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Welcome to Your Journal

Edited by Bruce Slutsky with David Lippman
Evelyn Begley, Kevin Carter, Kevin Handerhan, Phil Mann

Dear Casey Stengel Chapter Members and Friends,

On behalf of the entire chapter leadership, it is a pleasure to welcome you to YOUR journal!

While the names of Dave Lippman and Bruce Slutsky appear as editors, this is not our journal, this is for the members and friends of the Casey Stengel Chapter. Our goal is to provide you with a voice and a place to tell your stories, share your memories, and offer your ideas.

We are seeking input from our members and readers. We want to hear from you if you want to contribute to future issues. We anticipate our second issue to be published in Spring 2025. Some examples of the material we would like to publish are listed to the right. You get the idea. Just about anything you want. *You Can Look It Up* is your journal!

* Memories of notable baseball games you have attended

*Your introduction to baseball

*Brief stories of your favorite ballplayers and interactions with them

*Brief reviews of books you have read

*Short lists – Great moments, teams and players, favorite baseball books and movies, memorable announcers and calls

*Baseball trips and stadium stories

Batter up and play ball!

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Contributing to SABR Projects and Publications

By Jessica Smyth, SABR Membership Services Manager

Are you looking for more ways to get involved within SABR? A great way to do that is by contributing to a research project or a publication.

Whether you're a veteran researcher, or just getting started, all SABR members are invited to participate. Below are just a few examples of how to contribute.

The **Baseball Biography Project** is an ongoing effort to research and write comprehensive biographical articles on people who played or managed in the major leagues. With over 6,000 (and counting) biographies contributed by SABR members, the ambitious goal of the BioProject is to publish a full-life biography of every major league player in history. You could write the story if you discover a bio that has yet to be written! Click here for **the BioProject Resources** page, which contains information on how you can contribute to the project.

The **SABR Baseball Games Project** was formed in 2014 to research, write, and publish accounts of major-league regular season, postseason, and All-Star Games, including Negro Leagues

games, along with other games of historical significance such as in the minor leagues or international or exhibition contests. These game accounts complement Retrosheet and Baseball-Reference box scores, as well as SABR BioProject essays on the players involved.

The **SABR Digital Library** is home to nearly 100 free digital baseball books, written, compiled, and edited by fellow SABR members, with topics spanning a range of decades, teams, stadiums, and games. You can contribute to a publication as a writer, editor, or fact-checker. New and experienced authors are always welcome to contribute! If you would like to get involved with SABR's Digital Library, check out possible **writing opportunities for upcoming publications** or find out how to **submit a proposal** to the Editorial Board.

Here's a short video on how you can get involved with the Bio and Games Projects, as well as SABR publications.

Spotlight on Gary Mintz and the New York Giants Preservation Society

By Bruce Slutsky

Everybody knows that the New York Giants moved to San Francisco after the 1957 season. At that time, the fans were heartbroken, and many tried to follow the team from afar. Few wanted to become Yankee fans. One of those diehard Giant Fans was Lou Mintz. I had the pleasure of getting to know Lou in the 1980s when I worked with him at the New York Public Library. His son Gary was born in 1961 and learned about the Giants from his dad. Gary just self-published a memoir titled, *Baseball from 3,000 Miles Away: The Trials and Tribulations of Being an East Coast San Francisco Giants Fan*. One may purchase the book at Amazon.com.

The book is written in an anecdotal style as Gary describes stories in his lifelong following of the Giants. Some of the anecdotes are:

Watching the Giants for the first time playing the Mets at Shea Stadium on August 19, 1969. Following the San Francisco Giants in the '70s and '80s with the three-hour time difference and without the internet which today provides instant information.

Meeting Jim Davenport in Philadelphia when Jim allowed Gary and his friend to stay in his hotel room and later gave them tickets to the Giants game the next day.

Seeing the 2010 World Series trophy in New York with other Giants fans at the Hilton Hotel.

Gary formed the New York Giants Preservation Society (NYGPS) after he left the New York Giants Nostalgia Society in 2009. It held its first meetings at Bergino's Baseball Clubhouse in Greenwich Village that was run by SABR member Jay Goldberg. A few of the speakers the NYGPS had at Bergino's included:

- Giants beat writer Andrew Baggarly
- Author Arnold Hano, who wrote about sitting in the bleachers of the Polo Grounds during Game 1 of the 1954 World Series.
- Filmmaker Jon Leonoudakis
- Dan Taylor, baseball author, writer, historian, and announcer

Sadly, Jay had to close his location in Manhattan and take his memorabilia business online. Thus, Gary had to look for another location and soon found Finerty's, a sports bar on the east side of Manhattan that appealed to Bay Area Sports fans. Some of the speakers at meetings there included:

- Lincoln Mitchell – a political analyst, pundit, and writer affiliated with Columbia University who spoke about his new book: Mitchell, L. A. (2018). *Baseball Goes West: The Dodgers, the Giants, and the Shaping of the Major Leagues*.

- Stew Thornley – a baseball researcher and author of *The Polo Grounds: Essays and Memories of New York City's Historic Ballpark, 1880-1963* (McFarland Historic Ballparks).

The COVID-19 shutdown in March 2020 meant the group could not meet in person so the NYGPS, like many other organizations, transitioned to online meetings via Zoom. The group thrived in this new era with meetings almost weekly. Pre-2020 only people in the NYC area could attend meetings, but now Giants fans from all over the country can attend virtually. As of March 2024, the society held 141 Zoom meetings that are available on [YouTube](#). Some of the speakers at Zoom events were:

- Marty Lurie, legendary SF Giants radio announcer, talking about the present team
- Jamie Ruppert, granddaughter of Horace Stoneham
- Steven Treder, author of *Forty Years a Giant: The Life of Horace Stoneham*
- Dennis Snelling, author of *Lefty O' Doul: Baseball's Forgotten Ambassador*
- Norm Coleman, a San Francisco Giants fan who discussed how he obtained autographs from every Giant player from 1958 to the present

The Pologrounder is a newsletter published three times a year: April, August, and December. It informs the membership about what has happened

since the last issue in regard to the group. Hope you enjoy it.

You may also view photos from a walking tour of the Polo Grounds site led by lecturer/historian Peter Laskowich.

Obviously, Gary and all members of the NYGPS idolized Willie Mays. The society raised \$2,424.24 to support the Say Hey Foundation which is dedicated to fulfilling Willie Mays' dream of giving every child a chance by offering underprivileged youth positive opportunities and safer communities. Gary is thinking of having an NYGPS Symposium in 2025. It will be held in NYC. The dates would revolve around the Giants coming into town to play either the Mets or the Yankees. The first day would constitute 5-6 guest speakers addressing our group as well as authors who would like to sell Giants-related books in the entrance to the auditorium area. The next day would include a possible Polo Grounds Magical History Walking Tour and, of course, the baseball game at either Yankee Stadium or Citi Field.

More information about the Society may be found at [this link here](#) and on [Facebook](#). If you are interested in the Society, send Gary an email at giantsguru@gmail.com.

Candy Cummings in Brooklyn

By Stephen R. Katz

They called him “Candy,” a nineteenth-century nickname for someone who was the best at what he did. It was an apt moniker. The five-foot, nine-inch righty was one of the greatest pitchers of the 1860s and '70s. He was also a baseball pioneer.

Candy Cummings played at the dawn of professional baseball, and at the debut of the National League. He served as the first president of the International League. And, he invented the curveball and introduced it into baseball, thus setting in motion a fundamental transformation of the game. This nineteenth-century star is enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

He was born William Arthur Cummings on October 18, 1848, in the central Massachusetts mill town of Ware. The town had a strong baseball tradition. It fielded several intra-town nines, plus a consistently superior team representing Ware in regional competition. Remarkably, considering the town’s small population, Cummings was one of seven ball players born in Ware who made it to the major leagues—including two who were on the legendary 1927 New York Yankees.¹

Candy’s baseball journey began in Brooklyn. In 1851, when Arthur, as he was called by friends and family, was still a toddler (he did not obtain the nickname “Candy” until later), his parents moved the family to the New York metropolitan area. After a short spell in Newark, they leapfrogged over New York City and settled in Brooklyn (Brooklyn was not incorporated into New York City until 1898). The Cummingses were among large numbers of New England transplants to Brooklyn in the mid-to late-nineteenth century, drawn by the city’s booming economy.

By the 1870s, there were more New Englanders living in Brooklyn than in Boston. The Cummings family

settled in a section of South Brooklyn, near Carroll Park. The neighborhood of brownstones fronted by spacious gardens, now known as Carroll Gardens, was just beginning to be developed. Adjoining the park, a short walk away from the Cummings residence, were two baseball grounds. Located roughly between Smith, Hoyt, DeGraw, and Carroll Streets,² they were, at various times, the home fields of several Brooklyn clubs.

At that time, Brooklyn was the center of the baseball world. It was home to top amateur squads. (In those days, all organized teams were amateur; professional baseball was still a few years away.) And there were a lot of them. Beadle’s Guides list twenty clubs from Brooklyn that, in 1860, were members of the National Association of Base Ball Players (NABBP)—amateur baseball’s governing body—and seventeen clubs in 1865.³ And there were many other organized teams that weren’t in the NABBP. Among Brooklyn’s greats were the Atlantics, who didn’t lose a game from October 1857 through September 1859, or in all of 1864 or 1865; the Excelsiors; the Eckfords; and the Stars. Brooklyn’s teams and players were enthusiastically followed by their fans and were lauded by the local press. The *Brooklyn Eagle* crowed, “in no city of the Union is the game so popular as in Brooklyn.”⁷

It was in this baseball-mad environment that young Arthur developed into a ballplayer. And it was here, in South Brooklyn, where he conceived the curveball. The detailed story of Candy’s invention of the pitch is related in my full-length biography of Cummings, published in 2022. The book makes the case that he was, indeed, the curveball’s daddy.⁸

Cummings’s entry into organized baseball came in

1864, when he was just a schoolboy in Brooklyn. At age fifteen, he joined a junior ball club called the Carrolls. The club, whose home field was at the Carroll Park Grounds, was not a member of the NABBP, and scant records exist of their, or Cummings's, performance that year. He wasn't with the Carrolls for long.

Later in 1864, he entered Falley Seminary, a private boarding school in Fulton, New York, in the far western corner of the state. As a member of the school's baseball team—called the "Hercules," and self-effacingly nicknamed the "Butterfingers Nine"—he scored his first triumph, pitching his squad to the Oswego County championship. To commemorate the victory, the team was awarded a silver ball on which were etched the signatures of Hercules players who participated in the championship series. The trophy now resides in the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

After graduating from Falley in 1866, Cummings returned to Brooklyn and pursued his passion for baseball. He joined the junior squad of the Stars Base Ball Club, one of the teams that called Carroll Park home. There, he came to the attention of Joe Leggett, catcher, talent scout, and jack-of-all-trades⁹ for the crack Excelsiors club. The Excelsiors' home field at that time was at the Capitoline Grounds, located between Halsey Street and Marcy, Putnam, and Nostrand Avenues in the Bedford section of Brooklyn.¹⁰ Impressed with the youngster, Leggett persuaded his parents to allow him to join the Excelsiors junior squad. Cummings continued to shine with his new club, so much so that he was called upon from time to time to fill in as pitcher for the Excelsiors senior team when its regular hurler, Asa Brainard, was unavailable.

