

The INSIDE GAME

The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee

Volume 5, Number 1: "Let's get this lumpy, licorice-stained ball rolling!" March 2005

From the Chairman

by **David Jones**
dcjo63077@yahoo.com

Nearly five years ago, when Deadball Stars of the National League was still only in the planning stages and the companion American League volume was but an indistinct project for the distant future, Eric Enders and I stayed up late one night in his Cooperstown apartment dreaming up a third volume for the Deadball Stars trilogy, Deadball Stars of the Negro Leagues.

There were a few problems with the idea, of course. For one, there technically weren't any "Negro Leagues" during the Deadball Era. Rube Foster's Negro National League was not formed until 1920; the rival Eastern Colored League did not emerge until 1923. Additionally, resources on the black baseball players of the Deadball Era would not be easy to come by. Outside of legends such as John Henry Lloyd and Foster, relatively little is known about the lives of great players such as Spotswood Poles, Frank Wickware, and Dizzy Dismukes. Even less is known about the well-traveled, lesser-known, yet still significant players who form the rank and file of black baseball during the Deadball Era.

But while the committee is still immersed in the work that needs to be done for the American League volume, I think Deadball Stars of the Negro Leagues remains a compelling project for the future, and I hope that one day we can get it done. The work required for such a venture would be tremendous, especially on the research

Ichiro as Deadballer

By **R. Boehme**
rboehme9416@charter.net

Of the many great achievements of the 2004 baseball season, one of the most discussed was Ichiro Suzuki of the Seattle Mariners breaking the single season hits record of quasi-Deadballer, George Sisler. Suzuki collected 262 base hits in 2004, eclipsing the mark of 257 hits that Sisler set in 1920 with the St. Louis Browns. It is not often that single season records that have stood for 84 years are broken. One thing that separates baseball fans from fans of other sports is that we are able to compare players and teams from different eras and generations. Because of the skills involved in baseball, the stability of the rules, and so forth, what was accepted as an All-Star caliber performance in 1908 would still be considered an All-Star caliber performance in 2004, with the

possible exception of the current home run totals.

That being said, I have often wondered, as I am sure you have, how would the stars of the Deadball era perform in today's game? In the age of the long ball, steroids, and free swingers, Ichiro Suzuki may be the closest we will ever get to seeing what it might have been like to watch the Deadball stars of the last century. Watching Suzuki slap the ball to the left side of the infield for an amazing 225 singles in 2004, you can imagine what it must have been like to watch Ty Cobb and his split-fisted grip do the same thing. Suzuki, however, may be

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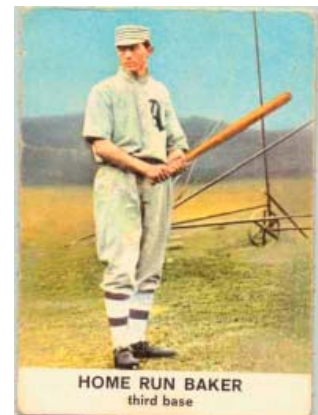


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Ichiro Graphic by Glenn LeDoux



Pitching to Baker

Norman Macht tells us how

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How to Pitch to Baker

By **Norman L. Macht**

normanmacht@netzero.com

History is booby-trapped. The search for the facts is like looking for your true image in a carnival hall of mirrors. Take the 1911 World Series, for example, the one that turned J. Franklin Baker into 'Home Run.'

In Game 2, Baker hit a two-run home run off Rube Marquard that gave the Athletics a 3-1 victory over the Giants. In his syndicated column the next day, Christy Mathewson had his ghostwriter, John N. Wheeler, write that Marquard had violated John McGraw's instructions. "Rube was especially warned not to pitch low to Baker. Rube pitched just what Baker likes."

But did he? Without the aid of six different camera angles and Tim McCarver to tell us what we saw, how do we know? Contemporary accounts differed; as time dimmed memories, the variations expanded.

