

Crawford Dead at 88; Three-Base Hit King

By FRED LIEB

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla.—Sam (Wahoo Sam) Crawford, Hall of Fame outfielder who was considered by old-timers as the hardest hitter in the dead-ball era, died at Hollywood (Calif.) Community Hospital June 15, after a lengthy illness. He was 88.

The one-time slugger for the Tigers was the only player ever to lead both majors in home runs, hitting 16 for Cincinnati in 1901 and seven for Detroit in 1908.

The late Ed Barrow, long-time Yankee president and one of Crawford's early managers in Detroit, referred to Sam as "the Lou Gehrig of his day." When the ball left Crawford's bat, it had greater momentum than when driven by such Hall of Fame contemporaries as Hans Wagner, Ty Cobb and Napoleon Lajoie.

In Crawford's day, when as few as seven home runs led the American League's home-run parade, the three-bagger was the symbol of baseball power. And, as Babe Ruth was the home-run king and Tris Speaker the top man in doubles, so Wahoo Sam was No. 1 in triples.

He was the only big leaguer to collect more than 300 three-baggers, hitting 312. He hit 62 in his four seasons as a National Leaguer and 250 in 15 seasons in the American League. His nearest rivals were Ty Cobb with 297 and Honus Wagner with 252. Both played many more games than Sam.

Shares Mark With Jackson

He and Shoeless Joe Jackson of the White Sox share the American League three-bagger season record with 26. Sam led the National League in triples in 1902 with 23, and a year later, after he jumped from the Cincinnati Reds to the Detroit Tigers, he topped the A. L. with 25. He held the major league record for most years leading his leagues in triples—six; and most years, 20 or more triples—five.

Sam was left-handed, both batting and throwing.

Crawford hit many line drives, which rarely traveled more than 25 feet off the ground. He collected 95 homers during a 19-year big league career. Lajoie hit only 82 homers, Wagner 101, and Cobb 118, in longer careers.

The writer has a recollection of a homer by Crawford in New York in 1912, the last year the Yankees, then known as the Highlanders, played at their early Hilltop park. A neighborhood tobacconist offered a box of cigars to any player who hit a home run into a faraway bleachers in deep right-center. Hal Chase, the New York first baseman, remarked contemptuously: "That fellow surely is taking a chance. The only way you could put a homer in that bleacher is with a cannon."

Sam Hit the Target

That season, Crawford the cannon collected a box of cigars.

Crawford was born in Wahoo, Neb., on April 18, 1880. Hence his nickname of Wahoo Sam. Somehow the sound of Sam's Nebraska hometown had an especial appeal to the fans at the turn of the century. It sounded so typical of the prairie country where Sam grew up.

When Sam went to bat, it was fun for the fans to greet him with cries of "Wahoo! Wahoo! Wahoo Sam."

Crawford started life as a small-town barber. But it was his bat that hoisted him into Big Time baseball and national headlines.

While Sam was learning the barber trade in Wahoo, he still managed to find time to play baseball. And the long balls hit as a Nebraska semi-pro were awe-

some. People came to the shop from distant farms just to talk baseball and discuss Sam's long belts.

He turned pro at the age of 19 in 1899 and made the majors that same season. He started with Chatham, Ont., of the Canadian League, where he hit .370 in 43 games. Oddly enough, the Canadian League was the only loop Sam ever led in batting.

Sam's .370 with Chatham won a quick advance to the Columbus team of the old Western League, which became the American League a year later. Cincinnati won Crawford in the fall draft of 1899, and Manager Buck Ewing of the Reds lost no time putting the boy from Wahoo to work.

Impressive Debut

Sam got his big league baptism in a freak Sunday double-header in Cincinnati on September 10, 1899. In the first game, the Reds played the Cleveland Spiders and in the second Fred Clarke's Louisville Colonels.

