

## **America's Presstime: How Images Of Baseball Reporters Have Shaped the Perception of Our National Sport and The Profession Of Journalism**

By Chad Sabadie

“You call ourselves writers, and all we do is watch ballgames, argue about everything and just get drunk a lot. You call that writing?” asks sportswriter Al Stump of his colleagues in the movie *Cobb*.<sup>1</sup>

What is a baseball sportswriter? Is it someone who merely reports on daily games and activities? Or is it someone who plays a larger role in the world of the players and fans with whom he associates? What is the image that comes to mind when one mentions a baseball reporter?

The image of a baseball reporter is varied at best. Some see him or her as just another hard worker out to do his or her job. Others see an intrusive antagonist who will do anything to break a story. Over the years, the public has seen many images of baseball writers, and not while attending games at the ballpark. They're seen in America's other favorite pastime, the movies.

It's on the big screen that the different personalities and traits are truly exposed. Some images are constant from film to film, while others may just flash up once in a while. In baseball movies specifically, the public comes across a wide spectrum of personas that reveal what it takes to make a baseball writer. Many of the images are projections of real life transformed to film. There are writers who believe that their word is final, while others are friends who aid ballplayers throughout their careers. The images are many and can be dissected into groups, beginning with a hobby of many baseball writers, drinking.

## JUST ANOTHER DRUNK

Alcohol plays a role in many sports movies, usually blamed for the downward spiral of a player, but some films also capture baseball sportswriters in the act of drinking, in good times, and in bad.

In the opening and closing scenes of *Cobb*, a group of baseball sportswriters, who are real life writers, gather at a bar, “The Sportsman’s Lounge”, suggesting a regular meeting place. This is where they have their discussions, their arguments, and it fits them well. What better place to argue over sports than in a sports bar?

Robert Wuhl plays Al Stump, the primary sportswriter who former baseball legend Ty Cobb selects to write his biography. Stump drinks throughout the movie. It appears mild at first, but eventually Stump begins to take on the traits of the flawed, abusive Ty Cobb and begins to drink heavily, going so far as to shoot a loaded gun at someone when thoroughly intoxicated.

He also hits on a prostitute in Reno after a night of drinking, revealing a sense of loneliness and despair within the reporter, who is working through a failing marriage.

*Eight Men Out* portrays the fact-based story of the 1919 Black Sox World Series scandal and how two baseball reporters worked together to uncover it. The various sportswriters seem to have a brotherhood, one in which drinking plays a common role. In one scene, the writers gathered together throw their glasses into a fireplace.

“Sportswriters of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your bar provisions,” states baseball writer Ring Lardner to his colleagues in the press box before meeting with the team owner.<sup>2</sup>

In *Woman of the Year*, a fictional romance story between a baseball writer and an international correspondent, the first place the audience sees New York sports columnist Sam Craig, played by Spencer Tracy, in is a bar, ordering a Scotch and water.

Many baseball writers are associated with drinking, yet it usually doesn't cause major downfalls. It is just a stigma that the audience will place upon them.

### **ANTAGONISTIC AND INTRUSIVE**

Worse than being a drunk, some films portray the baseball journalist as nothing more than an antagonist. The writer serves as the villain to the heroic ball player. And in some cases, the player or manager feels that the writer is actually out to get them.

*61\** portrays a fact-based story of New York Yankee star outfielders Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle's pursuit of Babe Ruth's home run record during the 1961 season. One of the central journalists, Artie Green, played by Peter Jacobson, continuously harasses Roger Maris, played by Barry Pepper, despite his solid play and behavior on and off the field. From the beginning of the film, when Maris has to field tough questions, to the end when the journalist continues to twist Maris' words around, there is a sense that the baseball writer has created a negative image of Maris for the fans.

Maris believes that no matter what he does, he will be presented in a negative light by Green and others, and he is right to an extent. They behave with a pack mentality, often presenting him as a villain. The other leading journalist, Milt Kahn, played by Richard Masur, goes so far as to refer to them as a bunch of jackals.

Green twists Maris' words around just to get a story. Green reports that Maris thinks poorly of New York and its fan base. In reality, Maris only said that he didn't think that he was a New York kind of guy.

"I don't get it. I strike out, and you say that I'm swinging for the fences. I bunt, and you say that I'm afraid to hit," Maris says to Green during a practice.<sup>3</sup>

In Green's defense, Maris was being compared to the affable Mickey Mantle, who is shown joking with reporters, which makes him more liked and respected. Maris, on the other hand, is depicted as surly and unpleasant.

Green notes that there are many papers in the city and everybody can't write the same thing.<sup>4</sup> This is most certainly true. Differences of opinion in sports journalism help fuel the passion for the game.

In the movies and in real life, some sports reporters are seen as too subjective. *L.A. Times* sports columnist J.A. Adande says that people often believe that the baseball journalist too often wants to be the news and not report it.

