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**Words That Make the Man:**

**Major League Baseball, the Media, and American Manhood, 1945-1962**

A Dissertation Presented

by

**Elizabeth O'Connell Gennari**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

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in

**History**

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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Baseball and the media have been linked throughout the American national pastime's history. Its rise as a professional game coincided with the Circulation Wars between Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, who used sports as one means of selling newspapers. The expansion of radio programming linked listeners across the nation, and made Babe Ruth one of the first national celebrities. Baseball likewise helped fill airspace in the early days of television, and allowed viewers unable (or unwilling) to attend a ballpark the opportunity to see players like Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays perform.

This dissertation examines the role of the media in promoting baseball and baseball players during the early years of the Cold War, 1945-1962. Print and broadcast media were essential to establishing and maintaining Major League Baseball's reputation as the "American national pastime," and in the process, established standards for evaluating players' skills and behavior. These standards aligned with the dominant values of white, middle-class America, and gendered expectations of athletes. I analyze the different ways in which journalists and broadcasters approached baseball reporting and the ways in which the construction of the game story helped to build ballplayers' reputations. Although these reputations fell into a series of archetypes, they revealed cultural arbiters' criteria for "proper masculine behavior" in an era in which "American character" was scrutinized, debated, and defined.

## **Dedication Page**

This dissertation is dedicated with love to my husband,

Christopher Adam Gennari,

without whom it would not have been possible.

Thank you for your love and support.

*God only knows what I'd be without you.*

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Introduction:  
**Baseball's Perfect Knight, Baseball's Perfect Warrior**

Baseball is America's game. The crack of the bat, strategy of the game, and pageantry of the ballpark are ingrained in our national culture. A critical part of the game's story, and thus of our nation's story, are the heroes who have captured the hearts of baseball fans and their skill, grace, competitive spirit, and unimaginable accomplishments. Few stand out like St. Louis great, Stan "The Man" Musial.<sup>1</sup>

So began U.S. Senator Claire McCaskill's 2010 letter to President Barack Obama nominating the St. Louis Cardinals' Hall of Famer Stan Musial for the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The Medal of Freedom, the highest honor awarded to civilians, has commemorated "especially meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural of other significant public or private endeavors." McCaskill's endorsement was included in a packet with similar letters by U.S. Senators Christopher "Kit" Bond of Missouri, and Dick Durbin of Illinois; U.S. Congressmen of Missouri Russ Carnahan and William Lacy Clay; Missouri Governor Jay Nixon; and a letter signed by 97 members of the Missouri General Assembly. The nomination was spearheaded by Bill DeWitt, Chairman of the Board and General Partner of the St. Louis Cardinals.<sup>2</sup>

DeWitt argued that Musial's accomplishments were as deserving of acknowledgment as those of his contemporaries Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams, both of whom had received the Medal of Freedom. In addition to his achievements on the baseball diamond (including a .331

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<sup>1</sup> Sen. Claire McCaskill, Washington, D.C., to Pres. Barack Obama, Washington, D.C., 1 February 2010. Copy provided by St. Louis Cardinals, "Nomination Packet," online. <<[http://stlouis.cardinals.mlb.com/stl/downloads/y2010/musial\\_nomination\\_packet.pdf](http://stlouis.cardinals.mlb.com/stl/downloads/y2010/musial_nomination_packet.pdf)>>, accessed 3 October 2010.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; copies of other letters provided by St. Louis Cardinals, "Nomination Packet."



lifetime batting average, 3,630 career hits, 475 homeruns, 1,951 RBIs, three Most Valuable Player Awards, and 24 consecutive All-Star Game appearances in a twenty-two year career in which he set seventeen Major League records, twenty-nine National League records and nine All-Star Game records), Musial was a World War II veteran, the chairman of Lyndon Johnson's Presidents' Council on Physical Fitness from 1964 to 1967, an unofficial emissary to Poland during the Cold War, and member of the Board of Directors of the St. Louis U.S.O., St. Louis Boy Scouts, St. Louis Muscular Dystrophy Association, St. Louis Diabetic Association, and the Easter Seal Society for Crippled Children. To DeWitt and those who supported Musial's nomination, the Medal of Freedom represented a way of expressing gratitude to a local and national hero whose humility had caused his good deeds to be overshadowed by the flashier figures on the East Coast: "Throughout his life, Stan has never sought recognition for his good works. His happiness comes from doing the right thing and bringing joy to others. While Stan does not know of our efforts to nominate him for this honor, we respectfully request your consideration as Stan has been a true role model—exemplifying the humility, grace and generosity we so desperately need to see in our American sports heroes."<sup>3</sup>

What began as a quiet campaign supported by Missouri politicians quickly turned into a social media movement, as the Cardinals turned to the Internet to advance Musial's candidacy in May 2010. The Stand for Stan campaign was launched on the Cardinals' official Web site and offered fans the opportunity to read the nominating materials, view information about the Presidential Medal of Freedom and sign a petition in support of Musial. By October, the page had approximately 60,000 visits and the campaign included 10,200 followers on social media Web site Twitter. Fans were also encouraged to print their own "Flat Stan," a play on the popular

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<sup>3</sup> William O. DeWitt, Jr., St. Louis, to Pres. Barack Obama, Washington, D.C., 15 March 2010. Copy provided by St. Louis Cardinals, "Nomination Packet."

children's series "Flat Stanley," which encouraged literacy and interaction with family and friends throughout the world by sending copies of their own paper cutouts and tracking his "adventures." Flat Stan was also a paper cutout, this time a cartoon likeness of Musial, and more than 1,000 fans posted photos of his adventures on the Stand for Stan Web site.<sup>4</sup>

On October 3, 2010, the 39,633 fans in attendance at St. Louis's Busch Stadium received cardboard Flat Stans during a game against the Colorado Rockies. The game paused for a five-minute ceremony in the sixth inning, in which Musial and Lillian, his wife of 70 years, were escorted around the field in a golf cart. Cardinals' manager Tony La Russa said that his players were eager to brandish their own Flat Stan cutouts while standing outside the dugout during the ceremony. "That was a special moment," La Russa said. "I looked around and there were a lot of guys choking up."<sup>5</sup>

It was a special moment, and an effective one. On November 17, five days before his ninetieth birthday, the White House announced Stan Musial among the fifteen Presidential Medal of Freedom recipients. Of the honorees, who also included former President George H.W. Bush, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, author Maya Angelou, artist Jasper Johns, and businessman and philanthropist Warren Buffett, President Obama said, "These outstanding honorees come from a broad range of backgrounds and they've excelled in a broad range of fields, but all of them have lived extraordinary lives that have inspired us, enriched our culture, and made our

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<sup>4</sup> David Wilhelm, "Fans Stand Up for Musial," *Belleville News-Democrat* (Belleville, IL), 3 October 2010, online <<<http://www.bnd.com/2010/10/03/v-print/1423693/fans-stand-up-for-musial.html>>>, accessed 3 October 2010. Flat Stan cutout available at "Stand for Stan," online <<[http://stlouis.cardinals.mlb.com/stl/downloads/y2010/flat\\_stantheman.pdf](http://stlouis.cardinals.mlb.com/stl/downloads/y2010/flat_stantheman.pdf)>>, accessed 3 October 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Rick Hummel, "Musial Visit Makes Cards Game Special Day," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch via American Chronicle*, 3 October 2010, online <<<http://www.americanchronicle.com/articles/yb/150579165>>>, accessed 3 October 2010.

country and our world a better place.”<sup>6</sup> By bestowing upon him the Medal of Freedom, President Obama acknowledged that Musial’s contributions were more than fantastic feats on the baseball diamond.

Stan Musial passed away in January 2013, and the public response was equally reverential. St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay ordered flags at all city buildings lowered to half-staff in honor of Musial to mourn his passing. The White House issued a statement acknowledging Musial’s “unrivaled passion for the sport and the example he set for all young Americans.” St. Louis County Executive Charlie Dooley proposed naming the new downtown bridge across the Mississippi River after Musial, and several fans endorsed renaming the Cardinals’ ballpark, Busch Stadium, “Stan Musial Field.” The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* devoted a fourteen-page special section to Musial’s life and career, then dedicated their editorial page two days later to letters from the community expressing their respect and affection for the Cardinals icon. The Cardinals organization cordoned off an area around the Stan Musial statue outside Busch Stadium’s third for fans to create a shrine with flowers, posters, pictures and balloons. In response to the outpouring, the Musial family made arrangements for a public viewing outside the St. Louis Cathedral Basilica; more than 3,600 people waited hours to pay their respects.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The fifteen recipients of the 2011 Presidential Medal of Freedom were: U.S. President George H.W. Bush, Chancellor Angela Merkel (Federal Republic of Germany), U.S. Congressman and civil rights activist John Lewis, environmental advocate and attorney John H. Adams, author Maya Angelou, businessman and philanthropist Warren Buffett, artist Jasper Johns, Jewish Holocaust survivor and writer Gerda Weissmann Klein, optometrist and humanitarian Tom Little (honored posthumously), cellist Yo-Yo Ma, civil rights activist Sylvia Mendez, baseball legend Stan Musial, Boston Celtics’ captain and human rights advocate Bill Russell, philanthropist Jean Kennedy Smith, and AFL-CIO President Emeritus John J. Sweeney. Robert Gibbs, “President Obama Names Presidential Medal of Freedom Recipients,” Office of the Press Secretary release, 17 November 2010, online <<[http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/President-Obama-Names-Medal-of-Freedom-Recipients](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President-Obama-Names-Medal-of-Freedom-Recipients)>> accessed 17 February 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Derrick Goold, “Many Memories – Players, Fans Turn Winter Warm-Up Into a Day of Talking about Musial,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 21 January 2013, p. B1; Bill Lambrecht, “Fan Base

