

# The Wood Pile

Newsletter of the Smoky Joe Wood Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research

Winter 2022 🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿 Volume 3 🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿 Issue 2

Stephen Krevisky (President) - Alan Cohen (Vice President/Treasurer)

Stan Dziurgot (Membership Director) - Stan Osowiecki (Wood Pile Editor)



## LEADING OFF

By: Steve Krevisky

Greetings, and Happy New Year to all!



We have started to resume in-person activities again! These include a recent chapter breakfast, our general meeting on the 19th century, held at Middlesex Community College and our participation at the Southern New England meeting. Author Bill Ryczek spoke on his new Dick Stuart book!

Also, Stan Dziurgot organized our annual holiday luncheon, which went smoothly and was well attended. Bill did an entertaining talk about the 1970's Peterson-Kekich wife-swapping event.

Upcoming is National SABR day on Saturday, February 5, which is quite fittingly Hank Aaron's birthday! I suggest that we have a chapter breakfast at the Athenian Diner on Washington Street in Middletown. I spoke to someone there, and they can accommodate us!

Let's also start to plan for our spring general meeting, so let's think about speakers for this. It would be nice for the lockout to end soon, with a new CBA, so that another season of baseball can proceed!

Finally, Karl Cicitto has decided to step down from his leadership role with us as communications director. He did a great job, and we will miss his contributions. He will take on a leadership role with the Springfield chapter, which is closer to his home.

See you soon at one of our upcoming events!  
Regards, Steve K

P.S. I can't pass up this trivia question, which I saw recently, namely, who are the 4 San Diego Padres who won the Cy Young Award?

Members are welcome to submit articles, book reviews or other information that might be interesting to other chapter members. Please send information to Stan Osowiecki at [osowiecki@sbcglobal.net](mailto:osowiecki@sbcglobal.net).

## FUTURE EVENTS

Events for Connecticut and National Events can be found online at:

[www.smokyjoewood.com/events](http://www.smokyjoewood.com/events) (Connecticut)

[www.sabr.org/events](http://www.sabr.org/events) (National)

## NEW MEMBERS

New chapter members (since June 16, 2021)

- Paul Bellofiore (Trumbull)
- Carl Frederick (Wallingford)
- Gary Hamel (Bristol)
- Paul Hunter (Norwalk)
- Adam Mednick (New Haven)
- Brandon Ogbunu (New Haven)
- Dan Scoppetta (Old Saybrook)
- Christopher Tormey (New Haven)
- Sidney Carlson White (New Haven)

## WRITING OPPORTUNITIES

### Baseball Biography Project

The lofty goal is to write a high-quality journal-length biography of every player who ever played in the major leagues. 5,700+ biographies have been written by 500+ SABR members as of June 18, 2021. Your subject can be anyone who ever played in the major leagues and has been retired for at least 5 years, or any manager, executive, umpire, scout, or broadcaster. In fact, we welcome your ideas for any subject who impacted the history of the game — someone from the Negro Leagues, the minor leagues, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, and even Japan.

Web-site: [sabr.org/bioproject](http://sabr.org/bioproject)

Things you should know: [sabr.org/content/bioproject-resources](http://sabr.org/content/bioproject-resources)

Request an assignment: Lyle Spatz at [lspatz@comcast.net](mailto:lspatz@comcast.net)

### SABR Book Projects

Biographers are needed for several books. Status of assignment availabilities changes daily. Please contact Bill Nowlin ([bnowlin@rounder.com](mailto:bnowlin@rounder.com)) to request an assignment.



## 1949 COLONIAL LEAGUE CHAMPION BRISTOL OWLS

By: George Pawlush

Bristol's minor league baseball history is best remembered for its ten-year relationship with the Boston Red Sox as their Double A Eastern League affiliate from 1973 to 1982.

Almost completely forgotten is Bristol's first foray into organized baseball that occurred in 1949 when the former Port Chester Clippers of the Class B Colonial League moved their operations to Muzzy Field and rebranded themselves as the Bristol Owls.

The Colonial League debuted in 1947 with teams in the Connecticut cities of Waterbury, Bridgeport, Stamford and New London and Poughkeepsie and Port Chester in New York. The circuit remained active for three-and-a-half years before collapsing mid-way into the 1950 season.

Minor-league baseball grew steadily in the post-World War 2 era reaching its zenith in 1949 with a record 59 leagues, 464 teams, and 10,000 players. However, as quickly as minor league baseball grew in the 1940s, interest nosedived in 1950 as the Colonial League and a few other leagues ceased operations at mid-season. By 1951, minor league baseball was down to fifty circuits with attendance dropping to just over 27 million fans. This downward trend continued throughout the 1950s.

The Owls were owned by Les Osterman from Rye, NY who was a co-founder of a very prosperous Wall Street brokerage firm. He bought the Port Chester Clippers for \$18,000 in 1948, prior to the team's second season in the Colonial League. Despite winning the Colonial League championship that year, the Clippers didn't fare well at the gate, drawing just 32,000 fans. This forced Osterman to move the team to Bristol.

Bristol generated instant success at Muzzy Field, winning the 1949 Colonial League championship and leading the Colonial circuit in attendance with 62,495 fans. Despite the great fan count the team still lost money due to high rent and excessive marketing overruns.

The team was skippered by Al Barillari, who had pitched for the 1946 Triple A International League Baltimore Orioles. Desiring to be closer to his hometown of New Rochelle, NY, Barillari was sold to Port Chester where he was hired as player-manager, guiding the 1947 and 1948 Port Chester teams. During those two seasons, Barillari played every infield and outfield position for the Clippers, and even pitched and caught.