Young Sam quickly showed Manager Ewing and Cincinnati fandom that he knew how to swing a bat. He cracked out five hits in eight times at bat.

By 1900, at age 22, he had developed rapidly into a fine-fielding, hard-throwing outfielder. He grew up to five feet, 11 inches, weighed 190 pounds, and was regarded by everyone who saw him perform as one of the coming stars of baseball.

At the time, the bitter National-American League war was on, and in both 1901 and 1902, Sam resisted offers from Ban Johnson's

agents to switch over to the new American League. But Crawford finally accepted a \$3,500 offer by the Detroit club after the season of 1902 and signed a Tiger contract.

The talent war ended in January, 1903, and Crawford was one of a number of players claimed by both leagues. Both the Cincinnati and Detroit clubs had contracts signed by Crawford for the 1903 season, but the peace committee awarded Sam to the American League club.

Three Flags in Row

It was a great break for the then struggling A. L. team in Detroit, and made possible the Tigers' pennants of 1907, 1908 and 1909.

Barrow was Detroit manager in 1903. Barrow had developed Honus Wagner in Peterson, N. J., and quickly recognized Crawford's potential.

"You can hit a ball as hard as any player I've ever seen, and you can go right to the top," he told Sam. "Anytime you see a pitch that you like, I want you to hit, regardless of the count."

Ty Cobb, a hot-headed 18-year-old Georgian, reported to the Tigers late in the 1905 season, and after the 1906 campaign, Bill Yawkey, the Detroit club's wealthy owner, brought Hughie Jennings, the fiery ex-Oriole, to Detroit as manager.

Cobb, a terrific competitor, spurred Crawford into playing his best game. At the start, there was a mutual dislike between the two. For some years, they barely spoke. Crawford, as the team's

batting star, had enjoyed an exalted position on the club and other Tigers showed proper deference to him.

Not so young Cobb. He had deference for no baseball figure. Besides, he let the Tigers know he didn't like northerners, whether they came from Maine or Nebraska.

For a while, Ty and Wahoo Sam frequently worked against each other. Cobb batted third, and Crawford fourth. When Cobb reached first he was a constant stealing threat.

