

# Houston Baseball

## Shooting Star Express

Official Newsletter of the Larry Dierker Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research



Volume 1 Number 2



Fall 2020

### President's Welcome

By Bob Dorrill

2020 has certainly been an incredible year in so many different ways. Our lives may never be the same. In baseball alone we have seen multiple rule changes that were contrary to tradition and are now being discussed as the new normal.

The Commissioner just came out in favor of continuing with the three-batter rule for relief pitchers, an expanded number of teams for playoffs, and having a runner start at second base for extra innings. The new players agreement now under discussion should be interesting.

The Astros had a remarkable season overall. They had the challenge of adjusting to all the negativity generated by the media and opposing teams from the cheating scandal in 2017 plus the adjustments made due to a significant number of player injuries and a lack of offensive production in the final weeks of the season.

Still the Astros came to life in the playoffs: sweeping the Twins, defeating a very good Oakland team, and coming within one game of reaching the World Series before being eliminated by Tampa Bay. An impressive job by skipper Dusty Baker and pitching coach Brent Strom in blending a variety of previously minor league pitchers into starters and relievers.

This year was also difficult in that so many of our baseball heroes and Hall of Famers, those we came to love in our childhood, passed away. People like Bob Gibson, Whitey Ford, Lou Brock, Tom Seaver, Joe Morgan, Al Kaline, Bob Watson, Don Larsen, and our own Jimmy Wynn. Each of these departed players provided us with treasured memories of baseball at its best.

On the local front, our SABR chapter continued monthly meetings with excellent speakers on Zoom, expanded our membership nationally, and started this newsletter. Let's hope 2021 will return us to some sort of normalcy where we can enjoy a full season of baseball and even attend some games.

Since this is our last issue of the calendar year, the Editorial Board would like to wish everyone as best a holiday season as can be expected in these pandemic times. We hope everyone exercises patience in conducting daily activities and celebrates the holidays safely. We want to see everyone next year when, hopefully, things improve to a point where our chapter can meet in person at our monthly meetings.



Bob Dorrill

### Veterans Day Baseball Story

By Mike Vance

Few subsets of the military are more romanticized than the daring flyboys of WWI with goggles pulled tight and teeth bared as their biplanes soared through the clouds. Pitcher Marv Goodwin had just such a background. He had left a promising future with the Cardinals in 1917 to enlist in the Army Air Corps and fight in France.

After the war, with his performance up and down, the Cards sent Goodwin to their Houston farm team, and he burned up the rails going back and forth between the two cities for the 1921 and 1922 seasons. The following two years, Goodwin was in the Bayou City exclusively and won 19 and 17 games respectively. In May 1924, Marv replaced Hunter Hill as manager of the Buffs and guided them to a second place finish in the Texas League.

*Veterans continue on page 4*

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## Articles Solicitation



Want to get into the game? Tired of sitting on the bench? Play ball with us by sending in articles for future newsletters! Give your fellow chapter members, and other SABR'ites, solid hits of wisdom, wonderment, and wit in an article of your choice that relates to baseball, especially Houston baseball. Rookies are welcome; our cracker-jack editors will tone up your prose into major league quality. Just send your article, from 200 to 1000 words, to umpire/editor Tony Cavender at [anthony.cavender@pillsburylaw.com](mailto:anthony.cavender@pillsburylaw.com) by the 15<sup>th</sup> of January for our Winter issue. Start writing your opening pitch and join the lineup!

The editorial board would like to honor the Hall of Fame players who passed away this year by having our chapter members write personal remembrances of them. If you have unique experiences or memories with any of the recently departed players, please send your stories to our umpire/editor and we will publish them in future newsletters. For each article, please provide your photo and any artwork that goes with your story. We cannot promise that we will use all the stories, but we'll try.

### Editorial Board

## Memories of Tom Seaver — from Cincinnati

By Bill Brown

The first time we met in Montreal in June of 1977, Tom Seaver and I did an unlikely TV interview. It was unlikely because he was about to pitch in a few hours, and starting pitchers seldom agree to do interviews right before they work. In this case the situation was a compelling one for the Cincinnati Reds TV Network. Seaver was about to make his debut for the Reds days after he had been traded by the New York Mets in a deal that had the baseball world buzzing. Seaver was his usual professional self in the brief interview. Then he shut out the Expos in a three-hit complete game in his first day in a Cincinnati uniform. It was the beginning of a fabulous phase of the Hall of Famer's career. He was 75-46 as a Red with a 3.18 ERA. He completed 42 of 158 starts with Cincinnati.

