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Rooting for the home team



Growing up with the Sox

South Sider Ethan Phillips, 6, will enter 2nd grade this fall. Tribune photo by E. Jason Wambsgans

My dad says he took me to my first game when I was 6 months old but I don't remember that. I remember seeing old Comiskey [must have been in photographs since the ballpark was torn down in 1991] but I've gone to a lot of games at the new field.

Which place do I like more? I like U.S. Cellular. But in Detroit when I went to a game and I saw these two tiger statues outside, I thought they were neat.

I think I fell in love with baseball when I played catch with my dad when I was 3. He would throw the ball and I would catch it.

I am lucky because my dad used to work for the White Sox. (Eric Phillips, currently assistant athletic director at the University of Illinois at Chicago, was previously a media relations director for the Sox.) I got to meet a lot of the players, travel to Toronto, spend spring in Tucson, Ariz., spring training, see the All-Star Game at U.S. Cellular and even visit



Does baseball still matter?

It does if you think childhood and collective memory still do

By Rick Kogan

Published June 20, 2004

Until the next games are played--and they are scheduled to begin today at 12:05 p.m. (CDT) in Montreal for the White Sox and 1:20 p.m. at Wrigley Field for the Cubs--Chicago baseball exists only as an immensely long train of memories, most of them in black and white, and some old enough now to be in danger of fading away.

Anybody there when Cubs Park, nee Weeghman Park, was renamed Wrigley Field? Can you tell me what Charles Comiskey looked like? Why was he called "The Old Roman"? Did you ever meet anyone who knew anyone who saw Cap Anson play, stringing together .300 seasons like a machine, or know that he invented what we now call spring training? You might hear some say they saw Babe Ruth hit his "called shot" home run at Wrigley in the fifth inning of the third game of the 1932 World Series--yes, the Cubs used to play in the World Series--but would you believe them? Who do you know who saw Joe Jackson hit or Ted Lyons pitch? What did the Sox's Luke Appling hit in 1936?

No one person's memory can encompass all of Chicago baseball. You will, however, meet many people who remember that they could walk into Wrigley free after the sixth inning, who remember when Carlton Fisk made his debut with the Sox, or when Ernie hit his 500th home run. Early Wynn and Dick Allen? Many people can remember them and there's a comfort in that, in all of it. Baseball memories conspire to make us feel like kids again.

That is why it came as a shock to learn that on April 29, Luis Ernesto Montiel Aparicio celebrated his 70th birthday. He was not in Chicago, where he enjoyed some of his most productive years, as the shortstop for the White Sox in their Go-Go days. He celebrated in Maracaibo, Venezuela, where he lives. But, baseball being baseball, he also lives in the memories of a generation of Chicagoans who once were kids.

And so it was that on that April birthday this year, the playground at the corner of Sedgwick and Eugenie



the clubhouse.

I think the White Sox will win the World Series this year. I like the White Sox but I like the Cubs too. Would seeing the Sox and Cubs in the World Series be a dream for me? It would be a fantasy.

My favorite players are Magglio [Ordonez], [Paul] Konerko and [Frank] Thomas. When I play, I pretend to be Magglio.

I'm a pretty good player. Am I as good as my dad? I'm pretty good. I play first base in Little League for the Athletics. I'm pretty good but I'm also pretty good at getting myself hurt.

This shoulder [his right] hurts because when we played the Royals, a ground ball bounced up and hit me hard.

Even though I get hurt, I still want to grow up to be a baseball player.

It's not about the money. It's just about the games you play, the winning and losing ... and it's about playing fair.



A true Cubs fan is born
North Sider Maggie McCullough, 11, will enter 7th grade in the fall. Tribune photo by E. Jason Wambsgans

When I hear the word baseball, I don't think of strikes, bats and balls.

No. I think of the Chicago Cubs. You know why? No matter how much they disappoint us, they never give up. The Cubs always play baseball--no more, no less.

I went to the sixth game of the playoffs last year. It was an exciting, yet disappointing, game. When I walked in Wrigley

Streets in Old Town came alive for me with echoes from a long ago, just-another-ordinary, summer day .

"I'll be Ernie Banks," said Ty Bauler.

"I'll be Jungle Jim [Rivera]," said Kenny Roper.

"I'll be Santo," said Marty Lazar.

"And I'm . . . , " I heard my little self say, "I wanna be Luis Aparicio."

That's the way it was, and ever has been, since professional baseball became part of the city's fabric in 1876: kids on playgrounds and in parks throwing balls and swinging bats and pretending to be heroes. The kids, boys mostly but some girls, would go to the stadiums too, clutching their mitts in one hand and their father's (but also mother's, grandfather's or grandmother's) hand in the other.

At one recent game, the guy sitting alongside me said he used to be Andy Pafko and that he was at Wrigley when Pafko played his first game. "My dad took me. Smallest crowd ever [314] at Wrigley, September . . . I don't know the exact date, but September, 1943. He drove in four runs. Never should have traded him, the dummies. Yep, when I was a kid, I was Andy Pafko."

"And I was Luis Aparicio," I said.

Behind us were two kids in Sosa jerseys.

The decades pass. Only the names change.

But there were no kids playing baseball in the LaSalle School playground on Aparicio's birthday. There were some playing basketball, others kicking a soccer ball around and a couple of little kids messing with the swings.

There was a time when no self-respecting school wall would be without a "strike zone" painted (or chalked) onto it, and when the baseball diamonds in each of the city's parks would be filled with kids and chatter.

You just don't see, or hear, those things much anymore.

But you do hear a question: Is baseball still important?

It was a very long time ago that the poet Walt Whitman, referring to what was then a relatively new addition to the country's sports scene, observed: "I see great things in baseball. It's our game--the American game."

And it was, for such a very long time, the American game and Chicago's game. There were great things in baseball here, some of them captured in pictures and words inside this magazine, but millions more just lounging comfortably in the synapses of our brains, easily evoked.

