

Summary of Hal Chase: The Defiant Life and Turbulent Times of Baseball's Biggest Crook.

© 2006 by Dr. John D. Eigenauer

2301 Barrington No. 3

Bakersfield, CA 93309

661.398.3270

jeigenauer@yahoo.com

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Chapter 1

From his earliest baseball days in Los Gatos, California, where he played for the local high school team, Hal Chase was recognized as a genuine talent, ignored rules with nonchalant disdain, and tried to find a way to play the game that he loved for money. Despite having earned money playing semi-professional ball in the Bay Area, Chase enrolled in the West Coast's premier baseball college, Santa Clara, in the Fall of 1902. [13] This practice of playing college baseball after becoming a profession was evidently common, since rival schools negotiated later negotiated rules disallowing it, as well as ones to stop athletes from competing "for more than six years," and prohibiting players from jumping schools. [14]

Chase traveled after that year to Victoria, Canada, where he played professionally for the once proud Victoria Baseball Club, whose long string of 35 years of dominance ended when Vancouver "was selected the western terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885," thereby dramatically increasing Vancouver's population at Victoria's expense. Chase received \$75 per game for playing third

base, first base, catching, and pitching—versatility that soon earned him accolades for being Victoria’s premier player. Despite a sore arm, his flashy base running, solid hitting, and occasionally spectacular fielding got him a professional contract offer from Seattle, which he declined, and returned to Santa Clara in 1904. [18-19]

In Santa Clara, Chase pitched, hit, and fielded brilliantly, sometimes dominating games alone. After one particularly stellar showing against powerhouse St. Vincent’s, the game’s umpire—who happened to be the manager of the Los Angeles Angels, “signed Chase to his first professional contract.” [21] Chase skipped his college team, which kept winning without him, and made an early impression on the Los Angeles media with his athleticism and versatility. [23] Chase quickly took over at first base for Frank (Pop) Dillon, who, after a long contract dispute, was sold to Brooklyn. Chase hit well and fielded decently, but gained a strong reputation for speed and athleticism, leading the New York Highlanders to draft him.

Chapter 2

New York at the time was not only home to a bustling immigrant population, but to the world’s wealthiest citizens, many of whom delighted in the city’s many gambling venues, and Chase seemed headed there. But the Angels’ owner claimed that Chase had been drafted illegally and convinced Chase to stay in Los Angeles, thereby provoking numerous protests from New York’s Clark Griffith and numerous newspapermen. While PCL owners threatened to stand behind their Los Angeles counterpart and fight the American League, their enthusiasm for that fight soon waned, and Chase was relinquished to New York. Since New York’s regular first

baseman, John Ganzel, was a holdout, Chase moved immediately into his position and made an impression in his first game with "a base hit and a sacrifice bunt," a stolen base and a run scored, [34] drawing high praise from his teammates and sportswriters. It took him little time in spring training to establish "himself as the team's top attraction." [37]

Chase started well, but faded in the following weeks as his average fell to .209 and his fielding was faulty, prompting rumors that he would be traded for Ganzel, who was playing in the Minor Leagues. Griffith quelled the rumors, Chase began to hit, and when the team stumbled with Chase out of the lineup with an injured eye, it became more obvious that the team needed him. Chase came on strong, raising his average and leading the team to a long winning streak. Soon thereafter, however, he got injured again, and the team ended the season at 71-78, with players quarreling. [41]

Despite an injured wrist, Chase improved dramatically playing ball over the winter in California. Soon after the 1906 season began, he was being referred to as "the best player at his position in the major leagues." [42] He shined throughout the season, nearly leading New York to the pennant, despite showing signs of allowing his success to breed overconfidence. That confidence gained steam when he returned to California and managed his alma mater "to a 26-0-1 record in 1907." [46] This overconfidence may have led to rumors that Chase would jump to an outlaw team in California, which supposedly offered him considerably more money than New York had. In truth, Chase was holding out for more money, which led him to skip spring training.

