

Comments from the Chair

Andy McCue

Riverside, CA

I have received the ultimate SABR collectible — a Bill James bobble head doll — along with the book *The Mind of Bill James*. The book is fairly interesting, basically a very long magazine profile of James by an admirer. The bobble head is fairly disappointing. It really doesn't look like Bill.

The best baseball book I've read so far this spring is Gene Carney's *Burying the Black Sox*, an account of how Charles Comiskey, Albert Austrian, and the powers that be tried to keep a lid on the fixing of the 1919 World Series. I've generally been slow to pick up baseball books this spring, but there appears to be a good crop.

Our committee's most pressing need right now is volunteers for The Baseball Index. This is the core project of our committee: a project virtually identical with our reason for existence, yet few of us actually work on the project. A volunteer's work on TBI can be tailored to their interests or current research. If we simply captured the material in the footnotes and bibliographies of books written by SABR members, we'd be making great strides. If you are a Pittsburgh Pirates fan, or writing a biography of Hooks Dauss, just adding the material you find as you go along would be great.

Our biggest need at the moment is for volunteers willing to sit down with runs of publications, such as *The Sporting News*, *Sports Illustrated*, or *Baseball Digest*. Please contact me if you are interested.

Skip McAfee suggested another worthwhile project.

One thing TBI does not do is tell you where to find holdings of certain periodicals. Now that TSN is available online, and SABR is teaming up with the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles and the Hall of Fame to digitize *Sporting Life*, more periodicals are becoming available to anyone with internet access. But others are much more elusive. In librarianese, Skip notes, what he's suggesting is called a "Union Catalog" and would simply list all libraries that hold copies, especially runs of copies, of baseball publications, whether it's *Baseball* magazine or *Baseball Digest* or even the *Collyer's Eye Publication* Gene Carney made such good use of in his book. If anyone is interested in pursuing this idea, please contact me. It would be useful to researchers looking to help their local libraries find something through inter-library loan, or just know what's within traveling distance. We have a number of librarians on the commit-

tee who could be a good source for telling you how to get going and where to look.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our committee meeting at the Seattle convention. I don't have the exact day or time yet, but I will post that to the list once I get it. Seattle looks to be our most popular convention since Boston, at least based on hotel reservations so far. Jim Bouton will be the banquet speaker, so bring your copies of *Ball Four*, *Ball Five*, *Ball Six*, *Ball Seven* and all his other books for autographs.



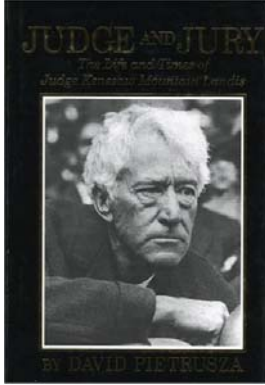
Book Reviews

Judge and Jury: The Life and Times of Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis. by David Pietrusza. Diamond Communications, 1998.

Rothstein: The Life, Times, and Murder of the Criminal Genius Who Fixed the 1919 World Series. by David Pietrusza Carroll & Graf, 2003.

Gambling and sports have always been intertwined, it seems. Reading Dewey and Acocello's biography of Hal Chase left me with the impression that in the first part of the 20th century, a culture of gambling existed that pervaded baseball. It seemed a good time to read David Pietrusza's monumental biography of Kenesaw Mountain Landis, espe-

cially since he followed it with an equally monumental biography of gambler Arnold Rothstein.



Pietrusza describes his Landis project as a medium sized one that turned into a very large one. We are very lucky he took all that trouble. He wants to discover the human being who lurks behind the stereotypes we hold about Landis. By the time the author is done, Landis may not seem too different from those stereotypes, but he definitely seems more human.

Pietrusza devotes a good deal of space to Landis's pre-commissioner career. The fining of Standard Oil has always been assumed to be a particularly bizarre example of the Judge's grandstanding. We have all read about his imposing of the \$29 million fine and the fact that his decision was subsequently reversed. His careful reconstruction of the trial and the appeal that resulted in the reversal certainly reveals Landis's fondness for the limelight, but it also shows the sources of his decision in his liberal trust-busting Republicanism and the sources of the reversal in large corporations' power to get such adverse judgments reversed.

When he deals with Landis as commissioner, the organization is somewhat different, topical rather than strictly chronological. The struggle that resulted in his appointment as commissioner, his confrontations with Babe Ruth, the scandals involving Cobb and Speaker and Jimmy O'Connell, gambling in general, his efforts to slow the growth of farm systems, and his attitudes toward race all receive separate chapters.