In eulogizing Musial, the media, Major League Baseball and Hall of Fame officials, and fans referenced his life off the field as frequently as on. They talked about his “ordinariness” as a St. Louis citizen to exemplify his extraordinary quality as a ballplayer—his long marriage to his high school sweetheart and devotion to his children; his tendency to play “Happy Birthday” or “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” on the harmonica to fellow diners at a restaurant; his willingness to sign autographs at all times; his regular presence at Catholic Mass and community events. One fan referred to him as “the background music of my life.” Comparing the simplicity of Musial’s public persona to the showier lifestyles and play of his contemporaries Joe DiMaggio and Willie Mays, sportscaster Bob Costas remarked, “All Musial represents is more than two decades of sustained excellence and complete decency as a human being.” Hall of Fame Chairman Jane Forbes Clark declared, “More than just a baseball hero, Stan was an American, and we will miss him very much.”<sup>8</sup>

Musial’s obituaries were imbued with nostalgia; loving memories of a childhood hero from America’s largest demographic group, the Baby Boomers. His passing was an opportunity to talk about “simpler times” in the national pastime, and to reprimand modern athletes who did not live up to his reputation. However, one should not dismiss these remarks so readily as per-

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Spread to Nation’s Capital: Obama Said Musial “Matched His Hustle with Humility,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 21 January 2013, p. A7; Derrick Gould, “Fans Can Honor Musial at Visitation Thursday,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 22 January 2013, p. A1; “Readers Pay Tribute to Stan Musial: Your Views on ‘The Man,’” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 24 January 2013, p. A16; Doug Moore, “The Fans’ Farewell,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 January 2013; Joe Holleman, “He Was the Epitome of Integrity,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 25 January 2013, p. A9.

<sup>8</sup> Marty Noble, “Beloved Hall of Famer Musial Dies at 92,” *MLB.com*, 19 January 2013; Bernie Miklasz, “Remembering ‘The Man’: Musial’s Value as a Person Transcended Statistics,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 21 January 2013, p. A1; Bryan Burwell, “Made to Order: Stan and St. Louis Could Not Have Been a Better Match,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 22 January 2013, p. B1; Rick Hummel, “Musial’s Death Is a ‘Crushing Blow’ to HOF President,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 21 January, p. S6.

spective clouded by nostalgia and the passage of time. Such sentiments were common during Musial's career as well. After Musial retired following the 1962 season, MLB Commissioner Ford Frick said, "Here stands baseball's perfect knight. Here stands baseball's perfect warrior." Both titles conveyed strength and dominance, but also honor and integrity. More than anything, though, Musial was known simply as "The Man."

The nickname was more than a simple rhyme. It was, unusually, gifted to him by the fans of an opposing team. Stan Musial had particular success playing against the Brooklyn Dodgers at Ebbets Field (a lifetime .356 batting average with 37 home runs), and one day in 1946, Brooklyn fans bemoaned "the man's" coming to the plate. A writer for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* made note of it his column the next day, and the nickname stuck. Unlike Frick's pronouncement of "perfect knight...perfect warrior," "The Man" seemed common, and yet has been regarded as one of the greatest nicknames in sports – because, like the ballplayer to whom it was affixed, there was more to the nickname than could be read on the page.

Stan Musial was part of the midcentury Golden Age in Major League Baseball (MLB). During the Second World War, after a letter from President Franklin Roosevelt to Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis declared that professional baseball must continue "for the duration" but would not be exempt from the war's demands, many Major League players, including Musial, enlisted in the armed forces. MLB carried on without them, scheduling games with compromised rosters as means of escape for those at home.<sup>9</sup> Baseball incorporated its wartime sacrifices

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<sup>9</sup> By 1945, approximately 5,400 of the 5,800 professional baseball players in Major League Baseball and its farm affiliates had enlisted in the armed forces. Like many industries, Organized Baseball had to fill its ranks with those who were left, including young players who were often unprepared for the Majors, veterans past their prime, and other players one normally would not find on a Major League roster. For example, the St. Louis Browns employed a one-armed outfielder named Pete Gray. Additionally, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League

into its branding as the national pastime, and after the war used this image to further promote the game, expanding across the nation through teams' movement west, racial integration, and televised baseball games. At the same time, media depicted professional baseball players as representing the masculine ideal.

American involvement in the Second World War led to a reconstitution of masculinity tied to images of the citizen-soldier. Masculinity was challenged during the Great Depression because high unemployment rates threatened the male breadwinner status and distanced men further from the "self-made man" ideal that had been dominant (but increasingly tenuous) since the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Robert Nye argued that World War II combined the apparently "indispensable masculine qualities of the combat soldier," including personal courage, sacrifice and shame, with twentieth-century notions that manliness could be read in physical characteristics and gestures. This evolution in the idealized male body type reflected a "turn to hardness" that dominated the American military organization from recruitment to the front lines, and was not easily dismissed at the war's conclusion.<sup>11</sup>

This reconstituted image of masculinity was emphasized in postwar America amid fears that American men were quickly becoming "soft." As Nye observed, "The lion's share of responsibility for defending the West in the late 1940s and 1950s required a continued American

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(AAGPBL) was created as a minor league circuit in the Midwest in 1943. Women's baseball had always been a novelty, and the league was similarly seen as a way to generate box office. (The league disbanded after the war.) See J. Ronald Oakley, *Baseball's Last Golden Age, 1946-1960: The National Pastime in a Time of Glory and Change* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1994), pp. 2-6; Jean Hastings Ardell, *Breaking into Baseball: Women and the National Pastime* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), pp. 102-135.

<sup>10</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), pp. 1-10, 199-205.

<sup>11</sup> Robert A. Nye, "Western Masculinities in War and Peace," *American Historical Review* (April 2007), pp. 423-424.

military readiness that was obliged to be compatible with full-bore productivity and consumerism, which has proven to be a formula for contradictory tensions.”<sup>12</sup> In her study of American manhood in postwar political culture, K.A. Cuordileone demonstrated that those tensions were immediately displayed. Contemporary social observers such as David Riesman and Arthur Schlesinger worried that mass consumption, suburbanization and homogenized culture threatened masculinity. In contrast, conservative critics such as Senator Joseph McCarthy worried that liberalism was equally feminizing and homosexuality was a threat to national security. Cuordileone concluded that although liberals and conservatives disagreed to the causes, both groups were concerned that masculinity was in crisis.<sup>13</sup>

While public figures debated causes and proposed solutions, middle class men bristled against society’s demands. Individuals chafed against the breadwinner ethic that required they accomplish “developmental tasks” such as marriage, home ownership, and fatherhood while working a white-collar job that offered financial advancement. The “gray flannel rebels,” as Barbara Ehrenreich labeled them, were frustrated by conformity but could not stray too far without being seen as perverse; these men settled for an “autonomy” in which one chose to conform and the recognition of such conditions was enough to set one apart.<sup>14</sup> However, not all men acquiesced to the white middle-class breadwinner ethic, as Ehrenreich and others have acknowledged. The Beat movement promoted by writers such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, and the image of the playboy, embodied by Hugh Hefner and marketed through his magazine, were

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>13</sup> K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. xv, 37-40.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983), pp. 11-12, 29-40.

examples of male cultural rebellion in the 1950s. James Gilbert's *Men in the Middle* argued that masculinity was in flux in the 1950s, and the popular culture of the time provided multiple examples of masculine identities, including *Playboy* editor Auguste Comte Spectorisky, Alfred Kinsey, Ozzie Nelson and the Reverend Billy Graham. Gilbert used these case studies to illustrate the fluctuations in male gender identity present and visible within 1950s popular culture—the high culture aspirations of Spectorisky, the variations in sexual behavior as seen in Kinsey's studies, the transformation to companionate marriage and modern family man with which Nelson comically struggled each week on television, and the return to muscular Christianity that Graham endorsed. Building from Michael Kimmel's work, which argued that manhood is a homosocial experience learned from and in comparison with other men, Gilbert argued that popular culture was of great importance in the 1950s because vicarious experience became as important as lived experience, particularly in regard to masculinity, and the presence of these multiple masculinities highlighted the tensions and subcultures present in postwar American society.<sup>15</sup>

Because Gilbert's work focused on the idea of masculinity *in flux*, none of his case studies represented hegemonic masculinity in popular culture. Gilbert was attempting to contrast notions of a singular masculine image within popular culture, but in highlighting public intellectuals concerns about masculinity in the era, it would have been helpful to pose them against the archetype for which David Riesman and others were advocating. Although this is not surprising, given the many analytical works about the western in general and John Wayne in particular,<sup>16</sup> the cowboy's absence was noteworthy.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-67; James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); pp. 1-17; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>16</sup> The western film genre has been an important focus for cultural historians studying Cold War America. A sample includes: J. David Alvis and John E. Alvis, "Heroic Virtue and the Limits of



The mythic cowboy, divorced from the reality of the underpaid ranch hand, recalled romantic notions of preindustrial society, the “freedom” of the West and life unencumbered by the demands of modern civilization. Westerns were populated by stock characters, familiar plotlines, open terrain, and, according to Lee Clark Mitchell, an obsession with masculinity:

a set of problems recurring in endless combination: the problem of progress, envisioned as a passing of frontiers; the problem of honor, defined in a context of social expediency; the problem of law or justice, enacted in a conflict of vengeance and social control; the problem of violence, in acknowledging its value yet honoring occasions when it can be controlled; and subsuming all, the problem of what it means to be a man, as aging victim of progress, the embodiment of honor, champion of justice in an unjust world.<sup>17</sup>

Yet for all their concerns about masculinity, westerns never resolved the contradictions of their plotlines (Mitchell cites Martin Pomphrey’s analysis that western heroes were both dominant and