In addition to the players--both the heroic and the flawed--there are millions of characters who populate Chicago's baseball history. All are part of an ongoing novel filled with sights and sounds and packed with disappointments (the latest, you needn't be reminded, as fresh as last year in Wrigley) and joys (though few of us, if any, are old enough to have been there when the Cubs, in 1908, or White Sox, in 1917, were world champions). There have been goats and black cats, bats juiced with cork, that lively Greek chorus known as sportswriters, fans, owners, coaches, managers, umpers, broadcasters, vendors, Andy Frains and memorable quotes:

"I've never played drunk. Hung over, yes. But never drunk!"--Hack Wilson.

"Aw, how could [Jorge Orta] lose the ball in the sun? He's from Mexico."--Harry Caray.

"Let's play two."--Ernie Banks.

"One more biscuit for breakfast and that's out of here."--Jack Brickhouse.

"If a horse can't eat it, I won't play on it."--Dick Allen.

"Nobody would know how good I was at digging balls out of the dirt if it wasn't for [Shawon Dunston] and all those bad throws."--Mark Grace.

What Hollywood screenwriter could have concocted such wicked or wonderful moments as the Black Sox scandal; fire commissioner Robert Quinn scaring the hell out of the city by setting off the air raid sirens when the Sox clinched the 1959 pennant; and Mayor Richard J. Daley's response, saying that Quinn was acting in accordance with a City Council proclamation that "there shall be whistles and sirens blowing and great happiness when the White Sox win the pennant"; or the Cubs collapse in 1969?

Or these:

Bill Veeck enlivening Comiskey one day with a juggler at first base, clowns and dogs at second and a sword swallower at third?

The Cubs' Jose Cardenal sitting out some spring training games, claiming that his eyelids were stuck shut. And taking himself out of an exhibition game the next year, complaining that a cricket underneath his bed kept him up all night?

The '77 Sox winning behind their "South Side Hitmen" with thousands of fans taunting opponents with a chant of "na na na na, hey, hey-ey, goodbye" and a pitcher, Wilbur Wood, who looked like a before picture in a weight-loss ad?

The Cubs allowing a Cy Young winner to go to Atlanta over a few measly bucks? The Sox letting Sammy Sosa go to the Cubs?

Leon Durham letting that ball roll through his legs? Owner Jerry Reinsdorf unloading much of his team in disgust when they were only a few games out of first? Brock for Broglio? Hawk Harrelson the Sox GM?

Bartman?

The history of Chicago baseball is alive with characters and oddities that help make it--unlike basketball, football and hockey--life-size and human. One does not have to be tall or large to play; or obscured and transformed with masks and padding. The players--most of them at least--look just like you and me.

And unlike other big city "games" such as politics, crime, business and culture, the rules and tools of baseball have remained relatively constant.

Jerome Holtzman, the esteemed sportswriter and baseball historian, wrote some years ago: "Among the beauties of baseball is that despite the designated hitter and artificial turf, evils both, essentially the game hasn't changed. The bases are still 90 feet apart. . . . The mound is 60 feet, 6 inches from the plate, unchanged since 1893. To hit .300 it is necessary to get three hits in every 10 at-bats. . . ."

Baseball's history gives Chicago its spine, even as the conventional cliché has it that baseball splits the city. You could not and never will find barroom arguments about architects (Frank Lloyd Wright vs. Louis Sullivan), gangsters (Al Capone vs. Jeff Fort), symphony conductors (Fritz Reiner vs. Georg Solti). But listen and you'll often hear, "You Cubs or Sox?"

But baseball also unites us. The decades-long futility of our teams is an odd badge of honor that we, or at least many of us, wear with pride. The real fan is not a partisan. The real fan loves baseball, and for all the playful (and not so playful) jousting between Cubs and Sox followers--which will become especially heated during the three-game "city series" that starts Friday--it is ultimately the game itself that lures us.

"Baseball is dull only to dull minds," wrote sportswriter Red Smith.

And it sneaks into our minds when we are young and impressionable. Because of that, the history of baseball in Chicago is not just that thick and ongoing novel but also a library of personal diaries, filled with names, stats and snapshots.

Ask around. Ask any man--and some women, but there are, frankly, few of them--"Who were you?" and answers will tell you much about that person.

Bill Lavicka, who grew up in Batavia, answers, "I was Nellie Fox."

"I was sort of small and not very good," he says. "But I loved the game."

Field, it wasn't quite the same as I remembered from games I went to before. But then I smelled the hot dogs, and heard the people trying to sell all kinds of souvenirs.

When my mom and I got to our seats--of course, they were in the bleachers--I took out a sign I had made at home that said, "Hit It Here," and on the other side, "Prior the Fish Fryer."

When the players first came out on the field, I got chills just knowing that so much talent was in one park. As soon as the game started I was cheering every five seconds as loud as I could. By the second inning I was hoarse. Whenever the center fielder for the Marlins would come out onto the field I shouted "Bouillabaisse!" since they are the Marlins.

It was a tight game and then came the very memorable Bartman ball incident and the Marlins started scoring runs. The whole crowd got quiet. But the game wasn't over! So I stood up and shouted, "Come on, everyone, it's not over yet!" The crowd started clapping, then everyone started cheering again. In the ninth inning I was on the edge of my seat.

Sadly, the Cubs lost. But at the end of that game I had a feeling I've never really felt before. At that moment, I realized I was a true Cubs fan. They still played the best game of baseball I've ever seen, and I will always remember it.

So Cubbies, I will always believe in you.

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That love can be seen near the corner of Leavitt Street and Lexington Avenue. It has been there for a few years, in the form of two dugouts on one of the two beautiful baseball diamonds at the Near West Side Little League Park.

Lavicka, who has spent his life renovating old Chicago buildings, built those dugouts, which feature wooden bats holding up roofs decorated with baseballs.



