

## ***THE BRAINIEST MAN IN BASEBALL***

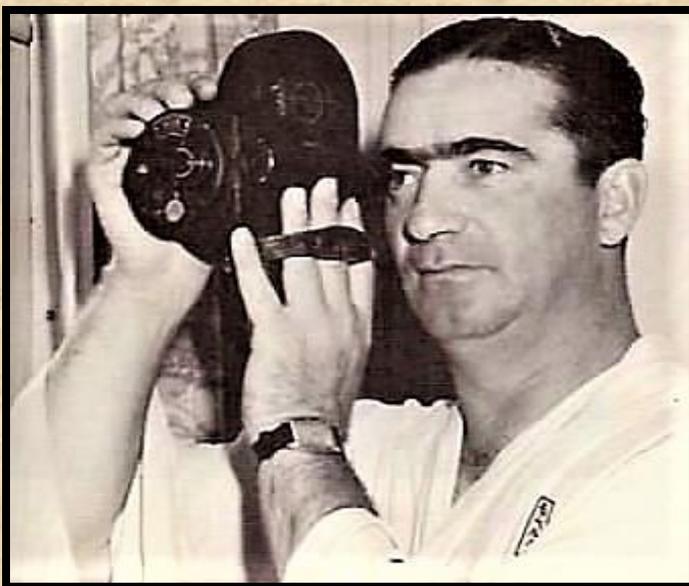


In 1932, a retired baseball player named Herb Hunter arranged a trip to Japan for three American baseball players. The stated purpose of their visit was to teach baseball seminars during the winter months of that year at six Japanese universities. Lefty O'Doul, Ted Lyons, and a mediocre third-string catcher named ***Moe Berg*** were chosen for the trip.

Upon completing their coaching obligations, O'Doul and Lyons returned to the United States. Moe Berg remained in Japan to explore the country and its people. He also toured Manchuria, Shanghai, Indochina, Siam, Peking, India, Egypt and Berlin. Moe wanted to return to Japan but had to report to the Washington

Senators training camp in Biloxi, MS on February 26, 1933. His stats that year can best be described as 'lousy'. Moe played in only 40 games and produced a bleak batting average of .185.

Released by the Senators, Moe was eventually picked up by the Cleveland Indians as a reserve catcher. When the Indian's first string catcher, Frankie Pytlak, injured himself, Moe became the starting catcher.



In 1934, Herb Hunter arranged another trip to Japan for a group of All-Stars, including Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. Their job was to play a series of exhibition games against a Japanese All-Star team. Moe Berg, nowhere near All-Star material, received

an invitation to make the trip at the last minute. ***Moe carried a 16-mm Bell & Howell movie camera to Japan and a letter from the newsreel production company MovietoneNews stating that he was under contract to film the visit.*** Upon their arrival, Moe gave a hospitality speech in Japanese then later addressed the Japanese legislator.

He skipped one exhibition games and put on a Japanese kimono to visit the daughter of an American diplomat hospitalized at St. Luke's Hospital, the tallest building at that time in Tokyo. Moe

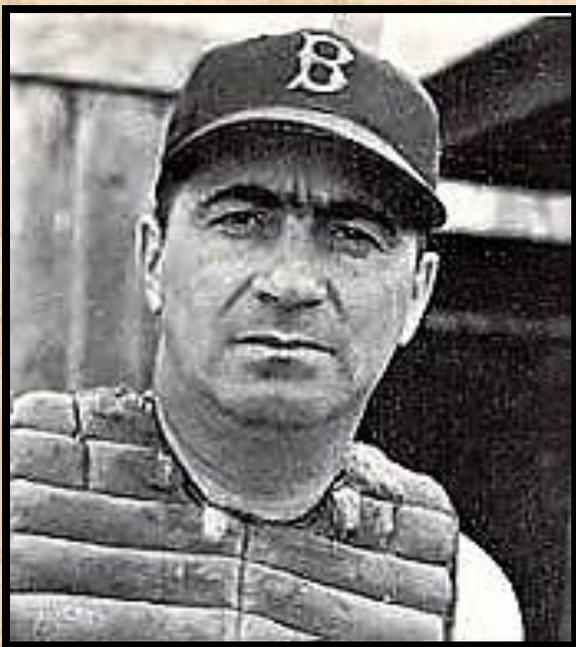
took flowers to the women but never delivered them. Evading the visit, Moe made his way to the hospital roof and filmed the railway yards, military installations, Tokyo harbor and other key structures. General Jimmy Doolittle studied Moe's films eight years later while planning his legendary raid on Tokyo in 1942.

