couple of blocks from Metro -- that allows us the ability to conduct a fully hybrid meeting.

You would have the option to either attend in person or stay home and watch it online, while speakers would also be able to address the gathering from a remote location if not in person.

However, no in-person meeting would be complete without the annual used book raffle, which is returning for the first time since our 2020 chapter meeting.

We are anticipating a full-day event as in past years, with both speakers and research presentations. Look elsewhere in this issue of the Squibber if you wish to submit a proposal for a research paper.

We believe there's pent-up demand for not only books but research presentations and the camaraderie that's been a highlight of the Bob Davids Chapter's meetings for decades.

Look for emails from the chapter as more details unfold.

**PRESENT RESEARCH AT THE CHAPTER MEETING:
Submit your Abstract Here, By Mark Pattison**

Interested in presenting your research at the 2023 SABR Day in Washington? Submit your abstract here. The annual chapter meeting will be held Saturday, Jan. 28. Oral presentations are expected to follow the SABR convention model: Twenty minutes for the presentation, followed by a five-minute question-and-answer period. Let us know what kinds of visual support you expect to have to augment your presentation.

Here is a link to the form used for submitting research presentations:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdEL42nW-jfqg7UMaEIF3_1kDO7v-ioJqxTX8XytR0tp5QbQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

TALKIN' BASEBALL: Upcoming Speaker Announced, By Pete Cottrell

The next "Talkin' Baseball" meeting, hosted by the SABR Bob Davids Chapter in Washington D.C. and surrounding communities in Maryland and Virginia, will be held via Zoom at 9 a.m. Eastern on Saturday, Dec. 3, 2022. All baseball fans are welcome to attend. The Zoom link is below.

This month, our speaker will be SABR member Justin McKinney, who will talk about his recently released book *Baseball's Union Association: The Short, Strange Life of a 19th Century Major League*. The title of his presentation is "The Washington Nationals in the Union Association and Beyond."

About the book and author:

Justin McKinney is a baseball researcher and archivist living in Canada. He is the author of the recently released *Baseball's Union Association: The Short, Strange Life of a 19th Century Major League*. He has written articles on 19th century and early 20th century baseball for the SABR Research Journal, *Base Ball: Journal of the Early Game*, and the SABR Biography Project, and writes about deceased baseball players at medium.com/@BaseballObscura

His newest book tells the story of the short-lived Union Association. Hastily formed in 1883 as a rival, third major league, the Union Association upset the moguls of the baseball world and disrupted the status quo. Backed by Henry V. Lucas, an impetuous 26-year-old millionaire from St. Louis, the UA existed for one chaotic season in 1884.

This first full-length history of the Union Association tells the captivating story of the league's brief and enigmatic existence. Lucas recruited a wild mix of disgruntled stars, misfits, crooks, has-beens, drunks, and the occasional spectator, along with a future star or two. The result was a bizarre experiment that sowed both turmoil and hope before fading into oblivion.

The meeting will start promptly at 9 a.m. Eastern. If you log on early and the meeting hasn't started, just stay on and it will begin momentarily.

For questions about this meeting, contact Peter Cottrell (pbcottrell@gmail.com).

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81610847540?pwd=b09rSXIMUGFpcTJNNUdDMG1BY2VUZz09>

BIG TRAIN BASE BALL AND HOLIDAY AUCTION: Kurkjian, Smith Featured, By Bill Hickman

On a blustery Sunday afternoon, November 13, the Bethesda Big Train held its annual Base Ball and Holiday Auction with more than 100 fans in the Davis Family Picnic Pavilion at Shirley Povich Field. The Randy Schools Outstanding Service Awards were bestowed on six individuals and groups.

Manager Sal Colangelo gave a report including his encounter in Houston at the recent World Series with pitcher Hunter Brown, who played for the Big Train in 2018.

Hunter expressed his strong gratitude for everything Sal had done for him while he was a pitcher with Big Train. He had begun that summer with a top pitching speed of 88 m.p.h. and finished with a maximum velocity of 92 mph.

The first featured speaker of the afternoon was Tim Kurkjian, ESPN baseball analyst and recent recipient of the BBWAA Career Excellence Award at the Baseball Hall of Fame. He was asked what local fans should think when they see former Nats and Orioles players like Bryce Harper, Trea Turner, Juan Soto, Kyle Schwarber and Trey Mancini in the playoffs. Tim's response was that the Orioles are on their way back. So are the Nats.

