



a man on second base.<sup>[8]</sup>

On June 26, 1923, Yale defeated Princeton 5–1 at [Yankee Stadium](#) to win the [Big Three](#) title. Berg had an outstanding day, getting two [hits](#) in four [at bats](#) (2–4) with a [single](#) and a [double](#), and making several marvelous plays at shortstop. Both the [New York Giants](#) and the [Brooklyn Robins](#) desired "Jewish blood" on their teams, to appeal to the large Jewish community in New York, and expressed interest in Berg. The Giants were especially interested, but they already had two future [Hall of Famers](#) at shortstop, [Dave "Beauty" Bancroft](#) and [Travis Jackson](#). The Robins were a mediocre team, where Berg would have a better chance to play. On June 27, 1923, Berg signed his first big league contract for \$5,000 (\$69,000 today) with the Robins.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Major league career [edit]

### Early career (1923–1925) [edit]

Berg's first game with the Robins came on June 27, 1923 against the [Philadelphia Phillies](#) at the [Baker Bowl](#). Berg came in at the start of the seventh inning, replacing [Ivy Olson](#) at shortstop<sup>[1]</sup> , when the Robins were winning 13–4. Berg handled five [chances](#) without an [error](#) and caught a line drive to start a game-ending [double play](#). He made a hit in two at bats, getting a single up the middle against [Clarence Mitchell](#), and scoring a [run](#).<sup>[10]</sup> For the season, Berg batted .187 and made 21 errors in 47 games, his only [National League](#) experience.<sup>[11]</sup>

After the season ended, Berg took his first trip abroad, sailing from New York to Paris. He settled in the [Latin Quarter](#) in an apartment that overlooked the [Sorbonne](#), where he enrolled in 32 different classes.<sup>[12]</sup> In Paris he developed a habit he kept for the rest of his life: reading several newspapers daily.<sup>[13]</sup> Until Berg finished reading a paper, he considered it "alive" and refused to let anyone else touch it. When he was finished with it, he would consider the paper "dead" and anybody could read it.<sup>[2]</sup> In January 1924, instead of heading back to New York and getting himself into shape for the upcoming baseball season, Berg toured Italy and Switzerland.<sup>[13]</sup>

During [spring training](#) at the Robins facility in [Clearwater, Florida](#), manager [Wilbert Robinson](#) could see that Berg's hitting had not improved, and optioned him to the [Minneapolis Millers](#) of the [American Association](#). Berg did not take the demotion well and threatened to quit baseball, but by mid-April he reported to the Millers. Berg did very well once he became the Millers' regular third baseman, hitting close to .330, but in July his average plummeted and he was back on the bench. On August 19, 1924 Berg was loaned to the [Toledo Mud Hens](#), a poor team ravaged by injuries. Berg was immediately inserted into the lineup at shortstop when Rabbit Helgeth refused to pay a \$10 (\$140 today) fine for poor play and was suspended. Major league scout [Mike Gonzalez](#) sent a telegram to the Dodgers evaluating Berg with the curt, but now famous, line, "Good field, no hit." Berg finished the season with a .264 average.<sup>[14]</sup>

By April 1925, he was starting to show promise as a hitter with the Reading Keystones of the [International League](#). Because of his .311 batting average and 124 [runs batted in](#), the [Chicago White Sox](#) exercised their option they had with Reading, paying \$6,000 (\$81,000 today) for him, and moved Berg up to the big leagues the following year.<sup>[15]</sup>

### Career as a catcher (1926–1934) [edit]

The 1926 season began with Berg informing the White Sox that he would skip spring training and the first two months of the season to complete his first year of law school at [Columbia University](#), and Berg did not join the White Sox until May 28. [Bill Hunnefeld](#) was signed by the White Sox to take Berg's place at shortstop, and was having a very good year, batting over .300. Berg played in only 41 games, batting .221.<sup>[16]</sup>

Berg returned to Columbia after the season to continue working on his law degree. Despite White Sox owner [Charles Comiskey](#) offering him more money to come to spring training, Berg declined, and informed the White Sox that he would be reporting late for the 1927 season. Noel Dowling, a professor to whom Berg explained his situation, told Berg to take extra classes in the fall, and said that he would arrange with the dean a leave of absence from law school the following year, 1928.<sup>[17]</sup>