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Democracy in John Ford’s *The Searchers*,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 38 (Spring 2009), pp. 69-78; Ron Briley, “John Wayne and *Big Jim McLain* (1952): The Duke’s Cold War Legacy,” *Film and History* 31 (May 2001), pp. 28-33; Stanley Corkin, *Cowboys as Cold Warriors: The Western and U.S. History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Robert Murray Davis, *Playing Cowboys: Low Culture and High Art in the Western* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992); Ronald L. Davis, *Duke: The Life and Image of John Wayne* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); Holly George-Warren, *How Hollywood Invented the Wild West: Featuring the Real West, Campfire Melodies, Matinee Idols, Four-legged Friends, Cowgirls and Lone Guns* (Pleasantville, NY: Reader’s Digest, 2002); Archie P. McDonald, *Shooting Stars: Heroes and Heroines of Western Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Emanuel Levy, *John Wayne: Prophet of the American Way of Life* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988); Sue Matheson, “The West-Hardboiled: Adaptations of Film Noir Elements, Existentialism, and Ethics in John Wayne’s Westerns,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 38 (August 2005), pp. 888-910; Lee Clark Mitchell, *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Michael Munn, *John Wayne: The Man Behind the Myth* (New York: New American Library, 2004); J.G. O’Boyle, “Be Sure You’re Right, Then Go Ahead,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television and History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005); Thomas H. Pauly, “The Cold War Western,” *Western Humanities Review* 33 (Spring 1979): pp. 256-273; Jim Sanderson, “Tom Dunson’s Descendants: John Wayne’s Loss of Femininity,” *Lamar Journal of the Humanities* 27 (Fall 2002), pp. 13-26; Max Westbrook, “Flag and Family in John Wayne’s Westerns: The Audience as Co-Conspirator,” *Western American Literature* 29 (Spring 1994), pp. 25-40; Gary Wills, *John Wayne’s America: The Politics of Celebrity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell, *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*, pp. 3-4.

gentle, individualist yet conformist, and peace-loving yet violent) so much as they narrated them in a way that seemed less problematic: “the Western is committed to revealing how contemporary versions of manhood are achieved.”<sup>18</sup>

Consider an iconic shot in postwar western film: the ending of John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956). In the film, John Wayne played Ethan Edwards, widely considered his best role, a violent racist determined to rescue his niece from the Comanche after his brother’s family were massacred and Debbie abducted. When Ethan and his companion Martin Pawley found Debbie, five years later, they learned she became a Comanche and wife of the chief Scar, who had led the raid on the Edwardses’ village. Debbie tried to convince them to leave her, but Ethan would rather see her dead than living as a Native American. In standing between Ethan and Debbie and later saving her from the Comanche, Martin emerged as the film’s hero, while Ethan exacted his revenge by scalping Scar. Ethan then carried Debbie home to his brothers’ neighbors, the Jorgensons. As the film concluded, the camera lingered on a shot of Ethan in the doorway, briefly grasping his arm (in homage to western film star Harry Carrey) and then walking away as the door closed behind him.<sup>19</sup>

Ethan Edwards was a dark character for Wayne, typically a “white hat” hero in his films. Like Tom Dunson, Wayne’s character and the anti-hero of Howard Hawks’s *Red River* (1948), the character underwent tremendous change from the source material. The stories from which *The Searchers* and *Red River* were adapted featured one-dimensional characters in stories that demanded they die in the course of the narrative. Yet as Mitchell remarked, Ford and Hawks did not want to kill off their star, and so “labored to make him more complex and sympathetic, capa-

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> *The Searchers*, DVD, directed by John Ford (1956; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007).

ble ultimately of some (though severely qualified) redemption.”<sup>20</sup> The characters survived, but, as seen with Ethan, never completely integrated into society. The door was an important symbol for John Ford; Gary Wills called doors “the liminal dividers between home and danger, confinement and freedom, a female world of enclaves and a male world of expansion.”<sup>21</sup> By positioning the camera (and therefore the audience) inside the house, Ford ended *The Searchers* with Ethan as an outsider to the home and family he had searched five years to restore. Ethan did not belong inside the house; an angry and savage man, he worked to save a civilization to which he never conformed, and so the door closed on him.

Contrast this image with an iconic photograph in postwar Major League Baseball: Brooklyn Dodgers pitcher Ralph Branca after surrendering a three-run home run to the New York Giants’ Bobby Thomson in the third game of the pennant-deciding playoff in 1951. Photographer Barney Stein captured Branca lying on the clubhouse stairs, sobbing. Stein later took another picture of Branca, this time in the clubhouse, hunched over and dejected.<sup>22</sup> These were intimate moments captured and disseminated through mass media. Stein was the Dodgers’ official team photographer and was therefore granted access that no other media members had. Stein watched the playoff game from the photographers’ cage between third base and home plate, but moved to the Dodgers’ clubhouse (located beyond the center field wall in the Polo Grounds) during the eighth inning when the Dodgers held the lead and Stein, certain the team would win the pennant, wanted to get into position to capture the celebration. The Dodgers’ clubhouse was closed to

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<sup>20</sup> Mitchell, *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*, p. 251.

<sup>21</sup> Wills, *John Wayne’s America*, p. 255.

<sup>22</sup> The images were reproduced in Dennis D’Agostino and Bonnie Crosby, *Through a Blue Lens: The Brooklyn Dodgers Photographs of Barney Stein, 1937-1957*, for. By Carl Erskine and Peter O’Malley (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2007), p. 8.

media after Thomson's home run and so photographers and sportswriters went to the Giants' clubhouse to chronicle the victory. Stein opted to wait outside the Dodgers' clubhouse until manager Charlie Dressen allowed him entry; the first person he saw was Branca, sobbing on the stairs. Branca later said that he was not bothered by Stein's photograph – Stein even took his wedding pictures later that month. He said that Stein was doing his job, and he never took it personally.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike Ethan Edwards, the ballplayer did not—could not—turn away. Thomson's field of victory was the same site as Branca's defeat. A pitcher relieved from a ballgame after a poor performance had to take the long walk to the clubhouse showers—the same clubhouse in which he would celebrate his triumphs. Baseball's settings were considerably smaller than the vistas captured by John Ford and Howard Hawks, but if the ballplayer's scenery was narrower, his audience was not. Cowboys and frontiersman embodied different characteristics if the film or television program targeted an adult audience (with heroes such as Edwards or *High Noon's* Will Kane) or children (such as Fess Parker's Davey Crockett or Clayton Moore's Lone Ranger). In baseball, the hero was consistent, as was his image; Mickey Mantle was "Mickey Mantle," whether his audience was eight, thirty-eight, or eighty years old. However, "Mickey Mantle" was in many ways as contrived as Will Kane or the Lone Ranger. Ballplayers, with real and terrific abilities, also had constructed identities. Major League Baseball was family entertainment for postwar America; it was a business, and its players had the unique position of being both the labor force *and* the product. Because audiences had to believe that the game was legitimate (particularly after the 1919 World Series gambling scandal), baseball players had to appear as men of character and strength. Players who did not conform to standards of fair-play or codes of con-

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

duct were subject to fines and suspensions. Furthermore, unlike westerns, where audiences understood there was a difference between the actor as a person and the characters he played, the line between on-field personas and off-field reality was consistently blurred for the Major League ballplayer. Although Mickey Mantle appeared to be baseball's Golden Boy on the field, the man behind the scenes was a difficult, immature, carousing lothario.

The media played a significant role in creating Mantle's image as well as other ballplayers'. The Fourth Estate has served as an important interpreter of political and social trends and values, and this has been true of baseball writers as well. Since the 1970s, biographers have worked to break down the myths surrounding ballplayers. The popularity of books such as Richard Ben Cramer's *Joe DiMaggio: The Hero's Life* and Jane Levy's *The Last Boy: Mickey Mantle at the End of America's Childhood* reflected Americans' dual devotions to baseball and gossip.<sup>24</sup> The necessity of such books, however, demonstrated an acceptance of media-generated ballplayer personas that needed proper examination and refutation. Although such studies are significant contributions to our understanding of American heroes, my intention is to study the original image and its construction in various media forms.

The public persona of the 1950s ballplayer was shaped by the rules and regulations of Major League Baseball and conveyed by multiple media to meet the demands of a society that said the rough character of the early twentieth century game or the extravagance of the 1920s were no longer acceptable and a new, wholesome image was required. Just as Mitchell argued of western heroes, ballplayers' reputations confronted conflicts between consumer-enforced conformity and ideological values of freedom and individualism. Unlike the westerns, however,

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Ben Cramer, *Joe DiMaggio: The Hero's Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Jane Leavy, *The Last Boy: Mickey Mantle and the End of America's Childhood* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010).

baseball did more than represent these tensions in narrative; it offered the ballplayer as a prescription to the masculinity crisis. Baseball succeeded because these variations were natural to its order, and therefore acceptable and even expected: the game required individual action but conformity to the team's needs; ballplayers were veterans by the time they were thirty years old and had to adapt to changes in their bodies that threatened their careers; a life on the road put pressure on the fatherhood ideal. Even MLB immortals, then, were still relatable "guys like us" and were therefore well-suited heroes and role models, despite one's inability to replicate their amazing feats on the field of play.

