

# The SABR(UK) Examiner

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BOBBY THOMSON CHAPTER OF THE SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN BASEBALL RESEARCH (UK)

## SABR GOES LOCAL !

On September 4 the Bobby Thomson Chapter of SABR(UK) staged a triumphant return to the Kings of Clerkenwell pub to hold its first local meeting. The call did not go out far and wide, and the meeting was appropriately intimate and informal. The crowd started gathering about 2 for a 3 o'clock meeting. Earlycomers were treated to a spectacle; surreal things seem to happen whenever SABR members gather. The last time we met, in Manchester, a monster warehouse party was just starting. This time we had a wedding start just outside our door. The pub is directly opposite the St. Peter and Paul Church (what is this - did they have to merge because of budget cuts?). So while we were standing around watching the latest baseball game from Sky partaking of our landlord's hospitality, and generally chatting about The Game, women with hats from Ascot were traipsing about in gowns from "Gone With The Wind". I half expected one to call out for Ashley. Just before the meeting was going to start, an ambulance pulled up in front of the church. We never found out if it was the groom faking an attack or the bride's father fainting dead away. I think it might have been one of these women tripping up in her stilleto heels and gathered-tightly-around-the-ankles Bill Blass creation.

So the meeting starts. We are represented by 15 SABR'ites, not only from London, but from Birmingham, Manchester, and the

Netherlands. Yes, our friend Laurens De Jongs once again showed his devotion by travelling across the Dutch Channel to mingle with fellow fanatics, this time bringing a friend, Guus Mater. Actually, the attendance was one short. A reporter from the Associated Press was sent to visit the meeting to do a piece on it and send it through the wires throughout the U.S. - but he got lost and couldn't find the place. Frankly, I don't blame him. I found trying to find the Kings so exasperating that I came very close to giving up. And so we all missed our chance for quick fame.

The meeting itself was informally organized, so there's not too much to report. The Editor read excerpts from a letter from Norman Macht, covered elsewhere in the Examiner. In the place of having formal presentations, we had a forum in which members could opine over some strongly-held baseball subject. The subject that got the most attention was whether Reggie Jackson should be in the Hall of Fame. Opinions of Reggie ranged from an overrated hotdog to one of the most exciting characters since Babe Ruth. We put on a tape of this year's All-Star Game and broke for the bar. Laurens De Jongs, our world traveller, told us of his visit to San Diego for the '93 SABR Convention, and informed us of some up-and-coming Dutch players in the Majors. Then we broke for the kitchen, and were treated to more of the chili and/or lasagne selection that we loved

last time. This might be a good place to mention our debt of gratitude to the Kings of Clerkenwell governor, John Eichler. Without his cooperation this meeting could never have taken place; his hospitality was always first-rate. Afterwards Mike played selections from interviews that he had conducted with Hall of Famers Ted Williams, Hank Greenberg, Luke Appling, and Reggie Jackson. Another video, "When It was a Game", was played. This incredible video consists of color home movies of baseball in the 30's, 40's, and 50's. All in all, a good time was had by all. This makes the hat trick of meetings SABR(UK) has had this year; may we do even better in 1994!

- Martin Hoerchner

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

Welcome to the second edition of the SABR(UK) Examiner. We've already made a few improvements over the last issue, like the ability to print pictures and graphics. In the next issue of the Examiner we're going for photographs. The next publication we are planning to send out is our version of the Baseball Research Journal, with articles directly related to the history of baseball in both Britain in the U.S. Look for that early in the New Year. Anyone interested in writing something please contact us. We've already got some fascinating stuff, but we can always use more. So get thinking!

## VIEW FROM THE CHAIR by Mike Ross

An Associated Press correspondent attempted to attend the SABR local chapter meeting in London at the Kings of Clerkenwell but was unable to locate us. Joseph White later phoned the SABR(UK) HQ and in a three-way conference call lasting 30 minutes obtained enough data from Treasurer Andy Parkes to send a report of events surrounding the meeting out on the AP wire, which is reproduced on page 8. The report was picked up by various papers including the local Akron, Ohio *Beacon-Journal*, and was spotted by Charles Kirkwood, a professor of economics at Akron U. (is there an Akron U.?) Kirkwood contacted us from Birmingham (England) where he was about to start a retirement programme, teaching at the local university. He phoned us and asked if he could join SABR... and so another little facet has been added to the SABR(UK) diamond. If any of you are planning to gather up there in the mid-boonies, for baseball purposes don't forget to invite Charles (tel 0384 378275).