"I'm constantly hearing -- whether it be directly from fans who stop me in the stadiums or write me e-mails -- that I'm too hard," says Adande. "Many believe that I'm just trying to create controversy when there is none. People want to believe everything is great with their team. It's as if they don't want to hear the truth."<sup>5</sup>

In *It Happened in Flatbush*, a partly factual story of how the Brooklyn Dodger baseball club regained prominence, the sports columnist Danny Mitchell, played by Robert Armstrong, has a strong antagonistic reputation. One sees how former Brooklyn ballplayer Frank Maguire, played by Lloyd Nolan, was basically run out of town when Mitchell chastises him for committing a costly error in an important game. When the

owner of the team seeks out Maguire to become the new manager of her club, she offers him small consolation.

“With Danny Mitchell and his column, I had to let you go,” says owner 'Mac' McAvoy to Maguire.<sup>6</sup>

Mitchell is seen as intrusive, going so far as to pay a visit to Maguire's home to grill him. Maguire is sure that Mitchell will not change his negative approach to his new club and wants to make Mitchell and “those monkeys eat their words.”<sup>7</sup>

“There's no use trying to tell a smart guy like this anything. That bird brain of his is all made up,” says Maguire to bat boy Squint in regards to Mitchell.<sup>8</sup>

After one too many of Mitchell's antagonistic columns, Maguire slugs the reporter. Mitchell takes revenge the only way he knows how, by writing more negative columns about the Dodgers.

Another reporter that gets slugged is Ranch Wilder in the remake of the fictional tale *Angels in the Outfield*. Ranch, played by Jay O. Sanders, continually harasses the losing Angels ball club and manager George Knox, played by Danny Glover. Knox hits Wilder during a heated interview. Wilder is arrogant and impatient and eventually gets fired.

*The Natural* portrays the fictional story of Roy Hobbs, an unbelievable slugger with a hidden past. Robert Duvall plays baseball writer Max Mercy who sets the agenda and serves as the antagonist to the hero Hobbs, played by Robert Redford. Throughout the movie, the audience sees Mercy determine rules for a contest, accuse Hobbs of using a loaded bat, and even goes so far as using blackmail to get an exclusive story. Mercy feels no guilt for what he does.

“They come and they go, Hobbs. They come and they go. I’m going to be around a lot longer than you or anyone else around here. I’m here to protect this game. I do it by making or breaking the likes of you,” Mercy says to Hobbs before the climatic game.<sup>9</sup>

And when Hobbs asks Mercy if he’s ever played the game, Mercy responds, “No, never have, but I make it a little more fun to watch. You see, after today whether you’re a goat or a hero, you’re going to make me a great story.”<sup>10</sup>

In *Flashing Spikes*, another fictional story, baseball columnist Rex Short wants to ban ballplayer Bill Riley because he believes Riley took a bribe in the first game of the World Series. Short is portrayed as intrusive throughout the movie, making accusations of Riley based on false evidence. Short also makes threats to seem more powerful.

“Now don’t brush off the press son. First rule of the game,” Short says antagonistically to Riley at an initial meeting during spring training.<sup>11</sup>

*Hustle* and *The Slugger’s Wife* are also examples of movies where the sports reporters rove in packs. The reporters pester the players with intrusive questions, and will not stop until they are satisfied.

*It Happens Every Spring* presents the fictional account of a college professor who enters the big leagues as a pitcher after developing a special serum which he puts on the ball, making batters miss all of his pitches. Another pack of reporters pry into King Kelly, the new and mysterious star pitcher of the St. Louis Cardinals. Kelly’s teammate offers him some advice when dealing with the media.

“Kelly, you gotta talk to these guys. Square yourself, they can ruin you,” says Monk Lanigan to Kelly after he shies away from reporters.

*Talent for the Game* and the latter remake of *Rookie of the Year* also portray a media circus. Dozens of reporters are present and all aimed with interrogating questions.

Many movies follow this format of the baseball writer as an outsider; something that Adande says can be misleading.

“The problem with most movies is that the sportswriters are so one-dimensional,” says Adande, “We only see them as they relate to the players, and always from the players' perspectives. We don't see the challenges the sportswriters face, or the personal issues they might carry to their jobs with them. So the public only sees them as intrusive, agenda-driven bad guys.”<sup>12</sup>

### **ARROGANT OR CONFIDENT?**

A trademark character trait in almost all of these movies is that the baseball writer is overly confident in his status and ability. Sportswriters in films believe their written words are what are most important to the world.

In the opening scene of *Cobb*, as Stump walks into the Sportsman's Lounge to meet his colleagues, the bartender greets him.

Bartender: “Congrats, Al. Four pieces in national magazines this month.”

Stump: “Five.”

Bartender: “Ah, well, you're the man, Stumpy.”<sup>13</sup>

Later when Stump first meets Cobb, the former ballplayer refers to the journalist as a moderate success. Stump is quick to answer, “Sir, I am the highest paid sportswriter in America, not merely a moderate success.”<sup>14</sup>

And when they argue over how Cobb's biography is being written, Stump demands that he is entitled to his opinion, to which Cobb replies, "Who gives a damn about Al Stump?"<sup>15</sup>

In *The Natural*, Max Mercy learns early in the film about the talent level of Roy Hobbs and sees a way to cash in quickly.

"I can do wonders for that boy, you know. If you let me," Mercy says.<sup>16</sup>

Both Stump and Mercy are sports journalists who, while talented, see themselves as part of the story.