For some scholars, understanding American sport has been essential to understanding American character because the values on the field of play are analogous to those of society. For example, Howard Nixon argued that analyzing sport was an efficient means for understanding the public's pursuit of the American Dream because "achievement and success are so openly and explicitly emphasized in sport, and because the rags-to-riches story so often seems to be told by the contemporary mass media with sports figures as the main characters." By representing social mobility, sports stars became what Richard Lipsky called "vernacular heroes," moving "with the ebb and flow of everyday life" and demonstrating the values of mass consciousness. Twenty years later, Kathryn Jay continued this line of reasoning, presenting sports heroes as national heroes because Americans "regard sports as a place that teaches all the best qualities of citizenship, especially integrity, reliability, and a sense of responsibility." Jay went on to analyze the ways in which sports fields served as the public spaces on which issues of race, class, gender and national

identity have been contested and defined, with athletics and teams acting as symbols of social change.<sup>25</sup>

Academics agreeing with Jay's assessment of the democratizing character of sports fields have often taken baseball as a subject. More than any other sport, both professional and amateur baseball have been studied for the game's contributions to American society and the ways in which it reflected and then altered race relations, included and excluded women, and became popular across class lines. Baseball historians were indebted to Harold and Dorothy Seymour and David Voigt, whose multi-volume narrative histories of Major League Baseball as an institution provided the foundation for all who followed. Jules Tygiel and Benjamin Rader also wrote comprehensive histories of MLB, but attempted to situate baseball's development within its broader historical context. For Tygiel and Rader, every phase of professional baseball's development has perfectly mirrored broader social and cultural trends, making it "America's game."<sup>26</sup>

If baseball was to be "America's game" by the conclusion of the twentieth century, however, its nineteenth century origins were economically stratified. Allen Gutman, like many authors, argued that Irish and other working-class ethnic groups comprised the early game's partic-

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<sup>25</sup> Howard L. Nixon, II, *Sport and the American Dream* (New York: Leisure Press, 1984), pp. 10-11, 24-25; Richard Lipsky, *How We Play the Game: Why Sports Dominate American Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), pp. 107; Kathryn Jay, *More Than Just a Game: Sports in American Life Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Harold and Dorothy Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); *Baseball: The Golden Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); *Baseball: The People's Game* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); David Q. Voigt, *American Baseball: From Gentleman's Sport to the Commissioner System* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983); *American Baseball: From the Commissioners to Continental Expansion* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983); *American Baseball: From Postwar Expansion to the Electronic Age* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983); Benjamin G. Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Jules Tygiel, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

ipants, making baseball a thoroughly blue-collar entertainment. In contrast, Melvin Adelman contended that the first professionals were artisans and low white-collar workers, but came to attract more middle-class audiences at the turn of the twentieth century, when the professional sport became more respectable. Warren Goldstein, analyzing baseball's antebellum roots and the role of the baseball team as a fraternal organization, concurred with Adelman, finding early teams consisting of mostly clerks and artisans and not unskilled workers, who often lacked the financial resources to participate. Whatever the specifics of its ethnic composition, it was clear that baseball was a working- and lower-middle-class entertainment; merchants, bankers and industrialists had no interest in the early teams, professional or otherwise.<sup>27</sup>

That these groups did not participate in early baseball was a matter of choice. In contrast, Organized Baseball's<sup>28</sup> racial divisions were much firmer, and consequently have occupied much more of baseball's scholarship, with a particular emphasis on Jackie Robinson, Branch Rickey and Organized Baseball's postwar integration. According to Tygiel's *Baseball's Great Experiment*, Robinson's breaking of the color barrier "offered a model for the nation and the world." Although Tygiel conceded that "federal legislation, court actions, and moral pressures precipitated most" civil rights advances, he maintained that "black athletes represented both the harbingers and the agents of change."<sup>29</sup> Although most historians agreed with that assessment, others traced the negative impact integration had on Negro League Baseball, the institution created by Orga-

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<sup>27</sup> Allen Guttman, *Sports Spectators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Melvin Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-1870* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Warren Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> Organized Baseball refers to the combination of Major League Baseball and its minor league affiliates.

<sup>29</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 333, 343.



nized Baseball's exclusion of black players. Donn Rogosin, for example, argued that Negro League teams were among the largest black-owned businesses in the interwar period, and their executives became community leaders despite their connection to the numbers racket. Following Rogosin, Neil Lanctot examined the internal struggles that made the Negro League financially unstable from their inception, and unable to compete with integrated Organized Baseball.<sup>30</sup> However, despite these changes being detrimental to black-owned ball clubs, they were seen as beneficial to Major League Baseball—and society. The national pastime, after all, had to be inclusive if it really meant to represent the nation.

Yet for all this analysis of inclusion and exclusion within Organized Baseball, few scholars have focused on gender. In the wake of Penny Marshall's successful film *A League of Their Own* (1991) and a Hall of Fame exhibit acknowledging the contributions of women in baseball, Gai Ingham Berlage and Jean Hastings Ardell each published a history of women in baseball.<sup>31</sup> While these works were as significant early texts for scholars of women's baseball history as Seymour's and Voigt's were to those of Major League Baseball history, it was not until Marilyn Cohen's *No Girls in the Clubhouse* that a monograph studied gender as "the central concept mediating social structures, forms of communication and social interactions among players and coaches, symbolic representations of female athletes, ideologies of inclusion and exclusion, and subjective identities of players in the social setting of amateur and professional baseball in the

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<sup>30</sup> Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1983); Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Fall of a Black Institution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Ardell, *Breaking Into Baseball*; Gai Ingham Berlage, *Women in Baseball: The Forgotten History* (New York: Praeger Press, 1994).

United States.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Cohen’s work, which ultimately found that World War II and the 1950s were periods in which the construction of the feminine gender identity was renegotiated, remains the only book-length analysis of its kind. To date, there has not been a comparable examination of the masculine gender identity in postwar Major League Baseball.<sup>33</sup>

My aim is to provide a media analysis of idealized masculinity’s construction and place it in connection with the larger history of the Cold War and masculinity crisis. By studying the constructed image of the ballplayer, one might understand the commodification of this particular group of men in the name of family entertainment while also emphasizing the tension inherent in maintaining and adhering to the dominant gender values of the time. The rhetoric used by both MLB and media reflected these values, but could not avoid conflicts within such ideals. This ultimately served to make the game more relatable, and added to its myth as “America’s game.”

If Major League Baseball was the national pastime in the 1950s, it fell behind in the 1960s and struggled to find its place in the 1970s. This was partially because professional baseball was slow to adapt to many of the changes sweeping through the nation in the 1960s. Although at the forefront of racial integration, MLB’s organization and conduct changed little in the

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<sup>32</sup> Marilyn Cohen, *No Girls in the Clubhouse: The Exclusion of Women from Baseball* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Even in other eras, studies of masculinity in baseball are scarce. Michael Kimmel published “Baseball and the Reconstitution of American Masculinity, 1880-1920,” (taken from a talk given at the Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture) in his collection *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). In it, he argued that baseball became an acceptable middle-class entertainment in the early years of the twentieth century as transformations in the economy were altering what was meant by “manhood.” Joakim Nilsson’s “Take Me Back to the Ball Game: Nostalgia and Hegemonic Masculinity in *Field of Dreams*” (*Canadian Review of American Studies*, 30 (2000), pp. 52-72) argued that transformations in the film’s plot from its original source (W.P. Kinsella’s *Shoeless Joe*) were means of reconciling generational differences in the 1980s masculinity crisis.

decade that followed. As a consequence, baseball lost some of its luster and faced competition from the flashy heroes of the National Football League, among other professional sports.

It was not until the 1970s that MLB saw the coming of free agency, the gimmicks of Oakland Athletics owner Charles Finley and the audacity of New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner. Yet as Major League Baseball changed, devoted fans of baseball's purity called out for the "simpler" game of their youth. Answering their call, former Brooklyn Dodgers beat writer Roger Kahn published *The Boys of Summer*, weaving stories of the 1950s Dodgers with those of his family (particularly his father).<sup>34</sup> Often regarded as baseball's masterpiece, *Boys of Summer* combined one of the most storied seasons, in which Brooklyn's Bums *finally* bested the Yankees in the 1955 World Series, with memories from home and, in doing so, spoke to its audience in a way the contemporary game could not. Kahn reminded them of a time when baseball games were family entertainment, and not the province of "Hot Pants and Halter Tops" promotional games or "Disco Demolition Night." It was the game they learned to score by their fathers' teaching, played by "men who loved it" – not these new professionals who would leave their teammates to play for the highest bidder. It was a game played with class by Joe DiMaggio, not the bombast of Reggie Jackson.

This was, of course, nostalgia. The game for which Kahn's audience longed never actually existed. Ballplayers refused to report to spring training ever year, hoping to negotiate higher salaries based on the last season's successes. Ladies Days and night games began as promotions during World War II with the intention of improving box office receipts. Willie Mays wore his cap two sizes too small so that it would fly off of his head when he made a diving catch. Bob Feller barnstormed in the off-season to make more money, and even Stan Musial considered

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<sup>34</sup> Roger Kahn, *The Boys of Summer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972; reprint, New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006).

leaving the St. Louis Cardinals for a Mexican League team because they offered a more lucrative contract. Yet these were not the stories Kahn's audience associated with their childhood heroes. It was possible that audience did not even know such facts about these men, given the constantly reinforced images of their childhood heroes as noble American heroes.

Instead, they knew what they read in the newspapers and what they heard on the radio. They knew stories of supermen who played with integrity and then went home to have dinner with their families. They believed that these men represented all that was good in America—they believed in that image of hegemonic masculinity and lamented its loss in the contemporary game. Inaccurate as it was, that memory was significant. Major League Baseball was America's game in the postwar era, and its men were presented as true American men. They were the nation's perfect knights and perfect warriors.

