

Take Me Out to the Reference Desk...

by Ladd Brown

Frank Houdek is a modest man. His socks may be loud, but, as a rule, he is not. He doesn't often talk about his secret dreams, his secret desires, his secret fantasies unless, of course, it's over a cozy and romantic Valentine's Day dinner.

It was over such a dinner that he tenderly revealed he once had aspirations to pitch in the major leagues—*The Show, The Big Ticket*.

As a wiry youth, Frank used to dazzle opposing batters on the diamonds of Los Angeles with his assortment of junk (or off-speed) pitches. His modest (see above) success merited some attention and a scout from the Orioles organization came to watch him pitch.

The scout told him, "Son, if you ever make it to Baltimore, don't bring that lousy screwball of yours. There's no room for screwballs in Baltimore."

Well, Frank, you proved him wrong. There was plenty of room for screwballs in Baltimore...

Baltimore, Ed Poe's old stomping grounds, has a rich baseball history. It's the home of George Herman Ruth. Mr. Ruth? No one called him George. It was The Bambino, The Sultan of Swat, Babe. It's also the home of the "Baltimore Chop," the batted ball that hops as high as Fort McHenry's flagpole.

Statistics weren't kept, but it's reckoned that Mr. Ruth probably ate more chops than he ever hit.

It is not without coincidence that we held our Annual Meeting in this city. Our Notional Pastime and law librarianship are as intertwined and interdependent as chords in a Francis Scott Key melody.

For those of you who've read Thomas Boswell's *How Life Imitates the World Series*, the strong parallels between our national pastime and our daily existence need no explaining. For those who need explaining, imagine, if you will, hearing James Earl Jones' rich baritone voice saying something like, "Baseball was always there, just below the surface, waiting for us to discover it and for it to discover us. Baseball, baseball, baseball. This is CNN."

For those who need explaining and a cite list, run the phrase "infield fly" in the legal database of your choosing.

Well, anyway, if you look close enough, you can find baseball everywhere, even in the law library. Listen to these actual exchanges overheard at the reference desk of a real academic law library:



"Did you find what you needed in the state statutes?"

"No, I struck out. I'm working on an assignment and the professor has thrown us a curve."

And,

"You're looking for information on hit-and-run?"

"Yes, my client has run a foul of the law."

Baseball has even borrowed a phrase or two from our "field," so to speak. The expression "around the horn" originated in the Yale Law Library in 1902 when several Yale infielders were studying "around the hornbook." The term "squeeze play" was first used by filers when they were wrestling with those Matthew Bender pulling binders.

The broadest baseball/law library analogy is the wood verses aluminum (*Wood v. Aluminum*) controversy. We need only a slight nudge to see that this is the classic paper verses disk argument; the traditional paper being subverted by the new technologies.

We hear the "crack" of the bat, we "crack" the books. Now that we can hear the "dink" of the bat, will we have to "dink" the books?

Let's explore some more baseball terms we use every day in our libraries.

The Steal. This usually occurs when patrons are too busy to check the item out. If caught, the patrons are "thrown out."

The Double Steal. This usually occurs when patrons are too busy to check the item out and the copier is broken, too.

The Heavy Hitter. This is the Big Donor, the Dean Emeritus, the Managing Partner, whatever. They command respect and can hit for power.

Doubles, Triples. What the Heavy Hitter has with lunch on Fridays.

The Sacrifice. What we all do every day For the Good of the Library.

Baseball, like legal practice, is not without its terms of violence, many of which bring to mind certain aspects of criminal law. For example, "he has a real gun for an arm," a double play is a "twin killing" and some players "choke." [Due to strict editorial standards, terms like "you can tie him up with inside heat" and "he was handcuffed on that knuckler" will not be addressed in this article.]

One feature of baseball sadly missing from our profession is the great nicknames. Shouldn't we, too, sport monikers like Mudcat, Blue Moon, Catfish? Would ours be Keyboard, Hushy, The Big Stamper? *Dink?*

Maybe some things are best left alone.

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