The large contributor is a potential embarrassment. Careful thought is mandatory here. On the one hand he is very touchy about his placement and handling, and on the other, we don't want people to think that... He should be positioned not too close to the throne, and not too far away.

Yes, a display of armed might contributes to pomp—is pomp, in a sense—but it can be easily, easily misinterpreted. We recommend that not more than two divisions be employed, and that these not be our best divisions, but rather sort of sloppy and amateurish-looking—stouthearted men, but maybe not entirely persuaded. Not more than three dozen generals, please.

THE ART OF BASEBALL

Art is, at an important level, play, as theoreticians from Huizinga to Roger Caillois have pointed out. Art is a game in which it is possible to win, to lose, or to fight one's way to an exhausting, desperate tie. So it is not surprising that a number of this century's most famous artists were also, at odd moments in their careers, baseball players. As a kind of antidote to their labors in the studio or at the writing desk, these giant figures typically played for a season or two and then returned, refreshed, to their artistic pursuits. Curiously, they have left little trace in orthodox histories of the game. It is as if baseball's chroniclers were frightened by these apparitions from another world, whose contributions to the sport were, very often, of a kind to provoke the denial mechanism familiar to readers of psychology texts.

Recent research has, however, turned up some notable instances of the magical combination of art and baseball, a number of which are adduced here.

T. S. ELIOT, SHORTSTOP

T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land is without doubt the most thoroughly studied, carefully annotated, and nitpickingly commented-upon poem in the language. What has been missed (in a series of misreadings so horrendous as to be without parallel in the annals of quality lit. scholarship in this country) is that the poem is essentially about the St. Louis Browns of 1922, a team
for which Eliot, back from Britain in that year, briefly starred at short.

Eliot, it will be recalled, had been living in the United Kingdom since 1914 (he became a citizen in 1927). After the publication of Poems (1920), he felt that some creative imperus, some vital impulse, had leaked from his work. His solution was to return to the St. Louis of his youth and enlist for a hitch with the Browns, a fateful choice for poetry, as we shall see. The Browns played him at shortstop, and he astonished fans and teammates alike by presenting himself on the field wearing not only the standard St. Louis regalia but also a black bowler hat, to which he had added, in proper English fashion, a rolled umbrella of the same hue. These eccentricities were tolerated because young Tom never failed to render a heads-up performance; his sector of the diamond was, during his tenure, safe as houses.

But if the poet was brilliant, the Browns of 1922 were not, a circumstance that decisively influenced the major Eliot work to come. The internal evidence is overwhelming, as open-minded consideration of the following citations will demonstrate.

Item. The poem's very first line, "April is the cruellest month," was originally "August is the cruellest month." The allusion is to the dreadful set of games the Browns dropped to the Yanks, in St. Louis, in August 1922, a setback that effectively removed them from serious league competition. Ezra Pound, whose magisterial editing of the poem wrought it into the great cultural artifact that it is, successfully argued that everybody, not only in St. Louis but in the larger world as well, knew that August was a terrible month and that its use made the work far too accessible.

Item: The line in Part I "Here is the man with three staves" is beyond cavil a foreshadowing of the movement toward the batter's box of the awesome Babe Ruth—one can almost see the Bambino twirling a trio of bats as he stumbles plateward. Ruth had been suspended for the first month of the season (by Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the first Commissioner of Baseball) for illegal barnstorming, but saw action against St. Louis, and the anxiety he inspired is everywhere present in the poem.

Item: The line, in Part III, "I Tiresias, though blind . . . can see" is transparently umpire-related.

Item: Also in Part III, the lines

While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
predict the Gashouse Gang of the mid-thirties, while the Fisher King himself is obviously George Sisler, the Browns' heavy hitter (averaging over .400 that season), who felt that his exertions were imperfectly backed by his mates—the poignant

Fishing, with the arid plain behind me

makes this abundantly clear.

Item: The line in Part V, "And bats with baby faces in the violet light," is a direct response to a game that has gone into extra innings—into a hallucinatory twilight rite with peril. Would you throw a ball (at ninety miles an hour) at a bat with the face of a baby? No, you'd hesitate, and in fact, hesitation, here as elsewhere, is key in the Eliotic canon.

