

# The Wood Pile

Newsletter of the Smoky Joe Wood Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research

Summer 2022 🏹 Volume 3 🏹 Issue 3

Stephen Krevisky (President) - Alan Cohen (Vice President/Treasurer)

Stan Dziurgot (Membership Director) - Stan Osowiecki (Wood Pile Editor)



## LEADING OFF

By: Steve Krevisky

Finally, for the first time in 3 years, we will have an in-person SABR convention, this time in Baltimore from August 17 to 21. I hope that many of you will attend, and partake of the many activities at the national level, including the Orioles'- Red Sox game on August 19.



We have resumed in person chapter activities as well. These include our spring general meeting, which included a lively point-counterpoint between Bill Ryczek and Paul Hensler on Jim Bouton's Ball Four book. Also, chapter breakfasts bring us together with lively discussion, but no set agenda.

Also, a few of us participated in the national chapter leaders meeting, where we shared ideas about making our chapters more effective.

After the national convention in Baltimore, we will start planning for our fall general meeting, and our next chapter breakfast. Please send me your ideas about topics and speakers for our fall meeting.

Additionally, at the June meeting in Rhode Island, we talked about a regional meeting. Please let me know if this interests you. along with ideas for topics and speakers.

See you soon at one of our events!

Regards,  
Steve K



Members are welcome to submit articles, book reviews or other information that might be interesting to other chapter members. Please send information to Stan Osowiecki at [osowiecki@sbcglobal.net](mailto:osowiecki@sbcglobal.net).

## FUTURE EVENTS

Events for Connecticut and National Events can be found online at:

[www.smokyjoewood.com/events](http://www.smokyjoewood.com/events) (Connecticut)

[www.sabr.org/events](http://www.sabr.org/events) (National)

## NEW MEMBERS

New chapter members (since January 25, 2022)

- Tommy Ender (Eastford)
- Charles Euchner (Hamden)
- Noah Gittell (Woodbury)
- Tim Langschultz (Berlin)
- Jeff Metzger (Berlin)
- Michael Myers (Norwalk)
- Daniel Palacios (Bristol)
- Yasel Porto (New Britain)
- Jonathan Richter (Hartford)
- James Smith (Bethel)
- Dan Speer (Waterbury)
- Devon Sundquist (New Hartford)
- Larry Walters (New Fairfield)

## WRITING OPPORTUNITIES

### Baseball Biography Project

The lofty goal is to write a high-quality journal-length biography of every player who ever played in the major leagues. 5,825+ biographies have been written by 500+ SABR members as of July 23, 2022. Your subject can be anyone who ever played in the major leagues and has been retired for at least 5 years, or any manager, executive, umpire, scout, or broadcaster. In fact, we welcome your ideas for any subject who impacted the history of the game — someone from the Negro Leagues, the minor leagues, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, and even Japan.

Web-site: [sabr.org/bioproject](http://sabr.org/bioproject)

Things you should know: [sabr.org/content/bioproject-resources](http://sabr.org/content/bioproject-resources)

Request an assignment: Lyle Spatz at

[lspatz@comcast.net](mailto:lspatz@comcast.net)

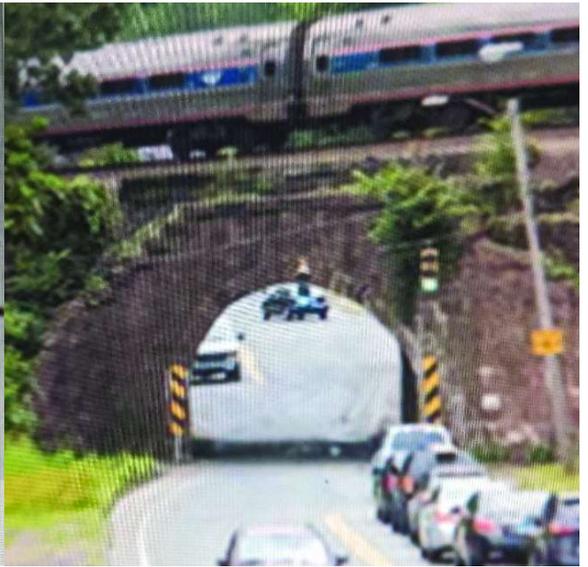
### SABR Book Projects

Biographers are needed for several books. Status of assignment availabilities changes daily. Please contact Bill Nowlin ([bnowlin@rounder.com](mailto:bnowlin@rounder.com)) to request an assignment.

# Babe Ruth In Culvert Smash

Chamoion Baseball Swatter Near Death in Meriden When His Car Crashes Into Truck—  
Auto Wrecked—Player Proceeds  
to Springfield

The Meriden Daily Journal, October 1, 1920.