William A. Phelon, a Cincinnati writer, in his recap in *Baseball Magazine*, called the pitch "a fairly high ball, with a little curve, and breaking a little below the shoulder." Wheeler, in his memoirs, said that Matty told him that Rube's mistake was pitching inside to Baker instead of outside. Baker said it was a fastball inside, without saying if it was high or low.

Fred Lieb called it a low fastball just above the knees in one version but a fastball "hit off the end of the bat" in another. The 1912 *Reach Guide* called it a low fastball, probably based on what Mathewson had written. Three years after the event, Mathewson claimed that Collins, on second at the time, tipped off Baker that a fastball was coming after Marquard had thrown two curves.

In *My Thirty Years in Baseball*, McGraw wrote, "I had instructed Marquard not to pitch a high fastball to Baker, but he forgot. He put one just in that spot and Baker whammed into the stands."

Charles Alexander in his biography of McGraw called it a high fastball, probably based on what McGraw had written.

In a 1947 *American Magazine* story, John Kieran of the

New York Times called it a curve inside.

In Game 3, Mathewson led 1-0 in the top of the ninth. With one out, Baker was up. Matty had been getting him out on curves all day. The count went to 2 and 1. Baker was looking for another hook. Mathewson wound up and threw.

Sitting behind home plate, Detroit pitcher George Mullin, who had faced the A's many times, had a scout's vantage point on Matty's slants. When he saw the waist-high curve was going to break down and in to the lefthand-hitting Baker, he reflexively muttered, "Look out" to himself. He knew it was the kind of pitch Bake would jump on. Baker crushed it into the right field seats.

Mathewson's ghostwriter, Wheeler, wrote in his memoirs that the embarrassed Mathewson had no choice but to admit that he had pitched wrong to Baker, too.

But had he thrown the same pitch as Marquard? McGraw later wrote that "Mathewson, who rarely forgot anything in his life," had made the same mistake as Rube. "After maneuvering around a while," he wrote, "[Mathewson] handed Baker a high fast one in an effort to cross him."

McGraw, too, apparently forgot a few things after 20 years. Newspaper accounts differed over what Baker had hit. Through it all, nobody considered that, instead of focusing on pitchers' mistakes, maybe some credit was due Baker for his hitting. After all, he had batted .324 with 115 RBI. His 198 hits included 40 doubles and a league-leading 11 home runs. He had also made two hits off Mathewson in the first game.

So Gordon MacKay of the Philadelphia *Evening Times* wrote a lengthy rebuttal, purportedly quoting Baker, who seldom spoke that many words on one subject at one time: "If you believe what Marquard and Mathewson are saying, I can't hit the ball only in one spot. Taking it all in all, I'm a lucky guy to be in the league at all, after they get done telling where I hit 'em and where I miss 'em. You want to know the kind of balls I hit for those two homers? Marquard gave me a fast one on the inside. Matty handed me a curve about knee high. It didn't look a bit different than the other curves that he handed me all through the series."

So, did Rube Marquard violate instructions? Did Christy Mathewson make the same mistake? One thing we know: you can't be sure by looking it up. ♦

The
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Committee Chair

David Jones: dcj063077@yahoo.com

Newsletter Editor

Charles Crawley: crcrawley@yahoo.com

Assistant Editor

John McMurray: mcmurrayj@aol.com

Database Manager/Distributor

Dan Desrochers: desrochsox@comcast.net

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even more of a Deadball player than the Deadball players we think of. His power numbers pale in comparison to Sisler's, who in 1920, the dawn of the Jazz Age and the live ball, clubbed 19 homers, which was good enough for second in the majors, getting "edged" out by Babe Ruth's 54. With only 24 doubles by Suzuki in 2004, I'm sure that Tris Speaker would encourage Suzuki to "take two!" In fact, in the years 1900-1919, the Lahman Database shows us that there were thirty-two 200-hit seasons and in only 3 of those instances did a player hit fewer doubles than Suzuki's 24. "Wahoo" Sam Crawford would probably ask, "With that speed, why stop at second? Take three!" Sam would probably be disappointed, though, because of all the players who amassed 200+ hits in the Deadball era, none had as few as the 5 triples that Suzuki did in 2004. Suzuki's 49 base on balls and 36 steals put him right in the mix of Deadballers with 200+ hits. The 118 walks and 96 steals for Ty Cobb in 1915 were the exception.

