

## Chasing Dreams: The National Museum of American Jewish History unveils a groundbreaking exhibit on the History of Baseball



Hank Greenberg aka The Hebrew Hammer.

by George Fosty

**Boxscore:** **New York City - May 20, 2014** - The National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia has launched a ground-breaking exhibition on the history of baseball entitled: ***"Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American."***

***Chasing Dreams*** is the first large-scale exhibition to focus on the role of baseball in the lives of immigrant and minority communities. It is a unique undertaking by the National Museum, known for its past efforts to document and preserve the 360-year legacy of Jewish Americans. As one would expect, early Jewish baseball stars are well represented, including Detroit's Hank Greenberg and the Brooklyn's Sandy Koufax. Yet, visitors to the exhibit will quickly realize though the story of baseball is presented in context with Jewish-American history, it also a testimonial to the role played by other minorities, effectively explaining the unique and historic ethnic 'melting pot' that defines the game.

The exhibit features over 130 historic artifacts, including game-worn uniforms, equipment and baseball ephemera that recreates the story of baseball in America. It is co-curated by Dr. Josh Perelman, the museum's chief curator

and director of collections and exhibitions, and Ivy Weingram, the museum's associate curator. These two individuals have done a remarkable job in presenting baseball and its history in a unique perspective.

According to Dr. Perelman, "Since the nineteenth century, baseball has been a metaphor for America, a land of so much promise and opportunity." He adds, "And for minority communities in this country, the sport has long served as a path to learning and understanding American values, representing a shared American identity and sometimes highlighting our differences. It is, in short, a mirror of America."

### **Honoring Allan H. "Bud" Selig**



Last Tuesday, the National Museum of American Jewish History held their inaugural New York City Gala to celebrate the launch of the exhibit as well as to honor Allan H. "Bud" Selig, the Commissioner of Major League Baseball.

More than 300 people were in attendance for the event and the master of ceremonies, Mike Greenberg, did an excellent job interviewing Mr. Selig during a 30-minute question and answer session that recounted Selig's nearly fifty-years of involvement in professional baseball, including the past 22-years as Major League Commissioner.

Greenberg is a co-host on ESPN's Mike & Mike in the Morning, along with fellow sports journalist Mike Golic, and his questions allowed the audience to gain a deeper understanding of Selig and his life.

Over the years, few people in the media have focussed on Selig, the man, preferring instead to report on Selig, the commissioner. As a result, most people's opinions and knowledge of Selig are based more on media caricatures and/or his varied responses to the many baseball crises of the 1990s, not fully understanding the many life changing complexities and experiences that shaped his character and life journey in the years preceding his time at the helm of baseball.

During the course of the interview, Selig told the audience "Baseball is a social institution." Adding, "the impact it makes on life is truly inspirational."

Selig made a point of stressing the racial integration of baseball in April 1947 was the most important moment in baseball history. He also noted how baseball's social institution was an influence greater than the game, changing America for the better. It was a point well taken, in an audience comprised mostly of Jewish-Americans who have long understood the historic threads of race and prejudice woven within the the tapestry of American society and sports. Selig's statements, added weight to a long held belief shared by many that baseball is a game where men and teams battle to overcome adversity.

In regard to his early years and the influence of his mother, Marie, Selig remarked that through her passion for the game, "Baseball became a part of me." His mother and his middle-class Jewish upbringing also influenced his view of the world, as he explained "If you are socially responsible, things will work out."

Discussing the decade of the 1990's when baseball was at its lowest ebb, Selig reminded his audience, "The 1990's were a very tumultuous period for us." The years between 1992 and 1994, "Were my worst time." In reference to the late Commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti, he lamented how Giamatti viewed "Baseball as a metaphor for life" and it was this philosophy that influenced his early years as a commissioner more than anything else.

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of the evening was Selig's confession that prior to his life in baseball, he had pursued a dream of becoming a history professor. Instead, his dream was derailed, when after graduating from university with a B.A. in History, he went on to serve two-years in the military, before returning home and working alongside his father in the family's Ford dealership in Milwaukee. Beginning in the mid-1960's, with the support of his family, his love of baseball, and the new-found financial success, Selig was able to pursue a secondary dream, the dream of bringing professional baseball to his hometown of Milwaukee. In the early 1970's, he successfully purchased the Seattle Pilots from bankruptcy, moving them to Milwaukee and renaming them the Milwaukee Brewers. Years later, having firmly established major league baseball in Milwaukee, he would take on a new role, as Baseball's Major League Commissioner.

One of the more fascinating moments of the evening was when Selig explained how, during the late 1990s, he spent many-a-night trying to grow the sport financially. "I use to stay up at night hoping to get to 2 Billion. This year we will get to 8-9 Billion." In terms of baseball's international reach, he went on to emphasize how "The sport

can grow beyond our comprehension." For no longer is baseball a uniquely American sport, but is quickly becoming a truly international game.

***Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American*** runs through October 26, 2014 at the National Museum of American Jewish History at 5th and Market Street, on the historic Independence Mall, in Philadelphia. Tickets to the exhibit are \$12 for adults. Children under 12-years of age are admitted free. For more information you can call (215) 923-381, Extension 141.

*George Fosty is the President and a Founder of the Society Of North American Historians And Researchers. He is an author and co-author of eight books including: Splendid Is The Sun: The 5,000 Year History of Hockey, Black Ice: The Lost History of the Colored Hockey League of the Maritimes 1895-1925, Footie's Black Book: A Guide To International Association Football (World Cup Soccer 2010 Edition), Where Brave Men Fall: The Battle of Dieppe and the Espionage War Against Hitler, 1939-1942, and Tribes: An International Hockey History.*