The portrait that emerges from all this is one of a superb public figure. Landis succeeded in establishing himself in the mind of the public as a figure of great authority. As Pietrusza puts it at the end of his introduction, Landis established the fundamental honesty of the game of baseball. By the end of the book, though, his success seems to have diminished some. Now his accomplishment is that he has carried out his bosses' instructions.

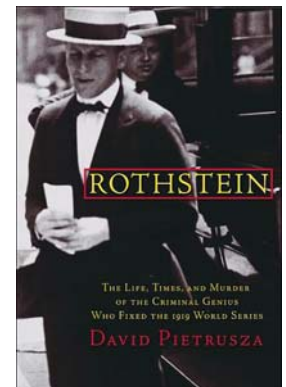
In humanizing Landis, Pietrusza has portrayed not a powerful leader but a devoted employee. He remarks in describing Landis's acceptance of the commissionership that this was the last time Landis would be concerned to have the approval of the owners. It would seem more appropriate to qualify that by saying "public approval." In private he had less authority. The author says at one point that his power over the owners mostly involved his threatening to walk away from the commissionership.

Pietrusza focuses on the Black Sox decisions as the most important and lasting of Landis's commissionership. He first cites Bill Veeck's conclusion that Landis did the bare minimum that was necessary to establish a public image of the game as honest. In banning the Black Sox, Pietrusza contends, Landis made his most important decision, taking professional baseball on a very different path than that followed by professional boxing. And in refusing to reinstate Buck Weaver, Landis established a moral code that set baseball on a higher plane than the rest of society.

Alas, rumors of game-fixing continued to surface, and players, managers, and owners continued to gamble, in spite of the fact Landis didn't want them to. All this suggests that a culture of gambling continued to exist within baseball at least for a while, though Pietrusza handles that possibility a bit differently than Dewey and Acocella do in their biography of Chase. Instead of seeing gambling a part of baseball, he suggests that events during World War I — particularly the closing of racetracks — resulted in a sudden increase in gamblers' interest in baseball, an increase that continued after racetracks reopened. Pietrusza's story suggests that the fixing of games, if not the gambling, died out during Landis's tenure.

As Pietrusza describes it, Landis had a hard time imposing his own vision of baseball on the game. He imagined a morally superior game — and he correctly praises him for this — played during the day by white players who were free to move from the minors to the majors according to their ability. All this was to change, in spite of Landis, both during his commissionership and directly thereafter. Club owners instituted night baseball, developed farm systems, and — after Landis's death — integrated the game. Pietrusza treats this, particularly the growth of the farm systems and integration, in satisfying detail. Branch Rickey appears particularly villainous in his role as developer of the farm system. And he details comprehensively Landis's encounters with race, emphasizing that major league owners were themselves almost unanimously opposed to integration, and that, consequently, Landis cannot be solely blamed for baseball's policy of segregation.

Then we have the biography of Rothstein, its very existence suggestive of the closeness of baseball and gambling. I found two dimensions of this book interesting for their relation to baseball in addition to the portraits of Rothstein himself and the New York underworld. Rothstein's involvement in the Black Sox scandal is the first, the second a scattering of baseball names who appear as denizens of the New York underworld.



The Black Sox scandal is given unusual prominence, even appearing in the book's subtitle as Rothstein's signature achievement. What Pietrusza presents in the section of the book is a full-scale revision of Eliot Asinof's version of the scandal as presented in his *Eight Men Out*. According to Pietrusza, Rothstein was the mastermind behind the whole operation, and one of the joys of the book lies in watching him read the evidence of this. He describes the scandal as "a labyrinth of fixes, double crosses, cover-ups, and a con so big, so audacious, it nearly ruined professional baseball."

Then there are the folk whose names keep popping up in association with Rothstein and gambling: Charles Stoneham, John McGraw, and Francis X. McQuade of the New York Giants, Emil Fuchs of the Boston Braves. In Chicago, Charles Weeghman is introduced as a confidant of gambler Monte Tennes. The index shows seventeen mentions of

Stoneham, sixteen of McGraw, six of McQuade, and five of Fuchs. This suggests that the world of professional baseball in New York City was in some ways connected with the New York underworld. The Chase biography focuses more directly on this, but Pietrusza also quotes this description of the Giants' ownership by McQuade's attorney: "All these men are of a type — all greedy, fighting men — and a rough element was in control of the club."

