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Buck Weaver's family pushes to get 'Black Sox' player reinstated



Chicago White Sox player Buck Weaver was banned from baseball 94 years ago, after being accused of throwing the 1919 World Series. Now his 88-year-old niece, Pat Anderson, is appealing for his reinstatement as soon as possible. Weaver raised Anderson on Chicago's South Side. (John Owens, Chicago Tribune)

*By John Owens, Chicago Tribune
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For almost 30 years, Patricia Anderson has lived in this scenic, rural Missouri town about 100 miles southwest of St. Louis.

But in her living room, she is surrounded by images of her youth on the South Side of Chicago, where she was raised by her uncle — former White Sox third baseman George "Buck" Weaver.

Weaver is in almost all of the photos, often appearing with celebrities. One picture features Weaver with Babe Ruth and silent-film swashbuckler Douglas Fairbanks. Another

is of Weaver with film star Buck Jones. And there are photos of Buck with his family, including one of an older Weaver with his wife, Helen, and others at Anderson's wedding in Chicago in 1948.

"Living with Buck, it was a wonderful way to grow up," Anderson said. "He was my idol."



Patricia Anderson, the niece of Chicago White Sox third baseman Buck Weaver, holds up a photo of her uncle as she sits in her home in Kimberling City, Mo. on May 17, 2015. Anderson is asking for Major League Baseball to reinstate Weaver, one of the eight White Sox players who was banned from the majors in the "Black Sox" scandal, where eight Sox players were accused of fixing the 1919 World Series.

[Watch an interview with Patricia Anderson on YouTube...](#)

Now 88 and housebound, Anderson thinks about her uncle often these days, especially when it involves his controversial baseball career. And she is on a crusade to save his reputation.

This spring, Anderson and her family launched their latest attempt to clear the name of Weaver, one of the eight "Black Sox" accused of accepting money from gamblers to throw the 1919 World Series between the White Sox and Reds. He was banned from organized baseball in 1921 by then-Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis.

In March, the family, working with Chicago Baseball Museum founder David Fletcher, sent an official request to Commissioner Rob Manfred, urging him to consider Weaver's reinstatement because the player had "been denied justice for far too long" and because "it's the right thing to do."

Weaver's descendants believe this is the right time to make their latest appeal because Manfred's office currently is reviewing a request to reinstate Pete Rose, the all-time major-league hits leader who was banned from baseball in 1989 after being accused of betting on major-league games.

"Pete Rose was a great player and we understand why baseball's is considering his reinstatement," said Sharon Anderson, Patrica's daughter who lives in west suburban Wayne. "But our family can't give up on Buck."

The family wants Weaver reinstated while Patricia Anderson is still around to celebrate for the man who raised her as a surrogate daughter.

"I know I'm pretty old, so I hope he can be reinstated while I'm still alive." Anderson said. "That way, I can let him know up there that's he's back in."

Baseball officials say Manfred's office received the most recent request for Weaver's reinstatement. But they couldn't say if Manfred will follow up with an official review of the request, like he is doing for Rose.



Black Sox footage emerges, documented after decades

"We are continuing to study the issues that (Weaver's descendants) have raised in order to send a response (to the family request for a reinstatement review)," MLB spokesman Michael Teevan wrote the Tribune in an email.

Almost from the time he was banned from the game, Weaver's supporters have been trying to get him back in, saying he was unfairly punished because he was not involved in the fix. Weaver appealed unsuccessfully six times to Landis and his successors, Happy Chandler and Ford Frick, before dying in 1956.

And Anderson, her daughters Sharon Anderson and Sandra Schley and even her granddaughter, Kristi Berg, repeatedly lobbied Manfred's predecessor, Bud Selig, about Weaver.

