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# In Search Of a Treasure: a 1919 'Black Sox' Cover

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At a meeting of the Long Beach Matchcover Club some time ago, talk eventually turned to a number of topics, one of which caught the immediate interest of several of the participants... the possibility that somewhere there existed a cover from the fabled "Black Sox" baseball team. Someone mentioned that he thought he may have even seen one at one time, probably long ago. The immediate problem, however, was the no one present could really remember who the Black Sox were...there were Red Sox, and the White Sox, or perhaps the "Black Sox" was just a nickname for a team that gave up on trying to keep their uniforms clean for each game? Perhaps it was a long forgotten team in the Negro League?

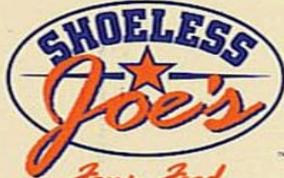
Well, all of these speculations were quite understandable. You'd have to be a real baseball historian or a very seasoned fan to remember who the *Black Sox* were, but, either way, it's quite a story.

The *Black Sox* were in fact, not a baseball team, at least not an entire team. Only the eight members of the Chicago White Sox who were accused of throwing the

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1919 World Series were dubbed the *Black Sox* by an enraged press and public. Indeed, the public was so outraged by the initial shock that in Joliet, IL, an overwrought fan accused Buck Herzog of being “one of those crooked Chicago baseball players,” and in the fight that ensued Herzog was stabbed. Herzog was on the Chicago Cubs, not the Chicago White Sox, but “Chicago” on his uniform was enough to arouse the fan. Such a scandal would rock not only the foundations of baseball, but the public’s very trust in the nation’s pastime.

Going into the 1919 World Series, the Chicago White Sox was one of the strongest teams ever put together, and it was overwhelmingly favored to win over Cincinnati, but, even before the Series started, those close at hand could smell that something was wrong. Rumors were already circulating in baseball circles that the Series had been “fixed,” and that the White Sox were going to let Cincinnati win. Then, just before the first game, the betting odds suddenly shifted in favor of Cincinnati, from 7-10 to 5-6, and in some cases to even money. Jack Doyle, whose Billiard Academy was an important betting center in New York City, estimated that the night before the game more than two million dollars had been bet. “You couldn’t miss it...The thing had an odor,” said Doyle. “I saw smart guys take even money on the Sox who should have been asking 5-1.”

Sure enough, in the first game of the Series, Cincinnati defeated the powerful Chicago team by a whopping 9-1. The White Sox lost the second game, as well. The Reds eventually went on to win the entire Series, five games to three.

Still, after the Series, the rumors subsided, a new season had started, and, as Babe Ruth (playing his first year with New York) was well on his way to hitting a phenomenal 54 homeruns, it looked as if the whole story of a “rigged” Series would be forgotten. Then, on September 4th, news broke that an August 31st Chicago Cubs-Philadelphia game had been fixed. Three days later, a Cook County grand jury was formed to investigate. That’s what brought the entire 1919 World Series back into the limelight. By the time the grand jury began meeting on September 22nd, it was investigating the Series, too.

Then all Hell broke loose! The American League President indirectly pointed the finger at White Sox owner Charles Comiskey. Comiskey admitted that he thought something was going on, but League President Johnson had dismissed it when it was brought to his attention. Then, Giants pitcher Rube Benton testified that he had known beforehand that the Series had been fixed, claiming that Chicago infielder Buck Herzog was in on it. Herzog threw everything back at Benton, and Benton went on to accuse Giants players Hal Chase and Heine Zimmerman (by now, both of the latter players had already been fired). By the end of the first day’s hearings, Assistant D.A. Hartley Replogle announced, “The last World Series between the Chicago White Sox and Cincinnati Reds was not on the square. From five to seven players on the White Sox team are involved.”

Eddie Cicotte and “Shoeless” Joe Jackson were the first players to crack. Cicotte admitted to throwing the first and fourth games of the Series by putting nothing on his pitches, throwing wild pitches, and purposely intercepting a throw from the outfield that might have cut off a run. “He had sold out for \$10,000.” Jackson, in turn, said that he had been promised \$20,000 and told of moving slowly for balls and purposely throwing balls that fell short. Together, Cicotte and Jackson implicated six other teammates: Chick Gandil, Swede Risberg, Fred McMullin, Buck Weaver, Happy Felsch, and Claude Williams. Williams broke next, then Felsch.

The grand jury brought in indictments against the eight *Black Sox*, Hal Chase, and gamblers Abe Attell, Sport Sullivan, Sleepy Bill Burns, Nat Evans, and Rachael Brown. Indicted later were several other



gamblers. Although these indictments were later dismissed on a technicality, everyone was reindicted (except McMullin—lack of evidence), and the trial began on June 27, 1921. On August 2nd, two gamblers and all seven players were acquitted...which led to talk across the nation that the court had been fixed!

Regardless, Commissioner of Baseball Kenesaw Landis banned all eight players from professional baseball for life. Later, he added Joe Gedeon of the Browns to the list. The *Black Sox* disappeared into private life. Gandil became a plumber; Weaver went on to be a drug store owner; Jackson and Felsch ended up a liquor store owners; Cicotte became a game warden; Williams found himself a nurseryman; and Risberg became a dairy farmer.

By the way, the movie, *Field of Dreams*, was based on this incident.

Was a cover ever issued on any of these players or on the 1919 World Series? One would initially conclude that it's very doubtful! But...

The late Win Lang reported in Mar, 1996, that there were at least two 'Black Sox' covers...“(on Jackson), a part of a set of nationals advertising Wild Turkey Whiskey. Others include Dempsey, Tunney, George Halas and Red Grange. Would guess issued ca. 1928-1929. Joe Jackson, by the way, was a victim, although he took part. He could not read or write and was conned—threatened with reprisals—promised \$20,000, and received \$4800.