

The Black Sox Scandal

“Shoeless” Joe Jackson

Famous Movies Depicting Scandal

Sandlot Stats

Chapter 8

*After studying the topic of sports betting in **Chapter 8**, it is very appropriate to discuss a major black eye to the game of baseball. The infamous Black Sox scandal and the end of the career of one of the best hitters ever in baseball will be detailed.*

STANLEY ROTHMAN

The Black Sox Scandal of 1919 (“Say it ain’t so, Joe”)

Background of Times

In the late 1800s, baseball was transformed from a gentleman’s game into a professional sport. As a professional sport, players were paid and admission was charged for games. At the same time, betting on baseball by gamblers became prevalent. During the first year of the National League in 1876, four players of the Louisville club threw games and were suspended. It was noted that their club failed to pay their salaries.

Much of the discontent of the players was caused by their poor treatment by ownership. The attitude of management toward the players made it very easy for gamblers to entice players to get involved with them.

With the onset of World War 1 in 1917, the U.S. government closed all the race tracks but did not close the ballparks. This caused gamblers to shift their interests from the race tracks to the ballparks.

The combination of the poor treatment of the ballplayers by management and the renewed interest by professional gamblers set the stage for what happened in 1919.

The Fix

Eight players of the Chicago White Sox conspired with professional gamblers to fix the 1919 World Series between Chicago and the Cincinnati Reds. The eight White Sox players were Ed Cicotte (pitcher), Arnold Gandil (first baseman), Lefty Williams (pitcher), Happy Felsch (centerfielder), Swede Risberg (shortstop), Buck Weaver (third baseman), Fred McMullin (utility player), and the most famous star of the time “Shoeless” Joe Jackson (leftfielder). In the end, gamblers bet nearly \$500,000 and agreed to pay the eight players a total of \$100,000 to be split among them. Understand, in those days players’ salaries were small. The split of the \$100,000 would equal their yearly salaries. Because many people had to be involved in the raising of the money for the fix, the word got around about the fix.

1919 World Series Results

The series was played and the fix worked. In the best of nine games, Cincinnati won 5 games and Chicago won 3 games. Cicotte pitched the first game and gave up five runs in the fourth inning and Cincinnati won by a score of 9 to 1. Williams pitched the second game and gave up three runs in the fourth inning and Cincinnati won the game 4 to 2. Cicotte pitched game number four and Cincinnati won 2 to 0. Williams pitched game number five and Cincinnati won 5 to 0. Game number eight was pitched by Williams and Cincinnati won 10 to 5. All five games lost in the series were started by Cicotte and Williams. Throughout the series the positional players involved in the fix made key errors and failed to hit in key situations.

Discovery of the Fix

The public did not know about the fix until September of 1920. There were some rumors of the dishonesty of the White Sox. However, as far as most people knew, the series was simply an upset victory. For the 1920 season, the discovery of the fix led to the suspension of the White Sox’s pennant hopes. At the time of their suspension, in 1920, the White Sox were in a close fight with Cleveland for the pennant. The eight White Sox players involved in the fix were

thrown off the team two weeks before the season ended. Without their super stars, the White Sox finished the season two games behind Cleveland.

Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis

Judge Landis was a Federal Judge from 1905-1922. Landis was selected in 1920 to become the first Commissioner of Major League Baseball. His appointment was due to the Black Sox scandal. His job was to restore the integrity of baseball to the public. Even though the eight White Sox players were found not guilty by a jury, Landis still banned all eight from baseball.

Landis remained Commissioner until his death in 1944. In addition, Landis has been remembered for several negative practices while serving as Commissioner. He has been accused by historians of prolonging the segregation practiced in the Major Leagues. In 1931, the owner of a AA Minor League team signed a seventeen year old female pitcher named Jackie Mitchell. She made headlines by striking out both Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in an exhibition game. The next day Landis voided her contract claiming baseball was too strenuous for a woman.

Despite the controversy that surrounded his twenty-four year term, Landis was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1944.

Joe Jackson's Career

One of the players, named in the scandal, the great star Joe Jackson performed well in the World Series. Joe Jackson was from the backcountry of South Carolina. He could neither read nor write. In 1911, Jackson was the only rookie to ever hit over .400 when he hit .408. Since Joe Jackson was 24 in 1911, he was not the youngest player to hit .400. That honor belongs to Ted Williams. Many baseball people of that time said he was the greatest natural hitter of all time. In his last year he hit .382 and was approaching his peak. Ted Williams remarked that he thought Joe Jackson was a better hitter than Ty Cobb. Tris Speaker, one of the greatest centerfielders of all-time, was injured when a line drive off the bat of Jackson hit him in the neck. Speaker could not

get his glove up in time. Babe Ruth said in 1942, “I copied Jackson’s batting style because I thought he was the greatest hitter I had ever seen. I still think the same way.”

