

SABR 31 recap — Milwaukee, 2001

Jim Nitz, Associate Member of All-American Girls Professional Ball League (1943-1954), led the panel of AAGPBL players Vivian Sheriffs Anderson (Milwaukee Chicks), Annastasia Batikis (Racine Belles), Jackie Mattson Baumgart (Springfield Sallies, Kenosha Comets), Betty Moczynski (Rockford Peaches, Chicago Bluebirds), Mary O'Hara (South Bend Blue Sox), and Joyce Hill Westerman (Grand Rapids, South Bend Blue Sox, Peoria Red Wings, Racine Belles).

Jim opened up with the question, "Did you feel like you were pioneers?", and as with later inquiries such as "How did your parents feel about you leaving home?", there were a variety of answers. The history that emerged covered the unique contracts --- there was no free agency, and the girls signed with the League, not with a team. From early May to the end of September, they played 115 games, mostly 8 pm night games (7 pm doubleheaders) with Sunday games at 2 pm. In the postseason, practice began in the morning for 3-4 hours, then the game started at 8 pm, followed by travel by bus, sometimes for 8 hours.

The panelists averaged about \$50-\$65 week (1951) and a catcher said she was offered \$365 in 1952 to return. Personal stats were not part of the League. Neither was integration. Nor was there any kind of "pregnancy clause" --- one girl played until she was almost 6 months pregnant, a few had children in the off-season, another (who pitched 2 perfect games) was married to the manager and their son ran up and down the bus, "just like in the movie". Wooden bats were used, Louisville Sluggers. Much of the life the ladies led was governed by strict rules for behavior, enforced by chaperones, and "dress code" took on a meaning of its own: "Never wear jeans or slacks in public. In the bus, we had to take off our jeans or shorts before going outside. We had to wear our hair down, near the neck, preferably curly hair ...we had to look like ladies". There was also Charm School in 1943 and 1944. "We had very strict rules, curfew, no smoking or drinking. Probably I broke it a few times. No men visitors". Dislike of dresses was universal. "They were awful! You really got beat up. he Kenosha Comets had a heavy canvaslike material. Can you imagine, with make-up running down your face and perspiring in those heavy dresses?", "I ate a lot of lipstick."

Injuries from sliding (strawberries) and from catching, despite chest protectors, shin guards, and masks, were explained. "You got dirty. I wore long hair in a ponytail. You couldn't throw when it was underhand with that skirt." The outfield fences didn't help. "I think only one diamond had a warning track". "We had to play. One year, I had a broken fingers and they taped all 4 of my fingers together, so I had to push the ball...I have the record for the most stolen bases against a catcher that day." Another catcher said, "Twice, I had a foul tip in the Adam's apple...it's very scary because you cannot breathe...and the muscles seem to set, and they said, Try to swallow. It happened again, a little more to the side and I knew what to do".

One panelist recalled ballpark dimensions as roughly 235' in the outfield (240' in center) and for a player to have 6 homeruns was considered a lot. Three umpires (home plate, first base, third base) worked the games. Catcher Jackie Mattson Baumgart described what happened if the umpires did not call the right pitches."As a catcher, you have to make the pitcher look good. A pitcher had to hit those corners. If the umps weren't giving the pitchers the corners, I'd say a few things. Actually, I would just back up and of course, I had metal cleats, and I would turn around to them and say, "Oh, excuse me" But that was my way of getting even. You have to play hard".

Around 1947, the League "incorporated sidearm and 2 years after that, they started overhand... Some catchers became All-Star pitchers because the League began overhanded pitching." One pitcher said, "When I came into the League in 1951, it was all overhand 10-inch ball;1954 it went to the 9-inch ball, ... what the men use now. When I got in, I played softball. You go from a 12-inch softball to a 10-inch ball, I thought I could throw it 400 miles...and I did ".