"I think sportswriters suffer from the same image problem as the media in general," Adande says. "There is a credibility problem, a belief that writers want to BE the story rather than just write it. Unfortunately, one of the most pervasive images of the sportswriter was the slovenly Oscar Madison, as portrayed in *The Odd Couple* movie and later the TV series. Sportswriters sure aren't considered leading-man material. Consider this: Paul Newman and Denzel Washington have played news reporters, but not sportswriters."<sup>17</sup>

## **PASSIONATE AND EXCITING**

Some films present the lifestyle of baseball writers as filled with excitement, danger and spontaneity. When Stump receives the phone call to write Cobb's biography, he takes great pride in the fact that he was chosen.

"Cobb wants to see me," Stump rejoices.<sup>18</sup>



He leaves instantly, driving through dangerous, snowy mountains to reach Cobb's home. Even after he encounters gunshots from an unpredictable Cobb while approaching the bedroom, Stump moves on to meet the legendary player.

In *Eight Men Out*, the two central sportswriters, Ring Lardner and Hugh Fullerton play roles similar to those of Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman's Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in *All the President's Men*. Whereas Woodward and Bernstein uncover a conspiracy that led to the resignation of a President, the reporters in *Eight Men Out* uncover scandal among the highest level of baseball players, the Chicago White Sox, whom they accuse of throwing the 1919 World Series.

From the beginning of the series, Lardner and Fullerton have a hunch that something's up. They decide to investigate by keeping separate scorecards and marking suspicious plays and players. Even though they know the public will be heartbroken if they report their findings, they continue to seek out the truth.

There is also a sense of sarcastic, comic relief present between the two writers. After the accused players go on trial, Lardner and Fullerton agree that the court's decision of not guilty was "A bigger fix than the series."<sup>19</sup> When they see one of the players purposely running slow during one of the series games, Fullerton responds, "I could have beaten that out with my shoes tied together."<sup>20</sup>

In the original *Rookie of the Year*, John Wayne plays Mike Cronin, an elder sportswriter looking for a big break. When he thinks that he's uncovered a huge story through investigative work, he is full of emotion. He has found out that one of the new Yankee star ball players Lynn Goodhue is the son of a former ball player who was involved in a big baseball scandal. Later Lynn's girlfriend holds Cronin at gunpoint

pleading with him not to print the story and affect Lynn's life. Cronin yields in another happy ending.

## RELATIONSHIPS

In sports journalism, it's all about relationships. The same holds true in sports movies. The most entertaining and comical relationship between a writer and player is served up in *Cobb*.

Stump: "We need each other."

Cobb: "Shut up Stump. You know I'm your meal ticket."<sup>21</sup>

Stump wants Cobb to believe that they must help each other to get the work done, while Cobb sees the journalist as someone who is trying to cash in on him. When they begin to work on the biography, Cobb is serving as more of a dictator. "You're not treating me like a writer. You're treating me like a stenographer," Stump replies.<sup>22</sup> The writer wants to uncover the true story of Cobb's life for himself, not by merely taking down what the player has to say.

Later Stump and Cobb reach a sort of mutual agreement, but the relationship is very abusive at times. Cobb reveals private aspects of Stump's personal life, including an affair. Cobb throws it in his face but tells him that it will be their little secret. They continue to work together, but Stump secretly hopes that his role as Cobb's biographer will soon come to an end.

"Somewhere along the way, I'd gone from biographer to stenographer to chauffeur to nurse. I was the only thing keeping the bastard alive, and I'd keep hoping he'd die," Stump thinks to himself while driving Cobb across the country.<sup>23</sup>

Stump shows some compassion for Cobb and earns his friendship in the end. When Cobb is sick and throwing tantrums in the hospital, it's Stump who pays him a cordial visit.

*The Pride of St. Louis*, the story of baseball legend Dizzy Dean and his success with the St. Louis Cardinals, also portrays reporters that develop trusting relationships with players. One such reporter is faced with a problem when former star pitcher Dizzy Dean struggles in life after injuring his pitching arm. The reporter doesn't want to print that Dean is all washed up because Dean has always been upfront with the reporters.

"You just tell me what to print Diz, and you being the guy you are, I'll do whatever you say," the reporter tells Dean.<sup>24</sup>

Even though trust can be present between the reporters and the players, the truth can be far away.

In *Eight Men Out*, reporter Ring Lardner asks pitcher Eddie Cicotte, who is secretly throwing his games, if the series is on the level. Eddie tells him that it is. Once the truth is shed, the reporter confronts Eddie.

"You lied to me Eddie."<sup>25</sup>

In this instance the player deceived the writer, something the baseball writer is often fond of doing.

## **DECEIVING**

Ethics is always a hot topic in journalism, and so it also is in sports movies. In *Cobb*, the audience sees Al Stump work on an approved biography of Ty Cobb that only

discusses the fundamentals of baseball. The audience then sees him work in secret on a manuscript that details all of Cobb's faults and failures.

To keep the truth from Cobb, Stump shows him only the typed work on baseball, while secretly keeping legal pads and stationary in his suitcase detailing everything that Cobb does not want revealed.

Stump purposely misleads Cobb to gain his trust and be able to secure more information about the man behind the game; however, Stump does have a bit of a conscience.