Soon, however, Chase appeared and played well. While injuries marred his season and dissension clouded the team's hopes, Chase had a good year in which he established himself as a star in the American League.

Chapter 3

Baseball ruled at the end of the 1907 season that players who participated in the outlaw California State League would be banned from playing organized baseball. Chase supposedly quit his affiliation with the league after two games with San Jose, but in reality continued playing under an assumed name, even though box scores showed his name as "Chase." [53] The Highlanders knew about Chase's ruse, and were it not for Frank T. Farrell's intervention in Chase's behalf, he probably would have lost his career in Major League baseball. [54]

Those troubles were only the beginning for Chase and his team. They played miserably and the team was wracked with conflict, resulting in Clark Griffith's resignation in June of 1908. The team appointed shortstop Kid Elberfeld to be player manager, a move that Chase may have resented because of his own desire to manage. When the team continued to play terribly, Chase feuded with his manager and was accused in the press of have an inflated sense of self worth that was harming his play. [58-50] Chase buckled under the criticism, stating, "I am not satisfied to play under a management that sees fit to give out a story detrimental to my character and questions my integrity and honesty..." [59] Farrell countered saying that the Highlanders had nothing to do with Chase's bad press and accused him of using the criticism as an excuse to jump the team. Chase denied that he had thought of leaving the team, and then promptly picked up his last paycheck and

headed for California. While many lambasted Chase for his impetuosity, others attributed his decision to manager Kid Elberfeld's failings. [60]

Chase must have felt at home in California again because he shined on the field for the Stockton Millers. His play attracted the attention of Major League clubs, who attempted to lure him back to the east coast. Boston sent a representative to persuade him, but Chase declined; the Tigers tried to trade five players for him; and one story claims that Ban Johnson personally intervened to dissuade Chase from continuing in California. [64] Eventually, Chase gave in and returned to the Yankees, having been excused for his indiscretion with a mere \$200 fine. [64]

The team and the press made every attempt to smooth over Chase's antics. The new manager, George Stallings, issued a statement that Chase had caused no trouble and that he was "the greatest ball player I have ever seen." [63] The press made much of the fact that Chase and Elberfeld had reconciled; Chase was given a special day and presented with "a \$600 loving cup." [66] Chase's talents were evidently deemed important enough to allow him occasional tantrums, even if he went so far as to jump the team.

1909 was a fairly successful season, which success only convinced Chase more of his value. By 1910, "he was earning a reputation as a selfish prima donna who made little effort to conceal his scorn for his teammates." [71] Soon, he was complaining about his new manager (Stallings), who in turn accused him of "laying down" [73] and the battle was on for the club's control. The press reported that the dissension was caused by Chase's desire to manage, a desire that was tearing the team apart. [73] The dissension was made public, with the press focusing on the open conflict between Chase and Stallings. Stallings' public comments essentially

invited team management “to choose between him and Chase.” [75] The choice, however, had already been made, as even AL president Ban Johnson became embroiled in the conflict as he advised Stallings to move on. [76] Of course, Farrell appointed Chase manager on September 26th and issued a formal statement that Stallings’ accusations about Chase not giving his best were unfounded and the ultimate cause of his dismissal.

Chapter 4

Predictions for Chase’s success in 1911 were tempered by the skeptics who claimed that Chase was too soft, too inexperienced, or simply didn’t have the players to win. His team played good ball in spring training, but got off to a bad start and lost their manager to a bad case of bronchitis shortly into the season. But the team rebounded when he returned, put together a good win streak, and climbed into third place in June. The streak did not last long enough, however, as the team fell apart in July and August and finished in sixth place.