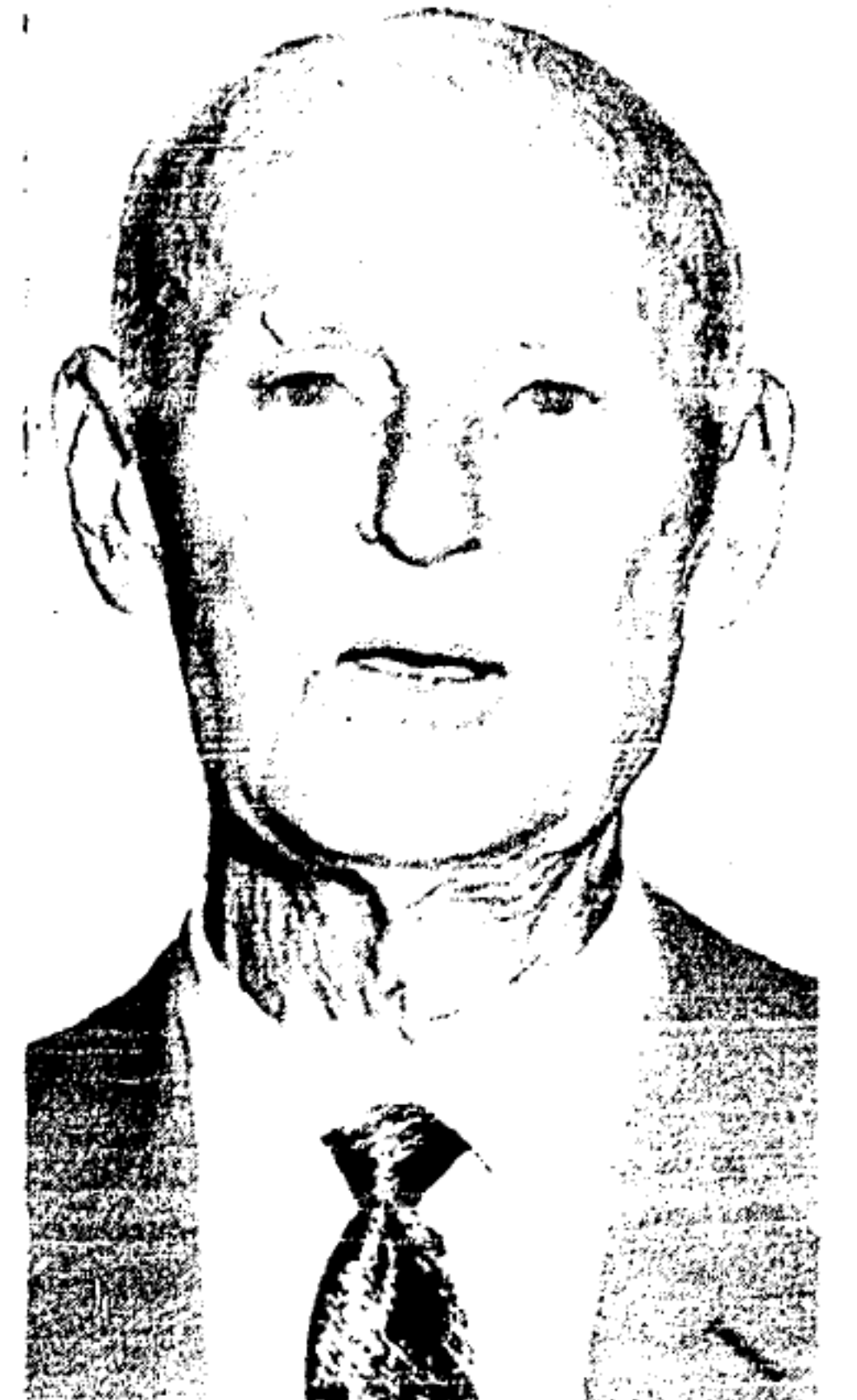
Often when Ty was well on his way to second on a steal Crawford would foul off a pitch and force Cobb to return to first base. That brought some caustic comment from Ty.

Ill Feeling Disappeared

"We had our spats on the field, sure, and some off the field," Crawford confided in later years. "Ty was a hot-tempered Southerner who let his emotions show. And we were mostly Northerners on those old Tigers. But Ty mellowed with the years, and I always respected him and his great ability."

Cobb thought the same way about Wahoo Sam. With their feuds well behind him, Ty repeatedly paid tribute to his Tiger outfield associate as one of baseball's greatest hitters. Long before Sam was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1957, Cobb went to bat for him and waged a personal campaign to get Crawford elected.

Jennings proved a managerial marvel in his early years in Detroit. Getting the best out of Craw-



SAM AT Hall of Fame induction in 1957.

ford and Cobb, he started his Tiger career with pennants in 1907, 1908 and 1909.

All three flags were won by narrow margins, and it is safe to say not one could have been won without Sam, or without Cobb. In those three championship years, Crawford batted .323, .311 and .314.

Sam's highest batting average was .378 in 1911, a year Cobb hit .420. It was also the only time Crawford went over 200 hits in the majors, closing with 217.

On Jennings' Tiger champions, Crawford played center field and Cobb right. As Sam slowed up, Jennings moved Ty to center and Sam to right. Crawford, who had been a southpaw semi-pro pitcher, always had the stronger arm of the two.

When Crawford faded as a big leaguer, he went quickly. In 1917, Sam's 19th season in the majors, he fell off to .173 for 61 games and the Tigers released him.

Nearly 3,000 Hits

Wahoo Sam played 2,505 big league games, whacked out 2,964 hits, stole 367 bases, and had a lifetime major league average of .309. Lacking only 36 hits to reach 3,000, Sam blamed it on his 1917 American League season.

