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Baseball Adopts a Candy, Whatever It's Named For

By [RICHARD SANDOMIR](#)

For 85 years, Babe Ruth, the slugger, and Baby Ruth, the candy bar, have lived parallel lives in which it has been widely assumed that the latter was named for the former. The confection's creator, the Curtiss Candy Company, never admitted to what looks like an obvious connection — especially since Ruth hit 54 home runs the year before the first Baby Ruth was devoured.

Had it done so, Curtiss would have had to compensate Ruth. Instead, it eventually insisted the inspiration was "Baby Ruth" Cleveland, the daughter of President Grover Cleveland. But it is an odd connection that makes one wonder at the marketing savvy of Otto Schnering, the company's founder.

"Baby Ruth" died of diphtheria in 1904, 17 years before Curtiss combined nougat, chocolate, caramel and peanuts into its chewy Baby Ruth.

The truth blurs but yields a marketing tale. Whatever the real story, the Babe-to-Baby connection is one that makes perfect sense to be exploited by Major League Baseball and Nestlé, the fourth company to own Baby Ruth.

Baby Ruth, as of today, is the official candy bar of Major League Baseball, and will be through 2008 — when Babe Ruth would have turned 113 years old.

"We've co-existed for so long, so why not work together to sell more candy bars?" John Brody, senior vice president of Major League Baseball for corporate sales and marketing, said in an interview yesterday.

"There's always been an association, however consumers got there, an indefinite connection because of the name of the product."

Tricia Bowles, a spokeswoman for Nestlé, said that corporate files on the naming of Baby Ruth did not follow the candy bar's path of ownership from Curtiss to Standard Brands to Nabisco to its current residence. So she could not settle the bet that Baby Ruth lovers have routinely called the Nestlé 1-800

consumer telephone line with: was it Ruth Cleveland or Babe Ruth?

Such mysteries do not exist for other Nestlé brands like Butterfingers.

"We only know what everyone else knows," Bowles said, then added, "For a long time, consumers assumed there was a relationship, and I think they'll be relieved to know there is."

Perhaps Baby Ruth's unofficial association with the Bambino made the candy bar a favorite of baseball fans. If one accepts a survey of candy eaters done for Nestlé by the Simmons Market Research Bureau, those who eat Baby Ruth bars are 22 percent more likely to be baseball fans than those who eat any other candy.

Tim Brosnan, baseball's executive vice president for business, said Nestlé had a strong, competitive reason to sponsor baseball and spend money with teams on network television and on the All-Star Game FanFest.

"Snickers is an N.F.L. partner," he said referring to Baby Ruth's quite similar rival. "Snickers is bigger than Baby Ruth, and Baby Ruth intends to capture market share through its relationship with baseball."

Babe Ruth might not be snickering about all this.

In 1926, the George H. Ruth Candy Company sought to register with the United States Patent and Trademark Office its own trademark confection: "Ruth's Home Run Bar" and "Babe Ruth's Own Candy." The commissioner of patents spurned the claim saying "Babe" was too close to "Baby," particularly as it related to "Ruth."

The Court of Customs and Patent Appeals upheld the ruling in 1931, saying that there would be confusion if "Babe" and "Baby" competed for the same sweet-tooth market. The court said it was evident that Ruth (George Herman, that is) was trying to capitalize on his own nickname, at a time when sales of Baby Ruths were as high as \$1 million a month.

So while Ruth famously earned more than President Hoover, Baby Ruth did a lot better than the Babe.

To Mark Roesler, chairman of CMG Worldwide, which represents the Ruth estate, "Baby Ruth was clearly named for Babe Ruth."

"A lot of people knew it was Babe Ruth, though not officially," he said.

But Roesler got something out of Baby Ruth for the Ruth estate. In 1995, the year of Ruth's centenary, CMG licensed Nestlé to use the Babe's name and likeness for a Baby Ruth campaign. Roesler said the idea was to make the Babe-to-Baby Ruth bond explicit, since it had already been out there for so long.