

What Team Does

Hartley Replogle Play For?

(Chicago)

There is nothing good about being a ballplayer right now. Pennock embarrassed us 6-2 on Wednesday, and that made it five losses in a row. I understand getting beat by New York, but getting swept by Boston is hard to figure. Nobody but Eddie Collins is hitting, and the talk on the train coming home was pretty open that the weekend's games were thrown. Schalk and I walked in on Cicotte in the restroom, so Schalk let him have it again right there at the pissers over his pitches Tuesday. What Cicotte said in response I cannot repeat beyond observing that he suggested Schalk engage in a physical impossibility. If I hadn't been around to pull Schalk away, the brawl probably would have started right there.

On top of that, the newspapers are full of talk again. This time it's the Cubs and Phillies. The story is the Detroit gamblers got to Herzog and Hendrix and a couple of the other Cubs and cinched up a Philly win, which is hard to do since the Phils are last in the other league. Maybe the talk's fed by the Cubs announcing Hendrix as the starter and then putting Alexander out there ahead of his turn. If the gamblers weren't playing Philly, they should have been because the Phils won 3-0, even against Alex.

Since I got to town there hasn't been a peep in the Chicago papers about Sox games being fixed, but my hunch is that'll change now. In fact I'd take a pretty good guess that the team that stands to get hurt the most by the news about the Cubs fix is the Sox. The odor around us may be pretty rife, but at least there was a chance of keeping it in the clubhouse until the Cubs business. I don't suppose that'll happen now. And if the public gets stirred up, they may demand the game do something. With the cast we've got, you're never sure whether we're playing to win or lose. But at least it looks like we propose to stay in the race. Sure we went in the tank in Boston, but it was just last week we built up a three-game lead. Now we're coming home for most of the rest of the year. We've got the Browns and Tigers, then the Eastern clubs. We've still got the best pitchers - when they want to pitch - and the best hitters - when they want to hit. And we're still only a half game out.

To me it looks like even if the gamblers are pulling the strings, they want us to stay in it, and that means winning often enough to make the last week interesting. If that's true, we may not get too far in front but we won't fall too far behind either.

Besides, who's going to pull away from us? Ruth's still hurt. And as for the Indians, they need another pitcher and a shortstop, and you don't just go out and find those.

No, the question is whether the public turns up the heat on the team. If the fans get hinky about whether the club is playing honest, Comiskey might have to do something. Comiskey wants to win, but he's no fool. He knows if people really start to think the games are fixed, they'll quit buying tickets, and that would be the worst possible thing for him.

I don't want to make it sound like I don't care what happens. For the record, you may come on to this team as an outsider, but once you begin to play you are forced to take sides one way or the other. The guys just don't trust you if you're neutral. So I have officially tossed in with Schalk and the Collins boys and Kerr and Faber and Leibold. As far as playing the games is concerned it doesn't mean much; you still hit it and throw it and catch it. But at least now I have somebody to talk to on the train and around the hotel.

There really wasn't much to choose about it. I wasn't going to throw in with Cicotte and Risberg; that was obvious. If they are crooked I wouldn't have wanted a cut and wouldn't have gotten one. And if they aren't crooked, then one side's as good as the other anyway, and they're not my type. So I took the one that doesn't get me in trouble either way. Besides, although Collins and Schalk are rough guys, they play the way I play - clean.

Did I feel good about that? Yeah, actually I did. Did it help my game? I think so. The record's pretty clear I haven't been worth two hoots to the Sox since I got here, batting average around .200 and all. I showed up at the park Friday feeling stronger than I have in two months. I knew it was going to be a good day. I told Shano just that. The locker was full when I got there, and I said it loud enough that everybody could hear me, even the other guys. "We're gonna turn it around," I told Shano with a slap on the shoulder, "and I'm gonna make sure."

