

BASEBALL DIGEST



OPENING DAY EDITION



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By Abe J. Shear
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Some people are collectors and I am certainly that. Be it magazines or baseball cards, global legal contacts or frequent flyer points, I collect. In particular, I collect relationships, and not surprisingly, my interview series has allowed me an additional method of keeping in touch with so many people from all over the world.

Years ago, I asked Doak Ewing if he would agree to be interviewed and am so pleased to be able to share his amazing story. Before Doak came to Atlanta, I had begun to collect baseball cards and, once Doak arrived in 1980, our paths crossed all the time.

As you will read, Doak developed a most unique and impressive baseball business and there simply is no one like Doak. In fact, after listening to Doak's enthusiastic memories, I bought three DVDs.

Doak reminds me that we each have a special skill, a passion, a love. One of his is sport films, meticulously restored to allow viewers the opportunity to relive their memories, often those shared with people long gone.

I'm extra pleased to share Doak's story. Doak can be reached at doakewing@rarsportsfilms.com.

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Abe J. Shear is an attorney with Arnall Golden Gregory LLP and is a member of the firm's Real Estate Group. Contact Abe at 404.873.8752 or Abe.Shear@agg.com.

Doak Ewing "The Best In Film"

Shear: I am talking with my friend, Doak Ewing. Doak, How would you describe what you do?

Well, I like to tell people that I do something that nobody has ever done before and nobody else is doing it and probably never will ever do it again. It is a labor of love. What I do is I take old films on sports – baseball, NFL football, NBA basketball, pro golf and

what will sell and what people like. For example, I know that people like different ball parks, the old ball parks. Somebody that is only interested in films would not know that. Take those three things and put them together and those are the ingredients of my business.

And you sell them online to interested people that either love a game or love a park or love an event, right?

"I have been collecting films since 1980."

auto racing, those are the only sports I am interested in and they are the only sports where I restore films to DVD. First of all, you have to have the film. I have been collecting films since 1980 and that's 30-something years and I have more films than anyone in the country on sports. For example, I have more NFL films from a certain period of 1946 through 1963 than the NFL does. I have more Indy 500 films than the Indianapolis Motor Speedway does from the period of 1946 through 1988, which is when they stopped making films. They have a lot of new stuff. From that period, I have more films than anyone else. I legally have the films per copyright laws, which you have to be very careful with. I am not the expert – I retain two attorneys (one in Chicago and one in Washington) who take care of all that stuff for me. We clear copyrights and so on before we place them on DVD. Then the other thing is that I have, of course, is the knowledge of whatever sport it is – a general knowledge of

Yes. We talk to them by phone, which is my favorite way. I try to pinpoint what they are looking for. If you are looking for a certain player, a certain park or team or era. Once I know what you are really looking for, I can steer you to the right DVD.

Okay. Now that we know what you do, and I know you are in Illinois, where did you grow up and what your first memories are of baseball?

Well yes. Baseball is where it all started. Really, it didn't start until I was about 14 years old. Let me think about this.

You have to tell me where you grew up first.

I grew up on an apple orchard and fruit farm and nursery garden in Cambridge, Ohio which is about one and a half hours east of Columbus, in southeastern Ohio. I didn't know anything about any sport until I learned about baseball. The only reason I learned about baseball is that I played softball a little bit when I got to the fifth grade. We started playing softball out on the playground. I liked

softball, dropping the bat, run and hit. A girl gave me a 1961 baseball card after she chewed the gum. I threw the cards in a drawer and didn't think anything else about them. I was interested in girls before baseball, if you can believe that. I was listening every night to a pop rock

up north to Cleveland and we saw a double header. The new Los Angeles Angels, they were one year old then or a year and a half, against the Cleveland Indians. The Indians lost both games – the first game went ten innings and Phil Rigney used a record number of pitchers

“I am a specialist in the sound films made by professionals.”

radio show. It was mid-April and, all of a sudden, I turned on to listen to the Johnny Long Show on West Virginia radio and it had been pre-empted by a baseball game. I thought “a baseball game? What is this?” It was Cleveland Indians playing the Kansas City Athletics and I listened to some of the game and I heard this name “Woodie Held.” I said “wait a minute – Woodie Held. Where have I heard that name before?” I knew who Woody Hayes was. I knew about Ohio State a little bit because my dad went there, but Woodie Held?