The Astros lost several stars to free agency and such, but showed they could recover and do well. Tim was asked how the Phillies turned around so well in the last four months in the season after they got off to such an unremarkable start. Tim's answer was that the Phils got a new manager, Rob Thomson. The players love him.

The Phillies are a tough, fearless, resilient team. The Philly crowd was amazing toward the end of the season. Tim was then asked what he thought of the playoff format and whether there were too many teams included.

His answer was that major league baseball embraced the chaos. It was one of the best postseasons ever. "It only happens this way in baseball. Every night, if you go to the game, you might see something you've not seen before."

Then Tim was asked about Game Three of the World Series, right after Bryce Harper hit his homer. It appeared Harper was saying something to Alex Bohm. Are those players so good that a little information lets them follow up with another homer? When Dusty Baker sees that kind of conversation in the opposing dugout, what can he do?

Tim said it was great gamesmanship. They spotted something in the Astros pitcher's delivery. These guys are supposed to do that. For the next question, it was noted that there were no U.S.-born Black players on either team in the World Series. Do major league executives see this as a major problem? How can they solve it? Tim replied that they are trying. Everyone is worried. The Aaron Judges are showing that going into baseball is a good thing.

Then Tim was asked to give the audience the outlook for 2023. Specifically, how will the new rule on defensive shifts change the game? Tim started by saying that it's time to bring in a pitch clock. Regarding the shift, he pondered that maybe there will be fewer strikeouts with batters no longer needing to loft balls over the extra infielders stacked up in a shift.

Then Tim was asked about his weekend in Cooperstown when he received his award. He said it was the most overwhelming weekend in his life. "I'm sitting on the bus that's going from the hotel to the Hall of Fame and there is one empty seat next to me. Sandy Koufax gets on the bus, comes up and asks: 'May I sit next to you?' So I get to spend 15 minutes with Sandy Koufax. I also spent some wonderful time on the veranda of the hotel with the best all-time catcher, Johnny Bench."

Finally, Tim was asked to share thoughts on Janet Marie Smith's contributions to baseball. He replied that she is the best at her trade. Camden Yards is still the best of all the retro ballparks.

Smith is a Major League Baseball executive, architect and urban planner. She has been involved in the development and planning for renovations of ballparks in Baltimore, Los Angeles, Boston and Atlanta. She has also done work in minor league parks. She is most well known for her work on the design of Camden Yards. The first question to her was how she processes the accolades that come to her for her accomplishments. Her response was in the context of Camden Yards, and she said, "We were trying to build the best ballpark for Baltimore. We weren't trying to change the world."

She was then asked about the steps along the way that helped build her skills. She said it would come down to basically two: 1. Going to public schools all the way through her education, which enabled her to understand the broader world; and 2. Traveling enough to understand cities.

Asked about the Camden Yards battle between using steel trusses vs. concrete, she explained that her preference for steel stemmed from the fact that the old ballparks were steel with lattice structures. In the end, the Orioles agreed to share the cost of repainting the steel every seven years with the Maryland Stadium Authority. Asked to name the major lessons from working in different places, she said it was important to observe the rule of listening to your community. Also, you don't want the design to become a formula.

Asked for her thoughts on the changes to left field in Camden Yards, she said her immediate reaction was to think of Frank Robinson and how much thought he had put into the dimensions of Camden Yards when it was planned originally. "It's hard to see it changed from that," she said.

As a final comment, she wanted to make clear she enjoys her smaller projects, like minor league ballparks and spring training facilities such as the one she worked on for the Orioles in Sarasota, as much as the major ones.

In addition to enjoying the information provided by our special guests, everyone (and that includes you, dear Squibber readers) was encouraged to participate in the Big Train online auction, which may be found at: <https://one.bidpal.net/2022btbaseballandholidayauction1/welcome>

In addition, Big Train announced the establishment of a David Povich Improvement Fund, named after the son of Shirley Povich and brother of Maury Povich. David died this August. The fund will be used to sustain the quality of Povich Field long into the future. contributions are welcome and may be made via the following portion of the Big Train website: <https://bigtrain.givingfuel.com/2022-big-train-baseball-and-holiday-auction>

MYTHS OF BASEBALL: True or False?, By Charles Pavitt

This is the 16th in a series of Squibber contributions intended to report the truth (as far as present data suggests) of the tidbits of “conventional wisdom” that TV analysts and comparable pundits make without any true knowledge about their validity.

