

The INSIDE GAME

The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee

Volume 6, Number 4: "Let's get this lumpy, licorice-stained ball rolling!" November 2006

Guest Column: The Ritter Award

By **John McMurray**
jmcurray04@yahoo.com

Since 2002, SABR's Deadball Era Committee has presented the Larry Ritter Book Award to recognize the best book set primarily in the Deadball Era that was published during the past year. I recently became chair of the Ritter Award subcommittee, and as we look forward to presenting the 2007 award, I wanted to provide some insight into the selection process and to invite input.

First, I would like to thank Paul Rogers for his superior work in steering the subcommittee since it began five years ago. Paul has agreed to remain a member of the selection committee, which, in addition to Paul and myself, includes SABR members Al Blumkin, Mark Dugo, Jan Finkel, Scott Flatow, David Fleitz, David Jones, Gabriel Schecter, Tom Simon, and Doug Skipper. This eleven-person committee is the largest since the Ritter Award was established.

A critical element that every subcommittee member is asked to consider when nominating a book for the award is that the book be "primarily set in or primarily about the Deadball Era." Also, to be considered for the 2007 award that will be presented at the SABR Convention in St. Louis, books must have a 2006 publication date unless they were released too late in 2005 to be considered for the award last year.

Topics of Ritter Award-winning books have run the gamut. The first

Continued on page 9.

Crosstown Centennial: An Interview with Bernard Weisberger

Editor's Note: October 9-14 marked the 100th anniversary of the Cubs-White Sox World Series. To commemorate this historic occasion, I interviewed Bernard Weisberger, who wrote *When Chicago Ruled Baseball: The Cubs-White Sox World Series of 1906*, published this past year (see David Anderson's review in this issue).

Charles Crawley: You are a university history professor. How did you become interested in writing a history of the 1906 World Series?

Bernard Weisberger: It started as a book on Chicago in the early years of the 20th century as a dynamic urban center in the midst of all the new political and social currents of the time. The 1906 World Series was to be a chapter in the story. Chicago's being the baseball center of the United States for a week was part of that bigger picture—big time sports entertainment, covered by the popular press, appealing to a diverse mass audience, involving intra-city ethnic and class rivalries, et cetera. My publishers suggested blowing up the chapter into a short book, and as I'm a longtime fan, I agreed and it was a pleasure. (By the way, I am no longer a university professor—retired, but not emeritus, just a freelance historian. But I was indeed a professor for some twenty-odd years at three universities and one college.)

CC: In the book you describe sort of a "Perfect Storm" that came together in 1906 pitting Albert Spaulding's Chicago Cubs and Charles Comiskey's White Sox. How did you come to see it that way?

Continued on page 2.

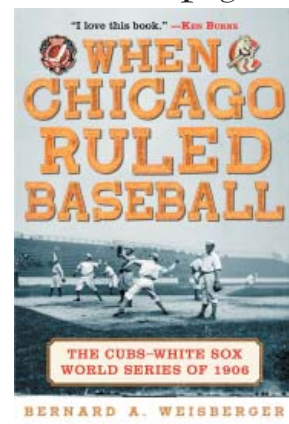
What's Inside...

Milwaukee's First American League Ballpark: Lloyd Street Grounds, by Ron Selter

Book reviews:

- *When Chicago Ruled Baseball, reviewed by David Anderson*
- *The Old Ball Game, reviewed by John McMurray*
- *Ee-Yah: The Life and Times of Hughie Jennings, Reviewed by Paul Zinn*
- *The Greatest Ballpark Ever, reviewed by John Zinn*
- *Honus Wagner, reviewed by John Saccoman*

Back when the Cubs were good, but the Sox were better... page 4



Milwaukee's First AL Ballpark: Lloyd Street Grounds

By **Ron Selter**
selter@socal.rr.com

Lloyd Street Grounds was located at 16th and Lloyd streets near downtown Milwaukee. The park was configured in a manner similar to the Polo Grounds in New York. The park site was quite narrow, and, as a result, the right and left field fences, located on the eastern and western boundaries of the park, were parallel to each other. The center field fence was, unlike the early Polo Grounds, perpendicular to the home plate-center field axis and extended from almost straightaway left field to almost straightaway right field. Like the Polo Grounds, the foul lines intersected the right and left field fences at about 135 degrees. There were two 90 degree corners in the park: one each where the left field and right field fences met the center field fence.

The basis of the park's configuration and dimensions (that are certainly less than definitive) were: (1) an 1894 Sanborn fire insurance map of the city block in which the ballpark was later sited, and (2) photos of the park from *Baseball Memories 1900-1909*. The 1894 Sanborn map showed the width of the park site (425 feet) to have been a bit more than half of the width of that city block. The eastern boundary was 16th St. and the parcel that included the park was quite deep (855 feet). From the photos of the ballpark, it is clear that the park site was not anything like 855 feet deep. The only clue to the actual depth of the park was a photo taken from behind the center field fence. This photo, (*Baseball Memories 1900-1909*, page 55), from a 1901 game shows the centerfielder playing relatively close to the center field fence. This image suggests the park's center field dimension was probably a fair amount less than 400 feet. Another photo in *Baseball Memories 1900-1909* shows a substantial amount of foul territory adjacent to both first base and third base and suggests the home plate-backstop distance was about 65-75 feet. In addition, this photo shows the right field fence meeting the foul line at much more than 90 degrees. The artist's depiction of the

park's configuration, in *Baseball Memories 1900-1909*, shows home plate and the infield centered between the eastern and western boundaries of the park's site. Given this location of home plate, the left field and right field dimensions would have been equal and were calculated on the Sanborn map. This location of home plate and the center field fence being parallel to the park's southern boundary (Lloyd St.) made the entire playing field perfectly symmetrical.