Chapter 1:  
**The National Pastime**  
Baseball, Major League Baseball, and American History

During the 1888-1889 offseason, former baseball player-turned-sporting goods magnate Albert Goodwill Spalding and the first group of baseball “all-stars” embarked on a world tour to promote what Spalding firmly believed was the American national pastime. Their tour included stops in Hawaii, Italy, France, and Egypt. The trip itself had mixed results abroad, with baseball seen as a novelty but failing to take off as a viable pastime. Nevertheless, the “baseball tourists” were feted upon their return to American shores.<sup>35</sup>

A large banquet was hosted at Delmonico’s in New York, where Spalding and his men were joined by figures from the sports world, newsmen and editors, two U.S. senators, three New York mayors, several judges, newly-appointed member of the U.S. Civil Service Commission Theodore Roosevelt, and Mark Twain. Like others that evening, Twain spoke before the assembly, “with humor peppered by nationalistic rhetoric.” He lauded Spalding and his players for “carry[ing] the American name to the uttermost parts of the earth—and cover[ing] it with glory every time.” In doing so, Twain had touched upon the theme of the evening: the game of baseball was a symbol of America and its goodness, and its players were models of masculinity and citizenship.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas W. Zeiler, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes: The Spalding World Baseball Tour and the Birth of the American Empire* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), pp. 3-4.

<sup>36</sup> Zeiler, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes*, pp. 164-165.

Shortly after their evening at Delmonico's, the baseball tourists were similarly celebrated at the Hotel Bellevue in Philadelphia, where Frank Richter, editor of *Sporting Life* newspaper, hosted 140 guests (likewise combining city luminaries with baseball officials and journalists). Here, baseball equipment was hung for decoration, Harry Wannemacher's orchestra played baseball songs, and guests enjoyed a "nine-inning" meal. When it came time for the toasts, speakers again combined their zeal for baseball with nationalist and imperialist overtones. Thomas Zeiler's history of the World Baseball Tour highlighted speeches from Phillies executive and Philadelphia politician John Rogers, who declared the traveling baseball company had advanced the flag into new nations, and the publisher of the *Philadelphia Times*, who likened their tour to missionary work that would better all it encountered. In Zeiler's summation, "The Delmonico's banquet became known for the notable figures in attendance; the Philadelphia dinner clarified baseball's place in the national project of organizing society and Americanizing the world through a U.S. empire of sport."<sup>37</sup>

All of these speakers considered baseball an American export, espousing the virtues of liberty and democracy, and promoting integrity, determination, and achievement. In so doing, they presupposed (or in the case of Senator Abraham Mills at the Delmonico event, outright declared) that baseball was of American origin, a notion that had long been contested. In fact, sportswriter Henry Chadwick, regarded the "Father of Baseball" for helping popularize the game in print and inventing the boxscore, disagreed with this analysis and during his toast at the Bellevue banquet, reasserted his opinion that baseball had evolved from the English game of rounders.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Zeiler, pp. 168-171; quote, p. 171.

<sup>38</sup> Zeiler, p.170.

These were nights dedicated to Spalding's World Tour, however, and there was no greater proponent of the American origins thesis than Spalding himself. Over the next several years, he and Chadwick regularly traded barbs, in print and otherwise, over the game's national origin. Though Chadwick was willing to concede that baseball was an improvement upon rounders, he could not overlook the similarities to the English bat-and-ball game. For Spalding, however, this was a matter of national pride as well as professional consideration – providing baseball with American cultural significance was good advertisement for his sporting goods business. By 1905 the debate had reached such a point that Spalding called for a special commission to investigate and determine the national origins of baseball. Chaired by Abraham Mills, the commission consisted of two sitting United States Senators, three former National League presidents, former players, and the head of the Amateur Athletic Union.<sup>39</sup>

The Mills Commission released its final report in 1907. Ultimately, the committee relied on testimony from a mining engineer from Denver, Abner Graves. Graves wrote a letter claiming to be present in Cooperstown, New York, in June of 1839, when Abner Doubleday invented baseball, standardizing the rules of town ball. In supporting the Doubleday thesis, the Mills Commission supported the “American” foundations of baseball. The finding was pleasing not only to Spalding, who had put the commission in place, but to James Sullivan, the Amateur Athletic Union president, who was of Irish descent and like Spalding wished to distance baseball from any British origins.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Zeiler, pp. 157-159; Benjamin G. Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game*, second edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 94-95.

<sup>40</sup> Rader, *Baseball*, pp. 94-95; Zeiler, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes*, pp. 157-159. John Thorn, *Baseball and the Garden of Eden: The Secret History of the Early Game* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), pp. 8-9.

Despite its claim to have found the “best evidence obtainable to date,” the Mills Commission’s findings have been debated for much of the last hundred years. In 1939, the National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum opened in Cooperstown, solidifying in the public mind the small town’s reputation as the “birthplace of baseball.” However, librarian Robert W. Henderson compared the rules of rounders and early baseball and found that at one time they had been nearly identical in style and form. Later scholars traced the origins to New York City in 1845, and Alexander Joy Cartwright, who co-wrote the “Knickerbocker rules” that established the diamond shape of the infield; three outs constituted an inning; three swinging strikes became an out, as well as a fielder catching the ball on the first bounce or in the air, or throwing to the base before the runner, or tagging a runner between bases instead of “soaking” or “plugging” (in which a fielder struck a base runner with the ball) to retire him.<sup>41</sup>

Although it remains unclear if any one person was responsible for the creation of modern baseball, it has become increasingly unlikely that Abner Doubleday played any role. Historians have documented that Doubleday was actually a cadet at West Point in 1839, and would not have been in Cooperstown to set down the rules as Graves claimed. Furthermore, Doubleday left a number of writings, including a two-volume memoir, sixty-seven diaries and a series of letters, none of which even mentioned baseball (nor did his *New York Times* obituary in 1893).<sup>42</sup>

The endurance of the Doubleday myth had more to do with will than reality. Baseball officials and promoters embraced the Mills Commission’s report because it delivered the answer they wanted. Not only did it promote a distinctly American origin for baseball, it connected it to the patriotic preservation of the Union in the form of Doubleday, the small town boy who be-

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<sup>41</sup> Rader, *Baseball*, pp. 94-95; Zeiler, *Ambassador in Pinstripes*, pp. 21-22, 156-158; Thorn, *Baseball in the Garden of Eden*, pp. 42-44.

<sup>42</sup> Rader, *Baseball*, pp. 94-95; Zeiler, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes*, pp. 157-159.



came a general during the Civil War, where he possibly ordered the first attack on Confederate soldiers at Fort Sumter in 1861, and later served in the second battle of Bull Run, Gettysburg, and Antietam. It also, as historian Richard Crepeau argued, established a rural home for the national pastime (as distinct from the urban origins of the Cartwright thesis), in an era when the frontier was officially closed and the effects of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration were being felt.<sup>43</sup>

The Delmonico's and Bellevue banquets, Mills Commission, and Doubleday myth all revealed baseball's struggle for identity. Though this was manifest in the debate over the game's creation, such an identity struggle was present in nearly every facet of the game. Promoters insisted this was a game of propriety played by upstanding men, trying to solidify its reputation among the middle-class and disassociate it with any working-class appeal. The insistence on the American identity embodied the cultural imperialist and nationalist rhetoric of men like Spalding, but also suggested to the average American that this was a safe entertainment that spoke to home grown values and lacked foreign influence. Finally, the rural setting of upstate New York contrasted the increasingly crowded, regimented life of cities and played to romantic notions of the past, full of open space and time not regulated by the clock. Baseball at the turn of the twentieth century was still fighting over its origins, its identity, and its meaning; it would continue to struggle until the arrival of Babe Ruth and advancements in media helped the game to have a "national" audience, though its audience was more diverse than the professional game itself.

Baseball would have to overcome its ties to the underworld and the underside of American society before it would fully convince the public of its value. This meant cleansing the game of gamblers and their influence, removing the spitball, and transforming the ball itself to some-

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Crepeau, *Baseball: America's Diamond Mind, 1919-1941* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), pp. 193-194; Zeiler, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes*, p. 157.

thing livelier with better lift. These changes coincided with the rise of Ruth, a larger-than-life figure whose skill was matched by his personality. In an age when media were reaching greater audiences through sports pages and radio, Ruth became Major League Baseball's biggest draw. He revived baseball's popularity in the aftermath of the devastating Chicago Black Sox scandal, sold tickets across the country, and played to his audience off the field as well as on.<sup>44</sup>

Yet even Ruth could not save baseball from the Great Depression. Baseball teams around the country suffered as their audiences struggled with their financial security. This encouraged innovation on ownership's part, who instituted night games and turned to radio to maintain fans' interest. The minor leagues were more susceptible to the effects of the Depression, but the professional game survived, only to be confronted with the loss of manpower through the Selective Service Act and the enthusiastic volunteers for armed service in the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The Cleveland Indians' Bob Feller and Detroit Tigers' Hank Greenberg were the first to enlist, but were followed by many others. In total, an estimated 5,400 baseball personnel served in the armed forces during World War II. Organized Baseball (the combination of Major League Baseball and its minor league affiliates) was again forced to adapt. The Majors played more night games and instituted Ladies Days to sell tickets, while emphasizing MLB's sacrifice in the name of the war effort. Minor league officials went so far as to create a women's professional circuit to draw attention. The Negro Leagues, created after a gentlemen's agreement among Organized Baseball owners refused to sign black players, also adapted to stay alive.

