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Jerome Holtzman, 82, 'Dean' of Sportswriters, Dies

By [BRUCE WEBER](#)

Jerome Holtzman, a homegrown Chicago sportswriter and columnist who wrote voluminously about baseball in general and Chicago baseball in particular, and whose mind and file cabinets were repositories of baseball history, died on Saturday in Evanston, Ill. He was 82.

The cause was a stroke, said his son, Jack Merrill.

With a signature cigar, suspenders and eyebrows as furry as Chia pets, Mr. Holtzman was an easily recognizable presence in press boxes around the country. He was a venerated one, too, known among many reporters as "the dean," not only because of his daily newspaper work in Chicago, first for The Daily Times, then The Sun-Times and finally The Tribune, but because he revered the sportswriting enterprise, acknowledging its skilled practitioners in "No Cheering in the Press Box" (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), a kind of oral history featuring the recollections of 18 of his colleagues.

For 30 baseball seasons, Mr. Holtzman was a columnist for The Sporting News, at one point appearing in 1,000 consecutive issues. He wrote the Encyclopedia Britannica entry on baseball, and for many years, he wrote the year-end summary of the baseball season for the Official Baseball Guide, an invaluable reference tool for writers and researchers.

In 1959, Mr. Holtzman, then covering the [Chicago Cubs](#), invented the statistic known as the save, which helps measure the effectiveness of relief pitchers. Mr. Holtzman's notion was that if a pitcher entered a game with a lead and had to face the potential tying run, and he then held the lead and finished the game, he should be credited with a save.

Mr. Holtzman introduced the save in The Sporting News; in 1969, it became the first new official statistic acknowledged by Major League Baseball since the run batted in, in 1920. The requirements for a save have since been modified, but it has become a staple of baseball broadcasts, barroom arguments and statistical reports.

Mr. Holtzman was elected to the writers' wing of the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1989.

"He had a career that spanned several generations of players," said Jim Gates, the chief librarian at the A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the Hall of Fame. "So he was able to make very valuable cross-comparisons. He used the pulpit he had to push for a statistic by which relievers could be compared, and where would we be without that stat?"

Jerome Holtzman (he had no middle name) was born in Chicago on July 12, 1926. His father died when he was 10, and his mother could not support the family, so he lived the rest of his childhood in an orphanage.

"I thought it was terrific," Mr. Holtzman told The New York Times in a 1990 interview. "The building was

about a half-block square, and there was a ball field beside it, and we had ice cream every Friday night. My wife, Marilyn, says there has to be something wrong with someone who likes an orphanage.”

At 17, direct from the orphanage, he went to work as a copy boy at The Daily Times (the precursor to The Sun-Times). He spent two years in the [Marines](#), and then returned to the paper, where he covered high school sports for 11 years. In 1957, he became a baseball writer for The Sun-Times and in 1981 became a columnist at The Chicago Tribune.

In addition to his son, Mr. Merrill, Mr. Holtzman is survived by his wife, whom he married in 1949: two daughters, Alice Barnett of San Jose, Calif., and Janet Holtzman of Wilmette, Ill.; and five grandchildren. One of Mr. Holtzman's daughters, Catherine, died in 1990; a second daughter, Arlene Disch, died earlier this year.

Mr. Holtzman's baseball library, some 4,000 volumes, along with his meticulously catalogued collection of documents, articles and other papers, was recently purchased for \$300,000 by the Chicago Baseball Museum, an institution, yet to be built, that will emphasize baseball scholarship.

“It might be the most significant private baseball collection in the world,” said David Fletcher, the museum president.

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