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Oct. 22, 2005. 12:13 PM

'Black Sox' curse haunts Weaver clan

Family, supporters of banned infielder still hope MLB someday reinstates him

GEOFF BAKER
SPORTS REPORTER

Those Cubbies fans claim that their curse is worse, But the White Sox have a real live curse,

It's the curse of injustice of Nineteen Twenty, Against Buck Weaver, Who didn't take a penny.

Lyrics to "Let Buck Back In" by Phil Coley and Joe Pickering (Sports Songs and Beyond, 2005)



AP FILE PHOTO

Buck Weaver, third baseman with the 1919 White Sox, maintained his innocence in the "Black Sox" scandal to his death in 1956.

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CHICAGO—Some dark humour making the rounds this baseball post-season notes that the hard-luck White Sox have actually thrown a World Series more recently than they've won a title.

And few people can appreciate just how long this city's South Side has supposedly paid penance for the sins of the 1919 "Black Sox" more so than 78-year-old Patricia Anderson.

She was raised from the age of 4 by her uncle, none other than George Daniel (Buck) Weaver, one of the infamous "Eight Men Out" who were banned from baseball after the 1920 season following a probe of allegations the White Sox had taken a dive in the previous year's Fall Classic against Cincinnati.

Unlike his seven teammates, including the more celebrated Shoeless Joe Jackson, Weaver was never found to have taken money from fixers and proclaimed his innocence until his dying day a half-century ago.

Weaver was the only one of the banned eight who kept living in Chicago, teaching the game to children there and remaining a popular, if tragic, figure for those believing him wrongly exiled from a sport he loved.

With the White Sox now aiming for their first World Series title since two years before the "Black Sox" scandal surfaced, a quest that starts tonight with Game 1 against the Houston Astros at U.S. Cellular Field, Anderson hopes more attention will be brought to her uncle's plight and finally push Major League Baseball to reinstate him in its good books.

"He knew a great many people in Chicago and there were plenty of

> [Richard Griffin](#)

Sharp-eyed Canuck helped expose Sox

CHICAGO—Few people outside of baseball historians are aware of how a Canadian helped expose one of the game's biggest scandals.

But that's exactly what Durham, Ont.-native Bert Collyer did shortly after the Chicago White Sox threw the 1919 World Series to the Cincinnati Reds. Collyer was a newspaper reporter for the Hearst chain on the Pacific Coast, who later moved on to Chicago and edited horse racing stories for a paper there.

In 1915, he founded *Collyer's Eye* — a weekly publication distributed across the U.S. in larger markets that became a must-read for those who gambled on horse racing, boxing and even the stock market. With its eyes and ears tuned to the gambling world, it wasn't long before *Collyer's Eye* heard the street grumbling associated with how the favoured White Sox had taken payoffs to throw the Series.

Collyer assigned reporter Frank O. Klein to head an investigation into the Series.

Their probe was greeted with scorn, abuse and disdain from the baseball establishment, which had been eager to keep the growing scandal quiet and denounced Collyer's publication as a "muckraker." Its biggest stories came after the 1920 season had already been played, with an item naming seven White Sox players that eventually would be banned for life — all except Buck Weaver, who it

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them who said he got a raw deal," Anderson said in a telephone interview from her home in Kimberling City, Mo.

"The way he played, you know damned well he wasn't being paid to throw the game."

The history books show that third baseman Weaver, portrayed by actor John Cusack in the 1988 movie *Eight Men Out*, went 11for34 (.324) in the series loss and had a perfect fielding percentage.

declared to be "clean as a hound's tooth."

The growing clamour stirred up by *Collyer's Eye* made the scandal hard to ignore. Collyer later declared vindication when a grand jury handed down indictments in the case.

Collyer died at age 61 in 1938 and is buried in Guelph, Ont.

Geoff Baker

Weaver did attend a pair of meetings before the series at hotels in New York and Cincinnati in which the fix was discussed between the White Sox players and gamblers, but insists he told them "it couldn't be done."