Despite the circumstances, then, baseball continued for the duration. Its ability to mold itself and its brand to the attitudes, expectations, and concerns of its audience strengthened its

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<sup>44</sup> Crepeau, *Baseball*, pp. 73-91; Jules Tygiel, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 74-86.

national appeal. When America emerged from war and Major League players returned to their rosters, they were rewarded with bolstered attendance figures. Through their ticket purchases, Americans affirmed their commitment to baseball as their national pastime.<sup>45</sup>

## GROWING PAINS

Though much of the Doubleday myth has been debunked, one point has remained unchallenged: the importance of the American Civil War in the geographical spread of baseball. Prior to that conflict, versions of modern baseball were confined to open spaces in the Northeast; afterward, amateur clubs and fraternities were found throughout the country. Similarly, the class component of players shifted. What was once limited to the lower-middle and upper-working classes then spread to day laborers, and was enjoyed by immigrant communities by the turn of the twentieth century. Such shifts were at once a cause for celebration (a demonstration of the sport's democratizing character) and for concern (whose game was this anyway?). From the beginning of professionalization, then, baseball owners and promoters struggled to find a wholesome, marketable identity. They had to reconcile the middle-class values they claimed the game espoused with the increasing dominance of the lower classes' participation and spectatorship.

The Cartwright thesis was reinforced by the quantifiable support for the New York game, which by 1861 had at least 200 teams in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Westchester, and northern New Jersey. These teams were usually social clubs (including Cartwright's Knickerbockers) of clerks and petty merchants, or teams formed by neighborhood or craft affiliation. Historian Benjamin Rader noted that the social clubs, who were the most dominant and whose

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<sup>45</sup> Charles C. Alexander, *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. ix-x; J. Ronald Oakley, *Baseball's Last Golden Age, 1946-1960: The National Pastime in a Time of Glory and Change* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1994), pp. 2-6.

records were most likely to have survived, often referred to themselves as “baseball fraternities,” indicating the level of closeness between players and expectations of behaviors off the field as well. They understood baseball as a way of building relationships, advancing fitness, and promoting individual skills, in contrast to their sedentary occupations and the impersonal nature of the boardinghouses in which these young, unmarried men often lived. They also believed success was tied to character. Rader identified a report in *Porter’s Spirit of the Times* in 1857 that demanded ballplayers “must be sober and temperate. Patience, fortitude, self-denial, order, obedience, and good-humor, with an unruffled temper, are indispensable,” and that baseball “teaches a love of order, discipline, and fair play.”<sup>46</sup>

If the conditions of antebellum New York were breeding ground for baseball’s popularity, then it logically followed the Civil War would further its advancement. The war took men from all walks of life and combined strangers into regiments removed from the comforts of home, demanding leadership, camaraderie, physical skill, and competition. Union training camps saw a great deal of sporting activity, including boxing, running, wrestling, and baseball. Baseball games were also played in prison camps and alongside battlefields, where Confederate soldiers watched, learned, and played. Consequently, veterans of both the Blue and Gray brought the “New York” game home with them. By 1862, Chicago’s baseball population had grown from four to 32 clubs, and by 1865 the National Association of Base Ball Players represented teams in ten different states.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Rader, *Baseball*, pp.10-15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18; Michael Aubrecht, “Civil War Baseball: Baseball and the Blue and Gray,” *Baseball Almanac*, July 2004, online <<<http://www.baseball-almanac.com/articles/aubrecht2004b.shtml>>>.

The National Association of Base Ball Players (NABBP) was founded by delegates of New York ball clubs in 1857 to establish rules and standardize play, regulate competition and preserve the fraternal character of the game. Yet with baseball growing in popularity, it was only a matter of time before enterprising men sought to commodify it. In 1862, William H. Cammeyer converted his Brooklyn ice-skating pond into a baseball field with seating for 1,500 spectators as well as a clubhouse and saloon, and charged admission. Like-minded businessmen followed suit, and baseball teams increasingly financed their play through gate fees paid by the entrepreneurs (few teams had sufficient funds to own their own facilities) instead of dues.<sup>48</sup>

Money quickly changed the nature of baseball. Because the best teams drew the most crowds and therefore generated the most revenue, clubs offered financial compensation to their most talented players. The Cincinnati Red Stockings were the first all-salaried starting nine, but when they took the field in 1869, at least twelve other clubs had salaried players. When the Red Stockings went on tour that year and were undefeated in fifty-seven games, their success encouraged other teams to increase their teams' competitiveness, and did so through salaries and contracts. This changed the sport from a fun form of leisure played among friends and colleagues to a business in which one argued for compensation commensurate with ability. "Play" had become serious; not everyone was guaranteed time. Furthermore, players moved from club to club based on the best salary offers, breaking the fraternal bonds that had previously characterized the sport. Teams needed the capital to finance such acquisitions, and so converted to joint-stock companies motivated by profit.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rader, *Baseball*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-27; Steve A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 157-159.

In 1876, the player-oriented National Association was replaced by the more financially-sound, business-oriented National League (NL). Where the National Association had been unstable due to the constant roster-jumping of top athletes, National League owners instituted the reserve clause in 1879 to tie players to teams. The reserve clause gave the team exclusive rights to a ballplayer, even beyond the expiration date of his contract. The team had the right to sell, trade, or release a player as it chose. The player was denied any opportunity to negotiate his own terms or with another team; if a contract offer failed to meet his expectations, his only recourse was not to play. The reserve clause concentrated power in ownership's hands, drastically reduced player movement, and curtailed wages' upward trend.<sup>50</sup>

Players' disdain for the reserve clause and other ownership demands contributed to labor unrest throughout the late nineteenth century. Attempts to create a competing major league circuit occurred throughout the 1890s, but were defeated by economic instability and depression. Finally, in 1900, Western League president Ban Johnson and Players' Protective Association organizers convinced many players not to sign contracts until the owners were willing to improve salaries and remove the reserve clause. When the owners balked, the PA vice president Clark Griffith wired Johnson and co-conspirator Charles Comiskey and essentially told them to sign whichever players they wanted. The Western League changed its name to the American League (AL), and established teams in the former National League cities of Cleveland, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, the previously minor league cities of Detroit and Milwaukee, and NL strongholds Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia. AL owners promised to uphold the Players' Protective Association contract, signed players to large contracts, and ignored the NL's salary cap.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Riess, *Touching Base*, pp. 158-160.

<sup>51</sup> Tygiel, *Past Time*, 48-52.

In 1902, the American League outdrew the National League, and the senior circuit was forced to negotiate with its competition. The Players' Protective Association was founded in 1900 and had played a great role in the American League's rise, but when the AL and NL met to negotiate the National Agreement in 1903, the players were pushed to the side. The National Agreement brought the two independently-operated leagues together under the banner of Major League Baseball (MLB), with a three-man commission to rule the game, and established the best-of-seven World Series to be played between the league champions at the conclusion of each season. Although the National League agreed to lift the salary cap, the reserve clause was restored.<sup>52</sup>

The players had little recourse. In the late nineteenth century, they existed on the same level of the social hierarchy as actors and boxers. Professionalization lured working-class Americans and German and Irish immigrants, who were attracted by the higher salaries but did not conform to the *Spirit of the Times* standard from 1857. These players were more physical and disorderly, fighting with umpires and each other. Pitchers threw doctored balls and protected the strike zone by throwing at batters to edge them off the plate; base runners regularly slid with their spikes turned upward. Off the field, players drank, gambled, and associated with gamblers and prostitutes. Middle-class parents were aghast by such behavior, and dissuaded their children from playing baseball or associating with players. Even college athletes eschewed the stigmatized professional game.<sup>53</sup>

Two figures who epitomized the rough character of early Major League Baseball were John McGraw and Ty Cobb. Baseball's "Little Napoleon" McGraw was a player, manager, and

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Riess, *Touching Base*, pp. 160-164.

minority owner of the American League's Baltimore Orioles, where he butted heads with umpires and league president Ban Johnson. The son of Irish-immigrants, McGraw's early life was filled with tragedy. When he was eleven-years-old, a diphtheria epidemic claimed the lives of his mother and four of his siblings. His father unraveled, and took his anger out on his oldest son, whom he regularly beat. A year later, the young McGraw ran away from home. He worked at Goddard's hotel, distributed newspapers, and sold magazines, fruit, and candies on the local railroad line before finding his place in professional baseball. There he found a place to battle his demons.<sup>54</sup>

McGraw was aggressive, and pushed his players incessantly. He fought with everyone—he screamed profanities and engaged in fistfights. As a player, he was known for grabbing baserunners' uniforms or charging fielders who got in his way on the basepaths. As a manager, he was merciless. He once fined a player who had hit a game-winning two-run homerun because McGraw had ordered him to bunt. National League President John Heydler once said that umpires had to bathe their feet by the hour because McGraw would spike them through their shoes, then spit tobacco juice through the holes. For Rader, McGraw “personified the tumultuous, working-class, ethnic character of the game.”

Small cities in the American league had trouble supporting their teams, and McGraw's investment in the Baltimore Orioles proved unwise. He wanted to transfer to a New York team, but failed to garner the support of Johnson, who believed that order and discipline were necessary to the league's success. McGraw and Johnson quarreled several times in the AL's first two seasons, including Johnson suspending McGraw for five days for mistreating umpires. In 1902, Johnson suspended McGraw indefinitely for insubordination stemming from another incident

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<sup>54</sup> Tygiel, *Past Time*, pp. 36-38.



involving an umpire; two weeks later McGraw resigned as manager, sold his stock in the Orioles, and signed on as manager of the National League's New York Giants. McGraw threatened the stability of Major League Baseball in 1904, when he and the pennant-winning Giants boycotted the World Series. He claimed that the American League was inferior, and that his team was champion of the "only real major league." He later relented, leading the Giants to three World Series championships (including 1905) and nine additional pennants.<sup>55</sup>

McGraw's American League contemporary Ty Cobb, facetiously known as the "Georgia Peach," was arguably the greatest hitter in the game's history, and certainly its meanest. To Cobb, baseball was war—and he used every weapon in his arsenal: spikes, fists, bat, and mouth. "When I began playing," he once said, "Baseball was about as gentlemanly as a kick in the crotch." Cobb was a devastating hitter. He kept his hands wide apart along the bat, giving him the ability to bunt, punch, or slap the ball through an opening. He allowed his speed to work for him, and always went in spikes first. It took a brave catcher or infielder to block the plate. Cobb's aggressiveness paid off, at least statistically. In 24 seasons, he won the league batting title twelve times, nine times in succession, and compiled a .367 career batting average, which is still a major league record.<sup>56</sup>

Like John McGraw, Ty Cobb battled personal demons. His childhood was marked by a distant relationship with his father, a very demanding man who was never satisfied. Cobb, competitive at a young age, once beat up a boy for an error that let a girls' team win the fifth-grade spelling bee. When he left home to find a career in professional baseball, his father told him not to come back a failure. Cobb was determined, and eventually found a spot on a semi-pro team in

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<sup>55</sup> Tygiel, *Past Time*, pp. 52.