A study of home runs hit at Lloyd Street Grounds during the 1901 season showed slightly more than half of the total home runs (15 of 29) were over-the-fence type. This proportion (53%) of over-the-fence home runs at Lloyd Street Grounds was more than average for the first decade of the Deadball Era. This fact, in conjunction with, the batting park factors (shown below) suggests that the outfield distances, most likely in left-center, center field, and right-center, were slightly less than average for the early part of the Deadball Era. As there were no over-the-fence home runs to center field, the center field dimension was estimated to have been about 380 feet. Recently compiled home/road American League batting data for the 1901 season showed Lloyd Street Grounds to have been a consistently slightly-below-average offensive park. Data for seven offensive categories are shown below. The data suggests the park was about typical in size and configuration as compared with the average of the other 1901 AL parks. Home run data, dimensional estimates, and park factors for Lloyd Street Grounds are shown on the next page in five tables:

Crosstown Centennial, Cont. from page 1

BW: I always look for context, the big story behind the one in the foreground that I am telling. Here was Spalding, a businessman and promoter, one of the generation of Chicago industrialists who had made fortunes for themselves and for the city, the guiding spirit of the Cubs and the National League for a number of years and still engaged in promoting baseball overall as a great national institution—and also a man born in small town Illinois, one of the millions of countryside Americans who'd come to the big city to find fame and fortune. And here was Comiskey, as much of a Chicago Irishman as anyone could be, by birth, breeding and loyalty, whose dream from the moment he became an owner was to bring a team to his "home town." It was just so obviously there that I don't know how I could have missed it.

CC: In your chapter "After the Lights Go Down," you write about the individual fates that befell all of the participants of the 1906 World Series. You do so in a manner reminiscent of Lawrence Ritter's *The Glory of Their Times* and Roger Kahn's *The Boys of Summer*. How did you come to write such a poignant chapter?

BW: I love both those books, and they may have influenced me without my being aware of it. And I also loved those old Dickens novels in which, in the final chapter, he would wrap up the lives of all his characters. And finally I am always interested in how star athletes live the remainder of their lives after reaching the heights, so to

The
INSIDE GAME
The Official Newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee



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

Home Runs By Type

Year	Total	OTF ¹	Bounce ²	IP ³
1901	29	15	0	14

Dimensions (All Estimated)

Year	LF	LC	CF	RC	RF
1901	384	380	384	295	

Average Outfield Distances (All Estimated)

Year	LF	CF	RF
1901	368	382	368

Fence Heights (All Estimated)

Year	LF	CF	RF
1901	20	10	10

Park Factors-1901

BA	94
OBP ⁴	95
Slug	94
2B/AB	90
3B/AB	98
HR/AB	97
BB/TPA ⁵	96

(Footnotes)

¹ Over-the-Fence

² Included in OTF category

³ Inside-the-Park

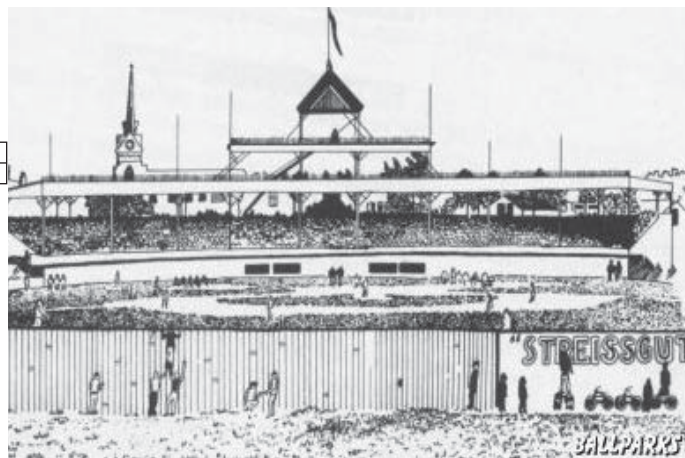
⁴ Excludes HBP as data not readily available

⁵ Excludes HBP as data not readily available◆

speak, as young men in their twenties and thirties. So from day one, I intended to do that chapter and even had the title of it in mind. The poignancy is just inherent in the story itself—how life brings us all to endings that we are very unlikely to have imagined when we were young and all the world was green.

CC: Deadball students are familiar with the amount of research that goes into writing a book such as *When Chicago Ruled Baseball*. What was it like to translate newspaper accounts into the exciting play-by-play that characterizes the book?

