

Zooming In on a Great Old Photo

Mark Fimoff

WIDE-ANGLE views of early baseball games provide an unending source of fascination and speculation: What ballpark? Which teams? What year? Can we identify any of the players? Of these, for obvious reasons, the last question is usually the most difficult one to answer.

Rarely, absent a highly credible contemporary source, is such a photo published with anything approaching definitive player IDs. When such claims are made, one wonders: How can you really know who the players are?

The wonderful photo below appeared in *Brooklyn Dodgers* by Mark Rucker (2002).¹

BASEBALL HALL OF FAME LIBRARY, COOPERSTOWN, N.Y.



The caption included these points:

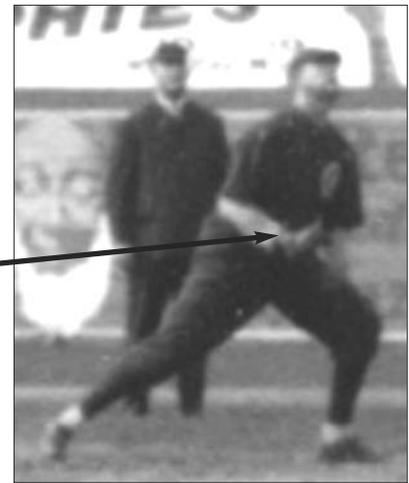
- Washington Park [Brooklyn], probably ca. 1912
- Cubs were in town . . .
- If . . . 1912, Tinker, Evers, and Chance . . . would be on the field
- The pitcher, **who looks like Three-Finger Brown** . . .

Since we can neither see his face nor count his fingers, it is certainly difficult to decide whether or not the pitcher looks like Three-Finger Brown. Three years later, the same photo was used by the same author in *Chicago Aces: The First 75 Years* (2005).² This time there is no hesitation in the caption:

- Cubs . . . playing in
- Washington Park in Brooklyn,
- 1912
- **Mordecai Brown is pitching** . . .
- Johnny Evers is at second base, Joe Tinker at shortstop . . .
- Frank Chance had already left for New York

Brown is clearly the reason for including this photo in a book about “Chicago aces.” But, how can anyone be so certain about this ID? Can we confirm or refute it? Let’s start with a magnifying glass.

To the right we see the pitcher greatly magnified. There’s his glove on his right hand, so he must be throwing with his left hand. But, as we know, Miner Brown pitched with his three-fingered *right* hand.



Furthermore, if this is a 1912 Cubs-at-Brooklyn game, a bit of newspaper-article and box-score research shows that, in 1912, Brown did not pitch at all in Brooklyn—not to one batter, not one pitch.

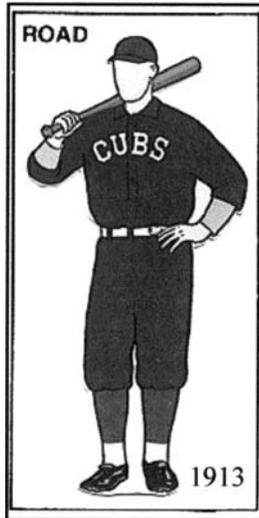
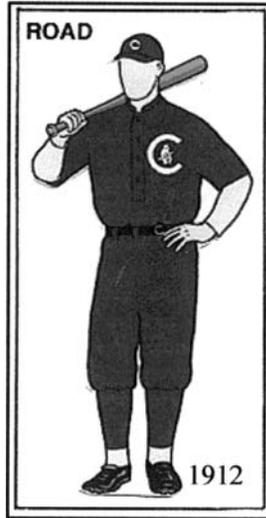
• **CONCLUSION: Mordecai Brown is not pitching.**

- Cubs . . . playing in
- Washington Park in Brooklyn,
- 1912
- • ~~Mordecai Brown is pitching . . .~~
- Johnny Evers is at second base, Joe Tinker at shortstop . . .
- Frank Chance had already left for New York

This great photo deserves a more careful analysis. Is it possible to determine who that pitcher is? Since the given caption seems untrustworthy, let’s start by confirming the teams, location, and year.