His first outing at the senior level came on August 14, 1866, when the Excelsiors faced the Mutuals of New York City at the Capitoline. Although his team lost, he caught the eyes of reporters for papers in Brooklyn and

even in New York; the *Brooklyn Eagle* prophesized that Cummings will one day (not far distant) be ranked among the best pitchers of the country.⁴

In late 1867, the Excelsiors, with Cummings, embarked on a tour to New England. On October 7, they took on the Harvard College team, at Cambridge. That was the day when Arthur made baseball history.⁵ Facing a Crimson power hitter named Archie Bush, Cummings decided it was time to unleash his curveball. It had the baffled Bush flailing helplessly. Cummings had been doggedly developing the pitch for three years, and it was the first time he used it in actual competition.

In those days, the rules of the New York game stipulated that pitchers were to deliver the ball underhand, with the arm straight and at the pitcher's side, swinging perpendicularly. That's how Cummings pitched his curveball. The pitch soon spread to other hurlers, eventually becoming an essential weapon in any pitcher's arsenal. It also fundamentally transformed baseball from a game in which the pitcher had only a secondary role—to deliver balls that the batter could put into play—to one in which his job was to throw pitches that would get the batter out.

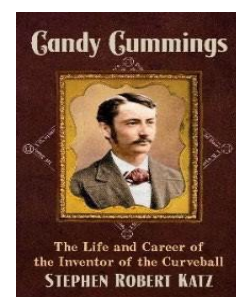
Cummings was making a big name for himself, and he was in demand. Two Brooklyn clubs, the Mohawks and the Stars, were angling to land him. After a brief stint with the Mohawks, he was hooked by the Stars, who had recently moved to the Capitoline Grounds. He had four highly successful seasons with the club, including pitching the team to consecutive amateur championships in 1869, 1870, and 1871. Reflecting the prevailing view in the baseball world, the *Brooklyn Eagle* declared, young as he is, [Cummings] has no superior today in his position.⁶

Professional baseball was formally recognized in 1869. Cummings was a hot commodity, and he received many enticing offers from pro clubs. But he preferred to

remain in Brooklyn, with the Stars. At the end of the 1871 season, however, he could resist no longer. He ended up signing with the Mutuals of New York City—a founding club of the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players (NA), considered the first major league—to pitch in 1872. He remained with the club one season, in which he posted a winning record of 33–20. Thereafter, he was with NA teams in Baltimore (1873), Philadelphia (1874), and Hartford (1875, his best year as a pro, winning 35 games and losing only 12). Candy remained with the Hartfords in 1876, the inaugural season of the National League, of which Hartford was a founding member. His final year as a major leaguer was 1877, with Cincinnati, another NL founder. Over the course of his major league career, Cummings compiled a win-loss record of 145–92.

Candy then returned to Brooklyn. He pitched in a few exhibition games in Prospect Park, and founded a new, but short-lived, club, called the Atlantics, after the earlier powerhouse of the same name. Later, he joined a Brooklyn

cooperative club, the Witokas, as captain and pitcher. He retired from organized baseball in 1883. Candy settled in Athol, Massachusetts, where he opened a paint and wallpaper business. He died on May 17, 1924, in Toledo, Ohio. In 1939, Cummings was among the first group of nineteenth-century pioneers of the game to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.



*Stephen R. Katz is a member of SABR. His books include **Candy Cummings: The Life and Career of the Inventor of the Curveball** (McFarland, 2022), and **Ware’s Boys of Summer: The Stories of Seven Major League Baseball Players from One Small Central Massachusetts Town** (self-published, 2017).*

¹ Their stories are told in Stephen R. Katz, *Ware’s Boys of Summer: The Stories of Seven Major League Baseball Players from One Small Central Massachusetts Town* (2017).

² <http://www.covehurst.net/ddyte/brooklyn/ancient.html>.

³ Henry Chadwick, *Beadle’s Dime Base Ball Player, 1860* (New York: Irwin P. Beadle & Co., 1860); Henry Chadwick, ed., *Beadle’s Dime Base Ball Player, 1866* (New York: Beadle & Co., 1866).

⁴ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 15, 1866.

⁵ In addition to Katz, *Candy Cummings*, the story is told in Mark Pestana’s SABR Games Project entry, October 7, 1867: Candy Cummings Debuts the Curve, <https://sabr.org/gamesproj/game/october-7-1867-candy-cummings-debuts-the-curve>.

⁶ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 9, 1870.

⁷ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 24, 1865.

⁸ Stephen R. Katz, *Candy Cummings: The Life and Career of the Inventor of the Curveball* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2022).

⁹ Tom Gilbert, Joe Leggett: Great Baseball Player, Terrible Human Being,” in Tom’s “How Baseball Happened baseball blog, <https://howbaseballhappened.com/blog/joe-leggett-great-baseball-player-terrible-human-being>.

¹⁰ <http://www.covehurst.net/ddyte/brooklyn/capitoline.html>.

Stranded on Second: Baseball's Gift During the Pandemic Or, My Response to Dan Duquette's Essay Question on Player Development

By Steven K. Wisensale

When I was eighteen, I traveled 2,240 miles by Greyhound Bus from Hanover, Pennsylvania, to Phoenix, Arizona, to attend Grand Canyon College. I was scared, lonely, confused and desperately homesick. Clearly, I was on a landscape alien to me, both physically and mentally. It was in the early evening of my second day that I found some solace when I walked across campus to the baseball field where I would play in the spring of 1964 as a utility infielder. Years later my coach, Dave Brazell, would be inducted into the American Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Fame, as would one of my teammates, Ron Polk, who became a legendary coach at Mississippi State where he launched the professional careers of Jeff Brantley, Will Clark, Rafael Palmeiro, Bobby Thigpen and Jonathan Papelbon.

On that very warm and lonely evening in Phoenix far, far away from home, I recall climbing to the top row of the bleachers behind home plate where I sat for several hours staring at something very familiar to me and comforting: a baseball diamond. The experience soothed my soul, and both the loneliness and homesickness slowly vaporized. I knew things were going to work out ok for me.

Over the years I have called upon baseball multiple times to bring calm and order into my life. Most recently, baseball has helped me cope with the pandemic through three diversions that I sought out myself. First, at the suggestion of several fellow SABR members who are familiar with games and simulations, I created my own baseball universe. Using Out of the Park Baseball (OOTPB) ([Out of the Park Baseball - Out of the Park Developments \(ootpdevelopments.com\)](#)), I created the International Baseball Federation (IBF), a 12-team fictitious league consisting of fictitious players, coaches, managers, trainers, and front office personnel. There are the Tombstone Desert Ghosts, the Muscle Shoals Swamp Jumpers, the Selma Freedom Riders, the Port Huron Radical Rogues, and the Riveting Rosies of Seneca Falls – to name just a few teams in the league.

As the GM and field manager of one of the teams, I participated in the league's inaugural draft, designed and

built 12 distinct ballparks (one per team) and completed a full 162-game season pitch-by-pitch in real time. My team went 74 and 88 but a pick-up in the Rule 5 draft in December and the signing of several talented free agents over the winter, gave me hope for a more successful second season. As I write this, my team is halfway through their 30-game spring training schedule in the Georgia Peach League and I am also evaluating the pool of 120 prospects who will be selected in the upcoming amateur draft in June. Do I risk picking a high school kid who may choose college over pro ball? I oversee a AAA and AA minor league club with plans to add an A level league next year. I am also creating the Pacific Coast Winter League which will be modeled after the Arizona Fall League.

My second diversion through baseball was to enroll in the Baseball Bureau's Scout School, headed up by former MLB GM Bill Bavasi, who is now with Perfect Game ([Bill Bavasi To Join PG Leadership Team | Perfect Game USA](#)). Held in conjunction with the Arizona Fall League, it went virtual during the pandemic, and I seized the opportunity to take the online version which consisted of professional scouts sharing their knowledge and insights in identifying and evaluating young talent. The class of 30 or so students met five consecutive nights for three hours each session. A special unit on baseball analytics was added in the spring which I also completed.

My third diversion during the pandemic was to complete a course on player development taught by Dan Duquette, the former GM of the Expos, Red Sox and Orioles. Offered by Sports Management Worldwide ([Baseball Player Development | Sports Management Worldwide](#)), the online course ran for eight weeks. There were assigned readings, weekly quizzes, short reflection papers, two required informational interviews with professional baseball executives, a major essay and a final exam consisting of 100 multiple-choice questions.

But perhaps the most interesting aspect of the course was the weekly one-hour chats with Dan Duquette who was particularly generous in sharing his baseball knowledge and experience with his students. What

follows is my response to Dan Duquette's final essay question for the course. I chose to go the creative route by bringing in both real and fictitious characters whom many SABR members and baseball fans in general have met through film or literature.

Dan Duquette's Essay Question

Assume the role of a General Manager of a minor league team that did well during the regular season until the end when it collapsed. The players are deeply disappointed and demoralized. How will you prepare your team to overcome such adversity and prepare them for the upcoming season? How will you handle, in particular, your young pitcher who is extremely emotional and has difficulty overcoming adversity. And finally, identify the key lessons you learned from Dan Duquette's course that can be applied to meeting these challenges before you.

Getting from ME2WE and Finding Ichiro Two

I was delighted to receive the phone call from the front office of the parent club informing me that as the GM of one of the minor league teams I would be in charge of turning things around for the upcoming season.

Granting such responsibilities to a minor league GM is a rare occurrence. After all, a GM's time at that level is often consumed by weekly butter inventories for the popcorn machine, reviewing advertising revenues generated by outfield fence billboard sales, interviewing Max and his frisbee-catching dog Zephyr who can entertain fans before games, meeting the fireworks salesperson who wants to put "The Big Ferris Wheel" high in the sky after the July 4th game for a small cost increase, negotiating a contract with a parachuting Elvis impersonator who promises to deliver the game ball to the starting pitcher before each of the next seven home games, auditioning teenagers (often escorted by their stage moms and dads) desiring to sing the national anthem, and meeting with the leader of a local garage band who fidgets with his nose ring while insisting his band is much better than it sounds.

It is with much pride that I hold the position of General Manager of the Bar Harbor Sea Monkeys, a lower-level minor league team on the coast of northern Maine and owned by legendary financial whiz, Gordon Gekko

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVxYOQS6gk>).

