

Sunflower Stars: Big Leaguers from Kansas

by Thomas S. Busch

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL TRACES its origin to the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, New Jersey. It was there on June 19, 1846, that two amateur teams met and played a form of baseball no one had ever witnessed before. This seminal game between the Knickerbockers and the New York Nine was played according to rules devised by Alexander J. Cartwright, a surveyor and amateur athlete, who umpired the game.¹ Many would argue that it is he, rather than Abner Doubleday, who is the father of baseball. It was his game that served as the conceptual foundation on which organized teams throughout the country were built.

While the teams became organized, the game remained amateur. It was generally played by upper-class aristocratic types who intended baseball to be a genteel, polite recreation.² It remained that way, more or less, for twenty-three years.

In 1869, the citizens of Cincinnati formed the first all professional team. The players' salaries ranged from \$600 to \$1,400. The team was called the Red Stockings and the caliber of play was so superior to that of the amateurs that it paved the way for the first professional baseball league.³

On March 17, 1871, the National Association of Professional Baseball Players was formed. In 1876 it folded because of gambling and bribery problems, but it was soon supplanted by the National League, which is still thriving today. The senior circuit was formed on February 2, 1876, at the Grand Central Hotel in New York City. Although other major leagues would come

and go, it was not until 1901 that the American League became a permanent rival.⁴

Baseball had reached Kansas long before these professional leagues were formed. Westward movement and the Civil War had helped to spread baseball beyond the Northeast and Midwest.

The Leavenworth Frontier Baseball Club was the first formally organized town team in Kansas by virtue of receiving its corporate charter from the state on January 29, 1867. The Frontiers were sponsored by a group of "Pioneer City" business and professional leaders, most of whom were veterans of the Civil War. The team initially played inter-squad games, but soon found competition as baseball fever gripped Leavenworth and spread rapidly westward up the valley of the Kansas River. Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Topeka had several organized teams by August 1867.⁵

Town teams were the symbols of civic pride. Intense inter-town rivalries would erupt on Saturday afternoons as the local "nine" played doubleheaders with visiting teams. To play for the town team was a highly sought after prize. Once obtained, it was not easily surrendered. Consequently, it was not uncommon to find a wide array of ages among the players. Teenagers played alongside fathers of four. This playing environment eventually produced players of major league caliber.

The evolutionary process was not a short one, however. The famous Forest Citys of Rockford, Illinois, and that team's celebrated pitcher, A. G. Spalding (who would later become a sporting goods magnate), came to Kansas on May 11, 1870, to play the state champion Lawrence Kaw Valleys at the Topeka fairgrounds.⁶ The home team lost 41 to 6 to the "champions of the West." This was not so bad when one considers that the Forest Citys went 45-13 between 1867-1870.⁷ After this shellack-

Thomas S. Busch earned his B.A. and J.D. degrees from the University of Kansas in 1974 and 1977, respectively. He is a member of the Kansas City law firm of Shughart, Thomson & Kilroy. Busch is also president of SportsMasters, Inc., a consulting firm to collegiate sports programs.

1. Joseph L. Reichler, ed., *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 6th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1985), 11.

2. Jack Selzer, *Baseball in the Nineteenth Century: An Overview* (Cooperstown, N.Y.: SABR, 1986), 4.

3. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 12; Selzer, *Baseball in the Nineteenth Century*, 7.

4. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 12, 13, 15.

5. Harold C. Evans, "Baseball in Kansas, 1867-1940," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 9 (May 1940): 175.

6. *Ibid.*, 178.

7. Peter Levine, *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 10.

ing, however, Kansas teams confined their activities to intrastate competition for several years.

Kansas saw its first native son play in the big leagues in 1882. The young man to hold this distinction is Walt Kinzie who played shortstop for the Detroit club. He was born in March of 1856, but records do not reflect in what town he was born. For this reason, Leavenworth holds the distinction of being the first town to produce a major league player. His name was Bill Hughes, born on April 10, 1862. He would go on to play for Washington in the Union Association in 1884.⁸ These two men were the figurative fathers of future generations of Kansas big leaguers. Their successors number nearly two hundred today.

Based on data contained in the sixth edition of *The Baseball Encyclopedia* and the *Official Baseball Register* for the years 1986, 1987 and 1988, 171 players have come from Kansas.⁹ (For a player to be included in this group, he must have been born in Kansas or spent a significant part of his childhood—high school or earlier—in Kansas; and he must have been credited with at least one recorded appearance in a major league game.) In some respects, this number is surprisingly large. For decades most players came from east of the Mississippi. Until the 1950s neither the American nor National League had a franchise farther west than St. Louis. In other respects this number is disappointingly low. More than twelve thousand men have made it to the big leagues,¹⁰ but Kansas has produced only about 1.5 percent of them.

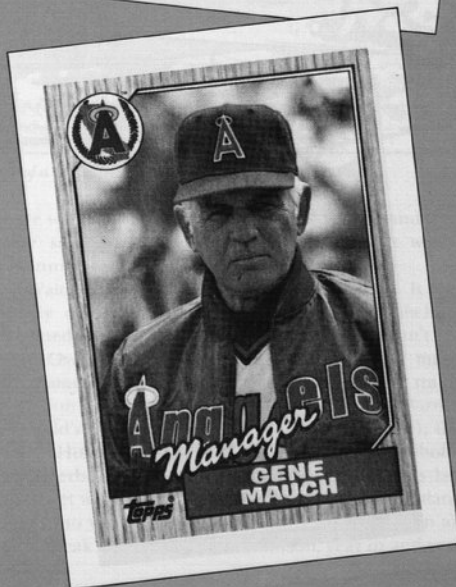
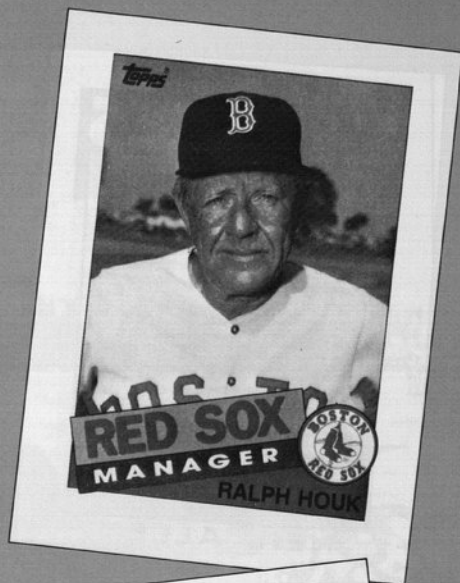
While Kansas may be somewhat under-represented in the big leagues, it has produced some of the game's greatest names. Within this group are three Hall of Famers and another who most certainly would have been one had his pitching career lasted longer. The three Kansans in baseball's Hall of Fame are Walter Johnson, Fred Clarke, and Joe Tinker. The fourth legendary great was the remarkable "Smoky" Joe Wood.