One could go on, but why? The case is proved.

Django

Few of us know more than one person named Django. It is, therefore, a virtual certainty that the Django who pitched for the Cardinals in the 1931 World Series (against the Philadelphia Athletics) was the three-fingered French gypsy jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt, star of innumerable Hot Club of France discs in which he was paired with his still-living colleague, the elegant Stéphane Grappelli.

Rumors of the time suggested that the Cards, scared to death of a Philly lineup that included Lefty Grove, Jimmie Foxx, and Mickey Cochrane, had smuggled the great Frenchman into the country inside a giant éclair used as a centerpiece for the daily luncheon buffet on the Cunard ship Queen Mary, then sailing from Le Havre on a twice-a-month schedule. Be that as it may, the redoubtable jazzman was a compelling presence on the field. "He put a lot of French on the ball," recalls one contemporary observer. Django's tridigital grip had much the same effect as that of any number of pitcher's dodges usually deemed illegal—chew-
ing gum on the (then) horsehide, scarring the surface of the ball with the cutting edge of a saber concealed in the pantaloons. It was deadly to the hapless would-be hitter; the ball leaped upward two to four inches as it crossed the plate. St. Louis's Pepper Martin, one of the heroes of the Series and a son of the sovereign state of Oklahoma, summed it up this way: "It was like having the Terrible Williamsons fix your road." The reference was to a tribe of gypsies of the period who roamed Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas in a fleet of decrepit vehicles contracting to repair roadways—their asphalt tended to disappear in a light rain. Memories of Django's days on the mound may be discerned in his tunes "Whiff," "Forkball," and "Pepper," all available on Vox 3084.

SONTAG AT FIRST

The distinguished novelist and critic Susan Sontag sparkled for Chicago for a single season, that of 1959. Sontag played college ball under trying circumstances at the University of Chicago, a school noted for many years for not having a football team—it's often forgotten that the place didn't have a baseball team, too. Undeterred, Sontag and a group of similarly baseball-mad graduate students formed the notorious Grind League, which played its games in the vast heating tunnels under the university's South Side campus. A White Sox scout, trying to ransom his son from the Physics Department, where the boy had unwisely lingered for thirteen years on the track of unnihexium [an artificial radioactive transuranium element not actually produced until 1974, at Berkeley, as it happened], opened the wrong door one night and blundered into a game. Transfixed by the dark-haired beauty's luminous activities at first, he inked her to a Sox pact immediately.

Plagued as she was by baseball's shameless (and continuing) prejudice against women on the field, Sontag was forced to appear with her hair firmly pinned up under her cap, and not under her own name: she is listed on the rosters of the time as S. Sunday. Fans remember with particular clarity that her stance in the infield was that of one thinking, fist deeply buried in the right cheek, little sidelong glances at the man at bat—the picture of one dreaming of Gregory Bateson and the double bind she tended to place on said man at bat were he so fortunate as to make it to Sack No. 1.

In later years, her well-known essay on "Firstness" incorporated her Windy City experience. The 1959 Sox went to the Series with high hopes, three handy outfielders, Jim Landis, Jim Rivera, and Al Smith, and such standouts as Luis "Base Thief of Baghdad" Aparicio, but lost to the Dodgers in six games. "Firstness," its twin themes excellence and loss, is an extended meditation on being first, first obstacle to the runner's progress (involvement in the agon in a negative, life-denying manner), while, paradoxically, granted the first opportunity to lift one's group [and by extension, mankind] toward apotheosis.

A footnote to the above: at the 1967 International PEN Conference at Bled, Yugoslavia, Sontag was observed autographing a worn first baseman's glove for Yurio Kawabata, the celebrated Japanese rare-glove dealer.

TWO DUTCHMEN

Willem "Big Bill" de Kooning swings perhaps the biggest brush in the contemporary art world, and his hard-charging, go-for-broke style at the easel has long been a matter of wonderment and green envy among his colleagues. How much his tour with the Dodgers influenced the Dutch master is a question oft debated, in Manhattan brasseries and East Hampton gin mills alike. This is one of those mysteries which resist the closest critical attention. Did the painter learn at least a part of his ferocious attack during his time with Brooklyn, or did he bring same to Ebbets Field already fully formed? What sticks in memory, in any case, is an amazing duel with a countryman and fellow painter in August 1939.