In response to a question from young Laura Salzman about sexism, the women agreed their managers (and chaperones) uniformly "treated us like human beings, with a basic respect, and ... covered for us a couple times". Patient ex-MLB managers, like Dave Bancroft and Jimmy Foxx, taught them well. "We were raw material and you gradually learned how to play", "Buck Weaver taught us how to swing a bat, how to bunt, how to steal bases. He was so loose, like a straw man --- have you ever seen The Wizard of Oz? ... He was a very nice man. We all knew his reputation but that was in his past".

The movie, A League of Their Own" was praised, despite "Tom Hanks in the locker room; none of our managers or coaches did that" and Madonna. "She couldn't hardly throw a ball....She threw it like a girl...but she worked harder than anybody".

Most felt "concerned. We have nothing in common with Madonna", but "now everybody says that Madonna played their part". Moderator Jim Nitz ended the session by noting, "That was one fast hour, wasn't it?" It was.

Bob Buege welcomed a large turnout to the Historic Marker Dedication Ceremony of the "Birthplace of the American League". He thanked Kelly Webber (Journal Sentinel marketing department) and after remarks by F. Thomas Ament (Milwaukee County Executive) and Keith Spore (President and Publisher, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel), Charles Comiskey (Chicago White Sox) entertained the crowd.

Mr. Comiskey, grandson of Charles Comiskey, mentioned that Bob Buege "told me last night he wanted me to say a few words. Did you ever know an Irishman who could say just a few words? I am the one who is honored to be here tonight. My grandfather owned the St. Paul ball club, and they were kind of like bandits, to the National League. They probably chose Milwaukee as an outpost, to hide, so the National League wouldn't know".

In response to some mild boos when he expressed the opinion that the American League was the better league, he laughed, then continued, "To show you that I think well of Milwaukee, I made one of my sons go to school here. At least, I think he went to school here! He spent a lot of years here, up the street there. Thank you all for being here, and I hope your ballclub here in this town will be playing the Chicago White Sox in the World Series...wouldn't that be great? This is a big-league, high-class town."

He then unveiled the marker, which Bob Buege read aloud:

BIRTHPLACE OF THE AMERICAN LEAGUE

The Republican House, a hotel that stood on this site from 1886 to 1961, was the birthplace of baseball's American League. On the night of March 5, 1900, Milwaukee attorney Henry Killilea, his brother Matt, Connie Mack, Byron (Ban) Johnson, and Charles Comiskey gathered in Room 185. In defiance of the existing National League, Comiskey's Chicago White Stockings (later Sox) were incorporated, and the league's eight team alignment was completed. After the 1900 season, the league reorganized, placed teams in Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. and achieved major league status.

This marker is dedicated to the Centennial Year of Major League Baseball's Junior Circuit by the Society for American Baseball Research, the Milwaukee Sentinel Journal, and the Milwaukee County Historical Society. Bob Teske ended the ceremony with acknowledgments, inviting one and all to partake in the complimentary birthday cake and soda, while enjoying Chuck Brodsky singing folk tunes in Pere Marquette Park, where Gorman Thomas signed autographs.

The Milwaukee Brewers (A.A.) and Braves Panel, composed of Johnny Logan (1951-63, Braves, Pirates), Felix Mantilla (1956-66, Braves, Giants, Red Sox, Astros), Andy Pafko (1943-59, Cubs, Dodgers, Braves), and Bert Thiel (1952 Braves), was moderated by Bill Stevens, who announced that Bert Thiel would be accorded the honor of throwing out the first ball at Miller Park that (July 14) night.

Thiel was introduced as having, "thrown more no-hitters than everyone else on the panel combined", and amused the audience by recalling when he was given a "night" and pitched for only 2 innings. Charlie Grimm came out to remove him by saying, "You so have many gifts to unwrap in the clubhouse. Why don't you go there?"

That happened at Borchert Field and his immediate reply to a later response during a question about Borchert Field was, "I get scared every time you mention it!" He also explained to the audience, after introducing 3 of his 9 children, that all of them "were born in June and July so you know we had some dang-cold winters!"

Johnny Logan, president of the recently-organized Milwaukee Braves Historical Association with more than 500 members, provided numerous highlights for the audience, relating in a humorous way his fighting reaction to being hit by Don

Drysdale's pitch, and beating the NY Yankees (1957 World Series). "When you get the Yankees, don't step on them, stamp on 'em!"