A few weeks ago, some dignitaries--including the mayor, a few hundred kids and dozens of parents--gathered for the opening games of the season and to see the 59-year-old Lavicka's "The Catch," a whimsical 20-foot-tall sculpture topped out by a two-ton concrete baseball mitt cradling a ball, complete with "stitching."

"Am I dressed for baseball?" asked the mayor, who was there to throw out the ceremonial first pitch, as he has done for seven previous seasons.

He was not, but removing his suit coat, he threw a strike and giggled like a kid.

"The toughest thing to do in public, pitching a baseball," he said.

Though the press conference that followed, filled with fastball questions about crime and homelessness, suggested that throwing a ball may not be the toughest thing to do in public, baseball has the ability to transport people, to remove us from the struggles of our lives. It's a touchstone, a comfort.

David Levenson knows the game. He is a beer vendor, working both Wrigley and--it may never trip as gently off the tongue as "Comiskey" or "Sox Park"--U.S. Cellular fields. He has been doing this for two decades and has seen something in the neighborhood of 3,000 Chicago games.

"There are now, maybe, 10 times a year when I can get caught up in a game," he says. (He grew up in suburban Detroit, so he was Tigers infielder Dick McAuliffe). "The '84 Cubs really crushed me so it's been harder to rekindle the passion I had before that. I root for both teams, and when I can get caught up in a game I find myself taken back to when I was a kid. My mind fills with memories of the friends I grew up with, and we are always on a baseball field."

You might think that working the parks would diminish his taste for the game through overexposure, but Levenson's affection remains great and has helped produce two lovely and loving films, 1992's "The Wrecking of Old Comiskey" and 2001's "Wrigley Field: Beyond the Ivy," which have had many successful screenings and continue to sell briskly, especially during the season.

Levenson is the co-producer and director of the films. The co-producer/writer is Bob Chicoine. A native of the Southwest Side, Chicoine has been selling beer at the ballparks for more than a quarter of a century. "I can remember the day I started, and I can't remember birthdays and anniversaries," he says. "I started on June 4, 1977."

"The game's going through a transition, I think," says Chicoine, who is also a poet and accountant. "I don't see that many kids playing, but that doesn't mean they aren't playing somewhere. And, no, you don't see a lot of the so-called blue-collar fans out there, but maybe there just aren't as many blue-collar people these days."



William L. Petersen, noted Chicago stage actor, devoted Cubs fan and star of the CBS-TV series "CSI," has spent the last two months in town. In May, walking his dog in Wilmette, he came upon a Little League game and sat down to watch a few innings. "I marveled at their uniforms," he says. "They all had these pro-like uniforms, with fancy logos. When I was a kid we were lucky to get a hat."

Petersen is 51, part of the last generation that would habitually grab a bat, a ball and a few friends and take off for a playground or park for a day of baseball.

"Be home before it gets dark," the mothers would say.

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But the world has become too dangerous for such "disorganized" ball. "I hardly ever see kids in parks or school playgrounds just playing pickup games," says Levenson, who is 46. "It's all organized ball now."

That's not such a bad thing. The ball's still round, isn't it?

And the ballparks are still here.

Asked to recall his first visit to a professional baseball game, Petersen hesitated not one second, saying, "My sister took me. I was 6. I was there with my mitt and at first it was the beer men that most impressed me with their shouting. But that was the game [Aug. 4, 1960] that Billy Martin [Cincinnati Reds second baseman] threw his bat at Cubs pitcher Jim Brewer and then they got into it. Martin hit Brewer with an overhand right and the benches emptied."

Brewer would suffer a fracture of the orbital bone of his right eye. He required surgery and was out for a month. Martin was fined \$500 but would be sued for \$1 million and was eventually liable for \$25,000. By the way, the Cubs won 5-3.



When Petersen now goes to Cubs games, as he frequently has during this stay, he has problems that didn't exist when he was younger. "Now," he says, "all I'm trying to do is not get recognized." But as he says that, he grows wistful, traveling back in time. "I can remember I always wanted to be Ernie [Banks] except when the Sox won the pennant. Then I was Nellie [Fox]. But mostly Ernie.

"Later I lived within a couple of blocks of Wrigley and Remains [Theater Company, of which he was one of the founders] performed at the Ginger Man [bar] just north on Clark. I spent a lot of summer days in the bleachers.

"Sure the crowds have changed, [but] there are crowds. The Cubs were really lousy back then. You could just wander around, sit anywhere. And this was back before the neighborhood exploded, all these bars, all this stuff going on outside."

But it will ever be what's inside that counts. And that's the game.

"In the same way baseball is part of all of us I think it is still an important part of the city," says Levenson. "There is a narrative arc to each game, unlike basketball or other sports where it's all about the final minutes. Things happen in games that you remember, as if from previous chapters in a novel you're reading."

The game is the same. Only the players have changed.



I tell Levenson a story about the La Salle School playground: There are four of us, early teens, playing fast-pitch against one wall of the school. A man and little girl walk across the playground, hand in hand. The man is Billy Williams, who plays for the Cubs. The bravest among us shouts, "Hey, hey, Billy, want to throw us a few?" and he nods and catches the rubber ball and starts throwing. He tosses gently, letting us hit, and when we do, he says, "That's away" or "Good one." In a while, the little girl tugs at his pants and he says to her, "OK, honey," and to us, "Thanks, boys," and we say, "Thanks a million, Billy," and watch him gracefully walk away.

Levenson nods his head and says, "That sort of intimacy with players is gone forever. I have a nephew who's 14 and I don't think he's ever played baseball. He's into soccer. But I still see kids at the ballparks.

"On their best days the ballparks are like neighborhoods, or what neighborhoods used to be. There are regulars who have known each other well, and the park's a place where people talk to each other. The game can make friends out of strangers. I see that all the time."