## THE BABE LEAVES HIS MARK IN WALLINGFORD

By: Stan Dziurgot

I drive thru the Yalesville culvert a couple times a week. Yalesville is a section of the western side of Wallingford. It looks like a bridge that you would see on the Wilbur Cross/Merritt Parkway where the opening is taller in the center. Looking at it you can see a traffic signal (they are on both sides of the bridge because the opening is only wide enough to fit one vehicle safely thru it at a time. When one side is going the other has a red light. Although there was some discrepancy when the culvert was built, the builder's great grandson and the Connecticut log of bridges says it was built in 1841. Train tracks rung along the top going from New Haven to Hartford.

On September 30, 1920 Babe Ruth was driving his new Packard through Wallingford in what should have been a routine trip from New York to Springfield, Mass to play in an exhibition game. Heading north his route would take him on Route 150 through the culvert and then connect to Route 5 a half mile further up which he could follow all the way to Springfield. 1920 was of course in the days before the interstate highways. Heading north thru the culvert, the Babe's car crashed into a Mack truck which was going south thru the culvert. The Babe's car was totaled in the crash and he and an unnamed passenger suffered only a few scratches, mostly because of a broken windshield. A nearby garage was notified of the accident and the Babe found a ride to Springfield to play in the exhibition game. He was back in Connecticut the next day to play in an exhibition game at Muzzy Field in Bristol.

The newspaper headline in the Meriden paper says that Ruth was near death but the article says he was not injured. Five years later there were also rumors of his near death because of his great stomach ache in 1925 but as Mark Twain said rumors of someone's death can be greatly exaggerated.

Sources:

*Meriden Daily Journal*; Meriden, CT. October 1, 1920

Ragali, A. "Yalesville Culvert is Not Going Anywhere" *Meriden Record Journal*; Meriden, CT. July 8, 2013

Ulbrich, W. "Babe Ruth's Connecticut Car Crash" February 18, 2021

## QUOTABLE BASEBALL

By: Jim Mizera

There is but one game and that game is baseball. - John McGraw

Ninety feet between home plate and first base may be the closest man has ever come to perfection. - Red Smith

Baseball is the only thing beside the paper clip that hasn't changed. -Bill Veeck

Baseball was 100% of my life. - Ty Cobb

If you don't have dreams, you don't have a life. - Bryce Harper

# WORLD SERIES CHAMP, YALE LEGEND STUPER RETIRES

By: Karl Ciccitto

John Stuper's two biggest baseball achievements came 40 years apart. In 1982, the 6' 2" righty pitched a complete game victory in the World Series for the Cardinals. In 2022, he retired as the winningest coach of the Yale College baseball team ever after leading the Bulldogs for 30 years.

John Anton Stuper was born on May 9, 1957 in Butler, PA to Frank J. Stuper, a carpenter for a coal mine operation, and Margaret Vargo Stuper, a book keeper. He has a sister and two brothers.

Butler, located 33 miles north of Pittsburgh, was also the birthplace of umpire Ed Vargo (1960 – 1983, NL) and the off-season home of the eccentric "sousepaw" Rube Waddell.

Stuper graduated from Butler High in 1975. He pitched for Bulter Community College and Point Park College. He helped Point Park to the 1978 NAIA World Series.

Stuper was taken in the June 1978 draft by Pittsburgh. The Bucs sent him to St. Louis in January 1979 for Tommy Sandt. After 4+ seasons in the minors he debuted for the Cardinals on June 1, 1982 against the Giants. Stuper (8 innings, 3 ER) outpitched Atlee Hammaker (7 innings, 3 ER) but the Giants pinned a 4-3 loss to Jim Kaat in the 11<sup>th</sup> inning.



The World Series spotlight shined on Stuper on Oct. 19, 1982 when he endured two rain delays to win a complete game victory over the Brewers at Busch Stadium II. Heavy rains came in the fourth inning. Play was suspended in the 5<sup>th</sup> inning for 26 minutes. A second rain delay in the 6<sup>th</sup> lasted for 2 hours and 13 minutes. The stoppages didn't deter Stuper, who later explained he was nervous before the game and felt that uneasiness enhanced his pitching. The Cardinal bats chased the Brewers' starting hurler, 37-year-old Don Sutton, in the 5<sup>th</sup>. "I had good stuff but bad location. I have no excuse.", said the future Hall of Famer. The final score was 13 to 1. The game 6 win teed up a St. Louis championship the next day.

St. Louis sent Stuper to the Reds after his ERA ballooned to 5.28 in 1984. After a December 1985 trade, Stuper was released by Montreal. He finished his MLB career (1982 – 1985) with 111 game appearances, a 32-28 W-L record and a 3.96 ERA.

Stuper spent the next 5 years as a coach and administrator at Butler Community College. He then coached in the minor leagues for the Savannah and St. Petersburg Cardinals.