Because he reported late, Berg spent the first three months of the season on the bench. In August, a series of injuries to catchers [Ray Schalk](#), [Harry McCurdy](#) and [Buck Crouse](#) left the White Sox in need of somebody to play the position. Schalk, the White Sox player/manager, selected Berg, who did a fine job filling in. Schalk arranged for former Philadelphia Phillies catcher [Frank Bruggy](#) to meet the team at their next game, against the [New York Yankees](#). Bruggy was so fat that pitcher [Ted Lyons](#) refused to pitch to him. When Schalk asked him whom he wanted to catch, Lyons selected Berg.<sup>[18]</sup>

In Berg's debut as a starting catcher, he had to worry not only about catching Lyons' [knuckleball](#), but also about facing the Yankees' [Murderers' Row](#) lineup, which included [Babe Ruth](#), [Lou Gehrig](#) and [Earle Combs](#). Lyons beat the Yankees 6–3, holding Ruth hitless. Berg made the defensive play of the game when he caught a poor throw from the outfield, spun and tagged out [Joe Dugan](#) at the plate. He caught eight more times during the final month and a half of the season.<sup>[19]</sup>

To prepare for the 1928 season, Berg went up to a lumber camp in New York's [Adirondack Mountains](#) three weeks before reporting to the White Sox spring training facility in [Shreveport, Louisiana](#). The hard labor did wonders for him, as he reported to spring training on March 2, 1928 in excellent shape. By the end of the season, Berg had established himself as the starting catcher.<sup>[20]</sup>

At law school, Berg failed [Evidence](#) and did not graduate with the class of 1929, but he did pass the New York State [bar exam](#). He repeated the evidence course the following year, and on February 26, 1930 received his [LL.B.](#)<sup>[21]</sup> On April 6, during an exhibition game against the [Little Rock Travelers](#), his spikes caught in the soil as he tried to change directions and he tore a knee ligament.<sup>[22]</sup>

He was back in the starting lineup on May 23, 1930, but his knee would not allow him to play every day. He played in only 20 games the whole season and finished with a .115 batting average. During the winter, he took a job with the respected [Wall Street](#) law firm Satterlee and Canfield (now Satterlee, Stephens, Burke & Burke). The [Cleveland Indians](#) picked him up on April 2, 1931 when Chicago put him on waivers, but he played in only 10 games with 13 at-bats and only 1 hit for the entire season.<sup>[23]</sup>

The Indians gave him his unconditional release in January 1932, but with catchers hard to come by, [Clark Griffith](#), owner of the [Washington Senators](#),

"Yeah, I know, and he can't hit in any of them"<sup>[24]</sup>

invited him to spring training in [Biloxi, Mississippi](#). He made the team, playing in 75 games while not committing an error. When starting catcher [Roy Spencer](#) went down with an injury, Berg stepped in, throwing out 35 baserunners while batting .236.<sup>[25]</sup>

— Dave Harris, Senators' outfielder, when told that Berg spoke seven languages

### First trip to Japan [edit]

Retired ballplayer Herb Hunter arranged for three players, Berg, [Lefty O'Doul](#) and Ted Lyons, to go to Japan to teach baseball seminars at Japanese universities during the winter of 1932. On October 22, 1932, the group of three players began their circuit of [Meiji](#), [Waseda](#), [Rikkyo](#), [Todai \(Tokyo Imperial\)](#), [Hosei](#), and [Keio](#) universities, the members of the Tokyo Big Six University League. When the other Americans returned to the United States after their coaching assignments were over, Berg stayed behind to explore Japan. He went on to tour [Manchuria](#), Shanghai, [Peking](#), [Indochina](#), [Siam](#), India, [Egypt](#) and Berlin.<sup>[26]</sup>