My field manager is Sidd Finch ([Sidd Finch - Wikipedia](#) ([Sidd Finch - Wikipedia](#)), my hitting coach is Willie Mays Hayes ([Bing Videos](#)), my pitching coach is legendary Ricky "Wild Thing" Vaughn ([Major League 1989 - Wild Thing Song - Entire Scene \(HD\) - Bing video](#)), and Bob Uecker is the parent club's Director of Scouting & Player Development. Uecker, who will consult with me on this project, loves to tell the story of how he was signed to a professional baseball contract. "I was sitting at the kitchen table with my parents. Across from us was the head scout of the Pittsburgh Pirates. He fiddled with a manilla folder filled with scouting reports and a blank contract. In a very dramatic way, he looked straight at my parents and said, without hesitation, 'Mr. and Mrs. Uecker, the Pittsburgh Pirates are prepared to sign your son for \$5,000.' Hearing that statement, my father leaped from the table and began waving his arms in disbelief. 'Oh my God.' He said, 'We can't afford to pay that kind of money.'"

Uecker of course went on to have a storied career in baseball, becoming best known perhaps for mastering the art of catching knuckleballs. "I just wait 'til the ball stops rolling and then pick it up," he said ([Bob Uecker "professional ball chaser" - YouTube](#)). He was often referred to as Mr. Baseball, thanks to his many appearances on the Johnny Carson Show ([1985 Bob Uecker Johnny Carson Nuclear Play by Play - Bing video](#)).

To address the problems at hand, I would do the following: First, I would call for a week-long retreat at The Inn by the Sea in Cape Elizabeth, Maine ([Oceanfront Luxury Beach Resort near Portland, ME | Inn by the Sea](#)). Invitees will include Uecker, who is coming from the front office of the parent club, the field manager (Finch), his two coaches (Hayes and Vaughn), the baseball analytics intern (Filkins) from The College of the Atlantic ([College of the Atlantic \(coa.edu\)](#)), the Sea Monkeys' video coordinator ("I am Claudia with a "K" she says each time she introduces herself), and the major league club's Farm Director (George Kissell, Jr), the Deputy Director of Scouting (Tony Lucadello III), and the Assistant Director of Player Development (Danny Litwhiler III).

Also invited was Koji Sawasaki, the Assistant Director of Player Development for the Hanshin Tigers of the Japanese Professional Baseball League (NPB). Several years ago, the Sea Monkeys and Tigers entered into a five-year partnership to share baseball knowledge and player

development techniques with each other. As part of a cultural exchange program, the Tigers' cheering squad and band are scheduled to tour with the Sea Monkeys for an entire month next summer.

Following my opening remarks at our first gathering, I asked for organizational confirmation that the two major principles guiding our player development program in the lower minor leagues remain in place for the upcoming season. One is that no players, other than pitchers, be pinch-hit for under any circumstances. And two, that no pitcher be allowed to throw more than 65 pitches per game until their last two starts of the season when they can go as high as 75 pitches per outing. The first principle is a confidence builder for our young hitters. The second principle is based on the belief that you cannot develop pitchers effectively if they are injured. Keeping our players healthy is a top priority.

As I was about to move on, Willie Mays Hayes spoke up forcefully. "I say we have one more principle," he said. "No sac bunts except for pitchers. I am developing hitters here, not pansies who drop down passive aggressive bunts." That prompted an immediate response from manager Sidd Finch. "C'mon Willie, there are times when you have to move the runner up." "Bullshit," shouted Willie. "You wanna move the runner up? Put the freakin' ball 14 rows deep in the bleachers. Let my boys hit, for God's sake," he shouted. To cool off the room, Uecker intervened with a perfect diversion in the form of an announcement. "Listen guys, we can talk about this stuff later in the year, but I forgot to mention something very important. The front office folks have finished designing the Baseball Aptitude Test (BAT) we've all been talking about. They will be sending it out to all of the affiliates in a few weeks for comments and feedback. It consists of 60 multiple choice questions that cover the history of the game, key rules that all players and coaches need to know, and defensive assignments on bunts and cut-off plays. Our kids will be scored on a 20 to 80 scale. Sound familiar?

And look, as far as I know, no other club has used such a test like this before," Uecker said, punctuating his comment with a wink.

I reminded the group that I was a strong supporter of the Baseball Aptitude Test (BAT) from its conception, and I enjoyed working on the section devoted to baseball history. I also pointed out that many of the questions on rules came from David Nemeč's *The Official Guide to*

Baseball Rules Illustrated and we also relied on the Baseball Rules Academy ([Membership - Baseball Rules Academy](#)). "And by the way," Uecker interjected, "We will continue to do 'Rule of the Day' throughout the organization next season." The part of BAT devoted to defensive assignments came from Ron Polk's *Baseball Playbook*. Polk, a member of the College Coaches Hall of Fame due primarily for his success at Mississippi State, was my teammate at Grand Canyon College in the 1960s. "I knew Ron was destined to do big things in baseball way back then when we shared duties as part-time utility players," I said.

During our daily meetings we discussed various strategies for improving team morale and cultivating a winning attitude. The video coordinator (Claudia with a K) had prepared a highlight film that captured the Sea Monkeys' most dramatic winning moments over the last three seasons. We all agreed that the video will be shown to the team on the first day of spring camp, but each player will also be given a DVD for his own personal viewing.

Furthermore, the video coordinator also produced an individual highlight film for each member of the team who will find the DVD in his locker on the first day of spring training. His most outstanding hits and fielding plays or pitching performances during the previous season or two will be highlighted. This approach is designed to address both team morale and individual confidence, with the point being that "we are a good team" and "each of us has succeeded in the past and we will succeed in the future."

Claudia (with a K) also announced that she created a baseball card for each player, with their photo on the front and a brief bio on the back rather than a listing of statistics that is commonly found on such cards. Each player will get a box of cards in his locker on the first day of camp, one card of himself and each of his teammates, about 30 cards in all. They will be informed that they must study each card thoroughly and be prepared to take a "scavenger hunt" type of quiz in which they will be given a nugget or two from a teammate's bio and then be required to pencil in his name in the blank space that matches the nugget(s). "Our players need to know more about each other," she said. We agreed and praised Claudia ("with a K") for her thoughtful work.

So instead of dwelling on the team's disappointing decline at the end of last season, we all agreed to focus on the positive aspects of the club and

devote our energy to rebuilding the players' confidence for the upcoming season. Besides viewing the team highlight film and the individual players' highlight films, we spent almost an entire day discussing a common slogan or mantra we want the players to adopt for the upcoming season. We agreed on a logo that would be placed on each locker, in the dugout, on their car bumpers, and embroidered on the left sleeve of every uniform. It read, **ME2WE**. Claudia (with a K) shared a timely quote from Yogi Berra: "Little things are big." To show off perhaps, I quoted architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: "Less is more." However, Claudia (with a K) didn't miss a beat. Actually, that particular phrase first appeared in Robert Browning's poem, *Andrea del Sarto*, she said with a smile. "Yes, she's absolutely correct," chimed in Filkins.

With respect to our troubled pitcher, who apparently is a cross between Steve Dalkowski ([Steve Dalkowski - Wikipedia](#)) and Nuke LaLoosh ([Bull Durham \(1988\) - Nuke Brings the Heat Scene \(4/12\) | Movieclips - Bing video](#)), we viewed his situation as somewhat representative of other players on the team who are equally frustrated, emotional, and immature.

We reminded ourselves that our players are still kids and fall somewhere along the maturity continuum at various scatter points. We discussed Harvey Dorfman's works, such as *The Mental Game of Baseball: A Guide to Peak Performance* and reflected on how so much of the game is indeed mental.

And we talked about Tom Hanson's (*Play Big*) strategies for building confidence and getting players to relax. We even discussed the layout of the locker room and wondered out loud if it should be designed differently in order to enhance team cohesiveness. I shared with the group my memory of the Orioles acquiring a troubled Alan Wiggins from the Padres in 1985 who found his locker next to Eddie Murray's when he joined his new club. "That was done with a purpose," I reminded the group. "Murray was the team leader back then and it was his clubhouse. His job was to keep Wiggins in line." That discussion led to an exchange of information about each member of the team. We took turns describing what we knew about each player's personality traits, his interests external to baseball, his hobbies and, in general terms, his strengths and weaknesses.

Halfway into this exercise Filkins boldly suggested that all players complete the same psychological exam given to U.S. Navy submariners. It

was tabled for a later discussion. "Ok, table it, but think about it," said Filkins. "Those guys are in a metal tube under the polar ice cap for six months. You need stable people on those subs who understand teamwork," he said.

We moved on but agreed that many of our players can learn much from their teammates if given more opportunities to interact with them. We decided to create some exercises designed specifically to push our less mature players in the direction of their teammates who are more experienced, mature, trusted, and respected. Our first step was to deliberately assign lockers in such a way that certain players would have daily interactions with each other.

For example, our emotionally charged pitcher's locker should be next to the oldest and most mature player on the team who also happens to be a catcher. "We got a Crash Davis type on this team?" asked Ricky Vaughn. "I needed Crash big time back then," he added. When it comes to playing pepper as part of the spring training regimen, the players will not divide themselves into threesomes randomly. The threesomes are to be chosen deliberately by the coaching staff so that our young, talented pitcher can interact with teammates who are passionate about the game but have mastered the techniques for keeping their emotions under control. Filkins, our young analytics intern, suggested that the club have an ongoing ping-pong tournament in which double matches are scheduled frequently. Again, assigning players to such ping-pong teams needs to be done with much thought.

Filkins' idea regarding ping-pong teams prompted responses from several people in the room. Claudia ("with a K") referred to Branch Rickey's *Little Blue Book*. "Besides ping-pong, we should also recall that Mr. Rickey installed handball courts at Dodgertown which helped improve players' footwork and hand-eye coordination." That comment generated a reaction from Tony Lucadello III. "Well, let me tell you about my grandfather," he said. "He scouted for the Phillies in Ohio and urged parents of ballplayers to build cinder block walls in their backyards so their kids could practice throwing and fielding balls off the wall. Here, I brought for each of you a copy of *The Lucadello Plan*, ([ESPN.com - E-Ticket: Wall of Dreams](#) and [3-Lucadello_Plan.pdf \(sportngin.com\)](#)) or what some people call 'The Wall of Dreams.' Did you know Mike Schmidt's parents built one of these walls for their son?" he asked. "How did that turn out?" As he distributed the

instructional guide to everyone, George Kissell Jr. explained how his father used a wall to convert Joe Torre from a catcher to a third baseman. “He had Torre face the wall and my father stood behind him and buzzed tennis balls by his ears and against the wall, forcing Torre to react quickly. So, I suggest we build some of Lucadello’s Walls of Dreams at both our spring training complex and at our ballpark in Bar Harbor.” We all nodded in agreement.

But just before we were about to move on to another topic, young Danny Litwhiler III rose from his seat, picked up a box and placed it on the table. “Perhaps this is the best time to talk about my grandfather’s book and give you each a copy” he said. “My grandfather coached at Florida State and Michigan State. This book is filled with all sorts of training techniques and unique devices. He actually got a patent for designing his Instructional Bunting Bat. He always told his players to visualize catching the ball with their bat when laying down a bunt. So here is a copy of his book, *Baseball Coach’s Guide to Drills and Skills*, for each of you.” At that point I quickly reminded everyone that we just added two more books to our reading list and then I thanked the group members for their cooperative spirit and generosity in sharing these new ideas.

