A batter, catcher, and umpire stand at home plate, all wearing cloth masks over their mouth and nose. The fans in the wooden bleachers are wearing masks, too. Even the canine mascot has its snout covered.

The photographs are some of the most enduring images of a global influenza pandemic that infected an estimated 500 million people, nearly one-third of the world’s population, and the cause of nearly 50 million deaths over a 24-month span.¹ They are a sign of the human desire to carry on in the face of horrific tragedy and of baseball’s place in American culture.

If these images did not survive, it might be hard to believe such an absurd spectacle ever took place: a baseball game played while everyone present was wearing flu masks. It happened only once, during a California Winter League game on January 26, 1919, in Pasadena, California. During a global influenza pandemic, all players and fans were required by city ordinance to wear facial coverings at all times while outdoors. Chick Gandil and Fred McMullin of the Chicago White Sox were two of the participants; Gandil had the game-winning hit in the 11th inning. (Photo: Author’s collection)
Hemingway gambles, loses on 1919 White Sox

By Sharon Hamilton
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In Under Pallor, Under Shadow, Bill Felber’s book on the 1920 American League pennant race, he writes, “Of all its sporting pastimes, the ticket-buying public only invested faith in the integrity of one.”1 Not long before the Cincinnati Reds met the Chicago White Sox in a fateful 1919 World Series, Morris Cohen wrote in The Dial magazine, “Baseball is a religion, and the only one that is not sectarian but national.”2

Young Ernest Hemingway numbered among those Americans who had faith in baseball — and in the White Sox.

On September 30, 1920, Hemingway wrote a letter to one of his closest friends about his own personal fallout following Shoeless Joe Jackson and Eddie Cicotte’s confessions to a Chicago grand jury. The two players admitted on September 28 that they had accepted money from gamblers to fix the 1919 World Series. The 21-year-old Hemingway addressed this letter to Grace Quinlan, a friend who had become like a younger sister to Hemingway. Hemingway wrote the teenaged Grace things he did not confess to anyone else. Consistently, his letters to “Sister Luke” (as he nicknamed her) are among the most vulnerable and revealing of his early letters.3

The months leading up to the fall of 1920 when Hemingway wrote his “Sister Luke” about the White Sox scandal had already been a difficult period for him. Following the end of the First World War, Hemingway returned in January 1919 to his home in Oak Park just outside of Chicago. Hemingway’s poor eyesight meant he was not permitted to enlist as a soldier, so he served as a Red Cross volunteer. It was in this role where Hemingway, who was just about to turn 19, had been delivering supplies to Italian soldiers at the front when he was wounded in an Austro-Hungarian mortar attack that almost killed him (the Italian soldier immediately in front of him died). This left him with a permanently damaged right knee.

Hemingway came back to America believing himself engaged to a Red Cross nurse and hoping to make a living as a writer to support them both. In March 1919, the nurse wrote to tell him she had become engaged to someone else.

At least he thought he could still depend on baseball.

Hemingway grew up as a baseball fan. He was fortunate enough to have ready access to a city with two championship teams and he appears to have cheered for them both. Around the age of 16, Hemingway wrote Baseball Magazine to order a subscription and to request posters of Chicago White Sox pitchers Big Ed Walsh and Ewell “Reb” Russell along with pictures of Chicago Cubs right fielder Frank “Wildfire” Schulte and catcher Jimmy Archer.4

As a fan of teams in both the American and National Leagues, Hemingway not only got to see star players of the Cubs and the White Sox in their glory days, he might also have seen some of baseball’s all-time greats on the teams that visited Chicago. Hemingway may have watched Babe Ruth as a pitcher for the Boston Red Sox and by attending games against the Detroit Tigers, he would have seen the player he described in a 1948 letter as the best of all baseball players: Ty Cobb.5

Hemingway shared his love of baseball with his father, Clarence, a physician, who appears to have very much enjoyed attending games with his eldest son. In a letter written to his father in early May 1912, when he was 12, Hemingway said he consulted his baseball schedule and saw there was a series coming up between the Cubs and the rival New York Giants.6 Hemingway asked his father if they could go to the May 11 game. If they attended that day, they would have seen the Cubs lose 10-3 against the Giants and star pitcher Rube Marquard, one of his favorite players, of whom he would also order a baseball poster.7

During his youth there had been many Chicago baseball wins to witness, some of them so transporting for the young author that he later immortalized them in fiction. In his short story “Crossing the Mississippi,” Hemingway wrote about the first game of the 1917 World Series between the White Sox and the New York Giants, including a description of Happy Felsch’s winning home run. Hemingway could have read about it in the press but it’s possible he was there to see it, especially considering that the details included in his story sound like an eyewitness account and not just the result of consulting a box score.8

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“This morning in your kitchen we were talking and in came Deggie and discussion occurred in the course of which I was informed by Deggie that it served me right to lose when I bet on the Sox last fall. Thinking the series was honest. And that he didn’t blame the Sox for selling it, etc. And becoming somewhat wroth, but not showing it I hope, a great and overpowering desire to spank him laid hold of me. But it was conquered because thought I, ‘Sooth and what will become of the small remnants of my old drag if commit spankage on a dear friend?’”

— Ernest Hemingway letter to Grace Quinlan, September 30, 1920

(“Deggie” was an acquaintance from Petoskey, Michigan)
Photos surface of Abe Attell’s World Series roommate

In the June 2017 edition of the SABR Black Sox Research Committee newsletter, I wrote an article on Abe Attell’s roommates, the two un-indicted gamblers who shared a room at the Sinton Hotel in Cincinnati during the 1919 World Series with Attell, David Zelcer, and the Levi brothers. Many have wondered why the two were never called to testify at the Black Sox criminal trial, as they could have shed light on the activities of the indicted gamblers.

One of the two gamblers was named in the hotel register and newspaper reports as “Jack Davis.” My article laid out six proofs that this man’s identity was John Henry Davis of Des Moines, Iowa. He was born Yechiel Shanin in 1864 in Dudino, Russia, and changed his name when he emigrated to the United States in 1892.

As I wrote then, “Davis played a lengthier role in the scandal, being named by David Zelcer as one of his companions at a ballgame in Chicago on September 28 (prior to the Series), and having traveled with Zelcer and Ben Levi to Cincinnati. … It seems clear that people sharing a small room with the noisy and indiscreet Abe Attell would, at a minimum, have had knowledge of the fix and likely have been active participants in the fix.”

I recently received an email from Katherine Keller, John Henry Davis’s great-granddaughter. Her information helps confirm that this Davis was the gambler Jack Davis. Better still, she shared two photos of Jack Davis — the first photos of this Black Sox figure to surface. One is from his younger days, the other from much later in life.

Thanks to Katherine for sharing these family memories.

— Bruce Allardice

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Author Ernest Hemingway was born in 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois, and spent the first six years of his life in this home.
(Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress)
The complete Black Sox Scandal Research Committee newsletter V12 N1 for June 2020 can be downloaded at https://sabr.org/research/black-sox-scandal-research-committee-newsletters