Despite serious criticism for his laxity and shortcomings as a manager, the press said that the Yankees would re-sign Chase as manager for the 1912 season. Within weeks, Chase gracefully tendered his resignation to a supposedly surprised owner, when in fact Chase was almost certainly asked to step down. [90] The managerial change made little difference as the Yankees had an abysmal year with Chase displaying only occasional flashes of brilliance amidst a season of batting slumps, errors, and injuries.

Chapter 5

The Yankees quickly solved their managerial problems in the off season by purchasing France Chance from the Cincinnati Reds, who had purchased Chance only weeks before after his dismissal by the Cubs. Few men in baseball had Chance's glowing reputation as a manager, as is evidenced both by his \$25,000 annual salary (for three years) [106] and the press' relentless accolades attesting that the Yankees had signed the very best manager in baseball and John McGraw's perfect antagonist. [108] Chance's presence necessitated, unfortunately, that Chase find another position. Because of his renowned athleticism, Chase switched to second base during spring training and received glowing reviews for his quickness and agility. The experiment was short lived for Chance returned Chase to first base on April 19. [100]

Shortly thereafter, Chance and Chase began to feud. One story claims that Chance complained to sportswriters that Chase was throwing games, but Chance quickly retracted that story. A second explanation for the antipathy between the two men was that Chase began making fun of Chance behind his back, taking advantage of the fact that Chance was deaf in one ear. When another player revealed what Chase was doing, Chance traded him the next day to the Chicago White Sox. [113] The trade produced a torrent of analysis ranging from anger to glee. Some thought that Chase had seen his best days, while others thought that the players that the Yankees received in return were small compensation for a star as great as Chase. Frank Chance, however, had the last word. When the two players he received for Chase faltered, he still insisted, "I want no part of Chase's

game. Zeider, in the hospital, is worth more to the New York club than ten Chases.”
[119]

Chapter 6

The Federal League opened in 1914, sparking a controversy by attempting to lure away Major League players. Chase, of course, was involved in rumors that he would leave the White Sox for the new league, but they proved unfounded because his contract demands were excessive. Instead, he returned to the White Sox for probably less money that he received in 1913. His stay lasted only part of the season, however, because the Federal League increased its efforts to lure away Major League players with ridiculously high salaries, and finally succeeded in doing so with several major stars, including Chase. On June 14th, Chase admitted to having signed with Buffalo. [129] The signing prompted Ban Johnson to threaten all players with banishment from the Major Leagues. [131] Chase, ever defiant, did not even tender a ten day resignation as Charles Comiskey thought that he might; instead, he left the White Sox after four days when his new Buffalo team was in Chicago to play on a Sunday. [132] Chase left that evening for Buffalo. Comiskey, however, did not give up. He followed Chase to Buffalo with a lawyer at his side and he “was granted a temporary injunction on behalf of the White Sox restraining Chase from playing anywhere in the state of New York until the issue was settled in court.” [135] Chase’s defense attorney argued that “If management was allowed to use the ten-day clause while the player was not, the contract was unconstitutional and therefore void, and Chase was free to sell his services to the highest bidder. If the player was allowed to invoke the ten-day clause, as was management, than

Chase had legally fulfilled his obligations to Comiskey—and was free to sell his services to the highest bidder.” [139]The judge ruled in Chase’s favor, saying that baseball “would seem to establish a species of quasi-peonage unlawfully controlling and interfering with the personal freedom of the men employed.” He stated that baseball was a monopoly, and that as such, it was a violation “of common law in that it invades the right to contract as a property right...” [140]

The ruling allowed Chase to finish the season with Buffalo and bat .347, thereby increasing his already spectacular reputation. And while his team played average baseball in 1915, Chase shined again, leading the league in homers with 17 and batting a respectable .291.