Clearly the most extroverted of the panelists, Logan shared his pride at having a World Series ring. "I go to the bars and I put my hand out and they look at this ring, and they say, "Wow! Who is this rich player?" In response to a question on why the numbers were not retired for Warren Spahn or Eddie Matthews, he quipped, "Why didn't you ask Mr. Selig this afternoon? I wasn't invited to that luncheon".

Logan lauded the fielding skills of Eddie Matthews, and his communication with Matthews before each game: "Eddie, did you get your sleep? He said, Yeah, so I played through the middle." After the audience laughter subsided, he continued, saying if Matthews had been out the night before, "I played third base." He also spoke about the politics of baseball (favoritism), and his years playing with 25 second basemen, and that if Felix Mantilla had taken his job, he'd be facing a life of "having a job as a Stat Man".

Felix Mantilla, who was also instrumental in founding the Milwaukee Braves Historical Association, spoke about breaking up the Harvey Haddix perfect game in the 13th inning, and about stealing signs against the Giants. He believes that the hitters are stronger today, the infielders are as good, but "the pitchers were much better than today".

Andy Pafko remembered the first time his parents came to Chicago to see his first professional game as a Cub in 1945. He struck out with the bases loaded in front of them ---- but later redeemed himself by hitting a grand slam in the same game (his mom died a few months after that).

Like Thiel and Logan, Pafko recalled playing under Charlie Grimm, twice, and the players shared theories on why Bob "Hurricane" Hazle could not sustain the potential he showed in 1957. After all questions from the audience had been fielded flawlessly, they were presented with their Home Run Logs by David Vincent, which included Bert Thiel's only HR given up (to George Metkovich).

The Negro Leaguers Panel of Dennis Biddle, Sherwood (Woody) Brewer, and Carl Long enlightened attendees at SABR 31 with their experiences and exploits. Bill Stevens delivered a masterly introduction:

Carl Long began playing professional ball in 1951 at age 14-and-a-half for the Nashville Stars under manager Oscar Charleston. In 1952, he played for the Philadelphia Stars before moving on to the Birmingham Black Barons in 1953. An All-Star in 1953, he also played in the minor leagues for the Dodgers' organization. Returning home to North Carolina, he discovered Jim Ray Hart, became the first black police officer in his home town, the first black detective and the first black driver for Trailways. He later was the driver for Bill Clinton in his first campaign for the presidency.

Woody Brewer began his career as an infielder with the Indianapolis Clowns, making the All-Star team in 1949, 1950, and 1951. He teamed up with Ernie Banks as a double-play combo for the Kansas City Monarchs. In 1953, after playing in other pro leagues, he was an All-Star again and was the last manger for the KC Monarchs.

Dennis Biddle, president of Yesterday's Negro Leagues Foundation (Brewer is VP) was "largely instrumental" in helping Bill Stevens put the panel together. Stevens related an amusing anecdote about the first time Biddle and Carl Long met in a game, "Dennis was pitching and Carl doubled off the Comiskey scoreboard. How many pitches did it take to get him" out the next time he came to the plate? Biddle's reply? "Four".

The panelists opened discussions of many topics such as the bittersweet mood in the Negro Leagues once Jackie Robinson signed a MLB contract, the hardships of racism, traveling, snow, limited food choices, the Black newspapers, barnstorming, and the umpires, which inspired Brewer to sing, "Three Blind Mice".

The issue of a pension fund arose and the panelists agreed it was unfair for MLB to declare that anyone after Jackie Robinson doesn't qualify for a pension fund. The average pay was \$175 month, an average working man salary. Players tried to save the \$2 day allotted for food "In those days, bologna was a delicacy!". Long, who had to promise his father to

continue full-time in school once the season ended, and to complete his education, urges youngsters today to get their education and emphasizes its importance.

