

JERRY ZOLENSKY/staff photographer

Fred Smith of Southfield had the best seat in the house for taking in all of the field at Tiger Stadium last week. There was only one problem for the avid baseball fan, no one was playing.

By Shirlee Rose Iden
staff writer

Big league baseball's just beginning to bloom like the dandelions we'll see next month, but for stalwart "society" members, baseball is never out of season.

Over pizza and beverages, members of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), the "Society" put their heads together every once in a while to find out what's going on in the world of baseball, past, present, and future.

Joe Hawser, 89, puffs on his cigar at a midnight meeting in Minneapolis, and holds folks spellbound telling how Ty Cobb, a tough Tiger once, tampered with his batting stance in 1928.

A born Detroit native who has no favorites but "loves 'em all," Jerry Bucholtz can conjure up visions of the Tigers back to 1910. "I used to come to the ball park and help turn the stiles. My pay was entree to the game," Bucholtz recalled.

"I'd get off school at 1 p.m. and the games all started at 3:30 so I'd take the streetcar and get down there every time I could."

Bucholtz played in sandlot baseball, but like other "SABR rattlers," he counts himself as "strictly a baseball fan," and loves the history, the mystery, and the trivia of it all.

FRED SMITH, Southfield's baseball trivia writer and a former employee of the Detroit Baseball Club, remembers the same kind of sandlot or amateur baseball the Bucholtz does. "It was something. In those days you could go to Northwestern Field to see a game and find there wasn't an empty seat in the place."

Smith, who can tell you without swallowing what old-time Tiger executed an unassisted triple play (Johnny Neun, 1947) or how many Tigers got over 3,000 hits in their careers (12 did with Ty Cobb getting 4,191 and Al Kaline hitting 3,097) has a special interest in the Detroit Chapter of SABR.

"It was formed 17 years ago and it's named after me," said Smith. (This time he had to swallow.)

"SABR," he said, has about 50 members in the metro

Social circle thrives on crack of the bat

area, but nearly 10,000 nationally." The pre-1989 pre-season opener meeting took place at Tiger Hall, 1401 Michigan on the last day of March and Smith was in his element. Tell a SABR member like Smith, you became a Tiger fan-atic in 1940 and he'll challenge with: "Who was on second?" (Barney McCoskey).

Smith has been a Tiger fan virtually all his life. A Detroit native, he says the first game he ever attended was on May 10, 1927.

"A guy named Lindberg loaded a plane in Paris and they came around the park with megaphones and announced it," he explained. "They didn't have a public address system then."

FOR MORE THAN two decades, Smith earned a living selling insurance for AAA, 12 years of them in Lathrup Village. When he quit, it was to go to work for the Tigers as a group ticket salesman.

Poor eyesight had precluded a professional baseball career for Smith, so he became, instead, a professional booster.

His first baseball book was written with Ernie Harwell, Tiger commentator, and titled "Tiger Trivia: a treasury of Tiger Lore."

His latest publication is "Tiger Tales and Trivia."

Within its pages are answers to questions like: Who are the only Tigers to be named the MVP (most valuable player) more than once? (Hank Greenberg in 1935 and 1940; Hal Newhouser in 1944 and 1945) and who was the last 30 game winning pitcher before Denny McLain? (Lefty Grove in 1931 and Dixie Dean in 1934).

Bob Ruland of Southfield has been a ball fan since 1937 when he adopted his home town New York Giants as his favorites. "When I moved to Michigan in 1965, I was already a die in the wool fan who had played hooky from school to watch the game as a kid. I took a look at the Tigers and it was love at first sight."

Ruland sees more baseball in Lakeland than at Tiger Stadium in recent years and feels he's in his element with SABR members. They always appreciate the story of how Ernie Harwell calls Ruland's wife, Marge, "the bravest lady" because she grew up in Brooklyn as a Giant fan.

GARY DUNSTON started college in 1959, yet didn't go to his first baseball card show until 1970. The young man from Ottumwa, Mich. became a SABR member when his brother gave him his membership last year for Christmas.

"There's something about the game, the way it has stayed the same, the stats, and how you can compare one generation to another that makes baseball appealing. I can remember chasing Rocky Colavito for an autograph (he got it)," Dunston said.

From the outfield, another SABR, and another point of view comes from Jim Northrop, manufacturer's rep of Waterford, an 10 year member of Tiger teams. "I'm still in baseball," he said, "will do color for the Tiger games on PASS this season."

