

# THE SQUIBBER

## April 2024

The Squibber is the Bob Davids SABR 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](mailto:wcherniakjr@aol.com).

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**TRIVIA QUESTION:** This season marks the 100th anniversary of the 1924 World Series championship Washington Senators. Seven members of that team played at least 10 seasons with the Senators. Name them.

### SAVE THESE DATES! A Summer Lineup of Chapter Events

The Bob Davids SABR Chapter is pleased to announce its Summer Lineup of chapter events. We hope that we'll see you at all of them.

#### Saturday, May 18 - Gaithersburg Book Festival

The chapter will have a tent at this year's 15th annual Gaithersburg Book Festival to showcase SABR's literary prowess and the benefits of being a SABR member.

The festival has announced that New York Times best-selling author Joe Posnanski will be a featured speaker, so come on out to hear him and visit us in our tent. There will be dozens of other great speakers discussing their books on a wide range of topics, and the chance to buy their books and to get them autographed.

This is a rain-or-shine free event that has become one of the premier book festivals on the East Coast, so be sure to join us on the 18th. For more information about the festival, including the lineup of speakers, please visit <https://www.gaithersburgbookfestival.org/>

#### Saturday, June 15 - Florida Marlins at Washington Nationals

Join us on June 15 for our annual major league game when the Marlins take on the Nats at Nationals

Park. There is a convenient 4:05 start time for this game. Keep an eye out for announcements with more details on how to reserve your spot.

### **Sunday Morning, June 30 - Cal Ripken Sr. Collegiate Baseball League**

Join us on Sunday morning June 30 at Shirley Povich Field for a Cal Ripken Sr. Collegiate Baseball League game and a post-game lunch conversation with the writers from Stadium Journey.

Celebrate the 25th season of Bethesda Big Train baseball at Povich Field. For early birds, join us at 9 a.m. for a talk by Big Train founder Bruce Adams about his quarter-century adventure building a ballpark, founding a summer wooden bat college team, and watching it all grow into a ten-time Ripken League champion and beloved community jewel.

At 10 a.m., the Big Train will face off against the Silver Spring-Takoma Thunderbolts. After the game, SABR members will have lunch with the writers of Stadium Journey to trade stories about favored ballparks and learn about this valuable baseball resource.

For background on the Big Train, go to [www.bigtrain.org](http://www.bigtrain.org). For background on Stadium Journey, go to [/www.stadiumjourney.com](http://www.stadiumjourney.com). This is a joint event with the Baltimore Babe Ruth SABR chapter. Watch for announcements with more details on how to join the fun.

### **Saturday, July 27 - York Revolution at Hagerstown Flying Boxcars**

The Hagerstown Flying Boxcars are the newest entry in the independent Atlantic League, and they'll be playing their inaugural season in a brand-new ballpark in downtown Hagerstown.

Join us at 6 p.m. on July 27 when they take on the York Revolution. Watch for announcements with more details on how to join the fun. And check out <https://www.visithagerstown.com/hagerstown-ballpark-project> for a live stream of the new stadium construction and some very interesting time-lapse construction videos.

It's going to be a great summer of baseball fun, and we hope you'll be able to join us, so reserve these dates on your calendar now.

### **SABR DAY 2024: Annual Meeting a Rousing Success, By Walt Cherniak**

The Bob Davids SABR Chapter annual SABR Day meeting, held on Saturday, Jan. 27, was a huge success, as 75 members spent an enjoyable day jam-packed with insightful baseball presentations and discussions.

For the second consecutive year – hopefully the second of many years to come – the meeting was hosted by the D.C.-area consulting and analytics firm Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH). BAH's state-of-the-art immersive visualization facility, located at The Helix Center For Innovation in the District's McPherson Square, once again proved to be an ideal setting for the event.

The featured speaker was national baseball writer Chelsea Janes of the Washington Post, who has recently returned to the baseball beat after spending the last few years as part of the Post's national election team. While she was "away," Janes said, baseball has changed in several significant ways. She discussed the potential impact of the MLB's close business alliances with gambling sites such as FanDuel and Draft Kings, as well as how recent rule changes are affecting the game.

Dave Smith, the retired founder and past president of Retrosheet, reprised his SABR 51 convention presentation, "The Three-Batter Rule: Demise of the LOOGY?" Dave illustrated how MLB's requirement that relief pitchers face at least three hitters (in most cases) has indeed changed how

relievers are used, but perhaps not in the ways people expected.

