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Uncle Buck's Posthumous Crusade

by Andy Behrens

Buck Weaver did not conspire to fix the 1919 World Series, and the dedicated people at ClearBuck.com want you to know it. More accurately, they want

Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig to know it. But like every one of his predecessors, Bud doesn't seem to care.

Another commissioner, **Kenesaw Mountain Landis**, permanently banned Weaver from baseball for alleged complicity with the Black Sox, the game-fixers who threw the 1919 World Series and nearly finished professional baseball. The game survived thanks to Landis' clearheaded decision to...well, OK, it survived largely because **Babe Ruth** stopped pitching. But the game's integrity survived because Landis took firm and decisive action against eight ballplayers, two of whom may have been somewhat less guilty than the rest.

Everyone who knows baseball knows the legend of one of them: **Shoeless Joe Jackson**, the incomparable hitter, the graceful outfielder, the knuckleheaded **backwoods rube**. (This piece of the Shoeless Joe myth is shaky. After his baseball career ended, Jackson operated several successful businesses during the Depression.) Despite Jackson's awareness of the fix, he refused substantial payoffs during the Series and, according to lore, asked to be benched to avoid the appearance of participation in the conspiracy. White Sox Manager **Kid Gleason** declined to sit his star, who hit .375 for the eight-game Series (it was then a best-of-nine contest) and slugged the Fall Classic's only home run. Commenting on Jackson's banishment, Hall of Fame manager **Connie Mack** famously described him as, "more sinned against than sinning."

Maybe. But he probably sinned a little. In the games tanked by the Sox, Jackson was more-or-less ordinary. He did most of his hitting in the three games the Sox won — going 2-for-3 in Game Three, 3-for-5 in Game Six, and 2-for-4 in Game Seven — and his home run was largely meaningless, coming in the Series' finale with his team down 5-0. Jackson's defense was also curious and unusually sluggish. He didn't commit an error in the Series, but, as **Rob Neyer** pointed out in a 2001 column, he did allow three Cincinnati triples on balls hit to left field. Atypical to be sure, and downright suspicious considering that sportswriters dubbed Jackson's glove the place, "where triples go to die." When the Series concluded, a conflicted Jackson accepted \$5,000 from conspirator **Lefty Williams**.

Buck Weaver, on the other hand, was decidedly more sinned against than sinning. It's his unending misfortune to be trapped in Jackson's long, murky shadow. Weaver played flawless defense against the Reds in 1919, hitting .324 (and .333 in the five Sox losses) while clubbing four doubles and a triple. He undoubtedly knew the fix was on, but

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accepted no money and defied his corrupt teammates with exceptional play. But Weaver was still banned by Landis, who issued this characteristically blunt decree in 1921:

"No player that sits in a conference with a bunch of crooked players and gamblers where the ways and means of throwing games are planned and discussed and does not promptly tell his club about it, will ever play professional baseball."

An iron-clad rule was thus born (Rule 21, specifically), and it begat the **Ineligible List**, which Pete Rose has since transformed into a sad, marketable stigma. Commissioner Landis didn't concern himself with at least one salient and largely agreed-upon fact: White Sox owner **Charles Comiskey** was aware that the Series was bagged, and he may have known it as early as Game One. If Weaver had ever wished to inform the club that the fix was on, there was really no one of consequence to tell who didn't **already know**. Nonetheless, Judge Landis refused to hear Weaver's repeated appeals. Weaver died of a heart attack in Chicago on Jan. 31, 1956.

He has not slipped completely into baseball anonymity, of course; **John Cusack** portrayed Weaver in the 1988 film *Eight Men Out*. (It should be noted that the **magnificently ugly** Weaver looked nothing at all like John Cusack. He actually looked a bit like a hairless **Joan Cusack**, with bigger teeth.) Buck Weaver remains on the ineligible list, however, and after 82 years of exile, his cause gets a little more lost each day.

Enter 89-year-old Marjorie Follett of **Pontiac**, Ill., and 77-year-old Patricia Anderson of **Kimberling**, Mo. Demographically speaking, they may be America's least likely Web proprietors. Genetically speaking, they are Buck Weaver's only living relatives.

Follett and Anderson, with assistance from a few sympathetic baseball fans, launched ClearBuck.com to revive their uncle's case. They don't want your money, they just want your name. And about 10,000 others. Their intention is to send a lengthy petition to Commissioner Selig in the hopes of **securing an audience** with His Excellency, or perhaps clemency for their departed uncle who, if he wasn't entirely innocent, was no more guilty than Comiskey himself. At least one annoyingly fervent ClearBuck.com supporter works tirelessly at White Sox home games, collecting signatures and distributing propaganda. (He's completely unable to recognize a face no matter how often he sees it. Seriously, dude, it's insulting.)

When ClearBuck.com representatives attempted to arrange a meeting between Follett and Selig during All-Star weekend, the Commissioner **responded curtly**:

Thank you for your letter relative to Marge Follett. Unfortunately, the All-Star Game is an extremely hectic period for me and I have many scheduled events, so I really do not have time to have any more meetings. However, I am very sensitive to the concerns Marge Follett has raised and I do thank you for your thoughtfulness and kind invitation. Thank you for taking time to write me.

Or, basically: Fuck you old lady. And your dead uncle

what's-his-name.

So while Pete Rose is apparently on a **fast track** toward Seligian redemption — despite the fact that everyone and their bookie knows **the creep is guilty** — Buck Weaver is banned. His supporters aren't asking for Hall of Fame enshrinement, although Weaver was unquestionably among the best at his position in his time. Follett and Anderson merely want a few minutes out of Bud's hectic day, and a chance to see **Uncle Buck** exonerated.

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— graphic by **Derek Evernden** (derek@ocellus.net)

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