Shano turned me aside with the sign accorded one who has committed a breach of locker room decorum. In Chicago, the principal rule of etiquette is not to say anything loud enough to constitute an imposition on members of the other persuasion, especially if it involves something as central as whether a game is to be won or lost, how and by whom. Against such language, fights are considered possible. "Take it easy, Amos...you'll do fine today...right," he said, quietly. He steered me toward the stool in front of my locker.

Maybe we both knew something. Faber and Davis matched up level through the first three. In the fourth Faber gave up a couple of scratches that brought Earl Smith up with a chance to hurt us. Smith hadn't done anything for four seasons but hang on to a job, but this year he's found his bat and came in hitting close to .300. A dangerous guy if you make a mistake, which Red did. He

got a fast one up and Smith put it between Felsch and me. By the time we could run it down he'd chased both scratches home.

It wasn't much but it was more than Dixie Davis was giving back. We put a couple on ourselves with two gone in the fifth, and I came up with a chance to get us going. The way our offense had been since the New York series and especially in Boston, we couldn't count on too many opportunities, even against Davis. This was my chance to make good on my locker talk. He fell behind 2-0 then fed me one I could see coming all the way. I swung and the contact felt good. Good, hell, it felt better than I'd felt since I played for the A's. The ball took off toward the wall in center and Schalk and Kerr took off around the bases and I took off for first figuring I'd at least tied the game and maybe could get around to third or even home with a break. I never saw Jacobson run it down, but Collins was on deck and he said the bastard just flat out-ran it and made the catch running into the wall. I'd have sworn nobody could have caught that ball, the way I hit it. But all I knew was when I turned first and looked up heading for second there was Jacobson coming off the wall and holding up the ball. I was as out as my boater would be after Labor Day.

That was the last dent we made on Davis until I came up in the eighth. They hadn't touched Red either, so it was still 2-0. I led off and caught another fat one. This time it split between

Jacobson and Tobin, ricocheted off the wall and kicked back toward center. I saw Jacobson slip into Tobin as I turned for second and I saw them both fall. I made third so easily that Jourdan gave me the go sign but when I picked up Collins near home he was telling me to get down and slide for the outside corner, that the play would be close. It was, but I nipped the plate just before Severeid could reach across to tag me, and got up screaming. 'C'mon, c'mon, let's hit this bum," I said, or words to that effect. I said it to Eddie and then I got back to the dugout and I said it to Weaver and Jackson and Felsch. For a second, I felt like we were a team and I was a part of it. We were one down with six outs to go, and with the score board showing that Detroit had beaten Cleveland, if we could win we'd be back in first place.

Davis got the next six guys out in order and we lost 2-1. It was our sixth loss in a row. The amazing part was we were still only a half game back.

We did win two of the next three from the Browns, then swept Detroit on Labor Day, but the Indians won just enough that we were still a game back coming to breakfast at the rooming house the next morning. It was the same crew as when we'd gone east - the salesman had moved on, but the same otherwise. The university fellow was reading the morning paper and in addition to bacon was especially interested in whether I had seen it.

"I don't need to read the story," I explain. "I was at the double-header."

"Were you at the courthouse, too?" he asked. "Because that's where the baseball news is being made."

"How so," I said, pouring coffee.

"They've empaneled a grand jury," the professor said. "The judge says they're going to look into gambling...in baseball."

"Well, I hope they find it," I said.

"There's a quote here from Hartley Replogle," the professor says. "He says they've got information that gamblers have made inroads into Chicago teams, and they're going to break that up."

"Never heard of that Hartley Replogle fellow," I said. "Who's he play for?"

"Well, I guess he plays for us," says the professor. "Hartley Replogle isn't a ballplayer, Mr. Strunk. He's the assistant state's attorney who's been put in charge of the case."

"Sounds like a good guy to know," I said.