As the conversation became more stimulating and we felt more comfortable sharing our creative ideas with each other (some suggestions bombed of course, but that was ok), Mr. Sawasaki, who was very attentive but also quiet during our sessions, took control of one meeting for an entire hour in which he argued strongly that our players be introduced to the martial arts, yoga, and meditation. He held up a copy of Sadaharu Oh’s *A Zen Way of Baseball* and suggested that everyone read it. I jumped on his idea enthusiastically. “Yes indeed,” I shouted. “It can be a one book, one team reading exercise for our players and coaches when they arrive in camp. They need to meet Mr. Oh,” I said.

Mr. Sawasaki then showed a short video of his Hanshin Tigers in their “quiet room” meditating and visualizing before they went on the practice field. Again, I supported Mr. Sawasaki’s points and reminded my colleagues that several years ago I visited the “quiet room” of the Pittsburgh Pirates and saw many members of the team sitting alone in darkness or stretched out on mats two hours before game time. I reminded everyone that next to the Sea Monkeys’ ballpark is the local high school

gym that is unused in the summer months but can be converted into our own “quiet room pretty easily at little cost.” I turned to Uecker and insisted that the entire organization begin this practice. “I caught that knuckler,” said Uke with a smile and a thumbs up gesture.

Just as we were about to leave the topic of dealing with immature and emotional ballplayers, such as our young pitcher (by the end of the retreat we were all calling him “Nuke”) and several of his teammates, Filkins, who was bolstered by the positive response he got from his ping-pong tournament idea, offered up yet another gem, as he toyed with his bowtie. “They should all learn how to play chess,” he said. “They need to play chess. It teaches mental discipline, anticipation, and visualization of future moves. To succeed in chess, you have to keep your emotions under control and it forces you to look at the other person’s position and strategy. To play baseball well, you, have to see the whole board,” he said. “It is so important to see the whole board,” he repeated. After a moment or two of dead silence and awkward glances among the group, the young Filkins filled the vacuum with “Well, ok, so, what if we first find out if we have any chess players on the team and see if they would be willing to do some demonstrations and perhaps teach any of their teammates who may be interested in learning the game. That’s what Manny Machado has been doing with the Padres.” We agreed to that approach and young Filkins ceased playing with his bowtie. We also agreed that the problem with “Nuke” is not mechanics; it is psychological. “Yes, and that can be fixed with the right approach,” said manager Finch who was seconded by coach Vaughn.

Creating a winning performance culture is one thing; maintaining it throughout the grind of a full season is quite another matter. Positive reinforcement is crucial, trust is critical, and open, transparent communication is a necessity for building and maintaining both individual and team morale. Borrowing from Joe Maddon’s playbook, I encouraged planning a variety of team-building activities away from the field – such as encouraging the entire team to wear goofy, funky clothes on their longest road trip of the season to combat boredom. Or how about a whale watch? Willie Mays Hayes’ suggestion that the entire team ride the Death Spiral at Acadia Park was promptly rejected, however. But his offer to serve as the judge of a kangaroo court that would call out players who made mistakes, but in a fun and non-threatening way, was well-

received. “Can you get me one of those white wigs like Frank Robinson wore for his kangaroo court sessions in Baltimore?” he asked. We all agreed with Hayes’ suggestion and Uecker promised to cover the cost of the wig. Almost immediately Claudia (“with a K”) texted the group with a link to Robinson’s kangaroo court (<https://tbt.fangraphs.com/the-kangaroo-court-and-frank-robinson/>).

At that point Claudia (“with a K”) reminded me to talk about my Roberto Clemente idea. I thanked her for the prompt and shared with the group an idea for building team harmony while also encouraging our players to think about community service. I explained to the group that at some point during the season I will assign each player on the team the name of the MLB player who was nominated for the Roberto Clemente Award last year. Their assignment will be to learn as much as they can about that ballplayer’s community service and understand why he was nominated for the award. That is what the Clemente Award is all about. “I want our players to think more about the community in which they play,” I emphasized. With respect to the challenge of overcoming adversity, we all agreed that there are plenty of stories from baseball and beyond about people who have had to overcome terrible events in their lives. Losing a string of ballgames is not the end of the world and our team needs to be reminded of that. “Yes, I’ve seen roses growing through asphalt,” said Claudia (“with a K”). After all, baseball, of all sports, teaches redemption and resurrection.

After the Baltimore Orioles lost their 20th straight game to open the 1988 season, Cal Ripken convinced the Minnesota Twins front office to keep the lights on in the Humphrey Dome after the game so the team could have a “special practice.” What Ripken did was to organize a “sock ball” game in which balls were created by stuffing one sock into another very tightly to create a ball about the size of a baseball. He and his teammates went back on the field and played “sock ball.” As Ripken explained later, “I wanted the players to recall how baseball can be fun. Most of all, I wanted this team to have fun and relax.”

Unfortunately, the team lost their 21st game the next afternoon but the following day they trounced the White Sox in Chicago 9-0. Even more important, the Orioles came back in 1989 and almost made the playoffs, losing a crucial game in Toronto due to a wild pitch by the Otter, Gregg Olson. “Just a bit outside,” said Uecker with

a smile.

All coaches and others who interact with young players should have in their mind an entire catalog of short stories about players who overcame adversity and succeeded – and such stories need to be shared with the players when the timing is right – that very special moment when the student finds the teacher. Two examples come to mind: Doug DeCinces and Sadaharu Oh. Doug DeCinces, who succeeded the great Orioles Hall of Fame third baseman Brooks Robinson in 1978, referred to “Brooks’ gnawing presence” that he seemed unable to shake off. In his first 57 games, DeCinces hit .226 and committed 12 errors. He was an absolute mess mentally! At the advice of a friend, DeCinces sought out a therapist who worked primarily with athletes. “He taught me that the game is 80% mental and then he convinced me that if I learned how to relax, confidence and success would follow. He was right,” said DeCinces. In his last 72 games of the 1978 season, he hit .324, hammered out 20 home runs, drove in 64 runs and committed only 1 error. His career was salvaged.

As I thought about things in more depth, and after recalling the story told by Harvey Dorfman and Karl Kuehl (*The Mental Game of Baseball*) about DeCinces’ recovery in mid-season, I kept thinking about Tom Hanson’s *Play Big: Mental Toughness Secrets That Take Baseball Players to the Next Level* and his emphasis on the importance of relaxation as illustrated in the conversation between #21 and “the man” who worked in the shadows but spoke clearly to his young, confused student. To perform well, you want to picture yourself on a vertical axis and moving north from the lower depths of fear and hopelessness, frustration, and anger, to the high plateaus of hope and confidence. At the same time, along the horizontal axis you want to be moving from left to right, from “unfocused” to “focused.” In short, you want to put yourself in the upper right quadrant where you can feel “The Bigs” and perform at your very best. Most important of all, you need to learn how to relax.

And then there is the journey taken by Sadaharu Oh, the great Japanese slugger who had to find a way to relax so that he could focus properly and perform on the field at the highest level possible.

Sitting in front of Sadaharu Oh’s display case at the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame in Tokyo is a glass case that is about four feet long and two feet wide. Inside is the samurai sword that Oh swung regularly as part of

his training routine. It increased his strength, improved his hand-eye coordination, and helped him focus as he struck the sword against a column of thick paper, making sure the sword landed precisely where he intended it to land. However, the harsh training program he imposed on himself did not immunize him against prolonged hitting slumps.

Suffering through a series of horrendous slumps during the 1959 season that produced a dreadful batting average of .161, Oh turned away from his batting coach for advice and chose instead to study martial arts and Zen Buddhism. "When you are at bat, how do you feel about the pitcher?" asked the Zen master. "I hate the pitcher," replied Oh. "He is my enemy." The Zen master smiled and shook his head. "Wrong answer, my friend, Don't hate the pitcher; the pitcher is not your enemy. The pitcher will give you the ball to hit home runs. Without the pitcher, you cannot hit home runs." For Oh, this was a revelation that changed the course of his career. He saw the pitcher in a completely different context and that alone helped him relax and gain the confidence he needed to perform well.

When Oh returned for the 1960 season, he introduced a new batting stance (the now famous flamingo stance) and assumed a mental state that would send him on a decade of torrid hitting that ultimately produced 868 home runs, a world record that still stands. By combining martial arts (use the energy of your opponent against him) and Zen Buddhism (focus on the now), he remade himself. When asked about the new Sadaharu Oh, he explained his hitting philosophy quite clearly: "My opponents and I are really one. My strength and skills are only part of the equation. The other half is theirs." It is doubtful this philosophy and approach to hitting is used very much by American batters. However, Mike Schmidt once described his hitting technique as "almost dancing with the pitcher." That may be as close as it gets in the US but I emphasized again that our young players need to get to know Mr. Oh.

It was during the last hour of our retreat on the Maine coast when I was about to finish off my comments and thank everyone for their contributions during our sessions that I noticed Mr. Sawasaki smiling broadly and then laughing loudly, joyfully. When I asked him to explain his joy to us, he rose from his chair and held a DVD high above his head as he walked toward the computer in the front of the room. "I can now bring you much happiness," he said, as he inserted the disk. "I can make the Sea Monkeys a very happy team," he said,

continuing to smile and then bowing politely several times. "I give the Sea Monkeys Ichiro Two. Yes, if you sign this player, you will have Ichiro Two." With that, the lights were dimmed, and we watched a short video of a young Japanese high school player going through his batting routine in a real live game situation. We were stunned ([This Japanese high school baseball player might have the best pre-at-bat routine ever : videos \(reddit.com\)](#)) and as the video ended and the lights came up, it was Bob Uecker who slapped his hand down forcefully on the table and declared, "Well, Mr. Sawasaki, your pitch was a bit outside, but yes, yes, yes, we must sign Ichiro Two." It was on that positive note that our retreat came to a close. We were proud of what we had accomplished, and we looked forward to spring training and the rebirth of the Sea Monkeys.

With respect to what I have learned from Dan Duquette's teachings, I am particularly grateful for his personal accounts about his own experiences as a GM. I am also thankful that he selected two books in particular for this class to read: Paul Richards' *Modern Baseball Strategy* and Branch Rickey's *Little Blue Book*. In preparation for our retreat, I asked all the invitees to read six books prior to our first meeting. In addition to the two books referred to above, participants were also required to read Earl Weaver's *Weaver on Strategy*, Bill Geivett's *Do You Want to Work in Baseball?*, which has a great section devoted to player development, Howard Fero and Rebecca Herman's *Lead Me Out to The Ballgame: Stories and Strategies to Develop Major League Leadership* and Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking Fast and Slow*. Although there are only one or two references made to baseball in Kahneman's book, it should be read by everyone in baseball who wants to put a winning team on the field.