"If only I could have played another 50 games that year, I could have made it," he reminisced ruefully. "But I ran out of gas."

Sam wound up his career with four seasons in the Pacific Coast League. After hitting .292 for Los Angeles in the shortened war season of 1918, Wahoo Sam hit .360, .332 and .318 for the Angels in 1919, 1920 and 1921.

After being out of baseball for 14 years, Crawford returned to the Pacific Coast League as an umpire, serving in 1935-'36-'37-'38.

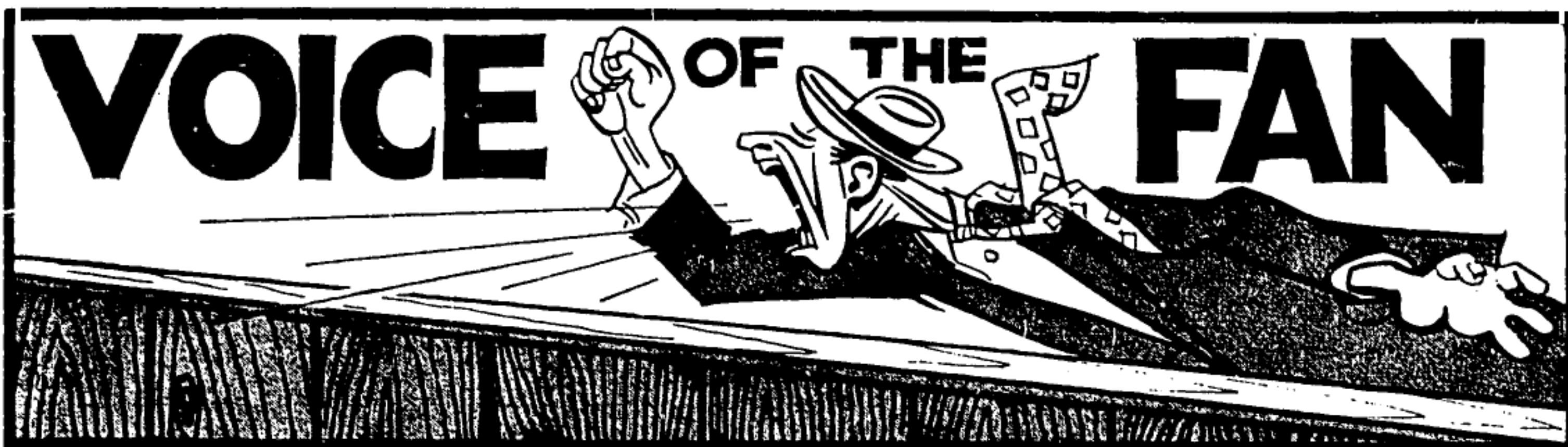
Crawford was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1957 by the special committee on Old-Timers headed by J. G. Taylor Spink, then publisher of THE SPORTING NEWS. It was Cobb who told Crawford of the honor.

Though Crawford was one of the game's great hitters, he never made much money out of baseball. He thought he was doing well in 1903, when he was paid \$3,500 by the Tigers to jump to the American League.

"I had a fine career; I enjoyed every minute of it," he said. "As to the money the stars are making today, more credit to them. It's a different game now; conditions are different, and the dollar has much less purchasing value than when I was making \$3,500. I've no regrets."



Sam Crawford . . . The Premier Slugger of the Dead-Ball Era.



cooperstown corner

By LEE ALLEN
Hall of Fame Historian

An Unusual Man Was Sam Crawford

COOPERSTOWN, N. Y.—Sam Crawford has left us now, embarking on the mysterious voyage that awaits us all. At 88, he had earned the reward.

None of the wire service obituaries I saw caught the flavor of his personality, but belabored the obvious facts about his career, his 312 triples, his birth at Wahoo on the Nebraska prairie, and his role as a cleanup hitter for the Tigers. One of them identified him as the oldest living Hall of Famer, which he was not, with Elmer Flick still extant at 92.