As for increasing the profile of baseball in Great Britain: just as Mt Everest increases the profile of mountains by simply being there, we with our love for baseball increase *its* profile. What makes Everest significant is that she has been scaled; likewise we must scale the heights by, in fact, digging down into and researching the vast wealth of historical data available in the UK.

We discussed the idea of publishing a separate research journal with scholarly works submitted to us for the Examiner; otherwise the size of the pieces would over-extend the Examiner, which really is a newsletter. ... The short piece by Geraint Johnes and Bob Thornton included in this issue is intended to be a seminal research item, hopefully to ignite activity, thus making Great Britain worthy of becoming (or, having become) "these SABR'd Isles".

I received word from the Midlands of the discovery of a scrapbook compiled by Joseph Wright, who is alleged to be a relation of George Wright, and Harry Wright who is credited with being "the Father of Baseball". There is mention of a hitherto undocumented baseball mission which journeyed from the USA last century and played the Middlesborough Pioneers who laid claim to being the best team in Britain. Further scrapbook items, from which I have yet to see more than fifteen pages, were promised. At the time I was about to confer on the transfer of more of these valuable documents, the gentleman in question, a Mr Marshall, was rushed to hospital for surgery. Since then he has been incommunicado. I leave you to supply the subtext to this tale. Meanwhile, I am sending out a research request for information on Joseph Wright and the Pioneers, circa 1892, and the American Baseball mission.

Then of course there is the quest for the Holy Grail of British Baseball which disappeared close to sixty years ago in Liverpool. The golden trophy was originally presented to the national base-

ball champions, under the auspices of A.G. Spalding. Its loss signifies - and was concurrent with - the demise of baseball in the UK. If some latter-day Indiana Jones (or your normal intrepid SABR member) can manage to unearth the Spalding trophy and - who knows? - decipher some ancient runes from a time when baseball was actually a drawing card in Great Britain, it could signify a new beginning for baseball research in this country.

Yours,  
Mike Ross

### TIPS FOR AUTHORS

Mark Alvarez, Director of SABR Publications, has put together a few suggestions for those interested in writing for SABR, whether in the Examiner, the Baseball Research Journal, or some other publication. These are contained in two handouts, which offer hints such as: 1. Be yourself ... 2. Have a point ... 3. Answer a question, don't confirm a prejudice ... 4. Pare extraneous material away ruthlessly ... 5. Don't strain for a lead paragraph - it will emerge ... 6. Imagine you're writing a letter to a friend ... 7. Rewrite - your first draft is just that ... 8. Stop when you've said what you need to say ... 9. Expect to be edited ... The full text can be obtained by writing Mark at SABR or the SABR(UK) Examiner. As a last thought, it is recommended that people wishing to do research should first contact Patrick Carroll, the Chair of the Historical Committee - he might be able to help you.

## OFFICERS AND GENTLEMEN

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# THIS SABR'D ISLE *by Martin Hoerchner*

*This royal throne of kings, this SABR'd isle,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm,  
this England.*

This is how the greatest British poet, William Shakespeare, described his homeland. By this we know that SABR had members in the British Isles as far back as the 16th century. This kernel was unearthed in a copy of the Complete Works of William Shakespeare that I bought in a discount book store in Bridlington for £3.99 - see, research can be simple. It however misprints the first line as "this scepter'd Isle", which makes no sense at all. Anyway, since I was barred from using my Shakespeare quotation as the title of the newsletter, I am using it as the title of my column for the SABR Examiner. I don't really have a format; I think this might be the first and only "stream of consciousness" baseball column; thus taking inspiration from James Joyce as well as Shakespeare.

