

**Ty Cobb**  
**By Jimmy Keenan**

“With a combination of speed, daring and brains, Ty Cobb is surely the terror of the opposing infield.” – 1912 Hassan Cigarettes tobacco card.

“Rogers Hornsby could run like anything but not like this kid. Ty Cobb was the fastest I ever saw for being sensational on the bases.” – Hall of Fame manager Casey Stengel. <sup>1</sup>



“The Babe was a great ballplayer, sure, but Ty Cobb was even greater. Babe Ruth could knock your brains out, but Cobb would drive you crazy.” – Hall of Fame outfielder Tris Speaker. <sup>2</sup>

"The greatness of Ty Cobb was something that had to be seen, and to see him was to remember him forever." – Hall of Fame first baseman George Sisler. <sup>3</sup>



Ty Cobb made his mark in baseball during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To this day, the mere mention of his name resonates baseball excellence. Cobb was credited with setting 90 individual records during his 24-year major league career. He played with the Detroit Tigers from (1905-

26) and the Philadelphia A's from (1927-28). He was the player-manager of the Tigers from 1921-26. Cobb hit over .400 three times (1911, 1912, 1922). He currently holds the highest lifetime batting average (.366) of any major league player. During his tenure in the bigs, he was credited with 12 American League batting titles, nine of them in a row. An error regarding Cobb's 1910 hitting statistics was discovered in 1978. This correction led to him losing a point on his lifetime average as well as the 1910 batting crown.

Cobb compiled the most hits in major league history (4,189), a record that stood until Pete Rose surpassed his mark in 1985. Nicknamed the "Georgia Peach," Ty compiled six hitting streaks of at least 20-games or more, including a 40-game run in 1911. A fearless and intimidating base runner, Cobb led the American League in steals six times. He stole home 54 times, while scoring from first base on bunts on several occasions. Defensively, Ty was a fleet and steady outfielder, compiling 410 assists (6<sup>th</sup> all time) while starting 112 double plays. Cobb finished his major league career with a .961 lifetime fielding percentage.



Throwing right-handed and batting left-handed, Cobb, 6'1", 175 pounds, had an unusual style of hitting. Crouching out over the plate, he kept his hands about three inches apart, with an equal distance separating his lower hand from the bottom of the handle. Cobb would then slide his hands together as he swung to meet the ball. Hitting to all fields, he felt this grip gave him better bat control. A place hitter extraordinaire, he could also lay down a bunt for a base hit at the drop of a hat.

Even with his amazing talent, he was superstitious by nature. A wagonload of barrels crossing his path before a game meant good luck. Finding a hairpin on the street meant extra hits. When he was on a hot streak at the plate, which was most of the time, he wore the same sweatshirt and socks.

There is no way to sugarcoat his demeanor on the ballfield. He was a fierce competitor who took no prisoners on the diamond. Baseball was a war to him and it was his mission to defeat his opponent at all costs. He wasn't out to make friends; he was there to win ballgames. Over the course of his career he fought with umpires, players, various people in the civilian world and

even a mouthy fan. For the most part, Cobb was a southern gentleman off the field but not one to be trifled with between the foul lines.

Tyrus Raymond “Ty” Cobb was born in a log cabin in a place called “The Narrows” in Banks County, Georgia on December 18, 1886. His father, William Herschel Cobb, (1863-1905) was a teacher, farmer and politician. His mother, the former Amanda Chitwood (1871-1936) was born into a well-to-do banking family from Augusta, Georgia. The two were married on February 11, 1886. The couple went on to have three children, Ty, John and Florence. The Cobbs moved to nearby Carnesville shortly after Ty was born. In 1893, they relocated to a 50-acre farm in Royston, Georgia. William was a professor and principal at a local preparatory school. In addition, he served as the mayor of Royston, editor of the *Royston Record* newspaper, County School Commissioner and Georgia State Senator.

Cobb began playing baseball in his early teens with a local amateur nine called the Royston Rompers. From there, he graduated to faster company with the semi professional Royston Reds. In the spring of 1904, Ty sent letters to numerous professional ballclubs asking for a tryout. Only one



team, the Augusta Tourists of the Class C South Atlantic League expressed an interest. The Tourists gave Ty a trial early in 1904 season. Reportedly, he was told to bunt by Tourists manager Con Strothers but hit a home run instead. In order to retain his control over the team, Strothers released Cobb after his unauthorized clout. From there, he moved on to the Anniston Steelers in the Class D Tennessee-Alabama League, hitting .370 in 22 games. Strothers realizing his mistake, picked him back up at the end of the season. Ty started out the 1905

campaign with Augusta. He soon ran afoul of Augusta’s new player-manager Andy Roth after he got a late jump on a fly ball that cost Tourists pitcher Eddie Cicotte a shutout. Roth, without checking with owner William J. Croke sold Cobb to the rival Charleston Sea Gulls for \$25. When Croke found out, he immediately called off the deal. He also raised Cobb’s salary from \$90 to \$125 a month. Roth was removed as manager a short time later.



That same summer a tragic incident occurred that would impact Ty for the rest of his life. Cobb's father William told his wife Amanda that he was going out of town on a business trip for a few days. For some reason, William came back to his house without notifying his wife on the evening on August 8, 1905.



Amanda Cobb later told police she heard a noise outside and observed a silhouette of a strange man at the window. Without calling out to the unidentified person or making any effort to ascertain the identity of the alleged intruder, Mrs. Cobb fired her pistol at the shadowy figure. When authorities arrived, Cobb's father was found lying dead on the porch. Ty was with the Augusta team at the time of the shooting. The other two Cobb children were staying overnight with friends. Amanda was arrested for manslaughter and later released on a \$7,000 bond. She was eventually acquitted on March 31, 1906, due to lack of evidence. Rumors circulated during the trial that William Cobb suspected his wife of having an affair. These stories imply that William came home unannounced to catch her with her paramour. Finding the two together, he was shot and killed by Amanda's lover. To be fair, no definitive evidence regarding these salacious accusations has ever been presented to the public. Over time it appears they were nothing more than malicious innuendo.

