



Powered by Clickability

Fallen stars have Cooperstown support

Updated 7/27/2006 10:11 AM ET

By Mike Dodd, USA TODAY

Buck Weaver was tainted by the Black Sox scandal though he wasn't accused of taking money. Johnny Kling got a bad rap as baseball's first contract holdout. Lefty O'Doul's batting career was so brief it created a popular notion he wasn't eligible for the Hall of Fame.

COOPERSTOWN CHANCES: [Are today's big names big enough for Hall?](#)

All have been dead for more than 35 years, but work continues to rebuild their legacies, thanks to loyal fans practicing a lobby of love.

Supporters of the three are among several groups whose dream is to journey to Cooperstown the final weekend in July to see their player inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. The campaigns are, for the most part, grassroots efforts and geared toward players who would appear on the ballot for the Veterans Committee, which votes every two years, next in January.

Brooklyn Dodgers first baseman Gil Hodges and Chicago Cubs third baseman Ron Santo received 65% of the vote in 2005, each missing the 75% needed for election by eight votes, and are the subjects of efforts that are gearing up again.

The more obscure missions face daunting tasks, and some are designed more to repair a player's reputation than elect him to the Hall.

One of 'eight'

Cooperstown is a secondary objective for the Weaver initiative, which is focusing on the former White Sox third baseman's reinstatement. He was one of the "Eight Men Out" in the 1919 Black Sox scandal, in which Shoeless Joe Jackson and teammates were banished from baseball for fixing to throw the World Series. Weaver wasn't banned for accepting money or tanking the Series but for failing to alert authorities.

David Fletcher, a Champaign, Ill., physician and life-long White Sox fan, says he started the latest movement about three years ago after having a "supernatural experience" at the site of home plate for old Comiskey Park. (The team commemorates the spot in what is now one of the U.S. Cellular Field parking lots.)

Fletcher, who had been married at home plate five years earlier, says he heard a voice telling him to contact Weaver's family and "clear my name."

When he reached the player's living relatives after the Ray Kinsella moment, he says, "They thought I was a nut case. They said, "It can't be done. Other people have tried.' "

Not like this. In addition to setting up a website (www.clearbuck.com), Fletcher hired a public relations consultant, staged a protest at the unveiling of former team owner Charles Comiskey's statue, rented a booth at the White Sox's winter convention and made presentations across the country.

"I'm trying to clear a dead baseball player's name and restore justice," Fletcher says, adding he has spent well into six figures in the endeavor. "The guy didn't take any money, and he didn't embarrass baseball the rest of his life."

Advertisement

CHEVY
72 hour sale
ENDS JUNE 30

0% APR for 72
months for qualified buyers on many '08s

CHEVY SILVERADO

CHEVY EQUINOX

CHEVY IMPALA

Find a Vehicle

Request a Quote

Current Offers

Find a Dealer

Monthly payment \$13.89 for every \$1,000 financed. Average example down payment: 9%. Some customers will not qualify. See dealer for details. Take delivery by 6/30/08. Not available with other offers.

Still in the running

Kling and O'Doul are on the list of 200 old-timers still in the running for election to the Hall next year. The list will be pared to 25 for the final ballot this summer; both failed to make it to cut in 2005.

Kling was the catcher on the Chicago Cubs' pennant-winning teams of 1906-08 but sat out the 1909 season. When he sought to return in 1910, the National Baseball Commission (the predecessor to the commissioner's office) ruled Kling had violated his contract and fined him \$700.

"He was cited as the original holdout. ... He got hit over the head with that forever," says Gil Bogen, author of *Johnny Kling, A Baseball Biography*, which argues that the catcher had received permission for a leave of absence to tend to his billiard parlor business in Kansas City. "If it hadn't been for the bad PR, I believe he'd be in the Hall of Fame."

Bogen and Kling's grandson, John, have petitioned Commissioner Bud Selig to have the National Commission's ruling overturned. "I'd like to see that part of his record set straight," Kling says. "After that, there shouldn't be any issues concerning him."

O'Doul, who died in 1969, was honored at a dinner by the United Irish Cultural Center of San Francisco (UICC) last month. The San Francisco native spent his first four years in the big leagues as a little-used, sore-armed pitcher. After four more years in the minors, he returned as an outfielder at 31 and played seven years before retiring after the 1934 season with a .349 lifetime batting average, the fourth highest all time. He gained wide popularity in Japan during barnstorming tours and is a member of the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame.

Daniel Woodhead, a retired banker, learned of O'Doul's exploits at the San Francisco restaurant bearing the player's name and started garnering letters of support for his Hall candidacy in the early 1990s. Woodhead believes a misunderstanding about O'Doul's eligibility has hampered his cause, though the lefty slugger was on the baseball writers' ballot, last appearing in 1962.

John Ring, a fan and member of the UICC board, resurrected the movement this year and, with Woodhead, organized an information campaign that is sending written material and a DVD to more than 260 sportswriters, editors and baseball notables. "The fact that he passed so long ago, his story may have faded," Ring says.

O'Neil stands in

The quests for Cooperstown took a particularly offbeat turn last week when Buck O'Neil, 94, stepped into the batter's box in the Northern League All-Star game. The Kansas City T-Bones of the independent league signed O'Neil to a one-day contract to drum up support. (He walked twice.) The team also has a petition on its website.

Others who have received organized support include Dummy Hoy, Dom DiMaggio, Bucky Walters and Roger Maris.

The Hodges' candidacy has several Dodgers fans working in its behalf. "Everybody works a little independently," says Marty Adler, president of the Brooklyn Dodgers Hall of Fame.

Brooklyn native Joe D'Agostin, a Norwalk, Conn., accountant, took up the cause in 1997 and has three websites/groups dedicated to it. Up until last year, he attended induction weekend in Cooperstown every summer, lobbying and putting fliers for the slugger on auto windshields around town. In 2001, he created and sold Hodges T-shirts, donating the proceeds to charity.

"My wife says if he gets elected, I won't have anything to do," D'Agostin says.

Santo, now a popular Cubs broadcaster, generates similar passion from Chicago fans. Scott Lewis, 28, of Palatine, Ill., started a website (www.santoforhall.com) to collect petitions for the third baseman's election. He says he attended Ryne Sandberg's induction into Cooperstown last year and "it made me angry for Santo. I want to do what I can to help Ronnie get there."

Santo, like most living candidates, appreciates fans' support but doesn't have any contact with his Hall activists. "I don't want to be part of that campaigning," he says. "What they do as a campaign, they do on their own."

His former teammate Billy Williams, a Hall of Famer and Veterans Committee voter, says he gets about three or four packages from fans lobbying for a player each election. Some may refresh his memory of a player before his time, but he doesn't think the material influences the outcome.

"We know the credentials," Williams says. "We played against those guys."

Find this article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/sports/baseball/hallfame/2006-07-27-cooperstown-campaigns2_x.htm?loc=interstitialskip