

# Trivia Hits New Heights At Baseball Research Parley

By JOHN THORN

**TORONTO**—The major league stadiums have been silent for an eternity, or so it seems. The long, damaging strike has weakened the faith of many in baseball's ability to resurrect itself this year, or ever. But baseball lives in the minds of the men who love it, and at the 10th annual convention of the Society for American Baseball Research, baseball was vibrant and flourishing.

The 125 SABR members who gathered at the University of Toronto July 24-26 are no ordinary baseball fans. They are part of an organization that, largely through the efforts of L. Robert Davids, was established a decade ago to dig in the darkest corners of baseball's labyrinthine past, and bring the truth to light. The first convention in Cooperstown, in 1971, was attended by the full membership: 16. Today the roster is 1,250 and climbing. (For membership information, write SABR, P.O. Box 323, Cooperstown, N.Y. 13326.)

The first item of business was a panel discussion with four former major leaguers who have ties to Canada, Phil Marchildon, Goody Rosen, Roy Hughes and Reno Bertoia. Not surprisingly, all were incredulous over the escalation of player salaries and dismayed by the strike. While Bertoia, the youngest of the four, expressed some support for the players, the others favored management. SABR senti-

ments were also divided. When Rosen observed, "For the first time, owners are right," his remark was met by equal measures of applause and hisses.

Marchildon, reminiscing about his playing career, pointed out that in 1947 he had won 19 games for the fifth-place Philadelphia A's. He was obviously gratified when a SABR member added that of those 19 victories, 14 had come at the expense of first-division clubs, while Bob Feller's league-high 20 wins included 15 against the second tier.

As the talk turned to Connie Mack in his late, dazed years, Bertoia told a tale he had heard about Earle Mack, the boss' coach and son. Umpire Red Jones called a close play at second base against the A's, which brought Earle racing to the mound. "What the hell are you doing here?" Jones bellowed. Earle's reply: "D-D-Dad thinks you missed that one."

Committee reports illustrated the range of SABR concerns. The Negro League committee is nearly finished with its grueling project of compiling a statistical record of black baseball in the 1920s. The minor league committee continues its research into such dusty areas as 19th century minor league box scores and player identifications. The biographical research committee has discovered a "new" major leaguer—Charles Fallon, a pinch-runner with the 1905 New York Highlanders who appears in none of the encyclopedias. The statistical analysis committee took on



Reno Bertoia... Canadian connection.

the project, so rudely interrupted, of chronicling the Oakland A's 1981 season pitch by pitch. And SABR reaffirmed its support for awarding the 1910 batting championship of the American League to Nap Lajoie rather than Ty Cobb, a controversial issue revealed by THE SPORTING NEWS earlier this year.

Some members' research topics are so esoteric, and their quests so intense, as to raise philosophical questions. Should every aspect of baseball be quantified? Is all of baseball worth knowing about? Is, as Mae West once said, too much of a good thing wonderful? A member's likely reply: Yes, yes, and yes.

Vern Luse, an engineer when he isn't reading old newspapers for his 19th century minor league project, had to spend some time in Yugoslavia. He took a microfilm reader along. "Some people thought I was crazy," he confessed, "but that's all that kept me sane." Kit Crissey has embarked upon a study of Navy baseball in World War II. Do his friends outside the society tell him he's wasting his time? "No. I get gratification from the research. I feel I'm doing something in baseball that I'm almost certain no one else is doing right now. I feel I'm contributing something." John Pardon, another expert in minor league history, researched the record of Tony Napoles, a pitcher for Peekskill in 1946. Why? "Involvement," Pardon said. "Napoles was going for an unbeaten season—he ended up 22-0—and while reading those papers, I felt I was in the park rooting for him." Individual research reports delivered at the convention were indicative of what SABR is all about. When you have an expert addressing his peers, you get reports like these: Ray Werfelmann, on Cuban baseball development in the 19th century; John Holway on the utterly implausible connections between astrological signs and particular kinds of baseball performance; Renwick Speers on wartime baseball—better than it's made out to be; Ed Doyle on Al Simmons, "The Underrated Hall of Famer."

Saturday night's banquet was the social peak of the convention, and supplied some spellbinding recollections by four stars of black baseball: Sy Morton, Buddy Burbage, Gene Benson and Jeep McClain. Another guest on the dais, with a strange story of reverse integration was John Craig, whose novel "Chippie Johnson's Colored All Stars" is based on his experience in the 1930s as a white first baseman (with shoe polish on his face) barnstorming along the Canadian line with a black team.

SABR 10 was nonstop baseball for three days but, in 1981, the last season, no one went home feeling he had enough

## Padres 'Ground' Giants, A's

**SAN FRANCISCO**—The baseball strike has grounded the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland A's in more ways than one.