BW: Well, I had good role models. Back then, with no TV or radio, the only way fans not in the stands “saw” the game was through the newspaper stories, which were my main source. There would be brief summaries, usually, in a separate box (so-and-so singled, next man sacrificed him to second, he stole third while next batter was striking out, following batter singled him home—that sort of thing), but there would be longer stories trying to re-create the action and color of the two hours. I tried to do the same by shifting from the field to the stands, throwing in sidelights, and, like all of them, reaching for different ways to describe the same action in different innings—he “hit a double,” he “scorched a liner past the infield for a two-bagger,” he “stung the pitcher with a drive that got him to second.” Things like that. It made me appreciate the writers who could do it well for a 154 game season. And it was fun.



Drawing of Milwaukee's Lloyd St. Grounds

CC: What was the most outstanding play of the 1906 World Series?

BW: It's hard to pick just one; there were many great defensive plays. I'd nominate for the two top slots in game one, Jiggs Donahue's catch of a wide throw from his third baseman on a hot grounder by Frank Schulte that would have been an error, allowing Schulte to reach first and Mordecai Brown to score the tying run from third in a 2-1 game. Donahue leaped for the ball, got it, did a barrel roll and landed on his back but with his heel touching first a split second before Schulte got there. Third out, and Nick Altrock held off the Cubs for three more innings for the win. The other one involved Brown, too. Ninth inning Game Four, Brown has a 1-0 lead on a two-hitter. With two out, Fielder Jones gets to second, moving the tying run into scoring position. Frank Isbell hits a white-hot liner right back at Brown who can only put up a glove in self-defense and deflect the ball and is actually knocked to his knees. He scrambles after the ball and barehands it to Chance at first just barely in time to nip Isbell for the third out and the series-tying victory for the Cubs.

CC: Who was the most memorable player of the 1906 World Series?

BW: For me it would have to be George Rohe, the Sox infielder substitute who had only played in half of the regular season's games. He hit a triple in Game One that allowed him to score on the next play (an error by Johnny Kling) and that one run proved to be the difference in a 2-1 Sox victory. Two days later, in Game Three, with Jack Pfeister and Ed Walsh in a tight pitchers duel, he hits another triple with the bases loaded, driving in the only three runs scored that day—Sox win, 3-0. He played the whole series, hit .333, getting a double in addition to those two triples, winds up with four hits and 7 RBI and stole two bases.

Continued on page 9.

When Chicago Ruled Baseball: The Cubs-White Sox World Series of 1906
by Bernard A. Weisberger
New York: HarperCollins, 2006.
[ISBN: 0060592273] 224 pages,
\$24.95, hardcover.

Reviewed by **David W. Anderson**
danderson46@comcast.net

The first thing you see on the book jacket of *When Chicago Ruled Baseball: The Cub-White Sox World Series of 1906* is “I love this book” from Ken Burns. I will not detail my problems with Ken Burns and how he dealt with the Deadball Era. He may have redeemed himself by introducing this book to the world. In the book, author Bernard A. Weisberger has penned a quality story of the early days of baseball and one that would be a good addition to any Deadball Era Committee member’s bookshelf.

Had this World Series happened in another era, we would have been treated to a ‘great event’ in terms of media-hype. But this was the Deadball Era, and it had more of an intimacy with the followers of both clubs. Weisberger does a great job of showing how each ballclub got to where they were. The Sox were heading for a couple more close finishes but only won in 1917 and 2005. The Cubs were on a tear with this team winning four pennants and two World Series while running up a 530-235 record in five seasons from 1906 through 1910.

Opening day was cold with a hint of snow, sort of like hell was freezing over. The Cubs were a dominant team and the Sox were called the ‘Hitless Wonders.’ The Sox won 2-1 and went on to win the Series 4 games to 2. Over a long season, the Cubs would have probably come out on top, but we all know what can happen in a short series.

Because visiting teams would dress at their hotels, there was always a ‘parade’ when the visitors arrived at the ballpark. These parades at times involved taunts and sometimes-overripe vegetables flung by those opposing the visitors, but the Sox and Cubs were spared that treatment.

Even though the city was divided by the allegiances of each team, the visiting team would dress at the Victoria Hotel and proceed to the park in a talleyho, a large open wagon with benches.

The teams were entertained with music during the first game and the author describes it this way: “A man with a cornet stepped up to the plate and played, “There’ll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight”:

*“One fine night all people were in bed
Mrs. O’Leary took a lantern to the shed*

*The cow kicked the lantern, winked an eye and said,
“There’ll be a hot time in the old town tonight.”*

He then played “How Would You Like to Be the Umpire” and wound up playing an anthem to Chicago which ended “Chicago, Chicago, Chicago is my home. My heart is in Chicago wherever I may roam.”

