



## ***Baseball, Hitchcock themes meld in Bartman movie? Busfield likes the idea***

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
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The confluence of two longtime Hollywood genres – a baseball movie and a Hitchcockian tale of the wrong man falsely accused and trying to prove his innocence – could come together if things ever broke right for Timothy Busfield.

Such a finished product was on the mind of a too-curious man with a digital recorder asking actor-director Busfield if the Steve Bartman story would transfer well to the silver screen.

“That’s a great story,” Busfield said. “He does an instinctual thing that may or may not cost them the World Series opportunity. That’s more of a baseball movie I would rather make.”



**Timothy Busfield (right) stops by the party for CSN Chicago's "5 Outs" documentary. With him is CSN Chicago public relations chief Jeff Nuich.**

How do you put Bartman and Busfield together in the first place?

Well, on the way to his own business meeting in an adjoining room, the three-decade Hollywood veteran happened to walk through the cocktail party end of Comcast SportsNet Chicago’s preview showing of “5 Outs,” the 90-minute documentary on the 2003 Cubs. The encounter with Busfield took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bartman’s date with destiny – and ignominy. And the luckless Bartman along with the star-crossed Game 6 of the ’03 Cubs-Miami Marlins NLCS was a big chunk of the show. In the subject of real and potential baseball movies, the Bartman saga sounded appealing.

The shaggy-haired, bearded Busfield is a person you'd want to talk to about baseball movies. As a Lansing, Mich. native, he's a lifelong Detroit Tigers fan. After co-starring in the "Thirtysomething" ABC-TV series with Chicago-area native Ken Olin and Mel Harris in 1987, he landed the part of Ray Kinsella's (played by Kevin Costner) doubting brother-in-law Mark in "Field of Dreams" the following year. Six years later, Busfield had the lead male adult role as Minnesota Twins first baseman Lou Collins in "Little Big League."



**The Steve Bartman Incident would translate well to a movie, according to Timothy Busfield.**

The Bartman story seems perfect, according to the thermometer that Busfield applies to baseball movies, where characterization and emotion trumps the actual on-field action. In fact, too many baseball movies feature actors who appear to have never played the game, even in sandlots. Making matters worse, historical accuracy sometimes flies out the window, such as Shoeless Joe Jackson, played by Ray Liotta, coming back from the Great Beyond as a right-handed hitter in "Field of Dreams."

The question of actors' athletic prowess was recently raised by retired Macon (Ill.) High School baseball coach Lynn Sweet, who will be portrayed in an upcoming movie based on the book "One Shot at Forever." Sweet noticed how the film action looked stilted and uncoordinated. As a result, he reasoned, where will Hollywood find nine young players who can emulate his skilled Ironmen, representing a small rural school that almost stole the 1971 Illinois state prep baseball championship against urban powers?

### **Actors trying to play ball doesn't hurt movies**

"It does look bad, although it doesn't seem to hurt the audience," Busfield said of movie on-field action. "When you look at the guys who pulled it off, Tim Robbins couldn't throw, he couldn't break 50 mph, and yet 'Bull Durham' is a great movie. People are there for the emotion. There's a lot of emotion in baseball.

"If you look at 'Field of Dreams,' Ray Liotta was turned around (to bat right-handed) from Shoeless Joe. I think people forgive that. People look at what we do and they think of theater and they realize we're going to take liberties. You look at Ronald Reagan and he played a baseball player (Grover Cleveland Alexander in 1952's 'The Winning Team'). He couldn't really pull it off.

“Kevin Costner probably had the best interpretation of a baseball player of that quality for an actor in Bull Durham. I think it helped the movie, but I don’t think it makes a movie.”

Busfield’s action role as Lou Collins in 1994’s “Little Big League,” about a 12-year-old who inherits the Twins and runs it as manager, doesn’t stick out in the baseball film pantheon. “We opened across from “The Lion King,” recalled Busfield, so the movie took a back seat in theatergoers attention span.

“We had Ken Griffey and we had really good baseball in the movie,” he said. “I was the worst baseball player in it, and I played baseball. I thought we had good baseball, but the movie wasn’t as strong as some of the other baseball movies.”



Timothy Busfield played a Twins first baseman in "Little Big League."

Busfield does possess is own starting lineup of top baseball movies.

### **‘The Natural’ tops his list**

“I can always watch ‘The Natural’ when it’s on,” he said. “There was something about ‘The Natural’ that captured the innocence of baseball and then what happens to these guys after they become pros, and trying to play the game for the purity of what it is. That movie is really strong.

“Bull Durham’ really makes me laugh. Kevin was great in it. He’s a great athlete. He was also in ‘For the Love of the Game.’ I play golf and baseball with him. I love the Gary Cooper movie (‘Pride of the Yankees’) because he looks so much like Lou Gehrig in the movie as the ironman. I like Lou Gehrig. Gary Cooper had a certain kindness about him that I always related to Lou Gehrig.”

The 56-year-old Busfield shows his Tigers stripes with a storyline atop his wish list.

“I always wanted to do the Mark Fidrych story, but I’m a little old for that,” he said.

Perhaps he can play a baseball investigative reporter of the same ilk as Danny Concanon, his character on NBC-TV's "The West Wing."



**Kevin Costner starred in the two best-known baseball films of recent decades – "Bull Durham" and "Field of Dreams." Costner displayed real baseball talent in "Bull Durham."**

The answer he wants to know now is why baseball's top winner can't go nine innings. The Tigers' five-run blown lead in the eighth inning in Game 2 of the ALCS in a game started by Max Scherzer was fresh on his mind.

"I'm a big (Jim) Leyland fan. He's got to let Scherzer finish a game. "Some 185 starts and he hasn't let him finish a game."

The Tigers' postseason problems seem trivial compared to those of Chicago teams. Given the concentration of storylines on both West and East Coast franchises, it's a wonder the Bartman and billy goat curse legends haven't been produced yet.

Maybe all the baseball-lovin' Chicago expatriates in Hollywood simply don't want to re-live their nightmares – or don't want to make a horror film.