

# BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

## *Newsreel fest proves baseball history sells*

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
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Teshh-ion pleese (with credit to Pat Pieper): Major League Baseball, individual teams in Chicago and elsewhere, sports-talk radio stations and print and on-line outlets.

Here's the correct lineup for today: Visual baseball nostalgia sells.

That's the conclusion drawn from a pleasant Friday night at the Block Museum's Pick-Laudati Auditorium on Northwestern University's Evanston campus. Dave Filipi, director of film/video at the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, made his annual pilgrimage to show vintage baseball newsreel footage, highlighted by rare films related to the 1919 Black Sox World Series.

Block Museum advised fans to come early to the free program to claim a seat. That counsel was heeded for the 7:30 p.m. start time. By the time Filipi screened the first clip — a 1933 spring training montage that had Cubs manager Charlie Grimm giving a short, low-octane pep talk to his defending NL champs — only a handful of scattered single seats remained.

The audience was packed with fans like Evanston's Ed Zulkey, who grew up within walking distance of old Comiskey Park in Bridgeport. Zulkey insists you could show him a 1959 Sox schedule and he can tell you from memory whether the South Siders won or lost each game.

We've written and broadcast for 25 years about how relatively little care has been taken of baseball's video, film and audio history, especially from the 1960s through the 1980s. Too many recordings are lost, stolen or strayed. Concurrently, too many media manag-



**Dave Filipi (right) at Northwestern's Block Museum auditorium just before he introduced his annual baseball newsreel program.**

ers and ballclub officials don't believe they can make money, gain ratings and attendance, and preserve the most treasured historical line in all sports with even a modest program segment or small amount of space devoted to nostalgia.

Fortunately, a resolute group of people like Filipi care. That's why on the side from his main job analyzing and teaching about the film industry in general in Buckeye Central, he has tapped into the UCLA Film and Television Archives, home of some 220,000 film and video clips, to cull mostly Hearst Metrotone newsreel footage for his annual traveling show that stops at Northwestern.

### **Best material seen on 'wild footage'**

"It's not just finished, edited newsreels," Filipi said. "Sometimes it's unedited. It's like wild footage. Some cases I have no idea whether it ended up in a finished newsreel or not. That sometimes is the most interesting footage."

The edited newsreels are catalogued at UCLA. In contrast, Filipi found the Hall of Fame, where he drew footage for eight years, was "much more of a grab bag...it could be TV commercials, documentaries and home movies." Still, wayward baseball footage shot by fans tends to end up in Cooperstown rather than Westwood.

Filipi switched to UCLA as his source of footage three years ago. The clips span the years from right after World War I to the end of the 1960s, when newsreel companies finally closed their doors amid increasing film coverage from TV networks and local stations.

He presented the ultimate bonus clip, originally shot by the British Canadian News Pathe company, of the 1919 World Series. The long-lost footage, found buried in of all places in Dawson City in the Yukon, gained a ton of publicity when Filipi put it on his tour.

Scheduled near the end as a kind of climactic presentation, the 4½-minute segment showed only a smattering of the apparently tainted game action. The most interesting shots were Redland Field shown from a plane by Pathe's "aero-camera" and a crowd gathered in New York to follow the World Series by a



**The 1919 White Sox. A long-lost British Canadian Pathe newsreel showed little revealing 1919 World Series on-field action; its off-the-field images were far more interesting.**

manual board with pegs for baserunners, a common way for big-city fans to monitor the game long-distance in these pre-radio days. Action would be flashed to board operators by telegraph, and they would adjust the pegs and other information accordingly almost in the same manner as Wrigley Field's hand-operated scoreboard crew does today.

Other clips of particular interest to Sox fans included films of Bill Veeck buying controlling interest in the team for the first time in 1959. Veeck is quoted as hoping minority owner Chuck Comiskey joins his group. That never happened, and the last of the Comiskey family ownership was pushed out for good two years later. Footage of the Sox pennant clincher in Cleveland on Sept. 22, 1959 (the Chicago Baseball Museum has the audio of Jack Brickhouse's WGN-TV call) was shown immediately afterward. That season's theme continued with World Series footage from the Los Angeles Coliseum and shots of the white-shirted record crowds of more than 90,000.

### **Hartnett takes his bows**

In addition to the leadoff Grimm shot, Cubs fans could time trip to their heroes downtown Chicago victory parade a few days after Gabby Hartnett slugged his "Homer in the Gloamin'" that helped clinch the pennant in 1938. Catcher-manager Hartnett is shown waving to the multitudes sitting atop the back seat of a convertible while expensive part-time pitcher Dizzy Dean also waves to the fans from another car.

Overall, the audience knew its subject matter, with laughs at appropriate times for the light side of baseball or hokey staged scenes for the newsreel shooters. I believe the likes of Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts, who lives a short drive away from Northwestern, would have loved the presentation.



**Gabby Hartnett (right) as a Cubs mainstay. Fans were entertained by 1938 images of Hartnett accepting accolades as manager and hero of the "Homer in the Gloamin'" in the Cubs' downtown Chicago victory parade.**

The assembled witnessed just the tip of the iceberg in visual and audio Chicago baseball history still in existence. One of the tasks of the Chicago Baseball Museum going forward is locating and organizing literally hundreds of hours of footage beyond that which already exists in the museum's possession.