It was the year Piet Mondrian, another Netherlander, was taking a sabbatical from the purity of his severely geometric canvases to pitch for Cincinnati. The great Neoplasticist had insisted on designing his own uniform, a splendor of large red and blue and yellow rectangles immaculately placed against stark white. When de Kooning's moment at the plate came round, the two artists glared at each other in friendly fashion across the 18.4 meters separating them.

"Piet," yelled de Kooning, anent the uniform, "the red, it's too close to the yellow."
"Bill," Mondrian shouted back, "how would you know?"

"A child could see it," de Kooning answered, choking his bat.

"Bill," Mondrian announced calmly and clearly, "that's my space you're leaning all over." And he dusted the Rotterdamer's breastbone with a pay-attention pitch that sent Big Bill reeling backward into the Reds' catcher, Ernie Lombardi.

On the next pitch, Mondrian went through his windup [a spectacular affair, given the uniform] and released a perfect strike. De Kooning took a mighty cut and missed. Mondrian's third pitch was low, but within the parameters; de Kooning let it pass him by for a second strike. The doughty Abstract Expressionist was by now visibly irritated, and he rapped the plate with his stick in a way that could not be mistaken for amiability. Mondrian's next pitch was squarely on the invisible line dividing inside from outside, and de Kooning stepped into it with a set of shoulders made massive by decades of paint hurling. The ball rose in the air like a mortar shell, and Kurt Schwitters,* the Cincinnati centerfielder, went back, back, back for it, thrust up his arm, and lost it by a good twelve feet. De Kooning trotted round the bases to extravagant applause, and Mondrian, long after the other players had left the park, was discovered with a tape, in the fading light of an Ohio evening, measuring the diamond in an attempt to prove that the diamond, not his sense of where to place what, had been at fault.

PASSION

Finally, it must be kept in mind that the traffic between art and baseball is not a one-way street. Gifted athletes venture onto the terrain of the artist almost as often as the reverse is the case. A memorable instance: in 1977 the multitalented Billy Martin exhibited, at the posh Pace Gallery on Manhattan's Fifty-seventh Street, a startling series of junked refrigerator doors smashed into likenesses of his patron, George Steinbrenner. The critics gave Martin high marks for surface tension, structural integrity, originality in choice of materials, and use of the sledge, but most of all for passion, without which neither art nor baseball would signify at all.

* Schwitters, the German collagist, spent much of his early career in Switzerland and learned his baseball in Basel, where it is called Basement.

Games are the Enemies of Beauty, Truth, and Sleep, Amanda Said

I was playing Password, Twister, Breakthru, Bonanza, Stratego, Squander, and Gambit. And Quinto, Phlounder, Broker, Tactics, and Stocks & Bonds. All at once. On the floor. It was my move. When I play alone, it is always my move. That is reasonable. I kneel first on one side of the board, then the other. I think a bit. I examine my move to make sure it is the correct move. I congratulate myself. Then I hobble to the next board, on my knees.

The floor of my study is covered with game boards, and there are boards in the bedroom, the kitchen, the bath. Conestoga, the Game of the Oregon Trail. Gettysburg, Stalingrad, Midway, D-Day, U-Boat, Bismarck, and Waterloo. Le Mans. Management, Verdict, and Dispatcher. Merger, the Game of Stock Manipulation in the Automobile Industry. Qubic, the 3-D Tic Tac Toe Game. My move. It is my move when I depart for the office in the morning and my move when I return at night. I move before, during, and after dinner, hobbling from board to board. It is my move when I go to bed and my move when I awake.

I extended an arm in its yellow vinyl smoking jacket. I moved. Then I hobbled around to the other side of the board to evaluate the move from the point of view of my opponent. A foolish move. Now I was in a position to destroy myself. Should I destroy myself?

Then the bell rang. It was Amanda. She was in tears. "Amanda," I said. "What is it?" She was wearing a tent dress, two-ply brown