Stuper was named the coach of Yale baseball in April, 1992. He saw 38 of his Bulldogs get picked in the MLB draft and notched 4 Ivy League titles and 553 victories.

No one coached the Bulldog nine longer than Stuper. Not Smoky Joe Wood (1924 to 1942) and not Ethan Allen (1946 – 1968).

In a January 2022 interview with Dan Guttenplan of New England Baseball Journal, Stuper reflected on his time at Yale. "I am just so grateful... (my players) have no idea just how much they mean to me." Stuper cited how special it was to coach outstanding Yalies including Cubs Assistant G.M. Craig Breslow, Orioles' GM Mike Elias, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, plus "doctors and lawyers all over the place". "I have the greatest alumni group... It's not about the games, it's about the people.", he said.

Like many other ballplayers, Stuper was involved in a historic moment by chance.

On June 22, 1982, Stuper surrendered a double to Pete Rose. The double was Rose's 3,772 career hit, moving him ahead of Henry Aaron into second place on the all-time hit list. The Cards won the game 3-2. Stuper credited his catcher, Darrell Porter for getting him through critical moments.

In former Yale player Matt McCarthy's book, *Odd Man Out*, the author writes that Stuper liked to start meetings by trying to crack up his players. One time he asked, "Does anyone have a class with (the actress and Yale student) Clare Danes? What's she look like?"

["Stuper Retires" continued on Page 7](#)

## CT AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL: LAUNCH PAD TO THE MAJORS

By: George Pawlush

Often overlooked and under-appreciated over the past 97 years in Connecticut, has been the contribution of the state American Legion baseball program in preparing teen-agers for the major leagues. Since its founding in 1927, the Connecticut legion program has seen 49 of its alumni making big league rosters.

The most notable Connecticut graduate is Jeff Bagwell, a former Middletown Post 75 player, who achieved the pinnacle of baseball success, by being inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame in 2017. Bagwell is one of 83 American Legion baseball graduates, from across the nation, who have been honored with a plaque at Cooperstown.

The latest American Legion Hall of Fame honoree is the late Gil Hodges, who was selected to the Hall of Fame last December by the Golden Days Era Committee. Hodges who, played for the Princeton, IN legion team, will be inducted on July 24.

The natural American Legion program began in 1926. During that inaugural year, over 2000 teams from 15 states competed. Following league competition, the winners advanced to state, regional, and sectional tournaments. The final four clubs participated in the first legion world series in Philadelphia, where Yonkers, NY was crowned as the first national champion.

Connecticut staged its first championship in 1927 with New Britain Post 6 besting Hartford Post 8 for the state title. The state legion had eight teams that year. This number has steadily grown over the years. Today, Connecticut has more teams than any other New England state. Dave Greenleaf, Bristol, currently serve as chairman of Connecticut American Legion baseball.

While Connecticut has to yet win a World Series title, state teams have appeared in 22 national classics. Its most recent representative was RCP Post 105 (Rocky Hill, Cornwall and Portland) in 2015. The first Connecticut team to reach the World Series was Stamford Post 3 in 1955. Bristol Post 2 and Branford Post 83 lead all state teams with four World Series appearances. Twenty-four of the 49 50 Connecticut legion alums have been pitchers.

Joey Jay, who hurled for Middletown in the early 1950s, enjoyed a 13-year MLB career, mostly with the Milwaukee Braves and Cincinnati Reds. Jay posted back-to-back 21-10 and 21-14 records for the Reds in 1961 and 1962. He retired from the majors in 1966 with a 99-91 record.

Fairfield' Post 143's Charlie Nagy, a 14-year veteran, stepped away from the major leagues in 2003 with a lifetime 129-105 log. Although he never reached the 20-win plateau, Nagy had three 17-victory seasons for the Cleveland Indians in 1992, 1996, and 1999.

Carl Pavano, Southington Post 72, toiled in the majors from 1998 to 2012. He owns a life-time 108-107 log that includes a stellar 18-8 season for the Florida Marlins in 2004 and later, a 17-11 effort with the 2010 Minnesota Twins.

Other pitchers who have excelled in the majors include relievers Rob Dibble and Craig Breslow. Dibble gained notoriety as one of the "Nasty Boys," a bullpen threesome, who were a big reason that the Cincinnati Reds won a World Series title in 1990. Dibble, another Southington Post graduate, was a seven-year vet who struck out 645 batters in 477 innings and turned in a 2.98 ERA.

Left-handed relief specialist Breslow, who competed for Trumbull Post 141, played with ten teams during his 12-year career. From 2012 to 2015 he was a member of the Boston Red Sox and won a World Series ring with the team in 2013. He currently serves as assistant general manager/ vice president of pitching for the Chicago Cubs.