Chapter 7

The Federal league folded after the 1915 season, leaving Chase in a lurch. All players were allowed to return to the American and National Leagues, although Ban Johnson made a curious comment that Hal Chase would not be allowed back into the American League. [157]A number of Major League teams shared “Johnson’s dim view of Chase,” [157] suggesting that he was more trouble than his talent was worth. The Cincinnati Reds, however, were in desperate need of a first baseman and were willing to take a Chance on Chase’s temperament to land a star at that position. Chase entered his first game as a Red in spectacular fashion, doubling, stealing third, and stealing home. Chase played well, although he was hampered by injuries, but the team was losing. Consequently, the Reds fired manager Herzog and rumors immediately began that Chase would take over. In fact, he nearly did, until a last minute trade with New York brought Christy Mathewson to manage.

[170] While the team performed even worse under Mathewson than under Herzog, Chase hit better than at any time in his career and captured the NL batting crown.

Chapter 8

The 1918 season started badly for Chase with injuries putting him out of the lineup for more than two weeks, and errors plaguing his defense after his return. Some time in June of July, Lee Magee began making a series of inexplicably horrendous plays. He muffed easy grounders and threw balls far over other players' heads, and on one occasion ran so slowly from second in front of Edd Roush's long hit that Roush caught up to him and yelled at him to run. [192] Chase's defensive and mental lapses mirrored Magee's, and Cincinnati's manager Christy Mathewson soon suspended Chase for "indifferent playing." [193] That led Sporting News sportswriter William Phelon to interview Cincinnati players and discover that they recognized Chase's actions for what they were and said that they were "glad that he is out of the lineup." [194] Jack Ryder reported on August 10th that Mathewson claimed that Chase would never play again so long as he was manager [194] and went so far as to say that the Reds would have finished second were it not for Chase.

Mathewson involved the team's owner, who assimilated evidence against Chase and proclaimed that said evidence was completely damning, eliminating any chance that Chase had to ever play again. But Herrmann would not say exactly what Chase had done; so Chase himself went on the offensive, declaring publicly that he had been accused of betting on baseball games, throwing games, and offering money to the opposition to lose games intentionally. [196] "On August 21

Herrmann finally turned over to the National League the evidence that he and Mathewson had accumulated, which supposedly included affidavits from six policemen showing that Chase had bet against the Reds as often as he bet on them." [198]

Despite what was purported to be convincing evidence, the press seemed to take Chase's side by stating that the prosecution lacked firm evidence, and further chastised the National League for not having handled the affair in private. The hearing went ahead despite the press' insistence, with three players testifying that Chase had offered them money to throw games. In his turn, Chase simply denied the charges and claimed that they were the result of prejudice and factionalism. He calm, sincere denials made the case into one player's word against others'. Lacking clear evidence that Chase had actually bet on the Reds' opposition, he was exonerated. Oddly, the National League President complained after the trial that Cincinnati failed to provide him with any of the promised evidence.

Chapter 9

Just before the 1919 season started, the Reds traded Chase to the New York Giants for two mediocre ballplayers, thereby demonstrating that wanted rid of him at any cost. The New York press smoothed the way with exculpatory remarks that assured fans that Chase would play his best for McGraw. When things seemed ready for Chase's arrival, McGraw inexplicably hired Mathewson as pitching coach and quickly quelled any worries that conflict would exist between Chase and Mathewson by simply exerting his authority: "While I remain at manager, there can be no conflict between them." [215] Putting the conflict aside, Chase appeared in

spring training to be at the top of his game. Despite his outstanding spring performance, Chase got off to a bad start, and then surged during the summer as the Giants and Reds battled for first place. As the summer wore on, however, Chase's game slipped badly. He committed repeated errors and slipped into a prolonged slump in August, resulting in a six game benching that was excused by a bad wrist. [221] And then, on September 11th, McGraw suspended third baseman Heine Zimmerman for the season. While the team covered up the real reason, it appears that Zimmerman offered pitcher Fred Toney \$300 to throw a game, causing Toney to tell McGraw that one of them would have to go. [223] When McGraw met with the club's owner, Zimmerman confessed and implicated Chase as well, even though McGraw took no formal action against Chase.