Seaver was traded for Pat Zachry, Doug Flynn, Dan Norman, and Steve Henderson. General manager Bob Howsam needed a staff ace after losing Don Gullett to free agency after winning the World Series in 1976. The Reds are the only

National League team since 1921-22 to win back-to-back Series titles. Adding Seaver to a rotation including Jack Billingham, Fred Norman, Woodie Fryman, and Paul Moskau gave Reds' fans hopes of making it three straight titles. Their record at the time of the trade was 32-27. They finished with 88 wins, in second place behind the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Seaver made 20 starts for the Reds in 1977 and completed 14 of them! He finished 14-3 for Cincinnati, 21-6 overall. Among his top individual games was a no-hitter for the Reds in 1978. He had what was called the "Imperfect Game" as a Met in 1969. He retired the first 25 batters in that game until unknown Jim Qualls singled for the only hit for the Chicago Cubs.

Tom and I struck up a casual friendship. He was the first to call me "Brownie." Not that it was any recognition of excellence or sign of close friendship, you understand. It's typical that baseball players or even media members have nicknames. They usually come from initials or some derivation of a person's last name. Reds' PR chief Jim Ferguson was "Fergie." Sportswriter Bob Hertz was "Hertz." Johnny Bench was "JB." Larry Dierker was "Dierk." Jim Deshaies was "JD." Phil Garner was "Gar." The Reds went on an exhibition trip to Japan after the 1978 season, playing a few games against Japanese teams. After they returned, the Reds TV Network hired Seaver to sit down in the studio with me and narrate the games, adding his description of the entire experience of being in Japan. He told us of sightseeing trips and made the experience stand out for the viewers. He also coached me through some pronunciations of Japanese Stadiums!

Seaver paid dividends in 1979, leading the Reds to the NL West title. Uncharacteristically, when the Houston Astros built a 10½-game lead over the Reds by July 4, Seaver

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**The Chapter Officers and Editorial Board thank Matthew Stevens and Meghan McCroskey for designing the logos for the masthead and this box, respectively.**

## Justin Verlander's Hat Trick: His Last Hurrah?

By Maxwell Kates

Remind me not to listen to any more of my baseball predictions.

On September 1, 2019, the Houston Astros played the Toronto Blue Jays in the last of a three-game series in Toronto. Justin Verlander was the starting pitcher. That morning, I remarked that "Verlander is capable to pitch a no-hitter with every start." Only I added that "...he's not going to pitch one today. No pitcher has ever thrown two no-hitters against the same team on the road. Indeed, as a member of the Detroit Tigers, Verlander pitched a 9-0 no-hitter against the Blue Jays in Toronto on May 7, 2011.



Maxwell Kates

Indeed, as a member of the Cleveland Indians, Hall of Famer Addie Joss no-hit the Chicago White Sox on October 2, 1908 – a perfect game – and again on April 20, 1910. The first game was in Cleveland, the second was in Chicago. More than a century later, Tim Lincecum of the San Francisco Giants no-hit the San Diego Padres, on July 13, 2013 and again on June 25, 2014. The first game was in San Diego, the second in San Francisco. Nobody had pitched two no-hitters against the same team on the road.

That is, until Justin Verlander pitched his second no-hitter against the Blue Jays in Toronto. That afternoon!

A crowd of 24,104 flocked to the Rogers Centre to see the Blue Jays behind starting pitcher Wilmer Font take on the visiting Astros. The Blue Jays were the first to reach base on a five pitch walk by Cavan Biggio in the first inning. The Houston native advanced to second base on a ground ball by a different son of a Hall of Famer, Vladimir Guerrero Jr., but Biggio was left stranded when Justin Smoak struck out to end the inning.

Verlander retired the Blue Jays in order through four when I turned to my friend and asked "Do you see anything interesting on the scoreboard?"