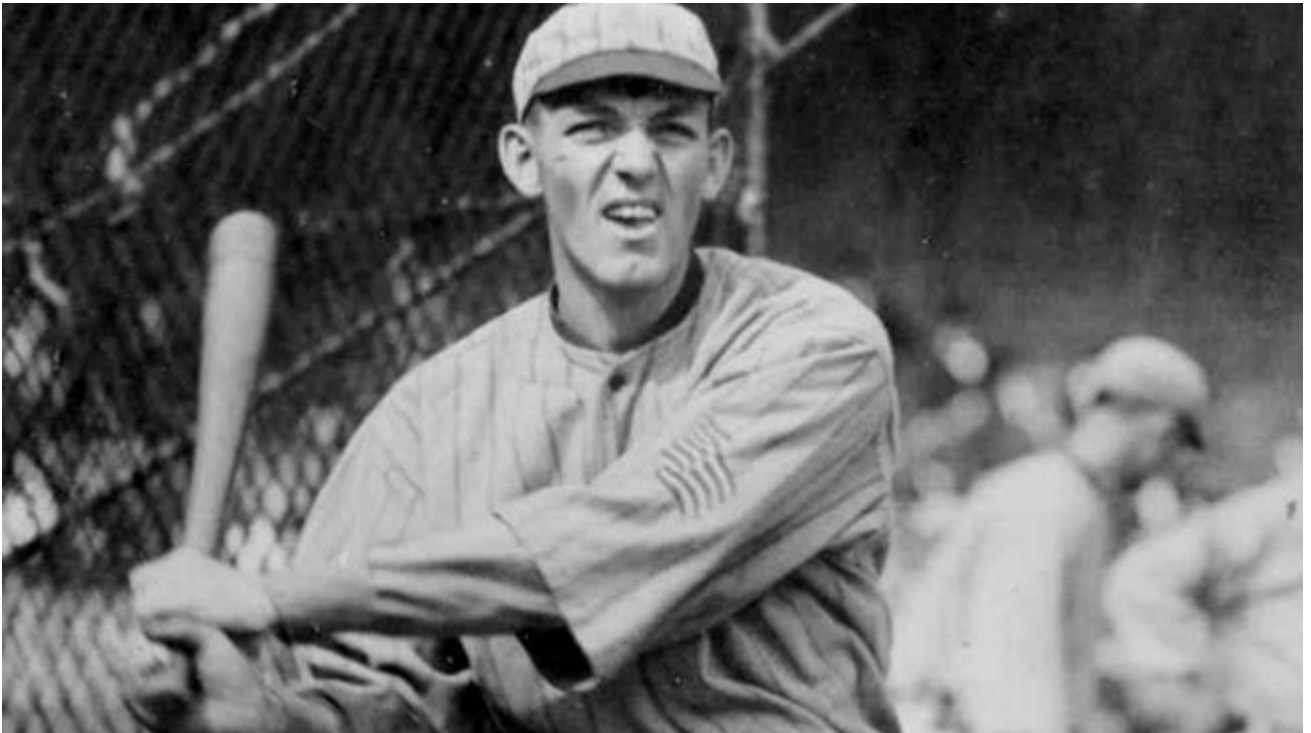
Anderson and her cousin, the late Marge Follett, attempted unsuccessfully to meet with Selig during the 2003 All-Star Game at U.S. Cellular Field, when the former commissioner was sent a petition with more than 10,000 signatures calling for Weaver's reinstatement.

And in 2013, Berg wrote a heartfelt, handwritten letter to Selig, in which she stated that "We pray that one of your last acts as commissioner is to reinstate my Uncle Buck."

In his written response to Berg, Selig admitted that the late Jerome Holtzman, the former Tribune and Sun-Times baseball writer who was Major League Baseball's first official historian, always believed Weaver should be reinstated. But Selig could only say the case was "a matter that I'll continue to take under advisement."

Supporters are baffled by MLB's continued tepid response to Weaver's case.

"Basically, Major League Baseball's commissioners have this thing about not wanting to overturn the decision of a predecessor," Fletcher said. "But the man who banned Buck Weaver also condoned the unofficial ban of African-Americans in the game before 1947, so it's time for a fresh look."



