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300 WINS

Greg Maddux makes history as the Cubs beat the Giants 8-4.

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HOW RUDE!



Detainee visited American in 2001

FBI tries to track down his contacts

By **TED BRIDIS**
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — A Qaida terror suspect detained in England was sent to the United States in early 2001 by the FBI, a top official said. The suspect, a principal architect of the Sept. 11 suicide hijackings to perform surveillance on economic targets in New York, according to U.S. officials, was interviewed by U.S. officials and government intelligence agents with other captured al-Qaida terror suspects. They said the suspect claimed

■ The U.S. State Department learned that al-Qaida operatives bought diamonds before the Sept. 11 attacks.

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SAVING A BUCK

Buck Weaver was banned for life from baseball with seven of his "Black Sox" teammates, but a Mount Zion man is working to clear Weaver's name.

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MONEY HORSE

Windsong's Legacy earned \$500,000 for winning the Hambletonian. The horse's owners

"WHEN I'M DONE *playing I'll look back. I'm sure I'll pat myself on the back then."*

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Maddux quietly steps into history



BUCKING

the system

Mount Zion doctor devoted to clearing Weaver's name

By STEVE SCHMIDT
STAFF WRITER

While political campaigns rage for the upcoming elections, one man wages his own campaign for someone who never ran for office.

George "Buck" Weaver never had political aspirations, but the former Chicago White Sox third baseman is caught in the politics of modern-day baseball 48 years after his death.

That's where David Fletcher comes in.

Fletcher, a 49-year-old doctor from Mount Zion, has dedicated a good portion of the last 18 months to trying to right one of what he thinks is the biggest wrongs in baseball history.



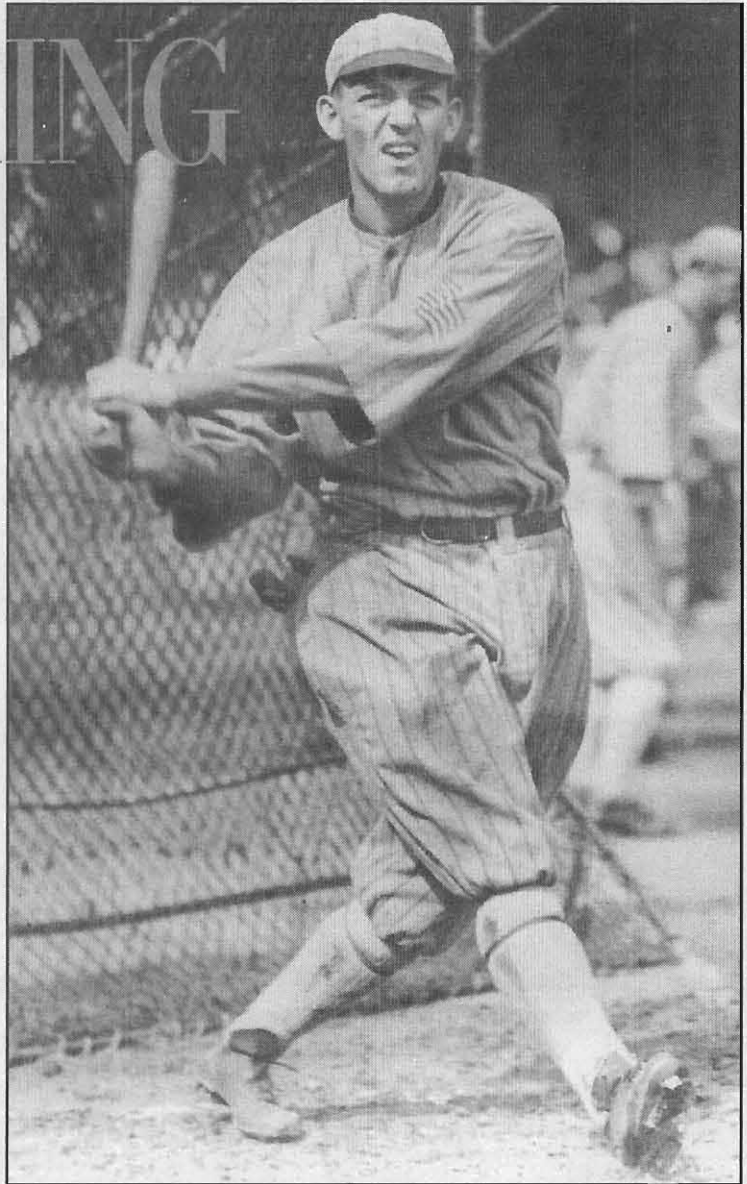
Fletcher

Why exactly?

"His story of perseverance and integrity is the most compelling out there," Fletcher said of Weaver.

"It's inspiring. It's the most tragic story in baseball."

It's a story of a player being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In Weaver's case, it was at the Ansonia Hotel in New York City on a September day in 1919 just before the start of the World Series against the Cincinnati Reds. Gamblers had struck a deal with members of the White Sox to throw the



George "Buck" Weaver was the only one of eight White Sox players involved in the Black Sox scandal who did not take any money to throw the 1919 World Series against the Cincinnati Reds. He batted .324 and committed no errors as the White Sox lost the Series.

"I FEEL LIKE *I have a ghost-like figure (following me). I know it sounds crazy, but that's the best way to describe it. There's a reason he'd be roaming those grounds. There's unfinished business that hasn't been cleared."*

— DAVID FLETCHER

Fletcher and others passed out neon green T-shirts, pins and stickers, creating a spectacle big enough to become one of the top stories in Chicago that day. They also collected about 5,000 signatures for a petition to clear Weaver's name.