When you see it, don't say anything." No Toronto batsman had reached base since Biggio; meanwhile, their next hit of the ballgame would be their first.

Two trends continued as the game progressed. No hits by the Blue Jays, but no runs scored by the Astros, either. The Astros' first hit of the game took place in the second inning, when leadoff hitter Aldemys Diaz lined a double to left field. He advanced to third base but could not score as Robinson Chirinos flew to left to end the inning. Moving ahead to the seventh inning with one out, Yordan Alvarez reached first base on a line drive to deep center field. He reached second when Diaz was hit by a pitch, but neither baserunner was able to score. In the eighth inning, Verlander struck out the side.

Now we go to the top of the ninth inning. Former Astro Ken Giles entered the game as the fourth Blue Jays pitcher of the afternoon. Alex Bregman, playing shortstop, led off the inning with a double. After Alvarez

struck out swinging, Bregman advanced to third base when Diaz flied out to center field. With two out in the top of the ninth inning, the Astros had still not scored any runs. Would Justin Verlander join former Houston Colt .45 Ken Johnson as the only pitchers in major league history to throw regulation no-hitters and lose? On April 23, 1964, Johnson pitched a no-hitter against the Cincinnati Reds and lost, 1-0.

Enter Abraham Toro.

Toro, a third baseman, was not supposed to play that afternoon but an injury to Yuli Gurriel forced manager A. J. Hinch to tinker with his lineup. The native of Longueuil, Quebec was batting .179 at the time he faced Giles. With the count at 1-1, Giles threw a 97 mile an hour fastball over the plate. Toro crushed the pitch. Left fielder Brandon Drury could not get under the ball as it sailed over the fence. Home run for Toro, the Astros 2, the Blue Jays 0.

Verlander still had to pitch the bottom of the ninth. He began by enticing Drury to ground out to Bregman, who relayed the ball to Diaz. Twice in his 12 years in Motown, Verlander had passed this way before. Besides the Toronto no-hitter, he had previously thrown one against the

*Verlander continues on page 6*

## Baseball



## Trivia

1. What hurler played his entire 18-year career with one team, lost both games in the only world Series he played, and was known as "Rapid Robert?"
2. What slugger won three MVPs, played in nine straight All Star games, and hit more than 500 home runs, mostly with one club, but also with three others?
3. What player/manager spent his entire 22-year career with one team, hitting more than 500 home runs with an unorthodox batting style?
4. What two facts are common for these three players?

Answers on page 6



## Babe Ruth Memories from a former Major Leaguer

By Larry Miggins

As a former big leaguer myself, I believe Babe Ruth was the greatest complete baseball player in the history of the game. His pitching and hitting records are simply incredible, and no one else comes close as the consummate baseball player.

Back in 1950, I was fortunate to spend the season in the home of Walter and Lucille Burke, two baseball enthusiasts. The Burkes were not blessed with children, so they “adopted” two players from the minor-league Columbus Red Birds each summer. It was the closest thing to home I ever experienced in professional baseball.

### Lineup of Upcoming Events:

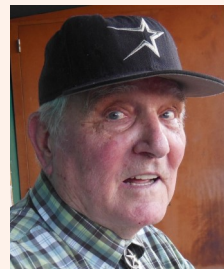
- Nov 16 Monthly Meeting: Mike Vance on Baseball and Civil Rights & Paul Rogers on Robin Roberts**
- Dec 14 Monthly Meeting: Jerry Amernick on Babe Ruth’s Impact**
- Jan 18 Monthly Meeting: Speakers To Be Determined**

One day at breakfast, Mrs. Burke told me a wonderful story that sheds much light on the character of this man Ruth. On a Sunday morning in 1927, when she was 17 years old, Lucille was handling the switchboard as a volunteer at the local orphanage when the Babe phoned. She couldn’t believe it. The Yankees were in town for a spring-training game against the Red Birds.

He asked how many youngsters they had at the orphanage. She said they had a total of 87 youngsters at the school. He then related that he would be playing a game at 1 p.m. and he wanted to come out and visit with the youngsters after supper and treat them to some cake and ice cream. But only on one condition – he wanted privacy. He told her that if he found one photographer or one sportswriter there, he would take what he had and throw it down a manhole. So, he asked her to please check with the person in charge; if he or she would

agree to these conditions, he would come out. They agreed.