But you can learn about Sam in Larry Ritter's wonderful book, "The Glory of Their Times," portions of which appeared in THE SPORTING NEWS last winter. Sam was an individualist, a man who hated telephones, but who could write long and earnest letters, a man whose formal education had been confined to seven years of elementary school, but who came to know the beauty of reading Balzac, Dickens, Ingersoll and Santayana, a free thinker and a free man and, in late years, a desert drifter who exuded love in a world that seemed to produce an increase in petty and irrational hatred.

For the past nine years, I had corresponded with him at intervals, and had come to look forward to his bold script in the green ink he always employed.

The lost art of penmanship was one of his accomplishments, and he liked to ask questions about men and events around Cincinnati at the turn of the century.

"Tell me," he would write, "what was the name of that cigar store on Fountain Square where they used to hang out a big white baseball on the days the Reds were at home?"

I'd tell him that the name of the store was Hawley's and that the building had been razed before my birth, but that it was all there in the newspapers of the '90s.

Poor Sam! How he wanted his 3,000 hits! His lifetime total was 2,964, but he always claimed with the same tenacity that he had battled pitchers that the 87 hits he made for Grand Rapids in the Western League in 1899 should be counted. He asserted that the National Commission, baseball's ruling body before Judge Landis became the first single commissioner, had awarded them to him. But this was just a pleasant delusion.

Western Loop Wasn't Big Time

The Western League was not a major in 1899 and it was not a major when it changed its name to the American League in 1900. And the National Commission, of which Garry Herrmann was chairman, and which included Ban Johnson and whoever happened to be the president of the National League, did not concern itself with playing records at all, but concentrated on the endless contractual disputes between players and their clubs.

It is possible that Garry, in a private conversation with Crawford, gave him his 87 hits. For Garry, who fronted for one of the most notorious gangs that ever ran a city, gave away throughout his life everything that passed through his hands, which explains why he left an estate of only \$800 when he died in 1931.

When Sam started playing baseball professionally with Chatham, Ont., in 1899, it took him only a few months to reach the majors. After stopping at Grand Rapids, he joined the Reds on September 10 and engaged in a freak double-header. In the first game, Cincinnati played Cleveland, and Sam, batting fourth and stationed in left, made two singles in four trips against a pitcher named Harry Colliflower. In the second game, the Reds met Louisville, and he added two more singles and the first of his famous triples off Bert Cunningham.

One of the most unfortunate events in Cincinnati baseball history was losing Crawford to Detroit. During the war that raged between the National and American leagues, Sam signed contracts with both the Reds and Tigers for 1903. But the winter before that season, the leagues made peace. There were a dozen or so players whose contracts were disputed. Sam was one of them and Christy Mathewson was another. As part of the peace deal, Crawford was awarded to Detroit and Mathewson to the Giants.

Sam then put in 15 seasons with the Tigers, glorious years in which he usually followed Ty Cobb in the batting order, a slashing lefthanded hitter who could bat the ball a mile.

Needless to say, with a .309 lifetime average for 19 seasons and following Cobb most of the time, he batted in plenty of runs, as did another nearly forgotten Detroit hero, Sam Thompson.

Crawford's passing thins again the ranks of those who played in the 19th century. How many of them are left? There may be more, but I know of only seven. The oldest is John Hollison, a pitcher in one game with Chicago in 1892. He became a physician, celebrated his 98th birthday on May 3, and has a chance to become the game's first centenarian, an honor that escaped the late Dummy Hoy by about five months.

Three rookies from 1898 are still around us. Flick, Hall of Fame outfielder for the Phillies and Indians, lives at Warrensville, O.; Tommy Leach, who starred at third and in the outfield for the Pirates, makes his home at Haines City, Fla., and Ralph Miller, a pitcher with Brooklyn and Baltimore, is in Cincinnati.