His beer-vending documentary partner Chicoine sees things at the parks too. "I saw these two people, a couple that had to be in their 60s and they were both keeping score. I stared at them and finally had to

go up and tell them they looked like something out of a Norman Rockwell painting," he says. (He's 52, a native South Sider and was Sox outfielder Minnie Minoso). "You can still get that at minor-league games. People keeping score. The families, the kids.

"There really is nothing like a ballgame. It's like urban fishing . . . long and slow with a lot of time for daydreaming. In baseball, what's going on around you in the stands is sometimes at least as important as what's going on on the field."

Remember the words from these two when other people tell you that the game has been irreparably sullied by steroids, corporate logos, stratospheric salaries and surly stars; when they tell you that unless you own the Cubs, as does the Tribune Company, or make a few million bucks a year batting .250, you should be worried about the future of the game.

People will also tell you that while there are still a few "bums" in the bleachers, they are now outnumbered by bankers and brokers. They will complain that for every mitt you'll see at the parks, you'll see 10 times as many cell phones.

When they do, know this: "Every game is a good story," says Chicoine.

Know that today a parent is taking a kid to his or her first game.

Know that somewhere in the city or suburbs at this very moment a father and his son or daughter are playing catch and the kid is shouting "Throw it higher, Daddy, throw it higher." Maybe the kid has already been to that first ballgame. Maybe not. Doesn't really matter. He or she is at that age: the ball's in the air, the catch is about to be made and baseball's about to enter the bloodstream.



A few weeks back, at the start of the Near West Side Little League season, you saw the members of the league's 60 teams and their anxious parents and friends. Most of them were African-Americans, with a sprinkling of Hispanics and whites. All of them were in uniforms. All of them looked excited.

"You build the field and they will come," said Lavicka, the sculptor.

So, you watch the games and feel a smile come across your face and hear the echoes: "I wanna be Luis Aparicio." But you also hear more recent words, only minutes old, that came from 27th Ward Ald. Walter Burnett, as he spoke to the crowd: "The things you learn in baseball will carry you through life."

And at that moment--accompanied by the real sounds of bats and balls and mitts and chatter--it's easy to have faith in the future of baseball and, perhaps, faith too in the city and in other things that are bigger than a game.






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Cubs tales, Sox yarns

A quirky, bumpy stroll down baseball's memory lane

By **Bill Hageman and Bob Vanderberg**
Published June 20, 2004

On June 23, 1895, a game against Cleveland was interrupted after the third inning so the entire Cubs team could be arrested for violating laws banning baseball on Sundays. While a West Side Grounds crowd of 10,000 fans waited, the players were marched into the clubhouse where they signed \$100 bail bonds. They then returned to the field to finish a 13-4 victory.

NOT ALL OF HACK WILSON'S headlines were made on the diamond. On May 23, 1926, hours after homering to help beat the Braves, the 5-foot-6-inch, 190-pound slugger was arrested in a raid on a Sheridan Road flat where the beer was flowing, a violation of Prohibition. On June 21, 1928, he went into the stands at Wrigley to punch a heckler, a milk wagon driver named Young, and on July 4, 1929, he stormed the Cincinnati dugout and punched pitcher Ray Kolp, who'd been heckling him. That evening at Union Station, as the two teams waited for their trains, Wilson decked another Reds pitcher, Pete Donohue. And on Sept. 5, 1931, Wilson and teammate Pat Malone mixed it up with two writers on a train. The next day, Wilson was suspended for the remainder of the season. That December, he was traded.

DURING SPRING TRAINING in 1954, owner P. K. Wrigley asked manager Phil Cavarretta about the team's chances. Cavvy was honest and told Wrigley the Cubs didn't have the horses. On March 29, Cavarretta became the first manager ever fired in spring training. "He said he did not have the kind of ballplayers he wanted," Wrigley told reporters. "He'd sort of given up on the boys, so to speak, feeling that they were not pennant material. Well, maybe not, but they could be with the will to win." Actually, no. The Cubs finished seventh that year, 33 games out of first.

IN THE EARLY 1990s, the Cubs pitching coach at the time, Billy Connors, dated adult film star Seka, a relationship that caused no small embarrassment to the Cubs, who forbade Connors from leaving tickets for her at the box office and told him not to be seen in public with her.



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MANY KNOW THE STORY of Fred Merkle's base-running mistake which cost the New York Giants a pennant. On Sept. 23, 1908, the Cubs and Giants were tied 1-1 with two outs in the bottom of the ninth when, with men on first and third, Giant Al Bridwell delivered what should have been the game-winning hit. But as the man on third crossed the plate, Merkle, who had been on first, neglected to touch second and ran right to the clubhouse when he saw the hit fall in. Cub Johnny Evers called for the ball and touched second base for a force. Merkle was out, the game ended in a tie, and was replayed later--with the Cubs beating Christy Mathewson to win the pennant. What most don't know is that two weeks before the Merkle incident, the Cubs were involved in an identical play. On Sept. 4, the Cubs and Pirates were scoreless in the 10th when, with two out and the bases loaded, Pirate "Chief" Wilson singled to drive in Fred Clarke with the winning run. But rookie Warren Gill, on first, left the field without touching second. Evers got the ball and touched the bag for the force, but umpire Hank O'Day said he didn't see the play--and the Pirates' victory stood. O'Day, though, realized he'd made a mistake and vowed to never make it again. And who was the ump who ruled against the Giants and Merkle on Sept. 23 in New York? Hank O'Day, of course.

ANY IDEA YOU MAY HAVE HAD that the Cubs-Cardinals rivalry is a recent media creation may be dispelled by this tale: In 1952, the Redbirds' Stan Musial and the Cubs' Frankie Baumholtz went into the last week of the season locked in a race for the NL batting title. By the final game on Sept. 28, the incomparable Cardinals hitter had pulled ahead by nearly 10 points, but it was still mathematically possible for Baumholtz to eke out the crown with a spectacular performance. With the Cubs playing the Cards in St. Louis, outfielder Musial traded places with starting pitcher Harvey Haddix in the first inning to pitch to Baumholtz--the only major league pitching appearance of Musial's 22-year career. Baumholtz, a left-handed batter, batted right-handed against the southpaw Musial, even though he was not a switch hitter. He made contact, but did his average no good, reaching first base on an error. Musial, his crown now safe, went back to the outfield. Some might say it was all in fun and not a plot by Musial to sabotage Baumholtz--but which version would you rather believe?