William Cobb was a strict yet caring parent who wanted his son to be a doctor or lawyer or possibly pursue a career in the military. Eventually, giving him permission to seek a career in professional baseball telling him, "Don't come home a failure."<sup>4</sup> These ominous words from his dad were the driving force in his pursuit of excellence on the ballfield throughout his career.

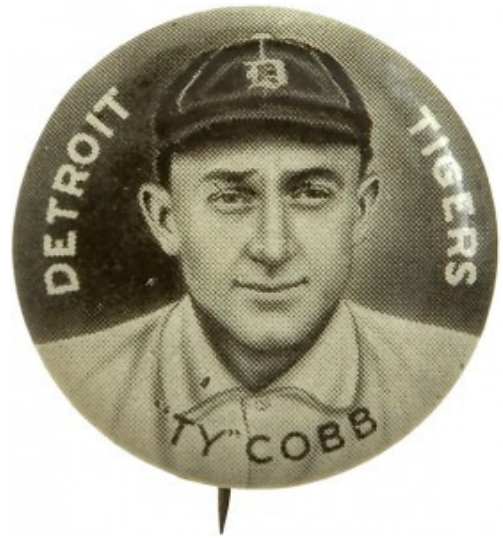
Amanda Cobb spoke about her son in a 1912 article in *Baseball Magazine*, "I used to worry about him, because he was so impulsive and strong-willed, but his father, whenever I spoke of it, would always say, "Never mind that boy; he'll get along all right. He's a law unto himself and even though he is impulsive, he's got good common sense to rally under the bumps he's bound to get."<sup>5</sup>



Right around the time of his father's death, Cobb, who was hitting .327 for Augusta, was sold to the Detroit Tigers for \$750. Ty made his big league debut on August 30, 1905 doubling off future Hall of Famer Jack Chesbro for his first hit in the majors. He finished out the year with the Tigers, hitting under .300 for the only time in his 24-year major league career. His initial contract with Detroit netted him \$18,000 for the season along with a \$300 bonus at the end of the year.

Ty soon established himself as one of the game's great stars, his annual contract escalating as his status grew. In 1907 he copped his first American League batting crown. That same year, he began his association with the Coca Cola Company. He eventually owned three bottling plants while retaining over 20,000 shares of stock in the company. On August 6, 1908 Cobb married the former Charlotte Lombard in Augusta, Georgia. The couple would go on to have five children, Ty, Shirley, Herschel, Jimmy and Beverly.

Detroit won the American League pennant three years in a row from 1907-1909. The Tigers went on to lose to the Chicago Cubs in the fall classic twice in a row and then the Pirates. During this time there was an anti-Cobb clique on the Detroit team that took rookie hazing to a new level. Cobb, a loner by nature, was going through a tough time coping with his father's death and his mother's subsequent trial. On top of all that, he had to deal with his teammates and their practical jokes. They sawed his bats in half, destroyed his belongings and even assaulted him. Cobb fought with Tigers catcher Charlie Schmidt on three separate occasions. Eventually these players left the team and things settled down on the Detroit ballclub.



In 1909 Cobb hit for what is now known as the Triple Crown, (.377 (9HR), (107 RBI). He also led the American League in hits (216) and steals (76) that season. On August 24, Cobb was involved in a controversial play that made national headlines. The Philadelphia Athletics were playing the Tigers at Bennett Park in Detroit when the incident occurred. In the bottom of the first, Ty walked, stole second and then tried to steal third. The ball arrived a little ahead of the runner so Athletics third baseman Frank "Home Run"

Baker inexplicably tried tagging Cobb while holding the ball in his bare hand. As Ty approached the bag, the two collided, resulting in a gash on Baker's forearm. Later in the game, Cobb slid into second base, knocking A's infielder Eddie Collins on his back in the process. This was the final straw for Philadelphia A's manager Connie Mack. After complaining about Cobb in the press, Mack eventually took his case to American League president Ban Johnson. Mack called for a suspension, telling Johnson that Cobb was the dirtiest player in baseball. Detroit owner Frank Navin was able to locate the photographer who took a picture of the play in question.

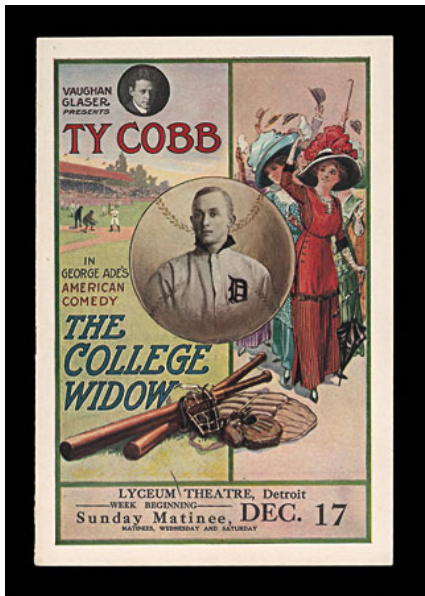


The image was eventually published in *The Sporting News*. The photograph showed Cobb sliding away from the bag with Baker falling into his path. In regard to this play, Cobb would later say, "I never spiked a man deliberately. Eddie Collins (A's second baseman) goes into the bases the same way I do. He has hurt as many men as I have. That is baseball and if we get hurt we take our own medicine and don't go around crying over it." <sup>6</sup>



The following year Cobb won his third straight American League batting title despite nefarious efforts by members of the St. Louis Browns. Throughout the last month of September, Cobb and Cleveland second baseman Nap Lajoie were locked in a tight battle for the junior circuit's highest batting average. Cobb chose to sit out the last two games of the season with a .385 batting average. Lajoie on the other hand went eight for nine against the St. Louis Browns to close out the season, finishing just below Cobb with a .384 mark. It was found out later that Browns manager Jack O'Connor, who despised Cobb, ordered his rookie third baseman Red Corriden to play back in the outfield grass every time Lajoie came to bat. Taking advantage of the loose defense, Lajoie bunted for a base hit eight consecutive times. However, his ninth bunt attempt resulted in an error after Corriden threw the ball past the first baseman. After the game, Browns' coach Harry Howell offered the official scorer a bribe to change the error to a hit but he was rebuffed. O'Connor and Howell were eventually blacklisted from professional baseball for their role in this unsavory incident.