I went up in my room and grabbed those baseball cards out of my drawer and said “Here is a Woodie Held card.” I thought “Wait a minute. This guy is actually on the radio right now while I was listening to the game?” I realized that Woodie Held was playing shortstop and I became amazed at this guy on the baseball cards. I thought this was someone from the past or something. I listened to the whole broadcast – I didn't have any else to do. I was listening to Jimmy Dudley and at the end of the broadcast, Jimmy Dudley says “and so remember fans, at this same time tomorrow night, remember to tune in and listen to another Cleveland Indians game. We will be back at Kansas City. So long and lots of good luck from Cleveland.” So I thought “They are going to play tomorrow night?” I tuned in and became a Cleveland Indians fan. I could still name the starting line-up of the 1961 Cleveland Indians team and that's one of my favorite teams of all time even though they weren't very good.

By the next year, for my birthday, my dad took me on a trip to my first baseball game in Cleveland. We drove two hours

for a double header. And they still beat us in both games. I don't remember who pitched for the Indians, I think maybe Dean Chance was one of the Angels' pitchers, but I don't remember. They had so many of them. Dad was kind of amazed at how many pitchers because they kept bringing in one after another. My dad didn't really know anything about baseball, so I learned it that way. That's how I got started.

And then who were your favorite players for the Indians?

Well, I guess Woodie Held, Tito Francona, Gary Bell, Jim Grant. The big three were Jim Grant, Jim Perry and Gary Bell with guys like Frank Funk, Wynn Hawkins in relief. You will remember the baseball cards. They had Jimmy Piersall in center field. He was colorful. We had Willie Kirkland in the outfield, Bubba Phillips was on third. We got him from the White Sox but that was before I knew where he came from. We had Johnny Temple, before he got in trouble, he was at second base. So that was the team. And Johnny Romano played with Gene Green as backups.

And Rocky Colavito was gone already?

He was long gone – well, not too long gone actually.

Did you have any favorite announcers back then?

Yes I did. I liked Jimmy Dudley. Right off the bat, he became one of my favorite announcers, Jimmy Dudley doing the play by play of any Indians game. Nobody has saved the games at all from those times. Now I have a film with Jimmy Dudley doing the narration of an Indians game. It is not a broadcast – he is narrating a silent film that was shot and he was narrating it. The other is a color highlights film with the Indians'

spring training.

So let me ask you a question. You acquire films that people have taken or from events. Are you out looking for the films or are the people who own the films out looking for you? How do you acquire your source material?

I thought you were going to ask about home movies. I very rarely even purchase home movies. Now there are exceptions. I bought a great 1935 footage from a lady. But generally speaking, I don't like silent films and I am pretty picky now that I have so many films. I only buy professionally made sound films. I am a specialist in the sound films made by professionals.

Where did I get them? I get them off ebay, I bought out different companies. I bought out Cambridge Spark Plugs. I bought film from Miller Brewing. I bought out libraries from people and companies. I bought out libraries from film stores. I would say those are big deals and mostly it's just here and there merchandise from people. They find out about me and, of course, I am on the internet and on our website is a whole section “We buy films.” There is a whole list of what we are looking for. The types of films we are looking for are live games, baseball, football. Those are the subjects of interest.

And then when you buy film, you are buying it in a format that you have to transfer into a new format?

The film is what I collect. I keep the film. The film is what I like to watch, not the video or anything. I like to watch the original film in my basement. I have a little theatre set up for watching films. I don't need a screen. I have a white wall which is perfect for film and I can show them right on the wall. That's how I watch them. There have been some interesting finds along the way, so to speak. There was a magazine called “The Big Reel” and I would subscribe to that. It was a magazine for film collectors. They would subscribe and sell stuff in there and you could buy stuff. I get some of that too.