Joe Jackson’s Role in the Scandal

To this day a controversy exists concerning Jackson’s role in the fix. The other seven participants admitted their part in the fix. Until his death, Jackson remarked he played the hardest he could in the series. The numbers support his case. He hit .375, had 12 hits, drove in six runs, scored five runs, and had 16 putouts in the field without an error. He did take money from the gamblers, but he tried to return the money. He tried to tell the owner of the White Sox, Charlie Comisky, about the scandal, but Comisky refused to talk to him. So he would not be connected to the fix; he even asked the manager to bench him for the series. His manager refused.

Conclusion

This scandal almost destroyed the game of baseball. The involvement of Joe Jackson, the biggest star of the period, caused fans to become disillusioned with baseball. One child approached Joe and with a sad face said to him, “**Say it ain’t so Joe**”. This expression became part of our language.

Judge Landis, the first commissioner of baseball, banned all eight players from baseball and consequently from admittance to the Hall of Fame. The evidence seems to indicate that Jackson did take the money. After taking the money, he saw his mistake but was unable to unravel himself from the plot. Should his ban be lifted? My answer is **yes**. In his own words before his death, Joe Jackson said, “**I am going to meet the greatest umpire of all—and He knows I’m innocent.**”

Joe Jackson’s Baseball Statistics

The table below gives the yearly hitting statistics for Jackson.

| SEASON | TEAM | G | AB | R | H | 2B | 3B | HRR | BI | TB | BB | SO | SB | CS | OBS | SLG | AVG |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|------|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| 1908 | <u>Philadelphia Athletics</u> | 5 | 23 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | --- | 0 | --- | .130 | .130 | .130 |
| 1909 | <u>Philadelphia Athletics</u> | 5 | 17 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 | --- | 0 | --- | .222 | .176 | .176 |
| 1910 | <u>Cleveland Naps</u> | 20 | 75 | 15 | 29 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 11 | 44 | 8 | --- | 4 | --- | .430 | .587 | .387 |
| 1911 | <u>Cleveland Naps</u> | 147 | 571 | 126 | 233 | 45 | 19 | 7 | 83 | 337 | 56 | --- | 41 | --- | .463 | .590 | .408 |
| 1912 | <u>Cleveland Naps</u> | 154 | 572 | 121 | 226 | 44 | 26 | 3 | 90 | 331 | 54 | --- | 35 | --- | .447 | .579 | .395 |
| 1913 | <u>Cleveland Naps</u> | 148 | 528 | 109 | 197 | 39 | 17 | 7 | 71 | 291 | 80 | 26 | 26 | --- | .453 | .551 | .373 |
| 1914 | <u>Cleveland Naps</u> | 122 | 453 | 61 | 153 | 22 | 13 | 3 | 53 | 210 | 41 | 34 | 22 | 15 | .389 | .464 | .338 |
| 1915 | <u>Chicago White Sox</u> | 45 | 158 | 21 | 43 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 36 | 63 | 24 | 12 | 6 | 10 | .363 | .399 | .272 |
| 1915 | <u>Cleveland Indians</u> | 83 | 303 | 42 | 99 | 16 | 9 | 3 | 45 | 142 | 28 | 11 | 10 | 10 | .386 | .469 | .327 |
| 1916 | <u>Chicago White Sox</u> | 155 | 592 | 91 | 202 | 40 | 21 | 3 | 78 | 293 | 46 | 25 | 24 | 14 | .384 | .495 | .341 |
| 1917 | <u>Chicago White Sox</u> | 146 | 538 | 91 | 162 | 20 | 17 | 5 | 75 | 231 | 57 | 25 | 13 | --- | .364 | .429 | .301 |
| 1918 | <u>Chicago White Sox</u> | 17 | 65 | 9 | 23 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 20 | 32 | 8 | 1 | 3 | --- | .397 | .492 | .354 |
| 1919 | <u>Chicago White Sox</u> | 139 | 516 | 79 | 181 | 31 | 14 | 7 | 96 | 261 | 60 | 10 | 9 | --- | .410 | .506 | .351 |
| 1920 | <u>Chicago White Sox</u> | 146 | 570 | 105 | 218 | 42 | 20 | 12 | 121 | 336 | 56 | 14 | 9 | 12 | .433 | .589 | .382 |
| Career Totals | | 1332 | 4981 | 873 | 1772 | 307 | 168 | 54 | 785 | 2577 | 519 | 158 | 202 | --- | .413 | .517 | .356 |

Joe Jackson's was playing at his peak when he was banned from baseball in 1920. Since he would have played his last years during the "lively ball era", I believe his career totals would have got him elected to the Hall of Fame.

Movies Motivated by Joe Jackson

The movie "Eight Men Out" is all about the 1919 scandal. The movie "Field of Dreams" talks about the eight players banned from baseball because of the 1919 World Series fix. The major flaw in the "Field of Dreams" movie is the actor playing Joe Jackson batted from the right hand side. Unfortunately, Joe Jackson batted from the left hand side.