I think the most important aspect of player development is building both physical and mental skill sets that are adaptable to new challenges. "Our players need to become comfortable making adjustments," I emphasized. And perhaps the most important concept to stress with young players is how to embrace adversity and overcome it. It was the morning of our last day and right before our mid-morning break that I seized the opportunity to emphasize that it is our responsibility as baseball professionals to remind our young players that adversity is only temporary. What needs to become permanent in the minds of our players is the courage to

face adversity, to overcome it, and then move forward. I then referred to an old proverb from India: “All is well that ends well, and if it is not well, then it’s not the end.” I recall standing in the lobby of the resort and saying thanks and farewell to each of my colleagues as they departed. I wished them well and gave each one a small, business-sized card and suggested they keep it in their pocket. On the front of the card was the logo we had created, the **ME2WE** logo, specifically designed to foster team unity. On the reverse side of the card was that special proverb from India that I had quoted during one of our morning sessions: “All is well that ends well, and if it’s not well, then it’s not the end.”

One week later each member of the group received from me a handwritten thank you card for their assistance. Also included in the packet was a 25-page summary of our discussions and the action plan we agreed to implement during the upcoming season. I signed my name on the card with *Me2We* written beneath it.

As for me, I had to get back to work planning promotions for the upcoming season. Should I hire the unicyclist who claims he can win the hundred-yard dash against our team’s fastest runner? Or what about that pre-

game pro wrestling match refereed by a Mahatma Gandhi impersonator? And is it true that Dylan is available for \$1,000 and a limo ride? Apparently, he just loves minor league ballparks these days. Will he leave the Catskills for Bar Harbor? Such are the decisions that keep a minor league GM up at night.

Yet as I circle back to that very special evening when I sat alone in a baseball stadium in Phoenix, Arizona where I found inner peace and solitude by simply staring at an empty field in front of me, I did find much comfort in baseball once again despite and during this horrific pandemic. By creating a fictitious baseball league and completing one course on scouting and another on player development, I found an antidote (several, actually) to loneliness and isolation. And as I reflect on my life’s journey with baseball as my loyal traveling companion, I keep thinking about two quotes in particular – one by Roger Angell, the other by Jim Bouton. “Baseball seems to have been invented solely for the purpose of explaining all other things in life,” wrote Roger Angell. “You see,” wrote Bouton, “**you spend a good deal of your life gripping a baseball, and it turns out it was the other way around all the time.**”

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Hank Aaron Handled Mets Handily

By Dan Schlossberg

The New York Mets were lucky: when the National League split into two divisions after the 1968 season, the Atlanta Braves inexplicably wound up in the West. That decision, which also placed the Cincinnati Reds in the West but the Chicago Cubs and World Champion St. Louis Cardinals in the East, lasted for 25 years until the advent of the three-division format that prevails today.

Somebody obviously failed geography.

Rumor has it that the Mets refused to agree to divisional play unless they were placed in a division with the Cardinals, a popular draw in New York because of Stan Musial, and that the Cubs had to be part of that package because Chicago and St. Louis were natural rivals. That left Atlanta and Cincinnati as collateral damage – and Braves star Hank Aaron having to face Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale, Juan Marichal, and Nolan Ryan much more often because teams played divisional rivals 18 times (90 games) but outside their division just 12 times (72 games).

Aaron, who shrugged off adversity that ranged from segregation to death threats, simply went about his business without blinking an eye. By the time he retired after the 1976 season, he had more home runs, more extra-base hits, more total bases, and more runs batted in than any player in baseball history. Take away his 755 home runs and he still had more than 3,000 hits. Over 23 years, he averaged 37 home runs per 162 games. Only Aaron, Babe Ruth, and Barry Bonds averaged 35 home runs a year for two decades. And Aaron alone was an All-Star 25 times. He led the majors in OPS in three different decades, finished first in total bases eight times, and first in extra-base hits five times. He also led the National League in runs batted in four times – four more than Willie Mays.

Henry Louis Aaron actually traveled 12 miles further around the bases than any other player. More than Babe Ruth, more than Ted Williams, and more than Willie, Mickey, or The Duke.

He even beat world home run king Sadaharu Oh in a home run hitting contest, 10-9, a month after Aaron's playing career ended. Hank Aaron was especially good against the Mets, hammering 45 of his home runs against the likes of Roger Craig, Al Jackson, and the hapless but aptly-named Jay Hook, a mechanical engineer who could explain the dynamics of a curveball but couldn't throw one.

On the night of June 18, 1962, Henry hit a Hook delivery deep into the distant center-field bleachers of the Polo Grounds, the decrepit Harlem ballpark where the Mets languished during the first two seasons. A moon-shot more than seven years before the world heard of Neil Armstrong, the Aaron blast went an estimated 470 feet – easily the longest home run of his 23-year career – and was only the third ever to reach those seats (Lou Brock Chipper Jones and Mike Schmidt (49 each), Ryan Howard did it for the Cubs the day before, duplicating the feat of Milwaukee Braves first baseman Joe Adcock years earlier).

The Braves won the game, 7-1, before a tiny Monday night crowd of 9,132. Then again, the fate of that first Mets team – which eventually lost 120 games – had been sealed months earlier. Moving from Milwaukee to Atlanta in 1966 did little to deter the determined Aaron from mauling the Mets.

Three years later, in the first season of divisional play, the Braves beat out the Dodgers, Giants, Astros, and Reds to win the western half of the NL flag by three games (the new San Diego Padres and their 1969 expansion partner Montreal Expos both lost 110 times to anchor the two divisions).

Atlanta won 93 games, seven fewer than the Mets, but faced much more formidable opposition within their division and were considered a heavy favorite to beat New York in the new League Championship Series, then a best-of-five affair.

Except for Aaron, however, the veteran Braves couldn't stop an opponent dubbed "the Miracle Mets"

even before they went on to beat the Baltimore Orioles in the 1969 World Series. In the first game of the playoffs, Aaron hit a home run against Tom Seaver, who had won 25 games that year en route to his first Cy Young Award. That seventh-inning solo shot, one of three Aaron hit in the three-game playoff, broke a 4-4 tie and gave the Braves a short-lived lead. But the Mets jumped on Phil Niekro's knuckleball and several relievers for a five-run eighth that turned into a 9-5 win.

With lefty-hitting platoon outfielder Art Shamsky hitting .538 against Atlanta pitching, the Mets went on to sweep their way into their first World Series. Aaron couldn't be blamed: his performance added to a .362 lifetime post-season batting average that included six home runs, 16 runs batted in, and a 1.116 OPS in 17 games.

Although Seaver held Aaron to a .205 average and four home runs during their regular-season encounters, the wiry Atlanta right-fielder was anathema to the remainder of the New York staff. In 188 games, he had 203 hits, 25 stolen bases, 45 home runs, 126 RBI, and 134 runs scored. Thanks to Seaver's abilities against Aaron, the right-handed slugger had a lifetime batting average against the Mets of just .295 – ten points below his career mark.

In 1967, the first year they met, Seaver fanned Aaron seven times in 20 at-bats. Never in any succeeding season did the Hall of Fame pitcher fan the Hall of Fame hitter more than once.

Five players homered against the Mets more often but only one of them, like Aaron, came from the National League West. The others were Willie Stargell (60), and Willie McCovey (48 apiece).

After the NL divided in 1969, Aaron never played for a team in the Eastern Division. He had been retired nearly 20 years before Atlanta finally landed where it belonged in 1995.

Aaron's exploits are too numerous to list here.

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He and Eddie Mathews hit 863 home runs during the time they were teammates and also homered in the same game 75 times, another record. He and brother Tommie hit a combined 768 home runs, a record for a brother tandem. Aaron, Mathews, Adcock, and Frank Thomas formed the first quartet of teammates to hit consecutive home runs in a game. Along with Chipper Jones – another Mets tormentor – and pitcher Warren Spahn, Aaron was one of three men who homered for the Braves in at least 17 consecutive seasons.

But he never got the credit he deserved, even after hitting home runs that won the only pennants in the history of the Milwaukee Braves in 1957 and 1958. Aaron won only one MVP but arguably deserved four (never finishing higher than third in any other season). He also deserved unanimous election to the Baseball Hall of Fame but was rejected by nine voters. He hit .362 against Sandy Koufax, .342 against Steve Carlton, and 17 home runs against Don Drysdale. The first player with 3000 hits and 500 home runs, Aaron got both All-Star and MVP votes every year from 1955-73.

There's no telling how much better he might have been without the twin heartaches of bigoted fans who screamed racial epithets or those who later threatened the lives of the entire Aaron family because they didn't want to see a black man break a white man's mark that was the most beloved record in sports. Hardly just a home run hitter, he won two batting titles, finishing with a better lifetime average than Willie, Mickey or The Duke and led his league in each of the three Triple Crown categories at least twice. He played hurt, played multiple positions, and walked more often than he struck out – averaging just 63 strikeouts per season. He lacked the charisma of Willie Mays, the muscles of Mickey Mantle, or the swagger of Duke Snider but he beat Willie, Mickey & the Duke where it counted. In the record book.

The Hobby of Baseball

By Jeff Cohen (co-host of the [Baseball and BBQ Podcast](#))

Admittedly, I was a pre-teen in the early 1970s. I don't know if it was the so-called golden era of Baseball Card collecting but it did seem that way to me. I couldn't wait to get to the neighborhood candy store and purchase a 'wax pack' of cards for either 25 or 50 cents. Yes, those were the cards with the stick of gum that tasted like cardboard if anyone dared to try it. But that was not my baseball card pack of choice. No, mine was the see-through three-sectioned pack of cards where you could see at least six players since they were visible. As a Mets fan, I probably drove the store owner nuts when I was looking through all the packs, so I'd know I would have at least one NY Met player. Oh, those were the days.

Now think of being in a time warp and fast forward 50 years. A lot of things have changed. Heck, Life has changed. Besides the sun coming up every day, everything has changed. Today, I have a bed telling me how I slept the previous evening. But I digress. We are talking about baseball cards. Okay, so the size of the basic card is still 2 inches by 3 inches. Really just the right size. But not 50 cents anymore. And that is a terrible shame. I went into a card store the other day and on the counter was a box of individual packs of cards. Out of curiosity, I asked how much they were. Five dollars and 99 cents!! That was for 14 cards and no gum. What 10-year-old kid who is getting into baseball has six dollars to

spend on only 14 cards? The owner told me how it hurts him to have to price them at \$6 and he only makes a few cents per pack. Again Outrageous.

Why a simple hobby has become so big a business that they are pricing out their future customers is beyond my understanding. Don't get me wrong, there are many people, of all ages, who love to collect baseball cards. But I have my doubts for the future generations who cannot afford to purchase a single pack and why they would purchase it in the future.

This brings me to the Baseball Card Collectors Shows. This used to be, emphasis on 'used to be' a nice time to spend a few hours, especially during the off season. In my area, there are a few companies that put on these "shows." Well, not really a show more like a flea market of vendors selling their wares. Many sell baseball cards from past eras going way back. The prices of these cards range from a few dollars to triple digits depending on the player and grade of the card. (Yes, there are grading services available.) But there are also cards/packs/sets for sale for which prices vary depending on condition and year. Memorabilia is also sold. Autograph pictures, posters, bobbleheads, past programs, free giveaways are on sale at these shows.

As little as a year ago, I might have attended a show. To satisfy my curiosity, I would spend my \$10 admission fee and wander into the massive sales area.