Former commissioner of baseball Fay Vincent played for Hamden during his scholastic years. Unfortunately, his baseball days ended when he suffered a near fatal accident leaving him with a crushed spine and paralyzed leg while an undergraduate student at Williams College.

The Connecticut legion program has also produced a number of position players who done well in the big leagues. Catcher Brad Ausmus, a Cheshire Post 92 grad, garnered 1579 hits and posted a .251 lifetime batting average during his 18-year career. Most of his best years came with the Houston Astros. Since retiring as an active player in 2010, Ausmus has served managerial stints with Detroit Tigers and the Los Angeles Angels.

["American Legion" continued on Page 6](#)

## SABR PROFILE: TOM ZOCCO

By: George Pawlush

Baseball book collector extraordinaire Tom Zocco thought he had died and went to heaven in 1971 when he learned through *Sports Trader*, a sports hobby periodical, about a new organization, called SABR, that had been formed to satisfy the interests of hardcore baseball junkies.

Zocco, who was just 22 at the time, remembers the article that mentioned if you wanted to join SABR contact Bob McConnell. "I immediately called," says Zocco, "Once I received the application, I filled it out and sent it quickly back with the \$10 fee, and became SABR's 47<sup>th</sup> member."

This marks Zocco's 51st year as a SABR member. With many of the original members having passed on, he is probably one of the few to have reached this milestone. Annual SABR conventions began in 1971 but Zocco didn't attend his first until 1974 when he traveled to Philadelphia. Since then, he has attended 47 straight conventions. His streak went on hold over the past two years as the conferences were cancelled due to COVID.

Zocco is well known and respected across SABR for his interest in baseball books. Together with Max Weder, Mark Wernick, and Richie Murrell, the four created a private Baseball Book Group on Facebook 13 years ago. The site has almost 11,000 subscribers. Earlier this year the group conducted a poll with its readers to determine their favorite books of all-time.

Following a two-month voting period, 217 subscribers responded with 1024 titles of their favorite books. Topping the list with 118 votes was *Glory of Their Times*, an oral history, followed by *Ball Four*, 106 votes; *The Boys of Summer*, 83 votes; *The New Bill James Historical Abstract*, 60 votes and *Veeck as in Wreck*, 57 votes.

Zocco is also prominently involved as a board member and former president of the World Series Club of Hartford County. The club was founded in 1926. During the off-season the club conducts monthly meetings featuring appearances by retired and active players, executives, and managers. Some of those who spoke to the group during the past 2021-22 off-season included Jeff Nelson, John Flaherty, Dale Berra, Daniel Nava, Al Oliver, Ray Burris and Charlie Hayes. Past guests have included Lou Gehrig, Ed Walsh, Frankie Frisch and Brooks Robinson.

As a long-time SABR and Smoky Joe Wood chapter member, Zocco remembers the group's beginnings. The chapter needed two tries before finally catching on in the early 2000s. He recalls Steve Krevisky's initial efforts in the 1980s to get the chapter started. "We began meeting monthly at Middlesex County Community College, but interest fizzled out," he says. During its second iteration, Krevisky built up interest by holding informal Saturday morning breakfasts at area restaurants. During the year, the chapter staged a few larger formal presentation meetings at Quinnipiac University. In recent years these larger meetings have moved to Middlesex Community College.

However, Zocco's pride and joy is his extensive baseball book collection, housed at his home in Rocky Hill, where he has lived since 1988. Here, most of his nearly 1800 hardcover books are stored in three rooms in specially built racks on the second floor. In addition, his collection includes a number of soft covered books, journals and brochures. Zocco, who is single, says with a smile, "These books have driven me out of my second-floor living area."

His love of baseball books extends to baseball trivia. He annually competes in the trivia competition at annual SABR Conventions. Zocco is also interested in baseball history as it relates to statistics. He compiles records like pitchers with ten or more strikeouts in a game, pitchers who have hurled ten or more innings in a game, and players with five or more hits in a game.

Zocco graduated from Wethersfield High School. He then enrolled at Quinnipiac University, where college days were cut short by being drafted into the Army. After service, he gravitated to a career in computer programming.

## AMERICAN LEGION (continued from Page 4)

Rajai Davis, a product of New London Post 9, had a lengthy 14-year career, playing outfield for eight different teams. The speedy Davis stole 415 bases during his big league tenure. He led the American League in stolen bases for Cleveland in 2016 with 43 swipes. Davis was a career .262 hitter.

Versatile John MacDonald, a Niantic Post 128 graduate, was a versatile defensive competitor, who played third base, shortstop, second base, and the outfield for eight teams during his 16-year MLB career, that lasted from 1999 to 2014. Despite a .233 career batting average, MacDonald's glove saved many games for Cleveland Indians and Toronto Blue Jays, where he played 13 years of his career.