"Cubs"

The Cubs wore dark jerseys and pants on the road for three seasons, 1911, 1912, and 1913. From the National Baseball Hall of Fame Uniform Database:³



Note the image of the pitcher above right. It is clear that his uniform, socks, and logo match either the 1911 or 1912 Cubs road uniforms. No other Deadball Era MLB team wore a similar uniform.

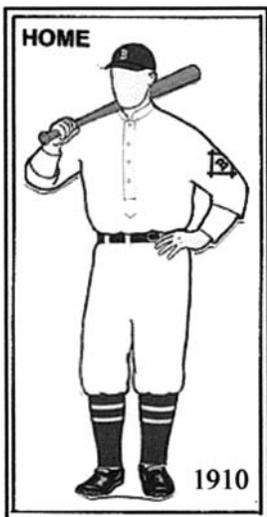
• CONCLUSION: It's the Cubs, 1911 or 1912.

Also, we note that Frank Chance did not leave for New York until after the 1912 season. So, on that point, perhaps the caption was right the first time the photo was used in 2002— Chance could be in the scene.

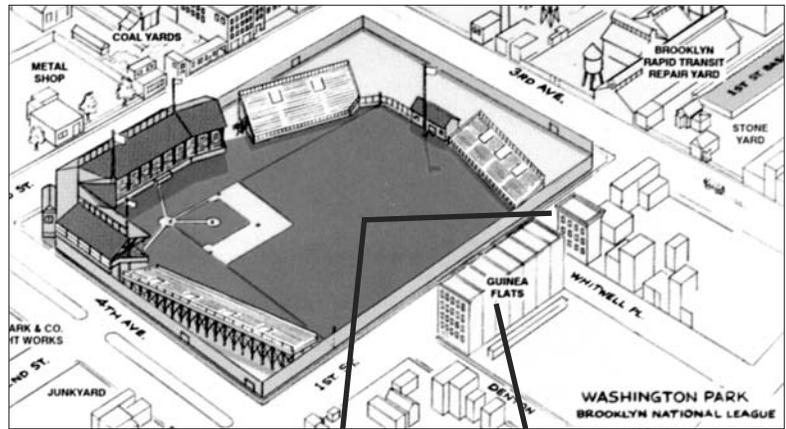
- • **Cubs . . . playing in** *Confirmed*
- Washington Park in Brooklyn,
- 1912
- ~~Mordecai Brown is pitching . . .~~
- Johnny Evers is at second base, Joe Tinker at shortstop . . .
- • ~~Frank Chance had already left for New York~~

"Washington Park in Brooklyn, 1912"

The Hall of Fame Uniform Database shows the following outfits for the Brooklyn club's final three years at Washington Park. Comparison to the magnification (note the socks), below right, indicates that the home team could be Brooklyn and therefore the site could be Washington Park, but this is not conclusive. Also, the cap/socks combination seems to favor 1911, but cap colors in the Uniform Database are not always perfectly accurate.



To the right is shown a bird's-eye view of Brooklyn's Washington Park.⁴ Just across First Street, beyond the right-field wall, is the large rectangular Guinea Flats building. Just across Whitwell Place from the Flats, at the corner of First Street and Whitwell, is a smaller three-story building, about the same height as that of the Flats building.



This confirmed 1915 Washington Park Federal League opening-day photo shows the smaller building, left, and the Guinea Flats building, right, beyond the right field wall.⁵



These same buildings are seen below in the photo in question.



• **CONCLUSION: This is Washington Park**

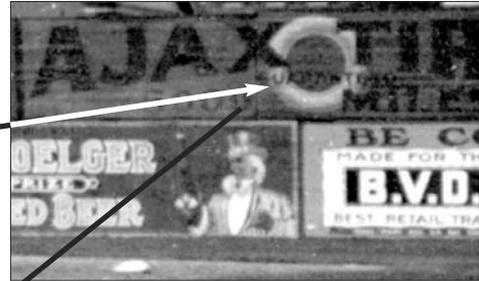
- Cubs . . . playing in
- • **Washington Park in Brooklyn** *Confirmed*
- 1912
- ~~Mordecai Brown is pitching . . .~~
- Johnny Evers is at second base, Joe Tinker at shortstop . . .
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It will be much easier to determine who the pitcher is if there is certainty as to the year. One thing that works in our favor is that the billboards are readable. Though one or two advertisers might keep the same design and location over a period of a few years, in most cases outfield-wall billboards changed every year. Since there were no NL games at Washington Park after 1912, and given that the Cubs uniforms are from 1911 or 1912, what is needed are confirmed photos of the right-field wall from 1911 and 1912.

