

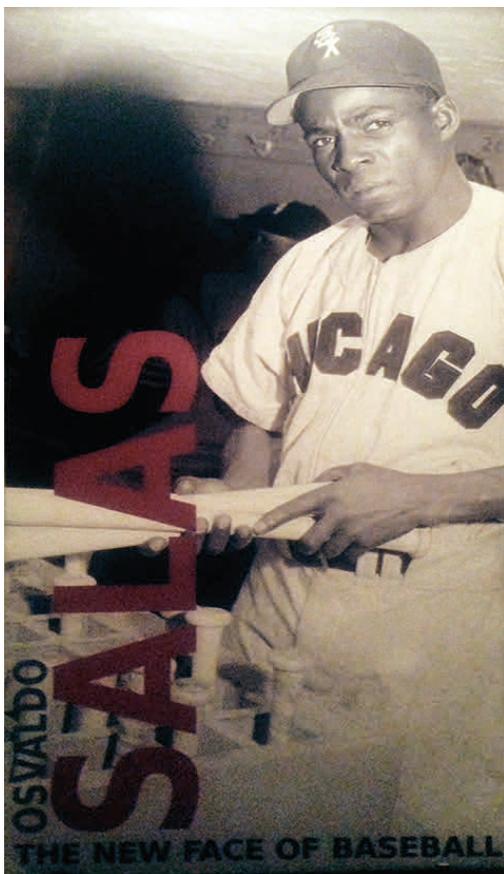
BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

1950s Latin players photo exhibit highlight of HOF

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
Posted Tuesday, July 29th, 2014*

COOPERSTOWN, NY — Memories and opinions of the sights, sounds and people of Hall of Fame weekend:

The Hall of Fame is very much worth the price of your admission, even if it needs a bit of freshening up.



An image of Minnie Minoso is the headliner to draw fans into a Hall of Fame photo exhibit of 1950s Latin players who helped break baseball's color line.



George Castle

Traditional exhibits are the bulwark of sports' most impactful repository of history. The collection of game-worn and-used items are special. They range from the resin bag employed by Ralph Branca as he served up Bobby Thomson's Shot Heard 'Round the World to the shoes Hall of Famer Billy Williams wore when he played in 1,117 consecutive games as a Cub.

Stan Musial, one of baseball's all-time good guys, was especially generous in donating his uniforms and other equipment. Overall, St. Louis' baseball community, from the Cardinals themselves to longtime flagship radio station KMOX, seem the most adept of anyone this side of Yankee Stadium in saving their history for themselves and the Hall of Fame.

Hank Aaron gets plenty of exhibit space, as he should. Given Barry Bonds' egotistical cutting of corners through use of PEDs, Aaron is still in every sane person's mind the all-time home-run champ. There's a good reason why Hammering Hank, now 80, got the biggest ovation from the 48,000 attending the Hall of Fame induction ceremonies.

Just about my favorite is the photo exhibit, on the third floor, of Latin and African-American pioneers. The old saying applies here: A picture is worth a thousand words.

Minnie Minoso, a man who should be a Hall of Famer, is the poster image for the exhibit, and another photo of Minnie with his bat in the Sox dugout is displayed prominently. So is a photo of three of Minoso's Cuban teammates in 1952, when the South Siders had a huge upsurge in the number of Cubans on the roster. A forgotten part of baseball history is documented here: some teams like the Senators and Pirates experienced their first significant taste of integration in the early and mid 1950s with black Hispanic players instead of African Americans.

The new Frank Thomas and Greg Maddux exhibits have their uniforms, MVP and Cy Young awards, and bats and gloves. Most significant in the Maddux profile is his 1991 Gold Glove Award with the Cubs – one of 18 he captured in his 355-win career. That's another example of how Tribune Co. viceroy Stan Cook, who screwed up the initial attempt to sign Maddux long-term for the Cubs days after that award was issued, ignored Mad Dog's sheer brilliance as it was hitting him in his patrician's face.

Meanwhile, Tony La Russa's cap is the only artifact from his Sox managerial days. La Russa's display contains uniform shirts from the Athletics and Cardinals.