Years later, noted baseball researcher Pete Palmer discovered that Cobb's last game in 1910 was tabulated twice in the final American League statistics. This modern statistical adjustment meant that Lajoie actually won the 1910 American League batting title by percentage points. Palmer's find also affected Cobb's lifetime average, which fell from .367 down to .366.



Ty Cobb took the stage as an actor in the winter of 1910-1911. Touring the country in George Ade's play, "The College Widow" Cobb starred as Billy Bolton, an aspiring collegiate football player from Vanderbilt. He earned \$8,400 for his work in the production. He received mostly favorable reviews from the critics for his acting ability.

In 1911, Cobb swatted the horsehide at an amazing .420 clip. He followed that up with a .409 average the next year. As Ty ascended into baseball stardom his aggressive style of base running didn't ingratiate him with most of the

opposing infielders. Many of these players were quite vocal in their belief that he was playing dirty baseball. In 1912, Detroit Tigers manager and future Hall of Famer Hughie Jennings spoke to *Baseball Magazine* about those accusations, "I say at this time what I have stated before, that Cobb has never intentionally spiked another player in his life. He is particularly fast on the bases, and always plays the game for everything there is in it. But he is a considerate and likable player in every way, and I know from my own personal knowledge that he would never be guilty of such an unsportsmanlike act. If anyone will take the pains to examine the records he will find that Cobb has spiked fewer players than several other prominent stars who have never been criticized in the slightest degree, or accused of unnecessary roughness. I am sure the average critic nowadays is ready to admit there is nothing whatsoever of rowdiness or dirty tactics in the playing of Ty Cobb."<sup>7</sup>

Jennings commented about Ty as a player as well, "It is hard to estimate what Cobb's worth is to the Detroit team. He is its mainstay in batting and base running, and one of its strongest features in defensive work. In my long career on the diamond, both as player and manager, I have come in contact

with most of the leading stars of the game, past and present, and I can say without prejudice, and I believe no one will accuse me of partiality, that I claim for Cobb the distinction of being the greatest player baseball has ever known.”<sup>8</sup>

On May 15, 1912, the Tigers were playing the Yankees in New York. As the game progressed, a number of fans in the stands began heckling Cobb. Throughout the afternoon, he endured all types of insults from the crowd. It got so bad, that Ty stayed in the tunnel out in centerfield between innings rather than run the gauntlet of verbal abuse to get to the visitor’s dugout. The most vocal of these rowdy fans was a man named Claude Lucker. After unsuccessfully looking for a policeman to throw the nere-do-well out of the ballpark, Ty, at the urging of his teammates, decided to go into the stands and take action himself. Lucker, who was missing one hand and three fingers on the other, was no match for Cobb. The Tiger outfielder pummeled him into a bloody pulp. Cobb’s teammates and manager confirmed Ty’s version of the incident. A few Tigers followed Cobb into the stands in case some of the other troublemakers had anything to say.



The newspaper accounts of the day supported Cobb’s version of the incident but the press condemned the outfielder for the violent beating he inflicted upon the physically challenged fan. American League president Ban Johnson happened to be at the ballpark that day. The next day, Johnson suspended Cobb indefinitely. Every player on the Detroit team, unlike his earlier Tiger teammates, had his back,. They were furious over the hasty verdict. They sent the following telegraph to Johnson: “Feeling Mr. Cobb is being done injustice by your action in suspending him, we the undersigned refuse to play another game after today until such action is adjusted to our satisfaction. He was fully justified in his actions as no one could stand such personal abuse from anyone. We want him reinstated for tomorrow’s game, May 18, or there will be no game. If a player cannot have protection we must protect ourselves.”<sup>9</sup>

Tigers manager Hughie Jennings backed Cobb and his players, telling the press, “The suspension was not warranted, I am in the hands of my friends. If they refuse to play, I will finish way down in the league race. I expect Mr.



Johnson to reconsider the matter, fine Cobb, or announce definitely the length of Cobb's suspension.”<sup>10</sup>

The Tigers next game was on May 18. Because of Cobb's indefinite suspension, the players refused to take the field against the Athletics at Shibe Park in Philadelphia. Hours before the game Jennings and coaches Joe Sugden and Jim McGuire started scouring the Philadelphia sandlots looking for players. They eventually picked up a hodgepodge of youngsters including St. Joseph College pitcher Joe Travers. With both Sugden and McGuire in the starting lineup, the replacement players were paid \$10 apiece with Travers receiving \$25 for his pitching effort. The game was a travesty as 15,000 fans watched their Athletics shellac the Tigers 26-2. Travers giving up 24 runs on 25 hits. The next day's game was postponed and a meeting was called with the striking players. American League president Ban Johnson levied a ten-game suspension on Cobb and fined him \$50 for his transgression. The striking players were fined \$100 apiece over the incident. Johnson also noted that each American League ballpark would now be required to have a larger police presence to protect the players from these types of situations.

Cobb finished the 1912 season with a .409 batting average. Continuing to establish his dominance as the most consistent hitter in baseball, from 1913-1919 he never hit under .368. He stole 96 bases in 1915. It remained the major league record until it was broken in 1962 by Los Angeles Dodgers shortstop Maury Wills.

In 1917 he starred in the silent movie “Somewhere in Georgia,” earning a reported \$25,000 for his part in the six-reel production. The Tiger star reportedly turned down at least 100 different movie offers before finally accepting this role. Ty played the part of a baseball playing Georgia bank clerk who saves the girl and wins the big game at the end of the film. The movie was based on a short story written by sports writer Grantland Rice.



