

# THE BASEBALL PROJECT

## VOLUME ONE: FROZEN ROPES AND DYING QUAILS

RELEASE DATE: 7/8/08

### PAST TIME

*Nostalgia can be deadly, and often delusional. Still, images and feelings from the past flit through the mind unchecked and unedited. Does that mean everything was better, simpler, less tainted, in the distant and not-so-distant past? Not necessarily. "The more things change the more they remain the same" – did Yogi Berra say that? Baseball is a circus these days, no doubt about it, but I think the feeling's much the same as it always was, when you first enter a ball park and watch the traces of the traditions and history unfold.*

When Campy Campaneris played all nine positions in a game. When Pete Rose demolished Ray Fosse he was never the same. 31 wins and an album on Capitol for Denny McLain. So long ago, so long, Pastime, are you past your prime? The DiMaggios, Shoeless Joe, Minnie Minoso, Yo La Tengo. Luis Aparicio and Nellie Fox made the Sox go go. The sideburns of Pepitone and Oscar Gamble's afro. So long ago, so long, Pastime, are you past your prime? One thing you can say about time is that it always passes. One thing you can say about the game is that it's not getting any faster. You can get tangled up in a ball of rubber bands and twine, the cowhide and pine tar, snuff, spit and chalk dust lines. Two round-trippers and a no-hitter, that's Rick Wise (not Bobby Wine). So long ago, so long, Pastime, are you past your prime?

### TED FUCKING WILLIAMS

*Legend (and Jim Bouton's classic baseball memoir 'Ball Four') has it that Boston Red Sox outfielder Ted Williams would take batting practice and shout "I'm Ted Fucking Williams and I'm the greatest hitter in baseball" before every pitch, sometimes adding "Jesus H Christ himself couldn't get me out!" But sometimes greatness just isn't enough and in this song the greatest hitter of all time eschews humility and wonders why the press and the public prefer and offer greater love to lesser players.*

Everyone's so kind and humble. Don't you know that I can see right through it? Keeping all their comments down. You know it ain't a boast if you can do it. And everyone says "Say Hey!" And everyone says "did you see that kid play?" I've got to give the kid a hand but there's nothing that he can do better than I can. I'm Ted Fucking Williams!

People say it's hard to like a man who doesn't fail and show he's a human. But failure's not a sign of grace. It only means you don't know what you're doing. And everyone says "hey Mick!" Mantle this, Mantle that—it makes me sick. It's just so hard to see. Why do they like him better than me? I'm Ted Fucking Williams!

And everyone says "hey Duke!" like everything I did was some kind of fluke. I gotta give the Duke a hand but there's nothing that he can do better than I can. I'm Ted Fucking Williams!

### GRATITUDE (for Curt Flood)

*Curt Flood looks back from beyond the grave and observes the high-living, wealthy modern player and bemoans the lack of attention paid to his costly and lonely battle against the reserve clause, a legal challenge that led directly to the advent of free agency as well as the end of Flood's career. He is not amused.*

Now everyone's walking like they're rolling in dough. Throwing all their money around just for show. Acting like everything is coming to them and knowing that more is just around the bend. But I'm the one who paved the way and laid my body in the road so you can walk on it today. I stood right up when they tried to put me down. You're so high up, you forget to look down!

You call that gratitude?

I'm the well-paid slave and the roads that I paved took my career, that's just what I gave. Five years later they were rolling in clover but nothing for me, my career was over. If I'd been born just a generation later I could have settled up with an arbitrator. I'd be wearing fur coats if I were rich with a "bum-bum-bitty-bitty-bum"

You call that gratitude?

On the day that I died and they laid me in the ground where was everybody? They couldn't be found. I'm gone and they don't know my name. No plaque, no speech, no hall of fame. A-Rod, Zito, Tejada, Posada, Johan, Maddux, Manny, Mussina. Who's the one who paved the way with blood? Go say my name—it's (Flood!) Curt Flood!

You call that gratitude?