I went to the park that afternoon not sure whether to be happy or mad about the news of the grand jury. I figured there was a good chance they'd root around and expose the rot. Get it out of the game. That was good; it needed to be gotten out. And although I couldn't testify to anything particular, I knew there was plenty of rot to be found. On the other hand, if the grand jury acted before the season was out it might queer the whole pennant race for us. I wanted the bums out...but I wanted to win as well.

Well, if I could read the papers the rest of the team could, too. Things were snipey in the clubhouse even before the game. They got worse in the seventh. We hadn't been doing shucks against Hub Leonard, who had given us just three hits up until then. The Tigers led 5-0. But the General got a piece of one to lead off and knocked one off Young's glove behind second for a hit. Hap was next. He was the only guy all day who had Leonard figured; he'd already punched out two hits. This time Hap sent one on a line out to left for another hit. Shano was next up and Leonard passed him. Bags drunk, nobody out. Suddenly 5-0 didn't seem so much.

Then it did again. On the first ball to Risberg, Felsch strolled so far off second that Stanage picked him clear by a yard. Hap didn't even have a grouse at the call. It was the end of our chances, for the Swede popped out and Schalk was also retired.

But it was not the end of the matter. When Felsch came back to the dugout Kerr, whose game was on the line at the moment, called him a quitter to his face. Since Felsch had three of the five hits we'd made all day, it was a tough case to make...but there was no question Hap had pulled a Class A rock. So with Schalk in the box and Kerr in his face, Felsch pushed the left-hander out of his way and back against the concrete, saying "tell it to the jury, squirt." "I can't wait for the chance," Kerr said, charging Felsch and trying to get in some licks. I put him at about 212 degrees fahrenheit. Only McMullen and Leibold getting between them along with Schalk making the third out, the latter requiring the presence of all the parties back on the field, forestalled punches being thrown.

It's a long walk back from Comiskey to the apartment, but sometimes taking it clears my head. This was a day when my head needed clearing. The problem was the city wouldn't cooperate. A half mile over toward State Street two old guys were standing on the street corner chewing, spitting and jawing with each other. "I seen Joe Jackson hit .408," the one old guy says. "And he was just a kid. That guy ain't crooked." Then he spits. "And Eddie Cicotte...straightest guy Comiskey's had since Walsh. Why the fellow won 28 just three years ago. "We wouldn't have won the Series without him."

And then the other guy piped up. "What's a matter...you think Cracker Schalk is stupid? Cracker says Cicotte's throwing fat pitches." Then he spits. "Cracker's a Chicago boy, and if he says Cicotte's crossing him up then that ought to be good enough for ya." I suppose they kept after it for a while, but I didn't want to hear more and I didn't want to chance them recognizing me and getting asked about it so I ducked my head and moved along as smartly as I could.

Less than a block more up the street - on a corner in front of the florist shop - I saw the bookie and his client. You could tell the one was keeping book because he didn't do anything without looking over his shoulder first, and because they both talked quietly. What I saw clearly was the two guys kicking at each other over a paper. But I could only see it from a half block away because as soon as I got closer the paper went into the bookie's pocket and discussion ensued regarding the unsatisfactory state of the weather. They were lamenting the heat as I passed. I gave them another half block before stealing a shot back behind me. The paper was out again.

I'd bet anything the bookie was trying to collect on our game that afternoon, and the mark was arguing the whole thing smelled fixed so it ought to be no bet and the money ought to ride. Either way, I figured, the guy's a sucker. Why would you ever bet

on something that skill has so little to do with? Unless you're on the inside, why bet on us?

A couple blocks more I passed the sandlot where some of the neighbor kids were playing ball. The shortstop muffed a grounder, and they all dropped their gloves and got into it. "You dumped that on purpose," the pitcher says," and the shortstop says "take it back!" and the pitcher says, "I won't neither," and the shortstop jumps the pitcher and the other kids jump each other and they all have at it. I probably should have jumped in and broke it up, but I didn't know which kid to be mad at, so I decided to let them settle it.