"I was drinking like a fish, smoking too much and by writing two versions, I was becoming something Cobb was not, I was becoming a liar," Stump thinks to himself.<sup>26</sup>

In a later scene, the pair visit Cobb's daughter who will have nothing to do with her abusive father. After she rejects their visit, Stump deceives Cobb again, but this time to protect him from the fact that his daughter doesn't want to see him. Cobb figures that Stump is lying and confronts him.

"Of course I'm lying. That's what I'm paid to do," Stump says to Cobb.<sup>27</sup>

Stump believes that the real Ty Cobb is better represented in his hidden biography, which details all of Cobb's failures along with the success. Cobb counters, "Don't give me the Sob Sister routine, Stump."<sup>28</sup>

In the end, Stump publishes the first version, admitting that he's lied to himself and the public. Stump's rationale is that he was writing about greatness, and Cobb needed to be a hero.

Reporter Artie Green in *61\** is also seen as deceptive, setting up Maris for a sound bite that he can twist around in his column to portray the player in a negative light.

## A GOOD FRIEND

Not all sportswriters are seen as deceivers. A select few actually aid the players they cover while becoming close friends in the process.

In *Pride of the Yankees*, Evening Standard reporter Sam Blake, played by Walter Brennan, becomes a dependable friend of star baseball player Lou Gehrig, played by Gary Cooper. They meet while Gehrig is playing college ball at Columbia University. Blake oversees Gehrig's contract signing and later entry into the big leagues. Blake is always there for Gehrig from the first game of his career to his final farewell speech. *Pride of the Yankees* shows a baseball reporter that believes in a player no matter the circumstance.

"Let me tell you about heroes Hank. I've covered a lot of 'em, and I'm saying Gehrig is the best of them," Blake says to fellow baseball writer Hank Hanneman.<sup>29</sup>

Blake is a true friend to Gehrig in good times and in bad. When Gehrig's health is in question, it's Blake who accompanies him to a clinic and consoles him when they learn that Gehrig is dying.

In *The Babe Ruth Story*, baseball writer Phil Conrad, played by Sam Levine, befriends Babe Ruth and also follows him throughout his career.

"I saw that guy when he broke in, I saw it when he bowed out. I've seen him come, and I've seen him go," Phil says to Ruth's wife Claire.

Phil constantly helps the Babe, even through the troubling times when Ruth is fired by the Boston Braves and when Ruth is later on his deathbed.

Unfortunately, the image of the baseball writer as the “Good Guy Friend” is not common. Another image that makes a rare appearance is that of being a romantic.

### **THE LOST ROMANTIC AND FEMALE POWER**

The movies rarely portray a baseball writer as a romantic leading man or woman. A rare portrayal can be found in *Woman of the Year*. Sam Craig, played by Spencer Tracy, is a charming, upfront individual who flirts with and eventually marries foreign correspondent Tess Harding, played by Katherine Hepburn. Craig struggles to keep pace with the high-end leading lady, and barely succeeds in a comical way. They fight throughout the movie, but in the end, they are together, and the sparks fly.

In *Pride of the Yankees*, one sees baseball writer Sam Blake play matchmaker, introducing Lou Gehrig to future wife Ellie Twitchell. Gehrig continues to ask Blake for advice on women, and Blake even attends Gehrig’s marriage ceremony.

Phil Conrad in *The Babe Ruth Story* also assists with love advice going so far as to write a love letter for Babe to give to Claire.

Other movies take the leading female role to a new level.

In the original *Angels in the Outfield*, the leading baseball writer is far from ordinary. Janet Leigh plays Jennifer Paige, a household hints columnist turned sportswriter assigned to cover the struggling Pittsburgh Pirates. Page doesn’t know much about baseball, but she courageously confronts Pirates manager Guffy McGovern about his losing team.

“Dogs have fleas. Managers have sportswriters,” McGovern says to Paige after she comments on his negative characteristics.<sup>30</sup>

Paige and McGovern eventually become friends throughout a winning season, thanks in part to the aid of angels. It is interesting though that her character initially plays the traditional role of a male sportswriter only to fall back into predominately female acts such as cooking and cleaning.

In *Damn Yankees*, the leading sportswriter is also a woman. Gloria Thorpe, played by Rae Allen, is seen as one of the boys, always hanging around at practices in addition to the games. The manager states that she can't be trusted because she is always looking for a story. Since the movie is a musical, Gloria also takes part in the singing and dancing, something not common for sportswriters.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Overall, baseball writers in movies range in terms of character images. A few provide a perception of a good friend, while many others show antagonistic enemies. The majority of baseball writers are overly-confident and intrusive. The strongest images seen are of these arrogant individuals who will do anything to get a story. They are flawed people who, while trying to do their jobs, deceive and use others while bringing their character into question.

So what is a baseball writer in the movies? The majority of films show that a baseball writer is a troubled character. He or she wants to protect and grow the game of baseball, but many lose all sense of morals. They get the story out to their audiences, but usually by unethical means and by making sacrifices such as not being liked or having a family. They are a fixture though, essential to the formation of baseball, and as Max Mercy says in *The Natural*, they make the game a little more fun to watch.<sup>31</sup>

## Filmography

The following movies were selected for relevance and importance.