The composition of the paying public was mostly, and sometimes only, white. "Even in the South, white people came out to see us. We could play so they came out to see us. But when the ballgame was over, they wanted you out of town ---- I couldn't understand that". Brewer described the Indianapolis Clowns, who "put on a 7th inning show...shadow ball juggling", and how Aaron came there cross-handed to the Clowns "No one could get him out". Aaron was regarded as a quiet kid, but, "You knew he was around when he picked up that bat!"

Oscar Charleston, Biz Mackey, and Josh Gibson were recalled, especially the eye-hand coordination of Gibson, "second-greatest hitter I've ever seen (Ted Williams being the best due to his discipline)" and Satchel Paige as well. During a barnstorming game, Eddie Lake (Tigers shortstop) dug in at the plate, prompting Satch to walk halfway to home plate. "How you gonna get up out of that hole to hit this high heat?" One SABR member asked, "Who is the best player you played with or against that we never heard of?", and two names immediately came to mind: Willard Brown and Bill Greason.

Even before the players were asked about Sol White, the panelists acknowledged "the greatest authority on Negro League Baseball, Mister Larry Lester. He can tell you more on Negro League Baseball than any man alive" and asked him to stand up. Larry is one of the researchers in the team that won the \$250,000 grant from MLB and the Hall of Fame to study African Americans in Baseball. "It means a lot to remember yesterday" was the theme of the panel, which will not be forgotten.

Bob Buege hosted the Milwaukee Authors Panel, composed of "Big Jim" Ksicsinski, Tom Flaherty, and Gregg Hoffmann. Ksicsinski began working for Milwaukee baseball in 1963 (Braves), became the manager of the visiting team's clubhouse, and is co-author of Socks and Jocks, along with Tom Flaherty. Tom, a former president of the Baseball Writers Association of America, worked for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Gregg Hoffmann, a SABR member, is the author of Down in the Valley, "the definitive book on County Stadium".

When recalling players, Jim Ksicsinski most remembered Cal Ripken, for the hours he put in working out and his generosity with his time, especially when staying late to sign autographs. The real heroes, "like Nolan Ryan, Paul Molitor, Cal Ripken, stayed. All of the good guys, they always had time".

Cal was special in that he actually asked, "How many balls do you need signed? What church group is this for?", showing a genuine interest in the person or group. "Cal worried about his kids growing up and not having to have to work a day in their lives" because of concerns how they would turn out.

Flaherty laughed about Pete Vukovich being scratched from a game because he'd hurt his foot and avoided telling Flaherty the real reason why (he had knocked over a heavy coin changer machine). When asked if he had kicked over video game equipment, the pitcher denied anything like that, and after 3 weeks of not talking to Flaherty, Vukovich said, "Hey, I know you were just doing your job". Tom then gave details of which equipment Pete had kicked, whereupon Vukovich said, "But, hey, I never lied to you!"

The authors discussed the difficulties of publishing a book, especially the coffee table book on Milwaukee's County Stadium that Hoffmann said had thousands of photographs, which had to be reduced to 240. Gregg encourage listeners to work with youth when writing to get them involved in doing research, even just looking for files, as he did while doing Down in the Valley.

Flaherty described the process of getting a book contract and the amazing technology of today that allowed him to complete the end of the book while covering the Olympics in Australia, " ...and I started 27 years ago on a manual typewriter!" Flaherty remarked that using the baseball encyclopedia helped tremendously when transcribing tape-recorded interviews. Recollections followed about players and personnel like Earl Weaver, Reggie Jackson, Harvey Kuenn, Al Kaline, and Tom Trebelhorn.

TRIVIA WINNERS

Scott Flatow flattened all challengers (Bill James, who scored points, and Maxwell Kates, who was shut out) in an impressive, and lopsided, win in the Individual Trivia Competition. SABR 31 had its first female contestant in the Trivia Challenge: Arleen Cohen, whose teammates Harvey Cohen, Tom Nahigian, and Dave Paulson finished second to the Winning Team of David Nemec, Mark Kanter, Eddie Gold, and Mike Caragliano.