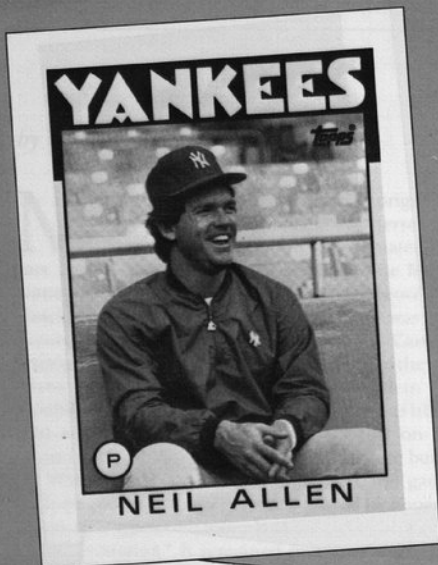
Walter Johnson is a luminary in baseball's pantheon of stars. The fact that he was one of the original five players inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1936 (the other

8. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 1040, 1088.

9. *Ibid.*, 1040; Barry Siegel, ed., *Official Baseball Register* (St. Louis: The Sporting News, 1988). The author has included only those players who were born in Kansas or those who spent a significant part of their childhood there. This latter category for inclusion is imprecise because of lack of documentation. For this reason, it is probably incomplete. It is hoped this article will precipitate new names coming to light. The latter group is known to include Fred Clarke, Joe Wood, Jess Barnes, Skip James, and Steve Jeltz. The total number is effective through the 1987 season. *Editor's Note:* When *Kansas History* went to press, it had not been determined if Ted Power, of the Kansas City Royals and former Abilene High School student, met the criteria to be included as a "Sunflower Star."

10. *The SABR Bulletin* 17 (January 1987), 4.





four were Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Honus Wagner, and Christy Mathewson) speaks volumes about his abilities.

He was born on November 6, 1887, to Frank and Minnie Johnson. The family owned a farm four miles outside of Humboldt. In 1901 the family moved to Fullerton, California, where Frank Johnson found business as a hauling contractor for drilling firms in the oil fields.¹¹ The Johnson family returned to Kansas in 1909 and bought a farm outside of Coffeyville. Walter bought his own farm a mile outside of Coffeyville in 1914 and wintered there with his wife and family until 1921.

Walter, who never played baseball in Kansas despite the fact that Coffeyville had a minor league team at the time, first played the game for his high school team in California. In a 1923 interview he described his baseball beginnings:

I started my first game of baseball as catcher. Half-way through the game the kids thought I could throw pretty good so I was put in as pitcher—and I've pitched ever since.... I'll never forget that first game I pitched for the high school.... I got beat 21 to 0.¹²

In 1907 while playing for a Weiser, Idaho, semi-professional team, he fast became a local legend. In a series of twelve games, he managed to strike out 166 men and pitched eighty-five consecutive scoreless innings. His one and only pitch was a fast ball. The incredible speed of his pitches has been attributed to extra long arms (which almost hung to his knees) and his effortless delivery. His momentum at release carried him forward in a peculiar little jump. Righthanded, he threw just a little above sidearm and released the ball with a snap (not a turn) of his wrist that increased both the speed and the spin of the ball.¹³

Johnson was signed by the Washington Senators in July 1907. He pitched his first game on August 2, 1907, and lost 3-2.¹⁴ He stuck, however, and never played a game in the minors thereafter. His career lasted for twenty-one years, and by the time it was over, he had set nearly a dozen major league pitching records.

Not all of those records have survived over the last sixty years. Yet he remains in the top ten in eight dif-

11. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 1817; A Neighbor, "And What A Best It's Been These Sixteen Years! Walter Johnson Tells of His Career as a Big-league Pitcher," *Dearborn Independent* (October 6, 1923): 7; Roger L. Treat, *Walter Johnson King of the Pitchers* (New York: Julian Messner, 1948), 73; "Sport Special From Yesterday," *Sport* (January 1950), 51.

12. "And What A Best It's Been These Sixteen Years!," 7.

13. Walter Johnson, "Some Experiences of a 'Speed-King' Or, My Life-Story," *St. Nicholas Illustrated Magazine* 41 (October 1914): 1064; Martin Quigley, *The Crooked Pitch* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 1984), 73.

14. Johnson, "Some Experiences of a 'Speed-King,'" 1064-65; "Sport Special From Yesterday," 51.



This Harper's Weekly illustration of 1874 gave its reading audience a view of a sport that was fast growing in popularity.

ferent categories of career pitching records. Amazingly, he still holds the record for most career shutouts with 110.¹⁵ This is a record that may never be broken. No active player is even close, and it was just a few years ago that his all-time strikeout record was eclipsed.

