

from the 2009 Texas Rangers Souvenir Program

A Silver Anniversary

By Eric Nadel



For the past 25 years, “A Page from Baseball’s Past” has brought Rangers fans closer to the game’s rich history.

As a young baseball fan growing up in Brooklyn, NY, my favorite book was “Big Time Baseball,” a collection of baseball lore and oddities. As a Brooklyn Dodgers fan, I was particularly moved by the story of Mickey Owens’ dropped third strike, which cost the Dodgers a win in a World Series game. When I became a Texas Rangers broadcaster in 1979, my interest in the history of the game was piqued. But it took a while before I figured how to use much of that fascinating information on the air.

The key to it all was the Rangers’ hiring of Craig Wright in 1981 as a baseball consultant. Raised in Michigan, Craig learned the game from his grandfather, who watched Ty Cobb and Honus Wagner play in a 1909 World Series game, and saw Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig hit back-to-back homers in a game in Detroit. Craig would listen to his grandfather tell vivid stories about the first unassisted



Craig Wright, the creator of
“A Page from Baseball’s Past,”
now lives in Montana.

triple play, about fielders playing without gloves, and foul balls not being counted as strikes. Not surprisingly, Craig developed a boundless curiosity about the game.

In 1983, newspapers were just beginning to print a daily abbreviated version of *This Day in Baseball History*, with a line or two about interesting occurrences that had happened on that date. Craig would see those items and research the full stories, often coming up with amazing details that the newspaper one-liners had not even hinted at.

Often at lunch, Craig would regale me with the stories behind the newspaper items, always with unbridled enthusiasm, as he is a great storyteller. He encouraged me to use this information during our radio broadcasts, as a way of providing some historical information to our fans during lulls in the action. As often as I could I would do just that, the problem being, of course, that the game itself rarely provided enough time to tell the whole story or anything close to it.

How was I going to tell these great stories on the air without disrupting the flow of the game broadcast? That question was ultimately answered by Dan Flanagan, then sports director of our flagship station, WBAP. Dan suggested that the following year, 1984, we create a pregame show in which I would have two or three minutes each day to tell any baseball story I wanted to tell.

And this how a show was born that now celebrates its 25th year as part of the Texas Rangers pregame show. (We missed one year due to a disagreement with station management.)

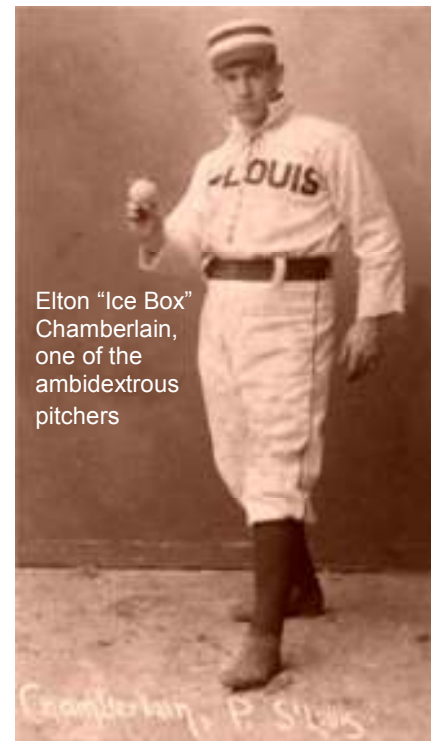
Craig insisted that the show not be limited to events of that date, as he wanted us to weave tales about entire careers, seasons, World Series and trends in the game's history. Together we envisioned a show that would go way beyond what happened on a particular date, and that could inform and entertain fans about a broad spectrum of baseball's amazing characters, miracles, tragedies and constant changes.

Our research would often start in the Baseball Encyclopedia, and we almost called the show, "A Page from the Baseball Encyclopedia," but that sounded a bit too scholarly for me, and I changed it to "A Page from Baseball's Past."

Craig would usually come up with the ideas for the shows, although some of the ideas were mine, and many of you have been kind enough to send in your own ideas over the years. He would write a first draft of each show, which I would re-write to better fit my broadcast style. Over the years, Craig got the hang of writing for radio, and now very little re-writing is necessary.

The fans' positive response to the show was immediate. In those days before e-mail I would receive letters and cards reacting to the remarkable stories of the *Ambidextrous Pitchers*, *The Pitcher Who Struck Out 27 in One Game*, and *The Worst Team in Major League History*.

One of the stories was so well-received that it inspired a book. Officials at Taylor Publishing in Dallas were so enamored of the show that they asked me if we would get some of the stories into literary form and find photos for a book of baseball anecdotes. With photo help from the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, this suggestion turned into the 1989 book, "The Man Who Stole First Base ... Tales from Baseball's Past," by Eric Nadel and Craig R. Wright.



Elton "Ice Box" Chamberlain, one of the ambidextrous pitchers



Germany Schaefer
"The Man Who Stole First Base"

Program directors in other cities were intrigued by the show. Some created their own versions. Others purchased our tapes or scripts, as the show ran at times on the pregame shows of the Baltimore Orioles, Detroit Tigers, and San Francisco Giants radio networks.

Dr. Bobby Brown, the President of the American League, wrote a letter to Craig, expressing his appreciation for the show's attention to the Negro Leagues. And older fans often wrote to add details to various scripts, as they had personally witnessed the players and events described in the shows.

Today, in addition to the radio pregame show, fans can enjoy an e-version of "A Page from Baseball's Past," that is e-mailed directly to subscribers and is enhanced with pictures, charts, research notes, and other fun details. (To learn about subscribing go to PagefromBaseballsPast.com.)

I am often asked which show is my personal favorite. For me, it has to be "The Day the Fans managed the St. Louis Browns," a Bill Veeck promotion in which the Browns fans got to make out the line-up and make in-game decisions on whether to bunt, steal, hit and run, or make a pitching change. (The hapless Browns won the game!)

Craig has a harder time deciding on one favorite, saying, "I tend to favor whatever stories I am currently working or have updated in the past few months. Looking over the recent list, I think 'Shoeless Joe Comes to the Big Leagues' is a wonderful story with great historical context, and it is a pleasure to learn about this great young talent before the weight of the Black Sox scandal came in and colored his story."

"With the e-version, I get more direct fan feedback on stories, and I find I can predict to some extent when a story is going to get a lot of comments. I told my wife that a recent story on Steve Dalkowski, 'The Fastest Ever' (which aired on the radio pregame show in May), was going to generate a lot of mail. Dalkowski's talent was so great that it seemed mythical, and yet it did not lead to success because of a tragedy of human failings." The Dalkowski story ended up setting a new record for e-mail responses. One subscriber emailed from Morocco – I kid you not – to say, "I am not sure exactly why, but this is my favorite so far."



St. Louis Browns fans make strategy decisions



Steve Dalkowski, "The Fastest Ever"

For those of you who have written, e-mailed, or personally complimented me on the show, I send a sincere thank you. And I am happy that you now know about the man who is responsible for delighting me, as well as you, with these great stories over the last 25 years.

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Pictures on pages 2, 3, and 4, courtesy of National Baseball Hall of Fame