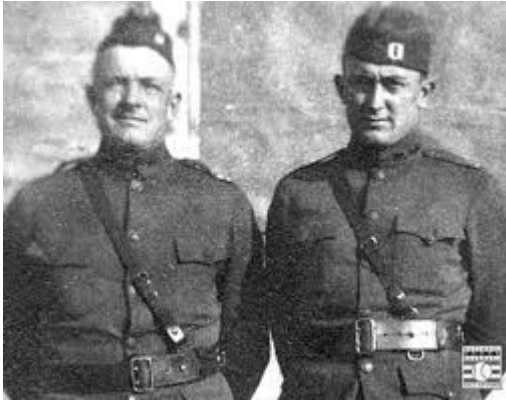
That same year, Ty was involved with one of his more publicized baseball fights. The Tigers, who held their spring training in Waxahatchie, Texas,

traveled to Dallas on March 31 to start a series of exhibition games against the New York Giants. Cobb shot 18 holes of golf in the morning and arrived at the ballpark just before game time. The Giants bench, with middle infielders Buck Herzog and Art Fletcher being the most vociferous, heckled Cobb for his superstar attitude in regard to his late arrival. Cobb singled his first time up and proceeded to steal second. While sliding into the bag, Ty's spikes ripped into second baseman Herzog's pants leg causing a bloody gash. Herzog joined by Giants shortstop Art Fletcher began fighting with Cobb in the dirt around second base. Players from both teams along with ballpark security eventually stopped the brawl, Cobb being ejected from the game. Later that night at the Oriental Hotel, where both teams were staying, Herzog challenged Cobb to a rematch. The fight took place in Cobb's room with Tigers trainer Harry Tuthill acting as the referee. From all accounts Cobb got the better of Herzog, an accomplished boxer, in the second fight.

The next morning in the hotel foyer, Giants manager John McGraw tried to exact some revenge on Cobb for the beating he inflicted on Herzog. McGraw was restrained by some bystanders before the fight could escalate. Despite this blowup, McGraw never wavered in his belief that Cobb was the greatest center fielder he ever saw. Ty refused to play in the rest of the scheduled exhibition games with New York. Instead, he traveled to Cincinnati where he worked out with the Reds until the Tigers finished their series of exhibition games with the Giants.

At the outbreak of America's involvement in World War I, Secretary of War Newton Baker issued his "Work or Fight" ultimatum to all men of draft age. This edict caused many professional baseball players to scramble for stateside jobs that supported the war effort in order to avoid military service. Cobb didn't try to procure this type of employment. Instead, he enlisted in one of the most elite military units of the war, the Chemical Warfare Service. It was organized by General John Pershing to combat the deadly poison gas attacks by the German army. This unit was also known as the Gas and Flame regiment. The mission of the Chemical Warfare Service was as follows:

"Anticipate German gas attacks where the heaviest trench fighting would be, then turn the tables on the enemy by quickly spraying their flanks with jets of flame from tanks strapped onto their backs. Then, once their tanks emptied they were to lob special "gas grenades" at fallen Germans and clear the area." <sup>11</sup>

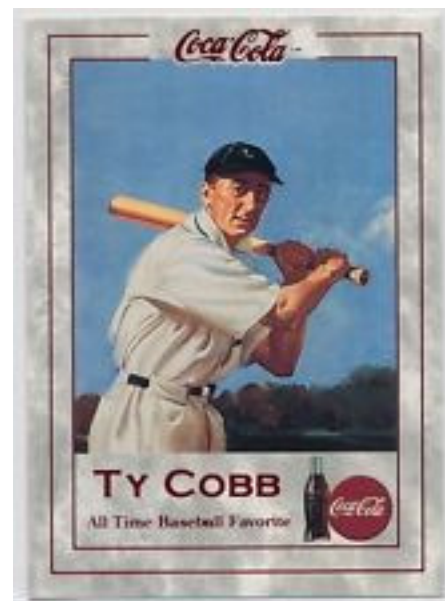


Cobb and another future Hall of Famer, Christy Mathewson, received Captain's commissions. Baseball executive Branch Rickey served as a major in this same regiment. Captain Cobb arrived in France in October of 1918. Part of the Gas and Flame training regimen was to enter a closed chamber, put on their gas masks and endure a chemical attack. In one of these mock exercises, the soldiers

either received a belated signal to put on their masks or they were slow in responding. Either way, many of the unfortunate men inhaled the gas. According to available reports some men died while others suffered permanent damage to their respiratory systems. Cobb developed a severe hacking cough from the incident but eventually recovered. Mathewson later contracted tuberculosis, dying seven years later at the age of 45. It can't be proven but some modern day baseball historians believe that Mathewson's premature death was due in part to this botched training exercise.

The war ended in November of 1918 and Cobb returned home. Contemplating retirement because of his diminished physical capacity, he eventually reported to spring training in March of 1919. Shaking off the lingering effects of the toxic gas, he went on to lead the American League with a .384 batting average.

Smart with his money, he began purchasing real estate early in his career. Throughout the course of his lifetime he profited greatly from these and other investments, including Coca Cola. He also purchased stock in cotton futures for a modest price on the New York Stock Exchange. At the conclusion of World War I, he sold his cotton shares for \$155,000. A stockholder in General Motors, he allowed his name to be used in the promotion of their automobiles, earning him an annual salary of \$25,000. A savvy businessman, he was paid to endorse a variety of products during his career.



In 1921 Cobb became the player-manager of the Tigers. The team never won a pennant during his tenure at the helm but their hitting improved under his tutelage. The first year he took over the club, the team's batting average jumped from .265 to .316. Near the end of the season, Cobb and umpire Billy Evans nearly came to blows on the field at Griffith Park in Washington. The dispute arose after Evans called pitcher Rube Oldham out on what Cobb perceived as bad call. Cobb challenged Evans to a fight after the game. The two met in the visitor's clubhouse, with both teams in attendance. Cobb punched Evans' face into bloody mess in a fight that Tigers second baseman Sammy Barnes later recounted as the worst he ever witnessed in baseball. Barnes noted that Evans was popular with the players, quite a few of them rooting for him to win the fight. Word got back to Ban Johnson and Cobb was suspended for the final three games of the season. Evans with his face covered in bandages umpired the next day. The fearless arbiter would be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1973.