Moe Berg read 10 newspapers every day and learned Latin, Greek, and French while in high school. He graduated magna cum laude from Princeton during which time he added German, Italian, Spanish, and Sanskrit to his verbal repertoire. Moe also earned a law degree from Columbia Law School and studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. At Sorbonne, Moe picked up Hungarian, Portuguese, Japanese, Arabic, Chinese, Korean and Indian. He was, indeed, a linguistic mastermind with 15 languages under his belt, not including several regional dialects. While playing baseball at Princeton University, Moe described baseball plays in Sanskrit or Latin.

Moe Berg, an intellectual and one of a few Jewish professional baseball players, had a passion for two things: America's game, baseball, and working undercover as a spy for the United States government. His government employer was the OSS (Office of Strategic Service), precursor to the CIA. Legendary New York Yankees coach, Casey Stengel, said of Moe Berg, "That is the strangest man ever to play baseball."

Born in 1902 and living in the Harlem section of New York City, by age four Moe was begging his parents to let him start school. In 1910, the family moved to a better location in Newark which

offered Moe good schools and a solid middle-class upbringing. His love for baseball began at the age of 7. During his senior year in high school, Moe was selected as the third baseman for a nine-man 'dream team'. At Princeton he played shortstop. He was not a swift baserunner nor a great hitter, but had good instincts and a strong throwing arm. He did have a good senior year batting a respectable .337 and crushed arch-rivals Harvard and Yale with an outstanding .611 batting average. Moe and Princeton's second baseman, Crossan Cooper, communicated in Latin if an opposing player was on second base.



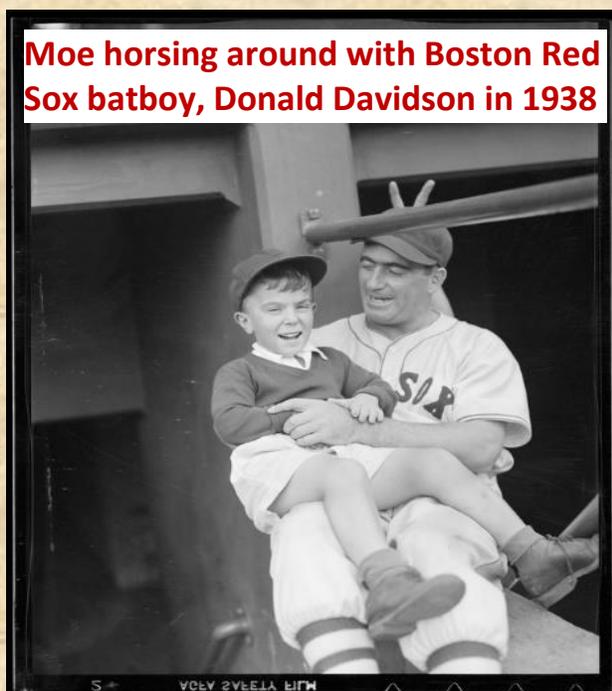
Moe's notable colligate baseball earned him his first big league contract with the Brooklyn Robins (i.e. Dodgers) of the National League. His contract: \$5,000, approximately \$75,000 in today's money). After his first season, Moe went to Paris and enrolled for 32 classes at the Sorbonne. In January of 1924, instead of returning to New

York to get in shape for the upcoming season, Moe toured Italy and Switzerland. His lack of serious training showed.

Poor play sent him to several minor leagues and major league teams, the Minneapolis Millers, Toledo Mud Hens, the Reading Keystones, and eventually the Chicago White Sox. He skipped

spring training and the first two months of the season to attend his first year of law school at Columbia University. Needless to say, he didn't play many games.

Moe continued his studies at Columbia but once again failed to report for spring training and spent his first three months on the bench. In August of 1927, the White Sox signed Frank Bruggy as a replacement catcher after their best three catchers were plagued by injuries. Problem was, Frank Bruggy was so fat the White Sox pitchers refused to pitch to him. Moe Berg became the starting catcher. In his first game, Moe had to handle Ted Lyons' notorious knuckleball plus the New York Yankee's famed 'Murderers' Row', including Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. Lyons held Ruth hitless and the White Sox beat the Yankees 6-3, with Moe having an outstanding game.



**Moe horsing around with Boston Red Sox batboy, Donald Davidson in 1938**

Moe's 1928 season was his best year but in an exhibition game he tore a knee ligament, an injury that would plague his career for the rest of his life. He had decent seasons, but Chicago put him on waivers in 1931. The Cleveland Indians signed Moe but gave him an unconditional release in 1932. Finally picked up by the Washington Senators, Moe had one of his better years. He later

played for the Boston Red Sox but as his playing days were coming to an end Moe found employment as a Red Sox coach in 1940 and 1941.

