

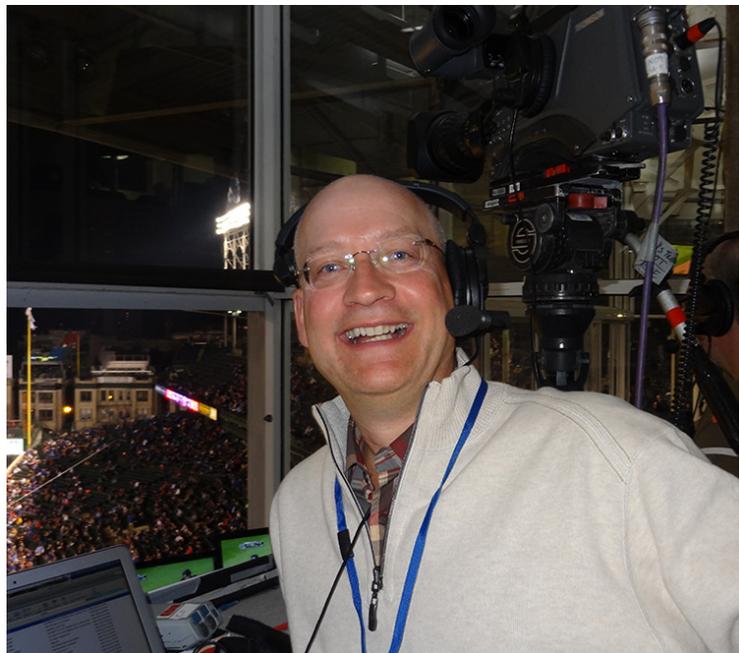


Personalities, as much as footage, carry WGN's special on Wrigley's 100 years

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
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Bob Vorwald did not lack for visual stimulation via both rarely seen WGN game highlights and vintage newsfilm footage to mark 100 years of Wrigley Field history on his station's two-hour special "Wrigley 100: A Century Celebration."

The show airs at 7 p.m. Sunday, April 20, and again at 4 p.m. Saturday, April 26 on both WGN in the Chicago area and WGN America. Station production chief Vorwald's labor of love – he wrote the entire shebang, conducted the new interviews and even shot a few when a camera operator wasn't available – makes use of the big stock of baseball tape WGN did save from the 1960s on. I personally liked



Bob Vorwald in the TV broadcast booth at Wrigley Field.

the newsreel footage that shows the personalities of the players and fans passing through Wrigley Field from the 1920s on. In this instance, black and white is good.

And that hits on the point which carries "Wrigley 100": the people. The human element gave the ballpark its legendary personality, be it Hall of Fame players, ne'er-do-wells in the bullpen, broadcasters and writers, and most of all, the fans who have suffered far more than they've triumphed.

Bravo for Vorwald that he got Andre Dawson high up in the stream of interviews. The Hall of Fame forced a Montreal Expos hat on The Hawk for his Cooperstown plaque. But Wrigley became Dawson's second home; without its emotional and physical embrace he

said he wouldn't have qualified for induction. Ditto for Jack Rosenberg's wisdom. Rosey saw it all, Cubs and Bears, as Jack Brickhouse's and Harry Caray's sports editor and guest booker, and later as marketer of the Cubs' expanded radio network in the 1980s.

Leave it to Rosey to sum up Wrigley as the master of language he is: "Wall to wall, like carpeting," he said of the cozy layout for the Bears.

Interesting comments from celebs

Ernie Banks is himself. Tom Ricketts said he never visited Wrigley Field until a class trip from Omaha as a high school senior, which makes you say, "Hmmm" about the Cubs' chairman's institutional memory and ability to know how to build a winner based on the flow of history in the ballpark.

Bill Veeck, builder of the present bleachers, scoreboard and the vines, said in a vintage interview a ballpark should smell like "freshly-cut grass," and Wrigley qualified. Joe Girardi recalled his father buying him Ron Santo's Pro's Pizza on trips to the ballpark – and we hope the future Yankees manager had more cheese and sauce than cardboard. And Don Kessinger admitted the all-daytime home schedule wore down the Cubs near season's end in his time. If only he had spoken up then – the likes of Richard Dozer of the Chicago Tribune and Jerome Holtzman of the Chicago Sun-Times likely would have written it.



Bob Vorwald interviews Ryne Sandberg in 2013 at Citizens Banks Ballpark in Philadelphia.

Great that Vorwald journeyed to Texas to talk to Greg Maddux, who perhaps enjoyed chucking those sinking fastballs at Wrigley Field with its high grass and often-pitcher-friendly winds more than any other pitcher. Maddux once said when the wind blew in, Wrigley Field played bigger than the spacious Astrodome.