In a Booz Hamilton panel discussion, moderator Tony Hughes interviewed Tony Dahbura and Tad Berkery about how they have integrated analytics into professional baseball and other sports. Dahbura owned the Hagerstown Suns while they were a Washington Nationals minor league affiliate. He also worked with the Mexican Professional Baseball League. Berkery is a student at Johns Hopkins University and a member of that school's sports analytics research group.

### **WELCOME NEW MEMBERS, By Ed Baranoski**

We'd like to welcome the following new members to the Bob Davids SABR Chapter. Looking forward to meeting and talking baseball with all of them:

- Jack Sobel
- Luke Holman
- Carter Vaughn
- Tim O'Brien
- Derek Puth
- Pearse McDade
- Kevin Singer
- Scott Lehrfeld
- Isaac Israel
- Kousei Sadakane

### **THE BOB DAVIDS PODIUM: Books, Presentations and More, By Pete Cottrell**

We're proud of our chapter members! Are you a Bob Davids member who has recently written a book or an article related to baseball? Made a presentation about baseball? If so, let us know about it so that we can publicize it in The Squibber; other chapter members will want to hear about it too!

Submissions can include publisher press releases or links to publisher/author websites, or they may include links to the actual content, such as for online magazines, or for things like the SABR Bio and Game Projects.

If you'd like to get the word out, send mail to Peter Cottrell ([pbcottrell@gmail.com](mailto:pbcottrell@gmail.com)) with content information and any links associated with it. Here's what some of our chapter members have been doing:

#### **BOOKS**

J. Thomas Hetrick - Baseball Stats and Stories: Confessions of a Tabletop Simulation Gamer  
<https://www.amazon.com/Baseball-Stats-Stories-Confessions-Simulation/dp/B0CQVSZ79C>

Jerry Manheim - The Keystone Corner: Thomas Edison Turns Two (The Deadball Files)  
<https://www.amazon.com/Keystone-Corner-Thomas-Edison-Deadball/dp/1934597961>

Gary Sarnoff - Team of Destiny: Walter Johnson, Clark Griffith, Bucky Harris, and the 1924 Washington Senators

<https://www.amazon.com/Team-Destiny-Griffith-Washington-Senators/dp/1538182343>

## ARTICLES

William Hickman - SABR publication "One Win Wonders" (available January 2024). Bill wrote a chapter on Ryan Garton, who pitched for the Bethesda Big Train while he was in college.

And from the Spring 2023 issue of "The Montgomery County Story," the publication of Montgomery History, Bill wrote a featured article "Walter Johnson's Forays into Politics."

[https://mchdr.montgomeryhistory.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12366/477/mcs\\_v066\\_n1\\_2023\\_hickman\\_mangin.pdf](https://mchdr.montgomeryhistory.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12366/477/mcs_v066_n1_2023_hickman_mangin.pdf)

Laura Peebles

April 20, 2022: Shohei Ohtani makes history by batting twice before throwing a pitch as Angels blank Astros, <https://sabr.org/gamesproj/game/april-20-2022-shohei-ohtani-makes-history-by-batting-twice-before-throwing-a-pitch-as-angels-blank-astros/>

April 17, 2012: Jamie Moyer sets record as oldest winning pitcher as Rockies beat Padres, 5-3, <https://sabr.org/gamesproj/game/april-17-2012-jamie-moyer-sets-record-as-oldest-winning-pitcher-as-rockies-beat-padres-5-3/>

Steve Weiner

July 23, 2023: Lane Thomas does everything as Nationals complete sweep of Giants, <https://sabr.org/gamesproj/game/july-23-2023-lane-thomas-does-everything-as-nationals-complete-sweep-of-giants/>

Frederic Frommer, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2024/02/23/masanori-murakami-first-japanese-mlb-player/>

## PRESENTATIONS

On March 26, Frederic Frommer and Gary Sarnoff presented "Washington's First World Series: When the Washington Senators Were America's Team" as part of the Smithsonian Associates Lecture Series.

On March 9, Jerry Manheim spoke about his "The Deadball Files" book series at a joint Babe Ruth Birthplace Museum / Baltimore Babe Ruth SABR chapter event.