Following is a list of the players who had seasons of at least 200 hits during the years 1900-1919, inclusive. Ichiro's 2004 campaign is also included. Achieving 200 hits was a tremendous accomplishment in the Deadball era and it remains so today. Eight players accomplished the feat in 2004.◆

Year	Player Name		AB	H	2B	3B	HR	BB
1900	Elmer	Flick	545	200	32	16	11	56
1900	Honus	Wagner	527	201	45	22	4	41
1900	Willie	Keeler	563	204	13	12	4	30
1900	Jesse	Burkett	559	203	11	15	7	62
1901	Nap	Lajoie	544	232	48	14	14	24
1901	Jesse	Burkett	601	226	20	15	10	59
1901	Willie	Keeler	595	202	18	12	2	21
1903	Ginger	Beaumont	613	209	30	6	7	44
1904	Nap	Lajoie	553	208	49	15	6	27
1905	Cy	Seymour	581	219	40	21	8	51
1905	Mike	Donlin	606	216	31	16	7	56
1906	Nap	Lajoie	602	214	48	9	0	30
1906	George	Stone	581	208	25	20	6	52
1907	Ty	Cobb	605	212	28	14	5	24
1908	Honus	Wagner	568	201	39	19	10	54
1909	Ty	Cobb	573	216	33	10	9	48
1910	Nap	Lajoie	591	227	51	7	4	60
1911	Joe	Jackson	571	233	45	19	7	56
1911	Sam	Crawford	574	217	36	14	7	61
1911	Ty	Cobb	591	248	47	24	8	44
1912	Ty	Cobb	553	226	30	23	7	43
1912	Frank	Baker	577	200	40	21	10	50
1912	Joe	Jackson	572	226	44	26	3	54
1912	Heinie	Zimmerman	557	207	41	14	14	38
1912	Tris	Speaker	580	222	53	12	10	82
1912	Bill	Sweeney	593	204	31	13	1	68
1914	Benny	Kauff	571	211	44	13	8	72

Ichiro, Continued from page 3.

1915	Ty	Cobb	563	208	31	13	3	118
1916	Ty	Cobb	542	201	31	10	5	78
1916	Tris	Speaker	546	211	41	8	2	82
1916	Joe	Jackson	592	202	40	21	3	46
1917	Ty	Cobb	588	225	44	24	6	61
2004	Ichiro	Suzuki	704	262	24	5	8	49

Playing for Time: The Death Row All Stars, by Chris Enns

Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2004. [ISBN: 0-7385-33084] 128 pages, \$19.99.

Reviewed by **John McMurray** (jmcmurray04@yahoo.com)

Playing for Time: The Death Row All Stars by Chris Enns tells the stunning true story of the Wyoming State Penitentiary All Stars, a team of talented death row inmates who played baseball against nearby teams in 1911 and 1912. The prison warden, Felix Alston, motivated his players by delaying or accelerating their respective executions depending on whether each played well or poorly. With their lives literally depending on the outcome of each game, the Penitentiary All Stars compiled a 36-9 record over the two years they played against local teams.

Betting on the popular team was common, and Enns claims that at least three local politicians bankrolled their political campaigns by putting money on the All Stars to win. Enns estimates that a staggering \$132,000 in bets on the All Stars exchanged hands in the county during that time. The high stakes of life and death combined with the gambling element described in the book makes *Playing for Time* one of the most unusual baseball books published in recent years.

The All Stars had each received death sentences for a variety of heinous crimes. First baseman Leroy Cooke, for instance, bludgeoned a barber to death and stole his money. The team's third baseman had shot and killed a hermit, cut him up, and

burned his remains in the fireplace. The book's many haunting images, including individual photographs of the death row ballplayers, are particularly striking.