### BROKEN MAN

*Mark McGwire went from "saving baseball" after the strike of 1994 to becoming a Bashed Brother of Steroids, humiliated in front of a Senate Judiciary Committee -- a pariah mentioned only in hushed tones. It's too simple to brand such men cheaters, or to erase them from memory and the record books. Everybody screwed up, everybody knew it and did nothing, now it's time to move on.*

We all need to gain the upper hand. An edge to do even better than we can. No one seemed to care when it brought back the fans. It's a broken record, strike up the band for the broken man. A crowd so loud and a son so very proud. The powers that be counting money, handing me a crown. Only now they decide that it's time to take a stand. It's a broken record, strike up the band for the broken man. You can say I cheated; prop me up defeated. Take a swing at me and the others too, if you've got nothing better to do. There's a street not far away that's named after me. But my present and future is a gated community. Leave your past behind if you really want to understand. It's a broken record, strike up the band for the broken man.

For additional information, photos or to set up an interview, please contact...

**PUBLICITY: JAMES BAILEY** at **Yep Roc** 336-578-7300 x244, james@yeproc.com

**RADIO: JOE SWANK** at **Yep Roc** 336-578-7300 x223, joe.swank@yeproc.com

**LICENSING: JOSH WHITMAN** at **Yep Roc** 336-578-7300 x248, josh@yeproc.com

**CAROL SUE BAKER** at **Ocean Park Music** 310-576-7424 carolsue@oceanparkmusic.com

**CANADA: STEPHANIE HARDMAN** at **Outside Music** 416-461-0655, X323, stephanie@outside-music.com



# THE BASEBALL PROJECT [CONTINUED]

## SATCHEL PAIGE SAID

*He was probably the best pitcher of his time, and his time lasted twice that of the other greats. But we'll never really know for sure. What we do know is that Leroy "Satchel" Paige liked to play ball, and he had his own ideas of how to do so, and how to live life to the fullest. And while the injustice of his race being barred from the majors irked and frustrated him, he somehow never let bitterness overtake him. Don't look back indeed.*

Satchel Paige said, "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you." Satchel grew up in a shotgun shack, and he had a pile of shotguns too. He carried so many bags on a pole that he looked just like a satchel tree. Satchel Paige and the Brown Bambino – that's an everlasting battery.

And we don't look back. We don't carry on (in society). And we don't sit still or we might rust, but at the same time, we don't run. And we don't look back.

Satchel Paige said "I could never be late. They could hardly start the game without me." Satchel Paige didn't get riled up, though his stomach surely had the miseries. So if you follow these few simple rules, you might have a long productive run. Satchel pitched about a million games. No one ever did what he has done. And we don't look back...

## FERNANDO

*Former L.A. Dodger pitcher Fernando Valenzuela considers the citywide love that he felt in 1981, a mere 20 years after the Mexican population of Chavez Ravine lost their homes to make way for Dodger Stadium and 20 years before the fervent anti-immigration movement of the current day.*

Yo trabajo en Chavez Ravine donde mi gente perdieron sus casas veinte anos pasado. Y ahora todo el mundo me quiere pero nadie sabe lo que yo hablo despues del partido.

Fernando, Fernando! Te necesitamos ahora.

Dicen que fue un mania--Fernandomania! Y por que me quiere tanto cuando hoy no le gusta mi gente cuando no estan jugando el juego Americano.

Le gente dicen, "devuelense" y por que cuando hemos vivido aqui por tantos anos.

Pero en '81 me quiere, me quiere y ahora que ha cambiado. Quiero saber.

## LONG BEFORE MY TIME

*After winning his third Cy Young Award and cementing his status as the best pitcher in the game, Sandy Koufax of the Los Angeles Dodgers ponders the pros and cons of an early retirement at age 30. His arm sore and riddled with cortisone shots, Sandy did quit the game that season and was voted into the Hall of Fame five years later, the youngest player to ever achieve that honor.*

The summer game has let me down, standing lonely on the mound. A crossroads only I can see between oblivion and destiny. My mind and body say I'm done but something says I must go on. Conventional wisdom does implore you give it all and then give some more.

Summer slowly turns to fall. It's so hard to walk away from it all long before my time.

My agent says I need to move. What do I have left to prove? I falter when I hold my ground. For a couple of bucks you can keep me around. You're only young just once, I know but history will always show you pad your best days with the chaff--A faded tarnished photograph.

Dandy Don and Warren Spahn tell me that I must go on. I must go on, I can't go on, I must go on, I can't go on.