So I have been doing these interviews for a long time and people are always wondering how I get to people to be interviewed. Back about 40 years ago when I was in Atlanta and was

collecting baseball cards, I knew Doak because both Doak and I would go to card shows in motels and people's garages or wherever people were trading. Doak and I have stayed in touch. So Doak, how did you originally get into the business of baseball before you got into the business of film?

and journalism. I was a pretty good writer and I have used the knowledge that I learned in college more than any agriculture stuff I learned in college. That helped me learn baseball and do all my other jobs in writing.

You were with the Braves early on, right?

After I got out of school, I still didn't

double A with Richmond, my boss took me there. I probably could have taken over the single A club when he left, but I decided to go with him to Savannah. The next year I wanted to go Atlanta, so I went ahead and went to Atlanta and got a job in sales and later went into public relations. I was with the Braves for about seven years or so. Everyone knew me in PR and I was a collector to boot. I was President of the Atlanta Collector's Club for a while and all that.

So tell me – you ended up in Chicago and all of a sudden you started to collect

I started in 1980 when I was still with the Braves. I had been at the Braves in Atlanta for about a year and I was not collecting films at all. One of the reasons I liked films was my dad – again, this goes back to the farm – we didn't have television at the farm. That was on purpose. My mom thought Elvis was evil and things on TV were evil. She did not allow us to have television. Dad would rent movies and bring them home. Dad was a guy who loved mechanical gadgets, projectors, cleaning things, of course, he was a farmer and loved to fix things. He was absolutely amazing. He liked to fool around with projectors so he taught me how to run it, how to show a film, how to repair films and do all that stuff before I was in high school. I kept that knowledge with me.

When I got to Atlanta, one day they were cleaning out a storage room in the bowels of the stadium and were getting ready to throw all of the films away. They were going through these films and I said "Whoa, whoa. Could I have these since you were going to throw them away?" They said "Well, you go through these and we want to keep one of every film and then throw the rest away. You can have one of any of the extras." I said "okay." So I took one of every film, which came to about 15 films of the World Series because they were the most common films. They made more copies of each roll of Series film than any other kind of film. They are pretty plentiful and they are also excellent films, probably some of the best films in baseball. So I started my collection. Then I started to get curious and my collecting instincts took over and

“I was President of the Atlanta Collector's Club for a while.”

Going back to the childhood thing there, about 1962. Another reason I got interested in baseball was because Post cereal came out with their first baseball cards on the back of the cereal box. I cut those out. They were cheap and for free. I had those cards before I had bought a pack of '61 cards. The first pack of cards I bought was the 1961 Cubs. I can even remember the grocery store where I bought them. I saved up and bought these cereal cards and I even sent in and got the other cards, for like the Washington Senators. I got the whole team set. In subsequent years, they didn't do that anymore. They only did that the first year. I really enjoyed those. I traded those and I started collecting cards and the card collecting led to my knowledge of baseball and my desire to do something regarding baseball. I studied baseball from the cards and magazines that I would buy or borrow. I listened to the radio broadcasts and I learned a lot from them. I now have a collection of baseball cards going back to the turn of the century. The cards, the T-206, the Goudey cards from the 1930's, I still collect those, and I still enjoy those. I am not so active now because I don't have the time.

That kind of led me to the knowledge of baseball and I got into baseball as a job in 1978. I graduated from college with a degree in agriculture. The only reason I did that is because I didn't know what I wanted to do and my dad said "well, study agriculture and you can always come back to the farm and take over someday." I said "I've got nothing else to do so I did agriculture." I did get a degree with a minor in communications

know what I wanted to do. I kinda knew that I wanted to get into baseball, but I didn't know how. So for five years, I worked at Coca-Cola in Columbus, Georgia driving a truck. It was a great job, it kept me in shape, it was fun, it was not boring at all, hard work, earning great money. I was making \$14,000 per year at the time and this was in 1973. Anyway, a buddy of mine, a classmate at Ohio State, went on to become a minor league umpire. I bought a book from The Sporting News called "How To Get a Job In Baseball" that helped me to try to get a job in the game. One of the big things was to go to the winter meetings, meet people, talk to people, get to know people in the game. That year, the winter meetings were in Hawaii. I went to Hawaii and back for a week. I spent \$900 back in 1977 and I met some people there. I won't go into that, but I did get to meet people in baseball and eventually got a job. A guy I met referred me to someone who was looking for a job with the Braves organization. He was a general manager of the Greenwood Braves in Greenwood, South Carolina and he needed an assistant GM. He fired his secretary and hired me instead because I did the secretarial work and helped him around the ball park to boot for the same amount of money. Incidentally, I was making \$83 per week in take home my first job in baseball. I got paid twice a month.