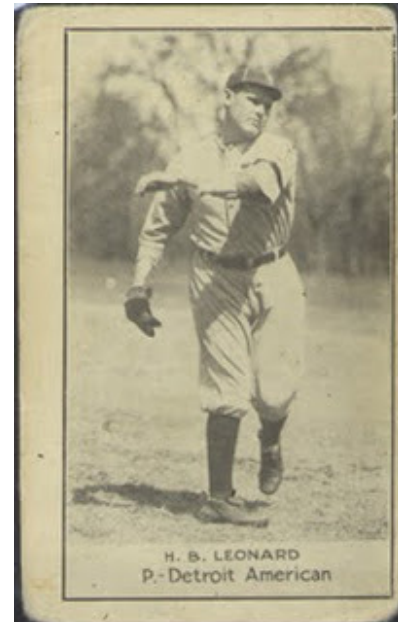
In February of 1922 Cobb purchased a large percentage of the Augusta Tourists in the South Atlantic League. The team was renamed the Tygers a short time later in honor of Cobb. For the next few years Ty continued to hit well but the Detroit Club, under his managerial reign, finished no higher than second in the American League standings.

On November 3, 1926, Cobb and the Cleveland Indians' Tris Speaker unexpectedly resigned as player-manager of the respective teams. The newspapers reported that Cobb said, "He'd been in harness long enough and was entitled to a rest."<sup>12</sup> It was implied in the papers that Cobb was tired of the criticism regarding his managerial skills as well as what he perceived as interference from Tigers owner Frank Navin.

The following month a story broke that alluded to the real reason for Cobb's unexpected departure from the game. In late December, baseball commissioner Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis made a stunning announcement that was carried in all of the national newspapers. Baseball's top man announced that Cobb and Speaker were possibly involved in fixing a game that took place between the Detroit Tigers and Cleveland Indians on September 25, 1919. The claims were made by former Tigers pitcher Dutch Leonard, who had recently lodged a complaint against the Detroit club for back salary. In addition, Leonard had an axe to grind with Cobb for many reasons, including putting him on waivers in 1921. Leonard was also angry with Speaker, a close friend, for not picking him up off the waiver wire.



Leonard asserted that he, Cleveland pitcher-outfielder “Smoky” Joe Wood, Cobb and Speaker, met under the stands at Navin Field (Detroit) on September 24 to discuss throwing the next day’s game. Detroit needed to win in order to clinch third place. Leonard stated to American League officials that Cobb was going to bet \$2,000 on the game while the other three conspirators were supposed to lay out \$1000 apiece. Leonard said that Cobb and Speaker failed to put up any money. He went on to say that he and Wood won \$130 each after the Tigers won the game 9-6. The statement about the two players winning money was never corroborated by anyone other than Leonard. Cobb went one-for-five with a triple in the game so he didn’t contribute much to help his team win the supposed bet. He wasn’t the manager at this time so he couldn’t do anything else to affect the outcome of the game. Speaker on the other hand had three hits including a triple. These don’t appear to be the actions of a man who was trying to lose. Wood did not play in the game.



The disgruntled ex-Tiger tosser produced two letters, one from Cobb, one from Wood that reportedly mentioned betting in general but gave no specifics. Leonard received \$20,000, the same amount he wanted from the Tigers in back pay, from American League officials in exchange for the letters. It should be noted that baseball players gambling on their own team baseball wasn’t against the rules at this time. Newspapers regularly publicized the betting line for the World Series during the Deadball Era of baseball (1900-1920). Prior to the 1919 Black Sox Scandal, the only players banned from baseball for gambling were those who were believed to have fixed games.

Cobb spoke to reporters, saying that he was innocent of all charges. He demanded an official hearing from the commissioner’s office to clear his name. American League president Ban Johnson told the media that he had additional evidence that further implicated Speaker and Cobb, but it was never produced. On September 9, 1926, a special board of American League directors held a secret session. At this covert gathering headed by Johnson,

the junior circuit's officials voted that both Cobb and Speaker should be banned from the American League for life.

Johnson was not happy with Commissioner Landis for going public with the letters from Leonard. Johnson gave them to Landis with the understanding that their contents would remain private. Even without definitive proof that they fixed the game, Johnson was determined to make an example out of both Cobb and Speaker. In an unusual stance on the situation, Johnson wanted both players banned from the American League for life but didn't want their reputations sullied in the press.



For months, the case was tried in the court of public opinion in newspapers throughout the country. Landis called for a hearing so that Leonard could confront Cobb and Speaker in person with his charges. Leonard refused to appear. With the principle witness unwilling to cooperate, Landis, disregarding



Johnson's wishes, reinstated both players into the good graces of major league baseball. Commenting on making the contents of the letters public, Landis felt that he had no choice as Leonard's accusations had become common knowledge. If there had been definitive evidence that Cobb and Speaker threw a game, Landis would've banned them from baseball. Without overwhelming proof, Landis, who personally liked both men, knew he didn't have a strong case. After the hit baseball took during the 1919 Black Sox scandal, it's safe to surmise that Landis didn't want to go down that road again unless he was totally convinced of their guilt.

Most of the American League owners, led by Charles Comiskey, had been at odds with Ban Johnson for years. On January 24, 1927, the day before Cobb and Speaker were originally scheduled to appear before Landis. Johnson was voted out by the owners as American League president. He was allowed to receive his salary through 1935 but Johnson no longer wielded any power in baseball. He had hopes of reclaiming the presidency, but the American League magnates made it known that he wasn't welcome to return. Johnson, who had been in poor health for some time, died in 1931.