## COMING UP

Paul Scimonelli will be talking about his biography of Joe Cambria and Cambria's pre-integration on baseball before Jackie Robinson at several upcoming events:

Saturday, April 13, 12 p.m. at the Babe Ruth Museum in Baltimore

May 29-31, at the Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture at the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY.

August 6, 12 p.m., at the Chautauqua Summer Institute in upstate New York.

You can Google these events for more information, or please contact the presenter.

## **AL LOPEZ GETS HIS START: Washington's 1925 Spring Training, By Andrew Sharp**

Al Lopez, the long-time catcher and Hall of Fame manager, got his first chance to handle major league pitchers with Clark Griffith's Washington Senators in 1925. Lopez was just 16 when the defending World Series champs hired him as a batting-practice catcher during spring training in Tampa, where Lopez was born and raised.

"The Washington Senators were training here and they needed a catcher to catch batting practice," he told Bill Madden of the New York Daily News in 2004 (reprinted in the August 2004 Baseball Digest). "They didn't want to use (only) their regular catchers, and I was playing sandlot ball when they called and offered me \$45 a week. That was my start in professional baseball."

"I was very lucky," Lopez told Bob Bloss in an interview recorded for SABR in 1996. "In those days, the clubs couldn't afford to bring in too many extra men so they could only bring three catchers. Muddy Ruel, Bennie Tate and Pinky Hargrave were the three catchers with Washington, so they wanted somebody else to just catch batting practice."

Lopez caught sessions with the immortal Walter Johnson and the rest of the mound staff of the Senators, who would repeat as American League champions that season. "I would have done it for nothing just to wear the uniform," Lopez said.

After spring training ended, Lopez was signed by the Class D Tampa Smokers of the Florida State League, where he played his first pro season. That fall, a group of major leaguers, including Walter Johnson, came to Tampa for an exhibition game. In hopes of attracting more Hispanic fans, they recruited Lopez (whose parents actually were from Spain) to catch for Johnson's team. So Lopez for one game became the battery mate of The Big Train.

The teen-aged backstop apparently made a good impression. According to a 1954 Arthur Daley column in the New York Times, the veteran pitcher told Lopez: "Nice game, kid. You're going to be a great catcher someday." Lopez never forgot.

"Johnson threw hard, maybe the hardest of all," he told Madden in 2004. "But he was easy to catch because he was always around the plate."

It's too bad that Johnson, who became Washington's manager in 1929, didn't keep track of Lopez. By 1927, he had signed with Brooklyn and made his debut in September 1928. He became one of the game's premier defensive catchers through the 1930s and into the late 1940s before becoming a successful manager.

Lopez managed the only non-Yankee teams that won the American League pennant in the 1950s (Cleveland in 1954; Chicago in 1959).

Playing in the majors from 1928-1947, Lopez set a record for most games by a catcher until 1987, when Bob Boone passed him. He still ranks in the top 10 in games behind the plate.

As a manager, Lopez finished second 10 times, nine times finishing behind the first-place Yankees. The teams he managed for a full season never had losing records and finished lower than second just three times.

During his career, Lopez caught four Hall of Fame pitchers: Dazzy Vance and Waite Hoyt with Brooklyn, and Bob Feller and Bob Lemon with Cleveland. But you could say he really caught five.

At the time of his death at age 97 in October 2005, Lopez was the last living player to have appeared in the 1920s – and to have caught Walter Johnson, if only in an exhibition game.

Alfonso Ramon Lopez -- The Senior, as he became known -- was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1977.

## **MYTHS OF BASEBALL: True or False? By Charles Pavitt**

This is the 21st 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 #61 – Closers pitch differently when in non-save situations.**

This appears to be the case. Russell Carleton (2008, under his former alias Pizza Cutter) looked at all relievers with at least 15 saves between 1980 and 2007 (sample size 220 pitchers and 696 seasons) and compared basic metrics for when they pitched in designated save and non-save situations.

ERAs were respectively 2.91 vs 3.15, OPS was .629 vs .652, walks per 9 innings were 3.08 vs 3.39 and strikeouts per 9 innings were 8.12 vs 7.79.

Russell (2013) compared the performance of 20+-save relievers over an unnamed time period between when used in “save situations” and when used in tied games in the ninth inning or later.

Tied games resulted in a lower probability of strikeouts and homers allowed and higher odds of outs in play – in other words, seemingly more risk-averse – than with the lead. But the difference in apparent pitching strategy did not impact the outcome in either direction.