PITCHER LEE MEYER belongs in the Cubs archives--not for his mound work, but for one off-field accomplishment. As a 21-year-old Cubs minor-leaguer, he married 33-year-old bombshell Mamie Van Doren ("High School Confidential!" "Sex Kittens Go To College") in May of 1966. Alas, there was no happily ever after. He never made it to the majors, the marriage ended in early 1969 ("It was a great 2 1/2 years," he told reporters), and he died in a car crash in 1972. Van Doren also dated journeyman pitcher/Hollywood playboy Bo Belinsky.

ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING Cubs during the 1960s was Bill Faul. The right-handed pitcher was purchased from Detroit in March of '65. He notched only a 7-10 record in two seasons with the Cubs, but was a starter on the All-Eccentricity Team. He defied superstition by wearing No. 13, practiced karate, was a minister at a Salt Lake City church, and, most intriguing, hypnotized himself before taking the mound. "I tell my arm it's extremely loose," he once explained. His Cubs career ended halfway into the 1966 season after he got into an argument with Manager Leo Durocher and was sent down to the minors.

THE YEAR PHIL CAVARRETTA was fired as manager by Cub owner Phil Wrigley for admitting the team was bad, White Sox GM Frank Lane, always eager to tweak the Cubs, had manager Paul Richards ask Cavarretta if he were still interested in playing. At 38, and still in good shape, Cavarretta was happy to sign as a free agent in May. He got into 71 games, mostly at first base, and hit .316 for a team that ended up with a 94-60 record. "I was going to fill in for 'em," he said, "pinch-hit a little and back up Ferris Fain, who was a very good first baseman. Then he tore up his knee sliding into home, and I got to play quite a bit and did pretty well. You know, you're 38 years old, you're just trying to help the club any way you can. And I was able to do just that. I enjoyed that year so much." Surely he enjoyed it more than P. K. (33 games out of first) Wrigley did.

ZEKE BONURA CAME UP to the White Sox in 1934 and took the South Side by storm. That rare Sox player who could hit the long ball, he'd have been a fan favorite at 35th and Shields even if he'd hit .250. But he did much, much better. The big, colorful first baseman from New Orleans hit .302 with a club-record 27 homers and 110 RBIs as a rookie, then reprised in 1935 with 21 homers, 92 RBIs and a .295 average. In 1936, he set a team record with 138 RBIs and batted .330. But there were those in management who weren't enamored with Zeke. His fielding range was poor, and he'd wave his glove at groundballs rolling by him in what was called "the Mussolini salute." In addition, there were his annual contract holdouts. But the worst thing, in the eyes of owner J. Lou Comiskey and his wife, Grace, was that Zeke had begun taking a romantic interest in their daughter, Dorothy. The Comiskys were not keen on the relationship going to a higher level. In 1938, after another Bonura spring-training holdout, the Sox dealt him to Washington for fancy-fielding first baseman Joe Kuhel.

DON RUDOLPH TRIED IN VAIN each March to win a spot on the White Sox pitching staff during the

1950s. But he was probably the most publicized farmhand the Sox had--not for his talent but his wife's. Under the stage name "Patti Waggin," she was what is politely called an exotic dancer. In early April of the Sox pennant year 1959, Manager Al Lopez told Rudolph that he had made the club. Lopez was hoping either he or Rodolfo Arias would fill the need for a lefty reliever--even though Arias lacked a good fastball and Rudolph lacked a good breaking ball. Rudolph got a save in the season opener at Detroit, but his success didn't last. On May 1, Bill Veeck traded Rudolph and outfielder Lou Skizas to Cincinnati for aging slugger Del Ennis. Said Veeck: "Alas, the wrong Rudolph had the great curves."

CHARLES A. COMISKEY, "the Old Roman," had always wanted to take a White Sox team on an exhibition tour around the world to sell his sport to the baseball-starved masses. He talked John McGraw and his New York Giants into joining the Sox on the journey, which began in November 1913 and ended in March 1914. The teams, bolstered by such luminaries from other teams as Hall of Famers-to-be Tris Speaker and Sam Crawford and Giants outfielder Jim Thorpe, who a year later would win two gold medals at the Stockholm Olympics (and respond to praise from the King of Sweden with a simple "Thanks, king") went to such places as Japan, the Philippines, China, Australia, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Egypt, Italy, France and England. In Ceylon, tea tycoon Sir Thomas Lipton bestowed 10 pounds of boxed tea on each player. In Egypt, catcher Ivy Wingo threw a ball over the Sphinx to outfielder Steve Evans as a publicity stunt. And in England, fans at London's Wembley Stadium--among them King George, who signed autographs--watched their first game of baseball, an 11-inning thriller at that. The teams sailed home on a famed British ocean liner, arriving in New York on March 6. Fourteen months later, a German submarine would sink the ship, the Lusitania, taking 1,201 lives.

ROOKIE JOHNNY MOSTIL took over center field in 1921 for Happy Felsch, who was suspended over the Black Sox scandal. He hit .301 and showed great defensive prowess. Later came seasons of .303, .291, .325, .299 and .328. He had 16 triples one year and 15 twice, and seasons of 43, 41 and 35 steals. Then something went horribly wrong. During spring training of 1927, he took a razor blade to his wrists, arms and neck. He was near death for days before recovering and missed the entire 1927 season. The official explanation was that Mostil was suffering from depression brought on by a painful nerve disease. But there were whispers that he was feeling guilty over an alleged affair with the wife of a top Sox pitcher. In any event, he was never the same and was out of baseball by 1930.

