

Fort Hays State University

## FHSU Scholars Repository

---

Master's Theses

---

Summer 2006

### Ahead of the Curve : A History of the National Baseball Congress Tournament in Wichita, Kansas,1935-2005

Travis M. Larsen

Fort Hays State University, [tlarsen@fhsu.edu](mailto:tlarsen@fhsu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Larsen, Travis M., "Ahead of the Curve : A History of the National Baseball Congress Tournament in Wichita, Kansas,1935-2005" (2006). *Master's Theses*. 2208.

DOI: 10.58809/YRIA5751

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses/2208>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact [ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu](mailto:ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu).

AHEAD OF THE CURVE: A HISTORY OF  
THE NATIONAL BASEBALL CONGRESS  
TOURNAMENT IN WICHITA, KANSAS  
1935-2005

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the Fort Hays State University in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts

by

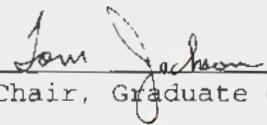
Travis Larsen

B.A., Fort Hays State University

Date July 13, 2006

Approved 

Major Professor

Approved 

Chair, Graduate Council

## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a history of the National Baseball Congress (NBC) tournament in Wichita, Kansas, from its founding in 1935 to 2005. The NBC tournament, since its inception, has had an impact culturally, economically, and socially on the city of Wichita, and to a lesser degree, an impact on Major League Baseball and other facets of organized baseball. By using a decade-by-decade overview of the history of the NBC tournament, one finds how social and cultural events have played a role in the success of the NBC tournament, and how the tournament influenced the baseball world.

Raymond "Hap" Dumont, the founder and master promoter of the NBC tournament, created an environment that would push his tournament to the forefront of the minds of Americans. He did this by using the mass media and by instituting unique promotions to enhance the game of baseball. Dumont also created opportunities for minorities, military baseball teams, and eventually college baseball players to participate in his semipro tournament.

This thesis, based on newspaper articles, Raymond Dumont's biography, and other assorted histories of baseball in the twentieth century, argues that the success

of the NBC tournament was due to Dumont's ingenuity and desire to succeed. When Dumont passed away, the tournament went through a series of ownership changes that initially weakened the overall economic effectiveness of the tournament. However, the originality and tradition of the tournament endured because of the dedicated employees that Dumont hired to help run the event. When the Rich family from Buffalo, New York, bought the National Baseball Congress in 1985, they also purchased a Wichita institution, a tradition that has endured into the twenty-first century.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have made this thesis possible. Their support and guidance made an arduous process enjoyable.

First, and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Raymond Wilson, my graduate advisor, for having faith in me to complete this project, and for making the most out of my skills and talents. Without his motivation, I would not be where I am today. A special thank you goes to Dr. Todd Leahy and Dr. David Goodlett, both of whom served on my thesis committee and offered tremendous advice throughout this practice. I would also like to thank Dr. Robert Rook for inspiring me to write a thesis in the first place.

The history faculty and staff at Fort Hays State University: Dr. Brian Hodson, Dr. Alan Busch, Dr. David Bovee, Professor Kim Perez, Professor Chris Powers, and Mrs. Rhonda Baker all provided assistance and inspiration in my studies. The interlibrary loan staff at Forsyth Library also provided me with invaluable resources.

Finally, none of this would be possible without the love and support of my family. I would like to thank my sons, Kailar Larsen and Jarod Schafer, for their understanding when their dad needed to work. A very,

special thank you must go to my wife, Stephanie Larsen.

Not only did she support me in this endeavor, but she also helped with the research and the computer work needed to complete this thesis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF APPENDIXES.....	v
CHAPTER ONE - IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME.....	1
CHAPTER TWO - STRIKEOUTS ARE FASCIST, GROUNDBALLS ARE MORE DEMOCRATIC.....	20
CHAPTER THREE - IS THIS HEAVEN? NO IT'S WICHITA.....	42
CHAPTER FOUR - THE SUN NEVER SETS ON BASEBALL.....	56
CHAPTER FIVE - THE DEATH OF A SALESMAN.....	76
CHAPTER SIX - EASE HIS PAIN.....	89
CHAPTER SEVEN - GO THE DISTANCE.....	103
APPENDIXES.....	124
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	127

# LIST OF APPENDIXES

Appendix	Page
A MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL PLAYERS WHO PLAYED IN THE NBC TOURNAMENT.....	116
B TOURNAMENT CHAMPIONS.....	117



## CHAPTER ONE

### IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

The one constant through all the years, Ray, has been baseball. America has rolled by like an army of steamrollers. It has been erased like a blackboard, rebuilt and erased again. But baseball has marked the time. This field, this game: it's a part of our past, Ray. It reminds us of all that once was good and it could be again.

Terrence Mann (James Earl Jones) to Ray Kinsella (Kevin Costner) in 1989's *Field of Dreams*.

If one could replace the Iowa fields of corn with Kansas's shocks of wheat, it is easily imaginable that the movie *Field of Dreams*' real life inspiration came from the National Baseball Congress World Series Tournament in Wichita, Kansas. From the first pitch thrown in Lawrence Stadium (now Lawrence-Dumont Stadium), the NBC tournament played an important role in the social and cultural history of Wichita and of Kansas. Unlike major league baseball, which often mirrored society, semiprofessional baseball concentrated on going beyond the norms of society. To ensure its success the NBC tournament needed to be innovative and remain ahead of the curve to compete with Major League Baseball and its minor league baseball affiliates. This study will look at how Raymond "Hap" Dumont brought to life the National Baseball Congress

tournament and will also examine the innovations, both physical and social, which Dumont brought to baseball and to Wichita.

The definition of semiprofessional baseball has changed over the years since the inception of the National Semi-pro Baseball Congress tournament. Professional teams consist of the organizations that make up Major League Baseball and the minor leagues. All other organized teams are considered semiprofessional teams.<sup>2</sup> However, at times semi-pro players made more than their major league counterparts did. During the Korean War, an Alpine, Texas team paid Brooklyn Dodgers pitcher Johnny Podres, then in the United States Navy, \$1000 a game and \$100 a strikeout. Podres made \$2200 in one game, almost as much as some major league players made in a whole season.<sup>2</sup>

The term semi-professional has always had a sense of mystery to it. When the winning team from the NBC tournament in 1950, the Fort Wayne, Indiana club, went to Japan to face the Nipponese all-star team, the term semiprofessional could not translate into Japanese.<sup>3</sup> Prior to the 1960s, the semi-pro game consisted mostly of former

big league ballplayers whose careers had come to an end or those men who loved the game of baseball and simply wanted to continue playing the game of their youth. In the 1960s, semi-professional baseball changed with the regular involvement of college baseball players accepting roster positions with semi-pro clubs, and Raymond Dumont eliminated the term from the organization's name; thus the National Semi-pro Baseball Congress became the more manageable National Baseball Congress.

Raymond "Hap" Dumont, the father of the National Semi-pro Baseball Congress's governing body and the architect of the national tournament, was a sporting goods salesman, as well as a boxing and wrestling promoter. Born in Wichita in 1904, Dumont grew up wanting a place in show business. After graduating from Wichita High School (now Wichita East), he ventured into vaudeville but did not make it as a comedian. He then drifted into sports writing and was the sports editor for the *Hutchinson News*. Additionally, he became involved in promoting baseball because circus employees who were in town for a show asked Dumont to find a baseball team for them to play due to the Blue Laws in Kansas at the time. The Blue Laws stated that a circus

show could not perform on Sundays, so the employees found a team to play and charged admission to earn a little extra money. Promoting baseball suited Dumont fine, and he warmed up to the idea by promoting more games in the Wichita area.<sup>4</sup> In fact, eventually Dumont was lauded as the best promoter ever by Bill Veeck, who was no promotional slouch either.<sup>5</sup> Veeck, an owner of the Cleveland Indians, St. Louis Browns, and Chicago White Sox, is best remembered for sending Eddie Gaedel, a midget, to home plate to bat, and for starting a riot in Chicago by promoting Disco Demolition Night on June 12, 1979 in the middle of a double header. Veeck and Dumont not only shared an imaginative promotional mind but both were also responsible for bringing Satchel Paige into their respective baseball worlds. Dumont would pay Paige to play in the first NBC national tournament and Veeck would make Paige the oldest rookie in Major League Baseball at the age of 43 in 1948.<sup>6</sup> While Dumont was not quite as notorious as Veeck, he did come up with his fair share of bizarre schemes.

In 1931, Dumont formed the National Baseball Congress, an organization designed to promote baseball around the country. Baseball in Kansas, up to this point, lacked a



clear, distinctive history. For whatever reasons, many of the professional teams in Wichita failed to draw fans. Interest in the game certainly thrived, but people failed to support the various incarnations of teams throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Starting in 1931, Hap Dumont ran the Kansas State Semi-pro Baseball Tournament. The tournament was held at Island Park on Ackerman Island in the middle of the Arkansas River. Between the years 1929-33, the Wichita Aviators also used Island Park. At the end of 1933, the Aviators moved to Muskogee, Oklahoma where they found depression era baseball business no better.

While the professional game of baseball burned out in Wichita during the 1933 season, the baseball stadium on Ackerman Island went up in smoke as well. A carelessly discarded cigarette burned the entirely wooden structure to the ground. Left without a stadium for his Kansas State Semipro tournament, Dumont turned to the city leaders of Wichita for help in building a new baseball field. According to Bob Broeg, Dumont's biographer, he initially received a "no" on his plan for the stadium. However, Dumont would not take "no" for an answer and he proposed

that if the city built his stadium he would organize a national baseball tournament. In 1965 Dumont informed *Wichita Eagle* sports editor Bill Hodge that Wichita City Manager Bert Wells could not build a stadium for just a state tournament. Dumont then told Hodge, "I just popped out with the idea, and told him I had been thinking about putting on a national tournament in another year or so...Wells called me about a week later and said the WPA would build Lawrence stadium and that it would share part of the expense."<sup>7</sup>

By starting this tournament, the city would reap greater financial rewards, as people from around the country would flock to Wichita to watch baseball. The new stadium was built just west of the Arkansas River at the end of the old Chisholm Trail in what was known as Payne's pasture.<sup>8</sup> The stadium's construction cost about \$125,000, could seat around 6,000 people, and held up to 2,000 standing room only fans.<sup>9</sup> Civic leaders decided on the name Lawrence Stadium, in honor of Robert Lawrence a leader in the community who died in 1934.

With a new stadium built, Dumont proceeded to formulate his plans for the national tournament held in

late July-early August of 1935. Dumont now attempted to go where other individuals had attempted unsuccessfully to go before him: actually to make a national tournament work. The more regionalized tournaments, such as the *Denver Post* tournament worked well, but the limitations on travel and especially money during the depression period could make or break Dumont's initial tournament set-up. Virgil Cory of the *Wichita Eagle* wrote,

"A national just wasn't possible. The idea had been toyed with by promoters in New York, Chicago, San Francisco and other centers of population for years and had been discarded for several reasons. Too much expense, failure to get genuine representation of teams from coast to coast, and an utter lack of a central governing organization were chief drawbacks in staging a national tournament."<sup>10</sup>

Dumont knew he needed a big draw to bring out the fans and establish a national voice for his tournament.

The middle of the thirties marked another change in the dynamics of American society and culture. Congress repealed the Volstead Act, which called for the enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment and banned the manufacturing, sales, and transportation of alcoholic beverages. The same year saw the invention of the beer can and the establishment of the first Alcoholics Anonymous. Bugs



Bunny showed up on the big screen for the first time, and Elvis Presley was born in Mississippi. One of the most famous people of the era died, Will Rogers, who, along with pilot Wiley Post, succumbed in a plane crash in Alaska. Persia changed its name to Iran. The Federal Bureau of Investigation caught the infamous Ma Barker and an assassin killed the "Kingfish" Huey Long. In sports, the Chicago Cubs caught the St. Louis Cardinals by winning twenty-one straight games in September to advance to the World Series. Jimmy "Cinderella Man" Braddock, a recent welfare recipient, ascended to the top of the heavyweight championship mountain by defeating Max Baer.<sup>11</sup> Then, Raymond Dumont made a deal with a baseball player outside the mainstream of the game to bring his national tournament dreams into reality.

The big draw Dumont sought came in the form of arguably the period's best pitcher, Satchel Paige. Dumont promised Paige \$1,000 to bring his Bismarck, North Dakota "colored" team to the tournament in Wichita. During the depression era, \$1,000 was hard to come by, especially for an African-American. To put Paige's "salary" in perspective, a congressman made \$8,000 a year, a lawyer



made \$4,000 a year, a doctor \$3,500, and a college professor made \$3,000.<sup>12</sup>

With Paige's entry set, Dumont enlisted more teams of color. An American Indian team from Wewoka, Oklahoma and a Japanese-American club from Stockton, California accepted invitations from Dumont. Four other teams of African-Americans entered the tournament: the Texas Centennials of Dallas, Texas, the Ft. Scott Blackhawks of Kansas, the Memphis Red Sox of the Negro National League; and the Monroe (Louisiana) Monarchs.<sup>13</sup> Dumont filled out the tournament brackets with an eclectic group of teams from around the United States: Gadsdon, Alabama; Jonesboro (Arkansas) Giants; Shawnee (Oklahoma) Athletics; Poplar Bluff, Missouri; Union Circulation Co. of New York; Halliburton Cementers of Duncan, Oklahoma; Lompee, California; Phoenix, Arizona; Byron, Nebraska; Holy Name of New Orleans; Lorraine, Texas; Blue Coals of Buffalo, New York; the Eason Oilers of Oklahoma; Chicago Sheridans; the Ford V-8's of Omaha, Nebraska; Oceanside, California; Jones Stores of Kansas City, Missouri; Cleveland Mills of Shelby, North Carolina; Stanzal Brothers of Waukegan, Illinois;

Shawnee, Oklahoma; Patterson, New Jersey; the Wichita Wings; the Arkansas City (Kansas) Dubbs; and a Kansas All-Star team. In all, 32 teams from 24 states participated in the inaugural National Semipro Baseball tournament.<sup>15</sup>

*Wichita Eagle* sportswriter Pete Lightner wrote:

By Sunday, teams will be arriving for the national semi-pro tourney. Some of the teams have booked games en route to help absorb the expense. It takes plenty of money to get those teams here. The tournament headquarters estimate that each team will spend at least a thousand and in some cases considerably more to get here and live while here.<sup>16</sup>

The Bismarck team piled into two cars, a Chrysler Airflow and a Plymouth Sedan, supplied by team owner Neil Churchill, who owned an automobile dealership in Bismarck, and headed south. Along the way, the team "barnstormed" through the Midwest picking up games to pay for their expenses. One of these games occurred sixty miles from Wichita, in McPherson, KS. *The McPherson Daily Republic* reported:

Satchel hadn't been used and the fans were yelling for him to take the mound. In the final inning he accommodated the spectators. He walked to the mound after waving his outfielders to the bench. He struck out the first two batters, then sent his infielders to the bench. The final out came when Britt rapped one down the center of the field,

Paige snagged the ball and chased down Britt before he reached first. Bismarck defeated the Dickey Oilers 14-0.<sup>17</sup>

The showmanship of Paige and the notoriety of his playing ability, not to mention the press coverage, delighted Dumont. As the tournament fast approached, the city of Wichita stood abuzz at what was to about to take place. Pete Lightner wrote in the *Wichita Eagle*:

The tournament has been planned to give everyone a fair chance and to satisfy the visitors that Wichita is a good place to come back to. The tournament may be a permanent fixture here if it's successful from a financial standpoint. Frankly, it will have the highest expenses of any sports event put on here in many a season. All the national sporting goods' houses and magazines are supporting the event. It would mean a vast amount of publicity for Wichita to have it here each year. That's what the plans are right now.<sup>18</sup>

Paige went on to pitch four times in the tournament, dominating the field and setting records for strikeouts and wins that still stand, including the title game against the Duncan (OK) Cementers which Bismarck won handily.

The tournament finished with over 50,000 fans attending over a two-and-a-half week span. Hap Dumont declared it a rousing financial success, making money even after paying Satchel Paige his \$1,000 "salary." The

National Semi-pro tournament also caught the eyes of two prominent baseball figures, *Sporting News* publisher J.G. Taylor Spink and Major League Baseball Commissioner Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis. Landis's interest in Dumont and his tournament came from a financial standpoint. The major leagues at that time struggled with player development as the minor league system could barely float above the financial waters of the time. Landis saw Dumont's tournament as another breeding ground for fresh baseball players and encouraged teams to send scouts to Wichita and sign players.