Back in the good graces of baseball, Cobb signed with Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics in 1927 season for \$70,000. His contract called for an additional \$10,000 bonus if the A's won the World Series. Cobb planned to

sue baseball over the accusations that he fixed a game. Mack, whose reputation and honesty was beyond reproach, believed in Cobb's innocence, which led to Ty putting the matter to rest. Speaker rebounded as well, signing with the Washington Senators. It turned out to be a good year for Cobb and the Athletics, who finished in second place. Mack's club was in the final stages of rebuilding. In just two years, his Athletics would be considered one of the greatest teams in baseball history. Cobb collected his 4,000 hit that year, at age 40, hitting .357 with 22 stolen bases.

Cobb joined back up with Philadelphia in 1928 in what would be his last major league campaign. Tris Speaker left the Senators and signed with the A's in early February of 1928. Eight members of this Athletic team, including manager Connie Mack were destined for enshrinement in Cooperstown. Cobb, batting second in the lineup, hit safely in seventeen of the first eighteen games. On June 15, he stole home against the Cleveland Indians for the last time of his career. On July 28, Cobb scored his last run before leaving the game after being nailed in the ribs by Detroit pitcher Sam Gibson. Ty spent the rest of the year on the bench as seldom-used pinch hitter, finishing with a .323 batting average. He recorded his last hit, number 4189, against the Washington Senators at Griffith Park. The A's finished in second place again. Retiring at the end of the season, Cobb told the press. "I prefer to cease active playing while there still may remain some base hits in my bat."<sup>13</sup>



After he left baseball Cobb returned home to Augusta where he lived at 2425 Williams street in the Summerville district of the city. A few years later, Cobb bought an estate in Atherton, California near San Francisco. An avid outdoorsman and crack shot, he made frequent hunting trips to the Sierra Rockies and Canada. He stayed in shape by playing at least four rounds of golf each week. He later purchased a home in Zephyr Cove, Nevada on the east shore of Lake Tahoe.

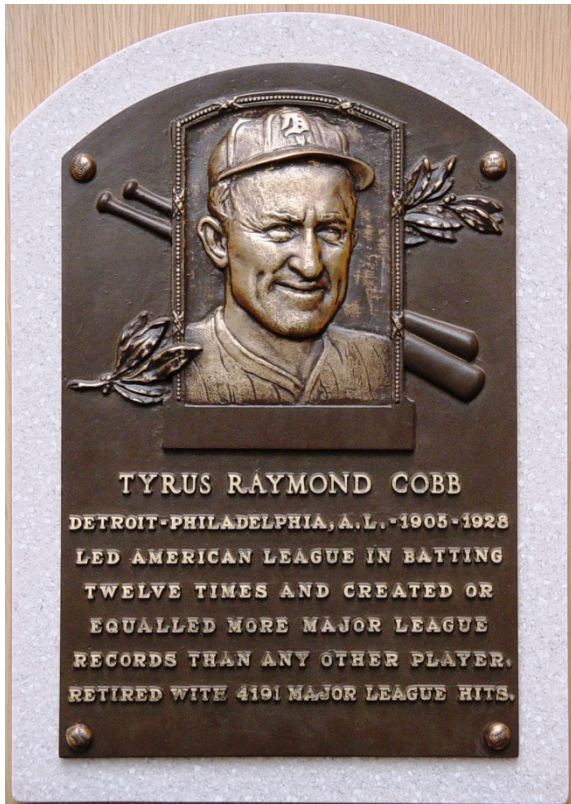
Cobb spoke at a baseball banquet in San Francisco in 1934, telling the crowd, "If I had it to do over again I wouldn't have taken baseball so seriously. In my playing days I was bearing down all the time. I guess I was pretty rough and tough. Looking back over the years I believe I could have

cut out a different path than I did. There were some mighty fine fellows playing in my days. We battled our way through baseball. It was a fight tooth and nail. I could have cemented some wonderful friendships with fellows who would be real friends today. I believe I made a mistake there. Baseball is a great game but there is such a thing as taking it too seriously.”

14

In 1936 Cobb was voted into the first Hall of Fame class along with Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson and Walter Johnson. Ty received 222 out of 226 votes. Cobb was proud of receiving the national pastimes' greatest honor. When his health permitted, he traveled to Cooperstown to greet each group of incoming inductees. He was an ardent emissary for the game of baseball as well as the Hall of Fame.

In 1942 *The Sporting News* polled 102 famous ballplayers and managers as to who was the greatest player of all time. Cobb was the winner by a landslide, receiving 60 votes. Honus Wagner came in a distant second with Babe Ruth finishing third.



Over the next few years, Ty continued to follow baseball while pursuing his hobbies of golf, hunting and fishing. In 1945, for the second year in a row, *Esquire* magazine sponsored an East-West All-American game for talented amateur prospects, age 14-17, from around the country. Babe Ruth was the manager of the East team and Ty Cobb the West. Ruth's charges defeated Cobb's squad 5-4 in front of 23,617 fans at the Polo Grounds. One of the players was a young man name Frank Lane. The youngsters were required to report to New York for ten days of practice before the game. Lane later recounted, "When I went there I wanted to meet Ruth. I had come there expecting Ruth to be the friendly one and Cobb to be the nasty one. But Ruth didn't pay attention to any of us ballplayers. Cobb was the nice guy. He had patience with us. He worked with us. The two guys were opposites."



<sup>15</sup> According to Lane, Cobb even gave some up some of his private time to help mentor the kids. In Ruth's defense, he wasn't in the best of health. He died from cancer three years later.

In a 1946 interview with sports writer Eugene Phillips, Cobb briefly described the circumstances that led to him retiring from baseball, "I didn't want, at my age, to disillusion a lot of people. I was tired after being in the game 24 years. Also I wanted to quit while I was still hitting better than .300. And they were catching up with me."<sup>16</sup>

Cobb and his first wife Charlotte divorced in 1947, Two years later, he married Frances Fairburn Cass. In late July of 1951, Cobb was called to appear before Congress to discuss baseball's reserve clause. The meeting was called by a House Judiciary Subcommittee, chaired by Senator Emanuel Celler of New York, to look into allegations that baseball violated anti-trust laws. Cobb testified that he thought the reserve clause helped baseball as it kept the wealthier teams from buying up all of the established stars. He also suggested that the players have the option of renegotiating their contracts every five years if they weren't happy with their salary.