Catcher John Ellis is one of five players from Niantic Post 128 to reach the majors. He was joined by Brook Fordyce, Matt Harvey, Pete Walker, and McDonald. Ellis was a solid backup catcher for the New York Yankees, Cleveland Indians, and Texas Rangers during his 13-year career that ran from 1969 to 1981. He was a lifetime .262 batter.

Bobby Valentine, Stamford Post 3, had his promising MLB career impacted by leg injuries during his second season with the Los Angeles Dodgers. Nevertheless, Valentine was a serviceable player for ten years, ending his playing career with a .260 batting average. His biggest contributions came later serving as manager of the Texas Rangers (1985 to 1992), New York Mets (1996 to 2002), and the Boston Red Sox (2012).

The most notable performance by a Connecticut graduate was turned in by Mo Vaughn, who played Norwalk Post 12. Vaughn was the 1995 American League MVP as a member of the Boston Red Sox. During that season, Vaughn batted .300 while clubbing 44 home runs and 126 RBIs. He competed in the big leagues from 1991 to 2013, and finished his career with 328 homeruns and a .293 batting average.

Rico Brogna, Oakville Post 195, played nine seasons in the majors before a form of spinal arthritis forced him to retire at age 32. The first baseman played between 1992 and 2001. He had a career batting average of .269 and launched 106 homeruns, with 24 of those coming with the Philadelphia Phillies in 1999.

Connecticut legion baseball's pipeline to major league baseball continues in 2022 with four alums on big league rosters. The group includes Matt Barnes, Bethel Post 100, Boston Red Sox; AJ Pollack, Hebron, Chicago White Sox; Matt Harvey, Niantic Post 128, Baltimore Orioles; and Aaron Civale, Windsor Locks Post 36, Cleveland Indians.

Note: George Pawlush served as state chairman of Connecticut American Legion baseball from 1999 to 2005. He was also on the 2006 American Legion World Series staff held at Bartlesville, OK. Pawlush was inducted into the Connecticut American Baseball Hall of Fame in 2019.

## QUOTABLE BASEBALL

Every player should be accorded the privilege of at least one season with the Chicago Cubs. That's baseball as it should be played - in God's own sunshine. And that's really living. - Alvin Dark

Basketball, hockey and track meets are action heaped upon action, climax upon climax, until the onlooker's responses become deadened. Baseball is for the leisurely afternoons of summer and for the unchanging dreams. - Roger Kahn

Baseball is all I ever wanted. I could eat, sleep, and dream baseball. - Smoky Joe Wood

Well, baseball was my whole life. Nothing's ever been as fun as baseball. - Mickey Mantle

Baseball was my whole life. I would forget to eat because of baseball. - Roberto Clemente



## FRANK OBSERVATIONS

By: Michael Frank

An old baseball fan, familiar with the pros and Little League but not with high school ball, fulfilled a pre-COVID promise to go to a Greenwich High School home game.

The red-trimmed Cardinals advanced to 6-7 in Fairfield County League play with a 10-0 victory over the purple-trimmed Westhill Vikings of Stamford. A year ago, Greenwich had one of the top teams in the State.

They have a spacious, well-kept field behind the school, equipped with a good scoreboard, announcing equipment, and batting cages. There was no food concession, but this being Greenwich, there were golf carts in the parking area.

There were about 50 fans for the home team, 25 for the visitors. An impressive group of cheerleaders lined up along the fence. There were few younger kids in attendance but I did see dozens of young girls going to lacrosse practice on the next field.

Kerry Gavin is now head coach. The coaches were in uniform. The players, almost adult size. I know you have many high school options, but if you take Indian Field Road (exit 4 off I-95) north to a short left on Route 1 to Hillside Road, you might see Greenwich play visiting teams like Westport or Fairfield or even Danbury. Games are 4:30 weekdays.



## STUPER RETIRES (continued from page 3)

To McCarthy, Stuper presented himself as a regular guy to his team. “(I’m) as meat and potatoes as they come. I don’t read poetry and I don’t drink lattes. I’m not fancy like some of you...but I’m smarter than just about all of you.” McCarthy believes Stuper also knew when to be serious and how to say the right thing at the right time. He could take a ribbing as well as dish it out. McCarthy points out that Stuper is a man of character. After his sister-in-law and brother-in-law were killed in an auto accident, Stuper quickly adopted their son and daughter and raised them as his own. “Whenever I saw Coach Stuper, his adopted son, Robbie, was by his side.”

Stuper will relocate to Florida, where Desantis, his former team captain and someone the coach simply calls “D” in private, is the Governor.