Without a dominant ace pitcher but with mound depth, Bristol rode the backs of Guy Coleman and knuckleballer Tony Sierzego, who won 15 and 13 games respectively. At midseason the Owls got a boost by signing Luis Cabrera, who went 11-1 with a 1.41 ERA in 83 innings, and rookie Ruben Gomez, who was 5-1 with 86 strikeouts in 48 innings.



Ruben Gomez

["1949 Owls" continued on Page 8](#)

# 1962: A MIRACLE YEAR

By: George Sommerfield

*Editor's Note: George originally sent this article in for the January 2017 issue and it got mistakenly put aside. Sorry George!*

Although 1962 was a very bad year for the stock market, it was great year for many in New York City. It had to be the work of the Great Unseen Genius of Baseball. The 1951 and 1954 seasons were memorable but in those days my team was the New York Giants. Having entered law school in the Fall of 1956, I had three years of intense study ahead. That, combined with working in the Catskill Mountains during the summers, gave me little time for going to sporting events. In addition, the Giants and Dodgers moved to California after the 1957 season resulting in far fewer NYC home baseball games.

During 1958 and 1959, school, summer employment and a Bar Examination placed baseball well into the background. Working in a law firm and getting married made 1960 another busy time and by the Spring of 1962 I hardly knew of any of the players on the Giants roster. Of course, there was Willie Mays but other stars such as Juan Marichal, Orlando Cepeda and Willie McCovey never wore a New York Giants uniform. I must admit, that except when they play the Mets, I still have a soft spot for the Giants and had a real thrill when they finally won it all in 2010.



Sixty years ago, in 1962, the year our daughter was born, New York City got the Mets. That season, going 40-120 was pure entertainment. I could just enjoy the game, day by day. A “must win” game was simply a hope that we would win a game. Often our mornings would include saying, “How will the Mets lose today?” We had grown men, professional baseball players, most of whom had many years of experience, futility going all out to win. A modern-day version of Sisyphus. Not many pitching 40-120 1962 A Miracle Year staffs can have two twenty game losers. Roger Craig 10-24 and one of my all-time favorites southpaw Alvin Jackson 8-20. Obviously, you have to be a good player to get a chance to lose so many times. What a team. The first baseman had the real-life initials MET, Marvelous Marv, Marv Eugene Throneberry.

It was relaxation watching a hopelessly last place team. They couldn't do much worse. Their play took our minds far away from the day to day challenges that young families have in the early days parenthood and working. I would watch some games on television with my friend and former law school classmate who previously played varsity college baseball at the University of Miami. He too would roll in laughter at what we saw. A team like the Mets brought fans together and created a camaraderie. Yes, winning is a goal. Some say it is “everything”. But there is a time where losing brings a valuable diversion, a time for recognizing that the game for most of us is simply entertainment at the end of which we smile as we go back to our offices and lives with loved ones.

1969 was a Miracle Year but the first was 1962. The year that brought back baseball to many fans in New York.

## BETWEEN INNINGS: TRIVIA

If Connie Mack had not found a suitable playing field in Boston, the 8<sup>th</sup> and final AL franchise would have gone to another northeast city that today has an NFL franchise but still none in MLB. Name that city.

Name Connie Mack's \$100,000 infield.

Name the 300-win hurler born in 1921 who later clubbed a home-run in every National League ballpark.

Ted Williams and Joe DiMaggio tore apart American League pitching in 1941 but it was a shortstop who had the most base hits. Was it Luke Appling, Lou Boudreau, Joe Cronin or Cecil Travis who led MLB with 218 base hits?

Name the winning pitcher in the Bobby Thompson game: (a) Larry Jansen; (b) Dave Koslo; or (c) Sal Maglie.

Name the 40-year-old hurler who threw a no-hitter and fanned 100+ batters for the 15<sup>th</sup> straight season in 1961.



# REORGANIZING THE MINOR LEAGUES

By: Jim Mizera

Early in 2021, major league baseball (MLB) shook up its minor league farm system, cutting the number of its affiliated teams from 160 to 120 and restructured the system. Now each major league team has one team in each of the four minor league classes: AAA, AA, High-A (A+), and Low-A (A). The big leagues also renamed the leagues, shifted some teams up or down a level, brought in a few independent league teams, and realigned the divisions.

## The New Farm-Club

After this year's reorganization, 36 states and one Canadian province now field a team in one of the four highest minor league affiliate levels. Nine large states have 5 or more teams and they are home to the majority of the clubs, although Florida and California have mostly Lower-A ball (Table 1.)

Major League Baseball also has affiliates in Rookie-level leagues - the Arizona Complex League, the Florida Complex League, and the Dominican Republic Summer League. These teams play a shortened seasonal schedule. Some major league teams have more than one team in these leagues and some and some different big-league clubs share ballparks. The big leagues have also started running their own collegiate summer leagues like the MLB Draft League, which absorbed some teams from three now defunct leagues - the NY-Penn League, the Eastern League, and the Carolina League.

Table 1. States with the Most Minor League Teams

State	Minor League Teams	High A Teams	Low A Teams
Florida	12	-	10
California	9	-	8
Texas	8	-	-
North Carolina	8	3	4
South Carolina	7	2	4
New York	6	-	-
Ohio	6	3	-
Pennsylvania	6	-	-
Virginia	5	-	3
Totals for Leading States	67	8	29

Major league teams fully own 15 of their minor league ball clubs and partly own another six. Regardless, under the new 10-year Professional Development Licenses they have with their junior franchises, they will continue to set standards for stadiums and schedules. The big leagues require stadiums at each level to have a minimum seating capacity and teams to play a certain number of games. (See Table 2.) The new rules also upgrade lighting, tunnel, and other ballpark requirements.