Buck Weaver warms up for a game in Chicago in 1917. (Associated Press)

Historians also agree with Weaver's descendants — now is the time to revisit Weaver's case. They also cite the commissioner's willingness to review Pete Rose's request for reinstatement — a request that may have taken a hit after a recent ESPN "Outside the Lines" investigation uncovered a 1986 notebook that allegedly includes dozens of bets Rose made on baseball games when he still was playing.

New documents also have been recently unearthed in the case of Weaver and his fellow Black Sox, including the only known existing copy of the 1921 criminal trial court transcripts for the eight accused Sox players, which was purchased by the Chicago History

Museum in 2007. Unlike Rose's situation, historians say these recently unearthed documents help Weaver's case.

"These new documents offer further proof that of anyone who has been banned from baseball, Buck Weaver has the strongest case to be reinstated," said Jacob Pomrenke of the Society of American Baseball Research, who is the editor for "Scandal on the South Side," the recently released book on the 1919 Black Sox.

The story of the 1919 White Sox became a part of American folklore almost as soon as the alleged World Series fix became public knowledge.

Most accounts say Sox first baseman Chick Gandil approached gamblers with the idea of throwing the series in exchange for \$100,000 to be paid to a group of Sox players. Gandil was responsible for recruiting the players involved — including pitchers Eddie Cicotte and Lefty Williams, infielders Swede Risberg and Fred McMullin and superstar outfielder "Shoeless" Joe Jackson. Gandil was also the players' main liaison with the gamblers, including Sport Sullivan, Bill Burns, Abe Atell and — most famously — mob kingpin Arnold Rothstein.

In most contemporary news accounts, and in later literature on the subject, such as Eliot Asinof's landmark book "Eight Men Out" (1963), Weaver was portrayed as someone who didn't throw the games or take money from gamblers.

Weaver's story, which he repeated to his family, was that he attended a few players-only meetings on the fix but opposed throwing the games. And Weaver did have a strong series, batting .324 with no errors.

"He told the gamblers where to go when they approached him — Buck didn't want anything to do with them," Anderson said. "But he had sympathy for the other Black Sox and didn't want to tell on them."

The recently unearthed documents at the Chicago History Museum, including the grand jury testimony from 1920 and the criminal court transcripts from 1921, back up this story. Weaver rarely is mentioned in both — he's placed at two players-only meetings on the subject in the grand jury testimony and is rarely brought up in the criminal trial, in which he apparently wasn't asked to testify, and was not mentioned in other players' testimony.

"There are no statements that he took an envelope with 'X' amount of dollars or committed an error and let a number of runs in," said Peter Alter, a curator at the Chicago History Museum. "And in terms of the trial transcript, Weaver is never really named as a co-conspirator."



Long ago banished from baseball for his part in the Black Sox scandal, former White Sox third baseman Buck Weaver held a variety of jobs, including installing tile. Here he works on an elevator in the early '50s. (Chicago Tribune historical photo)

In the end, all eight players accused were acquitted in the 1921 trial. But Landis still banned them from baseball. Weaver was banned apparently for his knowledge of the alleged scheme.

But the documents at the history museum show that gambling on baseball and throwing games was an open secret in professional baseball during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Cicotte, for instance, says in the grand jury testimony that the Black Sox got the idea to throw the 1919 Series from members of the 1918 Cubs. Cicotte said certain members of the 1918 Cubs were offered \$10,000 to fix the World Series against the Boston Red Sox, a series the Cubs lost.

And Cubs team secretary John O. Seys testified in the 1921 criminal trial for the Black Sox that he was a stakeholder for bets placed with gambler Abe Attell in the 1919 World Series. Seys, who served with the Cubs as traveling secretary and vice president until his death in 1938, testified that he bet on the Reds in the first two games of the Series before Attell told him to switch to the White Sox for Game 3, a game eventually won by the Sox's Dickie Kerr, who was not in on the fix.

"Buck's so-called crime was guilty knowledge, but he was one of hundreds or thousands of people in baseball who had guilty knowledge of gambling and throwing games in the sport," Pomrenke said. "It was baseball's worst kept secret at the time. The gamblers were operating in the wide open in the hotel rooms and the ballparks."