The rest of the walk was a half hour of more of the same. In Chicago, you could leave the ballpark, but you could not leave the discussion about baseball. And almost none of it involved the pennant race.

You wouldn't have thought such a team as the Sox could come back and play a decent brand of ball. But we whipped the Browns the next day - Williams did the hurling and Jackson did the hitting - then set up for Boston's last visit. It was our chance, for the Yanks were playing Cleveland three games, so one of them had to lose. For seven innings of the Thursday game, we looked as sick against Bush as we had looked two days before against Leonard. He had us 5-0 going into the bottom of the eighth. But a couple hits

fell in and just like that it's tied 5-5 going into the ninth. When we got the bags full - me at second -- with one out and Jackson up in the bottom half, it looked like a sure win. But Joe dribbled a ball back to Bush, who forced Wilkinson at home, and only Schang's bobble before he threw let the General beat out the double play. That brought up Felsch with me the winning run at third, and I have to say when he socked one into the gap in left-center that would have counted for three if we needed that many all was forgiven from Tuesday.

Then Hap juiced us again in the Friday game. This time we were down 2-0 in the seventh when he led off with a double into the corner. That set us up for two runs, but the Red Sox got one in the eighth to go back ahead. In the bottom half, Hap was on first with the bases full and one out when Murphy rolled out to Hoyt. He flipped home to force Eddie Collins, but when Schang tried to throw to first for the double play he plunked Murphy in the back. That let Jackson score the tying run, but then here came Felsch around third right behind him and tearing for the plate himself. McInnis is normally a sure hand at first, but he saw he has to hurry the throw and pulled Schang just wide enough off the plate that Hap hooked in around the far edge, and that was the run that won the game for us. When the Yanks beat the Indians, we were back in a tie for first. What I could not tell was whether Hap was a ballplayer or the gamblers had passed the word down that the odds have become favorable for us to win a couple. But I am

as sure as I have been since coming here - which I acknowledge not to be very sure -- that we are finally on a course to win the pennant.

What happened Saturday pretty well sent that feeling into the trash can for all time. Kerr opposed Jones, who has had Chicago's number all year - but we cuffed him around nicely. I got three hits myself, and poled one of 'em out to the wall in center for a triple. The General popped a grand slam in the fifth, and we scored seven overall. When you give Dickie Kerr seven, that ought to be enough.

The trouble started when Boston batted in the fifth. They were leading 1-0 at the time, and I did not think much of it when McInnis opened with a double.

But Risberg followed up by folding on an easy grounder. Two hits and a bad throw by Eddie Collins pushed two runs home and left Boston with runners on second and third. Jones was the hitter and he accommodated Kerr by punching an easy one right back to him. Dickie turned to third and threw one right into Weaver's glove to get Vitt, who had strayed from that base. But Weaver dropped the throw - from my view in right there was no reason for doing so - and Vitt walked across with the third run as the other two runners also advanced. One hit later it was 6-0.

"You selling me out today?" Kerr yells at Buck as we come in.

"Shut up and pitch," Weaver spits."

"I would...but you guys won't catch it," Kerr says, looking as much at Risberg as Weaver."

"Why don't you go cry to your boy Collins?" says Risberg. "You're forgetting about the one he tossed away, aren't you?"

Jackson's slam took some of the heat out for the moment, for it brought us back to within 6-5. But Kerr was gafloey. In the sixth they tap him for another single, then Menosky lifts one into the ether between Jackson and Felsch. It looked like a routine out. Either one of them was right there to pick it. But Jackson decided to let Felsch take it, and Felsch let Jackson take it. So the ball fell and by the time they got it back the Bostons had another run and Menosky had taken leave all the way to third. They scored it a triple, which was a crime against Kerr's earned run average. The next fly ball scored Menosky and caused Kid to remove Kerr from the game in favor of Hodge.