On September 4, 5, and 7 in 1908, he pitched successive complete game shutouts against the New York Highlanders. This record has never been surpassed. In 1912, from July 3 to August 23, he won sixteen successive games, tying the American League record. In 1913 he pitched fifty-six consecutive scoreless innings.¹⁶ Remarkably, all of these records were accomplished without resorting to the trickery of curves or doctored pitches. They were performed entirely in daylight, as

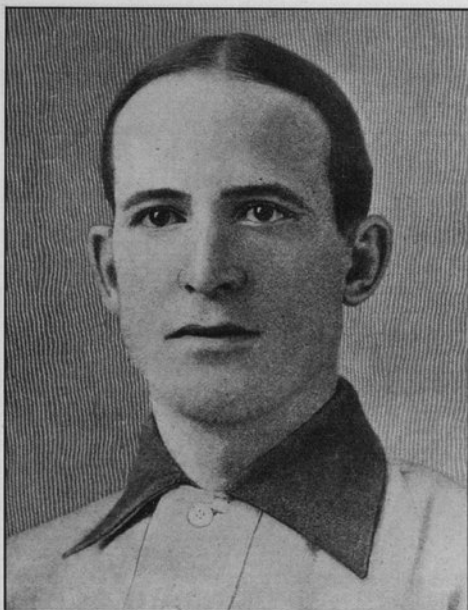
there was no night baseball during his career, and they were supported by a Washington team that was a perennial loser.

Walter Johnson's hallmark was his speed. It was simply overpowering. A description of his pitching spawned the phrase, "You can't hit 'em if you can't see em." Over the years his fast ball earned him many nicknames: The Big Train (relating to the fastest transportation of the day); Barney (referring to Barney Oldfield's land speed records set in auto racing); the Idaho Hot Potato; the Kansas Cyclone; the Humboldt Thunderbolt; and the Coffeyville Express.¹⁷ This last sobriquet was coined by the gifted sportswriter, Grantland Rice, who wrote in 1926: "It is my belief that, given an even break in team strength, Johnson, year in and year

15. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 92-93, pl. 93.

16. "Sport Special From Yesterday," 50; Quigley, *The Crooked Pitch*, 72.

17. Treat, *Walter Johnson King of The Pitchers*, 36, 50.



Fred Clarke, now in baseball's Hall of Fame, was a successful player and club manager.

out, was the hardest man to beat that ever sent a ball flashing over the plate."¹⁸

Also in baseball's Hall of Fame is Fred Clarke, a true baseball pioneer. He was exceptionally well-rounded in all phases of the game—hitting, fielding, and managing. At the age of twenty-four he became the first successful "boy manager."¹⁹ His career as a player-manager lasted for twenty-one years, all but six of those years spent with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

He was born on a farm near Winterset, Iowa, on October 3, 1872. In 1874 he and his family moved to Kansas by covered wagon. Two older brothers had earlier settled in Winfield and urged the family to make the move to the beautiful valley of the Walnut River. The family settled on a farm four miles north of Winfield.²⁰

For reasons unknown, the family decided to go back to Iowa in 1880, and moved to Des Moines, taking up residence in the city. It was there that Fred first excelled at baseball. He starred for the Des Moines Mascots, which at the time was the foremost amateur team in town.²¹

Clarke soon developed into a rather skilled player. In the winter of 1892, he saw an advertisement for baseball players in *The Sporting News* and considered inquiring. A friend of his, however, had already received favorable responses from a number of clubs and had an extra railroad ticket to try out with the Hastings team of the Nebraska State League. He offered it to Fred. Clarke's tryout went well and the club offered to pay him forty dollars a month.²² Despite the urgings of his parents to stay in college, he accepted the offer and set out in pursuit of a baseball career.

On June 26, 1894, Fred was purchased by the Louisville Colonels, then of the National League. His career at Louisville was brilliant. He was a consistent .300 hitter and in 1895 hit safely in thirty-one consecutive games. In 1897 he hit .402; that was the same year he was made player-manager, after only four years in the National League.²³

When Col. Barney Dreyfuss purchased the Louisville Colonels in 1900, he consolidated the team into the Pittsburgh Pirates. In that consolidation such future Pirate greats as Clarke, Honus Wagner, Deacon Phillippe, and Tommy Leach came from Louisville. Clarke remained as the player-manager for the Pirates and enjoyed almost instant success. His team finished second in 1900 and first in 1901, 1902, 1903, and 1909.²⁴ In 1903 the Pirates played in the first World Series and lost to the Boston Red Sox five games to three. However, in 1909, Clarke got his revenge on the American League by beating the Detroit Tigers and their star, Ty Cobb, four games to three. Clarke played a significant role in his team's success by hitting two home runs and driving in seven runs in the series.

Known as "Cap" or "Fearless Fred," Clarke was regarded as one of the greatest outfielders of his day and led the National League in fielding percentage for his position as a left fielder. He excelled with the bat as well as the glove as his .315 lifetime batting average

18. Grantland Rice, "The Coffeyville Express," *Collier's* 77 (June 5, 1926): 21.

19. Hall of Fame plaque inscription, Fred Clarke clipping file, Library, Kansas State Historical Society.

20. Frederick C. Lieb, "Fred Clarke," *Baseball Magazine* (February 10, 1910): 47; Judy Welch, "Cowley County's Fred Clarke Brought Fame, Glory to Pittsburgh Pirates," *Arkansas City Traveler*, November 8, 1976.

21. Lieb, "Fred Clarke," 47. Clark lived in Winfield in later years and died there in 1960.

22. Welch, "Cowley County's Fred Clarke," 10; Fred Clarke clipping file, *The Sporting News*, St. Louis, Missouri.

23. Clarence W. Miller, "Fred Clarke—Ball Player, Ranchman—Kansan," *Kansas Magazine* 2 (November 1909): 47-48; "Fred Clarke Is Dead," *Kansas City Times*, August 15, 1960, Athletics clipping file, Library, Kansas State Historical Society.

24. Lieb, "Fred Clarke," 48.

attests. In 2,245 games he collected 2,708 hits.²⁵ As a manager he was very well respected, and his players always enjoyed playing for him. His career winning percentage was .576. In 1945 he was elected to baseball's Hall of Fame.