AT AGE 25 and in his second full season, Monty Stratton went 15-5 with a 2.40 ERA and five shutouts for the Sox in 1937. The next year, the 6-foot-5-inch right-hander was 15-9 and even batted .266, terrific for a pitcher. Then, in November 1938, he was hunting rabbits near his mother's east Texas farm when he slipped and fell. His shotgun went off, sending a bullet into his right leg and severing an artery. Doctors amputated the leg the next day. Stratton, soon equipped with a wooden leg, realized his big league playing career was over, but he refused to accept the idea he would never pitch again. In 1946, he amazed the baseball world by posting an 18-8 record in the Class A East Texas League. His story was made into a movie, "The Stratton Story," starring Jimmy Stewart, that became a 1949 box-office success.

THE 1980 SEASON had been a travesty for the White Sox. Their announcer/coach Jimmy Piersall had run amok, calling owner Bill Veeck's wife a "colossal bore" on TV, then assaulting a suburban sportswriter. Later, Veeck waged a long, sour campaign to sell the team. In 1981, new owners Jerry Reinsdorf and Eddie Einhorn needed a burst of fresh air. They found it by signing Red Sox free agent Carlton Fisk. First "Pudge" destroyed his former teammates in the season opener in Boston, then slugged a grand slam to win the home opener against the Brewers. It signaled a new era, to be consummated in '83 with a division championship.



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Baseball in Chicago



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Pride and prejudice

For 30 years, Negro league teams took a back seat to no one

By Don Terry
Published June 20, 2004

Decked out in fedoras and wide-lapel suits, stylish dresses and platform shoes, up to 51,000 African-Americans streamed into Comiskey Park near the end of every summer from 1933 to 1953. They came for a Sunday afternoon of black power, promise and pride, the grand finale of a festive weekend that went largely unnoticed by the country's white citizens in the years before the Civil Rights Movement changed the nation.

One year, organizers estimated 10,000 people had to be turned away at the 35th Street gates. Scalpers and counterfeiters did a brisk business. South Side dress shops, hotels and restaurants worked overtime to keep up with the influx of visitors. Bronzeville was jumping around the clock. As one contemporary pundit put it, the nightclubs were loaded and so were the patrons.

On Sunday morning, folks might leave a little something extra in the collection plate at church for luck, then hurry over to Comiskey to get the best seats--maybe even an up-close peek at Joe Louis, Lena Horne or some other black celebrity. There was no telling what wonders might be witnessed. But first everyone in the stadium stood for the National Anthem, despite the insults and injuries that made up so much of life in apartheid America. As the last notes drifted over the walls, the call that everyone had come to hear rang out:

"Play ball!"

Another East-West All-Star game was under way. The contest was the crowning glory of the Negro league season. The series began the same year as the major league all-star games. There were several years from the late '30s to the late '40s when the East-West game outdrew the major league version.

Chicago was the capital of this parallel baseball universe. "I went to every East-West game from '33 until I was inducted into the Army in '43," says Timuel D. Black Jr., author of the recently published, "Bridges of Memory, Chicago's First Wave of Black Migration." "People from all over the country would come to Chicago. We'd feel like big shots because we were hosting the game."



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In 1943, four years before Jackie Robinson broke the major league color barrier, more than 51,000 people filled Comiskey for the "colored classic," according to Larry Lester's book, "Black Baseball's National Showcase."

"It was like a holiday for black America," Lester says. "People came out in their Sunday best."

Yet if you weren't a regular reader of the Chicago Defender, the Pittsburgh Courier or some other African-American weekly, chances are you probably didn't know much about one of the biggest sporting events in the country. Indeed, author Donn Rogosin titled his 1983 book about life in the Negro leagues, "Invisible Men."

Black professional baseball traces its roots to the late 1880s, around the time that a "gentlemen's agreement" banned African-Americans from participating in the major leagues. Cap Anson, a white superstar player and manager of the Chicago White Stockings, the precursor of the Cubs, endorsed the color line when he refused to play against Moses Fleetwood Walker, a black catcher on an opposing team. "Get that nigger off the field," Anson reportedly hissed.

But black America didn't slink off the field or just go sit in the segregated stands, content to watch the white boys play through the chicken wire that some ballparks put up to keep the black spectators away from the white. Black pioneers in business suits and starched collars started their own teams and then their own professional leagues, turning baseball into another front in the struggle for civil rights.

No place was more important to the birth of this movement in spikes than Chicago, the adopted hometown of Andrew "Rube" Foster, who was known as "the Father of the Negro leagues." Born the son of a Texas minister in 1879, Foster left school after the 8th grade to chase his baseball dreams. He caught most of them, except for the one he wanted most, a chance to see black men play in the major leagues. He died 17 years too early.

In his remarkable career, Foster was a team owner, a brilliant field manager and widely considered one of the best pitchers of his era, black or white. At 6 feet 2 and more than 200 pounds, he was a crafty hurler with a wicked "fadeaway," what modern ballplayers would call a screwball.

He moved to Chicago in 1907, wooed to town by Frank C. Leland, a college-educated black businessman and former ballplayer. Leland put together one of the best teams in the Midwest and named it after himself, the Leland Giants. The Giants' home field was Auburn Park at 79th Street and Wentworth Avenue, and Foster was the team's star and later its manager. "Leland is all but forgotten," says Kansas City-based Negro league historian Phil Dixon. "That's a shame, because he did so much to put black baseball on the map."



In the first 20 years of the last century, black teams were barnstorming independents, playing wherever they could. Although the major leagues wouldn't allow African-American teams, there were white semipro leagues that did. One of them was the Chicago City League. The Leland Giants handily won the league championship in 1909, setting the stage for a three-game exhibition series against the powerful Cubs.