In addition to losing at least one month of the season, the two clubs no longer have the services of the San Diego Padres' Boeing 727 to use on charter flights.

Ballard Smith, president of the Padres, said the club sold the aircraft to a Dallas-based business partnership to help defray expenses incurred during the strike.

According to the Padres' contract with the Giants and A's, the San Diego club was required to give 10 days notice if the charter agreement was to be terminated. Smith informed A's President Roy Eisenhardt and Spec Richardson, then the Giants' general manager, of the sale July 1.

Smith had been negotiating for the sale of the plane all season, intending to complete a deal after the A's and the Giants shared the charter for their 1981 flights. But the weeks of inactivity convinced the Padres' boss not to wait.

"I could have sold it a long time ago, but I was willing to wait," Smith said. "We were enjoying a profitable time, just starting to turn things around financially, when the strike hit. The strike forced us to make a

decision earlier.

"It was costing us \$80,000 a month to maintain the plane and it's my judgment this will be a long strike. The Giants and the A's caused us not to fly, so it was a case of looking to them for revenue, or doing something. I think they understand."

The Giants and A's rescheduled commercial flights, but Giants Owner Bob Lurie remained hopeful a charter arrangement could be continued.

"Mr. Lurie understands the new owners of the plane want to get into the athletic charter business," reported Giants traveling secretary Ralph Nelson. "If we can get a new crew and pick up the remaining contract, maybe we can still use the plane."

Eisenhardt fully understands Smith's position. "Even before he called, I didn't feel right about the Padres bearing the burden of the plane not being used," Eisenhardt said. "There's no question charters are more convenient—that's why we bought the package."

"Over a season, it would have cost us \$75,000 in excess of commercial flights, but there's not much savings now. Commercial rates have gone up and spot-chartering, which we'll have to do a few times, is really costly."

NICK PETERS

## Johnny Mize

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"I figured there were two things you could do when you went up there to hit," Mize says. "You were either going to hit the ball and get on base, or you were going to hit the ball and make an out. I always knew I was going to get a piece of the ball."

Mize, at 6-2 and 215 pounds, had the physical stature of a power hitter, but he was also a serious student of hitting. No college product, Mize nevertheless approached the science of hitting with more than a chaw of tobacco.

"Every night before I went to bed," he remembers, "I'd look in the paper to see who was pitching. Then I'd lay awake a half an hour or so, just imagining I was standing at the plate. I'd try to visualize how I might be thrown to, what to look for."

Mize was a chameleon in the batter's box, using different sized bats, different leverage points, even different stances. He'd do anything to get a hit.

"The problem with a lot of batters," Mize says, "is that they just get in there, dig a foothold and swing away. I say this: If you get in there and just dig yourself a hole without thinking first, you'll bury yourself in the same hole."

When Yankees Manager Casey Stengel used Mize as essentially a pinch-hitting specialist in the early 1950s, the long-ball threat evolved into a master of placing hits. Mize postponed retirement to go after his 2,000th hit in 1953 and when it came, a single off the St. Louis Browns' Duane Pillette, the Big Cat had collected 11 hits in 16 pinch-hit appearances.

Said Stengel waggishly: "It's this way. Big Jawn writes hisself a book, 'How to Hit.' That gives him a pride of authorship. I know dang well he ain't gonna louse up the sale of that book by not hittin' when I send him up to bat in

the pinch. It's worked good, son."

Mize recalls another game:

"I'm in the ninth inning of a scoreless game against the White Sox. Casey lifted Whitey Ford and told me to hit. We had a runner at second."

"I remember there was too big a hole between shortstop and the third baseman. I decided that's where I wanted to hit the ball."

Mize ran the count to 3-and-1, then calmly reached for a fastball on the outside corner of the plate. "The pitch was right where I wanted it."

It won the game for the Yankees, 1-0.

To Mize, ever the technician at the plate, a pinch-single is remembered with as much clarity as any of his 359 homers.


Mize's reputation in the field was as well-documented as his reputation at the plate. Only thing is, it was not nearly as good. In fact, humorist Goodman Ace once wired Giants Manager Leo Durocher this message: "Sir, before each game an announcement is made that anyone interfering with or touching a batted ball will be ejected from the park. Please advise Mr. Mize that this doesn't refer to him."

Mize, predictably, never saw any justification for such comments.

"But it's like anything else," he says, "you get a reputation and you're never gonna shake it. A guy has a reputation as a good fielder, he's gonna get a lot of good calls on scoring decisions."

"In my case, I had the bad reputation. That's the way it was. People just had it made up in their minds that I wasn't a good fielder, and that was the end of it."

Not quite. The end of it, after a 23-year wait, comes August 2, when Mize steps up to the podium at Cooperstown. Some people just had it in their minds that he belonged there.



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