Many people are surprised to learn that Joseph Bert Tinker another Hall of Famer was a native Kansan. He was born on July 27, 1880, in Muscotah, a small town in northeastern Kansas approximately twenty-five miles west of Atchison. Tinker achieved his stardom and his ticket to the Hall of Fame by being a member of the famous double-play combination of Tinker to Evers to Chance. He was the shortstop on a Chicago Cubs team that won four pennants and two World Series during his eleven-year career with the team.²⁶ All three players in the double-play combination were elected to the Hall of Fame in 1946. Tinker's fame was fixed when New York journalist Franklin P. Adams penned the following eight-line lament:

These are the saddest of possible words:
 "Tinker to Evers to Chance!"
 Trio of bear Cubs and fleetier than birds,
 "Tinker to Evers to Chance!"
 Ruthlessly pricking our gonfalon bubble,
 Making a Giant hit into a double—
 Words that are heavy with nothing but trouble.
 "Tinker to Evers to Chance!"²⁷

Joe Tinker's family moved to Kansas City shortly after he was born, and it was there that he started playing baseball on the sandlots. Against the advice of his parents, who had outlined a paperhanger's career for him, he started playing semi-pro ball as a teenager. He broke into professional baseball with the Coffeyville team at age nineteen in 1899. From there he went on to play with Parsons and Denver in the Western League.²⁸

Because he failed to excel as a second baseman with Denver, he was shipped out to Portland in the Pacific Northwest League in 1901. In 1902 he was signed for a tryout by Frank Chance of the Chicago Cubs.²⁹ It was Chance who turned him into a shortstop. Tinker was an excellent fielder and a reliable but not great hitter.

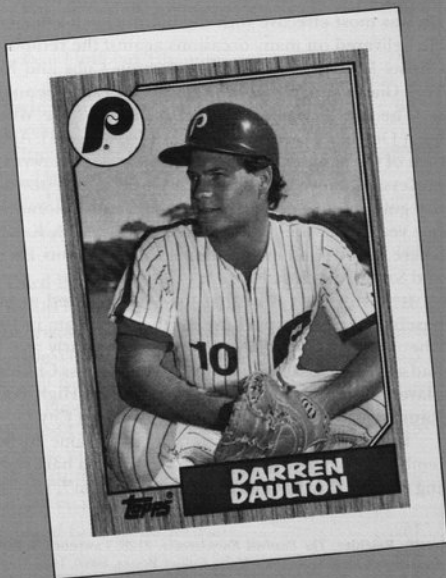
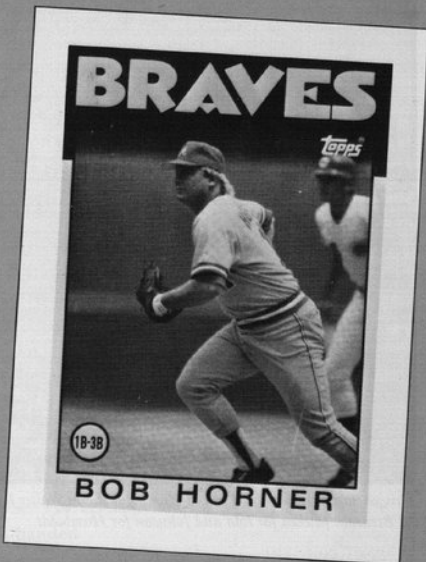
25. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 802-3.

26. Ibid., 1463; Associated Press release, July 27, 1948, untitled newspaper clipping, Joe Tinker file, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Inc., Cooperstown, N.Y.

27. Associated Press release, July 27, 1948, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Inc.; Charles Einstein, ed., *The Baseball Reader* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1980), 1.

28. Associated Press release, July 27, 1948, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Inc.; Wayne Oliver, "Joe Tinker, Sketch 3118," *The Associated Press Biographical Service*, April 15, 1944.

29. Associated Press release, July 27, 1948, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Inc.





Humboldt, Kans., Nov. 7, 1912.— Ad Brennan in the box. Walter Johnson at bat. Johnson made a 3-base hit on this ball. This photograph taken in 1912 at Humboldt shows Walter Johnson at bat during an exhibition game between the teams of Iola and Humboldt. Ad Brennan pitched for Iola and Johnson for Humboldt.

He was most effective with the bat in clutch situations. He delivered on many occasions against the renowned Christy Mathewson during the famous Cubs and New York Giants struggles for the National League pennant.

The fourth legendary great is "Smoky" Joe Wood, born October 25, 1889, in Kansas City, Missouri. At the turn of the century, his father, who was a trial lawyer by profession, moved the family to Ouray, a little town in the gold mining country of southwestern Colorado. A few years later the family moved to Ness City, Kansas, where Wood's father represented the Missouri Pacific and Santa Fe railroads.³⁰

It was in Ness City, that Joe Wood started to play baseball. He began pitching for the town team in 1906 when he was only sixteen.³¹ Even at that early age, he had a great fast ball with a hop on it. The Ness City team played all the surrounding towns such as High Point, Ransom, Ellis, Bazine, WaKeeney, and Scott City.

The start of his professional career came in September 1906, when he was asked to finish a barnstorming tour for the Bloomer Girls baseball team³²; yes—the

Bloomer Girls. Although it was promoted as an all-girl team, there were four boys who played. All wore wigs, except for little Joey Wood.

Joe's actual start in organized ball came in 1907 when he was signed to play for Hutchinson in the Western Association. After the 1907 season he was sold to Kansas City in the American Association. He pitched there until the middle of the 1908 season when he was bought by the Boston Red Sox.³³ The Red Sox team he joined in August 1908 became one of the best teams of all time. His roommate for the next fifteen years was the legendary Tris Speaker, considered by many to be the best center fielder of all time. This was the team that had the "Golden Outfield" of Speaker, Harry Hooper, and Duffy Lewis. Their defensive exploits became the stuff of legends.

Joe Wood won eleven games for the Red Sox in 1909; twelve in 1910; twenty-three (including one no-hitter) in 1911; and thirty-four in his career year of 1912. In 1912 his record was 34-5. That year he won sixteen in a row to tie Walter Johnson for the American League record. His ERA was 1.91 on the strength of ten shutouts. In

30. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 2128; Lawrence S. Ritter, *The Glory of Their Times* (New York: Collier Books, 1966), 147.