### Sources

- i. <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryuicontent/view/242166775:62308?tid=&pid=&queryId=6428b230d625ff59bf56790f8c309&phsrc=aGf23&phstart=successSource> (from 1950 Census).
- ii. <http://www.obitcentral.com/obitsearch/obits/pa/pa-butler22.htm>
- iii. <https://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-C>
- iv. Bulter County (PA) Sports Hall of Fame. <http://www.thebcshof.com/hof-era-1966-1979.html>
- v. [https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/1978\\_NAIA\\_College\\_World\\_Series#:~:text=The%201978%20NAIA%20College%20World,College%20in%20the%20championship%20game.](https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/1978_NAIA_College_World_Series#:~:text=The%201978%20NAIA%20College%20World,College%20in%20the%20championship%20game.)
- vii. <https://www.baseball-reference.com/boxes/SLN/SLN19820610.shtml>  
UPI, “Cards Storm Brewers, Fore No. 76”, *Salt Lake Tribune*, Oct. 20, 1982, p 27.
- viii. [https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/John\\_Stuper](https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/John_Stuper)
- ix. [https://www.baseball-reference.com/draft/?key\\_school=e7bc8c34&exact=1&query\\_type=key\\_school](https://www.baseball-reference.com/draft/?key_school=e7bc8c34&exact=1&query_type=key_school)
- x. [https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/Yale\\_University](https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/Yale_University)
- xi. <https://www.baseballjournal.com/tag/john-stuper/>
- xii. Ibid
- xiii. Ibid
- xiv. AP, “Battery Ignites Cards to Victory”, *The Dispatch* (Moline, IL), June 23, 1982,
- xv. Matt McCarthy, *Odd Man Out*, Viking, 2009, p 18.
- xvi. Matt McCarthy, *Odd Man Out*, Viking, 2009, p 20

## CORRECTION

I’m writing about a picture on page 6 that identifies Baker Bowl and “The Vet” (Veterans Stadium). The picture shows the Vet in the background but the stadium in the foreground is JFK Stadium which was formerly known as Municipal Stadium and was later renamed JFK Stadium. Municipal/JFK Stadium was where the the annual Army/Navy football game was held and was the site of many musical concerts including the Beatles in 1966 and the 1985 Live Aid concert.

Baker Bowl was located 7 city blocks from Shibe Park/Connie Mack Stadium in North Philadelphia while the Vet was located in South Philadelphia, about 9 miles away. Baker Bowl was demolished in 1950 long before the Vet opened in 1971. The oblong shaped building seen in the picture between the two stadiums on page 6 is The Spectrum, where the Philadelphia 76ers and Philadelphia Flyers played their home games. The Spectrum also hosted many concerts including the biggest names in rock ‘n roll. The Spectrum operated from 1967 until 2009 and was demolished in 2010. I saw games and events in all of those venues except Baker Bowl when I lived in Philadelphia.

Frank W. Collins  
Mathewson-Plank Chapter

# BASEBALL CONJECTURES & SPECULATIONS

By: Ezra Count

1. What was the best World Series matchup between the New York Yankees and Brooklyn Dodgers?
2. Which cities deserve a major league expansion team?
3. On a 0-100 scale, how much did each of these players live up to their potential? a) Dave Parker; b) Mickey Mantle; c) Dennis Eckersley; d) Dale Murphy; e) Sam McDowell; f) Bobby Bonds
4. What should baseball announcers do when a ball game gets out of hand?
5. How can pitchers best improve their control?
6. How long can Fenway Park and Wrigley Field last?
7. What grade does the Hall of Fame's Veteran's Committee merit for its voting?
8. What was the best baseball season?

## BOOK REVIEW: THE SAGA OF SUDDEN SAM

By: Paul Hensler

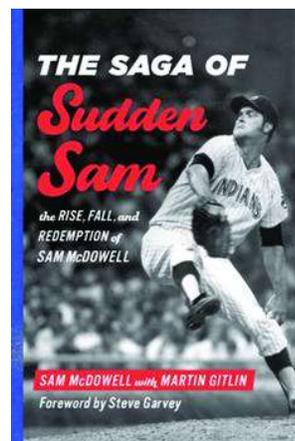
Several years ago, my wife and I were dining with another couple, an occasion that had been repeated once or twice annually with our friends for some time. As usual, when the waitperson took drink orders, the ladies gravitated toward glasses of wine, I went for my customary beer, and Jim opted for Coca-Cola – no lemon, and a lot of ice. It dawned on me that this scene had played out before only after Jim had casually mentioned, “I’ve been sober for eighteen years.” To me, this came as a stunning admission, and while I was happy for him in his ability to conquer a demon, I hadn’t known him long enough to even suspect that he had a drinking problem. Where my friend had turned a corner in his life and gainfully moved forward, the same could also be said about former Cleveland pitcher Sam McDowell, whose new memoir is both revelatory and, in the end, heartening.

I can’t vouch for the circumstances of my friend’s past, yet McDowell unabashedly lays bare the ill fate that turned a 6-foot-5 power pitcher into a man who, in his own words, was a mean drunk.

