



Black Sox Scandal of 1919

America's pastime has inspired young boys to play baseball since the 1840s. There have been close to 200 films made about the game. The game has brought us heroes, from Ty Cobb to Mike Trout. A game that started as a fraternal association of young men became an industry filled with fame and money. Money draws gambling and professional gamblers. Baseball has had its share of scandals.

In 1870, umpire Dick Higham worked with gamblers to fix games, and for this, he was the only umpire to be banned from baseball. The Louisville Grays in 1876 were paid to lose games, and four players were banned from the game for life. Then in 1908, there was an attempt to use bribery in a game between the Cubs and Giants. This practice repeated in 1914 when the Philadelphia A's allowed the Boston Braves to win four games to nothing. Then, owner Connie Mack dismantled the team when nothing could be proven.

The biggest scandal happened in 1919 with the Chicago White Sox. Eight players with the encouragement of a number of gamblers led by Arnold Rothstein agreed to lose the World Series. Player Chick Gandil was the organizer of the scandal. Gandil was given the money to pay the players. He took \$35,000 and gave the others \$5,000 each. Shoeless Joe Jackson did not attend either of the two team meetings, but he confessed to taking the money. This scandal became news, and players were arrested and put on trial. The jury found the defendants innocent in June 1921.

The new baseball commissioner did not let the lack of a conviction stop him from banning the players from baseball. This scandal has been the subject of books and films. Author Eliot Asinof wrote *Eight Men Out*, which became a film. This book set the standard for the scandal. However, the book is more historical fiction for its personal observations on what individuals were thinking. It placed the blame on owner Charles Comiskey for being cheap. However, seven members on the team were in the top 15 of the highest-paid players in the league in 1919.

The myth of Charles Comiskey was once more put in the public eye with the film *Field of Dreams*. The players were the victims of a ruthless owner. It is hard to believe that the image of the heroes of baseball would cheat. "Say it isn't so, Joe"—how could Shoeless Joe Jackson be part of the scandal? He had 12 hits and the only home run in the series, and he completed no errors. He did confess! The White Sox became known as the Chicago Black Sox.

Since 1919, baseball has had a number of scandals. The All-Star game in 1957 had seven Cincinnati Reds on the team roster. Pete Rose was banned for life in the 1980s for gambling, and that decade saw the drug-abuse scandal. By 2005, the use of steroids scandalized baseball, and asterisks were placed by each player's names (indicating the records were not equal). Recently, the Houston Astros were accused of stealing signs to win games. In the past, there have been scandals over equipment from pine tar to corking bats. Yet baseball is still America's game.

On October 2, 1919, the Philadelphia Bulletin published a poem:

Still, it really doesn't matter,
After all, who wins the flag.
Good clean sport is what we're after,
And we aim to make our brag
To each near or distant nation
Whereon shines the sporting sun
That of all our games gymnastic
Baseball is the cleanest one!

Compare these books:

Asinof, Eliot, *Eight Men Out*

Pietrusza, David, *Rothstein*