31. Ritter, *The Glory Of Their Times*, 147.

32. *Ibid.*, 149.

33. *Ibid.*, 150.

addition, he won three games in the World Series to lead Boston to victory over the New York Giants.³⁴

Nicknamed "Smoky" because of the speed of his fast ball, Wood's greatest career game occurred in the 1912 season when he was pitted against another legendary flamethrower in the form of Walter "Big Train" Johnson. Walter Johnson had recently fashioned a personal win streak that reached sixteen to set an American League record. His streak was broken on August 26, 1908.³⁵ As Johnson was working on his streak, Wood started one of his own.

When the Washington Senators came to Boston in September, Wood's streak stood at thirteen. Baseball fans and writers clamored for Johnson to have an opportunity to personally end Wood's streak and to protect his own record. On Friday, September 6, the match-up took place in an environment usually reserved for the seventh game of a World Series. The game was a scoreless tie until the sixth inning when Speaker scored for Boston. Although the Senators had men in scoring position in both the eighth and ninth innings, Wood was able to pitch out of these troubles and notch a 1-0 shutout.³⁶

These two mighty Kansans had a mutual admiration for each other. Joe Wood once stated, "In my opinion, the greatest pitcher who ever lived was Walter Johnson. If he'd ever had a good ball club behind him what records he would have set!" Walter Johnson once said, "Can I throw harder than Joe Wood? Listen, my friend, there's no man alive can throw harder than Smoky Joe Wood."³⁷

In addition to producing several legendary players, Kansans have made other contributions to professional baseball which are rich in their variety and degree of significance. Some are terrific while others are trivial. As a whole, they have had a surprisingly lasting effect on the game.

Nine Kansans have managed in the big leagues. Three have had considerable success. Bill Burwell of Jarbalo managed the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1947. Don Gutteridge of Pittsburg managed the Chicago White Sox in 1969 and 1970. Walter Johnson skippered the Washington Senators and Cleveland Indians for seven years. Joe Kuhel of Kansas City captained the Senators in 1948 and 1949. Bob Swift of Salina led the Detroit

The Author's All-Star Team

There is a degree of risk associated with naming an all-time all-star team of Kansas big leaguers. Some people may be offended if their favorites are left off. Selection criteria were strictly statistical. No player on the team played for less than eight years. Consequently, some players with better statistics may not have made the team if their careers were deemed too short for adequate comparison. Lastly, this is not a team of the best nine players. Rather, it is a team of the best players at their position. Certain positions had fiercer competition than others. As they say, those are the breaks of the game. In only one case (shortstop), was it too close to call. With these caveats in mind, my all-time all-star team is as follows:

Pitchers	W	L	Pct.
Right-handed			
Walter Johnson, Humboldt	416	279	.579
Joe Wood, Ness City	116	57	.671
Mike Torrez, Topeka	185	160	.536
Left-handed			
Ross Grimsley, Jr., Topeka	124	99	.556
Ray Sadecki, Kansas City	135	131	.508
Reliever			
Paul Lindblad, Chanute	61	46	.570 (64 saves)
Fielders			BA
Catcher			
Ray Mueller, Pittsburg			.252
First Base			
Joe Kuhel, Kansas City			.277
Second Base			
George Grantham, Galena			.302
Third Base			
Bob Horner, Junction City			.282
Shortstop			
Joe Tinker, Muscotah			.263
Bill Russell, Pittsburg			.264
Left Field			
Fred Clarke, Winfield			.315
Center Field			
Beals Becker, El Dorado			.276
Right Field			
Fred Brickell, Saffordville			.281

34. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 2128; Ritter, *The Glory of Their Times*, 151.

35. Emil H. Rothe, "The War of 1912: The Wood-Johnson Duel," in L. Robert Davids, ed., *Insider's Baseball* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), 127.

36. Ibid., 129-30; Ritter, *The Glory of Their Times*, 151.

37. Ritter, *The Glory of Their Times*, 146, 151.

Tigers in 1966, and Joe Tinker managed four years in the big leagues, for Cincinnati and Chicago.³⁸

The big three in terms of managing consist of Fred Clarke of Winfield, Ralph Houk of Lawrence, and Gene Mauch of Salina. Each of these men managed for at least nineteen years. Clarke's years with the Pirates have already been related. Houk managed the New York Yankees for eleven years and finished with Detroit and Boston. He managed the great Yankee teams of 1961, 1962, and 1963, winning the World Series in 1961 and 1962.³⁹ Mauch holds the longest tenure of any Sunflower State manager. After managing the California Angels for twenty-six years, Mauch announced his retirement in the spring of 1988. Considered a brilliant tactician, Mauch has lived with the reputation of not winning the big ones. The Angels' loss in the 1986 American League Championship Series to the Boston Red Sox was perhaps the toughest loss of his career.

Besides being a brilliant player and manager, Fred Clarke was responsible for several very significant contributions to baseball. He is credited with helping to originate the World Series in 1903, when, as the manager for the National League champion Pirates, he challenged the American League champion to a playoff. He also invented and patented the flip down sunglasses used by fielders. He was the first to wear sliding pads, and he was the first to use infield tarps.⁴⁰

Few people realize that it was a Kansan who brought the spitball to the big leagues. The spitter was actually the invention of an outfielder by the name of George Hildebrand, but he taught it to pitcher Elmer Stricklett in 1902 when both were playing for Sacramento in the Pacific Coast League. A native of Glasco, Kansas, Stricklett was about to be released from the Sacramento team because of a sore arm. He practiced throwing the spitter for four days. He then won eleven straight games, kept his job, and pitched two more years for Sacramento. Stricklett was called up to the big leagues in 1904 and pitched there for four seasons, the last three with the Brooklyn Dodgers. He is also credited by many with developing the first slider or "nickel curve."⁴¹

Eldon Auker of Norcatur is credited with developing the modern "submarine ball." After hurting his shoulder playing football at Kansas State University, he could not throw hard overhanded. The underhand pitching

motion he developed gave him several strong years with the Detroit Tigers in the 1930s.⁴²

Perhaps the strangest contribution Kansas provided big league baseball was Charles "Victory" Faust who left Marion in the summer of 1911 at age thirty to join the New York Giants as a pitcher on the strength of some advice from a fortune-teller. The soothsayer told Faust that if he joined the Giants he would become a great pitcher and the father of future generations of baseball stars. Not a skilled player by any means, he did manage to stay with the Giants as a mascot. He became quite well known by performing before games, clowning around in uniform, and by being the Giants' good-luck charm when the team won the 1911 and 1912 pennants.⁴³ Research indicates that he should be credited as the first white, paid team mascot, the historical equivalent of the San Diego Chicken.