Both Nemec and Kanter repeated victories from last year. SABR's Baseball Trivia Contest is sponsored by Total Sports, and hosted by Ed Luteran who succeeded Bob Davids in 1993. This year, Ed invited Al Blumkin, former (retired) trivia winner in Individual and Team competitions many times, to assume a more active role in hosting the trivia rounds and to share the emcee duties.

Forty-five regional leaders and webmasters/email-listowners met to discuss diverse needs of regionals in a productive meeting, shepherded by Vice President and Regional Committee Chair, Fred Ivor-Campbell.

George Case III encouraged leaders to make contact with their new members, such as with a welcome letter. John Zajc detailed the packet that new members get and asked chapters to contact him should they wish to do an "exit survey" on members who leave SABR (not enough time or tight finances, are the two most common reasons).

John addressed the need for accurate of email addresses and the need to "track changes" in addresses, as well as in snail mail addresses, phone numbers and other information that gets updated. Probably 60-65% of SABR members have email addresses. Seamus Kearney, as the listowner for SABR-L, gets changes and offered to forward a list to John. Rodney Johnson said that members can update their file with the webpage improvements.

Bob Savitt thanked JZ for the New Members email list every month or so, and the template of addresses in the various chapters. The Bob Davids Chapter has the Baltimore Baseball Weekend, Fan Fests, regionals, so to publicize these activities, an (electronic) newsletter goes to members, and a hard copy of that, along with the welcome letter, goes out to new members. About 700 people are in the chapter, of which roughly 400 have addresses. A major reason why there is no printed newsletter for each member is the limited number of people willing to do the work, and limited funds.

Evelyn Begley sends a similar welcome letter to new members, listing chapter activities and benefits. Since many chapter contributors do not have email, a printed newsletter had been going to the full 800+ membership, which has now become a subscription-based publication, since the chapter cannot afford to send it out for free. "We have an active chapter but an inactive membership", she said, acknowledging the common problem that only a few members do most of the chapter work. Evelyn emphasized the need for a Regional Leaders' egroup to discuss issues, including the best way to establish chapter egroups.

Rod Nelson and Mark Armour also have egroups for their chapters. One member spammed the rest of the group, and ways to avoid spamming were discussed, comparing an open group to a closed one. They agreed that Paul Wendt's advice to invite members to join, not to automatically include them without securing their permission, worked best.

Seamus Kearney asked, "Is there a "how to" for setting up an egroup to avoid problems?" Rod suggested going to a website that facilitates the process. "Do a google search". Steve Roney then wondered if F.X. was going to set up a list for regional leaders, and Fred thought that might be in progress.

Norman Macht explained the approach of the convention committee which is to ask a regional chapter if there is any interest in hosting a convention, once the membership decides it wants to go there. He answered questions concerning national conventions, assuring leaders that if their chapter does not want to host a National, the city will be crossed off the list.

Seamus added that an "ancillary benefit when I heard that Boston was one of the cities that people wanted for a convention" was that a Boston chapter was formed. Before that, members got together and now they were saying, "let's do it", and created the chapter, a direct result of members' wishes to have a convention in Boston.

Fred invited Mark Armour to share some of his ideas, and Mark proposed (1) that we create a Regional Chapter Handbook, and (2) that each chapter fill out an annual report or questionnaire. The sample outline he distributed for the Purpose,

Requirements and Goals of a local chapter was accompanied by his questions: How many meetings? Purpose of the meetings? Who is invited? Where should the meetings be? When? How long? Guest speakers? How do I get them? How are the meetings advertised to members? To non-members? How many presentations should there be? How should the meeting content be summarized afterward?

Mark's proposal included effective use of SABR-L, the Cleveland office, website, presentations to Len Levin's Lending Library, newsletters, maintaining an up-to-date list of members, member outreach, research incentives, projects, and archives, youth initiatives, chapter publications, publicizing the chapter, baseball weekends, hosting a super-regional or national convention, and an Annual Report.

Fred considered these. "We have very few requirements on the regional program, and we were never a top-down group. Let me ask you all: How do you feel annual report?" Jeff Bowers wondered if it could be in the form of a multiple choice or answers like "always, never,.. anything to minimize the amount of time, but not to be graded or ranked".