So let's get from the literature section to the Sports pages. This should be the last year of the current format of divisions and playoffs; until fairly recently I was totally against the new plan, being at heart a baseball traditionalist. I think baseball should still be played in flannel uniforms in parks like Ebbets Field. But the new plan would leave the Giants in a four-team division, sharing with the Dodgers and the powerhouse teams San Diego and Colorado. That way the Dodgers and Giants can fight tusk to tusk throughout eternity with nary a disturbance. This year Colorado was spared a cellar finish by the basement sale of the best of the Padre's players. In fact, thanks to the Padres and Mets, this is the first expansion year where all new teams avoided the cellar. Of course Charlie Finley had to pipe in and support the Padre's fire sale - and probably the ghost of Connie Mack would approve. But I think the fans in San Diego deserve more than to have a minor-league team

masquerading as a major-league team. Ask any Philadelphia A's fan; when Mack broke up the team after the 1932 season, they didn't win a pennant for forty years. I don't know too many southern Californians that patient; usually you have to be from Chicago.

It's been a strange year in baseball, and not all for the best. To cap off a miserable year for the Mets, Vince Coleman is in bad trouble for throwing an explosive device into a crowd of Dodger fans. Bad judgement, Vince. Perhaps that devouring tarp spreader scarred him emotionally. A baseball strike had been threatened for Labor Day - I must have missed it. Jim Abbott pitches a no-hitter and Roger Clemens gives up his first grand slam. Nolan Ryan's record-breaking career ended with not with a bang but with a whimper. Are people going to mew about his election to the Hall because of his low won-lost percentage? The A's cellar finish makes them the first team to go from top to bottom since their 1915 counterparts. They are thinking of replacing the field at Royals Stadium (excuse me, Kauffman Stadium - the owner died) with natural grass - W.P. Kinsella would be thrilled. And Mr. Royals announces his retirement, which means 1998 should have two sure-fire inductees. Street and Smith usually has the best baseball annual: this year's preview predicted the Mets to win the National League East with the Phillies in the cellar. Steinbrenner's at it again; he wants New York City to build him a new stadium, maybe in Manhattan. I wonder if even Steinie would care to be known as the Man Who Destroyed the House That Ruth Built. If he's determined to move to Manhattan, I can suggest some real estate under Coogan's Bluff. Does baseball need a Commissioner or what? We don't need the kind of Commissioner that would re-admit Steinbrenner and keep out Pete Rose, but if we had an active one, maybe the farce at San Diego

wouldn't have taken place and Atlanta wouldn't have won the division.

I must say I enjoyed my trip to California in July - I was able to see a grand total of one ball game. Of course I went to Candlestick: Despite what you might hear, my wife and I damn near died of sunstroke. They have made quite a few changes in the park, aiming to make it more user-friendly. It was an exciting time, about the time the Giants were riding their crest, before the Fall. The previous week they had beat the Phillies 3 out of 4, and averaged more than 10 runs a game. Now the Phillies were coming into Candlestick, bent on revenge. The Giants had taken 2 out of 3, and the Sunday game would decide whether San Francisco would take the series decisively, or just split. We enjoyed booing the Phillies, but we secretly liked them because they were *good fun*. They are the 90's reincarnation of the Gas House Gang. As Barry Bonds took his position, the left field bleacher bums bowed to him à la Wayne's World "we're not worthy". The Giants led all the way. Royce Clayton hit a home run (his third of the year), and this damn fog horn goes off. First blood, great jubilation. Bonds hit another home run (#29) and the left field bleachers went crazy along with everyone else. Later I read that the pitcher complained that he took too long in his home run trot. That's Barry for you. I think Matt Williams got a triple - he may not be the best ever, but he's the best Williams since Ted. After it was all over, my wife said "I really felt sorry for the Phillies. Everyone was booing them". Yes, but *with respect*.

With 1993 into the waste bin of baseball seasons, watch for the postmortems and analyses coming soon to a baseball column near you. In the meantime, try to keep a brave face during these baseballless winter months.

## SABR EUROPE ?

*by Patrick Morley*

Since SABR(UK) was formed only this January it's performed membership wonders. According to the SABR Bulletin, we've almost trebled our membership, something no other branch has even remotely approached in spite of a big drive for new members.

The list of Where SABR Members Live in the September issue has us down for 26 members this year compared with only eight in 1992. Those figures don't tally precisely with ours but they do convey what we've been able to achieve. We now have more members than 15 American states and far more - surprisingly - than Mexico, which as you all know is a great baseball country. In fact, we only have one less member than Japan, another nation of fantastic baseball enthusiasts. All this from a country where baseball isn't taken in the least bit seriously by the media and is totally ignored by the populace at large.