*61\**, 2001 (running time est. at 129 min), color, HBO Films. Produced by Billy Crystal and Ross Greenburg. Directed by Billy Crystal. Story by Hank Steinberg.

Summary: “Summer, 1961: Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle are on pace to break the most hallowed record in U.S. sports, Babe Ruth's single-season 60 home runs. It's a big story, and the intense, plain-spoken Maris is the bad guy: sports writers bait him and minimize his talent, fans cheer Mantle, the league's golden boy, and baseball's commissioner announces that Ruth's record stands unless it's broken within 154 games. Any record set after 154 games of the new 162-game schedule will have an asterisk. The film follows the boys of summer, on and off the field: their friendship, the stresses on Maris, his frustration with the negative attention, and his desire to play well, win, and go home.” (Summary taken from the Internet Movie Database).

Reporters Artie Green and Milt Kahn cover the home run chase and the M&M boys in different styles.

Characters: Roger Maris (Barry Pepper), Mickey Mantle (Thomas Jane), Reporter Artie Green (Peter Jacobson), Reporter Milt Kahn (Richard Masur)

*Angels in the Outfield*, 1951 (running time est. at 99 min), black and white, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Produced and directed by Clarence Brown. Story by Richard Conlin. Screenplay by Dorothy Kingsley and George Wells.

Summary: “A young woman reporter blames the Pittsburgh Pirates' losing streak on the obscenely abusive manager. While she attempts to learn more about him for her column, he begins hearing the voice of an angel promising him help for the team if he will mend his ways. As he does so, an orphan girl who is a Pirates fan and has been praying for the team begins noticing angels on the ball field. Sure enough, the Pirates start winning, and McGovern tries to turn his life around. But can he keep his temper long enough for the Pirates to win the NL pennant?” (Summary from IMD)

Characters: Pittsburgh Manager Aloysius X. 'Guffy' McGovern (Paul Douglas), Reporter Jennifer Paige (Janet Leigh)

*Angels in the Outfield*, 1994 (running time est. at 102 min), color, Walt Disney Pictures. Produced by Gary Stutman. Directed by William Dear. Screenplay by Dorothy Kingsley, George Wells and Holly Goldberg Sloan.

Summary: “The California Angels are currently the worst team in their division. It seems that the players have a little trouble with their teamwork. Manager George Knox would like nothing better than to dump all of them, which the owner says is impossible. Roger is a boy whose mother died and is currently living in a foster home. His father feels that it would probably be in Roger's best interest if he becomes a ward of the state.



But Roger would rather that he and his father get back together, and when he asks his father if that is possible; his father's reply is "when the Angels win the pennant". Roger then prays and asks if they could help the team. When Roger goes to a game, he sees some Angels come down from the sky and they help the players make some astounding catches and hits. When Roger tells Mr. Knox about it, Mr. Knox decides to keep him at every game, and it seems that Mr. Knox's faith is put to the test cause it seems that the angel are going to help if uses his worst players, but it seems to be working." (Summary from IMD)

Reporter Ranch Wilder is negative toward the Angels and Manager George Knox.  
 Characters: Angel Manager George Knox (Danny Glover), Reporter Ranch Wilder (Jay O. Sanders)

*Cobb*, 1994 (running time est. at 128 min), color/black and white, Warner Bros. Produced by Arnon Milchan. Directed by Ron Shelton. Based on the article, 'Ty Cobb's Wild Ten Month Fight to Live' and the book, *Cobb: A Biography*, by Al Stump. Screenplay by Ron Shelton.

Summary: "Al Stump is a famous sports-writer chosen by Ty Cobb to co-write his official, authorized 'autobiography' before his death. Cobb, widely feared and despised, feels misunderstood and wants to set the record straight about 'the greatest ball-player ever,' in his words. However, when Stump spends time with Cobb, interviewing him and beginning to write, he realizes that the general public opinion is largely correct. In Stump's presence, Cobb is angry, violent, racist, misogynistic, and incorrigibly abusive to everyone around him. Torn between printing the truth by plumbing the depths of Cobb's dark soul and grim childhood, and succumbing to Cobb's pressure for a whitewash of his character and a simple baseball tale of his greatness, Stump writes two different books. One book is for Cobb, the other for the public." (Summary from IMDb)

Characters: Ty Cobb (Tommy Lee Jones), Al Stump (Robert Wuhl), Real Life Reporters Allan Malamud (Mud), Bill Caplan (Bill), Jeff Fellenzer and Doug Krikorian

*Damn Yankees*, 1958 (running time est. at 111 min), color, Warner Bros. Produced and directed by George Abbott and Stanley Donen. Story by George Abbott and Douglass Wallop based on *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*.

Summary: "Film adaptation of the George Abbott Broadway musical about a Washington Senators fan who makes a pact with the Devil to help his baseball team win the league pennant." (Summary from IMDb)

Reporter Gloria Thorpe covers the Senators and is suspicious of new player Joe Hardy.

