

Baseball's most devoted fan Dr. James Penniman, of Philadelphia, has two hobbies - to collect and give away libraries and to watch ball games ... By Harry Robert. Reprinted from the Baseball magazine of December, 1929 ... Norwich, Conn. Bulletin Print. [1929].

Baseball's Most Devoted Fan

Dr. James Penniman, of Philadelphia, Has Two Hobbies—To Collect and Give Away Libraries and to Watch Ball Games. He Has Attended Thousands of Major League Contests, is a Close Student of the Game and Has Pronounced and Original Ideas

By HARRY ROBERT

Reprinted from the Baseball Magazine of December, 1929

Loud, boisterous and plentiful have been the yells with which Philadelphia baseball addicts split the air this season, especially at Shibe Park. For it was there that the Athletics won the American League pennant and the right to meet the Chicago Cubs in the play-off between the two leagues, bringing the first World Series to that championship-hungry city in fourteen years.

Among those roaring hordes, one with an occasional glance for something besides the play on the field might have noticed a quiet, dignified man who seldom raises his voice, and who could be seen reading a book while the teams were changing sides, or during some other lull in the activity. He might have been taken for one who wandered in to while away a few hours that hung heavily upon his hands. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This man was Dr. James Hosmer Penniman, Litt. D. and brother of Josiah Harmar Penniman, provost of the University of Pennsylvania. He attends every game played here, both by the Athletics and the Phillies, he has been called the country's greatest baseball fan, and doubtless deserves the title. Dr. Penniman has seen more than 5,500 big league baseball games since he played shortstop for the Norwich, Conn., Academy team, back in 1880. Unless he is on one of his frequent trips to Europe, he is sure to be where the bat rings against the leathern sphere.

A great friend and admirer of Connie Mack's, devoted to the Athletics and a staunch supporter of the Phillies. Dr. Penniman gets his recreation by watching these teams in their struggles.

"It is my only vacation," he remarked. "I have seen the time when I could work eighteen hours each day, but now it is harder for me to work four than it was then to work eighteen."

Dr. Penniman is an authority on George Washington. He has written several books on the Father of his Country, and is now under contract to write two more. He is best known, perhaps, as the founder of libraries of education. He donated the Maria Hosmer Penniman Memorial Library of 30,000 volumes, at the University of Pennsylvania, another of similar size to Brown, and another to Yale, which is his biggest benefaction and consists of more than 80,000 volumes.

Dr. Penniman is the possessor of many rare and valuable old books which are strewn around his Philadelphia home at 4326 Sansom street—piled on shelves, thrust into closets and dumped in odd corners. The good bibliophile has about 5,000 books piled up in his cellar like so much coal, because he has no other place to put them. Some of his rare old books are works of art, written by the laborious hands of monks hundreds of years ago, and are hand embellished. But he admits he does not get a kick out of them. He thrills only at seeing a book he has written.

He has traveled all over the globe. He has been to Europe twenty times and there are few spots he has not visited. And what other baseball fan has a glacier named after him? Twin glaciers at Harriman Fjord, Alaska, were named after Dr. Penniman and his brother.

THE PENNIMAN GLACIER, HARRIMAN FIORD, ALASKA A recently published decision of the United States Geographic Board has granted the name of Penniman to these two hanging glaciers in Harriman Fiord, Alaska. The name was proposed by Mrs. Dora Keen Handy after the brothers, Josiah H. Penniman and James H. Penniman, '84, distinguished writers and educators. James H. Penniman founded the Maria Hosmer Penniman Library of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, and the Penniman Memorial Libraries of Education at Yale and Brown. The glaciers were formerly a part of Baker Glacier, one of the six that descend to the sea in Harriman Fiord. It is a beautiful and almost unvisited district, except for occasional prospectors, yet it is the finest scenery in Alaska and quite near tourist routes.

Although he has collected many prize books, original manuscripts on Washington (enough for fifty books on him if he had time) authentic engravings and pictures of costumes of Washington's period, he has a possession he holds more highly. Dr. Penniman once presented Connie Mack with a white jade elephant on returning from the Orient, which reposes now on Mack's desk and Mack has shown him favors that would send ordinary fans into rhapsodies.