The official SABR list includes thirteen members on the Continent. There are three each in France and Switzerland, two each in Germany and in the Netherlands (including our friend Laurens De Jong, who has twice travelled to our meetings), and one each in the Czech Republic, Italy, and Sweden. If we thought we were out on a limb, how much more isolated are they? Shouldn't we perhaps embrace them in our own steadily growing branch and keep them in touch with what's going on in the world of SABR. That, incidentally, would give us the chance to call ourselves, grandly, SABR Europe? As they say, today the United Kingdom, tomorrow Europe ...

Seriously, though, folks, what do you think? Interest in baseball is growing all over the Continent. The Russians are particularly keen, surely fertile ground for a membership drive. Let us know whether you would like to suggest to SABR HQ that we should take our lonely European brethren into the fold.

## Norman Macht, the SABR Treasurer, writes ...

I chanced to be in the SABR office in Cleveland when Mike Ross called on Friday last. Since I told him I was intending to write to you, I decided I'd better hop to it. First of all, thanks for the SABR Examiner. Whatever you call it, you are far ahead of all other SABR regionals who as far as I know do not put out any publication, by any equivocal or unequivocal name. I enjoyed every line of it.

Of course I delighted to serve as godfather or honorary president of your SABR chapter, and stand ready to provide any suggestions or help you request. Do not hesitate to consider me your personal conduit to the board or the office in Cleveland for anything you need.

The mention of Les Mann on page 3 of the Examiner brought to mind that I had once interviewed Joe Oeschger (a great name for a trivia question) and Les Mann was his roommate and figured in the story. I had written it for a magazine that folded, but published a book of all the baseball stories they had not gotten around to publishing. So I thought I'd copy it and send it to you for printing in an issue of the Examiner or circulate it in some other way. Some other notes on Mann: He was one of many players who jumped to the Feds for the money in 1915, and led that league with 19 triples. With the pennant-winning Cubs in 1918, he led a player revolt for better shares of the Series money. In three seasons with the Cardinals he hit .328, .347 and .371. He was the guy pitcher Phil Douglas of the Giants wrote to in 1922 offering to throw a game for a fee. Douglas was banished from baseball. Later Mann formed the National Amateur Baseball Association and, as you mentioned, in 1936 persuaded the Olympic Committee to add baseball as an exhibition event. Two American teams puzzled a throng of Germans, and the game

drew a larger crowd than had ever attended a World Series game.

Since I have access to a fairly good sized list of taped interviews of oldtime players, if there are any that you might wish to include in a possible presentation at a future meeting, let me know and I will try to put something of interest together with some excerpts from a few of them. I shall not forget the meeting in the Clerkenwell Pub, and hope to return for an encore - providing the movement to open the pubs to kiddies does not go through. I heard one chap on the radio say "It is impossible to hold a civilized conversation with anyone under 16 on the premises. One's own children are bearable - just. But someone else's - never."

Hoist a Guinness for me at your next meeting. [Editors note: we did.]

Sincerely,  
*Norman L Macht*

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## SWAP SHOP

Mike Ross has informed us that he has a selection of ballpark models for sale. These are a steal at £10 plus £1.50 p&p. Both old and new ballparks are available - Old Comiskey, New Comiskey, Tiger Stadium, Ebbets Field, Polo Grounds, Yankee Stadium, and Shea Stadium. The perfect Christmas gift for the baseball fanatic.

Also, Andy Parkes has copies of the interview that Norman Macht conducted with Bobby Thomson, prior to his visiting us in January. The two-hour cassette tape is available from Andy for £5.00. Own a bit of history! He also has copies of the photograph Bobby Thomson signed for the Chapter - £3.50 for an A3 sized photo. Mike also has copies of this picture, if it's more convenient. Both Andy's and Mike's address and phone numbers are on page 2. Proceeds go to the Chapter.

# Baseball - Made in Britain

-Wherein a claim is put forward that baseball is not as American as apple pie.

Baseball is the national game of America, right? Well, sort of. The odd - and still relatively little appreciated - fact is that baseball was invented in England.