So

I loved it. It was the most fun job I probably ever had in baseball. The lower you go, the more fun it is. The closer to the game you are.

And then you went to Chicago?

Well, then I went from Greenwood to

I said “Gee, when did they start making these? How many did they make? Are there any other films other than the World Series?” Yes there were. There were All-Star game films – I found out about those later. They were pretty hard to get. I started building my collection through the Big Reel magazine and then I branched off into other sports by accident.

Here’s how that happened. I ordered a bunch of films from somebody out of Big Reel Magazine. I had to buy the whole box. There was golf in there, football and other things that I really didn’t want. I thought I would just give these away or sell them to somebody else. I watched them all, of course, on the projector. The golf ones were amazing. It was the 1960’s Masters Tournament. I didn’t know anything about golf and I had never seen a film on golf before. It was actually, as it turned out, the first film ever made of the Masters Tournament. I didn’t know that at the time and it was a 1960’s color film. It was a wonderful film and I showed it to a couple friends of mine in Atlanta. They raved about it. They said it was fabulous. I decided to keep it. I started collecting golf films. I have all the Masters’ films now too. There you go. It’s just my collecting instincts

that. Young people don’t know anything or care anything about history, it seems like. Young baseball fans really don’t

films and that’s actually the first film I ever restored was when I was still in Atlanta and I started doing this. The

“Young people do not collect things.”

care about the history of baseball unless it’s their team. Some of them are, not all of them, but not nearly as many as you may think. And another big thing is that young people do not collect things. They don’t collect baseball cards. They don’t collect anything hardly. They move around all the time. They are on their cell phones all the time. They download things. What they want is something to download to watch it once and that’s it. They don’t have to keep it. They don’t like to collect things. It is a total different mindset than I had and the people of my generation. You know when old people die, they have “stuff.” Young people are just not pack rats. That’s how things are changing. Basically, we are behind the curve here. **I am curious though**

And then there is YouTube. People watch stuff on YouTube all the time. The only thing wrong with YouTube is poor quality. The DVDs that we sell the picture quality is so sharp and clear and that’s because we restore the film. It’s not like a bootlegger or take the film

first one was the 1947 Boston Braves highlights. It was in color – gorgeous film. It was an historic film. I was working for the Braves anyway. I always liked the Braves even before I started working for the Braves. They were one of my favorite teams – not my favorite, but one of my more favorites. So, I put that on DVD. Well it didn’t sell very well because people in 1981, ’80, whatever, weren’t interested in the old Boston Braves. Now, the people that were interested were passionate. They had never seen this film before. They were just – they loved it. The next film I put out was on the Boston Red Sox – that didn’t sell very well either. But, the third one I put out was about the All Star games from 1933 to 1956 and that sold like crazy. And then I began to realize what people wanted and why, and so on. **What do you like to watch?**

One of the things I really like to watch are the actual baseball game broadcast from the 50’s. The old World Series games that I have in the 50’s. You sit down, you put a film on and it usually it takes two or three reels and you have to change reels but you watch the whole game in one night. The whole game – just as it unfolded in 1956. For example, Larsen’s perfect game or game 3 of the ’56 World Series.

“I really began to notice that it’s the old people that buy my old films.”

So when you sell the films, what format do you send them to people in?

Well, when you take a film and restore it, then the end result is a DVD. We make a DVD, people buy the DVDs and collect them and so on. Put them on their shelves and watch them whenever they want.

I see. Is the customer changing today?