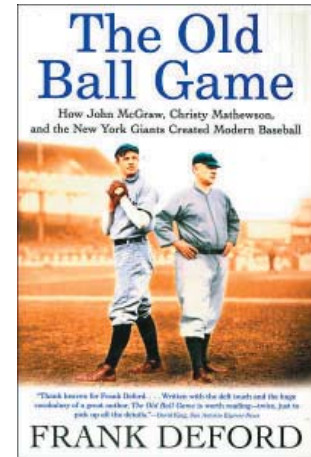
What is really excellent is how Weisberger treats both teams, in how they were put together and how they went their separate ways after their playing days were over. Many of the players did not enjoy long lives, Jiggs Donohue, George Davis and Harry Steinfeldt—all died before their time. Donohue and Davis both died from paresis, the final stage of syphilis, while Steinfeldt passed from a cerebral hemorrhage in 1918.

Others were more fortunate. Johnny Kling enjoyed a long life as a businessman in Kansas City. Big Ed Walsh became baseball coach at Notre Dame. Doc White also a productive life, living long enough to see his record of five straight shutouts broken by Don Drysdale. In turn, White sent Drysdale a telegram congratulating him. Reading the list of those who played in the Series is almost worth the price of the book.

The one shortcoming I see in the book—and it may be picking nits—the editing is uneven. In the first part of the book, Weisberger uses a number of parenthetical phrases, which could have just been added without parentheses. While Weisberger provides the reader with all of the seasonal records in the record of Game Five, the Cubs scored six times, but the number of runs showing in the score

was 0 and the hits were 6 and errors were 0, instead of a line score of 6-6-0.

But that is just a nit. This book is one that should be on every Deadball Era fan’s bookshelf. I said that twice



The Old Ball Game: How John McGraw, Christy Mathewson, and the New York Giants Created Modern Baseball
by Frank Deford
New York: Grove Press, 2005. [ISBN 0-8021-4247-8] 241 pages. \$13.00 softcover.

Reviewed by **John McMurray**
jmcurray04@yahoo.com

The Old Ball Game by Frank Deford is a dual biography of Hall of Famers Christy Mathewson and John McGraw. Not only does Deford describe how the gentlemanly and refined Mathewson coexisted with the cantankerous McGraw as his manager, but the author also explains how their respective careers helped to shape the modern game of baseball. It is an ambitious book, one which considers Mathewson and McGraw against the backdrop of contemporary history and major social movements.

Much of the book centers on Mathewson and McGraw’s joint successes in spite of “being so far apart in ilk and personality.” Mathewson, Deford says, was “golden, tall, and handsome, kind and educated, our

Continued on page 5.

Deford, Cont. from page 4.

beau ideal,” while McGraw, nicknamed ‘Muggsy,’ was “a pugnacious little boss” whom “his players came to love despite themselves.” Together, Deford says, they would “have such a profound impact on their sport that they would raise it to a new eminence in the first city of the land, and, then beyond, into Americana.”

Yet the book is more than a story about a star pitcher and his manager. Other contemporaries receive considerable attention, from Mike “King” Kelly and Andrew Freeman to Larry Doyle and Chief Meyers. Deford succeeds in putting players and events in context, including why the public in the early 20th century was so receptive to clean-cut sports heroes like Mathewson. In fact, this book would be an excellent resource for students of heroism in American sport during the Deadball Era.

Deford’s writing style adds to the book’s distinctiveness. The Polo Grounds, Deford writes, “was as much [Mathewson’s] pulpit as his stage, he as much a spiritual force as a theatrical one.” And according to Deford, McGraw “looked like a leprechaun without a conscience” while Matty’s “countenance was friendly and kind and touched with sympathy.”

Over and above the author’s language, Deford’s straightforward insights are a centerpiece of the book. Deford captures Mathewson’s diverse appeal by saying, “The public thought [Mathewson] was faultless while those who knew him thought Matty was wonderfully human.” Part of Mathewson’s allure, Deford argues, was that he was not just a gentleman but a “Christian gentleman,” a figure held in such supernal esteem that he appears in a stained glass window in New York’s Cathedral of St. John the Divine. And, at the time of their respective deaths, Deford claims that “America needed Matty; baseball needed Muggsy.”

Deford’s attention to detail throughout the book is striking. By including the words of the presiding priest at McGraw’s wedding or recounting how New York Giants players in 1916 gave McGraw the collected works of Shakespeare as

a gift following the team’s 26-game winning streak, Deford helps to capture the tenor of the time. Many readers are well-aware of Mathewson’s skill in checkers, but how many know that the pitcher was elected second vice president of the American Checkers Association or that he could play games blindfolded?

It is, of course, difficult for any author to break much new ground about two subjects who have already been the subject of numerous biographies. Still, Deford’s recounting of Mathewson’s role in the Merkle incident, the pitcher’s reactions to Fred Snodgrass’ muff in the 1912 World Series, and Mathewson’s reasoning that Hal Chase was throwing games are among the most comprehensive available.

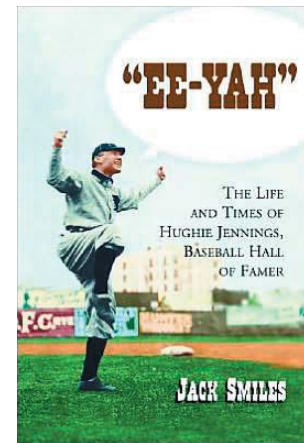
It should be noted that the book does not rely much on statistics; instead, it reads like a narrative, with statistics interwoven. Also, even though the *The Old Ball Game* does include a detailed index, one limitation of the book is that it is not footnoted. Consequently, it could be difficult for baseball researchers to track down the sources for specific facts that Deford cites in the text.