The Cubs had been steamrolling through white professional baseball the previous few years, but in 1909 the team narrowly missed the postseason. Foster challenged their vanity and promised to help fill their pocketbooks if they would pit their nine against his.

The Cubs won the first game 4-1, but the Giants' Joe Green stole the show. "Giants' Center Fielder Breaks One Leg and Tries to Score on Other One," proclaimed the Chicago Daily Tribune of Oct. 19. Green apparently broke his leg sliding into third. When the ball sailed into the outfield, Green was helped to his feet and pushed toward the plate. He hopped to within a yard of home plate before being tagged out, the Tribune reported. He collapsed and had to be carried off the field.

The next game, on Oct. 21, found the Cubs down by three runs in the ninth inning. They appeared "hopelessly beaten," according to Ring Lardner, the Tribune's scribe on the scene. Fans were heading for the exits when the Cubs "rallied and began to hit Rube Foster to the four winds of heaven." One Cub "smote" a Foster delivery off the right field boards and the rally was on.

The tricky Foster had handcuffed the major leaguers all afternoon. But in the late innings he weakened. As he tired, he dipped into his bag of tricks. "Rube, feeling he was slipping, started to work about as fast

as a hippopotamus would run on skis," Lardner observed.

The Cubs' Frank Schulte scored the winning run in the 6-5 contest on a controversial call. Schulte sneaked home while the players from both teams were gathered around the umpire arguing over Foster's deliberate pace. When the umpire signaled Schulte safe, Foster "wanted to know how one Cub could be allowed to steal home when three or four others were standing on the diamond in conversation."

Foster never got his answer. The umpire and the Cubs quickly left the field. The ump had to be escorted by "a large policeman" because the Giants' supporters "acted as if they were about to wound" him, Lardner wrote.

The final game of the series, on Oct. 23, was a pitcher's duel featuring the Cubs' ace, Mordecai "Three Finger" Brown against the Giants' lefty, Pat Dougherty. The Cubs "didn't have any picnic with the champs of the City League," Lardner wrote. "In fact, the result was more or less in doubt up to the finish."

Dougherty struck out the first three batters he faced with nine pitches. As for Three Finger, he cut the Giants down to size and the Cubs won 1-0. The game was called after only seven innings when the ump ruled it was "too dark to pastime longer."



No one, except maybe the Giants, believed the games would be so closely contested. "No question they were good players. The Cubs were pushed to the limit to beat them," says Robert Peterson, author of the 1970 classic about the Negro leagues, "Only the Ball Was White." The next season, with an even stronger team, Foster again challenged the Cubs. They declined.

By then, Foster and Leland had gone their separate ways, each now running his own team. In 1911, Foster started the Chicago American Giants, one of the most storied clubs in the history of black baseball. The team played its home games in the former ballpark of the White Sox at 39th Street and Wentworth Avenue, thanks to Foster's business partner, John Schorling, a white tavern owner and brother-in-law of Charles Comiskey. In 1910, the White Sox had moved into brand new Comiskey Park.

For almost 10 years, the American Giants won every Western colored championship but one, while usually dominating the white semipro clubs willing to go up against them. "Rube Foster had a great gift," says 92-year-old Buck O'Neil, who played for and managed the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro leagues before joining the Cubs as a scout in 1956 and becoming the first black coach in the major leagues with the Cubs in 1962. "People would just go and sit and listen to Rube talk baseball. He was a great organizer."

But when Foster surveyed the landscape of black baseball, he saw anything but order. Owners routinely raided each other's rosters, and players were happy to oblige. They constantly jumped from team to team, looking for the biggest paydays, which were not all that big to begin with. And the teams were giving too much of their money away to white booking agents to arrange games and playing sites.

Foster penned a weekly column, "Pitfalls of Baseball" for the Chicago Defender's sports section. In the last days of 1919 he told his readers: "Baseball as it exists at present among our owners is a disgrace. . . . What is needed is a foundation that we can build on, something that we can merit the wonderful attendance and pride our followers have in us . . ."

So in 1920, Foster wielded his powerful personality like a bat at an owners' meeting in Kansas City. He convinced seven other owners to form a league of their own. On Feb. 13 of that year, the first successful black professional league was born, the Negro National League, which included Foster's American Giants, Leland's Chicago Giants, the Dayton Marcos, the St. Louis Giants, the Indianapolis ABCs, the Cuban Stars, the Detroit Stars and the Kansas City Monarchs.

The rival Eastern Colored League followed two years later. Pennant winners of the two leagues eventually met in what was billed as the "colored World Series."

Between 1920 and 1927, the American Giants won five league pennants and two of the four World Series played by the two leagues. Foster's dream was to someday integrate one or two teams from the Negro league into the majors. But by 1925, he began to grow forgetful and irritable, and the other owners were tiring of his dictatorial ways. Once, as league president, he stripped a franchise from an owner

because the man fell asleep during a meeting. "He ran the league and his team with an iron hand," says James A. Riley, author of "The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues."

In 1926, he was sent to a mental hospital in Kankakee and never came home. He died there two weeks before Christmas in 1930 at age 51.

Many said it was the stress of running the league that led to his breakdown. He had much to worry about: The league's finances were fragile, the scheduling shaky. In a front-page story announcing Foster's death, the Chicago Defender called him "a martyr of the game." He was, the paper sadly reported, "called out by Umpire Father Time."

Three thousand people attended his funeral at St. Mark's African Methodist Episcopal Church at 50th Street and South Wabash Avenue. The other owners sent a 200-pound floral arrangement shaped like a baseball and made out of white chrysanthemums, with roses for the seams. The procession to Lincoln Cemetery stretched half a mile.

Foster's league folded in 1931, brought down by the Great Depression and the absence of its leader. His squad became an independent again and barnstormed throughout the Midwest. Over the years, the team was owned by a mortician and a florist, among others. Gus Greenlee, an East Coast numbers king who owned the hottest nightclub in Pittsburgh, resurrected the league in 1933 and later that year started the East-West Game.