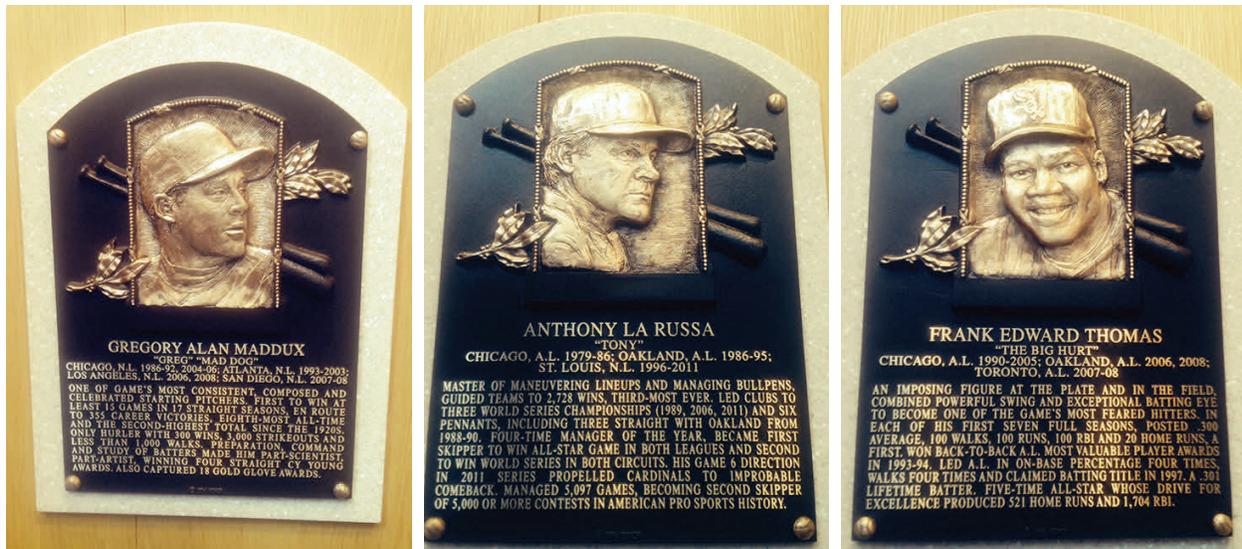
Nancy Faust, the greatest organist in Chicago baseball history, is recognized in the Women in Baseball section. Nancy's got a photo in the Hall since she was a virtuoso on the 35th and Shields' keyboard for four decades. But significantly absent in the same section was Margaret Donahue, baseball's pioneering female executive in a 39-year run with the Cubs starting in 1919. Donahue, who rose to the ranks of club secretary and vice president in the ultimate man's world, surely had as strong an impact on the running of a franchise as any of the other women recognized. There's certainly room for at least a Donahue photo.

"Yes, our curatorial team is very familiar with Margaret," said Hall spokesman Craig Muder. "Choices of whom to include in exhibits are always very difficult, and changes happen often over the years."

A Cubs display bears further research by the Hall of Fame. A uniform No. 24 and cap purportedly worn by 1930s Cubs ace Bill Lee was donated by his wife. However, the cap appears to be of post-1957 vintage, of the style worn today. The cap seems too new and not game-worn, as if Lee possessed it in retirement. The "C" on the cap seems to be out of time. We'll give the Hall a mulligan. With the sheer number of items donated, it might be hard without an army of researchers to absolutely verify the historical correctness of all.

"To the best of our knowledge, that is an accurate cap," said Muder. "But I've alerted the curators."

The induction weekend mobs held over to Monday included tons of wide-eyed kids. Yet the surest way to gain their attention in a speeded-up age are interactive exhibits of the type many baseball and football team museums possess.



The freshly-installed plaques of (from left) Greg Maddux, Tony La Russa and Frank Thomas at the Hall of Fame.

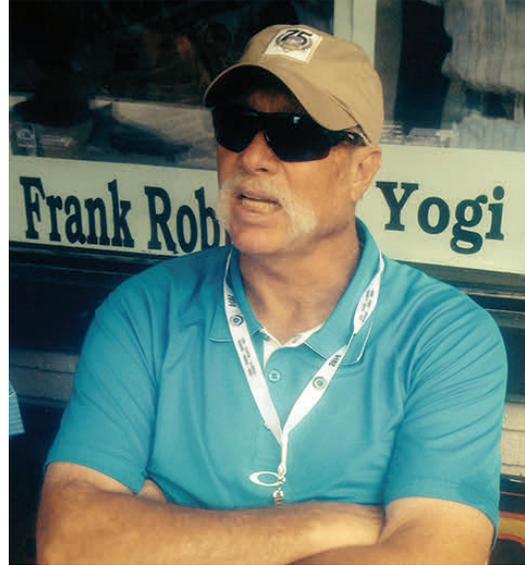
Kids (and their eternal-kid parents in many cases) would love to test their prowess against images of many of the enshrinees. At present, the Hall does not have a lot of interactive stops. One visual display was shut down with a sign explaining it was “on the DL.” Space and budget are always concerns, and almost every square foot of display space is claimed at present. Yet if the Hall wants to truly keep in step with the times, the number of interactive, technologically up-to-date exhibits ought to be boosted.

No room at the inn

If you visit the Hall of Fame with kids, the best timing is not around induction weekend. The line to gape at the plaques, including the six new inductees, was at least 45 minutes on Monday. So a weekday distant from the big weekend is best.

Staying and moving around town are other issues. This bucolic village is literally in a “Green Acres” setting – away from everything. The drive from the nearest major airport in Albany is about 90 minutes. No major chains have large hotel outlets around town. Finding quality accommodations is a challenge. The situation was exacerbated on induction weekend. The visiting crew and GM Phil Bedella of Comcast SportsNet Chicago, along with other media like The Score’s Bruce Levine, had to stay in Utica, some 40 miles to the northwest. Others had to literally commute from Albany.