Characters: Slugger Joe Hardy (Tab Hunter), Reporter Gloria Thorpe (Rae Allen)

*Eight Men Out*, 1988 (running time est. at 119 min), color, Orion Pictures. Produced by Barbara Boyle and Jeff Offsay. Directed by John Sayles. Based on the book, *8 Men Out* by Eliot Asinof. Screenplay by John Sayles.

Summary: “The great Chicago White Sox team of 1919 is the saddest team to ever win a pennant. The team is bitter at their penny pincher owner, Charles Comiskey, and at their own teammates. Gamblers take advantage of this opportunity to offer some players \$ to throw the series (Most of the players didn't get as much as promised.) But Buck Weaver and the great Shoeless Joe Jackson turn back at the last minute to try and play their best. The Sox actually almost come back from a 3-1 deficit. 2 years later, the truth breaks out and the Sox are sued on multiple accounts. They are found innocent by the jury but baseball commissioner Landis has other plans. The eight players are suspended for life, and Buck Weaver, for the rest of his life, tries to clear his name.”  
(Summary from IMD)

Reporters Lardner and Fullerton work to uncover the scandal.

Characters: Pitcher Eddie Cicotte (David Strathairn), Reporter Ring Lardner (John Sayles), Reporter Hugh Fullerton (Studs Terkel)

*Flashing Spikes*, 1962 (running time est. at 53 min), black and white, Avista Productions. Produced by Frank Baur. Directed by John Ford. Story by Jameson Brewer and Frank O'Rourke (novel).

Summary: “An old ballplayer, thrown out of baseball due to a bribery scandal, becomes friends with a young phenom. The younger player is at first tainted by his association with the old-timer, but eventually the truth about the scandal is revealed.”  
(Summary from IMD)

Reporter Rex Short makes accusations that player Bill Riley has taken a bribe.

Characters: Ex-Player Slim Conway (James Stewart), Star Player Bill Riley (Patrick Wayne), Reporter Rex Short (Carleton Young)

*Hustle*, 2004 (running time est. at 120 minutes), color, ESPN Original Entertainment. Produced by Orly Adelson. Directed by Peter Bogdanovich. Story by Christian Darren.

Summary: An account of the downfall of the career and banning of baseball legend Pete Rose. General example of pack journalism.

Characters: Pete Rose (Tom Sizemore), No Significant Reporters

*It Happened in Flatbush*, 1942 (running time est. at 80 min), black and white, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. Produced by Walter Morosco. Directed by Ray McCarey. Story by Harold Buchman and Lee Loeb.

Summary: Frank Maguire, a former player haunted by the memory of an error he made in an important game, is given a second chance in the big leagues, this time as a manager. Taking the helm of the Brooklyn Dodgers, he has to overcome both clubhouse dissension and the apathy of new owners when the team's longtime matriarch dies. Even after the players petition to have him removed as the skipper, Frank rises to the challenge

and leads them in an exciting pennant drive, falling in love with one of the new owners in the process.” (Summary from TV Guide.com)

Reporter Danny Mitchell hounds Maguire and his club throughout the movie with his negative columns

Characters: Manager Frank 'Butterfingers' Maguire (Lloyd Nolan), Reporter Danny Mitchell (Robert Armstrong), Squint (Scotty Beckett)

*It Happens Every Spring*, 1949 (running time est. at 87 min), black and white, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. Produced by William Perlberg. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. Story by Valentine Davies and Shirley W. Smith. Screenplay by Valentine Davies.

Summary: “A college professor is working on a long term experiment when a baseball comes through the window destroying all his glassware. The resultant fluid causes the baseball to be repelled by wood. Suddenly he realizes the possibilities and takes a leave of absence to go to St. Louis to pitch in the big leagues where he becomes a star and propels his team to the World Series.” (Summary from IMDb)

Characters: Prof. Vernon Simpson/King Kelly, St. Louis pitcher (Ray Milland), Monk Lanigan, St. Louis catcher/Kelly's roommate (Paul Douglas)

*Pride of St. Louis*, 1952 (running time est. at 93 min), black and white, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. Produced by Jules Shermer. Directed by Harmon Jones. Story by Herman J. Mankiewicz and Guy Trosper.

Summary: Account of baseball career of Dizzy Dean. General Reporter Scenes.

Characters: Jerome Herman 'Dizzy' Dean (Dan Dailey)

*Pride of the Yankees*, 1942 (running time est. at 128 min), black and white, Samuel Goldwyn Company. Produced by Samuel Goldwyn. Directed by Sam Wood. Story by Paul Gallico. Screenplay by Jo Swerling and Herman J. Mankiewicz.

Summary: “Biopic traces the life of Lou Gehrig, famous baseball player who played in 2130 consecutive games before falling at age 37 to ALS, a deadly nerve disease which now bears his name. Gehrig is followed from his childhood in New York until his famous 'Luckiest Man' speech at his farewell day in 1939.” (Summary from IMD)

Reporter Sam Blake is personal friend of Gehrig.

Characters: Henry Louis 'Lou'/'Louie' Gehrig (Gary Cooper), Eleanor Twitchell 'Ellie' Gehrig (Teresa Wright), Babe Ruth, Sportswriter Sam Blake (Walter Brennan), Sportswriter Hank Hanneman (Dan Duryea)

*Rookie of the Year*, 1955. Directed by John Ford.