Mack presented Penniman with the score card he kept on the day the Athletics tied the New York Yankees in the ebbing weeks of last season, after their long and bitter chase. On that day, Sept. 7,

1928, with Grove pitching, they defeated the Boston Red Sox, 1 to 0, and drew even with the Yanks. It was a memorable day, even though they later lost out to the New Yorkers.

"Connie brought out the score card and slipped it through the door, nobody being at home at the time," said Dr. Penniman. "Everybody hears about Connie Mack's score cards, but hardly anybody knows what he does with them. From this you can see that he really does score every play in the game."

Dr. Penniman was the first person to be notified he would receive tickets for the World Series this year. Ten days before they were put on sale, when the A's were refusing all applications, according to their announcements, one was not refused. Dr. Penniman received the following letter in Connie Mack's own handwriting:

"Dear Dr. Penniman.

"Am returning you the check which you can destroy.

"Have approved of your receiving

Dr. James H. Penniman, of Philadelphia, a close personal friend of Connie Mack and perhaps the most devoted and illustrious of baseball's great army of fans

two (2) seats and the club will notify you later how you will receive and pay for same.

"Sincerely, "Connie Mack."

No doubt the good doctor was over-joyed at the news, but it is not his way to beam with pleasure at what he had learned. Instead, he calmly ensconced himself in his study chair and made a comprehensive survey of Connie's handwriting.

"When one studies the formations made by his pen, it is very easy to understand why Connie Mack has been so successful in his work," he said. "Every movement of the pen shows strength of character. I am not a penmanship expert, nor do I believe character can always be read through handwriting. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that men like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and William Gillett, the actor, who writes me occasionally, and others who have gained success, have been distinctive in their penmanship. Connie's writing has many strokes similar to those penned by Washington. People think of our first president as a warrior and statesman. In reality, he was a scholar, a true man of letters.

“So it is with Mr. Mack. Although he did not attend school after he was twelve years old, he has become a scholar in his own line. Baseball calls for as much study as other lines of endeavor, and sometimes it calls for more. You have to know Connie Mack intimately, really to appreciate him.”

It was Dr. Penniman who persuaded Mack to adorn the uniforms of his players with the white elephant that they wore on their breasts for years, as the symbol of the club. We can't give him credit for a hit on that one, however, because the symbol brought no luck. Last year the Macks went back to the old letter “A” in place of the elephant, and they finished a close second after giving the Yankees a great fight. And this year they have won, at last, the “A” having made good in two seasons after the white elephant was given a thirteen-year trial and failed.

Dr. Penniman it was also who, a few years ago, suggested that the following signs be plastered over every city in the country: “If baseball interferes with business, give up business.”

This scholar has his ideas of the game. He can discuss baseball for hours. He has not watched game after game and followed it in the papers without gaining a keen knowledge of what goes on behind the scenes, as well as before the public. Although he idolizes Connie Mack, he does not subscribe to the methods of John McGraw, famous manager of the New York Giants.

“McGraw does not measure up as a developer of players,” he said, “and he has proved a poor trader. See what a trade he made this season, in swapping O'Doul to the Phillies for Leach. Even had the Phils obtained no money in the deal, they got the better ball player, not to mention the fact Leach has always been a hard man to handle. The Giants had difficulty signing him up this season. Besides McGraw has recently let such players as Hornsby, Hack Wilson, Frankie Frisch, and Fresco Thompson get away, and he could use them mighty well now. No doubt he had his reasons, but it seems the difficulties could have been overcome without losing such good players.