Ty divorced his second wife in 1956, both citing mental cruelty. This union produced no children. That same year, hoping to pass on his baseball knowledge, Cobb collaborated with writer John McCallum on an instructional guide to the game called *The Tiger Wore Spikes: An Informal Biography of Ty Cobb*.

In 1958 he returned home to his native state, moving into a small apartment in Cornelia, Georgia. Beginning in December of 1960, Cobb was hospitalized on four different occasions. He was suffering from prostate cancer, diabetes, chronic heart disease, bursitis plus a back injury he incurred while hunting in Idaho. During this time, Cobb contacted Doubleday Publishing about putting together his biography. Doubleday put him in touch with writer Al Stump (1916-1995). Stump was a former war correspondent, who dabbled in sports stories. Stump and Cobb spent about three weeks together in 1960-61 working on the book.

On July 5, 1961, Cobb entered Emory Hospital in Atlanta for the last time. Twelve days later he succumbed to the deadly cancer that had ravaged his body. He was survived by his estranged first wife Charlotte, his three living children Shirley, Beverly and Jimmy along with their families. The Cobbs

arrived in Georgia a few weeks earlier, keeping a bedside vigil until he died. After his passing, they put together his funeral then settled his estate. Two



days after Cobb died, the family held a private service at the Cornelia Christian Church led by Reverend A.E. Miller. There were 150 relatives and friends in attendance. After the funeral, Cobb was interred at the family mausoleum at Rose Hill Cemetery. Only three former players, Nap Rucker, Mickey Cochrane and Ray Schalk attended the service. The

Director of the Baseball Hall of Fame, Sid Keener, was also there. It is understandable that there weren't many of ballplayers there because Cobb had outlived many of his closest friends in the game. It has been reported that the family made a request that members of major league baseball and other celebrities stay away from the service. The Cobbs may have wanted to avoid the large crowds that would've been involved with such a high profile funeral.

The Lexington, North Carolina, *Dispatch* of July 19, 1961, reported that the following baseball notables would be attending Cobb's funeral as honorary pallbearers: The names included Casey Stengel, Ford Frick Joe Cronin, Del Webb, Charlie Dressen, Fred Haney, Herold "Muddy" Ruel, Frank "Home Run" Baker, Sam Crawford, Mickey Cochrane and Earl Mann. For whatever reason all of them, excluding Cochrane, didn't attend. Paying one's respects at funerals is a time-honored tradition among those associated with our national pastime. It appears the family wanted a private funeral and their wishes were honored. Cobb counted some of America's most influential people as his close friends but they too, weren't at the service. Only the Cobb family knows the true story. Even so, they received hundreds of telegrams and letters of condolence from numerous baseball dignitaries and celebrities from all walks of life.

The result of the collaboration between Cobb and Al Stump was the book, *My Life in Baseball: A True Record* that came out shortly after the Georgia Peach passed away. It was well received and stayed in print for years. In December of 1961 Stump published an unflattering article about Cobb in *True Magazine* called *Ty Cobb's Wild Ten Month Ride To Live*. Stump intimated that Cobb's creative control over the book didn't allow him to write the real story. Stump portrayed Cobb in last few months on earth as a deranged alcoholic/drug addict lunatic who hated everything and everybody.

Stump, failing to acknowledge the family's request for privacy, wrote that Cobb was so unpopular that no one from organized baseball bothered to show up for his funeral. After reading Stump's article on Cobb, Sid Keener remarked, "Why should an author wait until the idol of millions was locked in that mausoleum in Royston, Georgia to type such caustic and scathing prose?"<sup>17</sup>

Cobb's reputation took another hit from the national press in 1985, when Pete Rose broke his all-time hit record. The majority of these sports writers never knew Cobb yet they promulgated all of his alleged misdeeds, most of them gleaned from Stump's article. Ty's reputation didn't fare well in the Kens Burns baseball documentary nor did he get a favorable mention in the movie "Field of Dreams." In the latter, the players didn't want Cobb to play in their heavenly game in the cornfield because they hated him. In 1994 the movie Cobb, starring Tommy Lee Jones, was another film based on Stump's research and written work. Once again the depiction of Cobb wasn't very flattering. The surviving members of Cobb's family were disappointed in the film as well.

Stump, who put out two additional books on Cobb, later ran into his own trouble. Stump claimed to own the shotgun that was used in the murder of William Cobb. Amanda Cobb's own court testimony states that she used a pistol in the shooting of her husband. There were further accusations by law enforcement and baseball collectors regarding Stump's sale of forged letters supposedly written by Cobb. In addition, there were allegations against Stump for trying to sell other dubious Cobb memorabilia. Stump also wrote about a number of questionable incidents that supposedly occurred in Cobb's life, including the murder of a mugger in Chicago that has never been substantiated. Like Cobb, Mr. Stump is no longer alive to defend himself. So in fairness to the departed, the reader can look into the facts regarding Mr. Stump in order to draw their own conclusions regarding his veracity. In no way is it the intention of the author to cast aspersions on the late Mr. Stump. The author is only referencing what is now considered public knowledge, the information being gleaned from Mr. Stump's Wikipedia page.

Cobb's exploits on the diamond are legendary but his private life is shrouded in controversy. A number of present day sports writers and a variety of other people have labeled him a racist, most of the charges stemming from Stump's *True Magazine* article and later books. However, there are no

contemporaneous newspaper accounts that the author is aware of that corroborate these claims. As a young man, Cobb certainly had a temper, which led to fights with people from all ethnic backgrounds. With the participants in these brawls long since deceased, we'll never know the real cause of these altercations. Conversely, there are numerous confirmed firsthand accounts of Cobb's generosity and kindness to minorities from all backgrounds. Later in life Cobb spoke out publicly against baseball's color line that held back African-Americans from playing professional baseball.