## What Happened to the Teams Kicked Out

The majors dropped 43 teams from their minor leagues, 31 of them from Rookie leagues with short seasons and 12 from A or AA leagues. Unfortunately, five of these teams folded completely. Another 22 of the teams that were dropped converted to amateur collegiate-level status. The entire Appalachian League, a 10-team Rookie league, made this move, retaining its name but becoming a non-pro league that collaborates with MLB. Six other teams, four from the NY-Penn. League, joined the new MLB Draft League, a collegiate summer league that the big leagues support.

Table 2. Minor Leagues: Teams, Games and Seating

Minor League Level	# of Teams	# of Games in Schedule	Avg. Stadium Capacity
AAA	30	144	10,764
AA	30	138	7,566
A+	30	132	5,732
A	30	132	6,123
Rookie - Florida	18	50 – 60	7,193
Rookie - Arizona Complex	18	50 – 60	10,972
Rookie - Dominican Summer	47	50 – 60	-
Arizona Fall League	6	30	-

16 teams found new places in professional ball in independent minor leagues. Nine teams from the Pioneer League, a Rookie league, reformed as an independent league that partners with Major League Baseball. Two Low-A clubs went right to the Atlantic League. Another two Low-A teams that didn't find a new place last year went out of business but their cities got new teams that will join the Atlantic League in 2022 and 2023.

Two ousted teams went to existing independent leagues - the American Association and the Frontier League. Finally, the Salem-Keizer Volcanoes created their own independent league. They were formerly part of the Northwest League, a Rookie league. Left without a league by baseball's new plan, their owners decided to found the Mavericks Independent Baseball League, a four-team circuit playing all its games at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer, Oregon.

**"Minors" continued on Page 9**



## SABR PROFILE: KARL CICITTO

By: George Pawlusch

"Baseball's Biggest Bookie" was the title of a June 26, 2006 article by *Sports Illustrated* columnist Steve Rushin that gave Karl Cicitto 15 minutes of national fame.

It started with a chance meeting between Cicitto and Connecticut resident and SI sportswriter, Rushin at a Granby Public Library event. During their conversation Cicitto related his 4000-baseball book collection. Rushin wanted to learn more so Cicitto invited him to his house to see his collection in person.

As soon as Rushin showed up at Cicitto's house he began taking notes as Cicitto guided him through various areas of his house where the books were displayed in 16 separate bookcases. The SI writer was amazed at what he saw and told Cicitto that it would make good copy for an upcoming SI columns.

In the piece, Rushin described the collection as "a kind of urban sprawl." Cicitto explained that he built the collection "buying books at flea markets, on vacations and at library sales." His favorite possession is a signed early edition of "Veeck as in Wreck" by the late Chicago White Sox owner Bill Veeck and Ed Linn. He has arranged his collection by themes. Books about umpires are in one area while his Babe Ruth book collection, which numbers over a hundred books, is in a separate area as are SABR publications and Boston Red Sox books.

Soon after the article was published, Cicitto received a letter from Marty Appel, former New York Yankees public relations director and team historian, who has written over twenty books. Appel told Cicitto how much he enjoyed the article. However, in attempting to find Cicitto's address, he was surprised not to see his name in the SABR directory.

That's how Cicitto discovered SABR. He joined the group in 2007 attended his first SABR convention in 2009. There he met a member from Florida who had collected 8000 volumes, "I immediately felt at home," Cicitto remembers. "People in SABR are loyal and care instinctively about baseball history."

Cicitto confesses that when he takes on a project, he does it obsessively. "This is typical of many SABR members," he says. "If you have a strong interest in writing or editing, SABR can really make your dreams come true. You can participate in the creation of a SABR publication. There are a group of amazing people in the organization that are there to help you."

He points to New Englanders Len Levin, Bill Nowlin, and Alan Cohen who have established themselves on the national SABR scene. "These guys are so good at what they do, and they command a lot of respect in the baseball community, he adds. "They are always eager to help fellow members."

During his 15 years in SABR, Cicitto has been very involved with the Smoky Joe Wood chapter. He started the chapter's semi-annual Wood Pile publication in Summer 2015 along with Stan Osowiecki, who contributed his design talents. In January 2020, Cicitto turned over the editorship reigns to Osowiecki.

His most fulfilling project as a chapter member was as editor of "The 100-year Journey of a Baseball Journeyman: Mike Sandlock," that was published by SABR in 2016. It included many articles by Smoky Joe Wood members. At the time, Sandlock, a Greenwich resident, at 100, was the oldest living major league veteran in the nation.

"It was great that our chapter was able to shine the light on somebody local," Cicitto said. "His son and the rest of the Sandlock family were very gratified to see the book written about their dad." Unfortunately, Sandlock passed away soon after the book came out.

After attending his initial SABR convention in 2009, Cicitto followed it with nine straight trips to the annual confab. He brought back to Connecticut some of the things he experienced at the convention, most importantly the newsletter publication and panel discussions.

In March 2017, the Smoky Wood chapter hosted a panel discussion at Quinnipiac University to honor Jeff Bagwell's induction into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. The event drew a fine audience and as a result our chapter embarked on a new book project in conjunction with SABR. *Jeff Bagwell in Connecticut* was published in 2019.