Pietrusza doesn't treat McGraw kindly in either book. McGraw and Rothstein appear to have been partners in a poolroom beginning in 1908. This reader wondered about McGraw's establishment, given that Pietrusza says of poolrooms that "originally the term 'poolroom' — and pool itself — referred to 'pools' of money placed on horse races and baseball games." Pietrusza portrays McGraw in *Judge and Jury* as a hapless loser as a gambler who even lost money at his own track but also counts him among Rothstein's more respectable acquaintances.

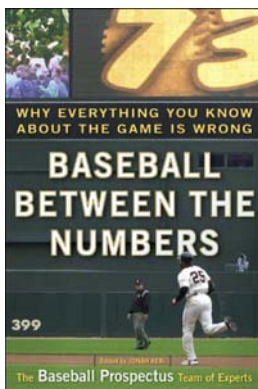
Leverett T. (Terry) Smith

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Baseball Between the Numbers

By the Writers of Baseball Prospectus
Basic Books, 2006



Baseball Between the Numbers is revisionist history for baseball statheads; its beauty and its worth lies in the myths it debunks. It wipes away those myths gently, slowly removing layers of dusty, conventional, commonplace ideas about baseball. Every time you think that you know where an article will lead, it changes direction and gives a little statistical surprise. That makes the book a lot of fun.

It could have been written with a Jim Rome, know-it-all, smackdown attitude that proclaimed, "I'll tell you why you're wrong." In fact, the subtitle — "Why everything you know about the game is wrong" — leads you to believe that it will do just that. In fact, that is just posturing, necessary bravado aimed at increasing sales. Once you get to reading, you see that the authors write as if they held the myths as dearly as we do. Even the most outrageous chapters, such as "Why Doesn't Billy Beane's Shit Work in the Playoffs," is careful, methodical, and revelatory. It's meant to take you by surprise, not to embarrass you. By treating the myths as their own, the authors make the readers feel that they are discovering something *with* the authors, and that we were all deceived together.

Take, for example, "What if Rickey Henderson Had Pete Incaviglia's Legs?" It takes aim at the platitude that

"you can't teach speed," which implies that speed is both valuable and irreplaceable. The writer starts by contrasting Henderson and Incaviglia, making it obvious that no two players' skills could have been less alike: Henderson constantly created offense with his blinding speed, and Incaviglia settled into slow trots around the base paths after long homeruns and slow walks back to the dugout after strikeouts. Next, he reduces Henderson's value on the base paths during his 130 steal season to a whopping two runs! Had he stopped there, the author would have made his point. But he finds increasingly illuminating significance in statistics about base running and its value to offense. Every time he reveals a new insight, you get the feeling that you don't mind having been deceived because it took some serious work to uncover the truth about Henderson's speed, and about speed in general.

Every chapter follows this pattern: here is what we baseball fans believe; now, let's scrutinize that idea with serious statistical analysis. That analysis always yields additional insights beyond what you expect: you start off reading about A-Rod's obscene salary and end up learning about revenue sharing, the value of luxury boxes, the wisdom of building new stadiums, the true value of playoff appearances, and the surprising fact that certain wins mean more financially to clubs than others.

Because of these never-ending revelations, the book is a delight. Some of the statistical methods may sound overwhelming, but the authors always explain them well and make them secondary to what the statistics mean.

Dr. John D. Eigenauer
Bakersfield, CA



Fantasyland: A Season on Baseball's Lunatic Fringe

By Sam Walker
Viking, 2006



Fantasy baseball was developed more than 20 years ago by a bunch of bored guys in the publishing field who decided they could do a better job of putting a winning team together than the jokers who actually do this sort of thing for a living.

The first group of intrepid souls, led by Daniel Okrent, named the invention "Rotisserie" baseball after the pub in which they used to meet. Since then, the concept has grown outrageously, both in variations on that first theme and number of participants.

What gives? Why would otherwise (relatively) sane people (mostly middle-aged white males), waste their time on this stuff? That's what Sam Walker, a writer for the *Wall Street Journal* seeks to discover in *Fantasyland: A Season on Baseball's Lunatic Fringe*.

I must say, as big as a fan of the game as I am, that I've never "gotten" fantasy baseball. The idea of agonizing over your real favorite players and/or ball clubs, when tangible outcomes actually count for something is tough enough. To work up the same sweat for an ersatz team just strikes me as a bit silly. I'm just saying. Obviously there are plenty of folks who think otherwise: A quick look on Google reveals more than 38 million mentions for search term "fantasy baseball."