In assessing McGraw’s long-term impact, Deford concludes that McGraw’s managerial style served as the inspiration for many contemporary coaches. “McGravian copies,” Deford asserts, include Earl Weaver, Bobby Knight and Bill Parcells. Even today, McGraw is considered “the prototypical tough-guy coach.”

Mathewson, Deford contends, has less of a presence among current athletes. In contrast to McGraw, Mathewson “was much more a creature of his time, a collegian when so few Americans were, a sportsman when it mattered, a muscular Christian rather than born-again.” Deford suggests that when the Cy Young Award was created in 1956, it was not named for Mathewson in part because “everything about him seemed so passé.” Deford alleges that Mathewson has inspired so few contemporary prototypes because “he was one of a kind, for all time, necessarily left back in his time.”

Deford has accomplished a rare feat in the book: he has written a dual

biography of two already well-known figures which presents them from a new perspective. *The Old Ball Game* is an engaging, thoroughly-researched, and precisely-written book that would be a welcome addition to any baseball library. ♦



Ee-Yah: The Life and Times of Hughie Jennings, Baseball Hall of Famer

by Jack Smiles

Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2006. [ISBN: 9780786422029] 224 pages, \$29.95, paperback. Order at (800) 253-2187 or at www.mcfarlandpub.com.

Reviewed by Paul Zinn
pzinn3@hotmail.com

What makes Jack Smiles’ biography of Hughie Jennings an excellent choice isn’t just that it is a well-written and thoroughly researched account of a baseball great’s life.

In *Ee-Yah: The Life and Times of Hughie Jennings, Baseball Hall of Famer*, Smiles goes above and beyond what a normal biography does. Jennings’ life, from his times with the Old Orioles to his three consecutive pennants while managing the Detroit Tigers (1907-1909) to the ensuing disappointing World Series each time, is an inherently interesting one and also a subject that hasn’t been researched enough.

Continued on page 6.

Smiles, cont. from page 5.

A simple timeline of Jennings would be an extraordinary story, but Smiles goes further.

The story begins with a depiction of Jennings' childhood, as he grew up working as a breaker boy and a mule driver in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. This time in his life also serves to explain why Jennings played the game with reckless abandon. The other option was a life in the dangerous coal mines, and Hughie, while never forgetting his past, didn't want to go back.

Baseball as an occupation in those days wasn't a glamorous profession, and while Jennings' father wasn't initially pleased with Hughie's decision, he learned to take a liking to baseball and an interest in his son's career.

Hughie's friendship with John McGraw and their lifelong relationship is critical to the story, but a description of how the great Baltimore Orioles teams of the 1890s were put together helps to go beyond Jennings' significance with them and his relationship with McGraw.

Smiles uses this relationship to help discuss the significance of the team in baseball history, while never straying to far from his primary subject. A vivid description of the celebration following the team's first pennant victory in 1893 is included.

Constant contract disputes enveloping Hughie and teammates, as well as clubs toggling over whose property Jennings actually was, describes a lot about the contemporary business of the game.

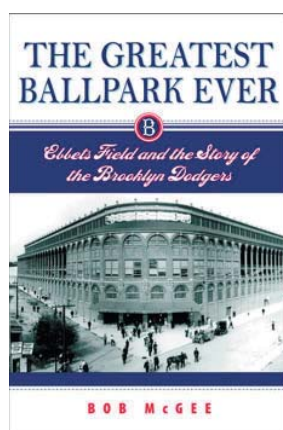
Jennings made his mark as a manager with the Tigers, a time which probably made up the most well-known years of his life. A chapter that describes Jennings' famous rallying cry of "Ee-Yah" is also an essential part of the book.

But in the following chapter, Smiles explains Jennings relationship with Ty Cobb, the fiery and unstable baseball great. It would have been easy for Smiles just to take Hughie's management style and outline it. However, using Cobb in comparison makes the study infinitely more interesting. Rather than a dry

description, the method gives hard examples of how Jennings handled problems while heading the Tigers.

Possibly the only portion of the story that leaves the reader searching for more comes at the end, after Jennings' death.

Smiles explores Hughie's personality, prompting questions such as "Was he insulting and demeaning to other people or was he compassionate and helpful?" As the author explains, there is little to go on in answering such questions. But the story seems to provide a positive portrayal of Jennings, and the end leaves you searching a bit for this potentially negative side. ♦



The Greatest Ballpark Ever: Ebbets Field and the Story of the Brooklyn Dodgers by Bob McGee

Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers
University Press, 2006. [ISBN:
9780813536019] 348 pages,
\$19.95, paperback.

