
Rare Films from the Baseball Hall of Fame

Block Cinema/Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art
Northwestern University
June 11, 2009, 7 pm

Special thanks to Ben Harry, National Baseball Hall of Fame, and Mike Olenick, Wexner Center Studio Editor.

Willie Mays 511th Home Run. 1966, 1:27.
Newsreel of 1954 World Series between New York and Cleveland. 1954, 4:47.
Baseball Promotional Spots featuring Bobby Richardson, Chuck Hinton, Al Kaline. 1963, 2:30.
Post-War Film on Ted Williams. 1946-7, 6:20.
Baseball's Hall of Fame (excerpt). 1959, 2:45.
The Name of the Game is Fun (excerpt). 1966, 8:03.
1955 Washington Senators Highlight Film (excerpt). 1955, 4:48.
Gillette Razor Commercials featuring Gil Hodges, Phil Rizzuto, Eddie Lopat, Carl Erskine. c. mid-1950s, 2:42.
The Ralph Kiner Show (excerpt). 1950, 6:51.
Baseball Promotional Spots featuring Floyd Robinson, Harmon Killebrew, Albie Pearson, Joe Nuxhall. 1963, 3:21.
National League Diamond Jubilee (excerpt). 1951, 9:07.
Bill Leinhauser Interview. 1968, 3:12.
Baseball vs. Drugs (excerpt). 1972, 5:01.
Gillette Razor Commercials featuring Gil McDougald, Hank Bauer, Allie Reynolds. c. mid-1950s, 1:48.
1934 American League Film (excerpt). 1934, 3:31.
Clark Griffith's 85th Birthday. 1954, 4:45.

On the previous Wednesday, May 15, the sixth-place Detroit Tigers were in New York's Hilltop Park for a regularly scheduled game against the New York Highlanders. On this fateful day fan Claude Lueker had been taunting Ty Cobb with a steady barrage of profanity-laced abuse peppered with racial slurs.

Cobb stormed into the stands and battered Lueker with a vicious volley of punches to the face, and then stomped him in the abdomen with his spikes. Unknown to Cobb was that Lueker, a former pressman, had lost one complete hand and three fingers from the other hand in an industrial accident the previous year. With fans screaming at Cobb, "Don't hit him! He has no hands!" the out-of-control Cobb reportedly shouted back, "I don't care if he has no feet!"

Unfortunately for Cobb, American League president Ban Johnson was in the park that day. He had witnessed the horrific incident and was aghast, later informing Detroit manager Hughie Jennings that Cobb was hereby suspended indefinitely. After the next game on Friday in Philadelphia, sixteen Tiger players voted to strike in protest of Cobb's suspension. They would not take the field again, they declared, until Cobb was reinstated.

Ban Johnson was not easily intimidated. Aware of the threatened walk-off, he informed Detroit's owner Frank Navin that the team would be fined \$5000 and forfeiture for every game that he failed to field a team. Navin panicked. Not one to call Johnson's bluff and sensing that the team was serious about the walk-off, he knew he was in critical danger of losing his franchise. He ordered Jennings to field any team he could find. Philadelphia manager Connie Mack suggested drafting a team of substitutes from around Philadelphia.

During the spring exhibition season, the Philadelphia Athletics had fielded a team of second stringers called the "Yannigans" against the nearby St. Joseph College varsity baseball team. Philadelphia sports writer Joe Nolan was acquainted with the team's assistant manager, Allan Travers, a twenty-year-old junior from Philadelphia. Before the Saturday afternoon game, Nolan contacted Travers asking him to find ten to or twelve amateurs in case the Tigers went through with their threatened strike. Nolan informed Travers that the recruited group would not be expected to play in the game, but were only required to take the field.

What may have started as a thrill for the replacement players quickly turned into an embarrassing farce. As expected, the A's won handily, 24-2, with Travers allowing all 24 runs on 26 hits, walking seven, and striking out one. The score was a respectable 6-2 through four innings until the A's erupted for 16 runs over the next three innings. Travers' lifetime ERA was 15.75 for his one-day "career." He unwittingly set a major league record for most runs allowed in a nine-inning game that exists to this day. The only recruit to get a hit was Ed Irvin, going 2-3. The crowd viewed the game as a joke, and after the third inning many left in disgust, seeking a refund of their money. Fortunately, there were no serious disruptions during the game, and the players were escorted off the field by local police. By the end, the weary players knew they had been used and had participated in a travesty.

The next day was Sunday, which in those days meant no baseball, but Johnson immediately canceled Monday's game and then called a mandatory meeting with the striking Detroit players. Johnson informed them in no uncertain terms that if the strike continued another day, they would all be banned for life. They had been read baseball's version of the proverbial "riot act."

The Tigers then departed for their next series in Washington. In a rare act of humility, Ty Cobb advised his teammates not to jeopardize their careers and urged them to end the strike. Ban Johnson's threat had its intended effect as the Tigers meekly returned to the field the following day.

- condensed from Gary Livacari's article on Allan Travers at BIOPROJ.SABR.ORG.

This screening is free; general admission seating.

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