After being banned from baseball, Weaver sued Sox owner Charles Comiskey for back pay. During that 1922 court case, according to documentation now in the Chicago History Museum, gambler Billy Maharg stated during testimony that he had no knowledge of Weaver being involved in the fix.

"The evidence is pretty clear — Buck Weaver was given the ultimate punishment but never really accused of actually committing the crime," Pomrenke said.

After playing semi-pro baseball for much of the 1920s, Weaver returned to Chicago, where he lived for the rest of his life in a spacious apartment at 7814 S. Winchester Ave.

Anderson and her sister, the late Bette Scanlan, moved in with Weaver and his wife, Helen, after their father died in the early 1930s.

"That helped my mom tremendously because it was depression time and my mom had been in show business — she didn't know how to get a job," Anderson said.

Weaver supported his extended family, first with a string of drugstores he co-owned that went belly-up by the in the mid-30s, then through a series of odd jobs — from painter to a longtime job as a pari-mutuel clerk at Sportsman's Park, the Cicero horse racing track that closed in 2003.

"He was always at the \$50 window," Anderson recalled. "He'd try to get information on good horses to bet on and he'd let us or his friends know."

Sportsman's Park and Chicago (now Arizona) Cardinals owner Charles Bidwill even hired Weaver to manage his semi-pro women's softball team in the mid-1940s — Bidwill's Bluebells.

"What I remember about him is that he always had a smile on his face," Anderson said of her uncle. "He wasn't a tall man — only around 5-foot-10 — but he had really broad shoulders. He could hit a golf ball a mile."

Anderson could talk to her uncle about anything except the World Series scandal.

"He never talked to Bette or I about it because he felt we didn't have to know when we were young," Anderson said. "We knew about it when we got older because other family members would bring it up. But Buck never mentioned it, and we never talked about it with him."

But Weaver never stopped lobbying for baseball to clear his name. And his supporters were legion, including the judge who presided over the Black Sox criminal trial.

That judge, Hugo Friend, sent letters to the Major League Baseball office in the 1950s, lobbying for Weaver's reinstatement, according to notes from Asinof, who interviewed Friend before he died in 1966.

Asinof's notes are also a part of the Chicago History Museum's collection on the scandal.

"A murderer even serves his sentence and is let out," Weaver told noted Chicago author James T. Farrell before he died. "I got life."

Weaver died Jan. 31, 1956 at the age of 65, collapsing on a sidewalk after suffering a heart attack on West 71st Street. Always a South Sider, he is buried at Mt. Hope Cemetery in the city's Morgan Park neighborhood.

Anderson and Scanlan, a longtime financial writer for the Sun-Times, continued to lobby for their uncle. After Scanlan died in 2002, Anderson's daughters and granddaughters became involved in lobbying MLB on behalf of Weaver.

Celebrity supporters also joined the cause.

Then-U.S. Sen. Barack Obama wrote Selig in 2005 asking for MLB to review the case.

"Contemporary news accounts, interviews, and reports as well as serious historical research has reached a consensus that Buck Weaver was innocent of conspiring to fix the 1919 World Series," Obama wrote to Selig.

And John Cusack, the actor who portrayed Weaver in the 1988 John Sayles film "Eight Men Out," continues to stump for Weaver.

"He played to win every game (of the 1919 Series)," Cusack wrote in an email to the Tribune. "He could only control his own play."

Supporters look at Weaver's nine-year career with the Sox and see a player who was improving steadily, posting a .331 batting average in more than 600 at-bats in 1920, his final season.

"Weaver never has gotten due process," said Fletcher, who also runs a website called "clearbuck.com" in support of the third baseman's reinstatement. "If what had been done to Weaver was done to a player in the modern era, it would have been an issue. He was deprived of his income and he could have played a lot longer than he did."

Anderson hopes Manfred will have a change of heart, sooner rather than later.

"Buck was a good man and a marvelous player," she said. "Reinstate him and people will know how good he really was."

Watch Patricia Anderson, the niece of Buck Weaver, talk about her famous uncle and the Black Sox scandal at <http://www.chicagotribune.com/buck>.