Playing for Time is told less as a narrative than it is through images. Each of the seven chapters is two pages in length, followed by an extensive series of photos or primary source documents. The story is presented primarily from the perspective of Joseph Seng, the team's shortstop and best player who had received his death sentence for shooting a man in the head. Seng was "a powerful hitter and a gifted fielder" and, according to Enns, "he was the Wild West's version of Shoeless Joe Jackson." At the same time, "the positive influence of baseball and months on death row transformed Seng's once arrogant attitude to humility." In the book, Enns emphasizes how the game of baseball provided a positive influence for the inmates. "It was clear to me that the inmates found sanctuary in the sport in the process," says the author. "They played as though excellence in baseball could redeem their sins."

While Seng's struggle to live is presented against a backdrop of Alston's desire to protect his own personal and financial interests, the other All Stars are described less fully in the text. The All Stars ranged in age from 19 to 38, and one limitation of telling the story primarily through Seng's eyes is that it is more difficult to learn about the unique perspectives of the other players. That said, the level of detail that Enns includes about Seng's story makes for gripping reading.

The All Stars were clearly influenced by contemporary major league baseball. Warden Alston was a fan of Ty Cobb "and encouraged

players to emulate Cobb's style and technique." Alston kept a picture of the 1911 World Champion Philadelphia Athletics over his desk, and he also made his pitchers study photos of Christy Mathewson's pitching techniques "in the hopes they could duplicate Mathewson's success." Enns also notes that Seng kept baseball cards of Honus Wagner and Hal Chase while in prison. The author suggests that "being a shortstop himself, Seng likely saw Wagner as a great hero."

Newspaper reporters eventually began to investigate the idea of "playing for time." As a consequence, Alston and co-conspirator Judge Kenneth Farchi ultimately decided they needed to carry out the postponed death sentences to avoid being uncovered in their "profitable money making venture." The latter portion of the book is devoted to Seng's fight to live when it became clear that the All Stars could not continue. Enns highlights the overwhelming outcry of fans who feverishly petitioned to keep their favorite player from going to the gallows.

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Playing for Time,
continued from page 4.

The back cover of the book includes a quote saying “*Playing for Time* is an anomaly. It’s one of those rare stories that gets you rooting for the bad guys because you want them to win the game and stay alive.” True or not, the contradictory circumstance of players who committed such brutal crimes coming together to support each other and to play as a team under life-and-death pressure is a remarkable story from the deadball period. ♦

*The 1917 White Sox:
Their World Championship
Season,* by Warren N.
Wilbert and William C.
Hageman

Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004. [ISBN 0-7864-1622-X] 230 pages, softcover, \$28.50.

Reviewed by **R.J. Lesch**
rjlesch_usa@yahoo.com

One of the occupational hazards of writing about the Deadball era is a tendency to lapse into Deadballese.

After reading the florid prose of Ring Lardner, W.A. Phelon, and others, it’s easy to start writing in that vein. Wilbert and Hageman succumb to this tendency occasionally throughout *The 1917 White Sox*, their book about the second (and most recent) World Series championship won by the Chicago American League team.

One example, on page 6, refers to Charles Comiskey’s attempt to jump-start his rebuilding process by purchasing Eddie Collins from the Philadelphia Athletics dynasty: “Dame Fortune was apparently looking his way, and the crafty White Sox

generalissimo was not about to snub the Good Lady.”

Another priceless example appears on page 99, referring to a pitching gem by Reb Russell: “Sir Ewell, the affable Southerner, threw his variety of fluff, benders and feathers, along with an occasional quickie, so effectively that the big sticks of the Bostons wilted in a feeble four hit effort that yielded nothing but frustration.”

I’m not necessarily complaining about this tendency. The book is reasonably well-researched and detailed, but it is written in a casual, fannish tone. As a White Sox fan, I enjoyed that. Wilbert and Hageman take us through Comiskey’s team-building process: the acquisition and development of young players like Buck Weaver, Red Faber and Swede Risberg, key trades for established veterans like Eddie Collins, Joe Jackson and Eddie Cicotte, and the steadying influence of veterans Shano Collins, Jim Scott, and Cicotte.