Cicitto is very quick to point out that many of the aforementioned initiatives couldn't have happened without the involvement of many Smoky Joe Wood members. "Nothing good happens without a lot of help," he says. "People like Larry Levine, Tom Monitto, Pete Zanardi, Joe Runde, Bill Ryczek, Tom Zocco, Stan Osowiecki, Steve Krevisky, Alan Cohen and others make things happen!"

"Cicitto" continued on Page 7

# TWO TEAMS, ONE STADIUM

By: Stan Dziurgot

With the move of the Oakland Raiders to Las Vegas, gone are the days of a Major League baseball team and a National League football team sharing the same venue. For the first month or so of their season football teams would play on grass and dirt fields because with the overlapping seasons, the dirt was still needed for a baseball infield. When baseball ended grass would be planted and the dirt or the artificial turf in the case of the cookie cutter artificial turf stadium of the late 1960's and 1970's today each sport has their own stadium; many in the same complex.

The Raiders, who shared the Oakland Coliseum with the baseball Athletics, actually shared Candlestick Park with the San Francisco Giants before the Oakland Coliseum was built. The Giants would share Candlestick with the football 49ers until they moved to Oracle Park in 2000.

In Southern California, when the Brooklyn Dodgers moved to Los Angeles, they shared the L.A. Memorial Coliseum with the NFL Rams until Dodger Stadium opened in 1962. Over 90,000 attended the World Series games in 1959 in a place where it was only 250 feet to the left field line with a 40-foot-high screen on the wall to reduce the number of home runs.

With the odd configuration of the stadium, fans sitting in the outfield, some 500 feet away from home plate were kept abreast of the action by listening to Vin Scully on their transistor radios. The Rams would leave L.A. from 1980-1994 and play in Anaheim sharing the stadium with the Angels thus moving from the City of Angels to playing with the Angels. The Rams had actually come into being in Cleveland in 1937 and shared League Park and Municipal Stadium with the Indians until they moved to Los Angeles in 1946.

Further south, before moving to Petco Park the San Diego Padres Qualcomm Stadium with the football Chargers. The stadium was also called Jack Murphy Stadium, named after a San Diego sportswriter and the brother of Mets' broadcaster Bob Murphy.

In the Midwest, the Kansas City Athletics and later the Royals shared Municipal Stadium with the NFL Chiefs. Sheep and goats grazed behind Charlie Finley's Pennant Porch and a mechanical rabbit named Harvey handing baseballs to umpires. Meanwhile, Len Dawson tried to matriculate the ball down the field for Hank Stram's Chiefs.

The Athletics came to K.C. from Philadelphia where they shared Shibe Park with the football Eagles who also played at Baker Bowl in the 1930's, home of the Phillies. The Phillies would share Veterans Stadium with the Eagles starting in 1970. The Phils won the World Series in 1980 the same year that the Eagles went to the Super Bowl (they lost to the Raiders).

When the Colorado Rockies came into being in 1993, they played their first two seasons in Mile High Stadium, home of the football Broncos. They moved into their own stadium, Coors Field in 1995 after drawing over 4.4 million fans in their inaugural year of 1993.

From their inception in 1977 and 1976, the Seattle Mariners and the Seahawks shared the Kingdome. Both teams now play in their own stadium adjacent to the site of the since imploded Kingdome.

The Houston Astros moved from Colt Stadium to the Astrodome in 1965 (Mickey Mantle hit the first home run there in an exhibition game) and were joined by the football Oilers three years later. The football team moved to Nashville, Tennessee in 1997 a few years before the Astros moved to Enron Field, now called Minute Maid Park.

Weather could be an issue on Thanksgiving when the Detroit Lions played at Tiger Stadium. The Lions were there from 1938 – 1974 before a move to Pontiac,



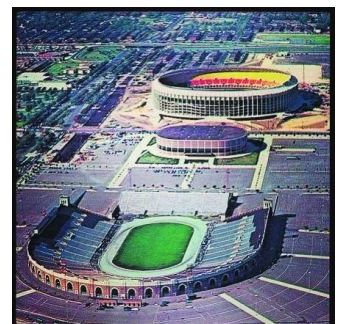
Oakland Coliseum



Los Angeles Coliseum



Jack Murphy Stadium



Baker Bowl & "The Vet"



Mile High Stadium

["Stadiums" continued on Page 10](#)



## FRANK OBSERVATIONS

By: Michael Frank

A pitcher born in Connecticut who pitches for Connecticut's Western Reserve in Cleveland? How much more Nutmeg can we get?

Aaron was born on June 12, 1995, in East Windsor, where he grew up and attended Loomis Chaffee School. He went on to Northeastern University, majoring in mechanical engineering, and graduated with a 3.5 GPA. He later pitched for the Hyannis Hawks in the Cape Cod Summer League.

Civale was drafted in the third round by the Indians and made all the stops in their minor league system. He was called up for good on June 2, 2019, was hit hard in 2020, but was the first pitcher in the majors to win 10 games in 2021. He was 10-2 with a 3.33 ERA -- quite a value for his \$587,400 salary -- when he sprained the middle finger of his pitching hand, one out short of an 11th win, against the Cubs. He missed time but it took several weeks till any A.L. pitcher passed him in wins.

Civale came back later in the season and won the last game under the Indians nickname. He looks forward to being part of the Guardians' new big three with Shane Bieber and Zac Plesac. Civale was the Indians nominee for the Roberto Clemente award.