Cobb's children have implied that he was a loving father who could be distant at times. Family members have stated that he held lifelong grudges against some of his kids. Later day stories about Cobb being rude to young fans and unwilling to sign autographs have proven to be completely false. Hundreds of Cobb signed items have surfaced over the years, many of them personalized to children. There have been veiled insinuations of spousal abuse but, as all parties have passed on, there's no way to accurately address this issue. Cobb's personal life is truly an enigma wrapped in a mystery.

In an interview shortly before his death Ty reminisced about his playing days, "I wouldn't change a thing. I played every game to the hilt. I always played to win. But I never filed my spikes the way they said I did, and I never deliberately spiked anyone in my life."<sup>18</sup>

Infielder Frank O'Rourke played on the Tigers from 1924-26 when Ty was the player-manager," When asked what it was like playing for Cobb, O'Rourke responded, "I liked him. He liked to win and I respected him for that. To me, he was a gentleman at all times. He was a hustler and a fighter. He just wouldn't take any backtalk from anybody."<sup>19</sup>



What we do know for certain is that Cobb was a philanthropic man, a fact that is rarely mentioned. In 1950 he donated \$100,000 to establish the Cobb Memorial Hospital in

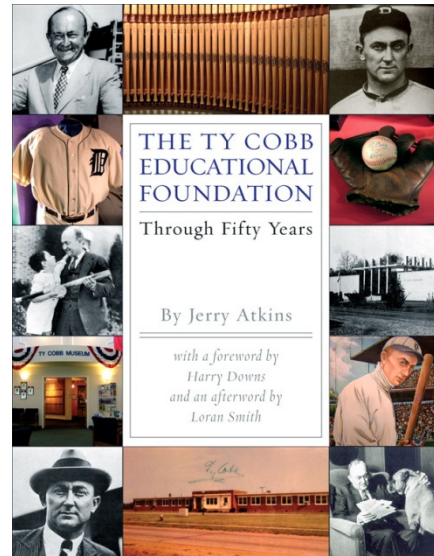
Royston, Georgia in memory of his parents. This hospital has evolved into the modern day Ty Cobb Health Care System. This group of medical centers has provided assistance to people of all races, creeds and religions. At no



time did he ever make any stipulations as to who could receive treatment at the facility that bears his family name.

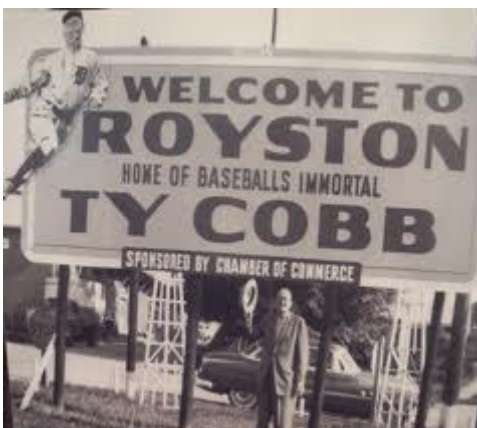
In 1953 Cobb started a scholarship fund for Georgia students, The Cobb Educational Fund extends financial aid to Georgia students from every race, creed and religion so they can obtain college educations. The foundation's mission statement reads as follows, "To provide help for the manual arts school, technological, professional or college education of qualified boys or girls, who otherwise would be unable to secure such education."

When he passed away in 1961, Cobb, whose net worth was estimated to be around 93 million in today's economy, left 25% of his estate to his educational foundation. The remainder of his fortune was distributed among his children and grandchildren. As of 2012, Cobb's foundation has distributed over \$12,000,000 in scholarships to young adults of all races from Georgia.



Cobb summed his baseball career up best in 1916 saying, "I know enough of fame on the diamond to know it lasts as long as the ability is there to win it. I shall have my day like all the rest, and whatever I have done will be forgotten." <sup>20</sup>

After Cobb's death Dr. Stewart Brown Jr. of Royston started an effort to honor the town's native son with his own museum. Over \$500,000 was raised, mostly in private donations, for the project. The museum was eventually built but it, like Cobb's legacy, didn't fare well. State funding of the museum ended in 1975. The building was sold back to the city for \$1. part of the structure becoming Royston's new City Hall.



Thanks to Brown, four billboards were erected that read, "Welcome to Royston, Home of Baseball's Immortal Ty Cobb." A 1978 *Associated Press* article noted that two of the signs had fallen into disrepair but there wasn't any money in the city

coffers to have them refurbished. Royston Mayor Jerry Gaines attempted to explain the decline of the Cobb Museum, “It all began when Interstate 85 opened up. We used to be a major traveling artery through (Georgia State Highway) 29 and people would stop off to see the historic sites but 85 ended all that. Occasionally, there is a person who will drive off I-85 and ask for the Cobb Museum. Perhaps we didn’t promote the idea enough in the beginning. But there was a problem in that most of Cobb’s stuff was sent to the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown (N.Y.) and his family didn’t cooperate that much. What we have now is over at the hospital.” <sup>21</sup>

The city of Royston opened a new Cobb Museum on July 17, 1998. The goal of this museum, which is housed in one of the buildings of the Ty Cobb Health system, is to provide the true story of their hometown hero. Chairman of the Museum Committee, Matt McRee, told the *Associated Press*, “Some of the stories about Cobb have been so exaggerated over the years, they’re not even accurate any more.” <sup>22</sup>

As the years roll on and generations come and go, one’s lifetime accomplishments are absorbed into the endless abyss of time. In Cobb’s case it’s safe to assume that he’d be astonished at the lambasting he has received at the hands of the modern day media. No benefit of the doubt has been given to a man who is no longer around to address his accusers. For the most part his once storied legacy has been tarnished by people that never met him. Hopefully, Cobb’s true persona, good, bad or indifferent, will emerge someday from the depths of negativism that has engulfed one of our national pastime’s greatest players. Cobb, imperfect as any human being, assuredly had his faults. On the other hand, he had a good side too, which should count for something as we formulate our opinion of this old-time baseball legend.



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Notes:

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