The man that Dumont was really interested in was Spink, whose *Sporting News* magazine was known as "Baseball's Bible." Dumont sent more letters and announcements to the *Sporting News* than any other outlet. Spink liked the earnest honesty of Dumont and believed the promoter when he stated that he would "not spend a nickel on myself until I pay you (for advertising)." Spink gave Dumont his advertising, and the gospel of semi-pro baseball and the National Baseball Congress spread. The relationship benefited both men: Dumont got more



recognition, and Spink got more baseball to cover. When the tournament blossomed in the late thirties, Dumont stated that he owed thanks to Judge Landis, but gratitude to J.G. Taylor Spink.<sup>19</sup>

With the success of the 1935 national tournament, Dumont no longer needed to pay special salaries to players to attract them to his tournament. In fact, Dumont paid less attention to bringing teams of color for the 1936 tournament. The 1936 tournament saw Honus Wagner come back as high commissioner of Semipro baseball. Wagner and tournament advisers George Sisler, native Kansan Fred Clarke, Ty Cobb and Tris Speaker declared that integrated teams would be excluded from that year's tournament.<sup>20</sup> Wagner, Cobb, and Speaker, men who were not known for their tolerance for African-Americans, certainly did not want to promote "black" baseball, hence their exclusion. All-black teams would be accepted in future years, but that would be up to individual member states that were part of the National Baseball Congress to decide. From 1936 on, the winners of the state or regional tournaments were granted entry into the national tournament, with Hap Dumont and his

associates picking and choosing teams to round out the field.<sup>21</sup>

The 1936 tournament saw Lawrence stadium expand to hold 20,000 fans. Those fans were charged anywhere from forty cents to \$1.10 to watch the games. Ten teams eventually divided the prize money of \$14,617.45. Fans of teams such as the Duncan, (OK) Halliburton Cementers were even able to listen to the games on the radio.<sup>22</sup>

The 1937 tournament saw more changes, as the National Baseball Congress became an even greater presence in semi-professional baseball circles. The group established stricter rules for players involved in the teams. Dumont required the players to sign one-year contracts and to register with the NBC by paying a quarter each for a membership card. A violation of the contract meant a two-year suspension from participating in sanctioned state tournament events and by this time, Dumont had added every state to his membership roster. Judge Landis convinced Dumont that he should exclude people who were signed to or reserved by organized baseball (the major and minor leagues.) Furthermore, former professionals could not play on semipro teams until after June 15 of a calendar year.<sup>23</sup>

These rule changes helped tighten the quality of the game and kept Dumont on good relations with other important areas of baseball, but it did not take away from the showmanship and pageantry that lived within Dumont. The 1937 tournament included movie cameramen, spotlights, bands, fireworks, and baseball games, running from early in the morning to late at night.

Throughout the rest of the thirties, baseball's policy on inclusion of races other than white differed from Hap Dumont's opinion. Dumont felt that African-American ballplayers brought another segment of society into his tournament, which could not hurt his bottom line. Honus Wagner, the high commissioner of the NBC, contradicted himself from his 1937 ruling on excluding minorities when he said, "We feel colored players are not only good as players but also good drawing cards."<sup>24</sup> However, as good drawing cards as the African-American players were, the NBC tournament did not display any more prominent black or mixed teams until after Jackie Robinson integrated Major League Baseball. Organized baseball's influence on Dumont and the tournament kept minorities from fully participating once again. The 1938 tournament incorporated almost eighty

percent of the teams from industrial firms and not one of them was integrated.<sup>25</sup>

Expansion of Dumont's semi-pro organization continued throughout the late 1930s. This expansion brought in over 25,000 baseball clubs under the NBC umbrella.<sup>26</sup> Dumont's expansion plans also included international competition in which the NBC oversaw development of a tournament in Puerto Rico and a Canadian program.<sup>27</sup>

The expansion of semi-pro baseball enjoyed tremendous success due to several factors. The level of play of semipro baseball teams increased due to out-of-work minor league baseball players. The initial inclusion of minorities, especially African-American ballplayers, also benefited the NBC tournament. Hap Dumont's tireless promotion and constant tinkering allowed the NBC and its tournament to become a distinct part of Wichita's and Kansas's culture.

The overarching factors of race and poverty during the 1930s played a significant role in the development of baseball and the NBC tournament. Dumont used both to establish and expand his vision of baseball in Wichita and around the United States. As the 1930s ended and the 1940s



began, Hap Dumont would once again use an unforeseen social event to further the prominence of the National Baseball Congress and the national tournament.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Raymond "Hap" Dumont founded the National Semi-pro Baseball Congress as a sort of governing body over the semipro game. Dumont also wanted to help promote and sell more baseball equipment from his sporting goods store. Dumont would travel from state to state trying to enlist sandlot baseball leagues to join his umbrella organization and in fact, he enjoyed great success in doing this. See Bob Broeg, *Baseball's Barnum: Ray "Hap" Dumont & The National Baseball Congress* (Wichita, KS: The Center for Entrepreneurship at Wichita State University, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Bob Rives, *Baseball in Wichita: Images in Baseball* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 65.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>4</sup> Dale Mullen, "Ray Dumont, Wichita Baseball Promoter Dies," *Wichita Beacon*, July 4, 1971, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Broeg, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Unknown Author, "Bill Veeck," [http://www.baseballhalloffame.org/hofer\\_and\\_honorees/hofer\\_bios/veeck\\_bill.htm](http://www.baseballhalloffame.org/hofer_and_honorees/hofer_bios/veeck_bill.htm). [accessed November 3, 2005] 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Beccy Tanner, "Baseball Legend Dumont Put Wichita On the Map: Tourney Idea Spurred Stadium," *Wichita Eagle*, June 10, 1993, 8E.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey L. Tully, "New Deal Construction Relief Projects: Wichita, Kansas, a decade of change" (M.A Thesis, Wichita State University, 1994), 46.

<sup>9</sup> James R. Shortridge, *The WPA Guide to 1930's Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1984), 304.

<sup>10</sup> Broeg, 34.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 38.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 43.
- <sup>14</sup> A team made up completely of nine brothers.
- <sup>15</sup> Pete Lightner, "Raymond Dumont Announces Field for National Nines," *Wichita Eagle*, July 31, 1935, B1.
- <sup>16</sup> Broeg, 43.
- <sup>17</sup> Kyle McNary, "Satchel Stages A Show," North Dakota Baseball History/Pitch Black Negro League site, <http://www.pitchblackbaseball.com/northdakotabaseball.html>. 2000-01 [accessed October 19, 2005].
- <sup>18</sup> Broeg, 43.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 43.
- <sup>20</sup> Associated Press, "Tris Speaker Is Named Chairman of Semi-Pro Body," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 26, 1937, B2.
- <sup>21</sup> Associated Press, "Negro Semi-Pro Teams Eligible in U.S. Tourney," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 6, 1937, B5.
- <sup>22</sup> Harold Seymour, Ph.D., *Baseball: The People's Game* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992), 285.
- <sup>23</sup> Associated Press, "Semi-Pros Tighten Rules: Will Cooperate with Organized Baseball, Declares Sisler," *The New York Times*, December 28, 1928, 27.
- <sup>24</sup> Seymour, 285.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 285.
- <sup>26</sup> United Press, "Semipros Will Expand," *The Washington Post*, September 27, 1938, X18.
- <sup>27</sup> Associated Press, "Semi-pros List Changes: Baseball Group Aims To Increase Number of Clubs; Other Plans," *The Washington Post* January 4, 1939, 17.

## CHAPTER TWO

### STRIKEOUTS ARE FASCIST, GROUNDBALLS ARE MORE DEMOCRATIC

I honestly feel that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going. There will be fewer people unemployed and everybody will work longer hours and harder than ever before. And that means that they ought to have a chance for recreation and for taking their minds off their work even more than before. As to the players themselves, I know you agree with me that individual players who are of active military or naval age should go, without question, into the services. Even if the actual quality to the teams is lowered by the greater use of older players, this will not dampen the popularity of the sport.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's letter to Commissioner of baseball Kennesaw Mountain Landis giving major league baseball the "green light" to play during the Second World War.

With Nazi Germany's 1939 invasion of Poland that started the Second World War, the United States prepared for entry into the war all the while claiming neutrality in those early days. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, reaffirmed this statement and was supported by the United States Congress, by confirming publicly that the American people would be neutral in the events overwhelming the world. At this point, the baseball establishment and the rest of the sporting world were not directly affected by the events in Europe and in the Pacific until the Japanese

attack at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941.<sup>1</sup>

However, the war effort in Wichita, Kansas, was like every other industrial center in the United States as companies like Boeing Aircraft started building war machinery such as the B-29 Superfortress and after 1942, the Model CG-4 Gliders that would be used in the invasion of Europe.<sup>2</sup>

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the landscape of both organized and semipro baseball changed dramatically. For the most part every able-bodied man either volunteered for military duty or was drafted into the service. Passage of the Selective Service and Training Act in 1940 paved the way for over 5.4 million people serving in the United States Armed Forces by the end of 1942.<sup>3</sup> Over five hundred of those 5.4 million people were Major League Baseball players, including thirty-five who ended up in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.<sup>4</sup> Men such as Bob Feller of the Cleveland Indians, who happened to be one of the first to enter the service after Pearl Harbor, and Yogi Berra, a catcher for the New York Yankees, saw combat action first hand.<sup>5</sup> Hoyt Wilhelm and Warren Spahn, of the Milwaukee Braves, both saw action during the Battle of the Bulge.<sup>6</sup> Many other ballplayers either served in the



military stateside or were not able to perform a duty in the armed forces. Professional baseball continued with older players and other fill-ins. Enos Slaughter, who played for the St. Louis Cardinals, said of wartime baseball, "It kept the spirit of the people up, and their minds off the war. I think it made everything go along better."<sup>7</sup>

Originally, Dumont and his advisors made it extremely difficult for military teams to participate in the NBC tournament. Teams would have to qualify in numerous district games, which service clubs found difficult to attend due to their military obligations. Special Services Captain Leroy Mounday of Fort Riley, Kansas, who had one of the better military teams in the Midwest, asked the NBC hierarchy to amend the rules that better allowed the service clubs to participate in the NBC tournament. Mounday recommended that they be exempted from district qualifying and that professional players be allowed to play (which the NBC banned from competition up until this point), permitted them to play at the site closest to their state tournaments, and gave them flexibility in scheduling games. Dumont acquiesced to Mounday's recommendations and

granted the service clubs permission to play in the 1942 NBC tournament.<sup>8</sup>

Dumont's decision allowing service baseball teams proved to be beneficial for the National Baseball Congress tournament. The tournament benefited by these ballplayers going off to war because soon military teams from various posts, camps, bases, and stations formed, and they included the active duty major leaguers on their rosters. The level of professional baseball play declined somewhat during this period because of the talent pool serving in the military; however, semipro teams became better. The major leagues used a hodgepodge assortment of players, including noteworthy performances from 15-year-old pitcher Joe Nuxhall of the Cincinnati Reds<sup>9</sup>; Pete Gray, a one-armed outfielder, who played for the St. Louis Browns; and former superstar Jimmie Foxx, who came out of retirement to play for the Philadelphia Phillies.<sup>10</sup>

African-American baseball players took note that the Major League Baseball owners preferred to hire schoolboys, the physically handicapped, and retired legends than black ball players who were in the prime of their careers. The

hypocrisy of the baseball owners was even more evident at the end of the war, when it became apparent that African-Americans played a significant role in the armed forces fighting against the axis powers in both theaters of operations, while at the same time they could not even fully participate in organized baseball.<sup>11</sup> Dumont and George Sisler, the new high commissioner of the NBC tournament, continued with the policy they had established at the end of the 1930s in which they left it up to individual state tournaments to allow teams of African-American players to compete and have a chance to move on to the national tournament in Wichita.<sup>12</sup> Desegregation of organized baseball started right before the Second World War ended when Brooklyn Dodgers General Manager Branch Rickey signed a former United States Army soldier named Jackie Robinson to a contract. Robinson then reported to the Brooklyn farm club in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Racial issues would continue to be an important factor in the NBC tournament, but as the Second World War raged in both the Pacific and European theatres of operations, Dumont faced a totally different predicament. Even though President Roosevelt had encouraged Major League Baseball



Commissioner Landis to continue playing the games, many people in the media suggested that Dumont and the other sports activities put their organizations on hold during the duration of the war. Dumont would have none of it, and when the Associated Press asked national sports figures to write a by-lined story on how the war effort would impact their particular sport, Dumont responded that

Strange as it may seem, the war will not hamper one sport-sandlot baseball. While other attractions in some sports may be temporarily curtailed or canceled due to losing participants to the army and defense industries, the sandlots by the same token will benefit. This is because the vast majority of the estimated 70,000 clubs throughout the nation will represent industrial and military-camp teams.<sup>13</sup>

Dumont proceeded to try to make his game even more entertaining by spicing it up with more innovations and gimmicks. Competition for the average citizen's dollar was at a premium during the war years, and Dumont knew that he had to make his tournament and program more attractive than other activities. In fact, the American Baseball Congress, a rival organization, decided to suspend operations for the duration of the war. As a result, the ABC never again was

able to achieve the popularity and success of the National Baseball Congress.<sup>14</sup>

One of Dumont's schemes included placing a microphone behind home plate that would pop out of the ground so that the umpires could announce line up changes and even let the crowd in on those nasty umpire-manager disagreements. Of course, the manager and game officials would be tipped off to let them know the people were listening in so that they could maintain proper language for all age groups.<sup>15</sup>

Many blackouts occurred during the Second World War, and this inspired perhaps Dumont's most comedic invention, baseball in the dark. Dumont painted the balls, bats, and uniforms fluorescent yellow during an exhibition game, which was then played without the stadium lights on. What followed could only be described as wacky and dangerous. The players were able to see the ball and each other, but the lack of depth perception caused by the darkness made it extremely difficult to move around and play the game without hurting oneself or another player. After the initial exhibition game, Dumont scrapped the idea. However, the fluorescent baseball did live on. Dumont sold the balls through the NBC organization, and they even

caught on briefly in the major leagues, as Kansas City and Oakland Athletics owner Charles O. Finley, who rivaled Raymond Dumont as a baseball huckster, used the orange balls in Athletics games.<sup>16</sup>

If night baseball without lights was not weird enough, then Dumont's other experiment would certainly be beyond comprehension to traditional baseball fans. Dumont suggested having batters run to either first base or third base when they hit the ball. According to the Associated Press, "in that way, Dumont figures, the fielders would be kept on their toes, wondering where to throw the ball, and the game would offer such novelties as two players stealing second base at the same time from different locations. In other words, he would put a reverse gear on base running."<sup>17</sup> Dumont observed, "It would create complications, but it would add razzle-dazzle to the game as well." An exhibition game between two semi-pro teams was played on August 11, 1944 under these obscure rules and confusion reigned. Dumont's idea quickly found its way into the scrap heap.<sup>18</sup>

Dumont's tinkering with the traditional rules of baseball would continue throughout his tenure as president

of the National Baseball Congress, which was until the day he died in his office on July 3, 1971. Although his contributions to the game horrified the purists during the forties and well beyond, some of his changes were significant as they were eventually adopted into the world of organized baseball. In 1940, Dumont introduced a solution to an old problem concerning the elimination of the pitcher as a batter by the substitution of a pinch hitter for him. The year 1941 saw all forty-eight state tournaments use the "designated-hitter" rule to great and resounding success. The rule was adopted by the NBC and continued to be used throughout the duration of the national tournament. On April 6, 1973, Ron Blomberg of the New York Yankees stood at home plate against the Boston Red Sox's Luis Tiant to become the American League's first designated hitter. The rule that Hap Dumont had experimented with thirty-two years earlier finally made it to the "show."<sup>19</sup>

Another area that Raymond Dumont experimented with was how baseball games were officiated. Umpiring has always been a critical issue in baseball history because it is a

game of inches. Many of the calls the umpires make are subjective in nature, such as each umpire's determination of the strike zone, which could vary from game to game and umpire to umpire. Dumont came up with the idea for a "magic eye" that would call balls and strikes by using electric rays that criss-crossed home plate. However, the "magic eye" device was way ahead of its time and never actually saw the field.<sup>20</sup> In 2003, Major League Baseball instituted the Questec system, a program that used lasers to determine balls and strikes. However, the Questec system would not be used to replace umpires as Dumont wanted his machine to do.<sup>21</sup> The Questec system graded the umpires on their balls and strikes calls. The umpires felt that the "magic eye" and the Questec system threatened their credibility to call a game and that their integrity was at stake. The Questec system is still employed in several ballparks around the major leagues but is not a uniform program. Once again, Hap Dumont proved he was way ahead of his time regarding some of his innovations to improve the game.<sup>22</sup>

Technological advances in umpiring were not the only ways in which Dumont experimented with the calling of the



game. During the war years, Dumont brought to Wichita an umpire named Luther Hayden Taylor. Taylor, nicknamed the politically incorrect "Dummy," could not speak. Taylor proved to be a crowd favorite however, using expressive sign language to call the game.<sup>23</sup>

Still another experiment in umpiring involved a woman named Lorraine Heinisch, who hailed from Wisconsin. Dumont, who never passed up an opportunity to capitalize on the "craze" of the moment, noticed that the song "Rosie, the Riveter" was popular and decided the NBC tournament needed to hire a woman umpire. He called her his "WUMP," short for woman umpire. Heinisch worked the bases for two evening games at the start of the tournament and received favorable press coverage both local and national but soon faded into obscurity. In 1988, the National League scouted and considered using Pam Postema, a Minor League Triple-A umpire to work some games, showing once again that Dumont had been ahead of his time.<sup>24</sup>

Not all of Dumont's ploys were intended for promotion or money making. He also could show a genuine concern for the safety of the participants in his tournament. During the summer of 1940, Dumont introduced the first plastic

batting helmet. The helmets bore the likeness of the 19-ounce football helmets that football players wore at the time. The batting helmet did not catch on until the 1950s, but Dumont showed enough foresight to have helmets available if any player or team wanted to use one.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps Dumont's most lasting gimmick was the invention of the time clock, which counted down from twenty seconds from the time the pitcher received the ball from the catcher until he threw the ball to home plate. If the pitcher did not throw the ball to the catcher in the required amount of time, the batter would be awarded a ball. This invention would lead to a quicker pace within the game; therefore more games could be played during a twenty-four hour period and Dumont could make more money. Unlike some of his other gimmicks, Major League Baseball did not "steal" this idea and implement it and the pace of pro baseball games continues to be a problem.<sup>26</sup>

Dumont then came upon the idea of late-night baseball accompanied by the creation of early-morning games. Because many Wichita fans who worked during the swing and graveyard shifts were missing games, Dumont established what is presently known as "Baseball Round the Clock."