Northrop put off getting his degree to play professional baseball, but when he hung up his glove, he earned an undergraduate degree, satisfying, but not the medical degree that had first been his goal.

"These people (SABR) are fanatics about the history and trivia of the game," said Northrop. "I love being with them."

A recent first-time grandfather, Northrop said though some see continuity and similarity in the game and players, he can't help but recall that his salary in his final years was in the \$10-25,000 range. "If I were playing today, I'd be making about \$17 million but not really earning it in my opinion."

"The 1940 Tigers earned as a total \$980,000," he said. "Today's managers make big money, but not coaches, it's a shame."

Ask any SABR member and they'll tell you when the Detroit Tigers joined the National League back in 1881, team members were paid from \$1,100 to \$1,400 a year. So, what's it all about, SABR? It's about the dreamy look in a guy's eyes when he goes back in memory to recall a batting average, an earned run average, or a home run total. It's about hot dogs, pizza (?), peanuts, ice cream and icy cokes.

And it's about the study of baseball as an institution, establishing an historical account of the game, the sharing of research information, and the stimulation of interest in baseball and keeping its history secure cooperatively.

For SABRE members, love of baseball keeps the dream alive for these wide-eyed dreamers, part hero worshipping, and part sports historians whose fountain of youth is found on a baseball diamond.

When you're hot . . .

Continued from Page 1

said. "If I had to wear a suit for a swim party, I'd choose a one-piece version with a low cut back and high cut sides to make my legs look longer."

"To tell the truth, I don't wear a swimsuit that much anymore because I don't lie out in the sun like I used to."

Fashion model Constantina also favors a black one-piece suit by Norma Kamali that's high cut at the thighs, accented with bows on each side, and "very low in the front."

"I JUST wear it for looks because I've never sunbathed in my life," she added.

Pamela Swift, fashion designer and partner in Strictly Swift Fashion Manufacturing, wears a bikini, but is opposed to swimsuits.

"I think swimming and sunbathing in the nude makes more sense," she said. "But, of course, you can't do that publicly, so in that case, my favorite is a two-piece white bikini that is very skintight."

She also likes fringe and glitter, adding that the suit "should look good" even though it doesn't have to be practical. "It shouldn't get wet," she said.

Her partner, Anne Strickstein, likes a two-piece black suit by Gottex.

"The material is great and the style is fabulous," she said. "I particularly like a strapless top. Black with gold or silver trim is what I really like."

Their favorite suits may not necessarily be what the designers have in mind this season, although, generally speaking, the basic swimsuit

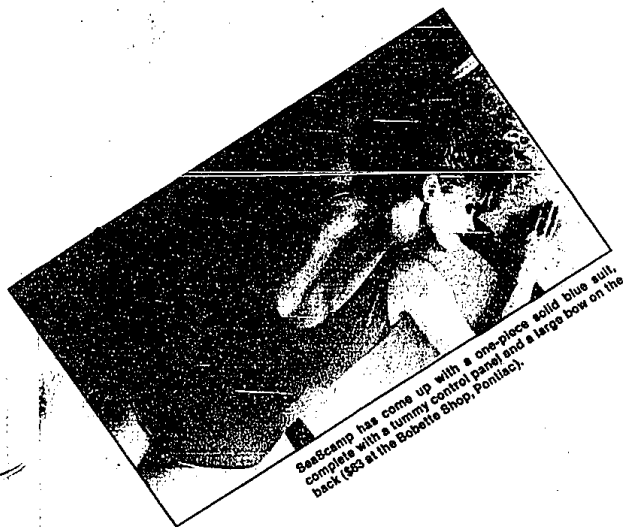
styles never really go out of style.

"One-piece suits are still very much in," said Roslyn Rock, owner of Roslyn's Intimate Apparel in Southfield. "The big story seems to be brights — colors like yellow and hot pink, even chartreuse."

Rock said her swimsuit sales are already double that of last year with many of her customers preferring the lines by Oscar de la Renta, Bill Blass and Gottex.



This one-piece suit by Gottex is a rainbow of colors on the diagonal. It has a convertible top and sheer bra (\$72 from the Bobette Shop, Pontiac).



SasComp has come up with a one-piece solid blue suit, complete with a tummy control panel and a large bow on the back (\$65 at the Bobette Shop, Pontiac).