Seamus preferred that SABR be "more proactive. If SABR contacted us, it might be more efficient, rather than us sending something in" meaning a telephone call --- more than just a survey.--- Active feedback from 4 or 5 questions. Bob Savitt responded to Mark's initiative with the philosophy that "the lifeblood of SABR is this grassroots, the regionals" and the importance of institutional memory, which Mark called a "living document".

Len Levin encouraged chapters to send media releases to the smaller papers and media outlets since many of the bigger ones will not publish the press release. "The small dailies are hungry for material". He also wondered if more of a response to emails and/or chapter newsletters would occur if a (purposely) wrong trivia answer was included! Len requested to be sent articles of research interest or any kind of publication for the Lending Library.

One highlight of the meeting was when Tom Simon described how a Chapter Project (started in 1995) evolved into new and welcome leadership. Five years later the project was published as "The Green Mountain Boys of Summer" --- the Vermont Historical Society has had an exhibit based on the book displaying the memorabilia of the people who had been interviewed. The project leader must expect some frustrations, however, because of time demands/needs of project researchers and the writing skills can range from exceptional to poor. The camaraderie is worth it, for the pride of a successful team effort, with a myriad of ways to be involved on some level, not necessarily writing. By drawing people into a research project, it can transform members and is an easy way to involve members in a research activity.

R.J. Lesch asked for suggestions in forming a new chapter (Iowa); contacting John Zajc emerged from many as the best way to begin a chapter. Jack Zerby, from the southwest corner of Florida has a new chapter list of more than a dozen members, with 4 meetings a year, and offered to assist R.J. with new ideas.

Terry Sloope talked about stepping in when a leader leaves. He surveyed his chapter to determine the interest in attending meetings, and more than half replied. "If I could get them to volunteer for something, that would be good", he noted. There is a fixed stipend for starting a chapter, and the reimbursement for mailings about meetings is 50 cents per piece. If a group does meet regularly, the SABR members should let JZ know, especially if there is a research component.

"David W. Smith won deserved honors and the \$250 prize from USA Today Baseball Weekly for the Best Research Presentation Award for his "Play by Play Analysis of the 1951 National League Pennant Race". A professor of microbiology at the University of Delaware, David is renowned for his generosity in sharing play-by-play accounts from Retrosheet, which he founded, and has been one of SABR's most respected members since 1977.

"Neal Pease, the coordinator for scheduling the Research Presentations, announced that "Dave has finished second ... several times in previous years, maybe kind of like the Dodgers in '51 but today, he's Number One, so Dave, this is next year", and Smith, a Dodger fan, said, "There's no greater honor than being given an award by people whom you respect, and that's what makes this absolutely precious to me. I have to say the most ironic thing of all of this --- for those of you who know me --- is that I could actually win an award for saying that the 1951 Giants were a good team. Thank you very much"

"SABR 31 had many evaluators in the audience as well as 10 judges who volunteered to rate the presenters: Mark Armour, Chip Atkison, Evelyn Begley, Tom Hunter, John Matthew IV, Denis Repp, Tom Ruane, Steve Smith, Bob Timmermann, and

Neal Traven. The runner-up presenter was Bob Schaefer whose presentation on "Hitting Techniques of 20th Century .400 Hitters" riveted everyone in the room, and Bill Marshall finished third with a score of 15 (out of a possible 16) for "Reluctant Heroes—Baseball's Great Triumvirate of the 1940s:: DiMaggio, Musial, and Williams".

"Mark Wurl earned a 14.9 score for "Class E: Frank Wade's Twin Ports League of 1943", a fascinating account of a WWII minor league in Wisconsin and Minnesota, and others scoring highly included Ted Hathaway for "Cobb As Role Model", Stew Thornley for "Cuba Baseball Tour", Dave Anderson for "Operation Catfish: Re-evaluating Bill Klem", and Brian Carroll for "Wendell Smith: Jackie's Friend, Jim Crow's Enemy". Congratulations to these gentlemen."

— **John Zajc**