<sup>56</sup> National Baseball Hall of Fame, ed., *Baseball As America: Seeing Ourselves Through Our National Game* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2002), pp. 100-104.

Augusta. Playing quite well, it seemed his opportunity in the Major Leagues was imminent, but his father would never see his success. Convinced that his wife was having an affair, Cobb's father decided to catch her in the act by climbing through the bedroom window unannounced. His wife, who was not unfaithful, was startled by the intruder, grabbed her husband's shotgun, and fired, hitting him square in the chest. Three weeks later, Ty Cobb played his first game for the Detroit Tigers.<sup>57</sup>

Yet if Cobb's anger was understandable, it was hardly forgivable. A terrible racist, Cobb once assaulted an African American groundskeeper for getting in his way. When the man's wife attempted to step in and break up the fight, Cobb attacked her, too. He also stabbed a black watchman at a hotel in Cleveland for daring to ask him for identification. His worst moment came in 1912, when a New York Highlander fan named Claude Leuker dared to heckle Cobb by calling him a "half-nigger." Cobb leapt into the stands and began to savagely beat the man. When other fans pled with him to stop because Leuker did not have hands, Cobb was said to have responded, "I don't care if he's got no feet." Furious, Ban Johnson suspended Cobb indefinitely for his conduct. Cobb's teammates, however, found his actions justified – to be called such a thing was the greatest insult they could imagine. They launched what might be considered the first players' strike, refusing to play until Cobb was reinstated. The Tigers played one game with scabs, but canceled the next. Johnson threatened to suspend the striking players, but Cobb convinced them to go back. Johnson fined each player 100 dollars, then overturned Cobb's suspension and fined him only 50.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Rader, *Baseball*, pp. 21-25, 102-103.

While the Leuker story exemplified Cobb's anger and violence, it also demonstrated the proximity between ballplayers and their audience. Unlike fine arts spectators, who were reserved and respectful, sports spectators were loud and energetic – their nickname *fans* was derived from their fanaticism. Though management discouraged rowdyism in the stands, spectators often heckled opposing players. George Bernard Shaw, no fan of sports, once observed: “What is both surprising and delightful is that spectators are allowed, and even expected, to join in the vocal part of the game.... There is no reason why the field should not try to put the batsman off his stroke at the critical moment by neatly timed disparagements of his wife's fidelity and his mother's respectability.”<sup>59</sup> The din of the crowd could be overwhelming, and even dangerous.

In 1908, New York Giants rookie Fred Merkle failed to touch second base at what should have been the conclusion to a game against the Chicago Cubs, in what famously (and perhaps unfairly) came to be known as the “Merkle Boner,” but that summation failed to provide insight into the difficulty of playing in front of early MLB audiences. In September of 1908, the National League pennant was a three-team race between the Giants, Cubs, and the Pittsburgh Pirates. On September 23, 19-year-old Merkle got the start at first base – the first big-league game he had ever started.

With two outs and a runner on first, Merkle singled in the bottom of the ninth, with the game tied at one. Moose McCormick, the potential winning run, advanced to third on the play. With runners at the corners, shortstop Al Bridwell lined a single to center field; McCormick raced home with what was supposed to be the winning run. Fred Merkle, on his way to second base, made a sharp turn and headed to the dugout to avoid fans that had run onto the field. Seeing them headed directly for him, Merkle headed for cover. Cubs shortstop Johnny Evers saw

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<sup>59</sup> George Bernard Shaw, “An Avid Hater of Baseball,” reprinted in *Pittsburgh Press*, 23 August 1981.

this as an opportunity: knowing that Merkle had not actually touched second base, Evers knew that if he could get the ball and tag second, Merkle would be out, and the winning run would be disallowed due to the third-out force out. Giants' first base coach Joe McGinnity, apparently suspicious of Evers, retrieved the ball from a fan and threw it into the stands. Evers claimed to have retrieved the ball (though no one knows if the ball he was holding was actually the same) and tagged second base. The umpires consulted and ruled Merkle out at second.

The game was called on account of darkness with 1-1 the official score, but the two teams finished the season still tied for first place. The game was replayed on October 8, and the Cubs won 4-2, claiming the National League pennant and later the World Series. However, when the final out was recorded in the bottom of the ninth inning on October 8, the Cubs were the ones running for their lives. Unable to rush the field to celebrate the Giants, fans instead rushed the field to *fight* the Chicago Cubs; some players left the ballpark with bruises inflicted by angry Giants fans.<sup>60</sup>

Owners and management worried about baseball's reputation as rowdy and violent. They fined players for using profane language or disorderly conduct; severe infractions led to suspension or dismissal. They also hoped to lure female spectators, with the expectation that the women's presence would have a civilizing effect over the men in the stands and on the field. Club owners additionally set aside passes for clergy, with similar hopes that they would discourage misbehavior. Although none of these attempts rid the game of "ungentlemanly conduct," they reflected the ownership's desire to reach middle-class audiences by appealing to their values.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> National Baseball Hall of Fame, *Baseball as America*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>61</sup> Riess, *Touching Base*, pp. 33-34; Rader, *Baseball*, 24-25.

Mostly it fell to the media to convince the public of baseball's virtues. Historian Steven Riess identified a 1913 *Outlook* magazine article in which author H. Addington Bruce argued that "baseball developed traits that would be important in the business of life, including fair-mindedness, honesty, judgment, patience, quick thinking, self-control, and temperance" as well as traits "that would eventually benefit the entire nation, such as respect for authority, self-sacrifice and teamwork." Addington based his argument on the democratizing nature of baseball and the importance of physical fitness in Theodore Roosevelt's strenuous life theory.<sup>62</sup>

There was, therefore, a disconnect between what was written about baseball and what was displayed on the field. This helps to explain why people were so surprised and disappointed to hear that eight members of the 1919 Chicago White Sox had conspired with gamblers to throw the best-of-nine World Series that year. The associations between gamblers and ballplayers was another example of the thin line between players and their audience. Poorly paid players found it in their best interest to tip off a gambler about an ailing player, or a pitcher who looked off during warm-ups. In some cases, single games were thrown – but no one anticipated throwing the World Series. That was something entirely different. Nevertheless, on September 18, 1919, White Sox first baseman Chick Gandil summoned an old gambling acquaintance, Joseph "Sport" Sullivan, to his Boston hotel room. Gandil told Sullivan that he and several of his teammates were willing to throw the World Series for \$100,000.<sup>63</sup>

The 1919 White Sox were an unhappy lot. They were poorly paid and did not get along particularly well. The team's owner, the "Old Roman" Charles Comiskey, had a reputation for being tightfisted. Despite owning the ballpark and even bottling his own soda to maximize prof-

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<sup>62</sup> Riess, *Touching Base*, pp. 24-28.

<sup>63</sup> Rader, *Baseball*, pp. 111, 117-118.

its on the concessions, Comiskey charged his players for laundering their uniforms. The players rebelled, refusing to pay, and their uniforms grew progressively darker until the press sarcastically began referring to them as the Black Sox.<sup>64</sup>

The money for the fix was provided by New York gambler Arnold Rothstein, who was said to have been willing to bet on anything except the weather, because it was the only thing he could not fix. Gandil's fellow conspirators were pitchers Lefty Williams and Eddie Cicotte, who had combined to win 52 games that season; outfielder Happy Felsch; infielders Buck Weaver and Swede Risberg; utility infielder Fred McMullin (who had overheard Gandil talking to Risberg and demanded to be let in); and outfielder "Shoeless Joe" Jackson, the idol of schoolboys everywhere.<sup>65</sup>

Cicotte in particular harbored a grudge against Comiskey. The owner had promised him a \$10,000 bonus if he ever won 30 games; then, when he had won 29 in 1919, ordered him benched to prevent Cicotte from reaching his bonus. Cicotte agreed to be part of the fix as long as he was given \$10,000 before the start of the Series. The gamblers paid the right-handed pitcher – as it turned out, he was the only one of the conspirators to be paid in full. Gandil, Williams, Felsch, Risberg, and Jackson each received only \$5,000 for their cooperation; McMullin and Weaver never saw a penny.

Nevertheless, the White Sox lost the series in eight games. While many hinted that it had been thrown – indeed, rumors were rampant from the start – the controversy died down by the start of the 1920 season. However, players on other teams had seen the advantage of getting close to gamblers. There were widespread rumors of games being sold by players on the Giants,

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*; Eliot Asinof, *Eight Men Out: The Black Sox and the 1919 World Series* (New York: Henry Holt, 1963), pp. 1-39.

<sup>65</sup> Asinof, *Eight Men Out*.