The Negro leagues in one form or another played on into the '50s. But after Jackie Robinson integrated the majors in 1947, the quality of play began to decline as more of the best Negro league players were gobbled up by major league teams hungry for talent. The fans left too, following their all-stars into integrated baseball.

Desperate to keep fans and maybe draw some new ones, the owner of the Chicago American Giants, Dr. J.B. Martin, tried a little integration of his own. In the spring of 1950, he approached an Italian-American teenager named Louis Clarizio, a graduate of Crane Technical High School. Clarizio was playing outfield for the Armour Stars, the meat-packing plant's semipro industrial league team.

After watching Clarizio play with the Stars, Martin asked if he would like to step up and play with the Chicago American Giants, a professional baseball team. "The American who?" Clarizio asked.

Martin quickly explained the team's history. "We play our home games in Comiskey Park when the Sox are out of town," he added.

That did it. Clarizio was 18 and had grown up on the West Side dreaming of patrolling the outfield for the Sox.

"Where do I sign?" he said. Martin also signed Clarizio's teammate, a tall 19-year-old pitcher named Louis Chirban.

The Chicago teenagers were not the first white players to join the Negro leagues. Eddie Klep, a white left-handed pitcher with a checkered past, had been recruited by the Cleveland Buckeyes in 1946 after the Dodgers signed Robinson. Klep lasted less than a season and later spent time in prison. But in his short time in the league, he got a taste of Jim Crow. When the Buckeyes traveled to Alabama to play the Birmingham Black Barons, police ran Klep off the field for violating the city's laws against race mixing. The officers were under the command of the infamous police commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor.

Clarizio and Chirban's debut with the Giants was on July 8 in the second game of a double-header in Comiskey Park against the Indianapolis Clowns. Clarizio stepped up to the plate. His knees were wobbly. He took a mighty swing and missed. The Clowns gave him a huge bat. Try this. "Everybody laughed and clapped," Clarizio remembers more than 50 years later. "It was fun."



Clarizio knew he was in over his head. Even in its dying days, the Negro league pitchers threw harder,

the batters hit the ball farther and the fielders ran faster than anything he had seen this side of the major leagues. "They were above my league," he says.

Most of the games he played with the Giants were on the road in small towns in Wisconsin, Iowa, Indiana and southern Illinois. That's when he ran into trouble. Just 75 miles south of Chicago seemed like a different country, a meaner one. A few times, the Giants pulled into a new town uncertain about which restaurants would serve a busload of hungry black ballplayers. Clarizio was sent in to find out. More than once the team was turned away, so Clarizio would purchase a couple dozen burgers and take them out to his teammates.

"There was real prejudice at that time," he says. He'd trot out to his outfield position and the white fans would throw bottles and slurs at him. "I was young then," Clarizio says. "I'd swear at them back. The women were as bad as the men."

The Giants got their revenge. "We'd run up the score on them," Clarizio says, a smile spreading across his face. "It was the most fun I ever had in my life. I never had any problems from the black fans. I was treated good, except when we went south."

Driving the bus when the Giants hit the road was the manager, the legendary Theodore Roosevelt Radcliffe, better known as "Double Duty." Damon Runyon tagged him with the nickname in 1932 after watching the squat ballplayer catch the first game of a doubleheader and then pitch the second.

Radcliffe played and coached in the Negro leagues for 26 years on more than a dozen teams. He never made it to the big leagues. "I can't kick," he says. "I got the best name in baseball."

Today he is the oldest surviving Negro leaguer. He will be 102 on July 7. He lives on the 15th floor of a senior citizens building on the South Side, and he loves for visitors to linger and gab about baseball.

On a recent afternoon, he's feeling young again, say, 98 or maybe even 95. As soon as his guests leave, he says, he plans on talking his home-care attendant into a little romance. She's skeptical and just shrugs: The longer men live, the bigger they talk. He keeps telling her that age is just a number. "She's just playing hard to get," he says with a wink.

The fingers on his right hand are twisted like tree branches after being broken so many times playing behind the plate. He used to slip a piece of steak between his palm and his glove to soften the impact when he caught his best friend, Satchel Paige. "His fastball," Radcliffe says, "looked like an aspirin tablet."

Reach in that cardboard box over there in the corner, he tells a visitor, and grab yourself one of the autographed pictures of young Duty putting the tag on Josh Gibson, the greatest home-run hitter of all time. He hit more out than Aaron, Ruth or Bonds, Radcliffe says.

He turns to one of the ballplayers he used to manage on the Giants in the fading days of the league, Johnny Washington, who is 74 and visits his old skipper a couple of times a month. "I ain't been out of the house since Friday," Radcliffe says. "I'm ready to go."

The Kansas City Royals are in town to play the White Sox at U.S. Cellular Field. Radcliffe is treated as an honored guest by the White Sox whenever he shows up, signing autographs, flirting with the pretty young girls. "I don't like old women," he says.

He always goes in through the media parking lot. But on this day a security guard tells Washington he has to go through the lot down the street. "Tell her," Radcliffe says, "it's Double Duty Radcliffe. The ballplayer."

The guard calls her supervisor. After a minute of conversation, she pushes the barricade aside and waves the oldest living ballplayer from the Negro leagues into U.S. Cellular Field.

It's not old Comiskey. But the sun is shining and baseballs are flying. It will do.

"I hit some tremendous home runs in Comiskey," Radcliffe says. "I loved that park."

The Chicago American Giants' last season was 1952. The previous year, according to "Black Baseball in Chicago," only 500 fans showed up for opening day.

The last East-West Game of note in Chicago was played in 1953 before 10,000 fans. A young shortstop

from the Kansas City Monarchs named Ernie Banks started for the West squad. He went 0-for-4. He wouldn't have many more days like that.

Soon the skinny kid from the Negro leagues would be known simply as Mr. Cub.



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