Hundreds of vendors there, so I would take my time and just look around to see if I could spot a bargain. At these shows, there were retired players who would sit for 60-90 minutes and sign autographs for a fee. Let me stop here and say that the players do not set the price for their autograph. It is the promoter who sets the price, and it is different depending on the caliber of the player. A Hall of Famer's autograph is worth more than for someone not in the Hall of Fame.

Now it has become interesting. I paid for an autograph or two in my life. I'd rather not but when a childhood player you looked up to is there, I figured what the heck. They were always pleasant and would take a picture with you. Nice, an autograph and a picture. Can't, or should I say, won't do it today. Why? Not the cost of the autograph, well, that is part of the reason but now these promoters have attached a fee for the Photo Op. For example, there is a show at Hofstra in April where Tony Oliva will be signing autographs. For a 'flat or ball' the cost is \$79. If you want Mr. Oliva to sign a bat, that costs \$129. Oh, want Mr. Oliva to write an inscription up to 4 words? That is an extra \$29. Add a Hall of Fame inscription and it is \$39. But here is the kicker. A photo with Mr. Oliva is \$70, with your camera. And guess what, Trevor Hoffman costs even more!!! A photo that takes less than 5 seconds should not cost so much. Heck, it should not cost anything at all.

What about the unanimous Hall of Famer Mariano Rivera? Just because he was unanimous, he can jack up the fee paid by the promoters. Let's be honest here, plenty of other players deserved to be unanimous before Rivera. How is Hank Aaron or Willie Mays not unanimous? But that is for another article.

At a recent autograph and baseball card show, Mariano Rivera's autograph alone was \$300. Just the name. If you want an inscription and only up to 4 words, that will run you another \$125. And if you want a picture, with your camera, that is only \$310. Does anyone besides me think that this is outrageous?

Now I have written to the promoter and was informed that the photo ops are now part of the contract that the player or his representative agrees to. I understand that the older players who did not make a ton of money do these shows to supplement their golden years. But when a Mariano Rivera who has made millions upon millions of dollars must charge a promoter such a huge appearance fee and to have his fans wait in line for the opportunity to have him sign a baseball or baseball card for an exorbitant amount of money, that is crazy.

But as long as there are people willing to pay, then this will go on and on. As P.T. Barnum said, "There is a sucker born every minute."

Baseball Memories

By Josh Goldberg

Hi, I'm Josh Goldberg! Born and raised in New York City, I've been a Yankees fan throughout my life. I currently live in Hoboken, New Jersey. I've been a part of SABR since I was 14, and first became hooked on baseball when my mom gave me a binder of 1970s baseball cards when I was seven. Growing up, I channeled my baseball fandom by creating numerous school art projects focused on baseball. For example, I twice created stadium replicas - only a couple feet long, not true-to-size - one out of clay, and another time out of cardboard. Those were fun to carry to school back then...

My favorite baseball memory so far is when I met Aaron Judge back in 2016 with the Scranton/ Wilkes-Barre RailRiders. Although he's a towering figure, he's truly a genuine person, and I really enjoyed chatting with him about his career journey along the way to the Majors.

Another great experience was in October 2021, when Aaron Judge had a walk-off hit to send the Yankees into the playoffs. I was fortunate to be in a suite at Yankee Stadium for the game, and the time there was magical. For anyone who has not been there yet, I highly recommend walking around the suite floor and taking in all the incredible historic photos of Yankees legends while embracing the history of the franchise. Beyond attending games, my passion for the game has evolved into the business side, where I currently work in the sports analysis business. I conducted a research project last year to evaluate player hitting performance while learning more about Sabermetrics. For anyone aspiring to work in baseball, I recommend checking out my [article](#) as well as the SABR certification courses.

Outside of baseball, another fun fact about myself is that I've also played guitar for over 15 years.



Baseball Books for Little Sluggers (aka Future SABR members)

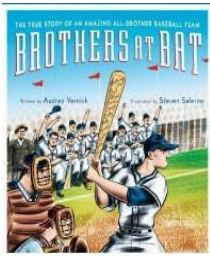
By Kelly Bennett

Here's a riddle for you: Where do all SABR members start? As children.

Are you looking to share baseball with children in your life? Okay, maybe it's too hot, or raining or snowing, or they aren't old enough (or you're too old) to swing a bat or field a ball, but that needn't stop you. Put down the bat and pick up a book!

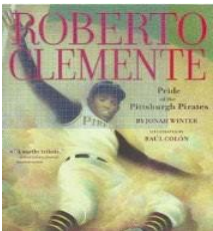
There are scores of books written for children about baseball and baseball players. And don't be deceived by the word "children," or by the colorful illustrations, or slight text. Copious research and fact-checking goes into crafting books for children. What's more, unlike many books for adults, children's books are interesting, informative, and entertaining! (They have to be to keep the little wigglers' attention.)

Here are five picture books about baseball players to share with the little sluggers in your life. Caution: After bedtime story time is over, you'll want to keep reading.



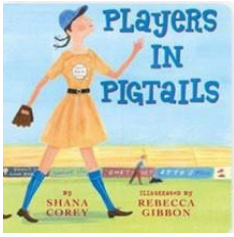
Brothers at Bat: The True Story of an Amazing All-Brother Baseball Team by Audrey Vernick, illustrated by Steven Salerno (ages 4-8).

The Acerra family of Long Branch, New Jersey, had sixteen children, including twelve ball-playing boys. This engaging story begins with the boys playing yard ball and follows them through WWII and after, when they reunited to form their own semi-pro team. The Acerras competed all over New Jersey and throughout the country playing and winning many games. The end note includes a family photo with more about this interesting family.



Clemente: Pride of the Pittsburgh Pirates by Jonah Winter, illustrated by Raul Colón (Ages 4-8).

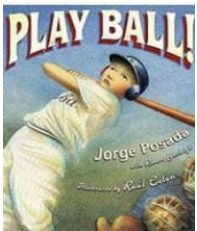
A biography of Roberto Clemente, Pittsburgh Pirates right-fielder and slugger, the first Latin American baseball superstar and humanitarian. The story's vibrant, realistic illustrations, fast-paced narrative, and saucy voice make it a fun read-aloud while at the same time sharing the story of how an "anybody" can grow up to be a hero, and how being a hero is about more than just being good at baseball.



Players in Pigtails by Shana Corey, illustrated by Rebecca Gibbon.

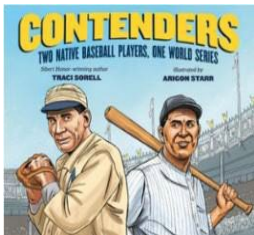
The true story of how girls began playing professional baseball during World War II told through the eyes of “Katie Casey,” the fictional baseball-loving girl immortalized in the first—unsung and little known—verse of “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.” Despite everyone telling Katie “baseball is for boys,” she goes on to become a player in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League.

The joyful text and lively art celebrate these brave girls' love of the game and the league they called their own.



Play Ball! by Jorge Posada with Robert Burleigh, illustrated by Raul Colon (ages 5-10).

Yankees all-star catcher Jorge Posada shares the story of how he learned to bat left-handed and then went on to be a switch hitter and pitcher. The switch was Jorge's father's idea and Jorge was not thrilled about the idea. The story, which includes Jorge's first family trip to Yankee Stadium, co-written with Robert Burleigh, is wordier than most picture books. However, Posada's story, is written like fiction with lots of dialogue and action so it makes a great read-aloud.



Contenders: Two Native Baseball Players, One World Series by Traci Sorell, illustrated by Arigon Starr (4-9).

There are lots of books about famous White and Black baseball players, but there are few books about Native professional baseball players, and definitely not about two! This dual biography of NY Giants power hitter John Meyers and Charles “Al” Bender, pitcher for the Philadelphia Athletics, who faced off in the 1911 World Series features realistic illustrations bordered with traditional designs, bookended with the play-by-play of the game. Along with baseball, Sorell's text addresses the adversity both players faced and overcame for the love of the game. Tracie Sorell is a member of the Cherokee Nation; Arigon Starr is an enrolled member of the Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma.

Kelly Bennett is the author of The House that Ruth, illustrated by Susanna Covelli (Familius 2023), a historical non-fiction picture book celebrating baseball, Babe Ruth, and the April 18, 1923 opening day game in Yankee Stadium.

My First Five of My 50 Favorite Baseball Books

By David H. Lippman

I may as well explain my thinking behind my favorite baseball books, since everything in life is subjective, and I'm a subject of this study. This was originally requested by the Society for American Baseball Research. They wanted a list of best baseball books published since the society's founding in 1971. That knocked out "*Ball Four*," "*Pitching in A Pinch*," "*My 30 Years in Baseball*," "*The Days of Mr. McGraw*," and Frank Graham's "*The New York Yankees*." It also punched out the three "*Fireside Books of Baseball*," brilliant as they are. If I could expand this list, I would add all the above volumes to the list, and the "Fireside Books" would head the list.

My family has rooted for the New York/San Francisco Giants since 1908 and the Yankees since 1913, as they played in the same park for decades, and then across the Harlem River from each other. So most of my books describe the fortunes of those teams and their histories. As a Yankee and Giant fan, my mortal enemies are the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Boston Red Sox. Someone might ask, "Why should a Giants fan hate the Red Sox?" My answer is one year: "1912." A Red Sox fan hurled a beer bottle at Fred Snodgrass just as he was about to make that catch. A distracted Snodgrass dropped the fairly easy fly ball, and the Giants lost the World Series. That was Fenway Park's inaugural year. As far as I can see, Red Sox fans have failed to show good sportsmanship ever since.

Example: I did not go to my Senior Prom. No girl wanted to go with me. So I saved a bundle of money and went to Yankee Stadium to watch the Red Sox play the Yankees, sitting in the bleachers. Inebriated Red Sox fans

began fighting Yankee fans, even though the Sox were leading. All combatants were removed.

I have a dislike of the Mets as well, but that's on personal grounds. I was the associate editor of their magazine "*Inside Pitch*," until they sold it to "*Baseball America*" in No'th Ca'lina in 1985, and they fired me on September 12, 1985, an interesting day in New York baseball history. The Mets played at home against the Cardinals for the NL East in the afternoon and the Yankees

in the evening at home against the Blue Jays for the AL East. I was at both games – the first as an accredited member of the press corps, the second one as a fan in mediocre seats. Next year was the 1986 run. I missed it. I would have been happy to be a Mets' lifer dog, or any other kind of baseball writer. Instead, I never got the career and life I dreamed of. I never forgot. I only root for the Mets as a New Yorker when they are in the post-season.

Aside from those two teams, I have some other interests in baseball. There are other teams that interest me: for example: the Cleveland Guardians – I actually admire Chief Wahoo, because he represents a form of resilience in the face of the franchise's history of catastrophe: "Why is this man smiling?"

The Philadelphia Athletics have interested me for their long history of failure, the Philadelphia/Kansas City/Oakland Athletics for being either excellent squads or rolling disasters, punctuated by Connie Mack and Charlie Finley.