The Babe arrived about 7 p.m. in two cabs loaded with goodies. In those days, you had to pack ice cream in ice in order to transport it, so it was quite an undertaking on his part.



Larry Miggins

“Well,” she said, “they had a big party with lots of laughs and stories about his days

at St. Mary’s Industrial School for Boys in Baltimore. He met each youngster, signed autographs, and really enjoyed himself. Then, about 10 p.m., after visiting with the staff, he summoned a cab and quietly went back to the hotel.

“To this day,” she said, “there never was a word about this incident in the news media” – because that is the way the Babe wanted it. The children were thrilled, and they talked about it for years. It was something that made them feel special.

*Ruth continues on page 6*

### Veterans continued from page 1

The 1925 season for the Buffaloes got off to a solid start. Goodwin was back as field boss, plus his pitches were working. He was one of 17 major leaguers grandfathered in to throw the spitball, and coupled with a hard fastball, he racked up a 21 and 9 record on the mound before St. Louis sold his contract to the Cincinnati Reds. At age 34, he was back in the show, and he ended the year on the losing end of a hard fought complete game against the NL Champion Pirates.

The season done, and a real second chance at big league success ahead of him, Marv Goodwin returned home to Houston and resumed his Air Corps reserve duties as a flight trainer at Ellington Field south of town. He and a mechanic were up in a 150 horse power Curtiss Jenny when the plane suddenly went

into a tailspin at the low altitude of only 200 feet.

Goodwin managed to roll the aircraft so that it hit wing first. The mechanic walked away with minor bruises, but First Lieutenant Goodwin badly fractured both legs and arms. He was brought into Baptist Hospital downtown, and the



Mike Vance

following day, it was thought that he was improving. X-rays showed no skull fractures. Two days later, however, Goodwin’s recovery took a disastrous turn. Serious head injuries had been missed. Marv Goodwin, who had made local baseball fans so proud of him just weeks earlier, died on October 22, 1925. All baseball

mourned.

Many of our local SABR members served in the military, including Chapter President Bob Dorrill, a Navy veteran, newsletter contributors Tony Cavender and Bill Brown, who both wore Army green, and chapter namesake Larry Dierker, who was on both the Astros’ and the Army’s rosters in the late 1960s. Many men who played professional baseball in Houston were veterans in the non-baseball sense of the word, as well. The founders of the first organized baseball clubs in the area later served in the Union and Confederate armies. The Double-A Buffaloes sent players to war, and the Astros organization had players, coaches, managers and general managers from among the ranks of America’s veterans. This Veteran’s Day, please give your heartfelt thanks to all of the men and women who have ably served their country.

Seaver continued from page 2

predicted the Astros would “drop like a lead balloon” in the standings. The Reds overtook them early in September and won the title by 1½ games. Seaver was 16-6 with a 3.14 ERA that year.

He pitched an outstanding game in the NLCS against the Pirates but left after eight innings with the score tied, 2-2.

Seaver’s sense of humor stood out. His cackling laugh is still in my head. Once on a flight to the West Coast, Seaver was chatting with pitching coach Bill Fischer in the aisle of the team charter at about 30,000 feet when Tom slipped a pair of trainer’s scissors out of his pocket and snipped off Fischer’s tie about three inches below the knot. That cackling laugh triggered a larger wave of laughter from the other passengers. When the team arrived at the hotel in Los Angeles, Fischer walked into the lobby with his tie still neatly knotted.

Seaver’s 1981 season was one of his best. He was 14-2 with a 2.54 ERA despite the interruption of the season by a players’ strike. The Reds had the best record in the National League that year, but there was no postseason for them. They were ½ game behind the Dodgers when the players went on strike. In the second half, the Astros claimed that title by 1½ games over the Reds.

Captivating New York Mets fans as the National League Rookie of the Year in 1967, Seaver went on to become the greatest Met in the team’s history. He won 198 games wearing a Mets uniform and won a World Series game in the Amazin’ Mets’ shocking defeat of powerful Baltimore, with a complete game 2-1, 10-inning triumph on three days’ rest in Game 4. Tom returned to the Mets in 1983 when Cincinnati traded him back to New York after his worst season. He also did some broadcast-

ing work for the Mets. And he brought back a disenchanting Mets fan.