The World Series distracted the baseball world from focusing on Chase and Zimmerman. But by spring training, rumors of Zimmerman's dishonesty were back, fueled by McGraw's refusal to trade, reinstate, or discuss Zimmerman. The Cubs followed suit by releasing Lee Magee and refusing to state reasons amidst rumors that he had thrown games. But Lee did not go quietly, saying that if he were barred from baseball, he would tell everything he knew about "tricks turned ever since 1906." [227] The NL office responded by disclaiming any relationship with Magee and inviting him to incriminate himself since no formal charges had been made against him. Magee responded by suing the Giants, [229] but the suit backfired because witnesses repeatedly incriminated Magee with exact details of his efforts to throw games.

Soon thereafter, a number of minor league players were banned for throwing games, and Chase was banned from PCL and Mission League parks, and soon

thereafter from the Northern San Joaquin Valley League. These activities opened a floodgate of suspicion. Bill Veeck learned that gamblers were favoring the Phillies in a meaningless game in Chicago, and he ordered pitcher Claude Hendrix replaced with Pete Alexander. Veeck followed up by hiring a detective agency "to investigate the fix rumors." [237] Despite his best efforts to keep the investigation secret, news leaked out and the press leapt on the stories with vicious alacrity. Writers listed all the suspected cases and places and blamed everyone from club owners to the NL president for failing to take action sooner. Investigating the Cubs-Phillies game mentioned above, an Illinois grand jury began called pitcher Rube Benton, who incriminated Chase, Zimmerman, and Buck Herzog. Benton's accusations did not hold up entirely, but with the following revelation that the 1919 World Series was fixed, the sports world became fixated on gambling in baseball. With a thousand rumors swirling and conflicting reports turning up everywhere, "it was impossible to tell which of the conflicting versions... was correct... but one thing was clear... Hal Chase's name had once again been linked to a scandal." [242]

In the midst of being banned from West Coast baseball, ushered out of the Major Leagues, and incriminated in court multiple times, Hal Chase lost his marriage. During the divorce proceedings, Chase's wife told of Chase's sordid behavior and of his confessions of having thrown games. A few months later, he was arrested in California to be extradited to Illinois in the Black Sox trial. The extradition suddenly fell through, however, and Chase was freed and his bond returned. Chase escaped baseball's punishment yet again.

Chapter 10

Chase moved to Arizona in his early 40s after being banned from playing ball in California. There he became manager of the Nogales Internationals, a local baseball team that played in both Arizona and Mexico. His appointment caused a stir and AL president Ban Johnson tried to get the Mexican government to ban Chase from playing, to no avail. The *Arizona Republic* followed suit in its outcry against Chase, repeatedly calling for other Arizona teams to prohibit games with Chase involved. Its outrage did little to dampen Arizona's enthusiasm for Chase as he bounced from town to town playing ball and even being elected to manage. There was even a proposal that he would head a Mexican National Baseball League, although that proposal did not come to fruition. With that plan failed, Chase turned his interests to a small venue—Douglas, Arizona.

Chase managed the team in Douglas and persuaded Buck Weaver and Chick Gandil to play for the team. He also recruited former Major League pitcher Limb McKenry. [255] The signings turned the team around and they finished in first place tie. The next season held more hope when Buck Weaver returned after the off season with five ballplayers, [256] but the team played badly and the new manager, Weaver, resigned after Chase confessed to having thrown a game.

Chase suffered a severe injury in a car accident and sat out nearly all of the 1926 season; when he returned, he was unable to run. Chase bounced around between Arizona and California in the late 20s and early 30s, playing ball occasionally and holding a variety of jobs. An occasional sportswriter stumbled upon Chase and wrote a piece about the fallen hero. As Chase aged and became sick, these interviews became less frequent and more pathetic, sounding at times

like half-hearted confessions and at others like sorry remembrances of the way things might have been. Chase died in 1947.