The authors guide us through the 1917 season, day by day, giving us mid-season standings and statistics, quick biographies of key players and box scores of key games contributing to the march to the 1917 AL pennant.

It is, of course, impossible to feel the true suspense of a pennant race because we know the outcome. The authors don’t really try to simulate any sort of suspense, which is understandable. After all, we’re reading about the 1917 White Sox because they won. If someone wrote a book about the 1916 White Sox, who finished second, would we read it?

A less understandable, and more irritating, choice, is the authors’ decision to make frequent references to the events of 1919-1920. Even people who don’t know that this club will win the 1917 World Series know that members of this club will take money to throw games in the 1919 World Series, and that eight members of this club will be banned from baseball for life.

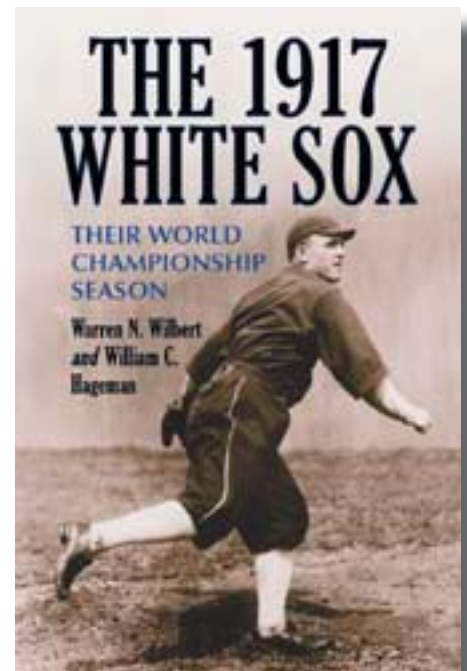
“It is important *not* to read 1919 into what happened in 1917,” the authors write at one point, and yet they seem to think it necessary to inject that 1919-1920 story into practically every chapter of the book. Doing so does make sense in spots.

Early in September 1917, White Sox players allegedly paid members of the Detroit Tigers to slough off during back-to-back doubleheaders (which the Southsiders then swept).

This is naturally connected to the Black Sox scandal and should be part of the 1917 story. Still, I would have preferred to focus on the 1917 club and its triumph for this book. Perhaps that’s fannish of me.

The book has some research value, although it contains some errors (such as referring to the wrong George Burns as “Tioga George”). I came away with a fuller appreciation of Pants Rowland as a manager, of Eddie Cicotte’s dominant 1917 season, and of such players as Risberg, Russell, and Dave Danforth, about whom I knew little. The World Series summary is thin but entertaining. An appendix asks whether the 1917 club was the best White Sox club of all time and presents a reasonable argument in favor of that claim.

The book is enjoyable if a bit light, and Southsider fans will enjoy reading about a time when, as the epilogue puts it, “they were the champs, and their sox were white.” ♦



The American Association Milwaukee Brewers: Images of Baseball, by Rex Hamann and Bob Koehler

Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing 2004. [ISBN: 0-7385-32754] 127 pages, softcover, \$19.99

Reviewed by **Mark Dugo**
trisaraptops64@hotmail.com

When baseball fans think of the Milwaukee Brewers, their first thought probably harkens to an average 2004 team with great potential. Way back in history, there was the American League, Robin Yount, Cecil Cooper and the Brew Crew. But to the long-time baseball fan, the Milwaukee Brewers were THE minor league baseball team of the century, with a history full of drama and excitement like no other.

Hamann and Koehler take us back to the original Milwaukee Brewers. These were the Brewers of the American Association that spent 51 years (1902-1952) on the city's near north side. These were the Brewers of quirky heroes, forgotten legends and home to the second-winningest franchise in the gloried league's existence.