## JACKIE'S LAMENT

*Here's to you, Mr. Robinson. Brooklyn Dodger second baseman Jackie Robinson bites his tongue and dreams of the day when he can speak his mind and rail out at the indignities and offenses he endured in 1947 when he became the first black man to play major league baseball. That day came only a few years later but in those first few years Jackie had to hold it in.*

If I ever get the chance I'll let them know just how I feel. I'd like to speak my mind but that just wasn't in the deal. It's never easy being first to walk down any road. I'd trade the glory just to crawl out from this heavy load. You should hear the things they say behind my back and when I turn the other cheek, they only sharpen their attack.

If I ever get the chance I'll let them know just how I feel. I'd like to speak my mind but that just wasn't in the deal. I run the race but now it seems the race is running me. I try to keep my cool but all this heat won't let me be. No matter how hard or well I played, I can tell you that I never had it made.

I only want to play the game. I only want to make my name for others who never had the chance. Laid out like some sacrificial lamb, a long and lonely road until I steal my way back home again. If I ever get the chance I'll let them know just how I feel. I'd like to speak my mind but that just wasn't in the deal.

And here's to you, Mr. Robinson!

## SOMETIMES I DREAM OF WILLIE MAYS

*My Dad took me to the game where Juan Marichal cracked his bat over John Roseboro's head. It was a late August battle for first with the game's two best pitchers on the hill. Mays (The Greatest) beat Koufax and the Dodgers with a three-run bomb to center, not far from where we sat. The majors' first Japanese player, Masanori Murakami, got the save. My Dad had locked the keys in the van and smashed the wind-wing out in the parking lot to get in and drive us home. Seemed like the best day ever at the time. Seems even better now.*

It's 1965. Me and my Dad, Mac. 50 miles to Candlestick in our green VW van. A Giants-Dodgers pennant race. Mays and Koufax face to face. Sometimes I dream of Willie Mays and tell him I was there. Sometimes I dream of Willie Mays, and the sun comes out and the fog lifts and he's there.

Now it's 1973, right across the bay. Playing right field for the Mets, a ball goes through his legs. I cheer the A's to victory, but that was something I never wanted to see. Sometimes I dream of Willie Mays and tell him I was there. Sometimes I dream of Willie Mays, and the wind dies down, and the sun comes out, and the fog lifts, and he's there.

In 1954 I was born into this dream. The kind that's always black and white, like an old news reel I've seen. A mile away in the Polo Grounds, he pulls it in and spins himself around. Sometimes I dream of Willie Mays and tell him I was there. Sometimes I dream of Willie Mays, and the wind dies down, and the sun comes out, and the scoreboard works, and the fog lifts, and he's there. And I'm there.

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## THE DEATH OF BIG ED DELAHANTY

*My brother wrote a poem—I bastardized it and blended it and put a beat to it, and now Big Ed's mysterious death can be discussed, fantasized, danced to. I'm sure he deserves all the above. One thing seems quite certain: the days of the boozing and brawling ballplayers are mostly behind us, no slight to the occasional throwbacks like David Wells, a man mentioned twice elsewhere on this album.*

Sometimes, hungover, he might lose a pop fly in the glare of the Washington sun. And yes, he swung at bad pitches, and let the Irish in him sharpen up and boozy-bloat his tongue. Nights on the road he led a bachelor's life, with the bright short blaze of a shooting star. But he soaked some homers—yeah, four in one game--when the ball was dead and the fences far. Big Ed don't let them weigh you down. Big Ed don't let us weigh you down.

In July 1903 he was hitting .333; for him that was a little bit under par. On the 2nd he jumped the team and jumped a train from Detroit to New York, went straight for the dining car. He was boozing it up good, they say, making trouble, cursing, shouting, Delahanting in the bar. At Fort Erie, Ontario, he was bumped from the train, wandered out on the bridge but he didn't get too far.

The night watchman said he'd seen a man, ended up wearing his bowler hat; he heard a splash but he didn't see him fall. For a week no one found a clue of him. What good's it do to question death when it makes a bad call? But I don't think he killed himself. I think some strange notion drew him to Niagara Falls, across the curve of day and night, like the perfect arch of a high fly ball.