Despite his desire to go back to Japan, Berg reported to the Senators training camp on February 26, 1933 in Biloxi. He played in just 40 games during the season, and batted only .185. The Senators won the pennant, but lost to the Giants in the [World Series](#). [Cliff Bolton](#), the Senators' starting catcher in 1933, demanded more money in 1934. When the Senators refused to pay him more, he sat out and Berg got the starting job. On April 22, Berg made an error, his first fielding mistake since 1932—an American League record of 117 consecutive errorless games. On July 25, the Senators gave Berg his unconditional release. He soon returned to the big leagues, however, after [Cleveland Indians](#) catcher [Glenn Myatt](#) broke his ankle on August 1. Indians manager [Walter Johnson](#), who had managed Berg in 1932, offered Berg the reserve catching job. Berg played sporadically until [Frankie Pytlak](#), Cleveland's starting catcher, injured himself, and Berg became the starting catcher.<sup>[27]</sup>

### Second trip to Japan [edit]

Herb Hunter arranged for a group of All-Stars, including [Babe Ruth](#), [Lou Gehrig](#), [Earl Averill](#), [Charlie Gehringer](#), [Jimmie Foxx](#) and [Lefty Gomez](#), to tour Japan playing exhibitions against a Japanese all-star team. Despite the fact that Berg was a mediocre, third-string catcher, he was invited at the last minute to make the trip. Among the items Berg took with him to Japan were a [16-mm Bell and Howell](#) movie camera and a letter from [MovietoneNews](#), a New York City newsreel production company with which Berg had contracted to film the sights of his trip. When the team arrived in Japan, he gave a welcome speech in Japanese and also addressed the legislature.<sup>[28]</sup>

On November 29, 1934, while the rest of the team was playing in [Omiya](#), Berg went to Saint Luke's Hospital in [Tsukiji](#), ostensibly to visit the daughter of American ambassador [Joseph Grew](#). Instead, Berg sneaked onto the roof of the hospital, one of the tallest buildings in Tokyo, and filmed the city and harbor with his movie camera. He never did see the ambassador's daughter. Back at home, the Indians gave him his unconditional release. Berg continued on to the [Philippines](#), Korea and Moscow.<sup>[29]</sup>

### Late career and coaching (1935–1941) [edit]

After his return to America, Berg was picked up by the [Boston Red Sox](#). In his five seasons with the Red Sox, Berg averaged fewer than 30 games a season.<sup>[30]</sup>

On February 21, 1939, Berg made his first of three appearances on the radio quiz show, *Information, Please*. Berg put on a dazzling performance.<sup>[31]</sup> Of his appearance, baseball commissioner [Kenesaw Mountain Landis](#) told him, "Berg, in just thirty minutes you did more for baseball than I've done the entire time I've been commissioner".<sup>[32]</sup> On his third appearance, [Clifton Fadiman](#), the moderator, started asking Berg too many personal questions. Berg did not answer any more questions and never appeared on the show again.<sup>[32]</sup> Regular show guest and sportswriter [John Kieran](#) later said that "Moe was the most scholarly professional athlete (I) ever knew."<sup>[33]</sup>

After his playing career ended, Berg was a Red Sox coach in 1940 and 1941.

### Post-baseball career [edit]

#### Spying for the U.S. Government [edit]

With the [attack on Pearl Harbor](#) by the [Japanese](#) on December 7, 1941, the United States was thrust into [World War II](#). To do his part for the war effort, Berg accepted a position with [Nelson Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs](#) on January 5, 1942. Nine days later, his father, Bernard, died.<sup>[34]</sup> During the summer of 1942, Berg screened the footage he shot of Tokyo Bay for intelligence officers of the [United States military](#). The film may have helped [Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy Doolittle](#) plan his famous [Doolittle Raid](#).<sup>[35]</sup>

From August 1942 until February 1943, Berg was on assignment in the [Caribbean](#) and South America. His job was to monitor the health and physical fitness of the American troops stationed there. Berg, along with several other OIAA agents, left in June 1943 because they thought South America posed little threat to the United States, and they wanted to be someplace where their talents would be put to better use.<sup>[36]</sup>