Jane Austen wrote about baseball in the late eighteenth century. The heroine of her book, *Northanger Abbey*, spent much of her youth playing the game. By that time, the ancient game of rounders had already started to be known as 'baseball' in England. There is published evidence that 'baseball' was a term in common use in Britain as early as 1748.

The game of baseball was taken to America by John Chadwick, a native of southwest England, in 1772. Ever since, the American and British versions of the sport have continued to develop along separate lines. Various attempts have, however, been made to introduce the American version to Britain. This is how Derby County's soccer ground came to be known as the Baseball Ground after its construction in 1889. Around that time several soccer clubs, including Aston Villa and Leyton Orient as well as Derby, were also involved in American baseball.

But the indigenous British version of the sport has maintained a strong following only in two areas - Merseyside and south-east Wales. Local leagues are organised in both areas and an annual international match has been played since 1908. Crowds of up to 16,000 have attended these games in the past, and the

international matches have been held at such illustrious venues as the Cardiff Arms Park and Everton's football stadium. More recently crowds have diminished somewhat, but it is still common for 2000 spectators to attend the international games between England and Wales.

The rules of British baseball differ in detail from the American version. Most notably, a run is scored for each base reached by a batter. The equivalent of home run is therefore a 'four'. Each time consists of eleven players. An inning is complete when all eleven players are out. The game ends

In the early 1930's, Freddie Fish, of Grange Albion, scored a total of eleven 'homers' in eleven consecutive 'at bats'. Seven of these were scored in a single game - against the unfortunate Pill Harriers.

More recently, Terry 'Slogger' Slocombe became a legend with his big hitting style. During a baseball career which lasted 37 years up to 1986, Slogger won eight international caps for Wales. In the 1959 International, he scored a record 43 runs.

Other international baseball players have achieved greater fame for their feats in other sporting arenas. David Bishop and Mark Ring have, during the last decade, played both baseball and rugby union at international level for Wales. Graham Vearncombe was a goalkeeper for Cardiff City and for the Welsh international soccer team, and also played baseball for Wales during the fifties.

On a few occasions, the British and American versions of baseball have linked hands on the same park. During the early 1920's, Grange Albion played the crew of an American ship at the American game one evening, and the British game the following night. Unfortunately, no record survives of the scores, but what price the modern-day Penylan against the Mets?

It is true that the original British game of baseball does not pack the crowds into the stadia as do the superstars across the pond. But it would be a pity if the domestic game, truer as it is to the roots of the sport, were to be neglected completely by the new baseball media. British baseball is an entertaining game with a long history. It is an indispensable part of the cultures of two of our great cities. Go watch some!

- Geraint Johnes, Bob Thornton

The Middlesbrough Pioneers terrorised British baseball in the 1890's. See "View From the Chair", pg 2.



when both sides have batted for two innings. Despite these similarities with cricket, the game is much closer to American baseball in style.

British baseball has, over the years, generated its own heroes and stories of great feats. In the early part of this century, 'Buzzer' Heaven, playing for Grangetown, masterminded an amazing 'quadruple play'. As catcher, he touched out the batsman who had swung and missed the ball. The ball then flew from home to second, back home, and then finally to third base, to dismiss a total of four batsmen with one ball. Surely a myth!

## Baseball In A Parched Land

How a baseball addict satisfies his craving in the British Isles

October 15, 1986 - The New York Mets and the Houston Astros are locked in the longest post-season game in history; it won't be decided until the 16th inning, when the Mets score three runs. The Astros came back with two, but Kevin Bass struck out with two on. All throughout America, eyes are glued to television sets as ears are to radios; individuals, game parties, sports bars watch each pitch. In a chilly flat in Stamford Hill, the game goes on past 1 a.m., 2 a.m., 3 a.m. I am taping the game off the U.S. Armed Forces Network, a feeble radio signal coming in from Germany that you can only receive once the sun sets, and then with varying strength. My alarm rings once more; my wife makes grumpy noises; I put the sound on low and hear that the game is still going on; I flip the 2-hour cassette tape (hour each side) over in the radio/cassette recorder running by the bed; and set the alarm clock for an hour hence; and then both my wife and I try to fall asleep for another hour. This scenario is repeated three or four times - I can't remember. It was a long game.