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Moe wanted to do his part for the war effort and accepted a position with Nelson Rockefeller's Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. Bored with that position, Moe accepted an offer from the Office of Strategic Services Special Operations Branch as a paramilitary operations officer, now known as the CIA's Special Activities Division. He was assigned to the OSS (SI) Secret Intelligence desk for undercover work in the Balkans. At 41 years of age, Moe parachuted into Yugoslavia to determine which partisan group should be supported by the Allies. After receiving Moe's report, Winston Churchill ordered a full-scale support effort for underground fighter Marshall Tito, who later became President of Yugoslavia.

Then there was the question of how close Adolph Hitler and the Nazi Party were to developing the Atomic Bomb. If the German war machine developed the Atomic Bomb first, they would win the war, plain and simple. Enter secret agent Moe Berg.

Moe traveled around Europe as much as possible from May of 1944 to December of 1944 interviewing physicists and trying to convince them to leave Europe to continue their work in America. During December the OSS received word that Nobel Laureate and top German physicist, Werner Heisenberg, was giving a lecture in Zurich, Switzerland. Moe was assigned the job

of determining, "If anything Heisenberg said convinced him the Germans were close to a 'bomb'."



Posing as a Swiss graduate student, Moe slipped past SS guards at the auditorium and took a front row seat. He carried a pistol in his pocket and a cyanide pill. If Moe determined Heisenberg and the Nazis were anywhere close to crafting an atomic bomb, Moe had orders to assassinate Heisenberg before swallowing the cyanide pill. Nothing is Heisenberg's speech gave Moe the impression that the Nazis were on the verge of

developing an atomic weapon, so Moe complimented the German physicist on his brilliant presentation then walked the man back to his hotel.

Moe's report on Heisenberg was distributed to key personnel in America's atomic program, to Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. When Roosevelt received the report, he said, "Give my regards to the catcher."

After the war, Moe pleaded with the CIA to send him to Israel, "A Jew must do this," he wrote in a notebook. The CIA refused

his request. In 1952, the CIA hired Moe to use his old contacts in Europe to discover secrets on the Soviet Union's top secret atomic projects. The CIA paid Moe \$10,000 plus expenses yet received nothing in return for their money. Perhaps Moe was burned out with his espionage gigs, or maybe he was upset at the CIA's refusal for a posting in Israel, whatever the case Moe Berg had changed. One CIA operative described Moe as 'flaky'.

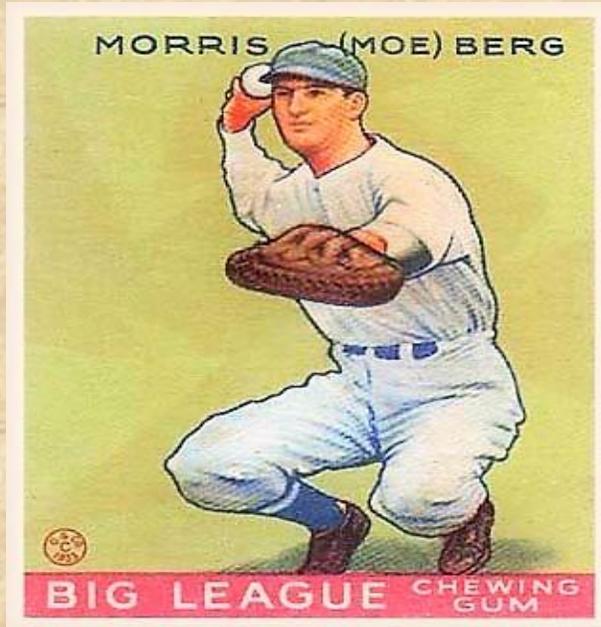
For the next 20 years of his life, Moe Berg had no real job. He lived off friends and relatives, he never married, and after 17 years of mooching off his brother, Samuel, Moe was asked to leave. Moe moved in with his sister in Belleville, New Jersey where he remained until his death. Several requests to write his memoirs were rejected. In 1960, Moe finally agreed to pen his memoirs but backed out of the deal when his assigned co-writer confused Moe with Moe Howard of the Three Stooges.

No doubt an intellectual among intellectuals, perhaps Moe Berg was a victim of the eccentricity so often attributed to brilliant and unconventional individuals. He was awarded the Medal of Freedom, the highest award given to civilians during wartime. Moe refused the medal. His sister accepted the award in honor of Moe after his death.

Often criticized for squandering his intellectual talents and law degree on baseball, Moe would reply, "I'd rather be a baseball player than a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court."

After sustaining grievous injuries from a home-fall, Moe Berg died on May 29, 1972 at the age of 70. One of his attending

nurses at the hospital remembered Moe's last words, "How did the Mets do today?" The New York Mets won their ballgame.



Moe Berg's ashes were spread over Mount Scopus in Israel. His Medal of Freedom is on display at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. ***And Moe's Big League Chewing Gum baseball card?*** It's the only baseball card on display at the CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia.