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News

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Eight men still out, but niece wants one in

By BRIAN BURNES
The Kansas City Star

KIMBERLING CITY, Mo. – The World Series continues tonight. But forgive Patricia Anderson if she doesn't watch.

"If you're asking me if I'm a big baseball fan, the answer is probably no," she said.

Baseball's annual fall classic often proves a difficult time for Anderson. It reminds the southwest Missouri resident of how her uncle, George "Buck" Weaver, remains one of baseball's infamous "Black Sox" after being banned from baseball for throwing the World Series 85 years ago.

Eight players with the Chicago White Sox, resentful of the low salaries paid by team owner Charles Comiskey, were given the nickname after they allegedly conspired with gamblers to "throw" the 1919 World Series.

The commissioner of baseball, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, seeking to restore public confidence in the game, banned the players even after a jury cleared them of fraud charges. When Weaver died of a heart attack on a south Chicago street in 1956, it was after 35 years of trying in vain to clear his name.

Anderson, now 78, has spent much of her life defending her uncle, who helped rear her after her father died when she was 4.

Weaver hit .324 in the 1919 series, she said,



The Associated Press

George "Buck" Weaver, who died in 1956, fought to clear his name.

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and committed no errors at third base. He took no money, she said, and was guilty only of attending meetings where a possible fix was discussed. His offense, as explained by the baseball commissioner, was not alerting higher-ups to the conspiracy.

Anderson sees it differently. "He wouldn't rat out on his friends," she has said to anyone who would listen.

For decades, few did.

But then came something out of left field.

Bandwagon for Buck

Beginning in the late 1980s, Anderson watched her uncle be transformed into a tragic hero.

She saw the 1988 film "Eight Men Out." Her uncle, played by actor John Cusack, was portrayed as a victim of history, brushed to the side by forces far bigger than he.

Then, the next year came "Field of Dreams," a movie that focused on Weaver teammate "Shoeless" Joe Jackson and introduced the "Black Sox" scandal to a new audience.

All of that was amazing, Anderson said.

But none of it compares to what has happened recently.

During the past two years an Illinois physician and White Sox fan, David Fletcher, has bankrolled "Clear Buck," an effort to petition Major League Baseball to reinstate Weaver into its good graces.

Fletcher has staged several events to showcase the Weaver story. One was a rally in Chicago before the 2003 All-Star Game. There, Anderson granted interviews while others passed "Clear Buck" petitions that hundreds of fans signed.

During the game Anderson sat behind third base, her uncle's old position, and then visited with the Illinois governor, Rod Blagojevich, who wished her luck in the "Clear Buck" campaign.

All of this eventually prompted Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig to write Fletcher, saying that the Weaver case was "under review." Fletcher insists his campaign has a chance to succeed.

"This is not a one-shot thing," he said. "This is going to be like a political campaign and we just have to be persistent."



MIKE RANDELL/The Kansas City Star

Patricia Anderson of Kimberling City, Mo., has worked for many years in an effort to clear the name of her uncle, George "Buck" Weaver, in the Chicago Black Sox scandal. Weaver played third base for the team.

RELATED LINKS

- **ClearBuck.com: Web site maintained by organization devoted to seeing George "Buck:" Weaver posthumously reinstated by Major League Baseball includes recent correspondence regarding Weaver's case from Bud Selig, baseball's commissioner.**
- **Website maintained by Douglas Linder, University of Missouri-Kansas City law professor who teaches a "Famous Trials" course once a year. Includes confessions and court records, including the text of a petition filed by Weaver and "Shoeless" Joe Jackson.**
- **Web site maintained by the Chicago Historical Society includes text and photographs concerning the Black Sox Scandal.**
- **GingerKid.com: Website devoted to Weaver includes Weaver's World Series statistics as well as many photographs.**

Weaver, too, was tireless. Each time a new baseball commissioner took office, he petitioned for a hearing but returned, dejected, to his apartment.

"He would come home and just be very quiet," Anderson said.

Baseball executives didn't return calls for this story. But it's clear to Anderson that never has her uncle — dead nearly 50 years now — been closer to achieving what he spent the remainder of his life chasing.

"He would be so grateful," she said. "All he wanted was to have his name cleared."

Inside baseball

Others see alternative meanings in the Buck Weaver revival.

James Carothers, University of Kansas English professor who long has offered a "Literature of Baseball" course, wonders whether Weaver was just a handy narrative device for screenwriters.

"They had to try to find some sort of positive character, and they picked Buck Weaver," he said. "They don't make movies without any good characters."

Still, added Carothers, who includes the original 1963 *Eight Men Out* book in his course, his most recent class recoiled more than ever against White Sox owner Comiskey.

"Yes, these players should not have done what they did, but Comiskey created the conditions," said Carothers.

Another angle is the opportunity the Weaver case presents to Major League Baseball, which has yet to reinstate Pete Rose, the game's all-time hits leader, from gambling-related banishment. Rose has admitted to betting on baseball while managing the Cincinnati Reds but denied he ever bet against his team.

"The commissioner's office would love a public relations coup, but they are not getting it with Pete Rose," said Lloyd Johnson of Kansas City, former president of the Society for American Baseball Research, an organization of about 7,000 baseball scholars.

Weaver conceivably could be cleared, said Lawrence baseball author Bill James, in part because so many people who remember the "Black Sox" scandal are gone.

"Today it's more of an academic issue than something that is deeply felt," he said.

Still, the Weaver case demonstrates that the distant past is never that far away for those who lived through it.

Eliot Asinof, author of *Eight Men Out*, learned that in the early 1960s when many sources refused to talk with him some 40 years after the scandal broke.

"Even those who played no role in the fix were still scared 40 years afterward," Asinof said from his New York home. "Everybody had made the deal with themselves and each other that they weren't going to talk about it. They were still afraid. The gamblers and the gangsters scared them."

The last word

There's little doubt that the distant past is still fresh to Anderson.

Earlier this month she traveled back to Chicago for the first-ever reunion of descendants of key figures in the scandal.

Also attending was Illinois state Rep. Patti Bellock, a descendant of White Sox owner Comiskey.

When Bellock described Comiskey as a "philanthropist," Anderson regarded it like a fastball under the nose.

"I sat there and thought 'OK, it's possible,' " she said. "But Comiskey was also a cheapskate and didn't pay his players beans."

She also loves to challenge the rationale of one baseball commissioner, A.B. "Happy" Chandler, for refusing to consider the Weaver case.

"Chandler said it was so long ago that nobody cared," she said.

Anderson said she thought about that when she attended a recent White Sox fan festival in Chicago, where she signed autographs for several young baseball fans.

"Now, Buck was born in 1890 and since I was his niece, these young people approached me like I might fall apart at any minute.

"But they all asked for autographs and I thought, 'OK, Mr. Chandler. Here are some young boys who are playing baseball and they want to know what is going on regarding Buck Weaver.

"So, I say, baloney on you.' "

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About the scandal

To learn more

- *The "Black Sox" scandal refers to the 1919 World Series and its aftermath, during which eight members of the Chicago White Sox were accused of "throwing" the series in a conspiracy with gamblers.*
- *The White Sox lost the World Series five games to three (in a nine-game format) to the Cincinnati Reds.*
- *Though rumors circulated during and after the series about a possible "fix," the scandal didn't break until nearly a year later. Though all eight White Sox players were acquitted at trial, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, baseball's first commissioner, banned all eight for life in an effort to restore public confidence in baseball.*
- *"Regardless of the verdict of juries," Landis announced in 1921, "no player who throws a ball game, no player that undertakes or promises to throw a ball game, no player that sits in conference with a bunch of crooked players and gamblers where the ways and means of throwing a game are discussed and does not promptly tell his club about it, will ever play professional baseball."*
- *George "Buck" Weaver performed well in the Series and insisted he took no money. But Landis deemed Weaver culpable because he knew of the possible conspiracy and didn't say anything.*

For more on the Black Sox scandal and Weaver, consult the following resources:

BOOK

- *Eight Men Out*, by Eliot Asinof, 1963.

FILMS

- *"Eight Men Out,"* 1988.
- *"Field of Dreams,"* 1989.
- *"Baseball: A Film by Ken Burns,"* 1994. The documentary devotes 35 minutes to the scandal and includes archival film footage of the 1919 World Series.

INTERNET

- For links to relevant Web sites, visit www.kansascity.com.

—Brian Burnes/The Star



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