## BASEBALL CONJECTURES & SPECULATIONS

By: Ezra Count

1. If the Pacific Coast League had become a third major league in the late 1940s or early 1950s, how would major league baseball have developed? Would the game be more popular?
2. What are the biggest misconceptions about baseball from (a) fans and (b) outsiders?
3. Name several players past and present who typify hitters and pitchers of average ability.
4. If the pitcher's mound was moved back three feet, how much would it change batting averages and run scoring? How much would moving it back six feet change the same?
5. Should major league players play winter ball? What should players do in the offseason to best prepare for the coming season?
6. What is the best temperature for a baseball game?
7. What can winning teams with poor attendance such as the Tampa Bay Rays and the Toronto Blue Jays do to improve turnout?
8. What teams will surprise baseball prognosticators in 2022?

## <sup>1</sup> CICITTO (continued from page 5)

Cicitto hails from Middletown and graduated from Xavier High School. He later matriculated at Central Connecticut State University and after working at various jobs, began a lengthy career in the advertising department at the *Hartford Courant* in 1984. He left the *Courant* in 2012 and then spent five years as the advertising representative for *Connecticut Magazine* before becoming fully retired in August 2018.

An ardent Boston Red Sox fan, Cicitto has also been active in SABR's Bio-Project. Two of his five bio submissions have featured fellow Middletown native Mark DeJohn and Red Sox pitcher Mark Clear.

Cicitto and his wife, Lisa, have been married for 36 years. They are the parents of three grown women. His life is much more than baseball. To keep his marriage in balance, Karl and Lisa are theater enthusiasts and have seen over 40 plays on Broadway. Both have degrees in fine arts and theater. They are looking ahead to attending the 2024 Olympic games in Paris, where, hopefully, one of their close relatives will become eligible to compete for the United States in the swimming competition.

## KREVISKY PRESENTED WITH AWARD



By: Stan Dziurgot and Stan Osowiecki

In October 2021, the President of the Connecticut Chapter of SABR, Steve Krevisky, was presented an award for his contributions to sport by the Connecticut Sports Writers' Alliance at their Gold Key Dinner that was held at the Aquaturf Club in Southington. Congratulations Steve!

*Photographs courtesy of Stan Dziurgot*



## 1949 OWLS (continued from page 2)

Gomez became one of a few Colonial League alumni to make it to the major leagues. During his 10 major-league seasons, mostly with the New York Giants, he finished with a 76-86 career record. Gomez is remembered for throwing the first pitch in San Francisco Giants history when he outdueled Los Angeles Dodgers' Don Drysdale, 8-0, on April 15, 1958 at Seals Stadium with a complete game, six-hit shutout.

Another future major leaguer on the Owls roster that year was 20-year-old Bristol outfielder Carlos Bernier, who had a breakout sophomore season, hitting .336, belting 15 home runs. The Puerto Rican native placed among the nation's top base thieves stealing 89 bags in 120 games.

Bernier reached the big leagues with the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1953. He got off to a fast start and set a team record by collecting three triples in one game on May 2. Unfortunately, Bernier's bat went cold, and he was relegated to the bench. He hit just .213 for the season and was caught stealing in 14 of 29 attempts.

Bristol's defining point in the 1949 Colonial season came on July 31 Bristol when bested Bridgeport, 4-0 and 6-5, in a doubleheader at Muzzy Field. The sweep gave Bristol a two-game advantage over the Bridgeport Bees in the standings and the Owls never looked back. Bristol went 27-12 the rest of the way to win the regular-season crown.

Stamford, in what was to be its final season, fought hard until the end with a 24-14 August surge but couldn't catch the Owls. Bristol made it a clean sweep in the Governor's Cup postseason series, besting Waterbury four games to one and Bridgeport two games to one in the abbreviated final.

Osterman received some monetary concessions from the City of Bristol and assured Owls fans that he was still committed to have a team in Bristol in 1950. With some of their best players returning, the Owls were heavily favored to repeat as Colonial League titlists. Surprisingly, the team was in the league cellar through the first 31 games of the season.

Bristol's baseball future quickly disintegrated as attendance plunged due to poor play and terrible weather. As a result, the team had difficulty to come up with the revenue to pay player salaries. The Owls tried to recoup some of their financial losses by selling the contracts of fan favorite Carlos Bernier and others to St. Jean of the Canadian Provincial League in late June.

Financial losses continued to mount as well for all the other Colonial team owners. The coming dissolution of the Colonial League became more visible at other league parks. The league formally disbanded on July 16, 1950.

After the league folded, Osterman began a heralded career on Broadway where as a theatre producer, he won three Tony Awards for his productions of "Da," "The Shadow Box," and "A Moon for the Misbegotten."

As an aside, his son, Tom, later became a partner in Sterling Equities, which until last year owned the New York Mets. Osterman summed up his ownership experience in the Colonial by saying "that the entire venture was a great artistic success but financially it was murder."



## Independent Minor Leagues

Independent leagues have always had a tougher time than other minor leagues. These leagues do not belong to the organization governing the minor leagues (currently called the Professional Development League) and major league baseball does not provide them with players and coaches. It's a risky business and most indie leagues eventually fail. Indeed, since 1978, 30 have gone out of business, lasting on average just four years. Nine are still active, but even these leagues have had many teams that failed. Nonetheless, two small new leagues debuted in 2021 and another two aim to start in 2022.

The shakeout in MLB's farm system both hurt and helped the independent minor leagues. Unfortunately for the best independent leagues, in 2021 they lost three of their most successful franchises - the Somerset Patriots, the Sugar Land Skeeters, and the St. Paul Saints - to major league baseball's AA and AAA leagues. On the plus side, some of the minor league teams or players dropped by MLB joined independent leagues. Also, in recent years the four most established independents have signed partnership agreements with major league baseball. As partners, these leagues work with MLB to promote the sport and test proposed rule changes, some of which the big leagues have already adopted.