We know WGN has extensive Cubs video highlights going back to the late 1960s with a few clips from earlier in that decade. The Sox's Jeff Szynal shows Fox-32 and WSNS Sox clips dating back to around 1972 on the U.S. Cellular Field scoreboard at appropriate moments. It's fun to watch the movie-star handsome young Bill Melton and Dick Allen's gargantuan homers.

The big challenge will be to identify and organize massive amounts of baseball film shot by Chicago's network-owned-and-operated stations – WBBM, WMAQ and WLS – in the 1960s and 1970s. That was a period when WGN forbade its competitors from using its game videotape on the 6 and 10 p.m. news as a spur for viewers to tune in Channel 9's lower-rated 10 p.m. show. Longtime radio raconteur Chet Coppock recently recalled the 1981 day when WGN sports editor Jack Rosenberg gave WMAQ, then Coppock's employer, the OK to use WGN tape.

Before that date, the stations set up at Wrigley Field, shot the game and had motorcycle couriers race the unprocessed film downtown for development and editing, in time for the early-evening news. That's one major reason the Cubs established the publicity high ground in a two-team market where one franchise played all its home games in the deadline-friendly daytime. We've heard much of the stations' newsfilm archives, including the baseball highlights, were long ago transferred to the Chicago History Museum.

We're lucky in Chicago with all the video clips known to survive along with TV-station film footage and home movies obviously stored away, waiting for retrieval, editing and display. The Cubs and Sox televised the majority of their games at a time when much of baseball adhered to the long-discredited philosophy of blacking out home telecasts to protect the gate. So there's almost a black hole in the visual record of much of baseball from the decline of newsreel companies to the advent of widespread cable hookups and regional sports networks around 1990. Many games simply weren't televised and scant film exists otherwise unless a local station or fan filmed the game.

With many games starting at 8 p.m. local time, TV stations simply did not send out crews to film games if they could not get the footage on the 11 p.m. news on the East and West coasts, let alone at 10 p.m. in the Central time zone.

### **Koufax perfecto filming stopped**

The most prominent individual achievement lost to history is Sandy Koufax's perfect game against the Cubs on Thursday, Sept. 9, 1965 in Los Angeles. WGN had televised a weeknight game out of Dodger Stadium two years previously, but there were no TV cameras in use on this night. Interestingly, Dodgers trainer Bill Buhler set up his own film camera behind home plate and began recording Koufax's excellence. But some stadium official didn't like the camera placement, and chased Buhler by the third inning. That fella ought to have worked as a bean counter at a TV station.

Filipi doesn't have time to scour attics or any other out-of-the-way places where old footage might have been stashed. But consider how a fan's home movie of Babe Ruth's "called shot" surfaced 62 years later in 1994 to re-open the "did he or didn't he?" debate. Or how the videotape of Mickey Mantle's 500<sup>th</sup> homer in 1967 had been taken

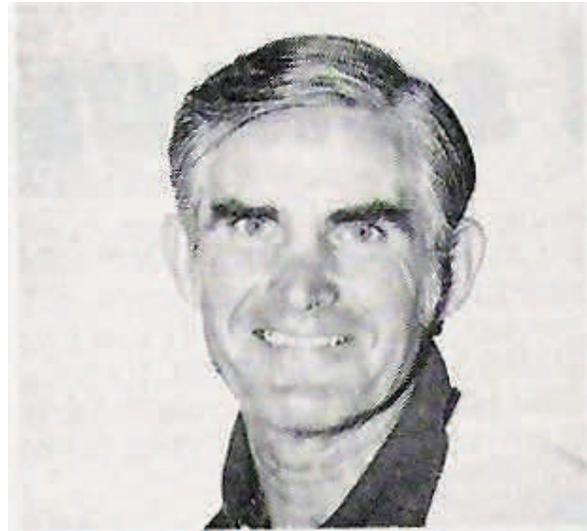
home and placed in a closet by a WPIX-TV technician, then was dug out 25 years into the future. An important effort going forward, endorsed by Filipi and the Chicago Baseball Museum, is to encourage anyone who knows of baseball home movies or video having been shot to look first before old stuff is trashed.

Some years ago, Cubs announcer Pat Hughes had some old tape cassettes of his Brewers radio work in the mid-1980s. He didn't know what to do with them. I told Hughes that I didn't have a specific use for them either, but it would be a crime to toss them. Hughes gave them to me. I still have them. They're not going anywhere.

In a couple of weeks, we'll have the most extensive tribute ever compiled to all-time Chicago broadcaster Jack Brickhouse on the Chicago Baseball Museum's web site. Brickhouse was one of the top advocates of the work of the WGN sports staff. When the station moved from Tribune Tower to its "Mid-America Broadcast Center" two miles west of Wrigley Field in 1961, a number of recordings of WGN programming were tossed. When Brickhouse found out, he told colleagues he hoped the bean counter who ordered the trashing "burns in hell."

I won't go to that extreme wishing bad on someone who doesn't appreciate recorded baseball history. Much more recently, a colleague in the radio business said he had been ordered by his station boss not to put on nostalgic highlights or otherwise old-time baseball subjects or guests on his show. Obviously, the honcho craved every ear of the young demographic at the expense of a mass of older listeners.

The counter-argument is the packed house at Northwestern to see black and white images of 20<sup>th</sup> century baseball. History sells in the game. Why else does almost every Hall of Fame vote result in controversy like no other sports enshrinement? People care. Put visual and audio history before them, and you've captured their eyes and ears.



**Bill Buhler began filming Sandy Koufax's perfect game against the Cubs, but was stopped by a Dodger Stadium official after just two innings.**