Here is a condensed summary of an article in *The New York Times*:

Elena Gustines had been an ardent Mets supporter for years, until the players’ strike of 1994. She swore off baseball after that, telling friends, “The only way I’ll go back to baseball is if Tom Seaver himself invites me back.” Ten years after she turned away, the Mets tried to bring her back into the fold by sending her a handwritten letter from centerfielder Mike Cameron. She refused to return, insisting on an invitation from Seaver if the team wanted her back. It was Seaver who had attracted her to baseball, with his big strikeout games. In 2004, her friends at work implored the Mets to ask Seaver to reach out to Elena. On a birthday card in May of that year, Seaver wrote, “Dear Elena, We miss you! Please come back to the baseball family. The game really needs you and so do the Mets! Your friend, Tom Seaver.”

Elena came back. “My hands started trembling,” she said. “I was in complete shock.” The two became good friends, exchanging notes and gifts. Seaver signed one note to her, “Your number one fan.” They met in person in 2009. She said, “I finally met my favorite player. I was in awe.” Elena sent the Seaver family customized M&Ms with his stats on them. She sent Seaver a book with the box scores from all 61 of his shutouts and another with his 311 victories. Tom told a marketing agent who worked with him on autograph sessions, “You don’t know the joy that I get out of somebody like her. She’s so real and so genuine.” Earl Wilson wrote the article in the *Times*.

Seaver moved to the American League with the Chicago White Sox, where I again encountered him at Comiskey Park and we exchanged pleasantries before a game. Tom won his 300<sup>th</sup> game for the Sox. He ended his career for the other Sox, Boston, in 1986. Ironically, they lost to the

## Welcome New Members

Byron Eknoyan.....Houston, TX  
 Maxwell Kates .....Toronto, ON  
 Ted Walker .....Houston, TX  
 Zack Hamm .....Spring, TX  
 Jack Peebles.....Winter Garden, FL  
 Armando Richardson .....Houston, TX  
 Robert Fait.....Sealy, TX  
 Brian Bennett.....Katy, TX

Mets. When all the numbers were in, Seaver stood at 311-205, with a 2.86 ERA. He went to 12 All Star games in 20 seasons. His 3,640 strikeouts ranked sixth on the all-time list. He whiffed 19 in 1970 at San Diego, including a record ten in a row! He completed 231 of his 647 career starts. That’s 36%!

Seaver was not afraid to take on the establishment. He joined the Marine reserves after his high school graduation and spent six months on active duty. “The principles that I learned in boot camp were the principles that I took to the mound,” said Seaver. “My uniform was always to the nines when I went to the mound. It’s a matter of respect.” The 2020 Mets took the field after his death with dirt on the right knee area of their uniforms. Seaver wore an old-fashioned knee pad on his right knee to protect it from the beating it took on the pitching mound every time he threw a pitch from his “drop and drive” delivery, fashioned from tremendous leg strength. He pushed hard off the rubber and came at the hitter with power.

Despite his background as a Marine, Tom was critical of the Vietnam War and signed a petition to protest the war when he was with the Mets. That story was bubbling over during the 1969 World Series, but Seaver was quite willing to acknowledge his opinions while pitching during that exciting time as a relatively young player. Not many players were comfortable giving their opinions on world politics at that time.

Lewy body dementia sent Seaver on a spiral starting before 2016. He

*Seaver continues on page 6*



Bill Brown

**Verlander continued from page 3**

Milwaukee Brewers on June 12, 2007. Next up, catcher Reese McGuire struck out, Verlander's 14<sup>th</sup> of the day. With two away, I had passed this way before. I was in the stands for Roy Halladay's second start on September 27, 1998. He pitched 8 2/3 innings of no-hit ball against Detroit before Tigers pinch hitter Bobby Higginson homered over the center field fence.

