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Tazewell County Board

Continuing a Family Tradition of Community Service

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April ASO Magazine Column **Baseball**

Baseball's Sad Lexicon

These are the saddest of possible words:

"Tinker to Evers to Chance."

Trio of bear cubs, and fleeter than birds,

Tinker and Evers and Chance.

Ruthlessly pricking our gonfalon bubble,

Making a Giant hit into a double--

Words that are heavy with nothing but trouble:

"Tinker to Evers to Chance."

Written by New York newspaper columnist Franklin Pierce Adams

(The term "gonfalon" refers to a flag or pennant)

The beginning of April means the start of another great season of Baseball. After yet another long winter break, America's game is back! Another year of the strong great hitters and wickedly overpowering pitchers. Another year of managers deciding when to take a player out of the game and when to go get that tiring pitcher. Another year of the St. Louis Cardinals showing all how championship baseball is played and yet another year added to the over hundred losing seasons for the Chicago Cubs (as a Cardinal fan, I had to add that last bit). Another year with another beer and another brat at our favorite ballpark!

In the middle of all of this is one of sport's most fascinating plays; the pitchers best friend, the Double Play.

In baseball, the art of Defense is one of the most prized attributes of great players. Great pitchers are good every five days or so, with pitching rotations being what they are today. Great hitters can come through three out of ten times (a .300 average) and on average three to four at bats per game. But great defense is the asset that is on the field all the time removing runs from the opposition and making it easier for their team to win. And one of baseball's most amazing defensive plays is the Double Play.

The Double Play can come about in many ways. Just think of Albert Pujols or Keith Hernandez at 1st fielding a sharp roller, turning to throw to second for one and then back to first for two. Double Play. Think of Jim Edmonds grabbing another liner in the gap for one and throwing back to first, catching the runner off guard for two. Double Play. Think of Adam Wainwright striking out another batter and the great Yadier Molina throwing to first to catch yet another would-be base stealer off guard for two. Double Play. Maybe the easiest way to think of a Double Play, just think of Ozzie Smith. Every day the great wizard played he put on an on-field clinic showcasing defense and turning unbelievable and effortless double plays. (And yes I know these are all great Cardinals, but it is so hard to think about great Cubs. Just the words "great Cubs" is an oxymoron.)

Regardless of all the possible combinations, at the heart of most Double Plays are two great infielders, the Second Baseman and Shortstop, working flawlessly together to create magic. In order to make these highlight reel plays, the two need to be able to work together to pass the ball from one to the other and on to the first

baseman to complete the play in a matter of seconds in order to outpace the two running athletes from the other team. This work involves flawless communication and co-operation.

Think of the best recent Double Play Combos and names will come forward like Craig Biggio and Adam Everett of the Houston Astros, Fernando Viña and Edgar Renteria of the St. Louis Cardinals, Chase Utley and Jimmy Rollins of the Philadelphia Phillies, Robinson Cano and Derek Jeter of the New York Yankees and the best of recent history, Roberto Alomar and Omar Vizquel of the Cleveland Indians.

Think about great all time Double Play Combos and you will hear timeless names of greats like Alan Trammell and Lou Whitaker of the Detroit Tigers, Pee Wee Reese and Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Luis Aparicio and Nellie Fox of the Chicago White Sox, Billy Rogell and Charlie Gehringer of the Detroit Tigers, Dave Concepcion and Joe Morgan of the Cincinnati Reds and, yes, the great Ozzie Smith and Tom Herr of the St. Louis Cardinals.

Regardless of all of these combinations, two individuals that have stood the test of time and continue to top list every time this subject is discussed are Joe Tinker and Johnny Evers of the Chicago Cubs. (And yes, sadly I note they are Cubs).

Joe Tinker and Johnny Evers played together from 1902 to 1912, during which time the Cubs won four National League pennants (1906-8, 1910) and two World Series (1907-8). The Cubs record through those years was 1048 wins and 600 losses and they finished below third in the league only once. The famous baseball poem above (Baseball's Sad Lexicon) by New York Evening Mail columnist Franklin Pierce Adams was written after he watched his home team New York Giants lose to the Chicago Cubs on July 18th, 1910, thanks in large part to Shortstop Joe Tinker, Second Baseman Johnny Evers and First Baseman Frank Chance. Along with Third Baseman Harry Steinfeldt, they formed the best defensive infield of the day and many say of all time.

Yet what I find interesting about the two started on September 13, 1905. In Bedford, Indiana, before an exhibition game versus the local club, the two fought on the field. The fight was supposedly over the fact that Evers took a taxi to the game, leaving Tinker and a couple teammates at the hotel. Why is this fight so important in the context of this column?

Remember above that I mentioned that the key to a Double Play is communication and co-operation between the Shortstop and Second Baseman. Well this fight in 1905 would end communication off the field between the two for the next 33 years. According to all recorded accounts, they never spoke to one another and continued a strong disliking of each other during 60% of their remarkable years in baseball. The contentious Evers would not speak to Tinker for decades, and gave him an unrepeatably nickname.

It wasn't until the 1938 Cubs World Series when, unbeknownst to one another, both were invited to help broadcast the game that they finally talked. When they saw each other, after a moment's strained silence, they hugged. (It didn't help the Cub's karma - they were swept in 4 games by the Yankees that year.) Some say that they never really reconciled. In 1946 the Hall of Fame inducted Joe Ticker, Johnny Evers and Frank Chance simultaneously, linking them forever not only in poetry but in the Hall of Fame also.

Regardless of how they felt about one another, their baseball stats show that they did their job. Both of them did not let their personal distaste for one another come between their performance and their teams performance on the field. They found a way to do the work they were assigned.

This trait is something Politics is lacking today. Republican, Democrat, Liberal, Conservative, whatever; all too often we are seeing behind the scenes personal politics compromising the real work these individuals were elected to do.

During elections, politicians need to be able to discuss and debate the differences between them. But once elected, it is our job to put these comments aside and work together on the task at hand. In our system of government, all voices and opinions need to be heard and considered. What we are seeing now is never ending campaigns in which such strong opinions and dislikes are formed and it blocks progress of the work that needs

to be done. There is an old political saying that goes: “Your enemy today may need to be your ally tomorrow.” We need to revisit this old political saying and also the performance of Joe Ticker and Johnny Evers and change the way we debate politics.

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