October 12, 1986 - The Angels are one out away from their first pennant. Donnie Moore gets two strikes on Dave Henderson, and the Angels are one strike away. This game's on at a decent hour - I listen on a Saturday evening. I've always liked the Angels, and I keep my wife updated with the details. The signal fades as Moore delivers...

October 13, 1987 - St. Louis is on the bubble in Game 6 of the NLCS vs the Giants. The only run in this game on either side is scored when Candy Maldonado loses a pop fly in the lights. This evens the series; the Cardinals go on to win it the next day. By this

time I have lugged a monstrous reel-to-reel tape recorder from California to London; it has a four hour tape capacity on slow speed. I set the timer to tape throughout the night, and wake up the next morning anxious to get the outcome. I discover that I had left the tape recorder on fast speed; only the beginning of the game is taped. I have to phone home to get the result.

October 17, 1989 - Finally, live baseball on television comes to Britain! The first Bay Area World Series prompts me to splash out on a satellite system - all the games will be shown live on Screensport (with Mike Ross doing the color). The A's score two quick victories. Game Three will be the first in San Francisco. I tune in at 1:15 a.m. to find the entire area devastated by a 7.1 earthquake. They pick up the feed from CBS, the U.S. network carrying the games. I watch for hours, entranced by the images of destruction. When I crawl into bed at 4 a.m., my wife asks me how the game went.

It hasn't been easy, keeping track of baseball in Britain. I'll never forget the first time I made contact with U.S. baseball in Britain. I had spent the day driving from London to Bridlington with a woman who would become my wife, to visit a woman who would become my mother-in-law. We had stopped and visited some ancient churches on the way up; I was delighted with their moldiness. That night I had a dream that a translucent woman in a wedding dress was holding my hand. This startled me awake. Whether this was a portent from the future, or my future wife sending her *ka* to put something in my head, I'll never know. I had trouble falling asleep, so I listened to my transistor radio. I was dialing through the stations, when I come across the unmistakable sounds of *baseball*. It was a game - it didn't take me long to figure out that it was a *live* game. This was September 1985, during the time that Pete Rose was edging up on

Ty Cobb's hit record and it was a Reds game. During the "commercial" break they said it was the Armed Forces Network. I was overjoyed. Only later did I find out that it came in on a lamentably weak signal from Germany; this was in the North of England in the middle of the night and it sounded fine to me. On my flight back to the States, the pilot announces that Rose had just surpassed Cobb.

AFN has always been my main source of baseball "over here"; it certainly has been the most consistent. It is, however, far from perfect. First of all, it's radio, not television. You'll never see a team's snappy new home uniforms, or see the incredible April sunshine in California. Another thing is that the signal is too damn weak. I'll never understand why they don't have an AFN station in Britain. You can only pick up AFN after dark, which varies according to season. In the height of summer you can't get reception until past 9. And just lately they'd had a Spanish station broadcast right next to it - sometimes over, with them howling a soccer match and trilling their R's as your favorite pitcher delivers. And you'll never be able to choose (or even know) what game they're going to broadcast. If you have a favorite team, chances are 14-1 against hearing your team. They also have this annoying habit of preempting baseball for almost anything: an address from the President, the Country Music Corral, and SummerSlam 93 - not to mention football, basketball, and hockey. Having said that, they did most admirably in covering the National League West pennant race, even to the point of preempting the NFL. But most importantly I think, baseball over AFN just doesn't have the feel of BBH (Baseball Back Home). Instead of those wonderful beer and pickup truck commercials, you get snappy jingles on eating foods from all the major food groups, and reminders to clean your car thoroughly when you ship it back home after your tour of duty. You

do, however, get Ken Allen. He may never make it to the majors (civvie style), but his depth of knowledge of professional sports and their relationship to the media makes him a joy to listen to. Because he is broadcasting on a non-commercial station, he has to freedom to offer strong and controversial comments on the running of baseball that other announcers couldn't get away with. But the moment the last out is scored, they cut to The Golden Age of Radio, or All Things Considered. Immediately. No post-mortems. No manager's corner. No postgame interviews. No outfielder popping his gum and drawling, "Well, I think it was a good ball game..." No sports talk. You don't even get final stats. Just public service spots. It's just a bit soulless. It's just not the same.