Many people felt that Faust was not in charge of all his faculties and had perhaps wandered into the Giants club from the wilderness, but there is reason to believe that there was method to his madness. Through the persons of Tex Jones and Beals Becker he may have known more about the big time than people thought. In 1911, Tex Jones was playing for the Chicago White Sox. Tex was also from Marion, and Charley surely knew him. That same year another Kansan was playing for the Giants. He was Beals Becker and his hometown was El Dorado.⁴⁴ There may have been more envy than sooth-saying propelling Faust toward the big time.

Kansas has sent two sets of brothers to the big leagues and two father-son combinations. Hall of Famer Fred Clarke had a brother named Josh who played for five years as an outfielder at the turn of the century. The Barnes brothers, Virgil ("Zeke") and Jess, from Ontario both pitched in the major leagues from 1915 to 1928. They also played together on the pennant-winning Giants teams of the early 1920s. Ross Grimsley from Americus pitched for the White Sox in 1951. Twenty years later, his son, Ross, started an eleven-year pitching career; his first three years with the Cincinnati Reds. The younger Ross was born in Topeka. Fred Brickell of Saffordville played from 1926 to 1933 in the National League as an outfielder, and he played in the 1927 World Series for the Pirates. Thirty years later, in 1958, his son, Fritz, from Wichita began a three-year career as a shortstop for the Yankees and Angels.⁴⁵

George Washington Zabel, better known as Zip, who hailed from Wetmore, pitched only three seasons in the

38. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 616-55.

39. *Ibid.*, 632.

40. Dan Schlossberg, *The Baseball Catalog* (Middle Village, New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1980), 70, 220; Welch, "Cowley County's Fred Clarke," 10.

41. Quigley, *The Crooked Pitch*, 102, 153-54; Ron Fimrite, "The Pitch of the '80s," *Sports Illustrated* (June 9, 1986): 75; Schlossberg, *The Baseball Catalog*, 274.

42. Quigley, *The Crooked Pitch*, 74.

43. Thomas S. Busch, "In Search of Victory: The Story of Charles Victor ("Victory") Faust," *Kansas History* 6 (Summer 1983): 96-109.

44. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 709, 1065.

45. *Ibid.*, 749, 803, 1578-79, 1756.



Two of Kansas' best known big league stars are Smoky Joe Wood (left) and Walter Johnson.

National League for Chicago, from 1913 to 1915. His career record was 12-14 as a starter. As a reliever he was 4-2. In one of those relief appearances on June 17, 1915, he managed to set a major league record that still stands. He beat the Dodgers 4-3 after 18 1/3 innings of relief work.⁴⁶

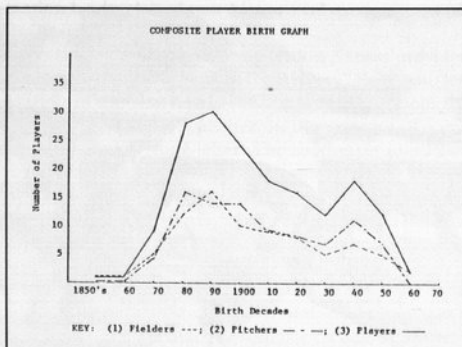
Luther "Dummy" Taylor, born in Oskaloosa in 1875, pitched for the powerhouse New York Giants from 1900 to 1908. He was one of only two deaf mutes to play in the big leagues.⁴⁷ After retiring from the game, he coached at the Kansas School for the Deaf in Olathe for many years.

On August 19, 1951, St. Louis Browns' owner, Bill Veeck, unveiled his newest acquisition, Eddie Gaedel.⁴⁸ Standing forty-six inches small, he was the shortest player ever to appear in the majors. The Browns were playing Detroit that day and the Tigers' battery consisted of two Kansans: catching was Bob Swift from Salina; pitching was Bob Cain from Longford. Cain walked the midget, who was then replaced by a pinch runner. Gaedel returned to the dugout to the cheers of a crowd bored from watching a game between the two worst teams in baseball. He would never play again. The Jayhawkers were more fortunate.

A statistical analysis of the 171 players from Kansas yields several interesting facts. Eighty-two fielders and eighty-nine pitchers make up Kansas' 171 big league players. The number of pitchers would seem to be disproportionately great and may reflect at first glance some validity to the stereotype of the hard-throwing farm-boy pitcher. These players came from all over Kansas, but the vast majority were born in the eastern half of the state.

Population centers have in fact produced the greatest number of players. Wichita holds the distinction of producing the greatest number, with sixteen. Kansas City is close behind at thirteen. Topeka and Leavenworth follow with seven and four, respectively. Coffeyville, El Dorado, Hays, Lawrence, and Pittsburg have sent three players each to the big leagues. The remaining 116 players have come from 100 towns. (See Appendix I.)

The careers of the fielders lasted an average of 5.12 years. Pitchers' careers lasted an average of 4.8 years. Both of these figures compare well with the modern major league career which averages six years.⁴⁹ Fred Clarke of Winfield enjoyed the longest career for a



fielder with twenty-one years in the major leagues.⁵⁰ Tom Wilson of Fleming had the shortest career with the dubious distinction of playing in the big leagues for one game, never to be heard from again. The great Walter Johnson from Humboldt had the longest pitching career with twenty-one years. Clarence Beers from El Dorado did not stay long enough even for a cup of coffee. His career lasted .2 of one inning.⁵¹ You do not want to know his ERA.