Reviewed by **John Zinn**
jzinn84@comcast.net

In 2005, there were numerous observances of the 50th anniversary of the Brooklyn Dodgers' first and only World Series championship. It seems unlikely, however, that 2007 will see similar recognition of the 50th anniversary of the team's final season in Brooklyn. Yet just mentioning that upcoming anniversary reminds us that the Dodgers have already been out of Ebbets Field for longer (49 years) than they played there (44 years).

Forty-four years is a relatively short life span for Deadball Era stadiums. However, during that time, Ebbets Field had an impact that extends both to today and far back into the early days of organized baseball. In announcing plans for the Mets' new stadium, team owner Fred Wilpon mentioned features drawn from Ebbets Field that reminded him of walking through the famed rotunda there with his father. Those memories were probably similar to those of Brooklyn Borough President Alfred Steers, who at the Ebbets Field groundbreaking on March 4, 1912, remembered watching the Brooklyn Atlantics' 18780 historic victory over the famed Cincinnati Red Stockings through a knothole at Brooklyn's Capitoline Grounds.

Ebbets Field deserves to have its story told and preserved, which is exactly what Bob McGee has done in his well written and well researched book, *The Greatest Ballpark Ever: Ebbets Field and the Story of the Brooklyn Dodgers*. The subtitle reflects the reality that the story of the stadium and the story of the team are inseparable. However, the author avoids focusing too much on the team's history, much of which (especially its last 25 years) has been told before. One important way that the author does so is through a wide range of interviews with 'ordinary' people who experienced games at Ebbets Field.

Unfortunately, the passage of time made it impossible for McGee to use this technique for the Deadball Era portion of the story. To his credit, the author did use eyewitness accounts, specifically contemporary newspaper accounts. While not perfect, this material allows for the correction of some popular myths such as the purchase price of the last parcel of land. To limit costs, Charlie Ebbets had begun acquiring the various lots in secret long before the public announcement of the new stadium. The major problem with the last parcel was difficulty in finding its owner. The popular myth is that the owner had

Continued on page 7.

McGee, cont. from page 6.

little knowledge of its value and settled for \$500. However, McGee's research indicates that the owner was not that uninformed, ultimately asking for, and getting, \$2,000.

One regret is that the author did not find or did not use other material from these sources. Of special note is a spectacular two-page picture in the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle's* coverage of the first exhibition game in 1913 that shows the original stadium from the perspective of looking towards home plate from the outfield. This view gives a good sense of how the scope of the project must have impressed New Yorkers at a time when Yankee Stadium was not even a dream. Also unfortunately missing is Tom Rice's wonderful comment that the access by public transportation was so plentiful that, "even a bigamist could ask no more avenues of escape or approach."

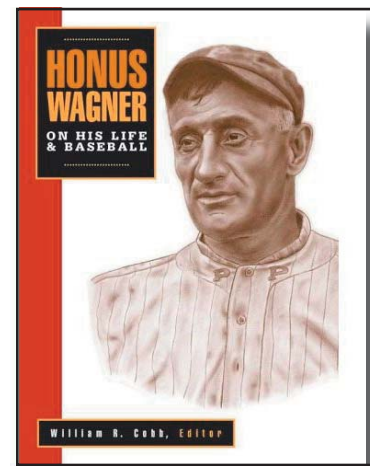
The story of the actual construction of the stadium is told warts and all, including the inordinate timeframe. Unlike the far larger Braves Field that was built in five months, Ebbets Field took over a year from the groundbreaking to completion. Apparently things just took longer for the Dodgers, whether it was building a stadium or winning a championship. The delays in construction further increased the cost which was already escalating beyond Ebbets' original estimates. The cost overruns forced Ebbets to bring in the McKeever brothers as partners thus setting in motion future divisions in ownership that would ultimately lead to an owner who would move the team not just out of the ballpark but out of Brooklyn itself.

Once the stadium is open for business, McGee takes the story through the team's mediocrity in the 20's and 30's through the resurgence of the 1940's and 50's and finally to the departure of the Dodgers in 1957 and the destruction of the ballpark in 1960. As the story moves beyond the Deadball Era, eyewitness accounts help to explain the unique connections between the team and the community, a connection greatly strengthened by the intimacy of the ballpark. That intimacy that was further magnified

by renovations beginning in the 1930's that changed Ebbets Field from a relatively large Deadball Era stadium to the much smaller facility that we remember today. The focus also stays on the stadium, as the worst (Bobby Thomson's home run) and the best (the seventh game triumph in the 1955 Series) moments in Brooklyn Dodgers history receive less attention since they did not happen at Ebbets Field.

Finally, the author turns to the end of the story, the move of the Dodgers to Los Angeles. The account is balanced by the recognition of Walter O'Malley's responsibility or culpability while also noting that civic leaders in New York City (especially Robert Moses) provided little support until it was too late. The sad irony of the Ebbets Field story is the difference from other franchises that moved. In the cases of the Boston Braves, the New York Giants, and the Philadelphia Athletics, the stadiums died primarily because the team died first. In the Dodgers' case, the team was alive and well but was simply ripped out of its home and its community. Perhaps even more ironic is that the only two Deadball Era parks that survive today, Wrigley Field and Fenway Park, are the enormously popular homes of teams that have similar histories of tragedy and triumph.