But I should be grateful to AFN, because it's immediate. Baseball is an everyday thing, and a "Game of the Week" just don't cut it. But any TV is better than no TV. Televised Baseball in Britain has a sketchy history. The first time I saw baseball on TV in Britain was a summary of the 1986 World Series (sorry, Mike) in a broadcast on ITV very late at night about a fortnight after the fact. The next year they had a baseball show on for an hour at 3 a.m. It used black and white photos and jazz music for its opening, and usually spent the first ten minutes explaining the rules of the game. It was about as good as it sounds. I think they had these shows on and off for a couple of years - but it wasn't until Screensport started broadcasting in 1989 did we get a World Series shown live. They have shown every one live since then. Screensport started out with two different two-hour games a week, both in prime time - they were simply games, without a lot of local embellishment, edited down to two hours. They were eminently watchable, but the number soon dwindled to one. If they have ever shown a regular-season game live I missed it, but Channel 4 showed a live game a few years

ago. In the middle of the night they broadcast a game from Wrigley Field, with Harry Caray announcing. During the U.S. commercial break they talked to players about different types of pitches, detailed explanation of baseball strategy - it was very well done. I got excited and phoned Channel 4 on Monday, and they told me it was a one-off thing. Oh well.

Of course Screensport wasn't destined to last - it was free. They kept threatening to charge us, and I gladly would have paid for baseball. But it never happened. This year came the announcement that Screensport and Eurosport had "merged". I phoned to ask them if this was the same thing as when Sky and BSB "merged". It was. I had to phone Paris to get the news - "no baseball". Screensport simply ceased to exist and Eurosport changed not a whit. Things looked dire when Sky Sports stepped in. In July they started broadcasting a weekly two-hour game with a promise to broadcast the World Series live. Sound familiar? This is a subscription service whereas Screensport was free, but it was worth it. So I went and ordered all the Sky channels, and today I am a happier and more contented person.

I must admit I haven't watched the Sky Sports weekly game regularly. First, we had a problem getting our satellite dish installed. We were told that we needed to get a new dish, as our old one did not support a decoder. Okay, fine, no problem. But as soon as we said this, the people in the flat above us immediately disappeared - on holiday? family troubles? suicide pact? We didn't know, they were just *gone*. So what's the point? Roof access. They couldn't get up to the roof to change dishes. It took almost a month before we could get the dish installed. We never did get a satisfactory explanation for their disappearance. I guess it's just none of our business.

The main reason I haven't

been all that interested in the Sky Sports Game Of the Week, or Pontel for that matter, is that I have been able to follow baseball in a better way. Before Sky Sports picked up baseball, I thought that the end of TV baseball in Britain was here. A life without visual baseball is of course unthinkable, so I purchased a multi-standard VCR that would play games taped in the States. It has been my pride and joy. I get games from my favorite team sent from home - diligently taped and posted by my mother. The lag time is roughly what it is in Sky Sports and Pontel, plus I get the added bonus of always having my team, and having the original commercials, news spots, and weather from back home. By the time I get the tape I already know the outcome of the game: I don't think anything will ever replace live baseball.

To get my daily fix of Baseball, I set my timer to audio tape an hour of the AFN broadcast. I set it for 2:30 each morning - sometimes you get baseball, sometimes you get wrestling. And every morning you can keep up-to-date with scores by using page 162 of ITV's teletext. This isn't always accurate, and sometime they do ridiculous things like showing Chicago beating Chicago (and it's not the 1906 World Series) or Montreal losing to two separate teams in one day. Well, I suppose *it is possible*...Despite its drawbacks, it's close to immediate. On November 15 CNN will start its teletext service; hopefully they'll take baseball a bit more seriously.

One fine day, for the first time in their current city, my team will win the World Series. People will be shouting, laughing, crying. Tears will be shed and babies will be conceived. A millisecond later, I'll be sitting alone by my radio, in the middle of some awful rainy October night. I'll be trying to tune in a crackly signal coming from a faraway land, trying to share in the joy of the moment. No way, man! I'll be there, dude!