Fred Parent, shortstop for the Boston Americans when that team met Pittsburgh in the first World Series of this century in 1903, can be found at Sanford, Me. He started with St. Louis in 1899, the year that also marked the debut of Silas Herring, a Washington pitcher who lives now in Philadelphia.

Finally, Mal Eason, author of a no-hitter for the Dodgers, is at Douglas, Ariz., on the Mexican border.



SAM CRAWFORD

HERE'S HOW IT WAS

Bob Hunter, your Dodger correspondent, tried to draw a parallel in your June 15 issue between a recent Dodger success in St. Louis and the 1963 Dodgers' series sweep in September that kayoed the Cards. Hunter's memory is not exactly infallible.

First, he claimed the Dodgers were "going bad" before they moved into St. Louis for the kill in September of 1963. The fact is that the Dodgers had won 13 of 19, but the Cards had gained on them by winning 19 of 20 before the showdown series.

Hunter also seems under the impression that the Cards were leading the league when the '63 crucial series began. They were not. The Dodgers led by one game when they arrived in St. Louis, and when they left, the Cardinals were dead and the Dodgers had a four-game lead. Does Hunter ever check a record book?

JOE BRAMLETT

Los Angeles, Calif.

CREAM COMES TO TOP

I am pleased that the American League has elected to establish Eastern and Western Divisions. I am disappointed that the National League has refrained from this progressive step.

Basketball and hockey use divisions, with a majority of teams qualifying for title playoffs. In the 22-year history of the National Basketball Association, the champion always has been either a first or second-place finisher.

Football and soccer use divisions, with the division winner qualifying for the playoffs. I do not believe you will find many fans who would detract from the Green Bay Packers' title because their regular season record was not as good as the Los Angeles Rams'.

NORMAN V. WERLING

Decatur, Ga.

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Several years ago, Maury Wills felt he was too important to be fired and left the Dodgers in Japan to return home. In spite of Wills' popularity and ability, Owner Walter O'Malley didn't hesitate a minute. He traded Wills. O'Malley is smart enough to know that you cannot let the inmates run the asylum.

Richie Allen apparently has done many things more disruptive to team morale than Wills ever did. Yet Phil Owner Bob Carpenter fired a good manager in the futile hope this will assuage his star and he will now be a good boy. Ha! The trouble is just starting.

DAN MILLER

Long Beach, Calif.

CHEERS FOR CAUSEY

I think a lot of ball players are being unjustly criticized for being rude to their fans. I met Wayne Causey of the White Sox in April. After learning that I'm studying to be a sportscaster, Causey consented to do an interview with me.

Wayne not only left me a ticket for the June 7 game with the Red Sox in Boston, but when I got to the park, he ran in from left field, brought me into the White Sox dugout and gave me an opportunity to talk with Eddie Stanky and his crew. I say hooray for the White Sox and Wayne Causey.

JIM LUCE

Falmouth, Mass.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

I've read numerous letters in Voice of the Fan criticizing baseball and other sports for failure to postpone activities on the weekend of Sen. Robert Kennedy's funeral. How many businesses closed up? It seems to me that those which normally remained open on a weekend stayed open then, too.

I would be the first to admit that the murder of this fine young American was tragic and horrible. Yet daily fine young Americans are destroyed in the mud of Vietnam. And the rest of the country goes blatantly about business without mourning.

I was at the Cincinnati park on June 9, and it seemed to me that the moment of silent prayer for Robert Kennedy was a sincere tribute paid by 26,000 persons.

THOMAS COX

Indianapolis, Ind.

NO TRIBUTE FOR GIs

While I agree that Sen. Robert Kennedy was an outstanding individual, I see no reason why any sports activity should have been postponed. Hundreds of GIs are dying every day in Vietnam, and I have seen no national day of mourning or postponement of sports events for them.