The vital statistics of a composite Kansas fielder are: height, 5'11 1/2"; weight, 176 pounds; six times more likely to throw right than left; twice as likely to bat right than left. The composite batting average is .228. This is lower than the respective current league averages of .261 and .252 in the American and National leagues.⁵²

The vital statistics of a composite Kansas pitcher are: height, 6'1"; weight, 182 pounds; .510 won-loss percentage; and three times more likely to throw right than left.

The most interesting statistical information about Kansas players concerns when they were born. Grouping players' birthdates by decades beginning with the 1850s reveals an interesting, if not disappointing graph. (See graph.) The number of fielders born in Kansas peaked in the 1890s, with sixteen, and has fallen every decade since, except for the 1940s. The number of pitchers peaked in the 1880s, with sixteen, and has fallen every decade since except for the 1940s. A composite graph of both fielders and pitchers reflects that the number peaked in the 1890s, with thirty, and has declined every decade since, except for the 1940s. It is the author's conjecture that the 1940s is an aberration because of the post-war baby boom.

46. Ibid., 2136; Schlossberg, *The Baseball Catalog*, 53.

47. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 2073.

48. John Grafton, *Sports Picture Quiz Book* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), 41.

49. Arthur Shack, Counsel to Major League Baseball Player's Association, telephone interviews with author, September 25, 1986.

50. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 802-3.

51. Ibid. 1527, 1586, 1817.

52. Arthur Shack interview.

APPENDIX I

KANSAS BALLPLAYER BIRTHPLACES/
CHILDHOOD HOMES

- Abilene—Harold "Hy" Vandenberg
 Agenda—Herb Bradley
 Altoona—Tom Hamilton
 Americus—Ross Grimsley
 Arcadia—Carroll "Deacon" Jones
 Argentine—Joe Bowman
 Arkansas City—Darren Daulton, Lorenzo Claire Patterson
 Atchison—Carter Elliott
 Belleville—Larry Cheney
 Beloit—George Darrow
 Benton—Ralph Winegarner
 Berlin—Otis Lambeth
 Brownell—Elon "Chief" Hogsett
 Cambridge—Clay Smith
 Caney—Charlie Rhodes
 Castleton—Larry Foss
 Chanute—Paul Lindblad
 Cherryvale—Bill Phebus
 Clay Center—Judd "Slow Joe" Doyle
 Clearwater—Ernie Maun
 Clyde—George Dockins
 Coffeyville—Charles Oertel, Paul "Shorty" Desjardien, Rudy May
 Delphos—Archie McKain
 Dexter—George Hale
 Douglass—Jimmy Durham
 El Dorado—Beals Becker, Clarence Beers, Tom Borland
 Ellinwood—Lee Dessen
 Emporia—Ray Pierce
 Eureka—Johnny Butler
 Fleming—Frank Wayenburg, Tom Wilson
 Fort Riley—Enos Cabell
 Fort Scott—Louis Ury
 Fredonia—Claude Willoughby
 Frontenac—Antone "Andy" Pilney, Joe Rabbitt
 Galena—George Grantham, Willis "Bill" Windle
 Garden City—Gary Krug
 Glasco—Elmer Stricklett
 Goodard—Ed Siever
 Gordon—Tom Sturdivant
 Grantville—Josh Billings
 Hays—Otto Denning, Willard Schmidt, Ron Schueler
 Herkimer—Elmer "Butch" Nieman
 Hiawatha—Joe Wilhoit
 Highland—John Misse
 Holyrood—Fay Wesley Thomas
 Hoxie—Urbane Pickering, Les Barnhart
 Humboldt—Walter Johnson
 Hutchinson—Phil Ketter, John "Jack" Banta
 Iola—Rick Kester
 Independence—Herm Merrit
 Jarbalo—Bill Burwell
 Junction City—Bob Horner, John Wells
 Kansas City—Gilly Campbell, Jim Clark, John Peters, Keith "Kite" Thomas, James "Cotton" Tierney, Leo Wells, Neil Allen, Mike Dupree, Ray Sadecki, Paul Edmondson, Joe Kuhel, Paul Penson, Steve Renko
 Kingman—George Alton
 La Cygne—Elias "Liz" Funk, High McMullen
 LaHarpe—Addison Brennan
 Lamar—Blaine "Kid" Durbin
 Larned—Mitchell Webster
 Lawrence—Bobby Henrich, Ralph Houk, Steve Jeltz*
 Leavenworth—Bill Hughes, Fred Raymer, John Hetki, Jack Killilay
 Linden—Zeriah "Rip" Hagerman
 Lindsborg—Ebin Delmar "Del" Lundgren
 Little River—Carl Manda
 Lone Elm—Dale Gear
 Longford—Bob Cain
 Longton—Jess Howard "Andy" Rush
 Manhattan—Brian Giles
 Maple City—Ferrell Anderson
 Marion—Tex Jones, Charley Faust
 McPherson—Bill McGill
 Mineral—Jack Ryan, Orval Grove
 Muscotah—Joe Tinker
 Ness City—Joe Wood*
 Norcatur—Dewey Adkins, Eldon Auker
 Norton—Bob Randall
 Olathe—Claude Hendrix
 Ontario—Virgil "Zeke" Barnes, Jess Barnes*
 Oskaloosa—Luther "Dummy" Taylor
 Overland Park—Skip James
 Palmyra—Pat Hardgrove
 Parsons—Gil Britton, Fred Bradley
 Pfeifer—Monty Basgall
 Piqua—Fred Kipp
 Pittsburg—Don Gutteridge, Ray Mueller, Bill Russell
 Pratt—Bill Marriot
 Reamsville—Ray Boggs
 Rosedale—Charlie Wheatley
 Rose Hill—Josh Swindell
 Saffordville—Fred Brickell
 Salina—Gene Mauch, Bob Swift
 Scammon—Fred McMullin
 Severance—Harry Chapman
 Spring Hill—Charles "Curly" Brown
 Stafford—Roy Sanders
 Topeka—Art Griggs, Ross Grimsley, Jr., Clarence Heise, Ken Johnson, Larry Miller, Don O'Reilly, Mike Torrez
 Udall—Nick Allen
 Uniontown—Don Dennis
 Valley Falls—Freddie Marsh
 Walnut—Don Songer
 Wamego—Wiley Taylor
 Weir City—Joe Kelly, Pete Kilduff
 Wellington—Mardie Carnejo
 Wetmore—George "Zip" Zabel
 Wheaton—Frank Bushey
 Wichita—Fritzie Brickell, Gail Henley, Rod Kanehl, Don Lock, James "Tke" McAuley, Ronn Reynolds, Galen Pitts, Daryl Spencer, Danny Thompson, Bob Thurman, Art Weaver, Larry McWilliams, Roger Slagle, Duane Wilson, Clay Christiansen, Lloyd Bishop
 Williamsburg—Louis McEvoy, James Willard "Willie" Ramsdell
 Winchester—Jerry Robertson
 Winfield—Fred Clarke,* Josh Clarke
 Unknown—Walt Kinzie
 *Childhood towns included for Fred Clarke, Joe Wood, Skip James, Jess Barnes and Steve Jeltz.

