

to a term as one of the five Montgomery County Commissioners (the predecessor body to the County Council). In 1940, he ran for the congressional seat in Maryland's Sixth District but lost to the incumbent Democrat William D. Byron. He was reelected as a County Commissioner, again as the only Republican, in 1942. Walter Johnson died of a brain tumor on December 10, 1946 at the age of 59. He is buried in Rockville Cemetery. If you visit, you are likely to see some Bethesda Big Train memorabilia at the grave. In 1956, the new high school near his Bethesda home was named after him.



4. Why is the ballpark named after Shirley Povich?



Early on, I thought it would be great to play the games in or near downtown Bethesda. The ballfield at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School was within walking distance of scores of restaurants and the Bethesda METRO station. But quickly I realized the neighbors might not appreciate the loud music and people parking on their residential streets. So much for the restaurants and the METRO station. Plan B was a no brainer. The 90 foot diamond in the athletic complex at Cabin John Regional Park (known as Field #1) was conveniently located near I-270 and the Beltway and had plenty of parking, and

a gorgeous backdrop of evergreen trees. And no near neighbors to complain when the games went past 10 p.m. But fan friendly, it wasn't. There were some aluminum bleachers and an ancient press box that disintegrated the first time our bulldozer touched it. We had a fine surface and a beautiful setting, but we had a lot of money to raise and work to do. We made our formal request to the Montgomery County Park Commission to renovate and use the Cabin John field on September 29, 1997. The Commission met just weeks later to agree to have staff negotiate a detailed development and license agreement to allow us to build a ballpark at the site of Field #1. That agreement was signed on December 21, 1998.

John Ourisman and I both wanted our ballpark to be a living baseball history museum. With the team to be named after Walter "Big Train" Johnson, we were on the right path. We needed a name for the ballpark and soon realized Shirley Povich Field would be perfect. As one of the nation's premier sports journalists, Shirley Povich's career at *The Washington Post* spanned 75 years from Babe Ruth to Cal Ripken, Jr. Many a young Washingtonian developed a passion for reading by devouring Povich's "Mornings with Shirley Povich" in *The Washington Post*. As Ben Bradlee, the *Post's* former executive editor, explained: "Shirley Povich was why people bought the paper. You got the *Post* for Shirley and the sports section. He was the sports section. For a lot of years, he carried the paper, and that's no exaggeration."

Shirley Povich covered the 1924 World Series, the only time the Washington Senators were crowned world champions. His description of Don Larsen's perfect game in the 1956 World Series remains a classic: "The million-to-one shot came in. Hell froze over. A month of Sundays hit the calendar. Don Larsen today pitched a no-hit, no-run, no-man-reach-first game in a World Series." He championed integration in major league baseball and had a long running feud with the owner of the Washington NFL team noting that its colors were "burgundy, gold and Caucasian." Povich covered Lou Gehrig when he said his goodbye at Yankee Stadium and Cal Ripken, Jr. at Camden Yards when he broke Gehrig's streak of 2,130 consecutive games played. He filed his last column the day before he died at 92 on June 4, 1998. In 1975, Povich received the J.G. Taylor Spink Award from the Baseball Writers' Association of America at the induction festivities at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

We knew this choice would be well received in the community and add distinction to our effort, but we needed to get the family's permission to use the Povich name. We asked our friend and fellow baseball enthusiast Don Graham, publisher of *The Washington Post*, if he would help. Don wrote to Shirley's son Maury asking him to meet with us. John Ourisman and I took a train to New York and attended filming of two episodes of *The Maury Show*. After the shows were taped, we met Maury in his office. I remember being dazzled by the baseball memorabilia. Maury was enthusiastic about having the ballpark named after his dad and agreed to be a Founding Member of our Bethesda Community Base Ball Club. With permission from the family, we proposed the name to the Parks department and received approval.



The December 18, 1998 groundbreaking ceremony for Shirley Povich Field was a well attended and festive affair. The Povich and Johnson families were joined by Montgomery County officials, BCBBC Founding Members, and youth baseball supporters. We had hoped that Shirley Povich himself would be at the ground breaking, but he

had died just six months before. Happily, Maury was able to report that when he told his dad that the ballpark would be named in his honor, his dad responded: "Well, this is an offer I can't refuse." The formal agreement that let us move forward was signed by Parks just days later. When Phil Leibovitz of Sandy Spring Builders hit the existing press box with his bulldozer, it disintegrated and the renovation and construction had begun. We had just more than five months before opening night.

*"Well, this is an offer
I can't refuse."
— Shirley Povich*

For Povich Field to be a living baseball history museum, it wasn't enough to tell the stories of Walter Johnson and Shirley Povich on the back of the grandstand wall. We needed the architecture of the ballpark to reflect our mission. You

enter Povich Field through an arch designed to evoke memories of historic Doubleday Field near the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY. The red brick and the Camden green seats honor Baltimore's Camden Yards, the ballpark that forever changed baseball architecture by turning back to the golden age of ballpark construction at the start of the twentieth century. And the original hand-operated scoreboard in left field was based on the iconic Ebbets Field scoreboard of the Brooklyn Dodgers. During our travels for the *Ballpark Vacations* book, we had seen a similar Ebbets Field replica scoreboard in the state of Washington that had been built by Margaret and Bob Bavasi, the owners of the rookie level Everett Aquasox. Bob's dad, Buzzie Bavasi, had been general manager of the Brooklyn and Los Angeles Dodgers.

5. How did the Big Train end up in a league named after Cal Ripken?

If there had not been a Clark C. Griffith Collegiate Baseball League, there would not have been a Bethesda Big Train. Starting a team and building a ballpark was challenging enough. Establishing a summer college league from scratch would have been far too daunting.

The league was founded in 1945 as the National Capital City Junior League and was a charter member of the All-American Amateur Baseball Association (AAABA). Games were played on the Ellipse near the White House. When Clark Griffith, the longtime owner of the Washington Senators, died in 1955, the league was renamed in his honor as the Clark C. Griffith Memorial Baseball League. Griffith had been inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1946 after a major league career as a pitcher, manager, and team owner. As a pitcher, he compiled a record of 237-146, with seven 20 win