Summary: "Starring John Wayne and directed by John Ford: both making their TV debuts. Wayne plays an unemployed sportswriter, Mike Cronin, who scouts a talented baseball pitcher (played by his son Patrick Wayne). The sportswriter discovers a secret in the pitcher's past: a "scoop" which the sportswriter can parlay into a job for himself at any sports desk in the country ... but only by ruining the pitcher's career."

Characters: Sportswriter Mike Cronin (John Wayne)

*Rookie of the Year*, 1993 (running time est. at 103 min), color, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. Produced by Jack Brodsky and Irby Smith. Directed by Daniel Stern. Story by Sam Harper.

Summary: "A twelve-year-old Chicago boy gets to help his favorite baseball team, the Chicago Cubs, when his broken arm heals in such a way to give him an unusually quick throw. He becomes a rookie pitching sensation, but learns that fame and a major baseball career have costs." (Summary from IMDb)

General Press Conference Scenes

Characters: Henry Rowengartner (Thomas Ian Nicholas) Press Conference  
Reporters: Dan Conway, Ron Beattie, Sunnie Hikawa, Al Joyner

*Talent for the Game*, 1991 (running time est. at 91 min), color, Paramount Pictures. Produced by Martin Elfand. Directed by Robert M. Young. Story by David Himmelstein, Tom Donnelly and Larry Ferguson.

Summary: "Virgil Sweet is on the verge of losing his job as a talent scout with the California Angels when he discovers Sammy Bodeen, a country boy with no pro ball experience, but with a pitching arm no one has seen the like of. Money-hungry owners want to make a quick buck while Sammy just wants to play ball. Virgil finds himself caught in the middle." (Summary from IMD)

General Press Conference scenes

Characters: Virgil Sweet (Edward James Olmos)

*The Babe Ruth Story*, 1948 (running time est. at 106 min), black and white, Allied Artists Pictures Corporation. Produced and directed by Roy Del Ruth. Story by George Callahan, Bob Considine and Babe Ruth.

Summary: "The famed slugger is played by Bendix, who resembles Ruth slightly in looks and not at all in baseball ability. The film traces the "life and times" of Ruth, including his famous "called shot" in the 1932 World Series." (Summary from IMD)

Reporter Phil Conrad befriends Babe Ruth

Characters: Babe Ruth (William Bendix), Reporter Phil Conrad (Sam Levine)

*The Naked Gun*, 1988 (running time est. at 85 min), color, Paramount Pictures. Produced by Jim Abrahams, David Zucker and Jerry Zucker. Directed by David Zucker. Story by Jim Abrahams, David Zucker, Jerry Zucker and Pat Proft.

Sportscasters at baseball game (Dick Enberg, Curt Gowdy, Jim Palmer, Mel Allen, Dick Vitale, Dr. Joyce Brothers).

*The Natural*, 1984 (running time est. at 134 min), color, TriStar Pictures. Produced by Philip Breen and Roger Towne. Directed by Barry Levinson. Story by Bernard Malamud (novel) and Roger Towne and Phil Dusenberry.

Summary: "An unknown middle-aged batter named Roy Hobbs with a mysterious past appears out of nowhere to take a losing 1930s baseball team to the top of the league in this magical sports fantasy. With the aid of a bat cut from a lightning struck tree, Hobbs lives the fame he should have had earlier when, as a rising pitcher, he is inexplicably shot by a young woman." (Summary from IMDb)

Reporter Max Mercy serves as antagonist to Hobbs.

Characters: Roy Hobbs (Robert Redford), Baseball writer Max Mercy (Robert Duvall)

*The Slugger's Wife*, 1985 (running time est. at 105 min), color, Columbia Pictures, Rastar Films. Produced by Margaret Booth. Directed by Hal Ashby. Story by Neil Simon.

General Reporter Scenes.

*Woman of the Year*, 1942 (running time est. at 114 min), black and white, MGM. Produced by Joseph Mankiewicz. Directed by George Stevens. Story by Ring Lardner Jr. and Michael Kanin.

Summary: "Tess and Sam work on the same newspaper and don't like each other very much. At least the first time, because they eventually fall in love and get married. But, Tess is a very active woman and one of the most famous feminists in the country; she is even elected as "the woman of the year". Being busy all the time, she forgets how to really be a woman and Sam begins to feel neglected." (Summary from IMD)

Characters: Sportswriter Sam Craig (Spencer Tracy), Tess Harding (Katharine Hepburn)

### **Other Baseball Films With Writers or Announcers Present:**

1912, *Sporting Editor, The*: Sporting Editor hates women, but changes his mind when he has to accompany the society page editor to a baseball game.

1921, *Tomboy, The*: Sportswriter Minnie Ann Thomas (Eileen Percy), the star batter for a local baseball team, takes a job as a sportswriter to expose bootleggers who are supplying her father with liquor.

1923, *Trifling With Honor*: Journalist Kelsey Lewis (Hayden Stevenson) runs a news service and sends his stenographer Ida Hunt (Fritzi Ridgeway) to get a story on a

reclusive ballplayer. She had a previous relationship with the ballplayer who is trying to hide a criminal record.