These armchair general managers spend countless hours (and in some cases dollars) to choose their in hopes of beating similar hobbyists in hundreds, if not thousands, of leagues around the world. Some play for money, some merely for bragging rights. The idea isn't just to put together an all-star team, but a more realistic ensemble, including second stringers.

Walker picked a particularly hard-core brand of fantasy baseball called "Tout Wars," meant for the best of the best. To that end, he hired two assistants to help in his research and statistical analysis, bought numerous reference works, and traveled to spring training sites in both Florida and Arizona, in an effort to get the inside dope from players, managers, and front office personnel. He even hired a baseball astrologist to see how the stars aligned as he prepared to chosen his roster of players.

"Rotisserie baseball may be the most ridiculous duplication of effort in the history of human beings, but that's hardly a concern," Walker writes, as he gets dragged deeper into the unholy circle.

He presents the eleven other team owners in his Tout War league with a combination of respect and head-shaking. What would compel these educated, otherwise accomplished gents to occupy themselves with such a time-consuming, often-frustrating, and ultimately-futile hobby?

Walker also depicts the desperation involved in seeking edges over the competition, rooting for your players, railing against the real-life decisions managers make that affect your roster. One observation: The line between fantasy and reality blurs from time to time. For example, who do you root for when one of your top batters faces on of pitching aces? Or when two of your pitchers face off against each other?

You have to give him credit, though: he certainly dives into his subject, going through absurd lengths to find who would compliment his team the best, planning drafting strategies, and even psyching out his opponents by methods that are, let's just say, less that professional.

Walker claims to have spent thousands of dollars to research and select his players (his team finished eighth out of the twelve teams.) One would imagine the other owners are similarly passionate, but he fails to do is show the reader what makes these guys tick. *Why* do they go through such seemingly nutty lengths?

Overall, *Fantasyland* is full of fun and self-deprecation. But if he's not careful, one can easily see him as a character in another book, *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc.*,

J. Henry Waugh, Prop., the popular Robert Coover novel in which the protagonist loses grips with reality as the fantasy takes a firmer and firmer group on his life.

Ron Kaplan
Montclair, NJ

(This review first appeared on Bookreporter.com)



Baseball Briefs by Ron Kaplan

Michael Kun, co-author of *The Baseball Uncyclopedia: A Highly Opinionated, Myth-Busting Guide to the Great American Game*, makes a particularly astute observation about the state of baseball literature over the last few years. Go into a bookstore, he writes, and you will find more often than not:

Books about the Yankees.

Books about the Red Sox

Books about the Yankees *and* the Red Sox.

Books about players who played for the Yankees.

Books about players who played for the Red Sox.

Books about players who played for the Yankees *and* the Red Sox.

And, depending upon where you live, a book or two about your local team.

It's not much of an exaggeration. Following their first World's Championship in almost ninety years, more than a dozen titles acknowledging the Boston Red Sox's accomplishment hit the shelves.

Now that the novelty has finally worn off, the genre can get back to normal, with its usual assortment of heroes, villains, and eclectic themes. Herewith a sampling:

The Mind of Bill James: How a Complete Outsider Changed Baseball, by Scott Gray (Double-day)

He may not have won any home run crown or broken the color line or set any official policy, but Bill James is one of the most influential people in the history of the game. His witty analyses and unique way of looking at statistics have made him either a visionary or the devil incarnate, depending on whether you're

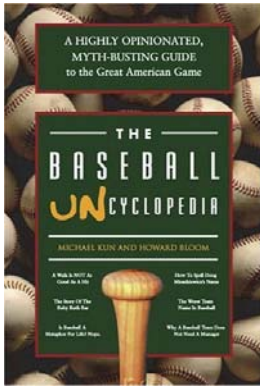
open to new ideas or a strict traditionalist. His theories fuel the fires of such institutions as the Boston Red Sox, who hired him as an advisor in 2002, and the Oakland Athletic, whose general manager, Billy Beane, incorporated James'



ideas into the now-famous strategy for putting a team together known as “Moneyball.”

Like many people of genius, James has his quirks. He was not especially thrilled with being the subject of a biography, but came to accept the idea. Gray intersperses observations *about* James with observations *from* James, taken from his now-famous *Baseball Abstract* annuals and other writings which skewered the “conventional wisdom” that had been in place for a century.

