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Sports

Weaver's Warrior

By TODD ENGLE H&R Staff Writer

Dr. David Fletcher earns a living in the medical profession, but baseball is his passion. To wit: the 18-year Mount Zion resident was married in 1998 on the spot once occupied by home plate at old Comiskey Park in Chicago.

For the last 10 years, Fletcher, 49, has been consumed by arguably the darkest moment in baseball history: the "Black Sox" scandal, where eight White Sox players were accused of fixing the 1919 World Series against Cincinnati in exchange for money from gamblers.

A jury found the eight men innocent. But Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, baseball's first commissioner, disregarded the jury's findings and banned the eight players from baseball for life in 1921.

Much of Fletcher's research on the Black Sox is focused on third baseman Buck Weaver, whom Fletcher claims is innocent.

"I probably have 750 different articles researched. I've gone all over the country to get this stuff," Fletcher said. "(Weaver) never accepted any money."

Next week, Fletcher and Weaver's two surviving relatives plan to plead their case to the world at the All-Star game in Chicago. Their goal: to clear Weaver's name and get him reinstated into baseball.

Weaver's niece, 89-year-old Marge Follett from Pontiac, and Weaver's cousin, 76-year-old Patricia Anderson from Kimberling City, Mo., will join Fletcher in protesting Weaver's banishment.

The trio plans to protest outside of U.S. Cellular Field, where third base -- Weaver's position -- was at old Comiskey Park.

"Ty Cobb, he was a stinker but a fantastic baseball player. He said Buck Weaver was on his dream team," Anderson said. "It would be nice to put him in the Hall of Fame, but we just want his name reinstated."

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Fletcher points to Weaver's performance in the 1919 World Series as proof he wasn't in on the fix. Weaver hit .324 -- 11-of-34 -- and made no errors in the eight-game series (best-of-nine format).

Weaver was Anderson's surrogate father for 16 years, after Anderson's father died when she was 4. She didn't know Weaver's history when she was young, and said Weaver didn't speak of it. She said Weaver went to two meetings and knew of the fix, but didn't participate in it. He was banned because he refused to implicate other teammates.

"He paid for friendship pretty strong. He didn't know if they were going to throw the games until they started playing," Anderson said. "Landis wanted him to say, 'Yes, they threw the games and took the money.' Buck didn't really know that and didn't see them take it."

Follett started working for Weaver's reinstatement 30 years ago with Anderson's sister, the late Bette Scanlon, a long-time financial writer for the Chicago Sun-Times.

"I owe him. He gave a home to everybody that needed one," Follett said. "I don't know what persuaded me to go on with this. I guess because Buck was so lovable and so good to me."

Follett has taken her case to baseball's commissioners during that time. She wants to meet with current commissioner Bud Selig at some point during her trip to Chicago.

Fletcher asked Selig for a meeting during the All-Star break. In a May 22 letter addressed to Fletcher, Selig declined, writing "... I have many scheduled events, so I really do not have time to have any more meetings."

Fletcher plans to get Follett and Anderson some face time with Selig, despite the commissioner's denial of a formal meeting.

The trio will sit along the third base-line during the All-Star game.

"Our tickets are very close to the commissioner, and I guarantee there will be some interaction," Fletcher said.

Lately, "interaction" between fans and baseball figures at U.S. Cellular Field hasn't been a good thing. But Fletcher only wants a chance for Follett and Anderson to speak with Selig.

Follett has a sheaf of notes prepared, just in case she gets to speak with Selig. She plans to emphasize one point if she gets her chance.

"Buck attended meetings, but he didn't squeal on his teammates. That's his only sin," Follett said. "Other than that, (Selig) knows the whole story."

Weaver died in Chicago in 1959. He fought to have his name reinstated before his death.

Fletcher doesn't believe in ghosts, but he said he could feel Weaver's "enthusiastic spirit" surrounding old Comiskey. Their crusade is slowly gaining momentum. Fletcher launched a new website on Friday, www.clearbuck.com. Fletcher is also working on a screenplay about Weaver. He would like actor John Cusak, who played Weaver in the 1988 film *Eight Men Out*, to reprise his role.

Anderson thinks Weaver might rest easier if he is ever reinstated.

"It isn't doing him any good, people say, because he's gone," Anderson said. "But I think he'll

know."

Todd Engle can be reached at 421-7970.

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