In a quick and dirty study, given how little PITCHf/x data was then available, Eric Seidman (2009) uncovered 41 pitchers who were closers during at least part of 2008, and studied their pitch characteristics between save and non-save situations.

In the former, velocity was about half a MPH faster, but at the expense of losing about a 0.10 inch in both horizontal and vertical movement. In his 2008 web post, Russell speculated that these differences may be due to closers primarily being used in non-save situations when they had not pitched for a while, in which case the deficit would be due to rust.

The more obvious explanation, adrenaline differences, is not as clearly indicated, as it should be more evident in comparing low vs. high leverage situations. These do not correspond well with the save situations; there is far higher leverage in a tie game in the 7th or 8th inning than in 9th inning with a three-run lead.

### **Myth #62 – A late inning loss results in poorer team performance the next day.**

We know strategically that the current standard reliever usage patterns (fixed roles for pitchers including an “official” ninth inning closer) is substandard, because a team's best reliever(s) should be used in the highest leverage situations no matter the inning.

However, there is a psychological argument in its favor, namely, that teams should save their best reliever until the end because a ninth-inning loss is the most upsetting to the players and carries through to poorer performance the next day.

Russell Carleton (2016) demonstrated that this is not true. Based on 2000-2015 data (likely from Retrosheet), team winning averages the next game after a ninth-inning comeback loss were actually better (.481) than when losing a lead in the eighth (.466) or seventh inning (.442).

If anything, this is an argument for teams using their best reliever earlier than the ninth. That same year, Russell also learned that between 2003 and 2015 the only impact of a blown save on subsequent game relief pitching was an increase in walks of about 1 percent for a game or two afterward and nothing for any other index.

Incidentally, there is another psychological argument for standard reliever usage patterns; the fact that pitchers like routines, and therefore are more comfortable knowing ahead of time when they are likely

to pitch.

### **Myth #63 – Outs in the ninth inning during close games are the hardest to get.**

This is connected with the “myth of the proven closer” (basically Dave Smith's term, I added the “proven” to it), i.e., that “proven closers” are a special breed set apart from other relievers in their ability to withstand the added pressure of the ninth inning in a close game.

I can say that this is a version of the belief that there are such things as “born leaders” who become leaders no matter the situation, which was disproved by social scientists more than half a century ago. Old-school people also are prone to point out that many relievers have tried but failed to make it as closers because they did not have the “right (psychological) stuff.”

There is no evidence of which I am aware supporting this notion, which must be tested under the proviso that relievers who are only effective against same-sided batters should never have been asked to attempt it given this non-psychological limitation.

The myth also depends on the belief that outs in the ninth inning truly are the hardest to get. Russell Carleton under his alias Pizza Cutter (2007) showed the falsehood in this idea.

Russell compared the actual average 2006 OBAs for batters at the various outs in the game with the expected average OBAs given the batters and pitchers involved.

The hardest was out No. 17 (third out, fifth inning; as Tom Tango a noted, one should assume that the starting pitcher was beginning to tire); given an expected OBA of .344, the actual OBA was .361, which means .017 better than expectation.

Completely opposite to the myth, the easiest was the first out of the ninth inning (out No. 25), with an actual OBA of .307, 25 points worse than the expected .332.

The second out of the ninth (out No. 26) was the 22nd hardest, with actual OBA (.321) 9 points worse than expected (.330). The last out No. 27) was right in the middle, 13th place, with almost identical OBAs differing by .0003 and both rounding to .328.

### **JOHNSON’S BEANBALL STYMIED NEMESIS HOME RUN BAKER, By Barry Sparks**

For nearly a decade, four-time home run champ Frank "Home Run" Baker and strikeout king Walter Johnson waged one of the most intense rivalries in the American League. From 1909 through 1913, the Philadelphia Athletics slugger dominated the Washington Senators fireballer.

At a time when Johnson was considered unhittable by many American League batters, Baker batted .385 against him. He inflicted considerable damage as he bashed four home runs, three triples and six doubles.

The Big Train called Baker "the most dangerous batter I've ever faced." A single pitch on May 8, 1914, however, shifted the power structure between the two. Both players were in their prime when the Athletics visited Washington early in the season. In 1913, the 25-year-old Johnson posted a 36-7 record, a 1.14 ERA and fanned 243 hitters.