Kerr may stand nothing over 5-6 and only weigh more than 140 after a heavy meal. But he has sand, and he doesn't like to be thrown over. So he is waiting for Jackson and Felsch when the inning ends. There aren't even any hellos. He just jumps the two

of them in the dugout and goes at it. As all of us had it, this is the trigger. Schalk grabbed Felsch and took up the cause. Williams and Cicotte went after the Collins boys. Risberg and me found each other. I just started wailing on him, and I'll say he got a few shots in on me. I think Weaver and McMullin were on Leibold and Faber, but by that point there were fights all over the dugout and I was too busy to keep much of a scorecard.

This went on for a couple minutes - all the time the Bostons are on the field waiting to play ball. Kid tried to break it up, but there was more action than at a Dempsey fight, and it wasn't until Chill threatened to forfeit the game that anybody could even break away long enough to get a batter to the plate. It occurred to me at that moment that I was supposed to be that batter, so much to my regret I release Risberg. The Swede of course obliges by popping me a good one in the jaw, which in a way has the benefit of sending me flying toward the bat rack, where I can obtain what I need to make the first out of the sixth inning. It is the only time all day Jones gets me out, but he had a big advantage, for Risberg had punched my right eye half shut. I checked out Risberg in the dugout when I came back. He had a shiner, too. In addition to being out, I was tired and sore, but for the moment, anyway, I was satisfied.

A smart guy might have thought the brawl would get everything out of our systems, and get us back to baseball. Sure enough, we

scored two in the seventh to get back within a run of Jones at 8-7. In the eighth Weaver and Risberg kicked away two more grounders, and the Bostons scored another run. The scorekeeper marked it up as a 9-7 loss that left us a half game behind New York, but basically in a triple tie.

Washington followed Boston into town. With Connie's boys at Cleveland and the Yanks in Detroit, it figured that we had to win all three just to stay even, but since the Senators were a solid sixth place club and Johnson was hurt there was no reason to think we couldn't. No reason except ourselves. We let Courtney shut us out in the first game, then we let Acosta do it in the third. The Indians only managed two out of three against Philly, but we'd have been right about the Yanks sweeping in Detroit. So by the time New York hit our place, we had gone from basically even to two and a half out.

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We had a day off waiting for the Yanks, but instead of playing baseball the game came to most of us via the U.S. mail. Mine showed up at the boarding house mid-afternoon, and the land-lady made sure she delivered it to my hands personally.

"It appears that you may be in a bit of difficulty, Mr. Strunk," she says. "Least ways, I wouldn't want to be getting mail from

the Assistant State's Attorney." Talk of the investigation was open around town, so I don't suppose the letter itself came as any great surprise to her. All the same, even the letter's arrival put the landlady in a position of depending on the discretion of the mailman not to mention it to the neighbors, for who knows the sort of juicy gossip that might be stirred up if that was not the case? If I were caught with a woman in my room, the reputation of the house could not be placed in a more fragile condition. "You'd think the least they could do would be to deliver these to the ballpark," she said.

I nodded politely, and tried to handle the letter as discreetly as was possible under the circumstances. Unless he was going to run me up for punching out Risberg in the dugout the other day, I didn't figure this Hartley Replogle had any real interest in me personally. Back in my room I opened the letter and confirmed my suspicions. "Mr. Amos Strunk, 6535 Wabash, Sir: Please be advised that this office is conducting...etc, etc." The upshot was except for out-of-town games I should keep myself available to testify if the Grand Jury wanted to talk to me the next couple of weeks, but they didn't know whether they would or not, and if they did they'd be back in touch. Word was all you had to do was be wearing a Sox or Cubs uniform and you got one.

I put the letter on the dresser and forgot about it. If Hartley Replogle wanted me to come in and talk, I didn't have any problem

with that. But except for testifying that Risberg and Felsch and Cicotte and the rest are a bunch of jerks, I wasn't sure what else I could tell them.