The Seattle Pilots attract my attention, not as much for Jim Bouton's "**Ball Four**," but for their unique standing as baseball's sole "one-and-done" team. They stand as a monument to appalling leadership and management in every way – a model on how NOT to run a franchise.

My great-uncle helped "fix" the 1919 World Series, so I have a great interest in that subject.

The life and struggles of Jackie Robinson fascinate me, because it was full of battles, all of which were completely unnecessary. Furthermore, he made the complaint that he was rarely seen as a baseball player, but in his role as a pioneer and a puppet. My father and grandfather, being Giants and Yankee fans, regarded him as neither – he was simply that pain in the neck who kept beating us in critical games, and Yogi was right, he was OUT! So we saw him more in his role as a player than a pioneer.

I learned how to write from, of all people, New York Yankee pitching ace Roger Clemens. Watching him pitch and hearing it described on the radio, enabled me to make the critical connection – writing is pitching.

With that epiphany, I got straight A's in my Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program at the New School for Social Research, one of the finest in the country.

Twenty-four years later, when I face a writing assignment at work, I mumble to myself, "I'm going to start this guy with a fastball up and in, then another fastball just lower, which will set him up for a breaking pitch away, which he will either hold back, making the count 1-2, or he'll swing and miss for strike three. If he holds back for a 1-2 count, I'll come back on the inside corner of the plate, which will either freeze him in the zone, or he'll hit a weak grounder to third for the out."

Another subject that interests me is umpires and umpiring – they have the most difficult job in baseball, are required to start off perfect and improve from there, have no home field, very few fans, are not paid millions, and yet maintain order with integrity, honesty, and efficiency for decades. More of them should be in the Hall of Fame. Reading their memoirs are fascinating – there is very little bitterness, great observational skills, incredible resilience, love of the game, and above all, immense humor. I would last about two minutes as an umpire.

The last subject in baseball that fascinates me is what Roger Angell called "La Vida," or "The Life." What is it like to live the life of a baseball player or someone in "baseball?" I do not talk about the salacious stuff, girlfriends in every town, for example, but simply about how such subjects as how teams operate ordinary actions and how ballplayers and their families work, live, and function.

A good example comes from SABR 43, where the Phillies trotted out their staff that teaches their minor league players "Life Skills," which classes on money management, avoiding STDs, on dealing with the press, personal security, and how to interact with the public. I was highly impressed. Many ballplayers from even 20 years ago lost their shirts, reputations, and post-season shares to con men and unscrupulous women. They were expected to learn these lessons the hard way. I was also intrigued on how the constant movement in trades and during the season impacted their families and their kids. Beyond that, I saw the larger picture. Some ballplayers end their careers with a massive ceremony on the home field, receiving gifts, everyone cheering, families weeping, knowing that their next destination will be the Hall of Fame induction five years hence.

But the vast majority of players finish up their

major league careers with a cold release slip, often in mid-season, followed by an even colder call from their agent, saying that none of the other 29 teams in baseball seek their services. How do these players face these premature deaths? What do they do after that? How do they cope with being forgotten, having to make their way in a real world, where the resume line item, "played right field for the St. Louis Cardinals" offers no value? What do they do when they age?

After that, I began to wonder about how all the other stuff is done. I bought and read books by batboys and clubbies, baseball wives, which helped, but there's still more to it. I read about how the FBI and MLB teamed up to crack down on the autograph fakery market, for example.

What really happened when Gerrit Cole came to New York to join the Yankees, for example? How did the Yankees handle his airline tickets, get him and his family to town, find him the appropriate hotel, and take care of the medical examination? For that matter, what can a doctor really say about someone like Cole, who is in pretty much in tip-top shape from endless modern conditioning methods? I bet the only thing the doctor could do was say, "Whatever you're doing, keep it up, stay away from saturated fats, and you need a flu shot. Roll up your sleeve."

Next, Mr. and Mrs. Cole and their legendary sign did the press conference at Yankee Stadium, said appropriate words, held up the sign, stared out at the ballpark, and finished up by posing with the sign and some local kids. I found myself asking, "Where did the Yankees find the kids? Did they get autographs for doing that? Baseballs? Tickets?"

After that, Mr. Cole and his wife and upcoming kid have to find somewhere to live in New York, sort out a lot of paperwork – income taxes, New York driver's licenses, rent a condo in Tampa for spring training, and even find a good hospital and day care facility for their impending child. Not to mention that the Coles should get their hands on all those DVDs on Yankee history and spend some copious free time watching John Sterling explain it all from 1903 to 2019.

From this list, I am excluding SABR books, as I have edited or written material for them. Conflict of interest and all that. So with all of that in mind, here are my 50 favorite baseball books since 1971, in no particular order:

The New Bill James Historical Abstract. You have to start with this one, of course. It's kind of a "Universal Problem Solver" for so many subjects of baseball history, metrics, statistics, and subjects ranging from "Who was the best shortstop" to player nicknames and their changes to the best baseball books of each decade to the best uniforms of each decade. My copy is from 2003. So, there are a lot of stars missing: Shohei Ohtani, Mariano Rivera, and Aaron Judge. The big problem with writing baseball history is that it keeps being made. But I return to it over and over and over again. There are a lot of oddities in it. Buried in the entry on Vern "Junior" Stephens is an admittance that despite his polemic "*The Politics of Glory*," Phil Rizzuto does indeed belong in the Hall of Fame. Some of the entries on individual players are tiny, some vast masses of mathematics. Mr. James points out that every photo of Ty Cobb seems to show him not looking at the camera, hiding one or both hands, staring out of the corner of his eye at some distraction, and bearing an expression of fear and nervousness, as if he doesn't belong in the same room or dugout as the other person.

One example is Cobb's visit to the 1911 World Series Giants' dugout (as Mr. James relates). Cobb looks inadequate, embarrassed, and limited. Things like this are unbelievably fascinating and lend a different angle to the parade of numbers and equations that take up much of the book. There's fascinating analysis on the minor leagues, the Negro Leagues, which team was "the greatest of all time," players with unusual stories, a great deal of humor, vast piles of valuable statistical comparisons, and great names. A new edition is desperately needed.

Pinstripe Empire, by Marty Appel. Outside of the New York Metropolitan area, it is presumed that the Yankees are the most hated team in sports, because they win the pennant every year (not so), have all the best players (also not so), and represent a filthy city that stands as a cesspool of crime, vice, and greed. (Well, that may have some validity) In actuality, the Yankees may hold sports franchise records for most games won, most championships won, most players in the Hall of Fame, most numbers retired, most hot dogs consumed (all by Babe Ruth), but throughout their history, they have had to struggle to achieve these incredible numbers, and then, once achieved them, continue living up to them.

Being a Yankee fan is being bred to a harder thing

than to triumph – if you win, everyone mutters angrily under their breath about how "With that lineup, you should have won." If you lose, everyone cheers, "With that lineup, you should have won." Marty Appel knows the Yankees' history better than anyone alive or dead, and in one volume, he tells the incredible history of this franchise from its move from Baltimore to New York in 1903 to its 27th World Championship in 2009. The book is full of statistics, as to be expected, the well-known moments and players in the team's history.

There are also many extremely human – the shocking fate of Jake Powell, the irritation of Bob Shawkey at being passed over for the managerial job, Appel's personal role in the Catfish Hunter signing, Bob Greenwade's account of seeing Mickey Mantle play for the first time, Jacob Ruppert's estate, Carl Mays' war with Miller Huggins, Ryne Duren's war with alcohol, George Steinbrenner's wars with his managers (and baseball logic), Ed Whitson's war with Billy Martin (and New York), and the Yankees' wars with Brooklyn, Boston, and Los Angeles.

There are also many important but incidental characters in this story: Alex Johnson, Kid Elberfeld, Eddie Layton, Bob Sheppard, Billy Crystal, Tony Morante, Frank Chance, Hal Chase, Slim Caldwell, George Mogridge, Clark Griffith, Big Bill Devery, Sad Sam Jones, Roger Peckinpaugh, Aaron Ward, Bob Meusel, Urban Shocker, Mark Koenig, Charlie Keller, Kevin Maas, Willie Keeler, Vic Raschi, Allie Reynolds, Eddie Lopat, Hank Bauer, Joe Pepitone, and Gene Michael.

Separately and together, they played vital roles in the history of the Yankees, and they get their due at varying levels. One discovers from reading this book that it was never easy for the Yankees to achieve and maintain their level of excellence – it was damned hard work, due to external pressures (the other teams, changes in baseball's operating and salary structure, national social and economic changes, overseas wars) and internal ones (these need not be rehearsed).

All these stories are told with a great deal of love, objectivity, fairness, and literary style. People who read this know the endings but will enjoy the ride. The only problem – the book comes to an end. Then you have to do a "Simchas Torah" to celebrate doing so and start over again.

The Echoing Green, by Joshua Prager. Anyone who says this is the book that rips the lid off the Giants' cheating scandal in the 1951 National League Pennant race is missing the point – signal stealing has been an issue in baseball since the 19th century. All that has happened is that it has become increasingly sophisticated with the advance of technology. Today the Houston Astros and Boston Red Sox are facing massive investigations over their use of iPhones and cameras to capture their opponents' signs, which apparently enabled the Astros to win the 2017 World Series. Doubtless their shenanigans will cost them dearly, so I chortle as a Yankee fan. The Giants' illegal use of a Wollensak telescope in their centerfield clubhouse to gain advantages when batting at home is central to the story, but the Giants did not gain their amazing triumph purely by a buzzer in a single at-bat: they had to win on the road, they had to hit the ball, and they had to pitch well.

The real message of this book is what I find fascinating: there are actually three stories in "*The Echoing Green*:" the first two are the lives of Ralph Branca and Bobby Thomson, which intersect on October 3, 1951, split apart, and then come back together as a friendship that lasts over decades, in a remarkable spirit of sporting reconciliation. Both were talented players, with Branca suffering the double misery of yielding the fatal home run and an injury the following spring that shortened his career.

The third story that rivets me is how the book is a massive freeze-frame of a nation in general and a city in particular in 1951, a time that is distant on the ear, but drenched in history (the past with pain) and nostalgia (the past without pain). There is immense detail, from the phone number for the Brooklyn Dodgers to the history of the Polo Grounds. We learn the precise layout of the Giants' clubhouse; that NBC had just signed Milton Berle to a 30-year contract that would pay him \$200,000 a year, and that reporters covering the game used Olivetti typewriters. All kinds of active and reactive voices are heard from in the great chase and the home run, in many places, involving many people. We learn that Frank Sinatra, Toots Shor, and Jackie Gleason were together in a box at the Polo Grounds, and Gleason missed seeing the shot due to an upset stomach. We find out how the famous learned about the homer: Eugene Istomin, Arthur Miller, Mel Brooks, Julius Rosenberg (awaiting execution); the yet to be famous: George Carlin, John Paul

Stevens, Gerald Ford, Doris Kearns, Fred Wilpon, and Alan Greenspan; and the very ordinary: Fred Fields, Harold Bloom, Ron Littlefair, Bob Berggren, and Philip Arbiter, who suffered a fatal heart attack on learning the news. We see reactions in New York, Washington, Europe, even the Korean battlefield.