Our Chicago Baseball Museum crew got lucky. We booked at a unique country inn a few miles outside town – The B & B Ranch www.bandbranch.com 607/547-5272. The place receives our heartiest recommendation for lodging for a Cooperstown vacation, but the inn itself can stand on its own as a destination. The rolling-hills scenery, horseback riding, spas and especially the home-cooked food make it a perfect getaway. The surroundings are so “country” that a rooster in the inn’s chicken coop could be heard crowing in two shifts from dawn through the late afternoon. Poor bird, though.



Amid the crowds, you could greet Hall of Famers signing autographs in front of stores on Main Street in Cooperstown. At left, Debbie Bumbalough of Nashville wears a No. 31 Greg Maddux Braves uniform as she meets Cubs Hall of Famer Fergie Jenkins, who also wore No. 31. Bumbalough's grandson is named "Maddux." At right, ex-Sox and Cubs Hall of Famer Goose Gossage still sports his trademark handlebar moustache.

One B & B hand said they planned for chicken soup later in the week, thinning the crowing herd. Vegetables in meals are harvested from the inn's gardens.

If you are driving from Albany, do not take the two interstates that jog west across New York state. These routes are too far out of your way. Simply take U.S. 20 west from the state capital. The road becomes a four-lane divided highway for part of the journey and is scenic, before it intersects with a state road 11 miles north of Cooperstown for the final leg into town.

Parking in downtown Cooperstown is a problem on a busy day. Trolleys ease the crowding, but the place is not set up for 21st Century traffic needs. Main Street reminds me of downtown Wisconsin Dells on steroids.

Woops... shouldn't mention "steroids" in connection with any Hall of Fame business.

Sox classy in bringing back Himes, Goldis to honor Thomas

You can come home again in Jerry Reinsdorf's world. In this case, the men who brought Frank Thomas to the White Sox were welcomed back in the fold here.

The tag-team duo of GM Larry Himes and scouting director Al Goldis, who drafted Thomas No. 1 in 1989, were front and center at a party for Thomas and Tony La Russa the Sox held near downtown the night before the inductions. Himes was fired by Reinsdorf in Sept. 1990, a month after Himes called up Thomas from Double-A for his Hall of Fame run. At the party, Reinsdorf warmly greeted Himes (later the Cubs GM when Maddux defected to the Braves) and Goldis.

Jermaine Dye and Aaron Rowand, two-third of the starting 2005 Sox outfield, were the most prominent players in attendance to honor Thomas. Rowand joked he has to keep his World Series ring in a safe to thwart his own absent-mindedness, like taking off the ring to wash his hands and then leaving it behind.

La Russa made a spectacular entrance later in the party after attending a Cardinals' fete in his honor. Recalling good days at old Comiskey Park, he led the assembled in two refrains of "Nah, nah, nah, nah, hey hey hey, good-bye." [View La Russa singing at Cooperstown >>](#)

Many of La Russa's old Sox comrades who went on to bigger and better things stopped by, such as GMs Dave Dombrowski of the Tigers and Walt Jocketty of the Reds.

Looking almost 10 years younger was La Russa's old Sox third-base coach, Jim Leyland, now sporting a goatee. Could Leyland, pushing 70, have curtailed his infamous smoking habit? Surely the stress of retiring from his Tigers managing job helps. Leyland divides his time between consulting Dombrowski and helping Major League Baseball fine-tune its new replay program.

Sox fans travel well

Braves fans in their navy blue and red colors dominated the surroundings over Hall of Fame weekend. But locals agreed Sox fans were a respectable No. 2 in turnout, showing up on induction day in all forms of Thomas and black team apparel.

The surprise was a relative paucity of Yankees regalia in honor of Joe Torre. New York fans literally could have just driven up for the day. Apparently, managers alone – even those with dynastic World Series rings – don't draw huge throngs to their enshrinement.

Perhaps they're saving their gas money for Mariano Rivera and Derek Jeter a half decade into the future.

Koufax lookin' good at 78

To show how time marches on and waits for nobody in baseball, the Hall of Famer introduced at the induction ceremony who had the oldest induction date was Sandy Koufax in 1972.

Koufax simply looks great at 78. Always a fine physical specimen, "Dandy Sandy" took pains to keep himself in top condition after he retired when his throbbing left arm simply couldn't take it anymore in 1966. He even lost weight to run races.

Sorry we failed here. The most prized interview for a baseball historian would be Koufax. He simply pitched in a higher league than the majors. Sorry, Mr. Maddux, you were one level below him. Koufax doesn't like mobs of people around him, but one on one I heard he's great. Unfortunately, unless you have a personal connection, the Hall of Famers are under tight guard in induction weekend.