As the most sought-after pitching prospect in the country upon his graduation from Pittsburgh’s Central Catholic High School in 1960, he was also a product of “protective” parents who “dictated everything” as the decision over which organization he would sign with was due, this coming in the era prior to the amateur draft (22, 23). McDowell was lacking the normal feelings and sensibilities that children and teenagers normally would experience, and he felt that no matter how great his achievements were on scholastic baseball fields, he could not gain parental love, praise, or approval. He frequently references the “fog” in which he seemed to perpetually exist, especially one related to alcohol.

McDowell was “desensitized to my environment” and “lack[ed] a true sense of reality” (23). Trying to combat depression at a young age by making himself the center of attention, and doing so in unflattering ways, McDowell discovered that “boozing temporarily strengthened my confidence in social situations and made me feel more normal” (32). Beginning his professional career just short of his 18th birthday, he took a tumble on a slippery slope by convincing himself that as long as he paced his intake of alcoholic beverages so as not to interfere with his starting assignments, he would be able to work both sides of the street.

Yet, even the book’s chapters tell a story of peril in progress: “The Melancholy Child”; “Better Pitcher, Bigger Boozer”; “The Battle With Birdie,” in which he describes his battle with Cleveland manager Birdie Tebbetts over the freedom to call his own pitches; “Goodbye Cleveland”; “Hello Misery,” on his time with the San Francisco Giants; and “A Sour Bite of the Big Apple,” a recounting of his brief tenure in Yankee pinstripes. All these episodes are preceded by the arresting first chapter that describes his suicide attempt at the age of 21, which failed when “the gun clicked on a dead shell and never fired” (1).



[“Sudden Sam” continued on Page 9](#)

## SUDDEN SAM (continued from page 8)

McDowell debuted for the Indians' farm team in the Florida State League, but from 1961 to 1964, his apprenticeship vacillated between Triple-A and the big club in Cleveland. Finally reaching the Indians for keeps in 1965, he began to draw solid comparisons to the great Sandy Koufax after leading the American League in strikeouts twice and the major leagues three other times.

Although his walk totals were uncomfortably high, "Sudden Sam" earned a berth on the AL All-Star team during six of seven years from 1965 to 1971, a time in which he partnered with Sonny Siebert and Luis Tiant to form the nucleus of one of the league's better pitching rotations. Cleveland's fortunes, however, were thwarted by a relatively weak offense, a flaw common to many teams in that era.

All the while his career was taking root, McDowell recognized his alcoholic plight but erroneously took shelter through the study of sports psychology. He was incited to do well in the classroom from an early age because of his parents' edict: without straight A's, there would be no baseball for him, so he was hardly an uneducated specimen. (N.b. – His well-written narrative evinces few tinges of jock culture literature.) He later came to draw a distinction between sports psychology and coming to terms with mental illness as a separate issue, a point that became central to his understanding the scourge of addiction.

As McDowell's drunken escapades wrought more and more havoc, readers will be amazed to note his resiliency in trying to right his ship after yet another bar brawl or situation where some kind of intervention was necessary to deliver his oversized frame back to his hotel room or residence. The photograph on the book's cover, showing the southpaw about to unleash a pitch, his scowl and protruding chin more than subtle hints of the gravity of the moment, speaks to his demeanor on the mound, and one shudders imagining him in an alcohol-induced fury off the diamond.

By the time major-league teams had exhausted their patience with McDowell, the once-shining star segued into a career selling insurance – a most successful endeavor for him – but he could not abandon his bouts with drinking. Not until 1980 did his salvation arrive in the form of a stint at the Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pittsburgh, where he learned that "[t]here had been a chemical imbalance within me from birth that automatically altered my frontal lobe, thereby numbing or desensitizing the area of the brain affecting such thought processes and emotions as critical thinking, fear, logic, and judgment" (98). McDowell describes his vital association with Dr. Abraham Twerski, who ultimately set the former pitcher on the path to redemption.

"The narcissistic, self-centered Sam who walked the earth seeking approval and an escape from reality had been replaced [at Gateway]," he notes with not a little pride (104). Thanks to his new lease on life, there followed McDowell's plunge into starting his own business dedicated to saving others as he himself had just been saved. The story is told in a plain-spoken fashion, and readers will not get the impression that they are being patronized or lectured. It's doubtful that anyone would want to have traveled in McDowell's shoes in order to finally reach the success he enjoyed with his addiction-consulting company.