I would also like to know whether the people who wrote in Your Voice of the Fan in the June 29 issue stayed home from work on June 8, the day of Sen. Kennedy's funeral.

GARY ZENTNER

Falls City, Neb.

EVERYBODY'S BUDDY

It isn't low-scoring games that is causing poor attendance this year. It's the stupidity of the owners and the public's fear of visiting ball parks at night.

And THE SPORTING NEWS doesn't do much to help. Your editorial position is very weak. I can see why your coverage of other sports has increased. You're aware of baseball's problems, but rather than stand up and fight, you try to please everyone.

GREGORY A. KNAPP

Dallas, Tex.

Letter Urging Divisional Play in N. L. Wins Prize

How important is tradition to baseball's popularity? Very important, according to National League President Warren Giles, who cited "tradition and history" as important factors in the N. L. decision to reject divisional play. The N. L. will conduct a 12-club pennant race in 1969.

Many fans who do not agree with Giles have said so in letters to Voice of the Fan. One of these was written by Gary Douglas of Champaign, Ill., who pointed out: "Nothing can remain the same forever. . . . Wake up, N. L., and stop clinging to a past that a lot of fans don't even remember any-how."

Douglas' letter, which appeared in the June 22 issue, was judged the best carried in Voice of the Fan during June. Douglas will receive a year's free subscription.

THE COST OF CRITICISM

Your editorial, A Fan or a Lunatic, on Page 14 of the June 22 issue was a welcome sight. Denny McLain expressed some views intended to be constructive and some nut endangered the life of McLain's family with a smoke bomb wired to the ignition of the family car.

Despite McLain's great record, Detroit fans have been getting on him worse than ever. Even if McLain's charges had no foundation when he stated them, they do now.

Are we coming to the point in this country where by expressing an opinion detrimental to some, you are putting your life on the line? I say more power to Denny and I hope he will silence the Tiger Stadium jackals with his fine pitching. BRUCE L. BENDIX

Kalamazoo, Mich.

A SLANTED STORY?

Why did you allow Tom Loomis to write what amounted to an editorial under the guise of a news story criticizing the Yankee youth movement (June 22 issue)? Loomis writes for the Toledo Blade. What connection does he have with the New York Yankees? Toledo isn't even associated with the Yankee farm system any more. The city has been a Detroit farm for two years.

Loomis' story was pegged on his assumption that Gary Blaylock quit as Syracuse manager because Blaylock was fed up with the Yankee organization for its failure to produce good young players. Yet the story does not contain a single quote from Blaylock or anybody else in the Yankee organization indicating he quit for that reason. All I saw were editorial comments by Loomis, like "Blaylock was stuck with too many dogs," and "the Yanks aren't competitive any more."

JOE DONOVAN

Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

A LONGER STREAK

In your June 22 issue, Eddie Stanky, Dick Williams and writer Jerome Holtzman all expressed the opinion that the White Sox' streak of nine straight one-run decisions between May 31 and June 7 might be without precedent. Actually, you have to go back only to 1967 to top it.

From May 28-June 7, 1967, the Reds were involved in 11 successive one-run verdicts. This is even more amazing when you consider that the Reds, unlike the White Sox, do have some semblance of an offense, and some of the scores in this streak were 8-7, 7-6 (twice), 6-5 and 5-4 (twice). The Reds also distinguished themselves by winning seven of the 11 cliff-hangers. DAVID A. QUELETTE

St. Clair Shores, Mich.

STATISTICAL OVERKILL

I think baseball's problem is statistics, not low-scoring games. Baseball writers have turned the game into an accountant's nightmare by constantly watching the ERA and batting average as if these figures were the Dow Jones Industrial Average.

Pitching has made the pennant race more exciting in recent years by giving any team with a good hurler a chance to defeat the league leader. Baseball is for the fans, not the statistician.

PATRICK NICOL

Vancouver, B. C.