During the second weekend of tournament play, baseball games were played from 7:30 a.m. until as late as 2:30 a.m. Fans could stay the entire time if they signed up for the program and checked in whenever a buzzer sounded, which alerted them to appear at a predetermined location. At the end of the seventy-two hour period, those who stayed at the stadium the entire time could win any number of prizes.

In spite of all the gimmicks and pageantry that Dumont used to try to lure fans to the ballpark, the actual game of baseball is what made the NBC tournament extremely successful during the forties. The male population of the United States during these years belonged to more cohesive units, such as industrial factories, the United States military, and civil work programs. Thus, the war years saw the emergence of industrial-based teams, military teams, and Civilian Conservation Camp (CCC) teams in which a wider range of the male populace could participate in a higher level of baseball. In fact, the level of play achieved such a point of proficiency that Major League Baseball scouts attended the tournaments on a regular basis, a practice that continues to this day.

However, there seemed to be a genuine concern that hometown teams, who had made up the life-blood of semi-pro baseball for several generations, would die out because of the emergence and success of these new teams. There was even talk of starting a service team tourney to allow town teams to play on a level field. Private Ken Crowley of Fort Lewis Washington wrote:

There is considerable speculation as to which Army camp has the better ball team and I have an idea that a national tournament to decide just who is who would be a grand thing. It could be a run off much like the semi-pro congress, with sectional eliminations, etc., and then the grand finals.<sup>27</sup>

The service team tourney never materialized, but talk of starting such an endeavor proved that a disparity existed between military team and their town team counterparts.

In the end, nobody argued with the results, as the tournament's level of play reached newer heights and made a significant profit over the ten years since it had been first played. For example, *Wichita Eagle* columnist Pete Lightner wrote that "the early national tournament drew around \$19,000, or not so much as a present state tourney. Quite a boost, and prexy Dumont expects the national to go up around \$36,000 or more (in 1945), twice as high as what

his first one grossed."<sup>28</sup> Dumont's profits made him worry less about the future of hometown teams during the war years. Hometown teams would regain their previous stature in the late fifties and early sixties.

One of Dumont's biggest desires was to expand the National Baseball Congress to include international teams and tournaments. To do this Dumont needed to send National Baseball Congress representatives out across the globe to make contact with baseball officials in foreign countries and try to convince them to join the NBC organization. The most common places these representatives visited were Canada and the countries in Latin America, but Dumont had his eye on Asia also.

By the tenth anniversary of the tournament in 1945, Dumont had lined up an international semi-pro tournament.<sup>29</sup> The Second World War had reached its conclusion and the free world could turn its attention to rebuilding and returning to everyday life. For Raymond Dumont, baseball was everyday life, and now he could further his efforts to make the NBC into a global organization by promoting an international tournament to pair with the already



successful national tournament in Wichita.<sup>30</sup> Dumont invited nineteen nations from around the world to compete in this international tournament, which was to be held September 20, 1945 in either Washington D.C. or New York City.<sup>31</sup>

However, Dumont made a significant public relations error in his invitations to participate in this tournament. Dumont invited the Empire of Japan to participate in the international baseball tournament several weeks before the official surrender on the U.S.S. Missouri. Dumont stated that "Our plan is to get Japan into the global program. Now that the war is over it is better to promote international understanding and let them compete like this."<sup>32</sup> Much to Dumont's dismay, public fury erupted over inviting Japan, with United States Representative Emmanuel Celler (D-New York) calling the invitation "a monstrous idea, totally asinine, and are we dolts for inviting the Japanese to play baseball with us as though the war was just a Sunday school picnic." Representative Celler went on to assail Dumont by saying, "what can one expect from a man like Dumont who not long ago suggested the screw ball idea of giving the batter, after hitting the ball, the option of running to first or third."<sup>33</sup> Bob Considine, a

sports columnist with the Hearst newspaper company in both New York City and Washington D.C., wrote in his column, "that Celler rasped Dumont into the first respectful silence in his eccentric baseball life."<sup>34</sup> Needless to say, Japan did not participate in the international tournament that fall of 1945. However, by the end of the forties, with a greater United States military presence in Japan due to the rebuilding of that country in accordance with a program similar to Europe's Marshall Plan, baseball would become a unifying factor in a burgeoning U.S.-Japanese relationship. This would be reflected when the NBC National Tournament champions from Ft. Wayne, Indiana agreed to play the All-Kanebo club of Osaka, Japan in September 1950.<sup>35</sup>

The National Baseball Congress tournament had established itself as a solid attraction during the war years. Raymond Dumont's innovations captured the attention of not only Wichitans, but also others throughout the nation. Newspapers in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, and Washington D.C. frequently covered Dumont and the National Baseball Congress tournament in their daily sports columns. By promoting new ideas that would make America's

national pastime more exciting, Dumont drew a broader range of fans and lured teams from around the country into traveling to Wichita and playing in the NBC tournament. Dumont's expansion of the National Baseball Congress and baseball continued in postwar America.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Of course everyone was affected in some way by the early war effort, as relatives went into military service, however baseball players were not being drafted and very few volunteered for the service until after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941. See Scot Mondore, "When Baseball Went to War," <http://www.baseballhalloffame.org/history/2003/030918.htm>. October 31, 2005 [accessed October 31, 2005].

<sup>2</sup> Chance Communications, Inc., "Wings Over Kansas," <http://www.wingsoverkansas.com/history/article.asp?id=375>. November 23, 2005 [accessed November 23, 2005].

<sup>3</sup> Frank N. Schubert, "Mobilization In World War II," <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/documents/mobpam.htm>. November 23, 2005 [accessed November 23, 2005].

<sup>4</sup> Mondore.

<sup>5</sup> Schubert.

<sup>6</sup> Hoyt Wilhelm played for the New York Giants, Cleveland Indians, St. Louis Cardinals, Baltimore Orioles, Chicago White Sox, California Angels, Atlanta Braves, Chicago Cubs, and Los Angeles Dodgers during his twenty-year career.

<sup>7</sup> Mondore.

<sup>8</sup> Steven R. Bullock, *Playing for their Nation: Baseball and the American Military during World War II*. Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 63.

<sup>9</sup> The Cincinnati Reds changed their names to the Cincinnati Red Leggings during the 1944 and 1945 seasons and between 1954 and 1960. This could have been to distance themselves from communism and the Soviet Union which were known as "reds" during this period. See Dan Nichols, "Professional Baseball Franchises," <http://www.krypis.com/Baseball/bb->

[franchiseInfo.html#CincinnatiReds2](#). February 8, 2000 [accessed November 20, 2005].

<sup>10</sup> James A. Percoco, "Baseball and World War II: A Study of the Landis-Roosevelt Correspondence," <http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/sport/percoco.html>. October 31, 2005 [accessed October 31, 2005].

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> George Sisler replaced Honus Wagner as commissioner after the 1938 tournament. See Broeg, 62.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>14</sup> Associated Press, "National Tourney Dropped," *The New York Times*, June 6, 1942, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Associated Press, "Semi-Pros to Let Mr. Fan in on All 'Beefs' at Games," *The Washington Post*, January 17, 1940, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Broeg, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>18</sup> Associated Press, "Bans Running in Reverse: But Semi-Pro Body Decides to Test Plan in Game Aug. 11," *The New York Times*, February 1, 1944, 17.

<sup>19</sup> United Press, "Semipro Baseball to Experiment with Old Problem," *The Washington Post*, December 29, 1940, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Associated Press, "Magic Eye Calls Balls and Strikes; No Plate Umpire," *The Washington Post*, December 2, 1940, 20.

<sup>21</sup> After all, umpires cost money, and if Raymond Dumont could save money in the long run then he would certainly eliminate umpires from his tournament.

<sup>22</sup> Hugo Lindgren, "The Foolproof Umpire," *The New York Times*, December 14, 2003, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Broeg, 98.



<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>26</sup> The time clock was experimented with sporadically in the forties and fifties and became a permanent fixture in the sixties. Players had ninety seconds to take their positions on the field after the third out and pitchers had twenty seconds to deliver the ball to the catcher. See Unknown Author, "NBC Will Retain Speed-Up Timer for 1963 Tournament," *The Sporting News*, November 3, 1962, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Private Ken Crowley, letter to the editor, "Wants Service Team Tourney," *The Sporting News*, July 9, 1942, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Broeg, 101.

<sup>29</sup> Dumont's plans for an international semi-pro tournament included teams from Latin America, Canada, and Asia. There is no mention of Dumont making contact with any European countries to participate in the international tourney.

<sup>30</sup> The international semi-pro tournament was an entirely different entity than the NBC national tournament that was established in 1935. International teams did not compete in the NBC national tournament until Chinese Taipei participated in and won the 2003 tournament.

<sup>31</sup> Dumont dropped the High Commissioner of his United States program in 1944. George Sisler was reassigned to a new group of commissioners who represented the various regions that made up the National Baseball Congress. See Associated Press, "Semi-Pro Baseball Drops High Commissioner Post," *The New York Times*, December 10, 1944, S2.

<sup>32</sup> Associated Press, "Japan Among Nines To Be Invited Here," *The New York Times*, August 19, 1945, 1.

<sup>33</sup> United Press, "Celler Blasts Semipro Head For Jap Invite," *The Washington Post*, August 20, 1945, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Bob Considine, On the Line with Considine, *The Washington Post*, September 8, 1945, 8.

## IS THIS HEAVEN? NO, IT'S BASEBALL

<sup>35</sup> Broeg, 109.

Whoever wants to know the heart and soul and mind of America had better learn baseball. The values and realities of the game will do it by watching first some high school or small-town team.

Excerpted Jacques Barzun in *God's Country and Mine: A Declaration of Love Spiced with a Few Heresay Words*

Jacques Barzun, a professor of history at Columbia University, wrote those words in 1954, just as the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union began to reach an even chillier level. In Barzun's view baseball was the perfect game to express America's true character during a time when the Soviet Union challenged the United States for world supremacy. Barzun wrote:

That baseball fully expresses the power of the American nation's mind and body is a merit separate from the glory of being the most active, agile, varied, articulate, and graceful of all group games. It is of and for my country. Tennis belongs to the international betting game, at most a pair of friends or lovers against the world. The idea of baseball is a team, an outfit, a section, a gang, a union, a hall, a commando squad in short, a twentieth century setup of opposite numbers.

Baseball at all levels reached new heights of popularity during the 1950s. Perhaps, consistent with Barzun's view, baseball was a reflection of America's true character. The evolution of the game now involved all

## CHAPTER THREE

### IS THIS HEAVEN? NO IT'S WICHITA

Whoever wants to know the heart and soul and mind of America had better learn baseball, the rules and realities of the game-and do it by watching first some high school or small-town teams.

Historian Jacque Barzun in *God's Country and Mine: A Declaration of Love Spiced with a Few Harsh Words*

Jacque Barzun, a professor of history at Columbia University, wrote those words in 1954, just as the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union began to reach an even chillier level. In Barzun's view baseball was the perfect game to express America's true character during a time when the Soviet Union challenged the United States for world supremacy. Barzun wrote,

That baseball fitly expresses the powers of the nation's mind and body is a merit separate from the glory of being the most active, agile, varied, articulate, and brainy of all group games. It is of and for our century. Tennis belongs to the individualistic past-a hero, at most a pair of friends or lovers, against the world. The idea of baseball is a team, an outfit, a section, a gang, a union, a cell, a commando squad-in short, a twentieth century setup of opposite numbers.<sup>1</sup>

Baseball at all levels reached new heights of popularity during the 1950s. Perhaps, consistent with Barzun's view, baseball was a reflection of America's true character. The evolution of the game now involved all

segments of society, especially with the integration of African-American baseball players, starting with Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. The Boston Red Sox were the last professional baseball team to integrate in 1959, however, the rest of the teams accepted African-American players within their locker rooms soon after the Jackie Robinson "experiment" proved successful.

Baseball also expanded throughout the continental United States. The Dodgers moved to Los Angeles before the 1958 season, and the New York Giants followed suit that same year to the San Francisco bay area. Professional baseball now extended from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast. These developments helped promote baseball, from the sandlots all the way to the gigantic baseball stadiums the professionals used. Raymond Dumont also had his eye on expansion, but his gaze extended beyond America's borders, into Latin America and across the Pacific Ocean to Japan. An exhibition game in September 1950 between that year's National Baseball Congress champions, the Ft. Wayne, Indiana Capeharts against a Japanese semi-professional team from Osaka named the All-

Kanebo club was the first stage in Dumont's plan to promote his brand of baseball overseas.

General Douglas MacArthur was slated to throw out the first pitch in the Fort Wayne-All-Kanebo club game; however, the ceremonial honor went to his wife, Jean MacArthur because MacArthur had other pressing matters, namely confronting the North Korean Army and pulling off his brilliant Inchon landing. The commencement of hostilities on the Korean peninsula coincided with the peaceful gesture of baseball games between the American squad and the Japanese team.

However, according to Dumont's biographer Bob Broeg, the National Baseball Congress' exhibition game might have provided a little diversion so MacArthur could use surprise as a tactic in his Inchon invasion. Broeg's source was Charles "Cookie" Cookson, an assistant to Dumont for fifteen years. Cookson claimed that even though the NBC's Global Commissioner, J. Taylor Spink, recommended strongly going to Japan and playing the game, the NBC's Japanese Commissioner Major-General William F. Marquat, who was in charge of the economic and scientific rehabilitation of Japan, insisted that Fort Wayne make the trip to Japan.



Cookson noted that at a time when the United States Air Force had a critical shortage of transport planes, General Marquat made sure that the Fort Wayne team made the trip, cutting through the normal red tape by personally getting the players and management passports and inoculations. The five game series ended up drawing 317,000 Japanese fans and, if Cookson is to be believed, performed perhaps one of the greatest Trojan horse maneuvers in history.<sup>2</sup>

The continued military build-up to meet the challenges presented by the Soviet Union and to check the expansion of communism throughout the free world called for the maintenance of a large active-duty armed forces. Military service club teams continued to dominate, as professional baseball players were drafted into the United States armed forces. However, while the field in the NBC tournament included numerous service club entries, town teams and industrial clubs ended up winning the majority of tournament championships in the 1950s. The one exception, happened to be in 1952, when the Ft. Myer, Virginia Military District of Washington Colonels won the tournament. In 1954, Dumont decreed that camp teams could no longer play as units in the National Baseball Congress

tournament. Billy Martin, who would go on to play second base for the New York Yankees and manage numerous Major League Baseball teams, said, "As Whitey Herzog will tell you, Hap Dumont made it tough on service players in 1954 by not letting camp teams play as units, but we moonlighted, like I did from Camp Carson, Colorado with Goodland, Kansas. Nice people, nice town, even if we couldn't beat Herzog's guys from Springfield, Missouri."<sup>3</sup>

The 1951 National Baseball Congress state tournaments were ones in which eighty percent of the participating teams represented towns of 5,000 people or fewer. These teams, for the most part, were municipally owned franchises. The remaining twenty percent were split between industry-sponsored teams and the teams from military installations.<sup>4</sup> The 1952 NBC tournament saw the last hurrah for military service teams, as fourteen out of the thirty-four teams were from military posts.<sup>5</sup> The Fort Leonard Wood players, representing Springfield, Missouri, managed by Whitey Herzog, could not even make it to the finals in Wichita in time to play in the tournament due to their participation in the All-Service baseball tournament in Denver, Colorado.<sup>6</sup>

While the participation of the service teams was steady up until 1954, an industrial team from Ft. Wayne, Indiana pulled off four consecutive championships, culminating in their 1950 victory that sent them to play the aforementioned exhibition game against the All-Kanebo club in Japan.<sup>7</sup> The previous fifteen years of competition at the NBC tournament saw repeat champions, as well as multiple champions, but the Ft. Wayne General Electric club became the National Baseball Congress's first dynasty. It would be hard pressed to even compare them with the other dynasty of the era, the New York Yankees, who won five championships in a row, and eventually ended the decade with seven titles.