When the 2004 SoxFest took place, Fletcher and friends were there, requesting petition signatures. The next big event also will take place in Chicago on Oct. 5, as the Chicago Historical Society will serve as host to a Black Sox symposium where a panel (including Fletcher) will discuss the effects of the scandal on baseball 85 years after the event occurred.

As any politician knows, campaigns aren't cheap. Fletcher esti-

Series in return for \$20,000 for each player.

Weaver wanted no part of what would become known as the Black Sox Scandal, but he also didn't want to tell on his teammates. Of the eight players involved in the scandal, Weaver was the only one who did not take any money. He batted .324 and committed no errors as the White Sox lost the Series.

By Aug. 3, 1921, newly appointed baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis was tired of the gambling that was permeating his sport at the time. A day after the players had been acquitted in a court of law, Landis permanently banned all eight players involved — Weaver included.

Fast forward 77 years.

Fletcher, a White Sox fan since the late 1960s growing up in the Chicago suburbs, held his wedding in 1998 at the spot where home plate was located in the original Comiskey Park, which had been torn down in 1991.

Among the congregation was one unexpected guest. Fletcher said it was Weaver — who died on Jan. 31, 1956, in Chicago from a heart attack — saying to him, "Clear my name."

"I had this weird feeling," Fletcher said. "I didn't know what to make it."

Five years later, Fletcher went back to the site of the old ballpark and touched the spot where home plate was located. It was Feb. 2, 2003, the same day the new Comiskey Park's name was changed to U.S. Cellular Field. That wasn't the only announcement he heard.

He could make out a now-familiar voice saying, "Go find my family."

"I feel like a have ghost-like figure (following me)," Fletcher said. "I know it sounds crazy, but that's the best way to describe it. There's a reason he'd be roaming those grounds. There's unfinished business that hasn't been cleared."

And there's more. In September 2002, Fletcher was driving home on Interstate 72 from his Campaign office when he said he saw the Argenta exit sign at mile marker 150 flashing a message, "Restore my honor."

"It wasn't until these unworldly experiences that it became serious," he said.

Some might say Fletcher has spent too much time watching the 1989 movie "Field of Dreams," in which a man keeps receiving signs to build a ballpark in the middle of an Iowa cornfield in order to connect to baseball's past, including Weaver and other members of the

1919 White Sox.

There is a correlation between Fletcher and Ray Kinsella, the main character played by actor Kevin Costner. Both are graduates of the University of California at Berkeley.

But Fletcher says it goes deeper than that. Both have been sent unexplainable messages compelling them to complete an exact task. Both in some way are trying to "ease his pain" — one of the messages from the movie.

Fletcher argues that there is one drastic difference between them.

"That's a fictional story," he said. "Mine's a real story."

So Fletcher — like Kinsella — started a quest. First he went to Pontiac to find Weaver's niece, Marge Follett (now deceased), who had sent a constant stream of letters to the baseball commissioner's office over the years, trying to clear her uncle's name.

"She championed it for years, so she finally felt I was the one she could pass the torch to," Fletcher said.

From Follett, he got the number of Pat Anderson, Weaver's niece who later became a surrogate daughter. She lives in Kimberling City, Mo., west of Branson. Anderson knew Weaver just as well as anybody after moving in with her Uncle Buck and Aunt Helen along with her mother and sister as a 4-year-old just after the death of her father.

Anderson ended up living with Weaver for 17 years. And so after a phone conversation with Anderson, Fletcher was Branson-bound.

Although Anderson was perhaps a little standoffish at first, she quickly warmed up to Fletcher's plans and brought out some of Weaver's old pictures and other memorabilia.

"I thought this was someone who could really help us," Anderson said.

She could tell that Fletcher was a "sports nut" who genuinely wanted to help her uncle.

"I didn't really get a reaction from her until I asked her, 'What was his voice like?'" Fletcher said. "I really felt I was able to get across to her that I was sincere."

Since then, Fletcher's quest has taken him to about 15 places nationwide, including the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. At some of the stops he has researched. At others, he has given talks.

One of his biggest successes happened during the 2003 All-Star Game at U.S. Cellular Field. when

Weaver is in good standing. at least \$160,000 during his effort, and he won't be satisfied until

"That's my mission," he said. "I continue to work on the mission. It's going to happen."

A meeting with Commissioner Bud Selig would be a huge step in the desired direction. Fletcher would love to sit a table with Selig and Anderson and others to talk about lifting the ban, but so far the only thing Fletcher has received from Selig is a collection of letters saying he's looking into the matter.

Fletcher isn't related to Weaver, but the two men share a common trait of persistence. Weaver appealed to all three baseball commissioners during his lifetime for a chance to meet and share his side of the story. He never got one.

"He'd be very pleased because all he ever wanted was have the commissioner listen to him," Anderson said of what her uncle's reaction would be to the current campaign. "He wanted his chance."

Anderson said Landis never would agree to lift the ban or much less schedule such a talk until Weaver agreed to sign a paper stating that the seven other accused players took money. Weaver never would, not wanting to betray the friendship of his teammates and also not exactly sure if they did or not. He only attended one of several meetings between the players and the gamblers.

"He walked out and said no way," Anderson said.

Although the story goes on, Fletcher is sure one day it will have a happy ending. Fletcher is trying to find a Chicago-based production company interested in doing a movie based on a screenplay he's going to write. He has finished a 15-page summary of the film.

Fletcher also envisions helping to build a Chicago baseball museum on the site of the original Comiskey Park.

A dream that Fletcher and Anderson both share is to one day witness a Buck Weaver Appreciation Day at U.S. Cellular Field after the ban is lifted.

"It would be wonderful," said Anderson, who said one her uncle's most defining physical characteristics was his beaming smile, especially when he was on the field.

"If that could come about," she said, "Buck will up there grinning from ear to ear."

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