This is Connie Mack's famous score card which he presented with his compliments to Dr. Penniman. This particular score card marked the zenith of Connie's hopes in the season of 1929. It was on this date, September 7th, that the Athletics tied the New York Yankees and threatened for a time to carry off pennant honors. Grove pitched against Ruffing, of the Red Sox, and won by a score of 1-0. Connie numbers players from 1-9. His symbol for a hit is X; for a strikeout, K. The score card shows that Bishop scored the only run of the game. The B shows that he walked and he later worked his way around the diamond on a hit by Cochrane and an error by Short-stop Rogell. The dot in Bishop's sixth inning box indicates that he scored

"McGraw's method is to buy high-priced men and fit them into his team. When he first came to the Giants they were weak, but he bought players for big sums and improved the club by money alone."

Dr. Penniman is a philosopher of baseball as well as of letters and much to which the average fan would not give a thought stands for something to him.

"I think an essay could be written on the climate of ball parks." he remarked. "On warm days at the Phillies' Park, the ideal place is on the top row of the upper deck, along the right field foul line. There is no cooler place, unless it be in a boat on a river. On cool days, I am in the lower deck.

"At Shibe Park I never sit in the upper deck. When the weather is warm, the best seat there is at the top of the lower deck of the left field pavilion, near the windows. When they are open, it is very cool. A group of priests is always to be found there, and I have sat and talked with them often.

"If it is comfortable, my favorite place is back of the plate, where I can watch the pitching, for pitching is at least seventy per cent of the game. Hank O'Day, the old National League umpire, used to tell me nobody can judge a pitch from the grandstand, but I take exception to that. Yes, I am afraid I let out rather a wild roar at times, when I think the umpires are roasting our teams.

"I like to watch the people around me, too. Boston is the best baseball town I ever visited, and I used to sit out in the bleachers at the games there to talk to some of the grandest people I ever met. What memories they had! They could recall just what their favorite players had done in games years before.

"The regulars, those who see all the games, are always in the same places. There is a little man who comes to the games here daily, bringing with him two suitcases that look as if they might be loaded with pig-iron, and he stands upstairs at the back. There is also a colored woman who never misses a game, and she keeps the score of every one."

And finally, Dr. Penniman advances suggestions that he believes might be for the betterment of baseball, which he thinks merit a trial, anyway.

"Why do so many clubs wear blue caps when white ones would be cooler?" he asks. The blue absorbs the heat; the white reflects it. I once asked Hank O'Day why he didn't remove his coat on a hot day, and he said he was cooler wearing it, but I know he was wrong.

"Did you ever think of four outs per inning, instead of three? If baseball were played like that, and the game were seven innings long, there would be twenty-eight outs instead of twenty-seven, a difference of only one, and there would not be such a waste of time changing sides.

"I certainly don't think the pitcher and catcher should be made to bat. They work hard enough on defense. And why pitch to a man when they have decided to walk him? Why not just wave him to first, instead of throwing four wide ones? And when the batter hits the ball out of the park, why make him run around the bases for a home run?

"Baseball is primarily an amusement enterprise, for the entertainment of the people. On week days, the game is just right. But on Saturdays, the holiday of the workman, there is not enough entertainment unless there is a doubleheader.

"When there is not a doubleheader, the game should be twelve innings long on Saturday. I know these are radical changes I suggest, but I believe they could be worked out."

Cats are a great hobby with the doctor. Not the least of his books is "The Alley Rabbit," the story of his former cat, Raoul, Raoul's successor is the Velvet Imp, an immense black creature weighing fifteen pounds.

"That is unusually large for a cat, but not a record." commented Dr. Penniman. "I know a barber who owns a cat weighing twenty pounds. Cats are more intelligent than dogs, but they do not get credit for it because of their wilfulness. What is often mistaken for stupidity in a cat is stubbornness. They cannot be forced to do what they choose not to do.

"And the cat is the greatest dodger in the animal kingdom. If you could give a cat a football and teach him to run with it, he could run through the best eleven in the country without having a hand laid on him. The cat could do the running, anyway, but he probably couldn't carry the ball." The Velvet Imp, however, looks big enough.

"George Washington would delight the eye of a modern football coach," Dr. Penniman concluded musingly. "He was six feet, two inches tall, weighed 210 pounds, and was strong and athletic. What a star he would have been."

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