Myth #46 – Good base stealers distract pitchers, resulting in better batter performance.

This myth could well be true. James Click, well before becoming Astros GM, examined batting performance in 2004 with a baserunner on first but not second, in other words a potential base stealing situation.

He divided baserunners into three approximately equal groups based on how often they attempted to steal in those situations. When doing this work, one must correct for the fact that batters perform better with baserunners in the first place, which James did.

It turned out that for the first group – baserunners who attempted steals at least 8 percent of the time they got on first – batting average for those batting rose 25 points over what it would have been without those baserunners.

For the second group – baserunners who attempted to steal between 2.8 and 9 percent of their times on first – that figure was only 10 points. For the third group – those attempting steals less than 2.8 percent of the time – it was 11 points.

In summary, the increase in batting average was noticeably higher with the most aggressive baserunners in the first group as compared to the less aggressive in the second and third. This provides evidence that something is going on that improves that aspect of batter performance with the better base stealers on first.

Interestingly, the corresponding increase for on-base average was 14, 10 and 7 points less than that for batting average. This result is only possible if walks to the batter decrease with more aggressive baserunners.

Similarly, the increase for slugging average was only 1 point higher than that for batting average for the first group, 5 points lower for the second, and 9 points lower for the third. In this case, the implication is there are no more extra base hits for the batter with the most aggressive baserunners than in non-base-stealing contexts and fewer for less aggressive baserunners.

These findings are counterintuitive, demand replication with a study encompassing multiple seasons, and demand an explanation if supported.

Myth #47 – In the National League it is a good strategy for the team on the field to walk the eighth-place batter and face the pitcher with runners in scoring position.

I am aware of two studies of this question, one by Russell Carleton based on 2010-2014 data and one by James Click using 2004. The issue is complicated. We must assume average performance here; particularly good or poor hitters in the No. 8 or pitcher spots will change things.

Overall, there is a trade-off in run expectancy between the relative weakness of the average pitcher's hitting versus the average No. 8, but it is at least partly offset by the additional baserunner following the intentional walk.

And we must also consider the subsequent innings. With two outs, getting the eighth hitter out means the pitcher's spot leads off the next inning, which should put the defense ahead of the game compared to walking No. 8, getting the pitcher out, and having the No. 1 spot lead off.

Again with two outs, the additional walk also gives somebody who is likely to be a better hitter than the

pitcher an extra plate appearance before the end of the game. Taking all of this into consideration, both Russell and James concluded that the only time when the strategy gets the defensive team ahead is with runners on second and third and two outs, by about 0.1 of a run per plate appearance. And that is by far the base-out situation in which it occurs the most often, about one-half of the time.

(Editor's note: With MLB moving to the designated hitter in both leagues, this strategy may disappear.)

Myth #48 – Players hit better when at their “regular” position than when playing somewhere else in the field.

As I write this, I am surprised to have located only one relevant piece of work, by James Click, that supported this idea. The overall advantage for fielding where one was used to playing was a batting line of .014/.016/.029 in 2003 and .010/.011/.031 in 2004.

Click also divided by position for 2004 and noted that players at their most frequent positions, depending on position (including designated hitter but excluding center field), had batting averages between 1 and 47, on-base averages between 3 and 31, and slugging averages between 8 and 72 points higher than when playing different positions.

TRIVIA ANSWER: Pitcher Joe Coleman, the Senators' No. 1 pick in the 1965 amateur draft, and outfielder Tom Grieve, their No. 1 pick in 1966, were both from Massachusetts. But that's not all they had in common. Both were parts of father-son MLB duos. Coleman, who won 142 major league games, was the son of Joe Coleman Sr., who pitched 10 seasons with the A's, Orioles and Tigers. His son Casey Coleman pitched parts of three seasons with the Cubs. Grieve, who later became a Texas Rangers executive, is the father of big-league outfielder Ben Grieve, who was American League Rookie of the Year in 1998.