1927, *Catch-as-Catch Can*: Reporter Reed Powers (William Fairbanks) was the manager of a baseball team accused of cheating. He actually was covering for his star pitcher, the mayor's son. He becomes a newspaperman and exposes the crook and the wrestler.

1934, *Death on the Diamond*: Sportswriter Jimmie Downey (Paul Kelly) is a cynical journalist in a murder mystery set in the world of baseball. Murders and sabotage. Downey does everything from trapping the murderer to advising the players how to play baseball.

1935, *Alibi Ike*: Reporter (Jack Norton).

1951, *Rhubarb*: Reporter (Roberta Richards). Newspaper Reporter (Stanley Orr).  
Media. PR

1954, *Roogie's Bump*: Sports Announcer (Tedd Lawrence)

1973, *Bang the Drum Slowly*: Photographer (Frederic C. Weiler).

1976, *Bad News Bears, The*: TV Newscaster (Howard Culver).

1976, *Ball Four*: Sportswriters

1978, *One in a Million: Ron LeFlore Story, The*: Media. Baseball star Ron LeFlore.

1988, *Bull Durham*: Media

1994, *Major League II*: Public Relations Practioner Flannery dumps her client/lover then tries to win him back. Reporter (Richard Salamanca).  
Reporter (Harold Surratt). Airport Photographer (Michael Willis).

1996, *Soul of the Game*: Reporter (Bruce Beatty). John Givens Reporter (Jesse D. Goins)

1998, *Major League: Back to the Minors*: TV Reporter (Warren Pepper). Reporter #1 (Nathalie Hendrix). Reporter #2 (Stephen Hardig). Reporter #3 (Leroy Myers). Reporter #4 (Gary P. Pozsik).

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<sup>1</sup> Sportswriter Al Stump (Robert Wuhl) to fellow sportswriters in *Cobb* (1994)

<sup>2</sup> Sportswriter Ring Lardner (John Sayles) in *Eight Men Out* (1988)

<sup>3</sup> Ball player Roger Maris (Barry Pepper) in *61\** (2001)

<sup>4</sup> Sportswriter Artie Green (Peter Jacobson) in *61\** (2001)

<sup>5</sup> From interview with Sports Columnist J.A. Adande, L.A. Times (November 2004)

<sup>6</sup> Owner Mac McAvoy (Sara Allgood) in *It happened in Flatbush* (1942)

<sup>7</sup> Manager Frank Maguire (Llyod Nolan) in *It happened in Flatbush* (1942)

<sup>8</sup> Manager Frank Maguire (Llyod Nolan) in *It happened in Flatbush* (1942)

<sup>9</sup> Sportswriter Max Mercy (Robert Duvall) in *The Natural* (1984)

<sup>10</sup> Sportswriter Max Mercy (Robert Duvall) in *The Natural* (1984)

<sup>11</sup> Sportswriter Rex Short (Carleton Young) in *Flashing Spikes* (1962)

<sup>12</sup> From interview with Sports Columnist J.A. Adande, L.A. Times (November 2004)

<sup>13</sup> Scene from *Cobb* (1994)

<sup>14</sup> Sportswriter Al Stump (Robert Wuhl) in *Cobb* (1994)

<sup>15</sup> Ball player Ty Cobb (Tommy Lee Jones) in *Cobb* (1994)

<sup>16</sup> Sportswriter Max Mercy (Robert Duvall) in *The Natural* (1984)

<sup>17</sup> From interview with Sports Columnist J.A. Adande, L.A. Times (November 2004)

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- <sup>18</sup> Sportswriter Al Stump (Robert Wuhl) in *Cobb* (1994)  
<sup>19</sup> Reference from *Eight Men Out* (1988)  
<sup>20</sup> Sportswriter Hugh Fullerton (Studs Terkel) in *Eight Men Out* (1988)  
<sup>21</sup> Scene from *Cobb* (1994)  
<sup>22</sup> Sportswriter Al Stump (Robert Wuhl) in *Cobb* (1994)  
<sup>23</sup> Sportswriter Al Stump (Robert Wuhl) in *Cobb* (1994)  
<sup>24</sup> Sportswriter in *Pride of St. Louis* (1952)  
<sup>25</sup> Sportswriter Ring Lardner (John Sayles) in *Eight Men Out* (1988)  
<sup>26</sup> Sportswriter Al Stump (Robert Wuhl) in *Cobb* (1994)  
<sup>27</sup> Sportswriter Al Stump (Robert Wuhl) in *Cobb* (1994)  
<sup>28</sup> Ball player Ty Cobb (Tommy Lee Jones) in *Cobb* (1994)  
<sup>29</sup> Sportswriter Sam Blake (Walter Brennan) in *Pride of the Yankees* (1942)  
<sup>30</sup> Manager Guffy McGovern in *Angels in the Outfield* (1951)  
<sup>31</sup> Reference from Max Marcy in *The Natural* (1984)

### Abstract

Enter the world of the baseball sportswriter in film. A life in which one does whatever it takes to get the story. Sacrifices must be made, but the news must get out to the public. Are they antagonistic or friendly? Arrogant or confident? What images have shaped our perception of the baseball sportswriter over the years?