

BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

Book it, Brosnan was game's pioneering author of realism

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
Posted Tuesday, July 15th, 2014*

It's obvious if you write a good book, certainly one of the classics, its impact assures it will far outlive you.

Such was the fate of Jim Brosnan.

We have one less thinking man in baseball today. The bespectacled Cubs and White Sox pitcher-turned-author succumbed to the ravages of old age the other day at 84. That's also one less old timer to whom I can mosey across town to talk about our common business and love of baseball.

Whenever you met with Brosnan in the house he and wife Anne purchased for \$32,500 in 1957, his best year with the Cubs, the conversation and eyeballs inevitably turned to his seminal work, *The Long Season*. Brosnan had turned his daily journal into the first realistic chronicle of daily life in baseball back in 1959. All other realistic baseball books were an outgrowth of *The Long Season*.

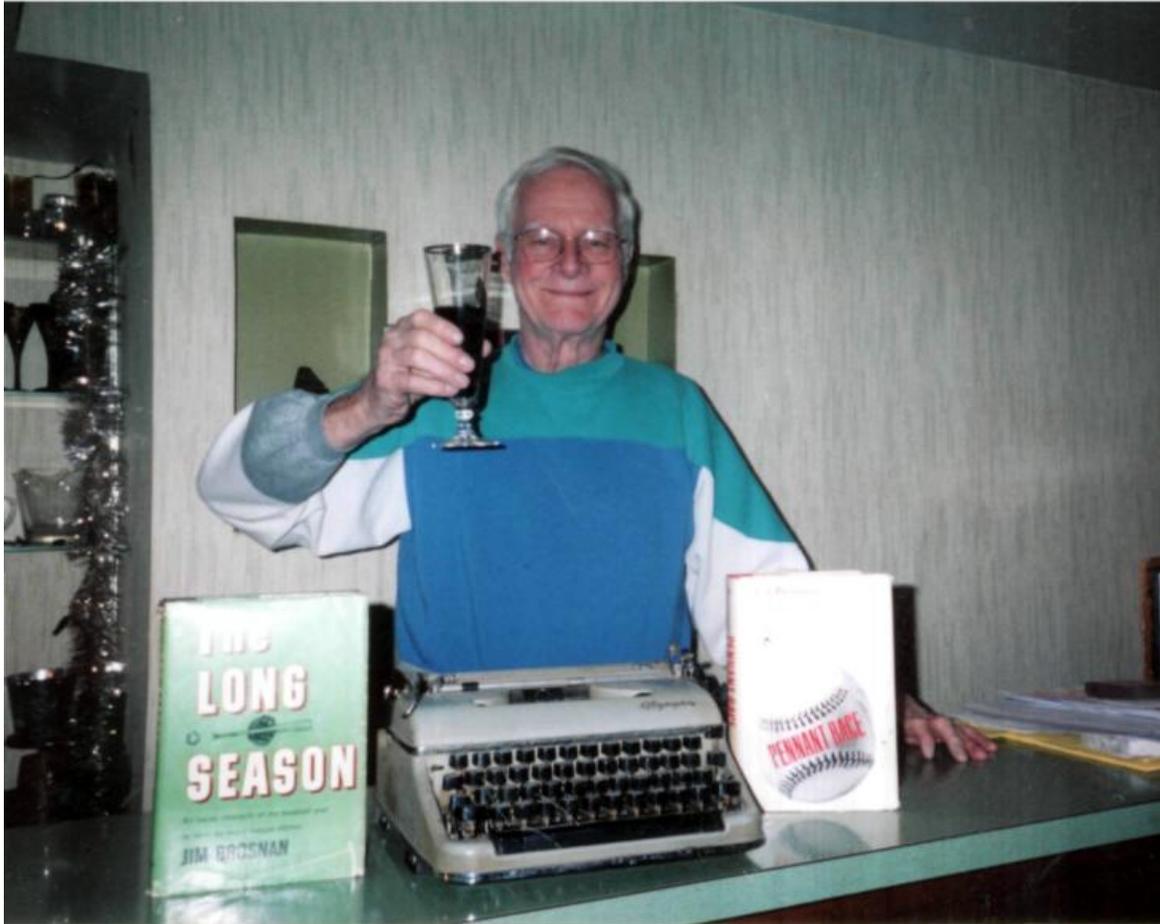


George Castle

Brosnan was no scandal-monger and chronicler of Baseball Babylon. But Brosnan went where no players had gone before in going into the clubhouse and on the field to show the ebb and flow of one season. Of course, at the other end of the spectrum was *Ball Four* by Jim Bouton with the prurient-interest antics of the Yankees. But *Ball Four* likely doesn't get written unless *The Long Season* was published a decade earlier.

