

Out of Bounds

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

scorecards

As the bats crack, uniforms gather dust, and fans sit with a hot dog in one hand and a scorecard in the other, take a minute to thank Henry Chadwick and Harry M. Stevens.

Who?

Chadwick, a baseball pioneer, originated the idea of scoring a baseball game in 1861 with the intricate set of hieroglyphics that speak a mystical language to fans of the national pastime. Stevens, the embodiment of the American dream, helped make scorecards a staple at ballparks today. He saw the potential for increased revenue by producing scorecards featuring the names and numbers of the players on the field daily.

Both men are also responsible for creating the throng of scorecard enthusiasts today — like myself.

It was in second grade, playing for Red Jacket Pumps in Davenport, Iowa, when I first realized there was someone at each of our games who always knew the score. He sat in a folding chair clutching a green book and gnawing at the end of his pencil. Normally, a man like this would have freaked my 8-year-old-self out.

I ventured a look at the book after a game one day and was instantly transfixed by the strange markings and the spate of numbers. Most of all, I was intrigued by a filled-in diamond. I imme-

KEEPING YOUR OWN SCORE AT A BASEBALL GAME TAKES YOU BACK TO A SIMPLER TIME

BY MARK LUCE

diately rushed home, got a ruler and paper and tried scoring the Cubs on WGN.

It took a few questions to dad before I figured out how each player was a number and that a walk was a BB, a strikeout swinging a K, and — my favorite — the backwards K for the sucker who whiffs without lifting the bat off his shoulder.

Since then, I keep score at nearly every baseball game I attend, despite the latest owner trickery of only selling scorecards with programs and charging extra for a pencil.

My system probably isn't technically as official as the professionals, nor does it follow the explicit rules you can find at great Internet sites such as *baseballscorecard.com*. But it's mine and it works.

It works on one of my favorite scorecards, a lead-laden 15-13 thriller between the Cubs and Brewers at Wrigley Field in 1998, where I saw Sammy Sosa hit his 60th homer (HR) onto Waveland Avenue (punctuated on my card by a giant "60!"). It works on the other two

times I've seen Sosa: a first-inning HR at Shea, and a top-of-the-ninth HR at Dodger Stadium to tie the game. It works on seeing the 1B (single) in the eighth inning of childhood hero George Brett's last home game. I've got SBs (stolen bases) for Ichiro, a HR-GS (home run-grand slam) for my man Travis Fryman, a 6-4-3 Jeter-Knoblach-Martinez twin killing in the Bronx, a 6U (shortstop unassisted) for a hot-smash handled by Ripken who casually stepped on second at Camden Yards and, as a long-suffering Royals fan, plenty of scorecards with plenty of goose-eggs and backwards Ks.

My wife Jennifer finds my passion for scoring at games quaint, a throwback to my youth. She may be right on one level, but there's a bit of old-school protest in my scoring madness.

You see, I am not one to let an onslaught of outfield advertisements, dorky mascots (K.C. has the worst, believe me), overpriced dogs, flat beers, petulant players and onerous owners ruin what is a beautiful and simple way to chronicle a beautiful and simple game.

Mark Luce, a free-lance writer based in Kansas City, Mo., lives 15 minutes from the stadium and still can't believe the Royals got rid of Johnny Damon AND Jermaine Dye.

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