The last batter of the game was the third son of a 1990s All Star in the Blue Jays lineup, Bo Bichette. As the crowd rose to its feet, Verlander became increasingly anxious. The plate appearance reached seven pitches as the Rogers Centre drew silent. Finally, a crack of the bat, a ground ball towards third base, Toro caught it, he threw it to Diaz. Diaz touched first base. Game over! Justin Verlander had his third no-hitter!

The no-hitter brought Verlander's record for the season to 17-5. Giles, now 2-3 on the season, took the loss. Verlander threw 120 pitches, including 77 fastballs, and approximately two-thirds were strikes. Verlander became the sixth pitcher to throw at least three no-hitters. Leading the path is Nolan Ryan with seven. Sandy Koufax pitched four, while Cy Young, Bob Feller, and Larry Corcoran each tossed three.

**Ruth continued from page 4**

Mrs. Burke was well-respected in the field of delinquency, and during her career she appeared before congressional committees in Washington. She said she had told this story to folks all over the country, only to discover that similar incidents involving the Babe had happened in other cities.

Incidentally, I might add that Babe Ruth never lost his faith. Neglected it, yes. But the seeds sown by Brothers Gilbert and Matthias at St. Mary's took root.

I met a Dominican priest in Houston years ago who told me that one of his confreres in New York was the chaplain at the hospital where the

All five have made their way to Cooperstown except Corcoran. Verlander was far from the only Houston Astro to participate in a no-hitter in 2019. On August 3 – Astros Hall of Fame night at Minute Maid Park – Aaron Sanchez, Will Harris, Joe Biagini, and Chris Devenski combined to pitch a no-hitter against the Seattle Mariners.

The no-hitter copped a season of milestones for Verlander who on September 29, victimized Kole Calhoun of the Angels as his 3,000<sup>th</sup> strikeout. His record for the season, 21 wins against 6 losses in 34 starts with a 2.58 ERA and an even 300 strikeouts. Verlander went on to win his second Cy Young Award, after earning the prize for the American League's top pitcher while in Detroit in 2011.

Verlander's 2020 campaign, and likely his Astros career, ended abruptly after suffering a right forearm strain in his first start of the season on July 26. It was announced in September that he will require Tommy John surgery and is expected to miss the entire 2021 season. In his sixteen-year big league career, Verlander's totals include 226 wins against 129 losses in 454 games pitched, 3,013 strikeouts, an ERA of 3.33 and a WHIP of 1.13.

Now if only I were as inept at predicting losing lottery numbers...

Babe died in 1948. He told him how the Babe, sensing that the end was near, asked everyone there to leave the room and send in the chaplain. He went to confession to this priest, and he received the last rites of the Catholic Church.

Say a prayer for Babe Ruth and these two great teachers the next time you pass his shrine in our National Cathedral – and, please God, we shall all meet in heaven some day.

*Editor's note: Larry Miggins wrote this in 2000 and graciously allowed us to reprint it here. He played in the St Louis Cardinals' organization and spent parts of two seasons in the Show.*

**Seaver continued from page 5**

admitted that he was terrified because his memory was slipping badly. When some 1969 Mets teammates came to visit him at the Seaver Vineyards in northern California in 2018, Tom could not remember many of the games and moments as they reminisced about them. Ron Swoboda was troubled to see his former teammate, a former master bridge player, robbed of his mental acuteness. "That's so painful because memories are treasures to me and all of us," said Swoboda. "The thought of anything sneaking in there and stealing my memory from me is just horrible. It's beyond words how painful it is to see Tom losing his memory."

We are left with our own memories of Tom Terrific. From the Miracle Mets to the Reds and beyond, Tom Seaver epitomized the Hall of Fame qualities that resulted in his approval on 98.8 percent of ballots submitted by the Baseball Writers of America in 1992. We don't have Tom Seaver anymore. But we do have indelible memories of him. When Seaver introduced himself to Hank Aaron at his first All-Star Game in 1967, Aaron was well aware of him. "Kid, I know who you are," said Aaron, "and before your career is over, I guarantee you everyone in this stadium will, too." Long after he left us, the legend of Tom Seaver will be told to new generations of fans. They need to know.

**Trivia Answers**

1. Bob Feller
2. Jimmy Foxx
3. Mel Ott
4. They are all in the Hall of Fame and started their Major League careers at age 17.