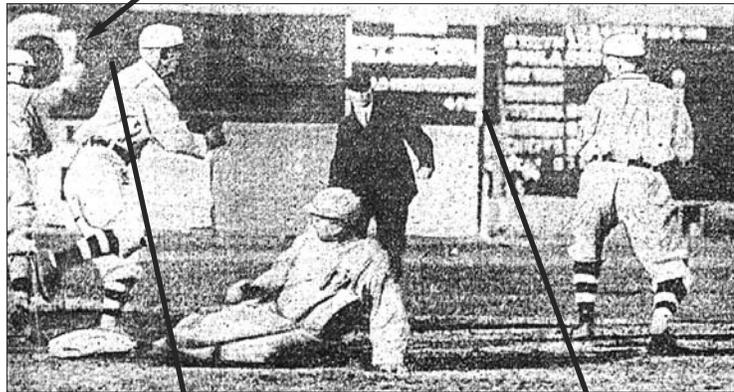
An “Ajax Tire” sign in right field is seen in a cropped portion of our Washington Park photo, below left.



It is magnified and shown below, right. Note the circular tire, partially overlaid with the letters X and T between the words *Ajax* and *Tire*.



This photo is from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 16, 1912.⁶ The same circular tire, overlaid with part of the *T*, is evident.



Another photo, this one from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 5, 1911, shows a different sign at that same right-field wall location.⁷



It's clear that the photo in question has the 1912 right-field billboard, which differs from the 1911 sign. Further comforting confirmation can be had from the following: According to box scores and accompanying newspaper articles, Cub lefties did pitch in Brooklyn in 1912 but not in 1911.

• **CONCLUSION: Photo taken in 1912**

- Cubs . . . playing in
- Washington Park in Brooklyn,
- • 1912 *Confirmed*
- ~~Mordecai Brown is pitching . . .~~
- Johnny Evers is at second base, Joe Tinker at shortstop . . .
- Frank Chance had already left for New York

So—who was really on the field?

A lot of effort has been expended to confirm the author’s original claimed location, teams, and year. This provides a firm foundation for proceeding with an attempt at identifying the pitcher. The next step is to check the Chicago-at-Brooklyn box scores for 1912.⁸ These reveal that three left-handed Cubs pitchers made appearances in Brooklyn in 1912.

- Lefty Leifield—27 innings, with these lineups:
Note that either Ward Miller or Tommy Leach played center field.

	AB
Sheckard, lf...	3
Good, lf.....	0
Schulte, rf....	2
Tinker, ss.....	5
Zimmerman, 3b	4
W. Miller, cf..	4
Saier, 1b.....	4
Evers, 2b.....	3
Archer, c.....	3
Leifield, p....	4

	AB
Sheckard, lf...	3
Schulte, rf....	5
Tinker, ss.....	8
Zim'erman, 3b	5
Leach, cf.....	3
Saier, 1b.....	4
Evers, 2b.....	2
Archer, c.....	4
Leifield, p....	4

	AB
Sheckard, lf...	4
Schulte, rf....	5
Tinker, ss.....	4
Zim'erman, 3b..	4
Leach, cf.....	3
Saier, 1b.....	3
Evers, 2b.....	2
Archer, c.....	4
Leifield, p....	4

- Len “Lefty” Madden—
1 inning, with lineup:
Note that Cy Williams played center field.

	AB
Sheckard, lf...	5
W. Miller, rf..	2
Tinker, ss....	4
Zim'erman, 3b.	4
Saier, 1b....	5
Evers, 2b....	4
Williams, cf..	3
Archer, c....	5
Madden, p....	0
*C. Smith ...	1
Richie, p....	2

- George Pierce—
7 innings, with lineup:
Note that Cy Williams played center field.