It should be noted that the American Association determined which cities should be included as possible stomping grounds for professional ball players by a poll of postmasters and in their estimates of burgeoning Midwestern cities. Along with Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Louisville, St. Paul, Kansas City, Columbus, Toledo, and Minneapolis rounded out the league. Initiated in 1902, the Brewers franchise started rather slowly, finishing a mere sixth of eight league teams. Over the course of the next decade, the Brewers never succeeded in capturing a championship, yet the team produced a rather respectable record of 795 wins versus 745 losses.

It was not their won-loss record that initial decade that so enamored these Brewers to the city, but rather startling performances by many local legends that remained American

Association records long after their names had lost meaning to a city eventually enamored with Aaron, Spahn and Mathews.

Stars of this first decade included Claude Elliott who posted 226 strikeouts in 1903, George Stone with a .405 batting average in 1904 and Stoney McGlynn who hurled an astonishing 446 innings in 1909, accumulating a won-loss record of 27 wins against only 14 losses.

The second decade of the 20th century was much more successful for the Brewers, though it got off to a slow start. In 1912, the Brewers' primary owner, Charles Havenor, passed on, resulting in the transfer of club ownership to his wife Agnes. This is one of the earliest examples of a woman owning a professional baseball team. Agnes took to her duties with gusto, hiring future Hall of Famer Hugh Duffy as manager as one of her first decisions. Duffy let her down as the Brewers could finish no higher than 5th place, twenty-six games out of first place.

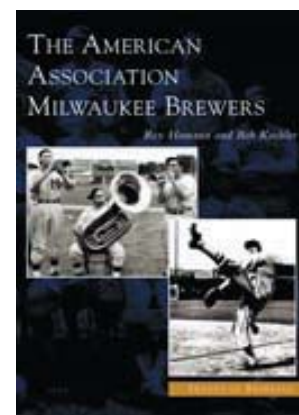
Faced with failure, Agnes decided to defer to Brewer third baseman Harry "Pep" Clark as field manager for 1913 and the result brought the Brewers their first pennant. Clark supplemented his on field decision making prowess with a respectable .286 batting average, which was third best on the team. The other main cog was pitcher Cy Slapnicka who was best in the league with twenty-five wins versus 14 losses. The 1913 Brewers finished with one hundred wins versus sixty-seven losses and their first of two back-to-back pennants.

The 1914 Brewers did nearly as well as the previous year's pennant winners by finishing 98-68. Stars for this team included pitching ace Joe Hovlik (24-14, 2.54 ERA) and slugger Newt Randall (.321). The Brewers were the champions and the toast of the town.

Other significant events for the Brewers during the Deadball era include the acquisition of American legend Jim Thorpe to the 1916 team. Thorpe played fairly well with a .274 batting average and 48 stolen bases, but other performances were dreadful, and the Brewers sunk to a league worst fifty-four wins versus a staggering one

hundred and ten losses. That result was enough to convince manager Clark to retire and led the team to almost a decade of continuous second division finishes.

Hamann and Koehler express a deep love of this era of baseball and of the Brewers franchise prior to Major League Baseball. The layout of the book is very easily readable with a brief synopsis of each decade of the team's history followed by fantastic images of old ball parks, famous heroes and supporting documentation that promises to be of great interest to the SABR crowd. A quick read but very well-written and extremely entertaining, Hamann and Koehler's *The American Association Milwaukee Brewers- Images of Baseball* was fascinating reading for this modern Cub-loving, Brewers-hating fan. ♦



From the Chairman, cont. from page 1.

end, where contributors would need to spend hours combing through African-American newspapers, visiting archival sources, and tracking down obscure leads. It would not be a task for the faint of heart, and it would certainly be something we would want to do in conjunction with members of the Negro Leagues committee. But as hard as the work would be, the finished project would be equally valuable to the field, providing the world with a better glimpse of the great players who dazzled fans in cities on the other side of the color line. I still have the list of players Eric and I came up with in his apartment several years ago. Next year, after we have put Deadball Stars of the American League to bed, I hope we can revisit that list, and chart the course for our next great Deadball project. ♦