Reference was made earlier to Fred Wilpon reminiscing about going to Ebbets Field with his father. McGee notes early on that "the thing that everyone remembers about going to Ebbets Field" is going with one's father, including the social and literary critic Alfred Kazin, who saw an opera, of all things, at Ebbets Field. The author gives ample space for such stories, including that of Anne Dermansky who remembered Ebbets Field as "a dark mysterious place" where "I, of course, was safe: I was with my daddy." Philip Lowry, who also wrote about old stadiums, named his book, "Green Cathedrals." Perhaps it is fair to say that baseball stadiums are cathedrals because of the holy things that can and do happen there. Fortunately for all of us, Bob McGee has written the story of one such cathedral, a story that should and will live on. ♦



Honus Wagner: On His Life and Baseball

Edited by William R. Cobb
Sports Media Group, 2006 [ISBN: 1587263084]. 187 pages. \$24.95, hardcover.

Reviewed by **John T. Saccoman**
sacomjt@shu.edu

When naming an all-time baseball team, shortstop is probably the easiest position to fill. The other positions are more challenging. Second base – Eddie Collins or Joe Morgan? Third base – Brett or Schmidt? Select three outfielders from among Mays, Aaron, Ty Cobb, Ruth, Williams, DiMaggio, Mantle, Speaker, and yes, Bonds. Seaver, Mathewson, Young, Grove, or Walter Johnson? But shortstop, well, virtually anyone will immediately say Honus Wagner.

What I always find amazing as that Wagner is a player about whom the sabermetricians and non-stat hounds can both agree. Bill James lists him as the greatest shortstop and the second-greatest player of all time. In 1931, John McGraw was quoted as saying: "I hold out for Hans Wagner as the greatest of them all...In all my career, I never saw such a versatile player."

It almost seems an insult that The Sporting News lists Wagner as low as 13th (out of 100) on its All-Century team from the 20th century.

Continued on page 8.

Wagner, cont. from page 7.

I have been fascinated with Wagner since I was young, growing up with Ralph Kiner's reminiscences of Wagner on the Mets broadcasts, and especially ever since I used his Strat-o-Matic Hall of Fame card. Who knew a shortstop could hit, field and run like that (in the pre-1990s)? Oh, right, A-Rod, but he's a third baseman these days. When I learned that Honus had played some pro ball in my hometown of Paterson, my interest was piqued even further.

It was with this interest that I read his "autobiography" *Honus Wagner: On His Life and Baseball*, edited by William R. Cobb. It seems that Wagner's memoirs were serialized in various newspapers in the 1920s, first appearing in *The Los Angeles Times* between December 13, 1923 and January 23, 1924, and it is nice to have all of Wagner's stories in one place.

In his foreword, Cobb mentions that he transferred the whole series from microfilm, and, apart from filling in illegible parts as well as modernizing spelling and word usage, "extensive changes were not required." One might quibble with Cobb's assertion that a ghostwriter was not employed; he states that the use of ghostwriters was "frowned upon" in the early 20th century and that a scandal led the commissioner to prohibit star players from "lending their name to any work that they actually did not write." Ford Frick and Babe Ruth?

That being said, the text does ring true. It definitely contains the intent and thoughts of Wagner, if not completely verbatim. Wagner's pioneering efforts at off-season conditioning—through hunting and basketball playing, among other activities—provide insight into why he was so dominant in his own day. There was nothing Wagner couldn't do on the ball field.

Cobb calls the reader's attention to the discrepancy in the signing names and dates on his first professional contract, and also of whether he ever batted left-handed in a game. However, Hans' reputation as a creative storyteller had me wary from

the beginning, and the wise reader should take with a grain of salt some of the fantastical stories contained herein.

Regardless, I highly recommend the book. It provides a rare comprehensive glimpse into the mind of one of the greats of the Deadball Era.

For example, one fine aspect of the book is Wagner's advice to young players. Coming from the Deadball Era, it was a much more cerebral game that Wagner played, and he recounts advice he gave in the off-season to the Carnegie University baseball team.

In the section "The Shortstop's Job and How to Fill It," Wagner lists eight points that a shortstop must consider when defending against a potential stolen base, such as "Do you have the catcher or other infielder giving signal to the pitcher when the runner is taking too much of a lead?" Clearly, the players were much more in charge on the field and expected to know what to do without coaching.

In "My Grand All-American Team," Wagner selects 21 men "to represent the best that there has been in baseball for the past thirty years." Significantly, he chose 18 who would ultimately be elected to the Hall of Fame, including his manager, John McGraw, an infielder of Sisler, Lajoie, Jimmy Collins and Bobby Wallace (modestly not selecting himself for shortstop) and an outfielder of Clarke, Speaker and Ty Cobb (with Babe Ruth in reserve). The selection of Ray Schalk (along with Bresnahan and Kling) as catcher gives pause to those who question Ray's Hall of Fame enshrinement, and who wouldn't want to enter into battle armed with a pitching staff of Johnson, Mathewson, Alexander and Waddell?