**Table 3. Independent Leagues**

League	First Season	MLB Partner	2022 Teams	Season Games	Geographical Area	Avg. Stadium Capacity
Atlantic League of Professional Baseball	1998	Yes	10	120	Mid-Atlantic, Southeast	5,457
American Association of Professional Baseball	2006	Yes	12	100	Midwest, <u>Maintoba</u> , Texas	5,534
Frontier League	1993	Yes	16	96	Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, Canada	5,330
Pioneer League	1939	Yes	10	96	Northern Mountain States	5,013
United Shore Professional Baseball League	2016	No	4	50	Michigan (play in one stadium)	4,500
Empire Professional Baseball League	2016	No	6	40 – 70	NY, NH, Puerto Rico	750
Pecos League	2011	No	16	64	CA, KS, Southwest, S. Mountain	2,091
Mavericks Independent Baseball League	2021	No	4	46	Oregon (play in one stadium)	4,254
Southern Shores Professional Baseball League	2021	No	8	40+	NC & SC (some share stadium)	-

Total Number of Teams

86

## Scouting the Future

Those wondering about the health of the minors may want to look at its past. The number of leagues and teams peaked in the post-World War II years. From 1945 to 1949, the number of teams almost quintupled to 448, and attendance quadrupled from roughly 10 million to nearly 40 million. In 1949, there were 59 minor leagues and the 16 major league teams typically had multiple teams in each of the classes from AAA to D. Then the spread of major league baseball on radio, demographic shifts away from small towns and small cities to suburbs, and changes in taste burst the bubble. Too many teams had formed in places where they drew less than 300 fans a game. In the next two years, minor league attendance plummeted by a third. In the next decade, the decline continued, with the league count falling to 20 and the number of teams declining to 132. Attendance in the 1950s sank by more than 50%. Minor league crowds would not start growing again until the late 1970s and would not better the 1949 attendance total again until the end of the century.

Major league baseball did not expand its number of teams right after the war, but its attendance jumped too. In 1943, it was barely 6,000 per game, but it grew for five consecutive years, more than doubling to 16,912 a game in 1948. But then like the minor leagues, its attendance fell in the 1950s, dipping below 12,000 per game some years. It did not top the 1949 peak average game turnout until 1977, when it surpassed 18,000. That was still early in the long rising trend that started in 1970 and continue for another 40 years.

Beginning in 1978, new parks and new minor league franchises for the major's expansion teams began drawing bigger crowds to minor league games. Despite having many fewer leagues and fewer teams than in 1949, the minors exceeded the 1949 attendance high in 1999. The upswing continued into the new century. In 2008, major-league-sponsored leagues saw their attendance reach a new all-time high, 43 million fans. Cities that had teams in both the 1960s and the new era saw attendance more than triple. But the 2008 mark

“Minors” continued on Page 10

## MINORS (continued from page 9)

After the lost 2020 season and 2021's reorganization, minor league baseball faces new problems attracting fans. The troubles of today are not the same as the troubles of the 1950s, but fans worry that the minor leagues may fall into a new slump. The 120 teams in the A through AAA leagues drew about 3,200 people a game in 2021, a 23% decline from 2019. Moreover, the major league attendance trend may bode poorly for the minor leagues. Big league turnout peaked in 2007 at 79.5 million fans, an average of nearly 32,700 per game. From 2008 to 2019, however, attendance flattened and started dropping, falling to 69.5 million, about 28,200 a game. For 2021 games without Covid attendance restrictions, attendance fell 17% from 2019. Attendance per game decreased to 18,650, below the 1977 level. Since the major league's attendance trends seem to anticipate or coincide with minor league baseball's, this should worry the farm clubs. Lockdowns, lockouts, complaints about the pace of the game and the growing dominance of strikeouts and HRs, the next recession, and other problems may aggravate the trend and cripple both the major and minor leagues.

Major league baseball reorganized the minor leagues but it's too early to say if it can revitalize them and reinvent itself. Owners, league officials, baseball writers and philosophers, and sabermetricians are searching for ways to strengthen baseball at all levels, from Little League to the big leagues. Perhaps they can find ideas and answers in Albuquerque, Allentown, Buffalo, Biloxi, St. Paul, San Jose, Toledo, or Tulsa, or some of the many other minor league towns where baseball finds a home.

## STADIUMS (continued from page 6)

Michigan and eventually Ford Field which sits next door to Comerica Park, home of the Tigers since 2000. The Tigers won 4 World Series in their time at Tiger Stadium while the Lions have never been to the Superbowl.

There was an NFL team in Boston in 1932, the Braves, who played their games at Braves Field. The name was changed to Redskins, and they shared Fenway Park with the Red Sox from 1932-1936. The franchise moved to Washington D.C. and shared Griffith Stadium with the original Senators from 1936-1960 and the expansion Senators from 1961-1972 when that team moved Arlington Texas. When the American Football League started up in 1960 the Boston Patriots played their first three seasons at Nickerson Field (formerly Braves Field) now the home of Boston University Athletics. The Patriots played in Fenway from 1963-1968 and eventually ended up in Foxboro, Massachusetts.

Those original Washington Senators moved to Minnesota in 1961 and shared Metropolitan Stadium in Bloomington with the football Vikings. The site of that stadium now is the Mall of America. The area of home plate is marked and there are seats on the inside wall of the mall from the Met. While the Vikings used the cold weather there to their advantage, the Twins used the Metrodome noise (both teams moved there in 1982) to their advantage in 1987 and 1991 World Series.