So, we see that this book is not just about cheating, more than baseball, but actually a crossroads for two Americans and a defining moment in American life. The fact that a baseball game and all that led up to it could hold such a role is what makes this book – and its rich writing – so riveting.

Out of Left Field – Willie Stargell's Turning Point Season, by Susan Hall and Bob Adelman. This book has a great deal of what Jim Bouton's "*Ball Four*" has – ballplayers talking bluntly about their on-field and off-field lives, including drugs and adultery. What makes it better than "*Ball Four*" is that the 1973 Pittsburgh Pirates were not a first-year expansion club collection of has-beens and never-weres trying to survive a doomed season, managed by a colorful incompetent on the field and colorless incompetents off the field. Nor does it have the self-absorbed Bouton, clearly at the end of his career, trying to become a successful knuckleballer (good luck with that, fella), dropping salacious stories that Yankee legends like Mickey Mantle and Whitey Ford behaved badly in their prime...none of them were actually ON the Seattle Pilots, were they? What draws me to this book is that the Pirates were contenders. They had won their division three years in a row, and the World Championship in 1971. They had a formidable array of talent, like Richie Hebner, Dock Ellis, Richie Zisk, Nelson Briles, Steve Blass, and Willie Stargell himself. They had also suffered the searing tragedy on New Year's Eve of the death of their leader, Roberto Clemente, who had flown to Nicaragua with supplies for earthquake relief. His plane blew up on take-off, and his body was never found. With that immense hole in the Pirates' lineup and psyche, the Bucs tried very hard to compete, but the 1973 National League East became a nightmare of .500 teams. Manager Bill Virdon angered players and was replaced by former Manager Danny Murtaugh. Blass suffered what became known as the legendary "Steve Blass Disease," bafflingly unable to deliver strikes. The Pirates shambled to a third-place finish.

The book is a combination of diary-photo essay-

semi-edited interviews with various Pirates as the season drones on. Some of them are quite revealing. Unlike Bouton's teammates, they cheerily speak for themselves. We hear from a "Baseball Annie" in New York who brags openly about her conquests of ballplayers. Dock Ellis talks about drugs (his specialty, I guess). Stargell describes his womanizing. His wife, Dee, admits that they are mostly together because he got her pregnant, and they won't really be together until he converts to her religious faith, being a Jehovah's Witness. More interestingly, Stargell counsels a group of women who want to set up a professional baseball league on what that really entails. Virdon and Murtaugh discuss the realities of managing both games and people. Nelson Briles talks about songwriting and the lack of rights ballplayers have in the pre-free agency era, Dave Ricketts about the work of a bullpen coach, Manny Sanguillen about catching, Joe Brown about being a general manager, and Dee Stargell and Donna Oliver have a symposium at the season's final game. The only things truly shocking about this book are the salacious material about drugs, sex, and infidelity, which doesn't detract from the first-person stories of how the speakers' view their lives and jobs – you find from them that playing baseball is a job, as romantic and fun as it seems to the fan – and that it is hard to cope with a long and increasingly unhappy season, filled with long travel. I'd come back to this book more often if my copy wasn't falling apart. One sad note: Dee and Willie Stargell never "came together." Both got divorced and Dee died of cancer. One mildly humorous note: she worried about whether or not to put in a swimming pool in her house, because her Jehovah's Witnesses superiors insisted the world would end in 1975. I read the book's 1979 edition, which had an afterword on "The Family." I wanted to send Dee a note, reading as follows: "Dear Dee: Go ahead. Put in the pool."

The Game From Where I Stand, by Doug Glanville. Doug Glanville had a fairly solid career in the majors, playing outfield on three teams, the Phillies, Cubs, and Rangers, seeing nearly every aspect of the game from "can't miss prospect" to "washed-up veteran." Unlike many of his colleagues who enjoyed and endured similar careers, Teaneck- raised Glanville had an Ivy League background – Engineering Degree from the University of Pennsylvania – so that he could scrutinize the game with perception and perspective. The book he produced after

his retirement discusses a great many subjects from that eye, defined by the chapter title, all of which end in "the game:" before the first; preparing for; respecting; the stresses of; relationships in; bridging differences in; giants of; the integrity of; toward the last; and reflections on the game. These are not told in a salacious or offensive manner, but in a thoughtful style. He does mention some interesting moments, like his odd encounter with supermodel Tyra Banks and some amusing ones, like how his Hackensack birthplace is flashed on screens in ballparks. That caused him irritation as Hackensack was Teaneck's athletic rival.

Mr. Glanville takes us through the steps of a baseball life, from beginning to end, with chapters on such subjects as preserving the game's integrity, his views of the game's galactic figures he played with or against, relationships (within and without) the game, bridging gaps between players (based on background and ethnicity), maintenance and conditioning, coping with fame and failure, and some odd but interesting advice: Gary Sheffield tells Glanville he can save on groceries by simply hiring a chef. Glanville, refreshingly, has no penknife to grind. He recognizes that his career came to an end and he had to move on – in his case to writing, the broadcast booth, and serving on the board of Athletes Against Drugs. His take on baseball is thoughtful and warm, and you finish up the book saying, "This guy belongs in the Hall of the Good Guys."

The next five will appear in a future edition of *You Can Look It Up!*

Obituaries

By David Lippman

Sadly, several former Met and Yankee players have passed away over the last year. Below are some thumbnail biographies with links to more detailed information from the SABR Bio Project.

OBITUARY: DON GULLETT

Born January 6, 1951, in Lynn, Kentucky, Donald Edward Gullett joined the Cincinnati Reds in 1970 at age 19. He pitched for the Cincinnati Reds until 1976, appearing in four World Series, winning twice, 1975 and 1976.

The Yankees signed him to a \$2 million six-year contract. He was 14-4 in 1977. A torn rotator cuff ended his career after eight starts in 1978. He compiled a lifetime record of 109-50, 3.11 ERA, 921 K.

Gullett was the Reds' pitching coach from 1993 to 2005.

He died at age 73 on February 14, 2024, in Columbus, Ohio of heart conditions.

BioProject Link: [Don Gullett – Society for American Baseball Research](#)

OBITUARY: JERRY GROTE

Gerald Wayne Grote was born on October 6, 1942, in San Antonio, Texas. He joined the Houston Astros in 1963 and was traded to the New York Mets in 1964. He was the Mets' primary catcher for the 1969 World Championship and 1973 National Pennant-winning team, respected for his strong defense and competitiveness. Lifetime statistics: .252, 39 HR, 404 RBI.

In 1977, he was traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers and played on two straight NL champion squads. He made his final major league appearance with the 1981 Kansas City Royals.

Grote died at age 81 on April 7, 2024.

BioProject Link: <https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/jerry-grote/>

OBITUARY: PAT ZACHRY

Patrick Paul Zachry was born on April 24, 1952, near Houston. He joined the Cincinnati Reds' starting rotation in 1976 and posted 14 wins, a 2.74 ERA, and a team-leading 143 strikeouts, pitching to a World Series victory.

He was traded to the New York Mets in 1977 in the infamous Tom Seaver deal, and toiled in defeat and injuries for five seasons until going to the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1982. After two years, he was shipped to the Philadelphia Phillies who released him after 10 games. Lifetime: 69-67, 3.52 ERA, 669 K.

Zachry died on April 4, 2024, at age 71 after a long illness.

BioProject Link: <https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/pat-zachry/>

OBITUARY: CARL ERSKINE

Carl Daniel Erskine was born on December 13, 1926, in Anderson, Indiana. He joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1948 and pitched for them through 1959. He threw two no-hitters and set a then-record 14 strikeouts in a single game in the 1952 World Series.

After retirement, Erskine earned honors for his work with the Special Olympics, inspired by his son, Jimmy, who was born with Down's Syndrome, and was awarded the Hall of Fame's Buck O'Neil Award. Lifetime: 122-78, 4.00 ERA, 981 K.

At his death at age 97 on April 16, 2024, Erskine was the last of the "Boys of Summer."

BioProject Link: <https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/carl-erskine/>

OBITUARY: FRITZ PETERSON

Fritz Peterson was born on February 8, 1942, in Chicago. He joined the Yankees in 1966 and was a left-handed rotation stalwart for nine years, going 109-106, and making the 1970 American League All-Star team.

He is best known for swapping his wife Marilyn to teammate Mike Kekich for his spouse, Susanne, in 1973. The marriage lasted but Peterson was traded to the Cleveland Indians. After two years, he was sent to the Texas Rangers, retiring in 1977 following injuries. His lifetime record: 133-131, 3.30, 1,015 K. He was active with Baseball Chapel during his career.

He died at age 81 on October 19, 2023.

BioProject Link: None

OBITUARY: KEN McKENZIE

Kenneth Purvis McKenzie was born on March 10, 1934, in Gore Bay, Ontario, Canada. He entered the majors with the Milwaukee Braves in 1960, and pitched for the New York Mets, St. Louis Cardinals, San Francisco Giants, and Houston Astros. He retired in 1965 with an 8-10 record, 4.82 ERA and 142 strikeouts.

He lettered at Yale in baseball and is best known for Met Manager Casey Stengel calling him “the lowest-paid member of the Yale class of 1956.” When Ol’ Case summoned McKenzie to pitch, he said, “Pretend they’re the Harvards.”

McKenzie died at age 89 on December 14, 2023.

BioProject Link: <https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/ken-mackenzie/>

OBITUARY: ED KRANEPOOL

Edward Emil Kranepool was born on November 8, 1944, and grew up in the Bronx, attending James Monroe High School. At age 17, he debuted with the 1962 original New York Mets and remained with them until his 1979 retirement, playing first base and all outfield positions. At that time, his 1,418 lifetime hits led the team, as did his 118 home runs. He posted a .261 batting average and drove in 614 runs in his career.

A fan favorite, Kranepool played on the 1969 World Championship and 1973 National League pennant-winning teams. During and after retirement, he worked as a New York stockbroker and restaurateur.

He died on September 8, 2024, at age 79.

BioProject Link: <https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/ed-kranepool/>

OBITUARY: WILLIE MAYS

One of the greatest players in baseball history, Willie Howard Mays, Jr. was born May 6, 1931, in Westfield, Alabama.

The New York Giants called him up in 1951 when he was batting .477 in Minneapolis. When he retired as a New York Met in 1973, Mays had amassed a lifetime .301 batting average, 3,293 hits, 660 HRs, 1,909 RBIs, and 339 SBs.

He won two MVP Awards, 12 Gold Gloves, the 1954 NL batting title, 1951 Rookie of the Year and was named to the All-Time and All-Century Teams. He was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1979.

Mays died on June 18, 2024, at age 93, then the oldest living Hall of Famer.

BioProject Link: <https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/willie-mays/>

SABR Book: Willie Mays: Five Tools (paperback) <https://profile.sabr.org/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=22025943>

(E-pub/Kindle) <https://profile.sabr.org/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=22025901>

(MOBI) <https://profile.sabr.org/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=22025922>

(PDF) <https://profile.sabr.org/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=22025859>