The book is chock full of little tidbits, such as who was the smartest pitcher Wagner ever saw? (It was Big Six). What was the greatest team Wagner ever saw? (The 1901 Pirates) What was the greatest catch he ever witnessed? (It was by Jack Murray, aided on a dark afternoon by a lightning flash).

Honus makes other all-time team selections, some of them curious. When selecting his all-time NL team, he again modestly defers at shortstop,

selecting Hughey {sic} Jennings, and Three-Finger Brown and teammates Deacon Phillippi and Babe Adams to the mound corps. However, Wagner puzzlingly changes managers to Fred Clarke. His all-time American League team includes Ray Chapman as an extra player, about whom Wagner opines, "would have undoubtedly have made one of the greatest ballplayers the game ever knew had he lived longer." Also, Wagner must have thought very highly of Jimmy Collins (or very poorly of contemporary third base play): Collins made the AL, NL, and Grand All-American squads.

After naming his all-time teams, Wagner talks about spring training and traveling in Pullman cars, and presents a "sort of final examination in the hope that it will bring up young teams as well as give the spectators a clearer appreciation of what the ball players are trying to do on the field." He adds that the questions were taken from exams he had given the players at Carnegie Tech when he coached there. They are more or less opinion questions, such as, "Do you use the sacrifice bunt in close games with no outs?"; "Is it good policy to hit the first ball now and then?"; and "Is the art of stealing bases on the decline?" [Definitely in the affirmative, circa 1925].

Wagner concludes the book with the section titled: "How the Game Can Be Strengthened." He asserts: "I am convinced that the game of baseball has done as much toward the amalgamation of races, toward Americanization, as any one factor in American life." Wagner goes on to anticipate the 1970s experimental Kansas City Royals academy, recommending a formation of a baseball college for professional players. It would have been an academy, ala West Point, which would turn out "30-40 skilled players every year," or roughly one tenth of the population of the major leagues of the time.

Finally, Hans asserts that sports, particularly baseball, form a large part of the national character of America, and he was most proud to have been a part of it. Who could argue with a Hall of Famer?◆

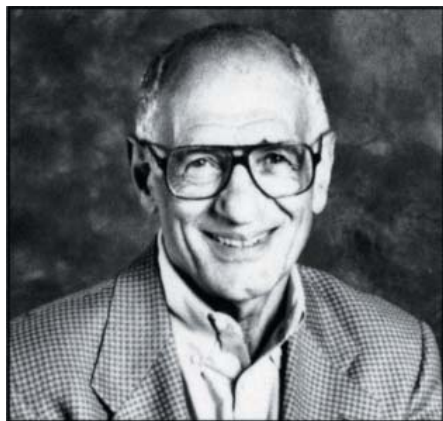
**Crosstown Centennial,
Cont. from on page 3**

CC: You seem much more sympathetic to Charlie Comiskey than Eliot Asinof was in *Eight Men Out*. Do you have a soft spot in your heart for the Old Roman?

BW: Well, certainly in 1906. He handed a \$15,000 check to the team to add to the victor's share right after Game Six—big bread in those days, and he was more of a hands-on, players' owner than later became common. By 1919, when he did seem to be a pinchpenny, he may have changed but as of '06 he was, to me, a likeable Chicago Irishman who loved his team and his town and showed it.

CC: As you note in your *Afterward*, which discusses the victorious 2005 White Sox, it is the Cubs' turn to win a World Series. What is the probability of that and of the probability of them meeting the White Sox?

BW: Huge odds against it. It's not merely a question of both teams getting hot in the same year, but each then has to survive two sets of playoffs—the Division and then the League Championship Series—and in a short series anything can happen. It sure was not going to happen in 2006 given the way the Cubs played!!!◆



Bernard Weisberger, author of *When Chicago Ruled Baseball*. Photo courtesy of the publisher.



A bear cub rounds the bases at the 1906 World Series. Harry Steinfeldt makes sure he touches all the bases. From *When Chicago Ruled Baseball*. Photo courtesy of the publisher.

Guest Column, continued from page 1.

winner was Hal Chase: *The Defiant Life and Turbulent Times of Baseball's Biggest Crook* by Martin Kohout (McFarland, 2001). In 2003, the award went to Jim Reisler's *Before They Were Bombers: The New York Yankees' Early Years, 1903-1915* (McFarland, 2002). The 2004 award was given to James Elfers' *The Tour to End All Tours: The Story of Major League Baseball's 1913-1914 World Tour* (University of Nebraska Press, 2003). Jeffrey Powers-Beck's *The American Indian Integration of Baseball* (University of Nebraska Press, 2004) took the award presented in 2005, and last year's award went to Richard Bak for his book *Peach: Ty Cobb in His Time and Ours* (Sports Media Group, 2005).

To learn more about the Ritter Award, please view our website <http://world.std.com/~pgw/Deadball/ritter.html>. There, you can also find a list of nominees for each year's award in addition to the respective winners. Also, if you would like to nominate a book to be considered for the 2007 award, please contact me at the above e-mail address. We look forward to another outstanding class of Deadball Era books to be considered for this year's award.◆