In Wisconsin, Hank Aaron and Vince Lombardi shared the same stadium after a move from Boston. The Braves played at Milwaukee's County Stadium from 1952-1966. From 1953-1994 the Green Bay Packers played 2-4 home games a year in Milwaukee. County Stadium had a larger capacity than the Lambeau Field (formerly City Stadium) until 1994 when Lambeau Field's expansion made it more feasible to play all their home games in Green Bay. When the Braves moved to Atlanta, they shared Fulton County Stadium with NFL Falcons until the Falcons moved to the Georgia Dome in 1991. The Braves would move to Turner Field in 1997.

Despite a tight fit for a football field with one end zone four yards shorter than the other, the Chicago Bears with former Yankees' outfielder George Halas played in Wrigley Field from 1921-1970 sharing the Ivy with the baseball Cubs. A second team in the Windy City, the Chicago Cardinals, played in both Wrigley and primarily Comiskey Park; home of the White Sox from 1922-1959. They moved to St. Louis in 1960 and played in Sportsman's Park (Busch Stadium I) and Busch Stadium II until 1987 when they moved to Arizona.



Fenway Park



Metropolitan Stadium



Milwaukee County Stadium



Wrigley Field

["Stadiums" continued on Page 11](#)



## STADIUMS (continued from page 10)

When the St. Louis Browns moved to Baltimore and became the Orioles in 1953 they played their home games at Memorial Stadium also the home of the football Baltimore Colts. The Colts joined the NFL that year after playing three years in the All-American Football Conference. The Colts moved to Indianapolis in 1984 so the Orioles had Memorial Stadium to themselves until they moved to Camden Yards in 1993 where the father of Babe Ruth owned a tavern in what is now center field.

Both teams had success with the Orioles winning six American League Pennants and three World Series. The Colts of John Unitas won back-to-back NFL championships in 1958 and 1959 and a Superbowl title in 1970, the same year that the Orioles managed by Earl Weaver won the World Series.

In Miami, the Florida (now Miami) Marlins came into existence in 1993 and shared Joe Robbie Stadium (after many name changes now called the Hard Rock Stadium) with the NFL Dolphins. After winning World Series Titles in 1997 and 2003 the Marlins moved to their own stadium – Marlins Park (now called Loan Depot Park) in 2012. That stadium sits on the site of the Orange Bowl; the former home of the Dolphins during their glory years of the 1970's.

In Cincinnati, the Reds moved into brand new Riverfront Stadium in 1970 joined that fall by the NFL Bengals. The stadium was built on the side of a tenement that was the birthplace and boyhood home of cowboy singer Roy Rogers. The Reds won five pennants and three World Series in their time at Riverfront. The Major League All-Star Game was played there in 1970 and is remembered for the game ending collision at home plate between Pete Rose and Ray Fosse. The Bengals went to two Super Bowls in the 1980's but lost both times. The Reds moved to a new ballpark, the Great American Ballpark, in 2003 built near Riverfront Stadium while the Bengals moved to their own stadium, Paul Brown Stadium, also built near Riverfront Stadium.

When the Toronto Blue Jays started play in 1977, they played in a football stadium (Exhibition Stadium) that they shared with the Canadian Football League's Toronto Argonauts. The two teams moved to the Sky Dome (now Rogers Centre) in 1989. The Blue Jays drew over 4 million people in home attendance for three years, 1991-1993 winning the World Series in the last two years. The Argonauts moved to their own stadium BMO Field in 2015. From 2008-2013 the NFL Buffalo Bills played eight games at the Rogers Centre called the Bills Toronto Series.

Before the Rams played in Los Angeles, they originated in Cleveland in 1936 and shared both League Park and Municipal Stadium with the baseball Indians when they left for L.A. in 1946. The Indians (now Guardians) won the 1948 World Series but didn't have the success the new team in town. The Cleveland Browns of the All-American Football Conference took up residence in Municipal Stadium. They won the AAFC Championship every year from 1946-1949 before moving to the more established National Football League in 1950 where they won the NFL Championship that year. Championships followed in 1954, 1955 and 1964 before the team left after the 1995 season and moved to Baltimore to become the Ravens. There, M&T Bank Stadium in Baltimore sits next to Camden Yards, the Orioles stadium and has a statue outside of it of John Unitas of the previous Baltimore football team, the Colts. The Cleveland Indians (now Guardians) moved to a new stadium, Jacobs Field (later called Progressive Field) in 1994. A new expansion Cleveland football team also called the Browns started play in 1999 and plays at Cleveland Stadium on the site of the old Municipal Stadium next door to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

In New York, baseball and football teams playing in the same stadium goes back into the 1920's. A football team called the New York Yankees played in the short-lived American Football League and National Football League from 1926-1929 playing in Yankee Stadium, home of the baseball Yankees. There would be a



Baltimore Memorial Stadium



Joe Robbie Stadium



Riverfront Stadium



Toronto Exhibition Stadium



Municipal Stadium



Yankee Stadium

["Stadiums" continued on Page 12](#)



## STADIUMS (continued from page 11)

short-lived team in the NFL of the same name playing in Yankee Stadium in the 1940's and also a football team called the Brooklyn Dodgers playing in Ebbets Field around the same time. There was also a time when a team, the Boston Yanks made their home in Fenway Park in Boston. Imagine a team named the Yanks having Fenway as their home field. The NFL's New York Giants shared the Polo Grounds with John McGraw and the baseball Giants starting in 1925 until 1955. They went to the NFL Championship game nine times winning on three occasions including the famous "Sneakers Game" at the Polo Grounds in 1934. The football Giants moved to Yankee Stadium in 1956 the year before the baseball Giants played their last game in New York prior to moving to the West Coast. The team won the NFL Championship that year and went to the Championship Game six times in the next eight years. The baseball Yankees won the World Series in 1956 and went to the Fall Classic every year but one from 1956-1964.