He paid a terrible price through much of his prime years of adulthood, which is also to say that his baseball stats could have been of Hall-of-Fame caliber had alcoholism not been a factor. The old saw about "all's well that ends well" comes up short in McDowell's case because a broken marriage, at least two brushes with near death, multiple arrests, and the pain he inflicted on himself and loved ones – to say nothing of the physical abuse he gave and received in fights – point to the ends not justifying the means. But this memoir delivered on the reviewer's high expectations despite its slenderness of a mere 163 pages. In fact, the last chapter is a denouement that seems almost quotidian compared to most of the book's revelations: Finding a new and lasting love with Eva, his second wife, together they embarked on kicking the unsavory habit of smoking, and McDowell is proud to report that they have been tobacco-free for over two decades.

## WRITING OPPORTUNITIES

### SABR Games Project

The SABR Baseball Games Project is a new initiative to research and write articles on major-league and Negro League regular, postseason and All-Star Games. These game accounts will complement Retrosheet and Baseball-Reference box scores as well as BioProject essays on the players involved. All games, regardless of their historical significance, are eligible to be written up.

Web-site: [sabr.org/gamesproject](http://sabr.org/gamesproject)

Things you should know: [sabr.org/content/sabr-games-project](http://sabr.org/content/sabr-games-project)

Request an assignment: Bruce Slutsky at [bruce@bruceslutsky.com](mailto:bruce@bruceslutsky.com)

# CT AMERICAN LEGION PLAYERS IN MLB (Compiled by George Pawlush)

Name	Post/Team	MLB Years Played
Brad Ausmus, c	Cheshire Post 92	1993-2010
Jeff Bagwell, 1b	Middletown Post 75	1991-2005
Matt Barnes, p	Bethel Post 100	2014-present
Ricky Bottalico, p	Newington Post 117	1994-2009
Darren Bragg, of	Oakville Post 195	1994-2004
Craig Breslow, p	Trumbull Post 141	2005-2006, 2008-2019
Rico Brogna, 1B	Oakville Post 195	1992, 1994-2001
John Canera, P	Naugatuck Post 17	1977-1978
Matt Carasitii, p	Berlin Post 68	2016, 2019
Scott Chiasson, p	Norwich Post 4	2002
Aaron Civale, p	Windsor Locks Post 36	2019-present
Rajai Davis, of	New London Post 9	2006-2019
Brian Dayett, of	Deep River Post 61	1983-1987
Pat Dean, p	Naugatuck Post 17	2016
Mark DeJohn, if	Middletown Post 75	1982
Bill Denehy, p	Middletown Post 75	1967-1968, 1971
Rob Dibble, p	Southington Post 72	1988-1995
Moe Drabowsky, p	Windsor Post 59	1956-1972
Angel Echevarria, of	Bridgeport Post 11	1996-2002
John Ellis, c	Niantic Post 128	1969-1981
Brook Fordyce, c	Niantic Post 128	1995-2004
Nick Greenwood, p	RCP Post 105	2014-2015
Mauro Gozzo, p	Berlin Post 68	1989-1994
Jason Grabowski, c	Westbook Post 103	2002
Adam Greenburg, of	Madison Post 79	2005, 2012
Jesse Hahn, p	Norwich Post 4	2014-2017, 2019-2021
Matt Harvey, p	Niantic Post 128	2012-2013, 2015-present
Paul Householder, of	North Haven Post 76	1980-1987
Joey Jay, p	Middletown Post 75	1953-1966
Brian Looney, p	Cheshire Post 92	1993, 1995
John McDonald, if	Niantic Post 128	1999-2014
Matt Merullo, c-dh	Fairfield/Trumbull Post 141	1989-1995
Moe Morhardt, 1b	Manchester Post 102	1961-1962
Charles Nagy, p	Fairfield, Post 143	1990-2003
Mike Olt, 3b	Branford, Post 83	2012, 2014-2015
Carl Pavano, p	Southington Post 72	1998-2012
AJ Pollack, of	Hebron	2012-present
Sal Romano, P	Southington Post 72	2017-2021
Bob Saverine, if	Stamford Post 3	1959, 1962-1977
Evan Scribner, p	Torrington Post 38	2011-2017
Troy Scribner, p	Torrington Post 38	2017-2018
Tom Shopay, of	Bristol Post 2	1967, 1969, 1971-1972, 1975-1977
Matt Sinatro, c	West Hartford Post 96	1981-1984, 1987-1992
Earl Snyder, 1b	Plainville Post 33	2002, 2004
Bobby Valentine, of	Stamford Post 3	1969, 1971-1979
Mo Vaughn, 1b	Norwalk Post 12	1991-2003
Fay Vincent	Hamden	Former Baseball Commissioner
Pete Walker, p	Niantic Post 128	1995-1996, 2000-2003, 2005-2006
Gary Waslewski, p	Berlin Post 68	1967-1972
Ron Wotus, ss	Colchester Post 54	1983-1984

## THE WOOD PILE

Newsletter of the Smoky Joe Wood Chapter  
of the Society for American Baseball Research