While Gray sometimes goes a little *too* far in offering examples of Jamesian baseball theory, which can cause the brain to numb, he opens the eyes of the heretofore uninitiated and widens the peepers of James’ fans even more.



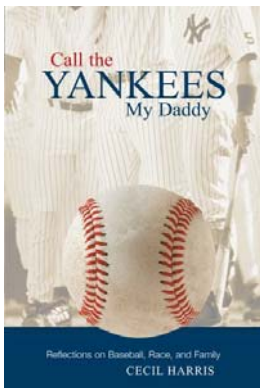
The Baseball Uncyclopedia: A Highly Opinionated, Myth-Busting Guide to the Great American Game, by Michael Kun and Howard Bloom (Emmis)

If Dave Barry and Andy Rooney ever collaborate on a book about the national pastime, it would probably be along the lines of *The Baseball Uncyclopedia*. The unusual writing team --- both attorneys with the same firm,

albeit from opposite coasts --- take turns commenting on sundry topics and personalities, all designed to dispel preconceived notions. And they’re serious about that myth-busting part. Each entry includes a disproof (“A Tie Does *Not* Go to the Runner”, “Baseball is *Not* a Metaphor for Life”), almost to a curmudgeonly extent..

Each entry bears the “signature” or the contributor, with Kun and Bloom arguing back and forth like a couple of school kids at times. For example, Bloom contends that “Cal Ripken was *Not* a Great Baseball Player.” “Howard Does *Not* Know What He is Talking About,” counters Kun.

Humor abounds, but is especially present at the bottom of the page, in copious footnotes. It’s a little labor-intensive, but well worth the effort.



Call the Yankees My Daddy: Reflections on Baseball, Race, and Family, by Cecil Harris (Lyons Press)

Contradicting the statement above, there are indeed several titles about the Yankees out this year. Most are overwhelmingly complimentary and nostalgic, calling to mind that fine lineage of Ruth, DiMaggio, Mantle and Jeter. That doesn’t mean, however, that they were perfect.

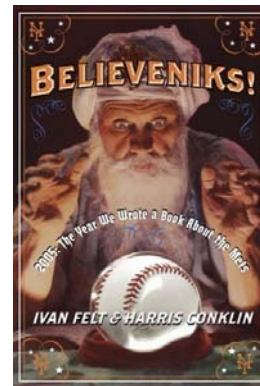
The Bronx Bombers were never known for their progressive thinking. They were among the last teams to break the color line, almost ten years after Jackie Robinson came on the scene. Manage-

ment’s position at the time was that they really didn’t care if their fan base included African Americans (though they expressed the sentiment in less politically correct terms.)

That’s what makes it all the more unusual for Harris, a black sportswriter for several New York and national publications, to pledge his allegiance to the (former) united team of white bread.

In 1995, almost forty years after Elston Howard donned Yankee pinstripes, Harris became the first black sportswriter assigned to cover the team on a full-time basis. But such distinction did not protect him from displays of racism that seem unbelievable in modern-day America. He writes of being stopped at the press gate by overzealous guards who were skeptical of his press credentials and pays homage to African-Americans who paved the way for his generation, much as Jackie Robinson did for black players a generation ago. His frustration carries over to the reluctance of Yankees owner George Steinbrenner to give him the time of day, although he states it was because he wrote for a small newspaper chain, not because of racial overtones.

Like all professionals, Harris’ fandom gave way to professionalism, a concept somewhat foreign to athletes, who chaff at every unkind word said or written about them. He notes several confrontations and has little patience for black players who expect better treatment because they share a common racial background, criticizing him for not being “black enough.” His excitement about the team’s good fortunes is tempered by the frustration of his job.



Believeniks!: 2005: The Year We Wrote a Book About the Mets, by Ivan Felt, Harris Conklin (Doubleday)

Ivan and Felt, two long-time Mets fans --- Conklin’s father was the team physician for the team when it debuted in 1962 --- collaborated on this back-and-forth exchange about the promise and disappointment of a team that frequently seems on the verge of accomplishment, only to run out

of steam or into a slew of injuries.

The book follows the same style as last year’s bestseller, *Faithful: Two Diehard Boston Red Sox Fans Chronicle the Historic 2004 Season*, by Red Sox fans Stephen King and Stewart O’Nan, a superior effort. (It’s hard to determine which fans --- Bostonians or New Yorkers (for either the Mets or Yankees)--- are the bigger complainers).