"Bros," as we affectionately called the scribe, took some guff about *The Long Season* and successor book *Pennant Race* from Leonard Shecter, the *New York Post* "chipmunk" sportswriter who edited *Ball Four*. "He said I should have put eyeglasses on hotel rooms to see who's [having sex with] who," Brosnan recalled. "Why? 'Because that's the way they [ballplayers] are,' he said. I said, 'What the hell do you know?'"

"I did not put in foul language. There was never any doubt my books were written by me. It was a personal language. I never had any sense of cleaning things up. It never would have occurred to me, writing phrases with [the worst profanities]."



In 2004, Jim Brosnan raised a toast at his Morton Grove, Ill. home to his two landmark books, "The Long Season" (left) from 1960 and "Pennant Race" (right) from 1962. In between was the manual typewriter on which he composed the text for the books.

Bros' twin peaks were good enough for most book buyers without the most salacious content.

How much *The Long Season* had an impact on its readers received an accurate measurement at the Barnes & Noble bookstore in Schaumburg, Ill. on a summer Saturday afternoon in 2005. The rise of e-books and death of competing book chain Borders were years into the future. Three-dimensional books were still dominant, so any enterprising author scheduled a book signing during the supposed peak of heavy store foot traffic, such as daytime on a weekend.

Fans still have top books after 45 years

Brosnan was kind enough to sit still for his own profile chapter among some 40 ex-players and managers in my *Where Have All Our Cubs Gone?* book that had just come out. He knew what it took to sell copies. So when I asked Brosnan if he'd join me for the signing, he gladly agreed, as his Morton Grove homestead, three miles west of mine, was on the way to the bookstore.



His only first-place season with the 1961 Cincinnati Reds provided Jim Brosnan with grist for "Pennant Race."

We had a nice turnout, but at least three fans came with original copies of *The Long Season* and *Pennant Race* for Bros to sign. They had not forgotten him, and were appreciative of his appearance. Overall, I had some good promotion for the book, including appearing for a half-inning in the booth with Len Kasper and Bob Brenly during a Comcast SportsNet Chicago telecast out of Wrigley Field. In 2005, a far different era featured Cubs officials with institutional memory going back at least to the early 1980s welcoming a media person doing multiple gigs, including books, at Clark and Addison. But nothing else was more fun than the original legit baseball author sitting by my side at Barnes & Noble.

I had written several Cubs-oriented books with an even harder edge than the expose-history parts of *Where Have All Our Cubs Gone?* *The Million To One Team* in 2000 was most notable of this group. But two Chicago-area scribes could have far outdone me if they had used their talents and access to expose why the Cubs have continually gone off the rails. One was Mike Royko. The other was Bros.

Royko's "serious" book was *Boss*, a 1971 profile of the autocratic rule of Mayor Richard J. Daley. Perhaps the greatest city-side columnist in journalism history, Royko wrote a poignant column about attending Jackie Robinson's first game in Wrigley Field in 1947 upon Robinson's death 25 years later. His last column prior to his 1997 death blamed the Cubs' supposed slow moves to integrate in the 1950s for their failures.

He was only half-right citing the race issue, but a decade or so off with regression in attitudes as GM John Holland grew older and stodgier. The Cubs actually were the second team, after the Brooklyn Dodgers, ever to field five African-Americans in the lineup a few days into the 1956 season. The franchise was grossly mismanaged top to bottom from owner Phil Wrigley's office. Royko could have brought down the Wrigley regime if he had trained all his journalistic guns on the team. But mostly he played the Cubs



After liking his books, Howard Cosell gave Jim Brosnan a start in broadcasting via commentaries on the ABC Radio Network.

for laughs, including the fable in his team trivia columns about the pitcher from Morton Grove who was injured and thus had to leave a game when his jersey got caught in his zipper.

Ah, who needs the truth when it gets in the way of a good story?

“I had some worn-down spikes that caught on the rubber,” Brosnan said. “Royko knew the real story, but the zipper made for a better story.”

Bros could have beaten Royko on a searing Cubs expose. He was triple-armed. He was a talented writer. He knew business, and Wrigley’s side of it, from the inside-out working on audience research projects in the off-seasons for Arthur Meyerhoff, Wrigley’s ad man. Best of all, he was a ballplayer. Maybe he wore specs and smoked a pipe, earning the nickname “Professor.” But Bros knew all about jocks and rocks and Sox, and could cuss and use baseball lingo with the best of ‘em.