On August 2, 1943, Berg accepted a position with the [Office of Strategic Services](#) for a salary of \$3,800 (\$51,800 today) a year. He was a Paramilitary Operations Officer in the part of the OSS that is now called the [Special Activities Division](#). In September, he was assigned to the [Secret Intelligence](#) branch of the OSS and given a place at the OSS [Balkans](#) desk. In this role, he parachuted into [Yugoslavia](#) to evaluate the various [resistance groups](#) operating against the Nazis to determine which was the strongest. He talked to both [Draža Mihailović](#) and [Tito](#) and reviewed their forces, deciding that Tito had the [stronger and better supported group](#). His evaluations were used to help determine the amount of support and aid to give each group.<sup>[37]</sup> In late 1943, Berg was assigned to Project Larson, an OSS operation set up by OSS Chief of Special Projects [John Shaheen](#). The stated purpose of the project was to kidnap Italian [rocket](#) and [missile](#) specialists out of Italy and bring them to the U.S. However, there was another project hidden within Larson, called Project AZUSA, with the goal of interviewing Italian [physicists](#) to see what they knew about [Werner Heisenberg](#) and [Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker](#). It was similar in scope and mission to the [Alsos](#) project.<sup>[38]</sup>

From May 1944 to mid-December, Berg hopped around Europe interviewing physicists and trying

From May 1944 to mid-December, Berg hopped around Europe interviewing physicists and trying to convince several to leave Europe and work in America. At the beginning of December, news about Heisenberg giving a lecture in **Zurich** reached the OSS, and Berg was assigned the task of attending the lecture and determining "if anything Heisenberg said convinced him the Germans were close to a **bomb**." If Berg came to the conclusion that the Germans were close, he had orders to shoot Heisenberg; Berg determined that the Germans were not close. During his time in Switzerland, Berg became close friends with the physicist **Paul Scherrer**. Berg returned to the United States on April 25, 1945, and resigned from the **Strategic Services Unit**, the successor to the OSS, in August. He was awarded the **Medal of Freedom** on October 10, but he rejected the award on December 2. His sister later accepted it on his behalf.<sup>[39]</sup>

### After World War II [edit]

In 1946, former Chicago White Sox teammate **Ted Lyons** was the new manager of the White Sox, and offered Berg a coaching position. Berg declined. Boston Red Sox owner **Thomas Yawkey**, who was much closer to Berg when he played for Red Sox, matched Lyons' offer, but Berg still turned them down. Berg did not apply for a teaching position, or join a law firm.

In 1951, Berg begged the CIA to send him to Israel. "A Jew must do this," he wrote in his notebook. The CIA rejected Berg's request. Still, in 1952 Berg was hired by the CIA to use his old contacts from World War II to gather information about the **Soviet atomic science**. For the \$10,000 plus expenses that Berg received, the CIA received nothing in return. The CIA officer who spoke with Berg when he returned from Europe said that he was "flaky".<sup>[40]</sup> Berg continued to serve his assignment for the CIA until 1954, when his contract expired. The CIA chose not to renew it. Berg tried again to serve the CIA and the CIA again declined.

For the next 20 years, Berg had no real job, living off friends and relatives who put up with him because of his charisma. When they would ask what he did for a living, he would reply by putting his finger to his lips, giving them the impression that he was still a spy.<sup>[41]</sup> A lifelong bachelor, he lived with his brother Samuel for 17 years. According to Samuel, he became moody and snappish after the war and did not seem to care for much in life besides his books. His brother finally grew fed up with the arrangement and asked Moe to leave and even had eviction papers drawn up.<sup>[2]</sup> After being evicted from his brother's home, Berg moved in with his sister Ethel in **Belleville, New Jersey**, where he remained for the rest of his life.<sup>[42]</sup>

He received a handful of votes in **Baseball Hall of Fame** voting (four in 1958, and five in 1960). When he was criticized for "wasting" his intellectual talent on the sport he loved, Berg replied, "I'd rather be a ballplayer than a justice on the **U.S. Supreme Court**".<sup>[43]</sup>

Berg received many requests to write his memoirs, but turned them down; he almost wrote them in 1960, but he quit after the co-writer assigned to him confused him with **Moe Howard** of the **Three Stooges**.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Death [edit]

Moe Berg died on May 29, 1972, at age 70, from injuries sustained in a fall at home. A nurse at the **Belleville, New Jersey** hospital where he died recalled his final words as, "How did the **Mets** do today?"<sup>[44]</sup> (They won.)<sup>[45]</sup> His remains were cremated and spread over **Mount Scopus** in **Israel**.