	AB
Sheckard, lf...	4
W. Miller, rf..	4
Tinker, ss....	4
Downs, 3b....	4
Saier, 1b....	4
Evers, 2b....	3
Williams, cf..	4
Archer, c....	2
Pierce, p....	2
*Good	1
Toney, p....	0

Newspaper articles indicate that, when any of the Cub lefties pitched, Frank Chance was there managing, but the above lineups show that without substitution Vic Saier played first base. Also without substitution Evers was at second, Tinker at shortstop, and Jimmy Archer was behind the plate.

• **CONCLUSION: Chance was there, but Saier played first and Archer was the catcher.**

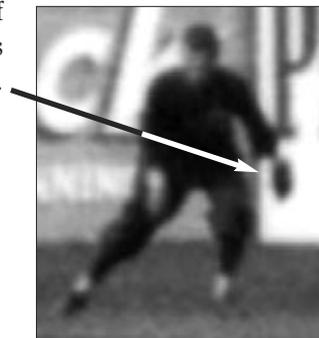
- Cubs . . . playing in
- Washington Park in Brooklyn,
- 1912
- ~~Mordecai Brown is pitching . . .~~
- • Johnny Evers is at second base, Joe Tinker at shortstop . . . *Confirmed*
- Frank Chance had already left for New York
- • **Vic Saier at first base, Jimmy Archer catching**

The above lineups also reveal the following:

- When Madden or Pierce pitched, **left-hander** Cy Williams was always in center field
- When Leifield was on the mound, **righties** Ward Miller and Tommy Leach were in center.

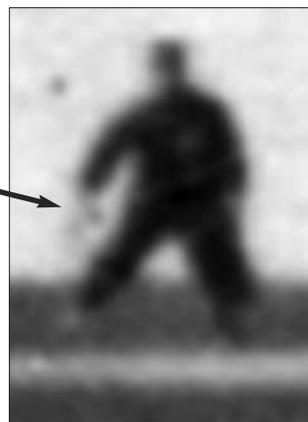
Now, note that, when a magnified fielder has his glove hand in front of a light background, the glove is easily discerned as a dark blob. This is clear, for example, in the magnification of second baseman Evers, right.

With that in mind, let’s take a closer look at the center fielder.



After zooming in on the distant center fielder, it is clear that he has *no glove on his right hand*. Therefore he is either Ward Miller or Tommy Leach. Checking the above lineups leads to the key finding:

• **CONCLUSION: Lefty Leifield is pitching.**



The lineups also indicate that when Leifield pitched, Frank Schulte played right field. So . . .

- Cubs . . . playing in
- Washington Park in Brooklyn,
- 1912
- ~~Mordecai Brown is pitching . . .~~
- • **Lefty Leifield is pitching**
- Johnny Evers is at second base, Joe Tinker at shortstop . . .
- ~~Frank Chance had already left for New York~~
- Vic Saier at first base, Jimmy Archer catching
- • **Frank Schulte in right field**

Putting it all together:

- Cubs . . . playing in
- Washington Park in Brooklyn,
- 1912
- *Lefty Leifield* is pitching
- Johnny Evers is at second base, Joe Tinker at shortstop . . .
- Vic Saier at first base, Jimmy Archer catching
- Frank Schulte in right field



Well, maybe . . .