This decline in the number of Kansas ballplayers has been so sharp that only two Kansans born in the last twenty-eight years have made it to the majors. Of players born in the 1960s, Kansas has produced only two players so far. Before then, at least a dozen players from Kansas from each decade had made it to the big leagues since the 1880s.

There is little reason to believe that the trend will reverse itself. Except for a baby boom echo that might have occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s, climate and demographics in Kansas cannot compete with those found in the Sunbelt and on the West Coast.

As it now stands, Arkansas City holds the distinction of producing the youngest big leaguer: Darren Daulton, born January 3, 1962,⁵³ entered the major leagues at the age of twenty-one.

In spite of the downward trend in the production of big leaguers, Kansas can claim several noteworthy post-World War II players. These are players who were born in 1940 or later. Of the ten who merit mention, seven are pitchers. These seven, however, do not appear to have spent much time on any farm and, thus, do not support the farm-boy pitcher stereotype.

Ray Sadecki from Kansas City pitched in the majors for eighteen years. He pitched in the 1964 World Series for St. Louis and the 1973 World Series for the Mets. Paul Lindblad of Chanute was an excellent reliever for fourteen years, spending most of his time with Kansas City and Oakland. Steve Renko from Kansas City was a solid pitcher for fifteen years and had his best seasons with Montreal. Rudy May of Coffeyville pitched for sixteen years and appeared in the 1981 World Series for the Yankees. Mike Torrez of Topeka was a very strong pitcher during his eighteen-year career and appeared in the 1977 World Series for the Yankees. Ross Grimsley, Jr., also of Topeka, had an eleven-year career and pitched in the 1972 Series for the Reds. Neil Allen from Kansas City is still pitching after eight years in the majors. He currently plays for the Yankees.⁵⁴

The non-pitchers are a surprising lot. Only one is easily identified with Kansas. Bill Russell from Pittsburg retired in the fall of 1986 after eighteen years in the big leagues. He is one of a select few who were career players for only one team. His years with the Los Angeles Dodgers were some of their greatest. He played in four World Series and set a World Series record in 1981 for the most assists by a shortstop. He currently holds the second position on the Dodgers' all-time games-played list with 2,181. The other two fielders are Bob Horner

and Enos Cabell. Horner was born in Junction City and spent eight years with the Atlanta Braves before playing one year for the Yakult Swallows in Japan. The 1978 National League Rookie of the Year has returned to the States and is playing with St. Louis for the 1988 season. Enos Cabell, from Fort Riley,⁵⁵ was a hard-hitting first baseman/third baseman. He spent fifteen years in the major leagues, eight of which were with the Houston Astros.

Baseball's evolutionary change from polite recreation to big business began with the westward movement of the nation over a century ago. This migration led by Civil War veterans was largely responsible for bringing baseball to Kansas. In towns such as Leavenworth, Lawrence and Topeka, baseball found a generous but untrained supply of participants. Young men eager to play, however, soon caught on to the intricacies of the game, and Kansas ballplayers gradually excelled and began to enter the major leagues in 1882.

Kansas players gained a place of prominence within the national game, and during baseball's Golden Age (1910-1930), several legendary players came from the Sunflower State. This was not a coincidence. The seasonal climate of Kansas allowed baseball to be played much longer during the year than in the cold and short-summered Northeast. This, coupled with the size and strength advantages of its farm-bred boys produced a winning combination that was hard to match east of the Mississippi.

However, climate and demographics soon became a foe for Kansas baseball as the nation's population continued to push south and west. Kansas springs and summers could not compete with the mild year-long climates of the Sunbelt and West Coast. In addition, as America became urbanized in the 1900s, so did baseball. Baseball's rural roots soon became entangled with city diamonds and the competitive strength in numbers of able bodies. It would seem that this produced a double whammy with climate and demographics primarily responsible for the gradual downward trend in the production of Kansas big league ballplayers that has persisted since the early 1900s.

Although the number of Kansans in the big leagues may have peaked nearly sixty years ago, Kansas will continue to send players to the majors. They just may be fewer and farther between. Trolley Line Butler, Bald Eagle Isbell, Shotgun Peters, Weeping Willie Willoughby, Smoky Joe, and the Big Train will be watching.⁵⁶ [KH]

55. Ibid., 773, 1033, 1354.

56. These players, known to fans and sportscasters by their nicknames, were Johnny Butler, Frank Isbell, John Peters, Claude Willoughby, Joe Wood, and Walter Johnson.

53. Reichler, *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, 849.

54. Ibid., 1564, 1756, 1865, 1891, 1993, 2015-16, 2084.