Johnny Braden, the general manager of the employee relations department at General Electric, headed up the Fort Wayne baseball club. The G.E. plant supported Braden and his dream of putting together a stellar baseball team, by compensating each player with \$600 extra dollars.<sup>8</sup> During Ft Wayne's incredible run, Braden used sixty-two different players, only seventeen of whom were on more than one championship team. Fort Wayne was such an established semi-pro town that when the Pittsburgh Pirates tried to

launch a professional farm club there in 1948, the team folded within a few years.<sup>9</sup>

The competition at the NBC tournament did not suffer, merely because the infusion of professional talent left the service clubs and went back to their own professional teams. For instance, Braden's Ft. Wayne team beat the St. Louis Browns and the Chicago White Sox in exhibition games in 1953. In that same year, Ft. Wayne placed fourth in Wichita. Dumont did not even have to manipulate the brackets for the Ft. Wayne team to create its dynasty, as Johnny Braden explained: "Hap was sharp enough to play us as the 'villains,' the so-called team to beat, and so he'd schedule us in the most attractive situations."<sup>10</sup>

Many observers considered Ft. Wayne the best team of the late forties and early fifties, but many other teams could hold the distinction of being great teams who played in the NBC tournament. A West Texas millionaire named Herbert L. Kokernot owned one such team, the Alpine City, Texas, Cowboys. Kokernot threw money at accomplished baseball players, such as Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Johnny Podres, and lured them to play in a ballpark that was reminiscent of some professional baseball facilities.

Like George Steinbrenner, owner of the New York Yankees in the early twenty-first century, Kokernot's money brought him close to the mountaintop, but never to the pinnacle of the National Baseball Congress world.

The Boeing Bombers, which won Wichita's first championship in 1942, accomplished the feat in consecutive years, 1954 and 1955. Boeing's championship in 1954 came at the expense of Herzog's Springfield club, who lost most of its players who were off representing Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri in the aforementioned All-Service tournament in Denver. Nevertheless, Boeing's accomplishment placed it among the National Baseball Congress elite.<sup>11</sup>

By this time, the NBC tournament had begun to capture many prominent figures' attention from all around the United States. Former U.S. President Harry S Truman called upon Wichita and the National tournament to throw out the first pitch for the Military District of Washington D.C. versus the Quantico, Virginia Marines opening night game.<sup>12</sup> In 1950, the *Coca-Cola Bottling Company*, the paragon of Americana, started sponsoring the first place trophy awarded to the NBC championship team. Dumont succeeded in

placing his tournament in the consciousness of a great number of Americans.

It also appeared that Dumont considered moving the national tournament from Wichita to several other locations, including Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Several press releases sent to the *Sporting News* stated that Dumont had negotiated a new contract with the city and the tournament would stay put in Wichita for several more years. The terms agreed upon by the city of Wichita and the National Baseball Congress included a guarantee that a specific number of tickets would be sold, which would ensure that the tournament would remain profitable, rain or shine.<sup>13</sup> Whether Dumont seriously considered taking his tournament to another city is doubtful according to Broeg, Dumont's biographer. Broeg observed that Dumont loved Wichita and the city never gave him much trouble when it came to extending the lease to Lawrence Stadium. Rather, Broeg speculated Dumont liked to stir up publicity by threatening to move while listening to offers by other municipalities.<sup>14</sup>

Wichita always responded kindly to the tournament and the men and teams who participated in it. For instance, in the 1952 tournament, players for a military team who were



stationed in Guam came in from the Pacific island to participate in the tournament were robbed. A group of fans from the Wichita area responded by raising enough money so the players could live comfortably during their stay in the city. Art Lance, the New Jersey commissioner for the National Baseball Congress, accompanied the Fort Dix entry in 1952 and proclaimed, "This is the most hospitable town in this country. The people are very friendly, they make you feel just like home, folks and visitors appreciate it." The Wichita fans even became known for taking up collections for players who were injured during the tournament.<sup>15</sup>

However, several incidents that took place in the 1950 tournament threatened to tarnish Wichita's good name. During a game between Elk City, Oklahoma and Ft. Wayne, In. an apparent home run was awarded to the Indiana team, and only a few fans in attendance could see whether the ball was fair or foul. The stakes were even higher than usual for the 1950 title game because not only would the winner be crowned the NBC national champion, but would also head to Japan to play a series of exhibition games. The angry Elk City players and fans challenged the three umpires to

fight, triggering a near riot within the confines of Lawrence stadium. The bad publicity ate at Dumont, who acknowledged that the umpiring in the 1950 tournament certainly was not up to the standards of previous tournaments. Dumont felt that the quality of the available umpires for the NBC tournament had reached an all-time low due to the increased number of minor league games and their need for quality umpiring that circumvented his tournament's desire for good officiating. Thus, Dumont took it upon himself to train better umpires by establishing several free clinics and awarding scholarships to men who wanted to attend umpire schools in Florida in exchange for their willingness to come back to Wichita to umpire in the NBC tournament.<sup>16</sup>

As with the previous two decades of Dumont's stewardship over the National Baseball Congress tournament, the man came up with some insanely brilliant ideas to promote his tournament. He reached back into the past once again to use a fluorescent baseball. The Glo-Ball, as he referred to it, went on sale in 1959 for \$2.50 each. Dumont promoted it as a lively, durable, bright, colorful

ball that had perfect visibility. He used the ball in the 1958 tournament before introducing it for sale to the public in 1959. St. Louis Cardinal outfielder Stan Musial, who participated in an exhibition game in Wichita that pitted the St. Louis Cardinals against the Chicago White Sox, amusingly asked, "How does it work, and what does it look like, if a player is colorblind?" However, players from both teams acknowledged that they could see the ball better.<sup>17</sup>

Dumont's other notable scheme during the fifties did not meet as much approval as the Glo-Ball. Dumont planned to liven up the National Baseball Congress tournament by introducing stage-money to gamble on the games. Fans could bet on plays and the outcomes of games. On the final night of the tournament, the top fifty fans with the most money would be awarded \$5,000 in cash and prizes. Outrage soon followed throughout the corridors of organized and unorganized baseball. Baseball's past experience with gamblers and gambling had been scarring, namely the scandal that erupted after it was revealed that several 1919 Chicago White Sox players had accepted money from gamblers to throw the World Series to the Cincinnati Reds. From the

Major League Baseball commissioner all the way down to the sportswriters who covered baseball, the general consensus was that the "legalized" gambling idea, as Dumont called it, was bad for the sport of baseball. Even Dumont's greatest supporter, *The Sporting News* magazine, called on the promoter to reconsider his scheme of gambling on baseball, to protect the integrity of the game that had been challenged by the aforementioned 1919 "Black Sox" scandal. Ford Frick, the Major League Baseball Commissioner, had the final say when he threatened to cancel all of the American Association games of the Wichita Braves minor league team if Dumont did not cease the gambling stunt. In the end, Dumont decided not to antagonize organized baseball or the city of Wichita, which wanted to keep their minor league franchise, and withdrew his plan.<sup>18</sup>

During the 1950s, Raymond Dumont further maneuvered the National Baseball Congress tournament into the national consciousness. By playing upon baseball's standing as the national game, Dumont promoted the NBC tournament as America's purest form of the game. By first using military teams and then promoting other teams who represented main

street America, Dumont had raised the standing of his tournament. However, the 1960s would present new and interesting challenges for Raymond Dumont and the National Baseball Congress tournament, with the establishment of teams made up of players from colleges around the country and with the introduction of teams from Alaska.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Gerald Early, "Birdland, Two Observations on the Cultural Significance of Baseball," <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/baseball.html>. July 1996 [accessed December 18, 2005].

<sup>2</sup> Bob Broeg, 114-115.

<sup>3</sup> Broeg, 107.

<sup>4</sup> Unknown Author, "80 Percent of N.B.C. Tourney Entries Are Town Teams," *The Sporting News*, July 4, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Unknown Author, "Baseball Classic Opens Today; Field Called Fastest in 18 Years," *Wichita Eagle*, August 15, 1952, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Herzog is best known for managing the Kansas City Royals and later the St. Louis Cardinals to the World Series in the 1980s.

<sup>7</sup> Fort Wayne ended up with five championships, winning it all in 1956, to go with the 1947-50 championships.

<sup>8</sup> General Electric sponsored the team for several years and then they decided to part ways with Johnny Braden. Braden, though did not have any trouble finding sponsors: the 1950 team was called the Capeharts and the 1956 title squad was known as the Dairymen. The players were still employed at the General Electric plant.

<sup>9</sup> Broeg, 119-121.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 123-124.

<sup>11</sup> Bob Lutz, *50 Years: The National Baseball Congress Tournament*, (Wichita, Kansas: Wichita Eagle Press, 1985), 35.

<sup>12</sup> Associated Press, "Truman Opens MDW, Quantico Game in Wichita," *The Washington Post*, August 14, 1953, 27.



<sup>13</sup> Pete Lightner, "NBC Heads Approve Plan: Seek Guarantee Fund for National Tourney Success," *Wichita Eagle*, August 8, 1951, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Broeg, 125.

<sup>15</sup> Pete Lightner, *The Morning After*, *Wichita Eagle*, August 21, 1952, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Broeg, 121.

<sup>17</sup> Unknown Author, "Luminous Ball? Stan Fears Effect of Color-Blindness," *The Sporting News*, April 16, 1958, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Unknown Author, "Frick Kills Non-Pro Gate Stunt; Dumont Drops 'Scrip' Bet Plan," *The Sporting News*, May 14, 1958, 14.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE SUN NEVER SETS ON BASEBALL

A game of great charm in the adoption of mathematical measurements to the timing of human movements, the exactitudes and adjustments of physical ability to hazardous chance. The speed of the legs, the dexterity of the body, the grace of the swing, the elusiveness of the slide-these are the features that make Americans everywhere forget the last syllable of a man's last name or the pigmentation of his skin.

Former General Manager of the  
Brooklyn Dodgers, Pittsburgh  
Pirates, and St. Louis Cardinals  
Branch Rickey in 1960.

The sixties saw the United States of America evolving in a new direction. A wave of youthful idealists emerged to challenge the conservative status quo. Often, the changes from the older generation to a newer generation included violent protests and, for much of the latter half of the decade, a revolutionary air drifted across the American landscape. The baby boom that had followed the post World War II years had produced over seventy million American teenagers by this time. With that many teenagers, a youthful renaissance was bound to challenge the traditional elements within society.

Arguably, no other American institution could be considered more traditional than the game of baseball. This statement is especially true at the professional

level. The domination of Major League Baseball by the traditionalist elements (i.e. the owners, the commissioner, and the sportswriters) is reflected in many different ways. The owners, for example, made the players dress for competition in uniforms that were grey for road games and white for home games. Commissioner Ford Frick, a steadfast baseball traditionalist, went so far as to declare that if Mickey Mantle or Roger Maris broke Babe Ruth's single season home run record, the accomplishment would be marked with an asterisk.<sup>1</sup>

Baseball sportswriters also bought into the traditionalist notion that the game could not change, and they ridiculed any innovation that was proposed to help the game. An example of this came from Edward Prell, a baseball beat writer for the *Chicago Tribune*, who derided the newly instituted statistic that awarded "saves" to relief pitchers. Prell believed that the save statistic rewarded relief pitchers but did not penalize them for their failures.<sup>2</sup> Traditionalist sportswriters still have not resolved the issues surrounding the save statistic and the relief pitcher's place in baseball. A good example of this came in the 2006 Baseball Hall of Fame election

when three of the all-time great relief pitchers--Bruce Sutter, Lee Smith, and Rich "Goose" Gossage--were the front-runners for selection to the hallowed institution.<sup>3</sup> Only Sutter with 76% of the votes made it based on the Baseball Writers Association of America (BBWAA) criteria. Gossage ended up with only 64.6% of the votes and Smith fell short at 45%, thus proving that the tradition behind the game never really dies.

However, like many institutions during the 1960s, baseball's traditionalist elements came under assault during this decade. Charles O. Finley, the maverick owner of the Kansas City Athletics, much to the chagrin of those traditionalists, introduced more entertainment into professional baseball. The emergence of Finley and his colorful schemes caused great consternation within the organized baseball community.<sup>4</sup> The December 28, 1963 edition of *The Sporting News* magazine wrote:

"It strikes us that this is the proper time to set up a better liaison between Ray Dumont and official baseball. Let his organization be the official one for trying out some original ideas. This may sound as if we're kidding, but we're not. The majors are not a place for experimentation. But there should be some place where an idea can be given a thorough testing. Ray Dumont's national tournament would seem to be the ideal place."<sup>5</sup>

The emergence of Charlie Finley and his ideas upset Hap Dumont greatly. Dumont did not like the fact that many of Finley's ideas were originally his (such as colored baseballs, colorful uniforms, and other notorious theatrics), with the Athletics owner never giving proper credit for their origination.

Arguably, throughout the baseball world, Dumont was known as the quintessential champion of non-traditionalism and change within the game. Since the 1930s, Dumont had stretched the limits of what traditional baseball should be about. Now that organized baseball needed a transfusion of ideas because baseball's popularity was "challenged by the disillusionment of the young with established institutions," Dumont's once scoffed-at approach to promoting baseball came into line with the mainstream baseball world. Indeed, the National Football League grew into a more suitable sports franchise for the television generation, where as baseball did not fit that model as well.<sup>6</sup> Dumont knew that for his NBC tournament to survive in this changing climate of the

sixties then he would once again have to become unique and innovative.

Luckily for Dumont and the National Baseball Congress, several men shared a mutual vision, similar to that of the impresario of semi-pro baseball. That vision included the introduction of college players into the National Baseball Congress tournament. The men who shared Dumont's vision included H.A (Red) Boucher, Joe Ferguson, Don Dennis, and Ubaldo Moschetti. These men constituted the driving force in introducing young, hungry teams made up of collegiate players. Many of these players would soon be bound for the professional ranks. Boucher, Ferguson, and Dennis formed a triumvirate that would bring a long line of successful Alaskan teams to Wichita. As for Moschetti, he established the Boulder, Colorado Baseline Collegians, which ended up winning four NBC tournaments in the sixties and seventies.

A swift change occurred in the make-up of many of the teams participating in the NBC tournament at the mid-point of the decade. Dumont reported to *The Sporting News* magazine that 196 of the 512 players registered in the NBC tournament during 1965 had participated in collegiate



baseball during the same season.<sup>7</sup> The fact that some of the National Baseball Congress's most successful participants would come from the frigid northland of Alaska was astonishing. However, the success of not only the Fairbanks, Alaska Goldpanners, but also the Anchorage, Alaska Glacier Pilots, the Mat-Su, Alaska Miners, and the Kenai, Alaska Peninsula Oilers, could be attributed to the fact that the Alaska semi-professional programs were well-run organizations. Don Dennis, one of the most instrumental men in the success of semipro baseball in Alaska, attributed the greatness of the baseball teams there to the fact that, "Recruiting to Alaska is not as hard as it seems. Many outstanding college players come to Alaska to say they have been here. They come to Alaska because some of the best baseball around is played here." Some of baseball's greatest players of the past quarter century passed through the Alaskan frontier. Young ballplayers such as Tom Seaver, Randy Johnson, Mark McGwire, Bill "Spaceman" Lee, and Dave Winfield, to name just a few superstar players from Major League Baseball, spent a summer playing semi-professional baseball in Alaska.<sup>9</sup>

The teams that traveled from Alaska continued to remain fan favorites at the NBC tournament. Sportswriter Bob Lutz, who covered the NBC tournament for the *Wichita Eagle* reflected that as a child

I remember being fascinated that teams from Alaska would come to Wichita to play in the tournament. I expected the players to wear parkas and leave their polar bears leashed to the outfield fence. I was curious to see just what Alaska players looked like and was surprised to see that the players from Alaska looked just like the players from Kansas and other states. Except those from Alaska were a little better. I didn't realize that the players I thought were Alaskans really were mostly college students from California."

The influx of young, college-age players reinvigorated the NBC tournament. These players were more talented than the players who either failed as minor leaguers or were washed up as professional baseball players. Daryl Spencer, a former shortstop for the New York/San Francisco Giants who also managed the Coors of Kansas team during this period, explained:

"Twenty years ago it seemed like every town in America had a minor league team. Everyday kids were getting released and coming back home to play semipro ball. Nowadays you don't have but a handful of minor leagues, and when a kid does get released, it seems like he always quits."