The 26-year-old Baker led the American League in home runs with 12 and RBI with 117 while batting .337.

That season, Baker clouted two home runs off Johnson, a feat that stirred fans and fellow American Leaguers. His home run on June 2, 1913, cleared the right field fence at Griffith Stadium. Over-the-

fence homers were still rare, particularly against Johnson. The Senators hurler surrendered just 97 homers in 5,942 innings pitched. Nearly half of the 40 homers off him in Washington were inside the park.

Later that month, on June 28, Baker once again tagged Johnson for an over-the-fence homer. Stanley Milliken of the Washington Post reported that it was "one of the most vicious blasts ever seen at the Georgia Avenue field." The Brooklyn Daily Eagle reported the homer was the "longest ever hit at the Washington grounds." No one had hit more than two homers off Johnson, but now Baker had two in one month.

Johnson posed problems for most sluggers because he had a blinding fastball that he threw with a sidearm motion. It was not easy to pull or hit it with power. He also pitched most of his home games in spacious Griffith Stadium, which measured 407 feet to left field, 421 feet to center field and 328 feet to right field.

Baker slugged two homers against Johnson in 1911, including the first over-the-fence homer the Senators great surrendered.

Baker's past success was fresh on Johnson's mind when he entered the game in the bottom of the sixth inning with the Senators leading 5-3. The A's battered Johnson for six runs in three innings in his worst relief performance of his career. Johnson was mired in his misery when Baker stepped to the plate.

Johnson's frustration level was understandably high as he faced his nemesis. Plus, there was talk that the Washington ace had lost some of the speed that had made him so effective, and he was being hit harder than ever before.

Baker always feasted on Washington pitching and hit Johnson better than anyone else in the league. He was a tough out, no matter which Senator pitcher was on the mound. Washington hurlers tried to stymie Baker's production by brushing him off the plate, either with inside pitches or pitches around his head.

Johnson, however, disdained the beanball. He had never thrown at a player's head, and said, "The beanball is one of the meanest things on Earth and no decent fellow would use it. The beanball is a potential murderer. If I were a batter and thought the pitcher really tried to bean me, I'd be inclined to wait for him outside the park with a baseball bat."

Encouraged by catcher John Henry, who was filling in for the injured Eddie Ainsmith, Johnson "let fly a high fast one which almost put the home run king into a state of dreamless slumber," according to the Washington Post.

Baker hit the ground with a thud as Johnson's 90-mile-per-hour-plus fastball whistled by his head, less than an inch away. "It was duck or no dinner," Baker later recalled.

According to the normally mild-mannered Johnson, it was the only time he threw at a batter in his 20-plus-year career, and he always regretted it.

The Athletics and Senators played to a 9-9 tie, which was called after 10 innings because of darkness. While the game didn't mean anything in the standings, it had a tremendous impact on Baker and his future performance against Johnson.

The single, frightening pitch had a lasting result. In his seven remaining seasons, starting in 1914, Baker averaged just .207 facing Johnson, with a homer and a double as the only extra-base hits in 111 at-bats.

Washington pitchers continued to throw at Baker. A couple weeks after the incident, the Washington Post reported that "Frank Baker's head is the target for every pitcher used by the Nationals with the



exception of Walter Johnson, who never throws at anyone's head."

Washington southpaw Joe Boehling reportedly remarked, "All you have to do to get Baker is to send a beamer at his head and then give him three strikes." But that strategy wasn't very effective, since Baker batted .339 against the Senators with 20 home runs during his career. Both marks were personal bests.

While the beanball tipped the scales heavily in Johnson's favor, Baker did deliver one more dramatic home run against the pitching ace. On July 5, 1917, Baker, playing for the Yankees, walloped a home run in the bottom of the 13th inning to defeat Johnson, who had entered the game as a reliever in the 11th inning.

Only Babe Ruth hit more home runs off of Johnson than Baker. Ruth clouted 10 round-trippers, all of them during the Live Ball Era from 1920-1927. How many homers would Baker have hit against Johnson if it hadn't been for that fateful pitch?

**TRIVIA ANSWER:** Members of the 1924 Senators who played at least 10 seasons with the Washington franchise included pitchers Walter Johnson and Fred "Firpo" Marberry; first baseman Joe Judge, second baseman/manager Bucky Harris; third baseman Ossie Bluege; left fielder Goose Goslin and right fielder Sam Rice.