The New York Mets started play in 1962 and shared their home, the Polo Grounds, with the American Football League New York Titans/Jets who played there from 1960-1963. When the Mets moved to Shea Stadium in 1964, the Jets went with them. The Jets won the Superbowl in January 1969 and the Amazins won the World Series in October of that year. The Giants left the original Yankee Stadium in 1973 when the venue closed for two years to be refurbished. Home games in New Haven at Yale Bowl followed and in 1975, they played at Shea Stadium followed by a move to the New Jersey Meadowlands the following year. The Jets followed them to New Jersey in 1985. In 1975, the Mets, Jets, Giants and Yankees all called Shea Stadium home. The Yankees also played there in 1974 until moving back to Yankee Stadium in 1976.

The Pittsburgh Pirates and football Steelers currently play down the street from each other at PNC Park and Heinz Field. While playing for a time at the University of Pittsburgh's Pitt Stadium, the Steelers played most of their home games at the Pirates Forbes Field from 1933-1963 and then at Pitt Stadium until 1970. That year both teams moved to Three Rivers Stadium which was located between PNC Park and Heinz Field. The Steelers won 4 Super Bowls in the 1970's with Pirates winning the World Series in 1971 and 1979 and had other post season appearances during the decade on teams nicknamed "The Lumber Company". The decade was full of triumph tinged with sorrow for Pittsburgh fans. On September 30, 1972, Roberto Clemente got his 3000<sup>th</sup> hit in a game for the Pirates at Three Rivers. On December 23<sup>rd</sup>, Franco Harris made a play in a playoff game call "the Immaculate Reception" to beat the Raiders at Three Rivers. Eight days later Roberto Clemente died in a plane crash.

### SOURCES

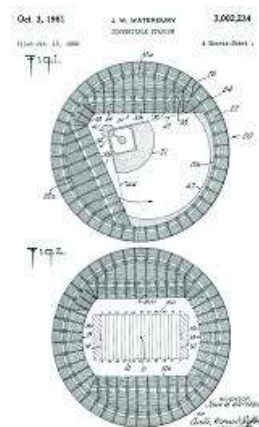
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New York Polo Grounds



Shea Stadium



Shea Stadium Schematics



Three Rivers Stadium

## BETWEEN INNINGS: TRIVIA

Name the colorful hard-throwing southpaw who won both the MVP and Cy Young Awards in 1971.

Name both Hall of Fame infielders who played in the historic Pawtucket-Rochester 33-inning game.

What Yankees manager benched team captain Don Mattingly for refusing to get a haircut?

Which team won an amazing 118 games in 2001 but did not reach the World Series?

Who set a record in 2011 by hitting a home run for his fifth American League team?

## QUOTABLE BASEBALL

By: Jim Mizera

People ask me what I do in winter when there's no baseball. I'll tell you what I do. I stare out the window and wait for spring. - Rogers Hornsby

There are only two seasons - winter and baseball. - Bill Veeck, Jr.

Spring training means flowers, people coming outdoors, sunshine, optimism and baseball. Spring training is a time to think about being young again. - Ernie Banks

I hate the cursed Oriole fundamentals... I've been doing them since 1964. I do them in my sleep. I hate spring training. - Jim Palmer

People who write about spring training not being necessary have never tried to throw a baseball.  
- Sandy Koufax

These days baseball is different. You come to Spring Training, you get your legs ready, your arms loose, your agents ready your lawyer lined up. - Dave Winfield

Don't tell me about the world. Not today. It's springtime and they're knocking baseball around fields where the grass is damp and green in the morning and the kids are trying to hit the curve ball. - Pete Hamill

Baseball does not announce the coming of spring. Baseball IS spring. - Nicholas Petrone

I'd give a year of my life if I could hit a home run on opening day of this great new park.  
- Babe Ruth 4/18/1923, about the newly built Yankee Stadium

You always get a special kick on opening day, no matter how many you go through. You look forward to it like a birthday party when you're a kid. You think something wonderful is going to happen. - Joe DiMaggio

## CHAPTER NOTES

Chapter member Steve Wisensale was interviewed in a Start Spreading the News podcast about his experience in Japan and his views on the game in general. Below is a link to the transcript of the podcast. Yankee fans in particular may enjoy the website and sign up for future podcasts.

<https://startspreadingthenews.blog/start-spreading-the-news/sw080521>

Steve also blogged about a huge concrete baseball in Deep River in tribute to J.G. Desmond:

<https://athomeatfenway.wordpress.com/2012/04/23/baseball-is-where-you-find-it/>

## WRITING OPPORTUNITIES

### THE WOOD PILE

Newsletter of the Smoky Joe Wood Chapter  
of the Society for American Baseball Research



### SABR Games Project

The SABR Baseball Games Project is a new initiative to research and write articles on major-league and Negro League regular, postseason and All-Star Games. These game accounts will complement Retrosheet and Baseball-Reference box scores as well as BioProject essays on the players involved. All games, regardless of their historical significance, are eligible to be written up.

Web-site: [sabr.org/gamesproject](http://sabr.org/gamesproject)

Things you should know: [sabr.org/content/sabr-games-project](http://sabr.org/content/sabr-games-project)

Request an assignment: Bruce Slutsky at  
[bruce@bruceslutsky.com](mailto:bruce@bruceslutsky.com)