In fact, as of 1962 only twenty minor league teams operated within North America, compared with the all time high of fifty-nine in 1949. According to Dumont, this meant that seven thousand exceptional baseball players who would normally be playing professional baseball were now left to play semi-professional baseball in their hometowns.<sup>1-</sup>

While the Alaskan ball clubs recruited some of the game's best collegiate talent, Ubaldo Moschetti established the Boulder Collegians. Moschetti's ability to recruit college talent rivaled the Alaskan clubs. "I think we had something like 112 or 113 players who went on to play pro ball," Moschetti said. Moschetti, whom the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame inducted into its membership in 1983, observed, "Recruiting players to Boulder was very easy." Boulder ended up winning four NBC tournaments, along with setting a record of consecutive tournament victories of fifteen and being one of the only teams ever to lose its first game and come back to capture the tournament crown.<sup>2-</sup>

Dumont did not have to look as far as Alaska or even the next state over (Colorado) for a successful NBC tournament team. Wichita's Rapid Transit

Dreamliners captured three out of four NBC tournament championships in the early 1960s ('62, '63, and '65). Only the success of another Wichita team, the Wichita Service Auto Glass, prevented the Dreamliners from running off with four titles in a row. In 1968, the Liberal, Kansas Bee Jays supplanted the Boulder Collegians as champions, preventing the latter from winning three titles in a row. Liberal's victory capped off the most successful decade for the state of Kansas.

However, while the competition on the field progressed at a higher level, it would not be a National Baseball Congress tournament without Dumont's staged theatrics. Perhaps, due to Finley's shenanigans with the Kansas City (later the Oakland) Athletics, Dumont felt compelled to top his major league rival. One of the strangest twists in NBC tournament history occurred thanks to Fairbanks General Manager Red Boucher who added a sixteenth "player" to the Goldpanners roster, one named Midnight. However, Midnight was not exactly an average baseball player; rather, she was a black bear!

The Alaskans flew the bear to Wichita and deposited the huge animal in the dugout. As a result, the benchwarmers spent their time out in the bullpen. This publicity stunt amused Dumont, who regretted only that it was not a polar bear, but a black bear. "

The masterminds of the NBC tournament were always known for thinking outside the box. However, at times even Dumont and his associates could not escape the traditionalism that enveloped the world of baseball at all levels. An example of this involved a team from Fallon, Nevada which brought to Wichita a batgirl named Sherri Statler for the 1967 NBC tournament. Tournament officials ejected and banned Statler, a former go-go dancer, from the tournament. They did not even allow her to sit in the dugout area with the Fallon baseball teams. Paul Fair, one of Dumont's tournament directors, gave no reason as to why Statler could not perform her duties. Perhaps tournament officials felt obliged to take action against Statler due to "traditional" Midwest values flourishing Wichita. How ironic those same tournament officials who had allowed a real, live bear to sit in the dugout would exclude an

attractive girl from participating in the tournament at any level.

From 1935 on, Dumont controlled almost all facets of the National Baseball Congress and the national tournament. However, Dumont could not control fate, as some of the men who had influenced him and the early success of the NBC tournament passed away during the sixties. Pete Lightner died in a private plane crash in the early summer of 1960. Lightner was returning from an assignment for the *Wichita Eagle*, for which he had served as the sports editor for well over thirty years, when the accident occurred. When Lightner passed away the coverage of the NBC tournament in the *Wichita Eagle*, while still abundant, lacked the personal touch that Dumont's dear friend brought to it.<sup>16</sup>

That same summer, another tragic accident struck Dumont and his National Baseball Congress family. Tyler "Ty" Lockett, a former Sedgwick County sheriff and player in the NBC tournament, died at home plate of a heart attack. Lockett, the emcee of the tournament awards presentations, collapsed while presenting the trophies for the best batting average and the Most Valuable Player.



Lockett, a close friend of Dumont's, was just fifty-seven years old.<sup>17</sup>

The death of Lightner and the December 7, 1962 passing of J.G. Taylor Spink, the publisher of *The Sporting News* magazine, hurt Dumont personally, but it also put him in a quandary professionally. Younger writers, who did not share his affinity for the semi-professional game, replaced these two men, who had been key components in Dumont's publicity machine for over three decades.

As for Spink's *The Sporting News*, the self-proclaimed "Baseball Bible," the coverage remained steady. Spink's son, C.C. Johnson Spink, replaced him as publisher and even accepted an award of recognition on behalf of his late father from Hap Dumont. Upon presenting the award, Dumont said, "We'll be starting our fourth decade with the 1965 tournament and we thought it appropriate to honor the person who had done so much to get the program off to the right start."<sup>18</sup>

With the losses of these dear friends also came the introduction of an important new one and the reappearance of another older friend. Leroy "Satchel" Paige returned to the NBC tournament in 1960 for a fourth time and performed

admirably.<sup>19</sup> On the twenty-fifth anniversary of his appearance for Bismarck, North Dakota in the 1935 tournament, Paige pitched well enough to get the win for the Wichita Weller Indians. While Paige did not dominate the hitters as he had in the 1935 tournament, he certainly gave the fans a show, just as Dumont hoped he would."<sup>20</sup>

Hap Dumont then tapped a young ticket seller to take over his position as tournament director. Larry Davis, a bank company clerk by day, assumed the important role of matchmaking teams for the 1961 tournament.<sup>21</sup> Davis, who was good friends with Dumont, earned his new position by being able to "handle people and to settle disputes," two important qualities in a tournament director."<sup>22</sup> Until his death in the early 1970s, Dumont relied heavily on Davis. Davis would remain tournament director of the NBC tournament throughout the sixties, seventies, and eighties. Davis always tried to follow Dumont's sage advice for a successful tournament: "You need a hero and a villain in these games." The good versus evil mantra fit perfectly for the time and Dumont used it frequently to achieve success for his tournaments."<sup>23</sup>

Even though he was now entering his fourth decade of stewardship over the National Baseball Congress and its tournament, and Larry Davis had assumed the title of tournament director, Dumont still controlled a good portion of the tournament. As always, the master still had a few tricks to promote the game. Dumont called for all teams participating in the tournament to purchase and wear bright-colored uniforms instead of the traditional white and gray flannel shirts and pants.<sup>24</sup> The head of the NBC also instituted a policy of players announcing themselves before they stepped into the batter's box. Dumont sent out a press release stating, "Instead of the loudspeaking system introducing batters, each individual will give his name, fielding position, and batting average over a jack-in-the-box microphone located near home plate. This will permit the fans to feel closer to the players and add color to the game."<sup>25</sup> Whatever superficial changes Dumont decided to make to the tournament, no other decision could equal the importance of the addition of collegiate players to semi-professional baseball team rosters.

As the turbulent sixties ended, the National Baseball Congress national tournament enjoyed an unparalleled success. This success could be attributed directly to the quality of semi-professional baseball reaching an apex due to mostly collegiate players replacing the old guard. In all corners of society, including baseball, a new, youthful ideal replaced the more traditional values that prevailed in generations past. As for the National Baseball Congress, Raymond Dumont's imminent passing would lead the tournament into an era of great uncertainty.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Roger Maris did break Babe Ruth's single-season home run record of sixty by hitting sixty-one home runs in 1961. The controversy with the asterisk centered on Ruth accomplished his record by playing in a 154 game season, while Maris hit sixty-one home runs in 162 games. The asterisk stood in front of Roger Maris' record until 1991 when Commissioner Fay Vincent eliminated the mark from the record books.

<sup>2</sup> Bob Prell, "It's the Season for Queer Baseball Ideas," *Chicago Tribune*, March 24, 1968, B2.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Sutter played for the Chicago Cubs, the St. Louis Cardinals, and the Atlanta Braves. Lee Smith played for the Chicago Cubs and the Boston Red Sox most prominently. Rich "Goose" Gossage is best known for being the closer for the New York Yankees during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

<sup>4</sup> "Dumont's NBC Ideal Trial Horse," *The Sporting News*, December 28, 1963, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The introduction of television was also presumably responsible for the shrinkage of the minor league system. Baseball, Answers.com, The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition, Columbia University Press., 2003, <http://www.answers.com/topic/baseball>, January 26, 2006 [accessed January 26, 2006].

<sup>7</sup> Because of this unheard-of participation, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) put forth rules governing collegiate players and their association with National Baseball Congress. The NCAA stated that the players would not receive "remuneration other than incidental expenses for lodging, meals, and travel. "National Baseball Congress Adopts Rule on Collegians," *The Sporting News*, March 12, 1966, 28.

<sup>8</sup> Lutz, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Seaver played for the New York Mets, Cincinnati Reds, Chicago White Sox, and the Boston Red Sox. He became a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1992. Randy Johnson currently plays for the New York Yankees and is considered by many sportswriters a virtual lock for the Baseball Hall of Fame. Johnson has won five Cy Young Awards for being baseball's most outstanding pitcher. Mark McGwire played for the Oakland Athletics and the St. Louis Cardinals. He hit 583 home runs for his career and briefly held the single-season home run record with seventy. Bill "Spaceman" Lee was one of the true characters of the game during which he pitched for the Boston Red Sox and Montreal Expos. Dave Winfield's career spanned two-and-a-half decades in which he played for the San Diego Padres, New York Yankees, California Angels, Toronto Blue Jays, Minnesota Twins, and the Cleveland Indians. Winfield was one of the few major league superstars who never spent a day playing in the minor leagues. Winfield went on to collect 3,110 hits and enter the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Lutz, Author's Comments.

<sup>11</sup> John Schulian, "Young Stars Destroy Semipro Baseball's Has-Been Image," *The Washington Post*, August 22, 1976, 37.

<sup>12</sup> "Town-Backed Teams Stage Comeback in Semi-Pro Ball," *The Sporting News*, April 11, 1962, 41.

<sup>13</sup> Lutz, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Broeg, 162.

<sup>15</sup> Associated Press, "No Place for Bat Girl in Baseball," *Chicago Tribune*, August 15, 1967, C2.

<sup>16</sup> Broeg, 142-143.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>18</sup> "NBC to Honor Taylor Spink in Tournament Salute," *The Sporting News*, August 14, 1965, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Satchel Paige, who would attend several NBC tournaments as a featured guest of Hap Dumont's, competed only once, in the 1935 inaugural tournament. His pitching performance at the 1960 tournament was remarkable considering he was fifty-four years old and it was twelve years since he had pitched in the major leagues for the Cleveland Indians.

<sup>20</sup> Bob Overaker, "Just Thinking It Over," *Wichita Eagle*, August 24, 1960, 2B.

<sup>21</sup> For an athletic tournament of any nature, figuring out which matches will produce solid competitions is considered essential. Without an even bracket, games become lopsided affairs and many fans, who would become disinterested, would not attend. The NBC tournament format was even more difficult, because many of the teams were unknown to the tournament directors. In addition, many of these teams would pick up other players from teams they competed with in their leagues. Hap Dumont and Larry Davis were very good at constructing a well-balanced and competitive tournament. Broeg, 144.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>23</sup> Overaker, "Just Thinking It Over," *Wichita Eagle*, August 27, 1964, 6C.

<sup>24</sup> "Non-Pro Teams Will Follow A's Lead With Flashy Attire," *The Sporting News*, February 16, 1963, 34.

<sup>25</sup> United Press International, "Baseball Players To Announce Selves," *The Washington Post*, October 26, 1968, E5.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE DEATH OF A SALESMAN

It breaks your heart. It is designed to break your heart. The game begins in the spring, when everything else begins again, and it blossoms in the summer, filling the afternoons and evenings, and then as soon as the chill rains come, it stops and leaves you to face the fall alone.

A. Bartlett Giamatti, Commissioner of Baseball from 1988-1989, "The Green Fields of the Mind," *Yale Alumni Magazine*, November 1977.

The chaos and turmoil of the late 1960s continued into the early part of the next decade. The familiar institutions of the United States received a serious blow and for many a great uncertainty surrounded the country. A president of the United States resigned, the American military, in many people's minds, had lost its first war, and the game of baseball suffered through its first labor crisis. The National Baseball Congress and its annual tournament endured a great deal of uncertainty as well.

The NBC lost its founder on July 3, 1971. Raymond "Hap" Dumont passed away at the age of sixty-six due to a heart attack. Umpire Jerry Gilas found the hardworking Dumont shortly after 1:00 p.m. face down on the floor in his office at Lawrence Stadium. Dumont had been trying to secure the service of baseball legend Joe Garagiola to appear at the 1971 NBC tournament. It did not surprise any

of Dumont's contemporaries that he died at the office trying to make that year's tournament better than any of the previous ones.<sup>1</sup>

The dean of semi-pro baseball was eulogized throughout the country. *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Sporting News* all ran Dumont's obituary, and stories of Dumont's antics filled the pages of the country's most important newspapers. Out of Kansas City, Missouri, came the story of Associated Press bureau chief Paul Mickelson who related the time that Dumont had invited him to the NBC tournament. Mickelson refused, stating "he was too busy for cow pasture baseball." When the comment made its way back to Dumont, he sent the writer a cow and had it tethered to the offices of the Kansas City Associated Press building. The amused Mickelson relented and traveled to Wichita where he and Dumont became fast friends.

Another story that routinely appeared during the period after Dumont's death dealt with his publicity stunt during the Unidentified Flying Object (UFO) craze of the 1950s. Dumont had a pilot drop thousand shiny discs from a plane, thus setting off a panic in which many Kansans

called in to report a UFO invasion to their local police departments. The Wichita chief of police for one was not amused with this kind of shenanigans.'

The fans of the NBC tournament also paid their respects. For example, Jerry Patterson of Fort Dodge, Iowa wrote:

With the recent passing of Ray Dumont, who was founder and longtime director of the National Baseball Congress, baseball has lost one of its great leaders. I firmly believe that Mr. Dumont, who was a tireless worker, did more for the whole game of baseball during his lifetime than any other man who ever lived. Those of us who have been active in NBC baseball sincerely hope that the NBC people in Wichita will continue to carry on in the Ray Dumont tradition.'

Dumont was laid to rest in Goddard, a small town fourteen miles west of Wichita. However, when Dumont's wife Annie noticed that the burial plot had been tampered with, possibly by fans, she moved the baseball promoter's body to a mausoleum across the street from Wichita State University's athletic field.<sup>5</sup> Even in death, Hap Dumont would not remain still.

As the saying goes, the show or in this case the games must go on. Dumont's longtime lieutenant, Larry Davis took over the tournament operations for 1971 and stayed on as tournament director until the late eighties.

A touch of sadness clung to Lawrence Stadium that year as the Anchorage, Alaska Glacier Pilots downed the Fairbanks, Alaska Goldpanners 5-4 in the championship game. Even though the tournament was in the capable hands of Davis, Dumont's will was headed through probate, which was handled by the Fourth National Bank and Trust Company of Wichita.<sup>6</sup>

Dumont did not leave specific instructions as to how the tournament was to continue in case of his death. His widow decided to sell the tournament and the organization. A consortium of local businessmen purchased the National Baseball Congress in February 1972. These investors included Professor Fran Jabara of Wichita State University and R.D. Hubbard, president and chief executive officer of Safelite Industries.<sup>7</sup> They formed the National Baseball Congress of America, Inc., and permanently installed Larry Davis as president of the organization. Ann Dumont collected somewhere around \$110,000 for her husband's business.<sup>8</sup> Bob Broeg, Dumont's biographer, estimated that the National Baseball Congress had earned the baseball promoter as much as \$75,000 a year during the Great Depression, and around \$125,000 a year thereafter. Dumont, who usually borrowed money from the bank to pay for the

operating expenses of the yearly tournament, made enough money to afford to pay any of the other expenses out of his pocket. In Dumont's mind, if he borrowed the money he would work that much harder to pay back the money.<sup>9</sup>

Hubbard, who in principle ran the organization, never had much interest in running the tournament; he would rather run a team playing in the NBC tournament. A native of Smith Center, Kansas, Hubbard worked his way up through a sales job at Service Auto Glass and then the sales division of Safelite Auto Glass to become a successful businessman. However, Hubbard found that he would rather entertain other business venture, so he sold his stake in the tournament. A heavy turnover of ownership followed Dumont's death. Several other local businessman joined with Jabara to continue to keep the NBC tournament in Wichita. Byron Boothe, a promoter, and Rusty Eck, who owned a successful Ford dealership in the Wichita area, came aboard as owners. They too found themselves in a similar predicament to Hubbard's. Both needed to concentrate on their full-time business ventures, and they could not afford to devote themselves to the NBC the way Dumont had.<sup>10</sup>

Eventually, Boothe and Eck left the partnership, and Jabara enlisted Jerry Blue and Earl Callison to take their place. Blue, a banker, and Callison, who headed up a concrete business, both desperately wanted to keep the tournament in the city where Hap Dumont had breathed life into it. Their financial backing helped keep the tournament afloat in those years after Dumont died and co-owners came and went. The tournament also had to compete with Wichita's growing fascination with professional baseball.