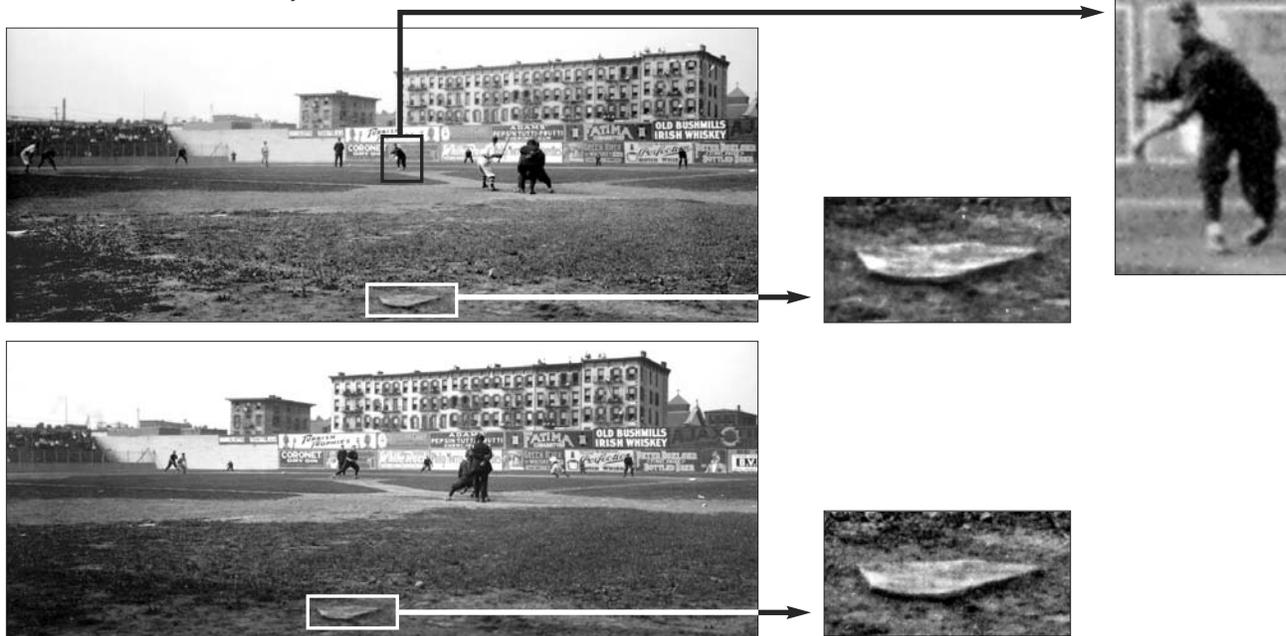
It's indisputable that the pitcher in the photo is not Mordecai Brown. Can we be so sure of the other conclusions, which of course are based on a presumption—the accuracy of the box scores with respect to lineups and substitutions? The records, as given in both the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, do match. However, quoting researcher Cliff Blau on the question of confidence in Deadball Era box scores, “No, we can’t be confident. . . . As for missing a player substitution, very possible.”

So has a misplaced trust in circa-1912 scorekeeping provided an erroneous assumption leading to superficially clever but naïve conclusions? I don’t think so. While these box scores alone do not provide absolute proof, they are entirely consistent with the accompanying articles describing the games.

Also, the pitcher’s proportions do indicate a tall man, and Leifield was 6’1”. Leifield pitched three complete games at Brooklyn in 1912. The Cubs’ other tall lefty, 6’2” Len Madden, pitched only one inning, and George Pierce is listed at just 5’10”. Therefore I stand by the identifications made here.

Note on another Washington Park photo

The National Baseball Hall of Fame has another similar image, just below, left. Comparison of the warm-up plate in that photo to the warm-up plate visible in the uncropped version of the photo that has been the subject of this article (bottom left) reveals an identical dirt pattern. That and other details indicate that both photos were taken on the same day. This additional photo yields another view of Leifield’s delivery. ■



Notes

Thanks to researcher John Zinn for going through two seasons' worth of *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* microfilm to find just the right views of the Washington Park right-field fence, and to Tom Shieber at the Hall of Fame for pointing out the other Washington Park photo taken on the same day.

1. Mark Rucker, *The Brooklyn Dodgers, Images of Sports* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia, 2002).
2. John Freyer and Mark Rucker, *Chicago Aces: The First 75 Years* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia, 2005).
3. National Baseball Hall of Fame, “Dressed to the Nines—Uniform Database,” http://exhibits.baseballhalloffame.org/dressed_to_the_nines/database.htm.
Note corrections added to Cub uniforms for this article—1911 collar added, 1912 buttons made dark.
4. Mark Okkonen, *Baseball Memories, 1900–1909* (Sterling, 1992).
5. George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.
6. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 16 April 1912.
7. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 5 October 1911.
8. *Chicago Tribune*, 8 June 1912, 1 August 1912, 4 August 1912, 20 September 1912, 21 September 1912.