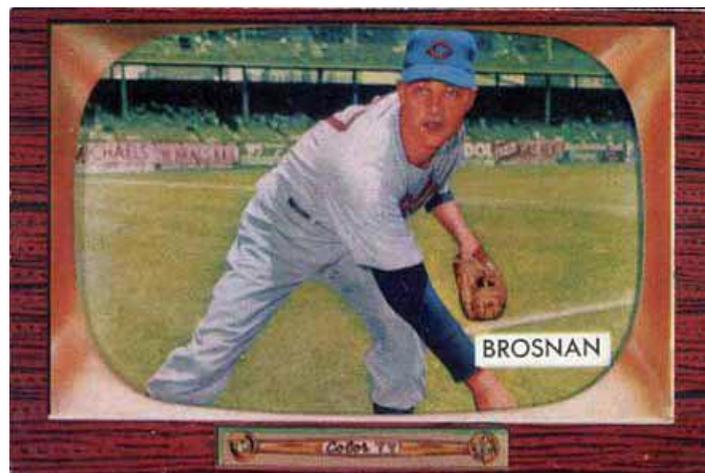
He would have asked Wrigley the right questions

After his success with *The Long Season* and *Pennant Race*, Meyerhoff recommended Brosnan do a biography of Wrigley. Somehow the project never reached fruition.

“I would have been able to find out how much he knew about baseball,” he said of Wrigley. “I would have found out whether he cared one way or another about the game. As a former Cub, I would have asked him key questions.”

At least Brosnan benefited from one of Wrigley’s eccentricities. Promoted to the starting rotation by manager Bob Scheffing early in the 1958 season, Bros’ salary was bumped up to \$15,000. Bros recalled Wrigley set a salary scale of at least \$15,000 for all starting pitchers. When Bros was traded to the Cardinals later in the spring of ’58, St. Louis GM Bing Devine was shocked to discover his pay grade. Bros didn’t last long in St. Louis, moving on to the Reds and his native Cincinnati early in the 1959 season. Good for him; he served as the top reliever on the 1961 Reds pennant team and amassed the grist for Pennant Race.

Too bad Brosnan did not have a longer broadcast career. The industry could have used his erudite analysis and depth of thinking amid a world of superficiality. Initially, Brosnan was able to leverage his authorship into radio and TV less than a year after he retired from the Sox in Sept. 1963. Admiring his books, Howard Cosell got Brosnan to author some sports commentaries on the ABC Radio Network. That exposure led Tom



Jim Brosnan as a mid-1950s Cub may have been portrayed on a color-like TV, but Brosnan was in glorious black and white as a WBKB-TV sportscaster in 1965.

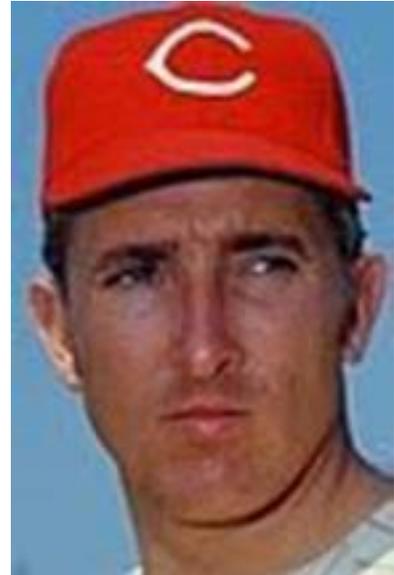
Miller, GM of ABC-owned WBKB-TV (now WLS-TV) to offer Brosnan the nightly sports anchor job. He was paid \$45,000 going into 1965, \$12,000 more than his top baseball pay. Brosnan worked on the same newscasts as anchors Frank Reynolds and Joe Templeton, who both moved on to greater news roles at the ABC-TV network.

Brosnan did not last that long on WBKB, which suffered from poor ratings. By 1966 he was replaced by Bill Frink. He did have a memorable moment at Wrigley Field, though.

On Aug. 19, 1965, Bros and his film crew raced to the ballpark to interview Jim Maloney, his '61 Reds teammate, when he pitched a 10-inning, 10-walk no-hitter against the Cubs. Since the no-no was in the first game of a doubleheader on a Thursday, the WBKB folks had enough time to get back to their studios at 190 N. State to process the film for airing on the early-evening news. After Maloney did a simulcast WGN TV and Radio interview with Lloyd Pettit and Lou Boudreau near the mound moments following the final out, Brosnan asked for an interview. To show the modest money standards in baseball back in the day, Maloney requested \$25 for his time. Bros talked him out of the money grab and got the interview.

Brosnan may not have been as successful with every interview subject. But he found a craft he loved, albeit one with modest pay. But few writers work for the big payoff. It's more like the baseball system in which Bros grew up. You simply do something you love.

That's why Bros unfortunately is gone, but his authorship will stand the test of time going forward.



After his 1965 no-hitter against the Cubs, Jim Maloney wanted \$25 from Jim Brosnan to do a TV interview, but then relented for his old Reds teammate.