For the better part of the four decades of its existence, the National Baseball Congress had battled the Wichita city government's desire to have minor league baseball compete in Lawrence Stadium. After the Wichita Aviators left in those dusty days of 1933, the city did not entice minor league baseball back until 1950 when the Wichita Indians farm club set up shop at the ballpark on South Sycamore Street. The Indians lasted until the 1956 season when they took the name of the Wichita Braves and became the Milwaukee Braves AA franchise.<sup>11</sup> Minor league baseball disappeared from Wichita after the 1958 season, but it returned once again in 1970 when the American

Association (a AAA baseball league) put a franchise in Kansas's largest city. The team nicknamed the Aeros would stay for fourteen years.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of the 1970s, the National Baseball Congress changed ownership hands again. Joe Ryan, the president of the American Association since 1972, acquired the NBC tournament along with a Miami attorney, Ron Fine. Ryan said at the time, "I not only respect Ray Dumont as a promoter and a person and Wichita as the traditional site of the tournament. But I also knew that with the college fountainhead of talent, the NBC was like a pretty good minor league. Basically, Class A and some teams even stronger."<sup>13</sup> Ryan kept the NBC tournament in Wichita at a time when it seemed destined to ride off to greener pastures in another city.

The fluctuation of ownership was not the only cause for concern for National Baseball Congress officials. The 1972 NBC tournament saw an unusual lag in attendance. Larry Davis attributed the decline in attendance to the start of college football and the success of the Wichita Aeros baseball club. Davis also noted that the absence of



Dumont, who had passed away the previous year, had left an unfillable void in the tournament's atmosphere. "Too many, Dumont was the National Baseball Congress. Some of the NBC died with him in July of 1971," said Davis.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, college football had recently expanded its schedule to include an eleventh game. Many college baseball players also attended their universities on football scholarships and the football coaches were not about to excuse players from practice to play in a non-collegiate affiliated baseball tournament. Davis and the NBC decided to move the tournament up a few weeks to avoid continued competition with college football, but they would need to wait four years to negotiate a new timetable with the city of Wichita concerning Lawrence Stadium's availability.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, the issue of stadium availability always reared its ugly head in August, especially when a minor league baseball team shared the premises as well. Dumont died believing that the minor league teams received a better lease agreement than he did. The NBC tournament also had to battle over the starting times of their games when the minor league teams also had home games scheduled

during the tournament. As a result of this competition, attendance fell. The NBC tournament's best attendance always occurred in the years that Wichita was not flirting with pro baseball.

One advantage of having the governmental leaders of Wichita fawning over pro baseball came when Lawrence Stadium needed an upgrade. The money flowed in to the tune of \$1.2 to modernize the field, clubhouse, press box, warning track, skyboxes, dressing rooms, ticket windows and spectator seating in 1978.<sup>16</sup> The most glaring addition to the ballpark left baseball purists aghast. Astro turf was installed in the infield, while natural grass remained in the outfield. What resulted could only be described as baseball's version of "Frankenstein." However, as Jerry Taylor, the 2006 National Baseball Congress tournament director, stated, "With over 100 games being played in a two-week span, it would absolutely ruin a grass infield."

While the purists frowned at the "fake grass," the renaming of Lawrence Stadium to include Hap Dumont's name was universally applauded. *Wichita Eagle* sports columnist Bill Hodge and Martin Umansky of Wichita's American Broadcasting Company's (ABC) affiliate KAKE-TV spearheaded

the successful renaming effort. If Yankee Stadium is the "House that Babe Ruth built," then Lawrence-Dumont stadium truly is the ballpark that Hap Dumont built. Dumont's name on the façade of the baseball stadium he helped get built is a fitting memorial to one of Wichita's most endearing, if sometimes infuriating, figures.

The only constant in the life of the NBC tournament in the years after Dumont's death was change. Larry Davis put in place a firm tournament bracketing system, something that Dumont had tended to ignore. Dumont's only concern was matching the strongest teams at the end so the tournament could draw a strong gate. The weaker teams would often be put at a disadvantage because of this. Davis acknowledged that Dumont meant no ill will by doing so and he even saved the less talented teams money because they did not have to stay in Wichita as long. However, managers and team officials often cursed Dumont when he released the schedule, which often required the weaker teams to play several games before the stronger teams even had to take the field. Davis noted that

"He wanted to pit the teams adjudged weak against the strong so that the tournament cream, the box-office attractions, would rise to the top. But he did it for another reason-he didn't want

inferior teams to stay in town, to spend and maybe waste money."<sup>17</sup>

One of the new owners of the National Baseball Congress suggested another change. Byron Boothe suggested that teams pay to play in the tournament. Boothe recommended that state champions pay \$1,000 to enter the national tournament.<sup>18</sup> As a result of this financial restructuring, the champion of the tournament would be guaranteed \$12,000 instead of having to use Dumont's complicated mileage payout. Boothe also came up with the idea to paint the bases red, white, and blue, a gimmick Hap Dumont certainly would have certainly approved.<sup>19</sup>

The NBC tournament weathered the storm of Dumont's death. Although ownership questions abounded, and attendance fluctuated, the tournament continued. However, future developments would have a leveling effect on the tournament and the way the games were played. Thus, the quality of baseball and the new leadership ushered in an era of progress and stability.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Broeg, 187.

<sup>2</sup> "Raymond H. (Ray) Dumont, Obituary," *The Sporting News*, July 12, 1971, 60.

<sup>3</sup> "Raymond Dumont, 66, Baseball Figure: Founder in '31 of Semipro National Congress Dies," *New York Times*, July 5, 1971, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Jerry Patterson, letter to the editor, *The Sporting News*, July 24, 1971, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Broeg, 187.

<sup>6</sup> John Swagerty, "Wichita Man Purchases Dumont Non-Pro Empire," *The Sporting News*, February 19, 1972, 45.

<sup>7</sup> Professor Fran Jabara was the one constant in the ownership of the National Baseball Congress following Hap Dumont's death. Jabara's part-ownership continued until Bob and Mindy Rich bought the NBC in the mid-1980s. Jabara was also the driving force behind Bob Broeg writing a biography of Dumont.

<sup>8</sup> Broeg, 195-196.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>10</sup> After the Coca-Cola Company stopped sponsoring the championship trophy, Rusty Eck took over that financial responsibility years before he bought into the tournament. See Broeg, 197-199.

<sup>11</sup> Each major league baseball team has one Triple A team, one Double A team, two Single A teams, and a rookie league team. These farm teams are used to develop players signed by the major league baseball team. The modern minor league system started in the 1950s.

<sup>12</sup> Rives, 127.

<sup>13</sup> Broeg, 201-202.

<sup>14</sup> Bill Hodge, "In This Corner," *Wichita Eagle*, August 20, 1972, 1C.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Broeg, 194.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>18</sup> This meant that there would be a total of \$32,000 in the pot. See Ibid., 190.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 190-191.

## CHAPTER SIX

### EASE HIS PAIN

Baseball is an allegorical play about America, a poetic, complex, and subtle play of courage, fear, good luck, mistakes, patience about fate, and sober self-esteem.

Saul Steinberg, American Artist,  
1914-1999.

The chaos and uncertainty that dominated the United States during the sixties and seventies gave way to a new era of optimism and progress in the eighties. Of course, this is a general overview of the decade because the early years of the eighties were anything but optimistic. The economy nosedived in the late 1970s and unemployment rates soared throughout the country. As former President Jimmy Carter described the country in July 1979, the United States and its people were in a "malaise." The leadership of the National Baseball Congress suffered an identity crisis as well in the early part of the decade. The athletic competition in the NBC tournament was at an all-time high, but the organization struggled both financially and managerially.

Joe Ryan and the rest of the National Baseball Congress ownership consortium tried to maintain an optimum level of personal interest in the running of the



tournament, but they all had their own businesses to run. The venerable Larry Davis maintained control of the tournament operations, and Joe Ryan and Ron Fine had the final say on the economic portion of the tournament. Then in 1984, in the minds of many Wichitans at this time, a black knight rode into town, stole the Wichita Aeros minor league baseball team, and moved them to Buffalo, New York. Robert E. Rich, Jr., the son of Robert Sr., who had founded Rich Products, a food production company, also purchased Ron Fine's portion of the National Baseball Congress and its tournament, much to the dismay of Wichita. The public feared that the Rich family would also move the NBC tournament to Buffalo just as they had the Aeros. However, Rich and his wife Mindy, who was also involved in the operations of the Rich family sports empire, proved to be white knights instead.<sup>1</sup>

All of the parties who were now invested in the National Baseball Congress tournament reaffirmed their desire to keep the half-century-old tournament in Wichita. Ryan, who now was headquartered in Miami, and the Buffalo based Rich family told the city that the tournament would remain, but the city government of Wichita needed to step

up and continue to make improvements on Lawrence-Dumont stadium, as well as granting the newly created Wichita Baseball Inc. a favorable lease to the ballpark. Wichita Baseball Inc. would be the organization that the Rich family would put in place to oversee the NBC tournament and later the Wichita Wranglers minor league franchise. The NBC's ownership not only promised to keep the tournament in town but also made a vow to seek another minor league franchise and move it to Wichita.<sup>2</sup>

Larry Schmittgens of Nashville, Tennessee beat the Rich family to the punch, however. Schmittgens moved his Double A Texas League franchise from Beaumont, Texas to Wichita and rechristened the franchise the Wichita Pilots. What ensued was a scheduling nightmare for the National Baseball Congress when they tried to set up game times for the 1987 tournament. The Wichita Pilots played a few home games during the same period as the semi-pro baseball tournament was reaching its peak. The Pilots took the prime slot of 8:00 P.M., while Larry Davis had the inconvenience of planning around professional baseball once again.<sup>4</sup>

The Rich family realized the chaotic situation in Wichita. They purchased the minor league Pilots, whose attendance fell from 150,924 in 1987 to 70,525 in 1988, but only on the condition that Wichita spend \$1,800,000 then and \$3,200,000<sup>4</sup> over the next three years to make Lawrence-Dumont stadium co-habitable for pro and semi-pro baseball." Finally, the scheduling conflicts that surrounded the NBC tournament and professional baseball in Wichita disappeared. It was an advantageous situation for both parties, although the players for the renamed Wichita Wranglers might disagree when they had to take a two-week road trip in August to avoid the tournament.

After almost a decade and a half after Hap Dumont passed away, the turmoil that surrounded the NBC tournament's ownership evaporated when the Rich family purchased the National Baseball Congress. Even though ownership groups bought the organization and then left, the baseball games continued and even reached a higher level of play in the years after Dumont's passing. This high level of play could be attributed to the continued development of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) baseball program. For years, Major League Baseball teams

signed players straight out of high school, leaving the less talented players to don the collegiate baseball uniform. However, starting in the late sixties, more and more top high school baseball prospects ventured into the collegiate ranks rather than turning to professional baseball.

Collegiate programs such as the University of Southern California (USC), Arizona State University, the University of Texas, and many other great baseball colleges sent their players to "summer school" by having them play for NBC-affiliated teams. Even legendary coaches, such as Rod Dedeaux of USC and Gene Stephenson of Wichita State, managed semi-pro teams in Alaska and Wichita respectively. The list of distinguished major league ballplayers who stepped across the baselines onto the field at Lawrence-Dumont stadium is long. A sampling of the all-time greats includes Mark McGwire who played for the Oakland Athletics and St. Louis Cardinals, Dave Winfield who played for the San Diego Padres and New York Yankees, Barry Bonds of the Pittsburgh Pirates and the San Francisco Giants, Albert Pujols of the St. Louis Cardinals, and Lance Berkman of the Houston Astros (see Appendix A). These all-star baseball

players spent their summers off from college participating in semi-professional baseball leagues that were affiliated with the NBC. Ultimately, many made it to the national tournament in Wichita, but only a select few won the NBC title.

Perhaps the best example of a team making it to the national tournament and falling tragically short of winning the title was the 1983 Hutchinson Broncos baseball team. The Broncos that year had an outfield that included Barry Bonds, who is the Major League Baseball single season home run record holder; Pete Incaviglia, who holds the single season home run record in the NCAA; and Rafael Palmeiro, who is a member of the 500 home runs and 3,000 hits club. According to Lynn Womack, who was part of the Hays Larks organization and a historian of semi-pro baseball in Kansas, the '83 Broncos fell short of the title due to some questionable managing decisions involving a relief pitcher during the tournament.

The Broncos, in their brief stay in Hutchinson, recruited formidable talent to the central Kansas city.<sup>8</sup> A year before the trio of Bonds, Palmeiro, and Incaviglia patrolled the outfield in Hutchinson, Roger Clemens took

the mound for the Broncos. One of the interesting aspects of using collegiate talent is that teammates from the same university occasionally played against each other in the tournament. Clemens and his University of Texas teammate, Calvin Schiraldi, who played for the Liberal Beejays, squared off often during the summer of 1982. Clemens and Schiraldi would become teammates again in pro baseball as they both pitched for the Boston Red Sox in the latter part of the 1980s.

Top collegiate talent made a concerted effort to play summer baseball in National Baseball Congress affiliated leagues. The players knew that every August, Major League Baseball teams would send their player development scouts to Wichita to rate the talent. Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis, the Commissioner of Baseball during the initial days of the NBC tournament, realized that the tournament would be a perfect way to find new talent, but even the esteemed Landis never had the idea that the scouts would be searching out collegiate players. However, that tradition appeared to be in jeopardy in August 1985. The Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) set August 6 as

a strike date, three days before the August 9 tournament start date.<sup>7</sup>

A MLBPA strike would mean the professional scouts would no longer be able to travel to Wichita due to anticipated budget constraints brought on by the strike.

Lee Anthony, the Texas Rangers Midwest scout, said:

"We anticipate that tournament every year. Every baseball-oriented person likes to go into Wichita and see that tournament. And I think it's a shame that the tournament won't be covered if (the strike) comes about. And we hope there won't be a strike, naturally."<sup>8</sup>

The scouts traditionally looked for players who were "superior in some categories and at least average in all categories." Anthony stated:

"If they're an everyday player, they have to show an ability to run, throw, and hit with power. If they're a pitcher, they have to show velocity--there's no substitute for velocity, but if a pitcher can get a hitter out, it doesn't matter whether he can throw 85 or 95 (mph)."

The scouts did have their chance to scout NBC players at the 1985 tournament. The players union staged a one day strike that did not affect the scouts' ability to travel to Wichita for the August 9 start of the tournament.<sup>9</sup>

The scouts of Major League Baseball teams were not the only group to mark August on their calendars for NBC



baseball action. The lifeblood of the NBC tournament was the group of fans who returned to Lawrence-Dumont stadium's catacombs every year like migrating birds. Bill Millspaugh of Wichita started attending the NBC tournament in 1935, the first year of the event when Satchel Paige made his dramatic appearance. For over fifty years, Millspaugh attended the tournament, posted numbers on the scoreboard in 1937, shagged baseballs in 1938-39, and worked in the concession stand in 1940-41, before joining the military from 1943-46.<sup>10</sup> Millspaugh stated:

"It's just an interesting tournament. You've got different teams coming in every year. They begin to eliminate each other and you just see a different group every year. As the tournament goes along, you kind of pick up a favorite here or there."

While there are many fans like Bill Millspaugh who adopt a favorite team each tournament, some fans stick with an old favorite throughout each and every tournament. Bill Gould, of Liberal, is one such fan. Gould, who began attending the tournament in 1945, was an avid fan of the Liberal Beejays. Gould, who served on the Beejays board of directors, attended the tournament for over forty years, often chauffeuring the players from Liberal to Wichita.<sup>11</sup>

While the fans are considered the lifeblood of the NBC tournament, many other people within the National Baseball Congress organization and the staff at Lawrence-Dumont stadium make sure the fans are able to enjoy the product on the field. Larry Davis said that it takes close to a hundred people--twenty umpires, forty concession employees and vendors, ball shaggers, security personnel, a scoreboard operator, ushers, program salesmen, and ticket salesmen--to pull off the NBC tournament. The National Baseball Congress paid \$6,000 in umpire salaries and nearly \$1,200 a night for the use of Lawrence-Dumont stadium. Davis said, "I would be glad to break even on the tournament or, hopefully, make a few dollars. If we draw true to form, we'll make some money."

