

Play Ball! An exhibit highlights Jewish Detroit's hand in baseball history.

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Mighty Hank Greenberg leaps for a ball at first base in 1946.

Image by © Bettmann/CORBIS

David Sloan was named after his paternal grandfather, a Russian immigrant who strongly believed that part of becoming American was getting involved with popular American pastimes.

An easy involvement was baseball, a love he quickly acquired and passed along to his son, Bernard, a lifelong Tigers fan who agreed with his dad's belief that Tigers teams would open the door to friendships, neighborliness and commerce.

Although the younger David Sloan never met his grandfather, he developed the same sports passion with the encouragement of

his dad and came to share that enjoyment with his own son, John.

David Sloan, a resident of Huntington Woods and Jewish history buff, will take part in demonstrating how widely baseball has entered into the immigrant experience by lending mementoes for display in "Chasing Dreams: Baseball & Becoming American."

The exhibit, touring under the auspices of the National Museum of American Jewish History, has been enhanced through relevant keepsakes borrowed from Metro Detroiters and will be on view Sept. 9-Nov. 27, at the Detroit Historical Museum.

The touring exhibit, made up of photos with captions and associated texts, features a searchable database of American Jewish ballplayers and an interactive screen to tempt viewers into simulated play.

“My dad and his father could always be seen together watching the Tigers in person or sitting beside a crystal set listening to the play-by-play,” Sloan explains.

“My dad was 17 when his dad passed away. After that, as games were broadcast during the day, my father would take a radio to the Workmen’s Circle Cemetery and play the games for his father so that the tradition continued.

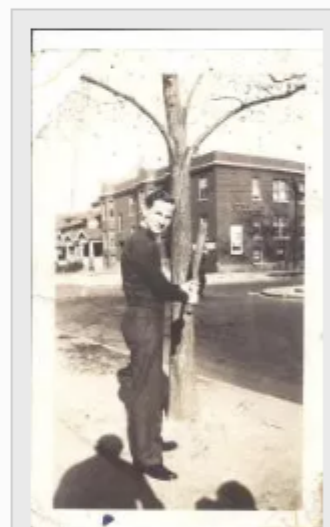
“My dad was known as the person who took people to their first Tigers games,” says Sloan.

“Whenever my son comes home from service abroad, his trip is scheduled around going to a Tigers game together,” Sloan says, “and we imagine we are sitting alongside David and Bernie with a mixture of immigrant fans.”

The exhibit, presented locally by the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan (JHSM) and the Detroit Historical Society, launches Sept. 8 with “The Season Opener,” a strolling dinner and program to benefit the Jewish Historical Society.

In addition to a docent-led tour, the event will spotlight a presentation by Tigers broadcaster Dan Dickerson, who will recall outstanding baseball events, and an upbeat panel discussion about the relationship of baseball to the Bible, a conversation led by *Detroit News* columnist and Tigers fan Neal Rubin with Rabbis Aaron Bergman of Adat Shalom Synagogue, Mark Miller of Temple Beth El and Joseph Krakoff of Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network.

Other events will be offered throughout the time of the exhibit. (See sidebar.)



Detroiter Bernie Sloan grips the bat at age 18 in 1930.

“The exhibit was designed so that each presenting community could add significant content,” says Wendy Rose Bice, JHSM executive director. “Guests will know where the content is local because of the adjoining map of Michigan.”



Moe Berg's c. 1930s catcher's mask and a photo of Berg, who led a double life as a renowned MLB catcher and as a spy for the U.S. during WWII. Loaned from the collection of Robert Matthews.

Aimee Ergas, exhibit curator and research director for the JHSM, worked with a committee of five to find the local items and put the display together with segments that have been on tour. The display has large panels of photos and other materials.

“This exhibit combines serious historical issues with the fun and playfulness of baseball,” says Ergas, a Tigers fan who checks team statistics every day and gets to a couple of games each season. “It expresses important aspects of American history with a lighthearted touch.”

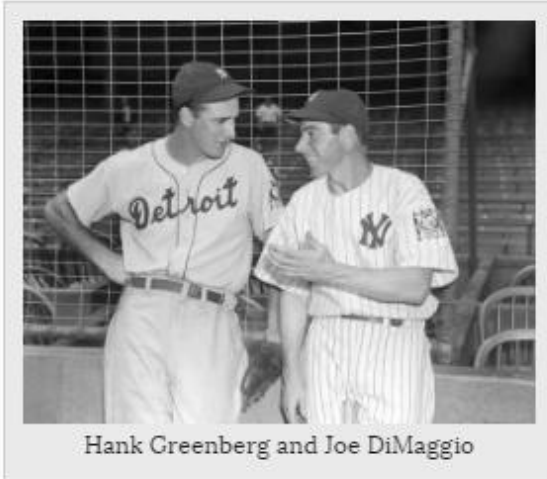
“While the initial focus of the initiative was on Jews, references also are made to experiences of the Irish, Italians, Germans, Asians, African Americans and Latinos, among others. There are several basic themes, including shaping identity, overcoming adversity, family and community, and Americanization.”

Networking turned out to be the best resource for finding the local artifacts to personalize the traveling pieces, and she worked closely with committee members Irwin Cohen, Jim Deutchman, Daniel Golodner, Jim Grey and Robert Matthews.

“This exhibit shows how waves of immigrants with different backgrounds faced the same issues and how baseball helped them learn about American values,” Ergas says. “Teamwork and community were at the forefront of what they found in baseball.”

Robert Matthews, a lifelong baseball fan with an extensive collection of sports memorabilia exhibited rotationally at the Jewish Community Center, has volunteered some pieces for the upcoming museum display.

He gives visitors the opportunity to see a white yarmulke signed by Sandy Koufax, Tiger pennants from 1968 when the team won the World Series and baseballs signed by Detroit's World Series players in 1935, 1940, 1968 and 1984.



Hank Greenberg and Joe DiMaggio

Matthews, a resident of Farmington Hills, researches the backstories represented in the objects he owns and readily talks about Moe Berg, a Jewish catcher and coach who secretly spied for the United States during World War II and managed to change teams.

A Berg mask will be part of the local artifacts, and Matthews alerts baseball fans that a movie about the catcher-spy is in the works.

"My collection grew incrementally," says Matthews, who owns a picture of Berg that will be part of a scrapbook included in the display. "I enjoy sharing the pieces in my collection by showing them on exhibit." *



and a variety of programming. \$125.

EXTRA, EXTRA!

Special programming enhances the experience of seeing "Chasing Dreams: Baseball & Becoming American" at the Detroit Historical Museum. For details about each: (248) 432- 5517; michjewishhistory.org.

Chasing Dreams: Season Opener The exhibition will be launched at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 8, with a strolling dinner

Nosh Gen: Chasing Dreams A conversation about baseball and baseball history features Mike "Stoney" Stone of "The Ticket" on WXYT FM (97.1). Exhibition tours will be ongoing as baseball-themed food is served. 6:30-8:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 27. \$40.

Chasing Dreams: Family Day Sunday, Nov. 6. Pack up the family for kosher baseball foods and a chance to sit in a broadcasting booth to present your play-by-play skills, hang out with Paws from the Detroit Tigers and listen to a late-afternoon program of "Old Jews Talking Baseball" featuring Max Lapidus, Bob Matthews, Irwin Cohen and Jim Grey.

Private Tours The Jewish Historical Society will offer docent-led tours of the exhibit and the Detroit Historical Museum for groups of 10 or more. *

By Suzanne Chessler, Contributing Writer