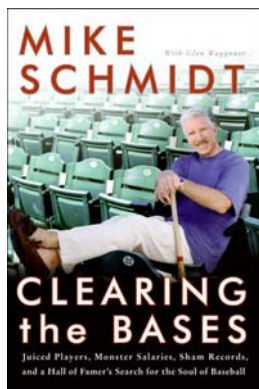
Note that the title of the book offers no clue about the fortunes of the team. Rather it merely heralds the fact that Felt and Harris published. The book art, which depicts a fortune-teller gazing into a baseball-themed crystal ball, seems similarly disconnected from reality.

Amid the observations, delivered in an almost stream-of-consciousness manner and which includes snatches of poetry and fictional ramblings about the Mets’ performance (and lack thereof), one of the more humorous exchanges deals with Felt’s disastrous attempt to fix a problem with his

cable TV reception (including a transcript of his conversation with the offending cable company).

When the Mets' season comes to an end at the hands of their perennial nemesis, the Atlanta Braves, one wishes the authors would pack it up, too, but they soldier on to the bitter end.

An "Encyclopedia Metsiana" offers catty remarks about a select group of past and present members of the team, with such contributions as "Cameron, Mike (2004-?): A major leaguer."



Clearing the Bases: Juiced Players, Monster Salaries, Sham Records, and a Hall of Famer's Search For The Soul Of Baseball, by Mike Schmidt with Glen Waggoner (Harper Collins)

The game has always been romanticized. With apologies to Shakespeare, *baseball* is the stuff dreams are made of. Summer evokes memories of childhood or at least leisurely times.

Just about every year, some retired player weighs in on the state of the sport, how things were better in his day and warning of dire times ahead if management and labor don't start behaving in a sane, responsible fashion.

Hall of Famer Mike Schmidt is the latest Cassandra. Schmidt, who played third base for the Philadelphia Phillies in 1970s and 80s, mixes past and present in this combination autobiography/baseball history/primer.

He recalls his humble beginnings and compares it with the status of players starting out today. He discusses the birth of free agency and wonders if current fan's have any team loyalty any more, what with players jumping from team to team. It's worth noting that Schmidt chose to play his entire career with one team rather than pursue much more lucrative contracts elsewhere.

Schmidt also weighs in on such hot button issues as drug use (which is a bigger transgression, I wonder: Imbibing in recreational drugs such as cocaine that do nothing to help the team, or steroids, which might enhance performance and thereby help win games?), home run records, and whether Pete Rose should be in enshrined in the Hall of Fame.

(This review first appeared on Bookreporter.com)



FEATURED LIBRARY: The Mears & Murdock Baseball Collections

The foundation of the baseball collection at the Cleveland Public Library is comprised of two outstanding, formerly private collections.

In 1944, the Library acquired the baseball collection of Cleveland advertising executive Charles W. Mears (1874-1942). Mears was a young contributing writer to the St. Louis *Sporting News* when he began a lifelong enthusiasm for baseball information and statistics. He amassed one of the largest baseball libraries in the country, and is recognized as the first baseball statistician. The Mears Collection contains the daily box scores for a period of approximately 40 years, as well as books on all phases of baseball. Included are long runs of annuals and periodicals (some dating from 1858), league constitutions, and baseball fiction.

In 1992, the Cleveland Public Library acquired the collection of Eugene C. Murdock (1921-1992), Ohio historian and professor at Marietta College. The Murdock Collection spans a later time period than the Mears Collection and includes minor league material, more biographies, annuals, and 50 scrapbooks covering the years 1910-1976. Oral history tapes of major league players recorded by Dr. Murdock are available for lending. Dr. Murdock authored several books and articles, including a biography of Ban Johnson.

For more information, contact the Cleveland Public Library, 325 Superior Avenue, N. E., Cleveland, Ohio (216) 623-2800 or visit cpl.org/cc-the-mears-murdock-baseball-collections.asp

KUDOS FOR BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE

From: Society for American Baseball Research
On Behalf Of R. J. Lesch
Sent: Saturday, April 15, 2006 6:53 PM
To: SABR-L@APPLE.EASE.LSOFT.COM
Subject: In Praise of Baseball Index

It has been a while since I've used the Bibliography Committee's Baseball Index website, www.baseballindex.org ... but I have to say it's pretty brilliant. I particularly like the feature by which I could email myself a PDF of my search results for later reference. Maybe this feature is old news to everyone else on SABR-L, but I was delighted by it, myself.

"Nice job!" to everyone involved!

R. J. Lesch, Adel IA