The city of Wichita, however, always makes money off the NBC tournament. As of 1985, the Wichita Convention and Tourism Bureau estimated that more than \$107,000 was spent on hotel rooms, meals and entertainment during the tournament. This amount would greatly increase if the NBC had a policy that forced the teams to arrive the first day of the tournament and stay until they were eliminated. However, Davis and his predecessors have followed the

scheduling rules set forth back in 1935 by Hap Dumont himself. Some teams are scheduled so that they can return home after just a few days. The teams from Alaska do not usually arrive until the tournament is about a week old because it would cost too much for them to stay the entire eighteen days of play. According to Fairbanks General Manager Don Dennis, it cost nearly \$13,000 to fly his team to Wichita and another \$6,000 to house the players for ten days in 1984.<sup>11</sup>

The city of Wichita stepped up and kept their promises to the Rich family concerning the improvements on Lawrence-Dumont stadium. The plan to renovate the infrastructure of the venerable stadium called for renovations to be broken up into several phases. Phase I involved replacing the box seats, rest rooms, and concession stands, combined with an exterior facelift and new graphics. Phase II called for the replacement of skyboxes and the press box, as well as the installation of a new artificial infield turf. The outfield received a new drainage system, and the stadium would get new infield lighting. The phase II renovations were done before the 1990 minor league season began for the Wichita Wranglers. Phase III renovations involved

installing a new upper reserved seating section, additional improvements to the concession stands, and a new picnic area. The last phase of renovations was completed in 1991. The HOK Sports Facilities architectural group was in charge of the renovations. The total costs of the three phases of renovations topped out at \$5 million.<sup>14</sup>

The ownership chaos that ensued after Hap Dumont's death finally ended when Bob and Mindy Rich took control of the NBC tournament. Along with their purchase of Wichita's minor league franchise and the establishment of Wichita Baseball, Inc., the Rich family solidified the baseball environment for Wichita for many years to come. The stable environment that followed the NBC tournament in the 1990s led to more great baseball, and less concentration on the financial aspects of the tournament. In short, Dumont could now rest in peace. His tournament, built out of the dusts of the Great Depression to become a fixture of the Wichita sports scene, would not end with the death of baseball's P.T. Barnum. The NBC tournament continued to offer great baseball. Dumont's pain (the fear the tournament would fold or move to another city without him) had been eased.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Broeg, 202-203.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>4</sup> The city of Wichita spent over 5.1 million dollars on stadium improvements from 1989-1991. See Joanna Chadwick, "Wranglers have Rich History," *Wichita Eagle*, July 2, 2006, 7D.

<sup>5</sup> Broeg., 208.

<sup>6</sup> The Broncos moved to Wichita and then later El Dorado after departing Hutchinson.

<sup>7</sup> James Wangemann, "Strike in Major Leagues Could Keep Scouts Away," *The Wichita-Eagle Beacon*, August 4, 1985, C1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The years between 1943 and 1946 were the only years that Millspaugh missed any NBC action. James Wangemann, "Tournament a Treat for Baseball Lovers," *The Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, August 4, 1985, 1D.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> All of these numbers are in terms of 1985 dollars and statistics. The numbers have gone up in the twenty years since the newspaper article was written. See Casey Scott, "Wichita Fields NBC Classic," *The Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, August 4, 1985, 1A.

<sup>14</sup> The travel and living expenses have caused many of the Alaska teams to reevaluate whether they intend on participating in the NBC tournament after 2005. The city of Wichita and the National Baseball Congress are always

looking at ways to cut costs for these teams who have to travel longer distances. See Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Scott Berg to Nat Griffin, memorandum, Wichita, Kansas, February 12, 1990, Archives of the Downtown Wichita Association.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### GO THE DISTANCE

Baseball is a game dominated by vital ghosts; it's a fraternity, like no other we have of the active and the no longer so, the living and the dead.

Richard Gilman, author and sports fan.

With solid ownership now firmly behind the National Baseball Congress, those men and women who coordinated the annual national tournament could concentrate on putting the best baseball product on the field. Lawrence-Dumont stadium continued its renaissance as the city of Wichita refurbished the ballpark "Hap" Dumont built, and many more future all-star Major League Baseball players made their way through the ranks of the NBC tournament. Even though people outside of Dumont's original sphere of influence now directed the tournament, many aspects of his ingenious, and some would say infamous, promotions remained in place. However, a trend towards baseball's traditional roots invaded not only the NBC tournament, but also Major League Baseball.

One such trend that specifically involved the National Baseball Congress was the replacement of aluminum bats with the more time-honored wooden bats. Since the mid-1970s, the ping of aluminum bats had rung across the friendly

confines of Lawrence-Dumont stadium. The aluminum bat found its way into college baseball, and subsequently into the NBC tournament, because it is virtually indestructible. These durable bats proved to be cost effective for the universities and the players, while their wooden counterparts splintered rather easily with an imperfect swing. The reintroduction of wood bats in the summer of 2000 went directly against Dumont's theory of baseball promotion, which was that using aluminum bats created offense, and using wood bats cut down on home runs. Home runs and offense put the casual fans into the seats and Dumont knew this when he controlled the tournament. Hays Larks manager Frank Leo commented, "I think with aluminum, it was becoming more of a softball thing. Let's see how many runs you can put up and how far you can hit it. Some of the finer skills of the game were lost. I kind of like getting those finer skills back."<sup>1</sup>

Those skills included base stealing, the hit and run play, and bunting. Larry Davis, a former NBC general manager, stated that he always put a wood bat in the dugout for the sake of bunting. With wood bats reappearing and the offensive aspects of the game being dialed back to



focus on station-to-station baseball, a greater emphasis could be placed on defense and pitching, two aspects that often were lost in collegiate and NBC games in the past. A positive part of the players using wooden bats, about which many players complained, was that many more professional baseball scouts started to attend the NBC tournament games. The scouts were able to accurately gauge a hitter's true ability to strike the ball, whereas using an aluminum bat created greater bat speed, had a bigger sweet spot, and enabled a hitter to hit a "mistake" home run, which with a wooden bat would never happen. Derrick Dukes, the man who replaced Larry Davis as NBC general manager, said, "Wood is brutally honest."<sup>2</sup>

The home run has always held a special place in the hearts of the casual baseball fan. The most hallowed record in all of sports may be Hank Aaron's 755 home runs for a career. The home run's place in the NBC tournament lore is a special one. "Fans like to see high-scoring games. They just like to see the ball go out of the park," said Davis. For years, the hierarchy appeased those homer hungry fans, going so far to order a unique baseball from the now defunct DeBeer sporting goods company, the "Jet."

The Jet flew like one when hit because it was made with a solid rubber core. Davis's philosophy was that he would start the tournament off with a dead ball to prevent having too many lopsided games; and then he would bring the Jet in, and the games would go from having one home run a game to three or four a game. Joe Carter, a star at Wichita State University (WSU) and for the Boulder Collegians and also a prolific major league slugger who played for the San Diego Padres, the Cleveland Indians, and the Toronto Blue Jays, once hit a ball that took one bounce in the parking lot behind the left field wall and hit the corner of the Metropolitan Baptist Church; it then traveled across McLean Boulevard and into the Arkansas River. The total distance was a whopping 685 feet. Many people might say that Carter's home run involved telling a tall-tale; however, Larry Davis, Gene Stephenson, who coached Carter at WSU, and several other NBC officials backed up the length of the behemoth blast. For many years, whether they used aluminum or wooden bats, many NBC alumni found Lawrence-Dumont stadium a hitter's paradise.<sup>3</sup>

While a premium was always put on hitting and offense during the tournament, the pitching legacy that started

with the great Satchel Paige continued to grow through the years. Hall of Fame pitchers Tom Seaver, who played for the New York Mets, Cincinnati Reds, Chicago White Sox, and the Boston Red Sox, and Don Sutton, who played with the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Atlanta Braves, are just two of the all-time greats to survive an August in Wichita. Roger Clemens, perhaps the greatest pitcher in Major League Baseball history, played in the NBC tournament. Men who would go on to pitch in the majors often were overlooked in the NBC tournament for one simple reason, they did not pitch. Dave Stieb, who would help the Toronto Blue Jays win several World Series championships in the 1990s, played outfield for the Kenai (Alaska) Peninsula Oilers. When he signed a pro contract, the Blue Jay organization made him a pitcher because the scouts liked his arm strength. Dumont and Davis both believed the fans would come to the park to see hitting rather than pitching, but somehow the cream of the crop in pitching always rose to the top. Davis reluctantly stated, "When you've got guys like Seaver, Sutton, and Clemens, they're going to pitch well even if you put a skyrocket in the middle of that baseball. Because you still have to hit it first."<sup>4</sup>

The 1990s saw many well-known Major League Baseball players make their way through the NBC tournament before venturing onto a minor league and pro career. In 1995, Team USA participated in the NBC tournament for the first time.<sup>5</sup> Skip Bertman, the legendary coach of the Louisiana State University (LSU) Tigers baseball team, coached a squad of players that included future major leaguers Mark Kotsay, A.J. Hinch, Casey Blake, Travis Lee, Matt Anderson, Troy Glaus, Jacque Jones, and R.A. Dickey. Several of those players ended up being selected highly in professional baseball's amateur draft and a few, such as Glaus and Jones, went on to appear in a few all-star games. Team USA went on to devastate the competition in 1995 to capture the NBC tournament trophy.<sup>6</sup>

However, four years later, when the United States national team reappeared in the NBC tournament, their performance differed significantly. Team USA finished in seventh place in the 1999 tournament. Many observers lamented early that at the outset of the 1999 tournament, Team USA held a huge competitive advantage over the other summer league teams based on their performance in the 1995 tournament. The fact that the 1999 national team lacked

the talent to measure up to the 1995 squad's talent became obvious with their seventh place finish; thus the naysayers who wanted Team USA to be banned from NBC competition changed their minds."

Recruitment to play for the U.S. national baseball team was simple enough in that the best college players gravitated towards the national team. But for those other summer baseball teams, recruiting the best college talent proved to be more difficult. When constructing summer league baseball teams, a number of factors played into being able to assemble a roster that could play throughout the summer and all the way through the NBC tournament in early to mid-August. When the recruiting process for summer league baseball begins in the fall, players usually commit to several teams at one time, but when it comes time for the final commitment they are able to choose only one. This leaves the disappointed and angry general managers seeking baseball players at the last moment. Then, once those players committed to one team, the general managers had to deal with the possibility of injuries, bad grades that would require the player to attend summer school at his university or college, and many times just plain

homesickness that played a role in losing a player. The Major League Baseball amateur draft also often created problems, as players were eligible for the June draft after their third year in college. If a player was drafted and signed by a major league club that did not want him to complete his commitment to his summer league team, then that ball player could leave the team's general manager in a predicament.<sup>8</sup>

Most teams often recruited more players than they actually needed. They did this knowing that many would drop out due to the factors listed above. The general managers of the summer league teams had to protect themselves in case they come up short on the roster. J.D. Schneider, the general manager of the El Dorado Broncos since 1987 declared, "I've had summers where we've gone through 40-45 kids." The collegiate coaches direct the players as to where they should play during the summer, and if an injury or an academic problem occurs, then the college coach usually informs the summer team of any problems. "It happens a lot, you talk to kids in the fall and winter and their stock will rise or fall depending on

what kind of year they've had in college," said Mark Standiford, who coached the Wichita Braves.<sup>9</sup>

Even though many general managers and coaches dealt with a lot of negative aspects in recruiting players, the players themselves sometimes made tremendous sacrifices to participate in the National Baseball Congress tournament. Many teams feature college players, but teams such as Cape Girardeau, Missouri Kohlfeld Capahas have competed with a number of ex-high school, ex-college, or ex-professional baseball players, just like the Dumont run tournaments of yesteryear. Many of these players have left behind full-time jobs to take unpaid vacations to participate in the NBC tournament. Some of the players such as Tim Ellis, a 26-year old first baseman for the Cape Girardeau team, have left behind families, and in the case of Ellis, a wife who was about to give birth to their second child. "I love to play," Ellis said. "I love to be around the guys. And the only reason I'm still playing baseball is the chance to play in Wichita. It's such a different atmosphere." The attitudes of baseball players like Tim Ellis are what have kept the NBC tournament alive for over seventy years.<sup>10</sup>

While many players continue to compete in the NBC

tournament simply for the love of the game of baseball, a significant segment of society and sports has declined in the participation of baseball. African-American participation in baseball has declined dramatically since the days of Satchel Paige. In 2003-04, only six percent of the nearly 9,800 Division I baseball players were African-American, compared to 25 percent in all sports combined. Baseball players of Caucasian descent totaled nearly 84 percent of collegiate baseball rosters. This absence of African-American players in college baseball corresponds with a lack of participation of African-American players in the NBC tournament."

African-American kids just are not playing baseball anymore. This could be attributed to many things, such as the rise in popularity of football and basketball throughout the United States and the pressure to "specialize" in one sport. Former Major League Baseball star and ESPN baseball commentator Harold Reynolds commented:

When I was a kid, everybody was playing all the sports. You got coaches now who say if you want to play on my high school basketball team, you've got to play basketball in the summer. Now you're cutting out kids' options to play baseball.



The phenomenon as to why kids of all races, including those of Caucasian descent, and economic backgrounds are shying away from baseball can be ascribed to complex sociological trends that have emerged in American society in the past thirty years. Baseball in urban areas simply has disappeared, and this might be because basketball is easier to play: all one needs is a hoop and a ball. More issues are at work though. Doug Shanks, the head coach at Mississippi Valley State University, which is a "black" college, said:

Where you see black players now are not in the urban areas, but in the baseball hotbeds in the suburban areas. You can mention millions of reasons for it, but basically the reason for it is daddies. It's the deterioration of the family, because baseball starts out with junior throwing with daddy in the backyard. They don't go out and say 'Let's go kick the soccer ball.' It is usually 'Let's go out and throw a baseball.' That is the missing link.<sup>12</sup>

These factors and others have led to the decline in African-American participation in the NBC tournament. In the earliest days of the tournament, Hap Dumont needed African-American players like Satchel Paige to have enough teams to play a tournament and to attract fans. The lack of African-American players in the NBC tournament has weakened the tradition that Dumont started, but baseball

has now evolved from an urban and rural game to a suburban one.

While Wichita remains the state of Kansas's largest metropolitan city, the area could be considered suburban rather than urban. This could quantify the reasons that the NBC tournament remains popular with the people of Wichita. In 2000, Wichita Baseball Inc., which includes the Wichita Wranglers and the National Baseball Congress tournament, drew over 254,228 fans to Lawrence-Dumont stadium. Baseball drew over one-third of the 750,000 fans who attended Wichita sporting events in 2000.<sup>13</sup>

The fans of Wichita continue to support the NBC tournament. Many families still "adopt" teams that travel to Wichita from the farthest reaches of the continent to play in the tournament. Janine Ruiz and her family adopted the Southern, Alabama Paw Sox after she read in the *Wichita Eagle* about how the team had to scrape together enough money to make the trip. The Ruiz family invited the team over to their home and served them a large dinner. Eddie Boyett, the Paw Sox general manager, said, "That's just super-kindness that you don't see very often in a town where you don't know anyone."<sup>14</sup>

The hospitality of Wichitans like the Ruiz family is why many teams return year after year. Old favorites have returned to the NBC fold after years of not being able to make the trip to Wichita. The Fairbanks, Alaska Goldpanners did not play in the tournament from 1987-99 for a variety of reasons. While Alaskan teams such as the Anchorage Glacier Pilots, Kenai, Mat-Su, North Pole, and the Anchorage Bucs represented the Alaskan Baseball League well, none of those teams has the NBC pedigree that the Goldpanners acquired.<sup>15</sup>

In recent years, the hierarchy of the National Baseball Congress have started to promote the NBC tournament as the NBC World Series. However, "the world" included only the continental United States and Alaska until 2003, when Chinese Taipei sent a team to Wichita to participate in the tournament. Even though Taipei did not dominate the field (they lost their third game of the tournament and had to win nine games, which was only the second time that has happened in NBC history), they surged through the consolation bracket to capture the NBC crown in 2003. The Taiwanese attracted new fans to Wichita as quite a few fans traveled from Taiwan, and many Taiwanese

expatriates ventured to Wichita to watch their countrymen.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, even though they received an automatic bid to the following year's tournament, the Chinese Taipei team was unable to make it to Wichita because of budget problems and a depleted pitching staff. Jerry Taylor, tournament director of the NBC World Series, said, "We'll miss them. They had a great team, and they brought some great crowds, so it's a little disappointing."<sup>17</sup>

The history of baseball is about its past more so than its future. The vital ghost that dominates the NBC and its annual tournament is that of Raymond "Hap" Dumont. The legacy he left behind still dominates the tournament in many ways. Some people, such as the former general manager of Wichita Baseball Inc. Steve Shaad, say that Dumont haunts Lawrence-Dumont stadium. However, it is hard to believe that Dumont haunts the catacombs of the stadium to scare people away; rather, the specter of Dumont must want to stay close to the action. Even if the ghost story is that of people's imaginations, Dumont's presence still is felt by the many programs he put into place, such as the timer that allowed the pitcher only twenty seconds between pitches and the baseball-around-the-clock plan that he

inspired, with pajama and donut parties for early morning games. Dumont's gaze still stares out over the field and the games that are played at Lawrence-Dumont stadium, as his portrait is painted on the outfield wall.

The grand traditions that encompass baseball found their way back into the NBC tournament. Wooden baseball bats replaced aluminum bats, and the focus of the game shifted back to the basics that made it such a complex and exquisite game to watch and play. The NBC tournament could not compete with Major League Baseball financially, but it also arguably put a more traditional and perhaps better product on the field. The players who came to Wichita came because they loved the game of baseball. This is not to say that those players who compete in professional baseball do not love the game of baseball. However, the perception of the greedy and uncaring pro baseball player dominated many headlines throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. The NBC teams that participated in Wichita came from all over the world, often with only \$15 dollars a day for meal money.<sup>18</sup> The sacrifices are many, and for a select few, the professional scouts recognize their talents and give them a shot to compete in the big leagues.