Mike Ditka and Gale Sayers were must-gets for Vorwald. They did not disappoint. And the recollection of Bears chairman George McCaskey was appreciated. He seems a real chip off his colorful late father, Ed McCaskey, who fit right into Wrigley along with famous father-in-law George Halas.

Vorwald had help from editor Terry Bates and seven camera operators: Jim Tianis, Greg Gressle, Joe Pausback, Wyn Griffiths, Mike Clay, Steve Scheuer and Bob Albrecht, who also has produced Comcast SportsNet Cubs telecasts out of Wrigley.

Vorwald said he conducted a total of 73 interviews in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Dallas, St. Louis, Arizona and Virginia. Vorwald estimated he used 65 interviews. Production began in Jan. 2013.

The special could have gone to two parts if WGN had desired.

“Between the interviews and the hundreds of tapes, we could have made this show much, much longer,” said Vorwald. “But editing is important and hopefully we will leave you wanting a bit more.”

Cubs Hall of Famers lead the lineup of guests. They include Banks, Maddux, Billy Williams, Fergie Jenkins and Ryne Sandberg. Vintage chats of the late Ron Santo are used. Other prominent ex-Cubs were Kessinger, Girardi, Kerry Wood, Rick Sutcliffe, Keith Moreland, Lee Smith, Derrek Lee, George Altman, Ken Holtzman, Jose Cardenal, Jody Davis, Glenn Beckert and Mike Krukow. Vorwald had a very productive St. Louis trip to chat with Altman – a three-time All-Star who has never been invited to a Cubs Convention – and Holtzman, who hasn’t been back to Chicago much in the last 15 years.

Past interviews with deceased Cubs heroes like Andy Pakfo, Woody English and Don Cardwell were used.

Aaron, Schmidt recall power feats

Other Hall of Famers who played so well in Wrigley Field, such as Hank Aaron and Mike Schmidt, were taped. Both combined for nearly 110 homers as visitors at Clark and Addison. Incoming Hall of Fame manager Tony La Russa, who played one game as a Cub in 1973, waxed nostalgically, too. However, La Russa’s recollection of his pinch-running appearance that stood up as the winning run on Opening Day ended up on the cutting-room floor.



The quintessential Wrigley Field scene: Ernie Banks rounds third in 1964 on his home-run trot while being congratulated by coach Verlon Walker.

The lineup also included Sox icon Paul Konerko, all-time Cardinal Albert Pujols and ex-Reds hurler Tom Browning, who sneaked out of a 1993 game to appear on a Sheffield Avenue rooftop.

“I love the pitchers and outfielders talking about the wind and their thoughts on how best to play when it is blowing in vs. blowing out,” Vorwald said. “I basked in the universal appreciation for the history of the park and delighted in passing along some of that history to players when we were talking after the interviews.”

Ditka, Sayers and McCaskey were joined by ex-Bears players Ronnie Bull, Ed O’Bradovich and Bob Wetoska.

Surprisingly declining an interview was Mark Grace, one of the more popular Cubs of the past 25 years. Grace’s refusal came in the wake of his second DUI conviction that sent him to a work-release jail sentence in 2013 in Phoenix. He consented to an interview with the *Tribune’s* Paul Sullivan during spring training as he prepped for his role as a minor-league Diamondbacks hitting coach. But Vorwald likely asked Grace too close to his imprisonment last year.

Moody slugger Dave Kingman, a difficult interview in his day, also declined “multiple offers to participate” around his Lake Tahoe home, said Vorwald. Instead, the producer used a vintage filmed interview of Kingman in his first Cubs season in 1978, before he really turned sour against almost all Chicago media.

Some of the old stand-by classic WGN baseball tape seen many times before was used. Vorwald busted some legends floating around about stashed-away game highlights in WGN’s “attic.” Sorry to disappoint, he said, but he found no “hidden treasures” in the station vaults.

Well, not exactly. For decades WGN never aired the tape of the last few innings, plus some precious commercials starring Brickhouse and Lloyd Pettit, of Reds fireballer Jim Maloney’s Aug. 19, 1965 no-hitter at Wrigley Field. I saw it at a private collector’s home in the early 2000s, and he warned me it was not available for duplication. Finally WGN aired snippets of the amazing tape during rain delays starting around 2008. Perhaps because the Cubs lost this game 1-0 in 10 innings, Rosenberg never used it for the “Great Moments in Chicago Sports” filler series in the early 1970s.



