

“Baseball – A Love Affair”

I can pinpoint the exact date and time this 67-year romance began. It was Monday, October 8, 1956. ‘Miss’ Emmie Herndon had walked our second-grade class to the bus line in front of Abbeville Elementary. 90 minutes later Mr. Jeff Wolf’s old yellow school bus made its last two stops of the day. He dropped me off at our little two-bedroom house on an old dirt road leading north out of Shorterville. One minute later he left Jimmy Money (current Abbeville mayor) at his house – just a three wood and pitching wedge from us. We were always the first ones on/last ones off Mr. Jeff’s bus so it was likely around 4:30 that afternoon when I overheard a couple of my uncles talking. They seemed excited – like children at a birthday party. Back then, if your last name was ‘Money’ and you lived in Henry County, there was a 90% chance you were a New York Yankees baseball fan. (‘Yankee fandom’ actually became a thing in our family over 100 years ago when my grandfather and great uncles got off the ship in New York harbor upon returning from WWI). On this particular October afternoon, Jimmy and I listened to his brothers talking about something that had just happened. We heard phrases like ‘perfect game’ and ‘World Series’. Don Larsen had just thrown the only perfect game in World Series history. The first world series game was played in Boston in 1903. Now, 120 years later, there has been just that one perfect game pitched in World Series play. I was hooked.

So began my love affair with the game...baseball in general, the New York Yankees in particular and especially with Mickey Mantle. The record books will show that Mantle homered in that 2-0 game Yankees win in game five. And he made a spectacular back-handed catch in the fifth inning to preserve Larsen’s masterpiece. Old #7 will forever be my first sports hero. Behind my office desk (and on loan to me) is my most prized sports item – a Yankees batting helmet personally autographed by Mickey himself.

My love and fascination with the game of baseball continued throughout Little League and high school under the tutelage of men like Cliff Roland, Joe Wood, Bo King, Wright Wilkins and Lindy Money. Uncle Lindy is one of several uncles who have been like second fathers to me. He taught me everything I know about the game before turning me over to a Wiregrass legend, Johnny Oppert, at Wallace College. Coach Oppert took a chance with me as his starting third baseman (and #3 pitcher) on the first ever Wallace College baseball team in 1967. The highlight of our first season was beating Troy. But we weren’t very good – this was a half century before these Gobs state championship teams of today. Later, Coach Oppert insisted that I finish getting my degree at Alabama. Work interfered with any baseball hopes I had while in Tuscaloosa but I’m convinced that I could have played on the 1970 Alabama team coached by Hayden Riley. They weren’t very good either – the Wallace teams of today would have held their own with them.

Then my priorities changed. While a junior at Alabama, I met a 19-year-old girl who opened my eyes to an understanding that there was much more to life than baseball and Alabama football. We maintained a long-distance courtship while I was in a student teaching program in Cartagena, Colombia. While there, I realized that before me was an opportunity to hit a ‘grand slam’ when I got back home in December of 1971. We were at a Christmas party when I shocked myself – and I’m sure her – by looking straight into her eyes and declaring “I love you more than baseball!” I don’t think she quite understood the seriousness of that statement. It didn’t take her long to learn.

This ‘love of baseball’ disease is contagious. Over the last 50 years, I’ve passed this albatross on to my family – especially our two sons. Each season, from March to early November, there are daily text threads bouncing back and forth with Dave, Scott and me. We have the answers to all the Yankees’ current problems if only Aaron Boone, Brian Cashman, and Hal Steinbrenner would listen. We’ve made several visits to Yankee Stadium (including the 2008 all-star game) and even took in a couple of the Yankees/Braves World Series games in 1996. On our bucket list for next summer is the Cubs-Yankees series at Wrigley Field.

This past year, Major League Baseball implemented new rules designed to shorten the game. Mission accomplished. If long life is compared to a baseball diamond and age 100 is to be the destination, the distance between each of the four bases represents 25 years of life. I reached first base in 1973 - Karen and I were married but had no children. When I rounded second in 1998, our oldest child had finished college, one was at Huntingdon and the other two were still in high school. In a few days I'll touch third as Karen and I look forward to celebrating the birth of our eleventh grandchild later this year. Life and baseball are similar. We're taught to respect both, to play the game/live our lives with integrity and to value the relationships that come our way. Baseball, like life, gets shorter with each passing day. Baseball has long been a major part of my life. As James Earl Jones told Kevin Costner, "The one constant through all the years, Ray, has been baseball." And, oh what a game it is! 🏆

Thirty Day Review:

- If your last name begins with 'J', 'K', or 'R', August is your month to renew your tags.
- Probate activity for June: four wills probated, three administrations, one final settlement, eight miscellaneous hearing, three guardianships, three involuntary commitments, two name changes, and seven marriage certificates recorded.
- July 12 – we welcomed 94.3 (Joy FM) to the courthouse lawn.
- July 17 – ZOOM call with Senator Tuberville's staff regarding possible EMS funding
- July 17 – opened bids to replace the courthouse roof
- July 17 – participated in a roundtable discussion with HudsonAlpha staff members
- July 18 – July administrative meeting
- July 18 – July commission meeting
- July 19 – Henry County Industrial Workforce Summit – Ravenwood in Headland
- July 27 – met with the school superintendent and the sheriff regarding school resource officers
- July 27 – met with Alabama Power in Headland
- July 31 – attended the Henry County Health and Rehab board meeting
- August 3 – ADECA broadband expansion webinar – Abbeville (or virtual)
- August 3 – Abbeville Chamber luncheon – noon – Great Southern Wood Conference Center

Upcoming Dates to Remember:

- August 9 – ACCA/ICA Operations Council annual meeting – Montgomery
- August 10 – SEARP&DC nomination committee meeting – Dothan
- August 11 – HCEDA board meeting – Abbeville
- August 17 – August Administrative meeting – 10:00 – Herndon Building Probate Courtroom
- August 17 – August Commission meeting – 1:00 – Annex Building Courtroom
- August 22/25 – ACCA Convention – Perdido in Orange Beach
- August 25 – Wiregrass Forum breakfast – Ozark
- August 29 – Alabama Department of Archives and History records assessment meeting
- August 31 – Commission 2023/2024 budget work session – Herndon Building