Finally, after years of uncertainty the National Baseball Congress tournament has solidified its stature as a Wichita tradition.

An argument can be made that baseball is not even America's national pastime anymore. Other sports, such as football and basketball, are enormously popular. However, for over seventy years the National Baseball Congress tournament has generated a loyal and substantial following. Hap Dumont, his staff, and his successors generated this following by the fans of semipro baseball because they knew that if they were to be triumphant in this endeavor they needed to be ahead of the curve and present an alternative to Major League Baseball and other entertainment alternatives.

The ideas that sprouted from the mind of "baseball's man in motion," as Kansas State Representative Garner Shriver said of Dumont at his funeral, kept the tournament alive during its initial days. Colored baseballs and "colored" baseball players enhanced the curiosity factor that drove many people to the ballpark. Even the ideas that never saw the light of day at the ballpark generated enough publicity. This publicity meant people would come

from all over just to see what "Baseball's Barnum," would do to top his latest stunt. Who could ever forget playing baseball in the dark without any lights on or running the bases in reverse, to name just a few schemes that Dumont was never able to make work?

Despite Dumont's colorful innovations during his thirty-six year run as head of the NBC tournament, the promoter laid a sound foundation for the tournament to survive even after his untimely death in 1971. Though his immediate successors did not find the goldmine many sought when they bought into the tournament, with them subsequently bowing out of the ownership picture to pursue other business ventures, the arrival of Bob and Mindy Rich proved to be the financial and management savior of the NBC organization and tournament.

The Rich family and their organization have given the NBC tournament the focus it has needed to survive in a competitive sports environment. The sports fan's attention is at a premium in the new century. There are many options for sports and entertainment, but the NBC tournament has held steady in its popularity in the community of Wichita.

However, to continue this, the city of Wichita and its population must remain ahead of the curve as well. For the past twenty years, the Wichita City Council has supported the Rich family and renovated Lawrence-Dumont stadium several times, most recently in 2001. Part of the stadium renovations for Lawrence-Dumont have included an NBC Walk of Fame, which added a touch of innovation along with the tradition of the stadium itself. However, Lawrence-Dumont stadium is one of the fifteen oldest baseball stadiums still in use in professional baseball. Funding for future renovations and even, perhaps, a new stadium will be hard to come by with the addition of a new multi-purpose arena on the riverbanks of the Arkansas River.

No matter what the future has in store for the NBC tournament, semipro baseball has a strong legacy in the air capital of the world. As former Wichita Mayor Bob Knight stated in the dedication of the NBC Walk of Fame, "Wichita, be proud of your baseball heritage."<sup>19</sup> Hap Dumont's vision and fortitude provided the integral part of the foundation for that baseball heritage. After seventy years, the National Baseball Congress tournament remains a purely



Wichita-based institution and a part of the great baseball history of the city.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Adam Knapp, "Will Wood Be Good? Wood Bats Return To The NBC In An Effort To Make Games More Competitive," *Wichita Eagle*, July 23, 2000, 1C.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Lutz, "Monday's Opening Night Blasts From the Past: Home Run Hitters Hold Special Place in the History of NBC World Series," *Wichita Eagle*, July 31, 1994, 1G.

<sup>4</sup> Lutz, "Here's the Pitch: NBC Has Seen the Best," *Wichita Eagle*, July 29, 1990, 1G.

<sup>5</sup> The 1984 United States Olympic baseball team, which included Mark McGwire, Barry Larkin, Will Clark, and B.J. Surhoff, played several exhibition games against NBC-affiliated teams in Kansas such as the Hutchinson Broncos and the Liberal BeeJays. The 1995 Team USA baseball club was the first national team to compete in the NBC tournament.

<sup>6</sup> Lutz, "Can Anyone Beat Team USA? 41 Other Clubs Think They Have A Chance," *Wichita Eagle*, July 30, 1995, 1C.

<sup>7</sup> Lutz, "Seventh-Place Finish About Right for U.S.," *Wichita Eagle*, August 15, 1999, 1C.

<sup>8</sup> Kirk Seminoff, "Final Rosters Rarely Final as Summer Teams Get Started," *Wichita Eagle*, May 22, 2005, 1D.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Lutz, "You Gotta Love It: NBC Players Sacrifice A Lot to Play Game," *Wichita Eagle*, August 1, 1995, 1A.

<sup>11</sup> Keith Parsons, "NCAA Study: Blacks Shifting Away From College Baseball," *USA Today*, June 24, 2005, C3.

<sup>12</sup> Mike Fish, "Baseball Blackout? It's Naïve to Blame Dearth of African-Americans in Baseball Solely on MLB," [http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2004/writers/mike\\_fish/05/](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2004/writers/mike_fish/05/)

11/fish.colbaseball/index.html. May 11, 2004 [accessed February 20, 2006].

<sup>13</sup> Wichita Business Journal, "Wichita Baseball Outpaces Other Sports Teams," <http://wichita.bizjournals.com/wichita/stories/2000/09/04/daily31.html>. September 7, 2000 [accessed October 7, 2005].

<sup>14</sup> Fred Mann, "Family Fixes Up Feast For Players Far From Home: Janine Ruiz Says She'd Want Someone To Do The Same For Her Boys If They Were Away Playing Ball," *Wichita Eagle*, August 2, 2000, 1A.

<sup>15</sup> Lutz, "Fairbanks Successful Return Brightens NBC," *Wichita Eagle*, August 13, 2002, 1C.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Parsons, "Thankful Taipei Sets NBC First," *Wichita Eagle*, August 18, 2003, 1D.

<sup>17</sup> Duane Frazier, "Taipei Won't Defend NBC Championship," *Wichita Eagle*, July 8, 2004, 1D.

<sup>18</sup> Mann, 1A.

<sup>19</sup> LaTricia Harper, "Wichita Wranglers Art Walk Dedication-Remarks by Mayor Bob Knight," <http://www.wichitagov.org/PrinterFriendly.aspx?guid={9AFAFE C3-34C4-476F-B918-8F...> March 26, 2002 [accessed May 17, 2005].

Appendix A: Examples of Major League Baseball All-Stars who participated in the National Baseball Congress Tournament and the college they attended.

Dave Winfield	University of Minnesota
Roger Clemens	University of Texas
Lance Berkman	Rice University
Albert Pujols	Maple Woods (Mo) Community College
Mark McGwire	University of Southern California
Barry Bonds	Arizona State University
Pete Incavigilia	Oklahoma State University
Rafael Palmeiro	Mississippi State University
Will Clark	Mississippi State University
Tony Gwynn	San Diego State University
Joe Carter	Wichita State University
John Olerud	Washington State University
Ozzie Smith	California Polytechnic University
Ron Guidry	Southwest Louisiana St. University
Tom Seaver	University of Southern California
Jacque Jones	University of Southern California
Troy Glaus	University of California-Los Angeles
Kirk Gibson	Michigan State University
Troy Percival	University of California-Riverside
Chris Chambliss	Montclair State University
Mike Boddicker	University of Iowa
Jason Giambi	Long Beach State University
Dave Kingman	University of Southern California
Michael Young	University of California-Santa Barbara
Travis Lee	San Diego State University
B.J. Ryan	Southwest Louisiana St. University
Jack Wilson	Oxnard (Ca) Community College
Graig Nettles	San Diego State University
Rick Monday	Arizona State University
Mark Grace	San Diego State University
Todd Zeile	University of California-Los Angeles
Luis Gonzalez	University of South Alabama
Morgan Ensberg	University of Southern California
Steve Howe	University of Michigan

(Sources: ESPN.com, nbcbaseball.com, Wichita Eagle, and Baseball's Barnum: Raymond "Hap" Dumont and the National Baseball Congress).

Appendix B: National Baseball Congress World Series  
Tournament Champions.

1935-Bismarck, North Dakota Corwin Churchill  
1936-Duncan, Oklahoma Halliburtons  
1937-Enid, Oklahoma Eason Oilers  
1938-Buford, Georgia Bona Allens  
1939-Duncan, Oklahoma Halliburtons  
1940-Enid, Oklahoma Champlins  
1941-Enid, Oklahoma Champlins  
1942-Wichita, Kansas Boeing Bombers  
1943-Camp Wheeler, Georgia Spokes  
1944-Sherman Field, Kansas Flyers  
1945-Enid, Oklahoma Army Air Field  
1946-St. Joseph, Missouri Auscos  
1947-Ft. Wayne, Indiana GE Club  
1948-Ft. Wayne, Indiana GE Club  
1949-Ft. Wayne, Indiana GE Club  
1950-Ft. Wayne, Indiana Capeharts  
1951-Sinton, Texas Plymouth Oilers  
1952-Ft. Myers, Virginia Military District of Washington  
1954-Wichita, Kansas Boeing Bombers  
1955-Wichita, Kansas Boeing Bombers  
1956-Ft. Wayne, Indiana Dairymen  
1957-Sinton, Texas Plymouth Oilers  
1958-Drain, Oregon Black Sox  
1959-Houston, Texas Fed Mart  
1960-Grand Rapids, Michigan Sullivans  
1961-Ponchatoula, Louisiana Athletics  
1962-Wichita, Kansas Dreamliners  
1963-Wichita, Kansas Dreamliners  
1964-Wichita, Kansas Glassmen  
1965-Wichita, Kansas Dreamliners  
1966-Boulder, Colorado Collegians  
1967-Boulder, Colorado Collegians  
1968-Liberal, Kansas Beejays  
1969-Anchorage, Alaska Glacier Pilots  
1970-Grand Rapids, Michigan Sullivans  
1971-Anchorage, Alaska Glacier Pilots  
1972-Fairbanks, Alaska Goldpanners  
1973-Fairbanks, Alaska Goldpanners  
1974-Fairbanks, Alaska Goldpanners  
1975-Boulder, Colorado Collegians  
1976-Fairbanks, Alaska Goldpanners  
1977-Kenai, Alaska Oilers

1978-Boulder, Colorado Collegians  
1979-Liberal, Kansas BeeJays  
1980-Fairbanks, Alaska Goldpanners  
1981-Clarinda, Iowa A's  
1982-Santa Maria, California Indians  
1983-Grand Rapids, Michigan Sullivan-Polynesians  
1984-Grand Rapids, Michigan Sullivan-Polynesians  
1985-Liberal, Kansas BeeJays  
1986-Anchorage, Alaska Glacier Pilots  
1987-Mat-Su, Alaska Miners  
1988-Everett, Washington Merchants  
1989-Wichita, Kansas Broncos  
1990-Wichita, Kansas Broncos  
1991-Anchorage, Alaska Glacier Pilots  
1992-Midlothian, Illinois White Sox  
1993-Kenai, Alaska Peninsula Oilers  
1994-Kenai, Alaska Peninsula Oilers  
1995-Team USA  
1996-El Dorado, Kansas Broncos  
1997-Mat-Su, Alaska Miners  
1998-El Dorado, Kansas Broncos  
1999-Dallas, Texas Phillies  
2000-Liberal, Kansas BeeJays  
2001-Anchorage, Alaska Glacier Pilots  
2002-Fairbanks, Alaska Goldpanners  
2003-Chinese Taipei (Taiwan)  
2004-Aloha, Oregon Knights  
2005-Prairie Gravel, Illinois

(Sources: nbcbaseball.com and *Wichita Eagle*).

## Bibliography

## Primary Sources

## Newspapers

*The Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL). June 1, 1935-September 1, 1992.

*The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA). June 1, 1935-September 1, 1992.

*The New York Times* (New York City, NY). June 1, 1935-September 1, 1992.

*USA Today* (National). June 25, 2005.

*The Washington Post* (Washington D.C.). June 1, 1935-September 1, 1992.

*The Wichita Eagle* (Wichita, KS) 1934-1961.

*The Wichita Beacon* (Wichita, KS) 1934-1961.

*The Wichita Eagle-Beacon* (Wichita, KS) 1961-1989.

*The Wichita Eagle* (Wichita, KS) 1989-current.

## Other Primary Sources

The Official Program of the National Baseball Congress  
1935-2005.

Personal Interviews with National Baseball Congress  
Tournament Director Jerry Taylor.

Scott Berg to Nat Griffin, memorandum, Wichita, Kansas,  
February 12, 1990, Archives of the Downtown Wichita  
Association. Wichita, Kansas.

*Sporting News Magazine* (St. Louis, Mo) 1934-1970.

## Secondary Sources

## Books

- Alexander, Charles C. *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Boston, Talmage. 1939: *Baseball's Tipping Point*. Albany, TX: Bright Sky Press, 2005.
- Broeg, Bob. *Baseball's Barnum: Ray "Hap" Dumont, Founder Of the National Baseball Congress*. Wichita, KS: Center For Entrepreneurship, W. Frank Barton School of Business Administration, Wichita State University, 1989.
- Bruce, Janet. *Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1985.
- Bullock, Steven R. *Playing for Their Nation: Baseball and American Military during World War II*. Lincoln, Nebraska and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.
- Hays, Hobe. *Take Two and Hit to Right: Golden Days on The Semi-pro Diamond*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999.
- Lutz, Bob. *50 Years: The National Baseball Congress Tournament*. Wichita: Wichita Eagle-Beacon Press, 1984.
- Nakagawa, Kerry Yo. *Through a Diamond: 100 Years of Japanese American Baseball*. San Francisco: Rudi Publishing, Inc., 2001.
- Powers-Beck, Jeffrey. *The American Indian Integration of Baseball*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.



Rives, Bob. *Baseball in Wichita*. Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2004.

Rossi, John P. *The National Game: Baseball and American Culture*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishing, 2000.

Seymour, Harold, PhD. *Baseball: The People's Game*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Stubbs, Lewis St. George. *Shoestring Glory: A Prairie History of Semi-pro Ball*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1996.

Tygiel, Jules. *Past Time: Baseball as History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

#### Theses

Jansson, Kyle Robert. "Amateur and Semi-professional Baseball in North Dakota Communities." Masters Thesis. Arizona State University, 1994.

Tully, Jeffrey L. "New Deal Construction Relief Projects: Wichita, Kansas, A Decade of Change." Masters Thesis. Wichita State University, 1994.

#### Articles

Alamillo, Jose M. "Peloteros in Paradise: Mexican-American Baseball and Oppositional Politics in Southern California, 1930-1950." *Western Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 56-68.

Pendleton, Jason. "Jim Crow Strikes Out: Interracial Baseball in Wichita, Kansas, 1920-1935." *Kansas History* vol. 19, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 86-101.

#### Websites

"Baseball Blackout? It's Naïve to Blame Dearth of African-Americans in Baseball Solely on MLB."

[http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2004/writers/mike\\_fish/05/11/fish.colbaseball/index.html](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2004/writers/mike_fish/05/11/fish.colbaseball/index.html). [accessed February 20, 2006].

"Baseball and World War II: A Study of the Landis-Roosevelt Correspondence."  
<http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/sport/percoco.html>. [accessed October 31, 2005].

"Birdland. Two Observations on the Cultural Significance of Baseball."  
<http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/baseball.html>. [accessed December 18, 2005].

The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition, Columbia University Press. 2003.  
<http://www.answers.com/topic/baseball>. [accessed January 26, 2006].

"Mobilization In World War II." <http://www.army.mil/cmhp-g/documents/mobpam.htm>. [accessed November 23, 2005].

"The National Past Time in Black and White: The Negro Baseball Leagues, 1867-1955."  
[http://www.maaa.org/exhi\\_usa/exhibitions/baseball/pg\\_baseball.pdf](http://www.maaa.org/exhi_usa/exhibitions/baseball/pg_baseball.pdf). [accessed June 1, 2005].

"National Baseball Congress Official Website." <http://www.nbcbaseball.com/>. [accessed June 25, 2005].

"National Baseball Hall of Fame."  
<http://www.baseballhalloffame.org/>. [accessed November 3, 2005].

"North Dakota Baseball History/Pitch Black Negro League Site." <http://www.pitchblackbaseball.com/>. [accessed October 1, 2005].

"Professional Baseball Franchises."  
<http://www.krypis.com/Baseball/bb-franchiseInfo.html#CincinnatiReds2>. [accessed November 20, 2005].

"Wichita Baseball Outpaces Other Sports Teams."

<http://wichita.bizjournals.com/wichita/stories/2000/09/04/daily31.html>. [accessed October 7, 2005].

"Wichita Wranglers Art Walk Dedication-Remarks by Mayor Bob Knight."

<http://www.wichitagov.org/PrinterFriendly.aspx?guid={9AFAFEC3-34C4-476F-B918-8F....>. [accessed May 17, 2005]  
March 26, 2002.

"Wings Over Kansas." <http://www.wingsoverkansas.com/>.  
[accessed November 23, 2005].