### Legacy [edit]

Berg was inducted into the **National Jewish Sports Hall of Fame** in 1996,<sup>[46]</sup> and the **Baseball Reliquary's Shrine of the Eternals** in 2000.<sup>[47]</sup> His is the only **baseball card** on display at the headquarters of the **Central Intelligence Agency**.<sup>[48]</sup>

In 1976, reporters Louis Kaufman of the Boston Globe and Tom Sewell of the Boston Herald joined Barbara Fitzgerald to write *Moe Berg: Athlete, Scholar, Spy*. In 1994 Nicholas Davidoff wrote a biography, *The Catcher Was a Spy: The Mysterious Life of Moe Berg*. **Rick Wilber** has a story in the April/May 2012 issue of **Asimov's Science Fiction** that presents a lightly altered history of Berg's spying activities for the OSS in 1944. Berg makes an appearance again in the March 2013 issue of **Asimov's Science Fiction** in the story by Kristine Kathryn Rush "Uncertainty". Berg makes a third appearance in the July issue of **Asimov's Science Fiction** in Rick Wilber's story, "At Palomar".

### See also [edit]

- Jews and Baseball: An American Love Story*, 2010 documentary
- List of select Jewish baseball players
- Operation Alsos

### References [edit]

#### Notes

- ↑ Davidoff, p.17
- ↑ <sup>*a b c d*</sup> Berger, Ralph. "Moe Berg" . *The Baseball Biography Project*. The Society for American Baseball Research. Retrieved March 11, 2007.
- ↑ Dawidoff, 15–16.
- ↑ Dawidoff, 20–22.
- ↑ Dawidoff, 26–27
- ↑ Dawidoff, 29
- ↑ Dawidoff, 30–31
- ↑ Dawidoff, 32–34
- ↑ Dawidoff, 36–37



Moe turned down the Medal of Freedom during his lifetime; it was re-awarded after his death, with his sister accepting on his behalf.



10.   Dawidoff, 39–40
11.   "Moe Berg Statistics" . *Baseball-Reference.com*. Sports Reference, Inc. Retrieved March 11, 2007.
12.   Dawidoff, 42–43
13.  <sup>a</sup>  <sup>b</sup> Dawidoff, 46.
14.   Dawidoff, 49–50
15.   Dawidoff, 51–52
16.   Dawidoff, 52–54.
17.   Dawidoff, 54–55.
18.   Dawidoff, 55–56.
19.   Dawidoff, 56–57.
20.   Dawidoff, 59.
21.   Dawidoff, 61–63.
22.   Dawidoff, 64–65.
23.   Dawidoff, 67–68.
24.   Dawidoff, 72.
25.   Dawidoff, 74–75
26.   Dawidoff, 77–81.
27.   Dawidoff, 81–86.
28.   Dawidoff, 87–93.
29.   Dawidoff, 94–95.
30.   Dawidoff, 98.
31.   Dawidoff, 113–114.
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33.  "Moe Berg, a Catcher in the Majors Who Spoke 10 Languages, Dead" . *The New York Times*. June 1, 1972. p. 46. Retrieved March 11, 2007.
34.   Dawidoff, 129–30.
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37.   Dawidoff, 153–55.
38.   Dawidoff, 161.
39.   Dawidoff, 202–15.
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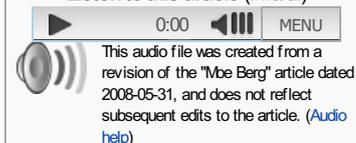
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### External links [edit]

- The Moe Berg Papers at Princeton University Library
- Career statistics and player information from Baseball-Reference , Fangraphs , or The Baseball Cube , or Baseball-Reference (Minors)
- SABR biography
- Moe Berg at Find a Grave
- BR Bullpen profile
- BaseballLibrary profile and career highlights
- Annotated bibliography for Berg from the Alsos Digital Library for Nuclear Issues
- Jewish Sports Hall of Fame bio
- "Secrets, Lies, and Atomic Spies"
- Jewish-American Hall of Fame
- Moe Berg Biography at J-Grit: The Internet Index of Tough Jews
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- Moe Berg Batted .243 for the White Sox and 1.000 for America
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