

'Black Sox' World Series Scandal, 1919

Baseball, America's pastime, has inspired young boys to play the game since the 1840s. There have been close to 200 films made about baseball. The game has produced heroes from Ty Cobb to Mike Trout. The 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 place a bribe on a game between the Chicago Cubs and the New York Giants. In 1914, the Philadelphia A's allowed the Boston Braves to win four games to 0. The owner, Connie Mack, dismantled the team when nothing could be proved.

The biggest scandal happened in 1919 with the Chicago White Sox. The 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. "Shoeless Joe" Jackson did not attend either of the two team meetings. This scandal became news, and players were arrested and put on trial. The jury found the players 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 members 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 completed no errors. He did confess that he knew of the agreement. The White Sox became known as the Chicago Black Sox.

On Oct. 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!*

Since 1919, baseball has had a number of scandals. The All-Star game in 1957 had seven Cincinnati Reds players on the team who got there through ballot stuffing. Then, Pete Rose was banned for life in the 1980s for gambling. By 2005, players' use of steroids scandalized baseball, with the commissioner having asterisks placed by names, showing 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, the game is still America's Game.

*Compare the books *Eight Men Out* by Eliot Asinof and *Rothstein* by David Pietrusza