A jury acquitted Weaver and teammates Jackson, Eddie Cicotte, Chick Gandil, Swede Risberg, Lefty Williams, Oscar Felsch and Fred McMullin of conspiracy charges in a 1921 criminal trial.

Nevertheless, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the newly appointed commissioner of baseball, upheld the ban and, in an obvious reference to Weaver, stated that "no player who sits in conference with a bunch of crooked players and gamblers where ways and means of throwing games are discussed and does not promptly tell the club about it will ever play professional baseball."

A Chicago group two years ago started up a ClearBuck.com website lobbying for Weaver's posthumous reinstatement. Dr. David Fletcher, a long-time fan of Chicago baseball and its history, founded the group because he says a feeling came over him one day and he knew "my mission was to help Buck Weaver clear his name."

Standing yesterday inside the old Criminal Courts building, where a newspaper boy is said to have famously shouted, "Say it ain't so, Joe!" to Jackson as he arrived for his trial, Fletcher insisted the White Sox won't win the World Series until Weaver gets justice.

"He's the only one of them who kept on living in Chicago and who died in Chicago," Fletcher, 51, said of Weaver, buried along with his ring from the 1917 World Series — the last one won by the White Sox — in a cemetery less than 10 kilometres from U.S. Cellular Field. "He was the only player who never took any money, was a good citizen and represented everything this game was supposed to be about. Until someone starts to listen, (the White Sox) will stay cursed."

Fletcher also has sympathy for Jackson, who claimed he took payoff money and held on to it because he didn't know how to give it back. But

Weaver, he says, flat-out did nothing wrong.

Fletcher says he's fairly well-off financially and estimates he's spent \$125,000 (U.S.) traveling and lobbying on Weaver's behalf. He's even hired a Canadian-born publicist, Amber Buchanan, 29, a Chicago resident originally from Belmont, Ont., who moved to the U.S. on a soccer scholarship years ago.

Buchanan is now a vice-president of ClearBuck.com — the pair are also trying to launch a Chicago Baseball Museum — and can't understand why Weaver is still banned while figures from today's ongoing steroid scandal remain in good standing.

"Buck and his family can't get anyone to listen," she said.

Weaver's closest surviving relative, Anderson, appeared at the group's launch across the street from U.S. Cellular Field during the 2003 All-Star Game and still helps in its lobbying efforts.

Anderson's father had died in 1931 during the onset of the Great Depression and she, her mother and an older sister went to live with Weaver and his wife, Helen, in their apartment. It had been a decade since Weaver was banned and Anderson only started to piece together what had happened years later.

"He never talked about it at home," she said. "But he still loved baseball. If he had time, while he was on his way to work, he'd walk over if there were some kids playing a pickup game in a sandlot and teach them how to do it right. "To him, that was what the game was about. Not money."

Forced to work odd jobs, Weaver never gave up the optimistic spirit that made him immensely popular in Chicago during and after his playing days. But his optimism faded in later years, especially after commissioner Ford Frick turned down his final request for reinstatement in 1953, three years before Weaver's death.

"He was very down in spirits," she said. "He'd come home after going there with high hopes and a new petition and getting the same runaround."

Landis had turned down several of Weaver's pleas in the years after he'd banned him, including a petition with 14,000 signatures. Anderson said Landis had wanted her uncle to roll over on other players at the height of the scandal, which he refused to do.

Others at the time supported Weaver's claims of innocence, including a Chicago-based gambling publication — run by Ontario-born entrepreneur Bert Collyer — that conducted the only serious journalistic investigation into the scandal.

Shortly after the 1919 series, Collyer's *Eye* publication ran a list of seven suspects in the fix who were later banned, but found no evidence linking Weaver.

Anderson said the White Sox making it to the World Series for the first time since 1959 has caused renewed interest in her uncle and hopes commissioner Bud Selig — previously unreceptive to lifting the ban — has a change of heart.

"It can't hurt it," she said. "It's bringing it to the attention of many people and I think (Selig) will listen more."

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