## HARVEY HADDIX

*A pitcher has thrown a perfect game when he faces the minimum 27 batters in nine innings and doesn't allow a single man to reach first base. It's only happened 17 times in history. This song tells the sad tale of Pittsburgh's Harvey Haddix who threw TWELVE perfect innings in 1959 before finally losing the game -- and his chance at immortality -- in the 13th. Perfection? Flawed? You make the call.*

May 26, 1959 in Milwaukee on the mound. Harvey Haddix of the Pirates was mowing 'em down. 27 up, 27 gone. Nine innings in the book and not a man had gotten on. Now, in history only 17 have thrown a perfect game. A most exclusive club and a most exalted fame. But after nine the Pirates hadn't scored. A perfect game and still old Harvey had to pitch some more. David Wells, David Cone, Sandy Koufax, Cy Young, Jim Bunning, Tom Browning, Charlie Robertson. Don Larsen in the series in 1956. Why don't we add old Harvey to that list?

10th inning down, 11th inning down, he moved on to the 12th. Three straight outs and the fans were pinching themselves. The best game ever pitched and still a scoreless tie! Poor Harvey had to carry on and give it one more try. Thirteen's never lucky so you can guess the rest. Harv gave up a hit and then he lost the whole contest. I wonder how he slept that night knowing how close he came to a most exclusive club that should include his name. David Wells, David Cone, Randy Johnson, Addie Joss, Kenny Rogers, Mike Witt, Dennis Martinez. Don Larsen in the series in 1956. Why don't we add old Harvey to that list?

The search for perfection is a funny thing, at least as I've been told. It drives you nuts, it makes you curse and eats away at your soul. Sometimes better isn't better, sometimes justice just ain't served. Sometimes legend isn't laid where it's most deserved. But humanity is flawed as the losers will attest.

We're drawn to tragic stories, the ones that suit us best. But for 12 innings on that fateful day, old Harvey was a God. A perfect game if nothing else because perfection's always flawed.

David Wells, David Cone, Lee Richmond, Monte Ward. Len Barker against the Jays and Catfish for the A's. Don Larsen in the series in 1956. Why don't we add old Harvey to that list?

## THE YANKEE FLIPPER

*Another true story. They're all true, aren't they? Black Jack McDowell should be remembered for his pitching, and for his music as well. When the ever-understanding Yankee Stadium fans booed a rare early exit, Jack reciprocated with a majestic (and much-photographed) raised arm and middle finger. I applauded his gesture, yet at the same time wondered if my pals and I had played some small part in his bad day.*

He's a friend of the Smithereens, an old pal of Eddie Vedder. For a good few years there weren't any pitchers better. He loved R.E.M. and he played a Rickenbacker guitar, but for a night on the town with Mike Mills you get hit pretty hard.

Mike and I met up with Dennis Diken and Black Jack somewhere. As this was New York City, you may have heard they have a few bars there. Jack loved the Replacements, and we drank enough that we became them. Two guitars, bass and drums--yeah our line-up was the same then.

He was crowned the Yankee Flipper by the foul ball of fame. He gave 50,000 fans the finger, but we'd like to share a little bit of the blame. It was Spike and Mike and Black Jack and me.

I'm told Jack ended up on the cold tiles of the floor, with his mom who was visiting banging on the bathroom door. Next time he took the mound was not a pretty sight, and I've always figured it had a lot to do with that night.

The photos filled every front page of the morning editions. Now he's the poster boy for a grand baseball tradition. Templeton, Tejada, Billy Martin and Albert Belle--from old Hoss Radbourne all the way to David Wells.

## THE CLOSER

*It takes a certain amount of guts, arrogance and a bit of insanity to work in only the final minutes of the game when everything is on the line and the margin between winning and losing hinges upon the handful of pitches that you throw. Baseball's closing relief specialists combine these elements and a hunger for pressure to cement their status as the ultimate outlaws in a gentlemen's game.*

I sit on my ass and watch the game like everybody else. And when it's on the line, that's when they pull me down from the shelf. You think this kind of pressure is easy? You're just kidding yourself. All my heroes had colorful names and a bad attitude, short-lived fame and an even shorter fuse.

Everything to gain and plenty to lose.

If you're only in it for a little while you'd better make it count. If you can't stand the heat you're gonna have to get out

I'd pitched 5 days straight. They didn't want to bring me in. My arm was hamburger meat. They didn't want to bring me in. Bases loaded, nobody out, they had to bring me in. Some hot-shot rookie! They didn't want to bring me in. Switch-hitting batting champ! They didn't want to bring me in. MVP! Strike 3! My work was done again.

If you want to hate my guts, that's all right by me. If you think you've got my number, that's all right by me. But you're gonna have to stand in against me, and then we'll see.

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