Bob Vorwald uses vintage newsfilm from the prime Bears days of Mike Ditka. Photo credit [Korye Logan](#).

Game highlight reels from '70s boost video

Vorwald also employed some game highlight reels from the 1970s. These included two or three game highlights each, in no random order for the seasons. That's the origin of Cardenal and Rick Monday tackling Wrigley's deceptive walls (head-busting brick behind the pastoral ivy), and Kingman launching perhaps the longest homer in ballpark history, as a Met, four houses down on Kenmore Avenue in 1976.

The newsreel footage and other old black and white visuals are particular treats.

"I have a lot of WGN film clips from around the ballpark in the 1950s that don't get seen often, especially of a young Ernie Banks," Vorwald said. "I was able to negotiate for the use of some great home movies from 1929-34, including Babe Ruth's 'called shot.'"

The final piece of content is in cartoon form.

"Drew Litton (you can see his work in the *Trib* sports page) created some fantastic original drawings to introduce each segment," Vorwald said. "I've always been a fan of 'The Sting' and Drew came up with some beautiful cartoons for each segment in that fashion."

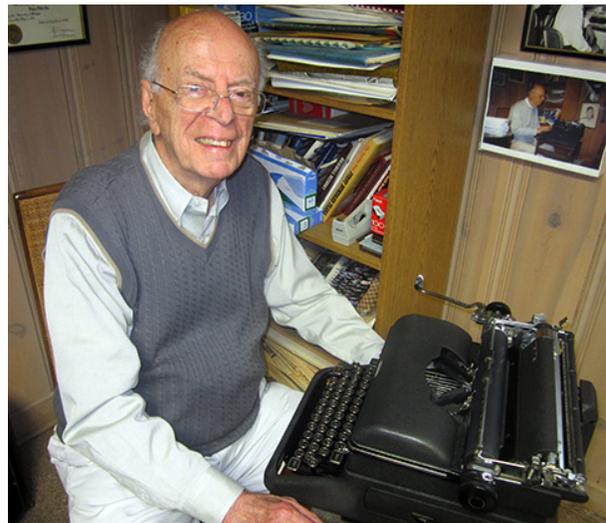
Producing and writing "Wrigley 100" was a herculean task.

"As far as writing the show, I messed with the outline/rundown for six months or so trying to find the best way to organize things," Vorwald said. "I didn't want this to be a history lesson – it's a birthday party. The people who have played and worked at Wrigley are every bit as important as the bricks and ivy in making the park special.

"I transcribed all the interviews right after doing them, noted the best stories and quotes and threw them into various folders for each segment, then actually wrote the scripts this fall. It's about 45 pages long."

Rosenberg is Vorwald's inspiration

The Rosenberg influence is heavy in "Wrigley 100." After all, Rosey produced the first WGN commemorative baseball special honoring the station's 30th anniversary of baseball telecasts in 1978. Vorwald was able to build upon that first effort in 2008, and then go on to "Wrigley 100."



Jack Rosenberg set up the model for Bob Vorwald's special in 1978 and also served as the producer's mentor at WGN.

“Jack Rosenberg is my mentor and gave me my start at WGN,” Vorwald said. “We meet for lunch at least once a month and I always pick his brain any time I am working on a project like this. John Owens of the *Tribune* did a wonderful show titled ‘The City’s Pastime’ a few years ago. He unearthed a lot of WGN film that had been stored at the Chicago History Museum and I was able to use lots of that footage.

“This is certainly the most involved project I’ve done at WGN. Terry and I put together ‘Cubs Forever’ in 2008 to celebrate 60 years of the Cubs on WGN. That show was two hours and was great fun – no narrator or track, just the subjects telling their stories.

“I’d say we are using three times as much historical footage in this show and he’s been great about putting up with me as I keep tweaking things looking for just the right shot to illustrate what we are talking about in a given segment.”

There’s a bittersweet angle about “Wrigley 100.” Vorwald’s greatest triumph might be the station’s last Cubs commemoration. The 67-season marriage between WGN and the team might be headed for a divorce. Ricketts wants a big bumpup in rights fees to match the TV windfalls in other big markets. Some WGN stalwarts are fatalistic about the future of baseball on the station after this season, when the contract with the team expires. The station has never had to pay real market-rate money, thanks to the Wrigley family philosophy of promoting the team via radio and TV, and the formal 28-year co-ownership with the Cubs under Tribune Co.

But worries about the mega-billions in the future can be put aside for two hours here. More innocent and happier times are thankfully celebrated in “Wrigley 100.”