Wow, that’s the next thing I was going to get into. I know what you are thinking. Things are changing and they are really changing fast. Starting about 2 or 3 years ago, I really began to notice that it’s the old people that buy my old films. Young people don’t seem to be as interested. They don’t even teach history in schools anymore. I don’t understand

and copy it. There may be scratches, the color is bad and all that stuff. We correct the color, we go scene by scene to clean the film, take all the dirt off it (everything we can get off of it) and make it look as good as we possibly can. We enhance the film whenever we can and make it look as good as we can and put it on DVD. If somebody buys the DVD from us, they are going to get it in better shape than anywhere else they are going to see it.

Of the film you have – what’s your favorite? If you had to watch one film, what would you reach for?

Well, alright, there are two things. First of all, my favorite film is one of my first

Game 1 in the 1957 World Series, we have that. These things you can sit down and you watch Hank Aaron, Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra, Whitey Ford, Warren Spahn and Roy Campanella and Jackie Robinson and all these people and playing right in front of you now. They’re like watching an old black and white TV. If it’s an electrical image, not a hard actual image like what’s on film. That’s what I’d like to watch, probably most of the time. I’d sit down and grab a broadcast and watch that. Those are great.

Doak, there really aren’t any competitors for what you do, are there?

No, there really aren't. I would say there's nobody in baseball. We still have the same World Series films as major league baseball does, but in many cases ours are better quality than theirs. We've added features that theirs don't have. When we did Larsen's perfect game, we did something nobody had ever done before on a commercial DVD. We added the radio broadcast to the picture (the TV broadcast). So, we put on the menu of the DVD a button where you could punch and listen to radio commentary for the game on film, or you could punch the button the other way and listen to what they said on TV and watch the film.

Two different announcers, two different ways to watch the same game. Larsen's perfect game was the first film we ever did that had that on there. The first film that anybody ever put out professionally like that.

Do you remember who the radio announcers were?

Oh yea, in '56 the TV announcers were Mel Allen and Vin Scully. On radio, they had Bob Wolfe and Bob Neal of Cleveland. Those are the four announcers.

So Doak, I could talk about this forever. I have one more question. You know this is not a business, it's more of a love that you've got for this amazing product. One of these days, what do you do with all this material?

I'm not sure yet, but probably it should go to an organization or someone. If somebody wants to purchase it that would be a possibility. Just purchase the whole collection. I could deal with a split up and the different groups of films. For example, I could put in my will that the films might go to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. The ones on golf would go to New Jersey Golf Hall of Fame. Baseball would go to obviously to the Hall of Fame or major league baseball. And, NFL films, I have a lot of stuff they don't have, so that would go to NFL films. Those are some places where maybe it ought to go. In my opinion, I still believe that you know in ten years people are still going to want to buy DVDs and watch old time baseball games restored so that it looks good on whatever media there is. I could sell the business to somebody, somebody that's 35, 40 years old and wants to go another 30 or 40 years with it. That would be a possibility.

Every time I think about this Doak, this stuff all makes me smile. I know there are plenty of places to go with the material because I know that I've done about 80 of these interviews over the last twenty years. People ask me this question all the time about what am I doing with all this. The Baseball Hall of Fame is interested in all sorts of source materials because they have already asked me. They want all of

my interviews. One of these days I'll have to give your interview to them. I promised them one day I would consider doing that. So, Doak, what haven't I asked you that you want to tell me? This is a perfect interview and you know if I could (laughing) only make you a little bit enthusiastic about this! This is just a great topic. The materials that you've got are unique, and they're memorable and you love it. Are you a sports fan or do you really just love the history of the sport at this point? I guess that's my last question.

Well, that's a real good question and I would say that as time goes on I'm slipping more and more into the past and enjoy watching the old times sports as much and even over and over, I mean the same film as much as I enjoy the new games on television. Now, obviously films stopped being made in 1988. The last World Series on film was '86. There's no more film. And, I do not collect anything other than film. So my film collection stops at 1988. Now, that doesn't mean that I'm still not going to acquire from '88 on back. I certainly don't have everything.

I need to end somewhere so it might as well be here. What you've done is remarkable and it is unique and it is clear how much you love it. Thanks.

Doak Ewing
"The Best In Film"

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Arnall Golden Gregory LLP
171 17th Street NW
Suite 2100
Atlanta, Georgia 30363