- Martin Hoerchner

## Joseph White's AP Story

Herein is the text of the story that gave SABR(UK) worldwide publicity:

London(AP) - Andy Parkes never saw Reggie Jackson play. But the baseball fan from Manchester, England, has no shortage of opinions about Mr. October's recent election to the Hall of Fame. "I'm not overly impressed with Jackson", said Parkes, arguing his case at a recent meeting of SABR(UK). "There was a lot of hype with Jackson. He sort of talked his way into the Hall of Fame. He struck out a lot. He batted only .262. A lot greater players than he are in the Hall of Fame". "I disagree, Andy", came the response from American journalist Mike Ross. "I think Jackson deserves it".

Intense discussions are standard fare at meetings of the Society for American Baseball Research, or SABR. The society claims more than 6,500 members in the United States, but this chapter meeting at a London pub is the first outside North America. The Bobby Thomson Chapter, named after the Scottish-born hero of the 1951 New York Giants, boasts 35 members in its first year of existence. There are a half dozen or so transplanted Americans in the group, but the rest are native Britons. "It was always difficult being a baseball fan", said Parkes, 52, who played for a local team in Stretford in the 1960's. "The only way to keep up at all was to tune in to AFN (Armed Forces Radio Network). I did that for many years, more than I care to count. I've listened to every World Series since 1961 on the radio."

Which means that while Parkes didn't see Jackson's three home runs in Game 6 of the 1977 World Series, he certainly heard them, live on a crackly radio signal at about 5 am. Like many British baseball fans, Parkes got interested in the game during its spurt of popularity surrounding

the two world wars. "The first team I played for had been formed shortly after the war near where I lived", Parkes said. "The huge amount of American servicemen in the area had created interest in the game. I saw them in the park as a young boy. The first baseball paper I read would have been old copies of the Sporting News."

Today, it's a little easier for Parkes to follow the majors, although a weekly baseball series on the national television station Channel Four was scrapped after a brief run a few years ago. European editions of American newspapers provide scores and standings, and satellite television channels show an occasional game. Next month, Parkes is looking forward to seeing some live action, when minor-league players from the Boston Red Sox and New York Mets organizations play a two-game series at the Oval cricket ground. There are also plans to bring two major-league teams to the legendary Lord's cricket stadium next year.

"We're trying to raise the profile of baseball in England", said Parkes, the chapter's treasurer. "The other three sports got the jump on us. Football's been coming over here for several years, and basketball is coming this fall, and hockey's coming this weekend. Baseball's behind. They dropped us on Channel Four, but we want to show there's a lot of interest out there".

In addition to its efforts to promote the same, the chapter's other objective is to explore baseball's rich but little-known history in Britain. Parkes, who has been to three SABR conventions in the United States, usually draws incredulous looks when he mentions the sport's British heritage. "People in America can't believe there's a history of baseball in England", Parkes said. "It's been played for over 100 years". "A great deal of the evolution of baseball came in England, before it was invented in America", agreed Ross, the chapter's president and

a British resident since 1959. "We've had some letters suggesting there's quite a lot out there that can be researched". Ross noted the British claim that baseball is a version of the schoolyard game of rounders, one of the theories the group is sure to explore and debate.

There's also plenty to talk about on the modern British baseball scene, but there the news is not as pleasant. A bitter split within the British Baseball Federation two years ago led to several of its best teams breaking away to form a rival league. Neither league has more than a token following on the national sporting scene, and teams play their games in public parks in front of a handful of fans. In addition, the BBF lost its major sponsor in the later 1980s. "There is a chance of reconciliation now", Ross said of the rival groups. "That would help quite a bit".

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### STAT CHAT

Who were the 10 best teams of all time, plus one? Here is what the record book says, ranked according to won-loss percentage:

1. 1880 Chicago (NL)  
67-17 .798
2. 1876 Chicago (NL)  
52-14 .788
3. 1885 Chicago (NL)  
87-25 .777
4. 1906 Chicago (NL)  
116-36 .763
5. 1885 New York (NL)  
85-27 .759
6. 1884 Providence (NL)  
84-28 .750
7. 1902 Pittsburgh (NL)  
103-36 .741
8. 1886 Chicago (NL)  
90-34 .726
9. 1909 Pittsburgh (NL)  
110-42 .724
10. 1954 Cleveland (AL)  
111-43 .721
11. 1927 New York (AL)  
110-44 .714

Of course, the list was extended to 11 to include the 1927 Yankees. They are widely regarded as the best team ever, but maybe only for those with a 20th-century bias.