Yankees, Braves, Indians, and White Sox. In September 1920, a special Cook County grand jury convened to investigate allegations that the Cubs had thrown a three-game series against the Philadelphia Phillies. The probe soon widened to include the 1919 World Series. Several gamblers and all eight ballplayers were indicted for conspiring to defraud the public and injure the business of Charles Comiskey and the American League. All were acquitted for want of evidence, but the story did not end there.<sup>66</sup>

Major League Baseball was a business dependent upon talent and faith. The talent was supplied by the ballplayers, and the faith by the audience. If the spectators could not believe that what they saw on the field was credible, the business would suffer, particularly given all of the symbolic weight the game carried. When *The Great Gatsby's* Nick Carraway met Meyer Wolfsheim (F. Scott Fitzgerald's stand-in for Rothstein), he remarked, "It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people – with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe."<sup>67</sup> The loss of credibility was the greater crime, particularly as it affected schoolchildren. One of the most lasting anecdotes of the Black Sox scandal came from the *Chicago Tribune's* Hugh Fullerton, who wrote of an exchange between Jackson and a young fan on the steps of the Cook County Courthouse. According to Fullerton, the young boy grabbed Jackson's sleeve and asked, "It ain't true, is it, Joe?," to which Jackson responded, "Yes, kid, I'm afraid it is." Jackson always denied the story, which was not reported by anyone

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*; Rader, *Baseball*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>67</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 2004), p. 73.

else, but its endurance (usually misquoted as “Say it ain’t so, Joe”) reflected the sadness and disillusion of baseball fans of all ages, watching their hero fall.<sup>68</sup>

Major League Baseball responded by reorganizing their leadership structure. They replaced the three-person board with a commissioner, upon whom the responsibility of handling the Black Sox scandal fell. Kenesaw Mountain Landis was selected from a list of candidates that included former President William Howard Taft and General John J. Pershing. Landis, who was named after the Civil War battlefield on which his father lost a leg, was a federal judge with a flair for the dramatic – he was known for making strong decisions, only to have them reversed by higher courts upon appeal. He first came to baseball owners’ attention when Major League Baseball was sued by the rival Federal League during the 1914-1915 offseason. The league challenged MLB’s antitrust status, but baseball fan Landis withheld judgment, telling the two leagues that they should negotiate. The Federal League could not afford the costs of prolonged litigation and folded after the 1915 season.<sup>69</sup> As baseball’s czar, Landis had everything he wanted: an opportunity to establish himself as baseball’s protector, and the ability to make grand pronouncements without having to worry about anyone overturning them.

Ruling on the Black Sox scandal one day after the players’ acquittal, Landis banned all eight players from the professional game, and established the precedent that would separate ballplayers and gamblers from that point forward: “Regardless of the verdict of juries, no player that throws a ball game; no player that sits in conference with a bunch of crooked players and gamblers where the ways and means of throwing games are discussed, and does not promptly tell his

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<sup>68</sup> “‘It Ain’t True, Is It, Joe?’ Youngster Asks,” *Minnesota Daily Star*, September 29, 1920, pg. 5; Gene Carney, *Burying the Black Sox: How Baseball’s Cover-Up of the 1919 World Series Fix Almost Succeeded* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2006), p. 13.

<sup>69</sup> Rader, *Baseball*, pp. 120-121.



club about it, will ever play professional ball.” The latter clause – about those who sit in conference – applied specifically to Buck Weaver, who claimed innocence. He had never received any money and cited his 11-hit, .324 batting average performance and strong defensive work as proof. Landis could not be moved, however. Weaver applied for reinstatement every year until his death, to no avail. As recently as 2005, *Chicago Tribune* columnist Mike Downey requested that Commissioner Bud Selig exonerate Weaver; he too was let down.<sup>70</sup>

Others have claimed that Shoeless Joe Jackson was innocent. He was a simple man, who could neither read nor write. Jackson hit .375 in the World Series, with twelve hits and six runs batted in, but he missed crucial plays in the field and struck out at key moments. His wife also wrote a letter to Charles Comiskey following the series, informing him of the fix and Jackson’s participation in it. During the grand jury investigation of 1920, Jackson and Cicotte both signed confessions – although they mysteriously went missing when the jury was in deliberation.<sup>71</sup> The fans’ refusal to accept Jackson’s guilt indicated the importance of baseball in their lives and their desire to see that their heroes were above the fray. It was *their* desire to “say it ain’t so.”

Landis’s appointment and swift and severe decision were the first in a series of steps to bring Major League Baseball more in line with its intended brand. Over the course of the 1920s, MLB officials changed the physical baseball and put limits to an individual ball’s use, and relied on the enormous skill and personality of Babe Ruth to restore fans’ faith. The Black Sox were forgotten, an aberration in the national pastime. In their place stood Ruth, Baseball’s Hercules, who utilized the power of the press to keep the nation in his thrall. By the end of the decade, he

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<sup>70</sup> Mike Downey, “It’s High Time for Selig to Pardon Weaver,” *Chicago Tribune*, 20 October 2005.

<sup>71</sup> Asinof, *Eight Men Out*, pp. 235-270.

was more myth than man, but that was fine, because through his reputation Major League Baseball was restored in the public mind and able to expand even further.

## THE GAME RUTH BUILT

The “dead-ball era” existed from Major League Baseball’s founding until 1920. It was so-called because pitchers spat on the ball, players scuffed the ball’s cowhide to prevent it from flying, and the ball was loaded with mud as it was tossed around the infield. A typical game used only one or two baseballs, and the ball itself was loosely wound. By the game’s end, it was a sack of mush, weighed down by mud and gunk, and erratically floating around the plate. As a result, this was a pitcher’s era, with greats like Cy Young, Walter Johnson, Grover Cleveland Alexander, and Christy Mathewson dominating game. Hitters tended toward “small ball,” hitting line drives and bunting, and then using speed on the basepaths to manufacture runs. Run totals were generally low, and a batter could lead the league with as few as ten home runs.<sup>72</sup>

The mechanics of the dead-ball contributed to the gritty style of play exemplified by Cobb. It also made the game dangerous, which would ultimately be its undoing. On August 16, 1920, Cleveland Indians shortstop Ray Chapman stepped into the batter’s box against New York Yankees pitcher Carl Mays. Mays was a particularly disagreeable person, and like many pitchers of his day, he believed that home plate was his territory. When Chapman appeared to crowd the plate, Mays decided to assert his ownership by firing a pitch inside. Chapman didn’t react; it’s likely he never saw the pitch. The ball struck Chapman in the temple and crushed his skull. The

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<sup>72</sup> National Baseball Hall of Fame, *Baseball as America*.

sound of the blow was so great that Mays thought it came from the bat, fielded the ball, and threw to first. Chapman lay on the ground. Within twenty-four hours, he was dead.<sup>73</sup>

After Chapman's death, Major League Baseball ruled that umpires had to replace any ball that had become dirty or discolored. The spitball was also banned during the offseason, and new baseballs were introduced that were more tightly wound and thus flew more readily – the dead-ball era was officially over.<sup>74</sup> With Major League Baseball at its lowest point, and with its governing body making changes to the ball, the era of the pitcher was over. Interestingly enough, it was a pitcher-turned-hitter that inaugurated the new era of the hitter.

George Herman Ruth, Jr., was the son of a German-American saloonkeeper. He was the first of eight children, although only one of his siblings, his sister Mamie, survived infancy. Ruth went through life believing that his parents hated him, perhaps even blaming him for his siblings' deaths. He was a troublemaker as a child: he stole, threw rocks at cops and delivery people, drank whiskey and chewed tobacco. At seven years old, his parents had him declared incorrigible, and handed him over to St. Mary's Industrial School for Boys, a combined orphanage and reformatory school. In later adding to his own myths, Ruth supported the idea that he landed at St. Mary's because he was an orphan—and he might have felt that way, because his

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<sup>73</sup> Remarkably, Chapman was the only player to die from an incident on the field. Mike "Doc" Powers, who played for the Philadelphia Athletics, was injured at a game at Shibe Park in April 1909 when he pursued a fly ball and crashed into a wall with such force he suffered internal injuries. Powers was taken to the hospital, where he underwent several intestinal surgeries. His official cause of death was peritonitis—caused by post-surgery infection, and thus he was not considered an on-field fatality. His death was, however, inspiration for Bernard Malamud's Bump Bailey in the novel (and later film) *The Natural*.

The only other on-field casualty was in 1996. Major League umpire John McSherry was behind the plate for the Opening Day game in Cincinnati. Seven pitches into the game, McSherry called time, waved another umpire over to cover his duties, and retreated to the dugout. There, he collapsed and was later pronounced dead of a heart attack.

<sup>74</sup> Ward, *Baseball*, p. 153.

family rarely came to visit. Instead, he was taken under the wing of Brother Mathias, who taught him to play baseball. His skill was apparent early: at eight-years-old, he was playing on the twelve-year-olds' team.<sup>75</sup>

In 1913, he was signed (as a pitcher) by the then-minor league Baltimore Orioles. His contract was sold to the Boston Red Sox the following year. During the Red Sox's dynasty, 1914-1919, Ruth was their greatest pitcher, winning 89 games in six seasons. He led the team to two World Series, in 1916 and 1918.<sup>76</sup> He might have remained in Boston, had the team not been bought by a hard-living, hard-drinking theatre producer named H. Harrison Frazee, for \$576,000 in 1916. Despite owning the winningest franchise in early Major League Baseball, Frazee's first love was the theatre, and he frequently sold players' contracts to finance his shows.

American League President Ban Johnson detested Frazee's practices and urged owners not to make deals. New York Yankees' owner Colonel Jacob Ruppert could not be dissuaded, however. He built the Yankees' dynasty of the Twenties with many of the Red Sox from the Teens, including Ernie Shore, Duffy Lewis, Dutch Leonard, and Carl Mays. The biggest get, though, was Babe Ruth. Ruppert purchased Babe Ruth's contract for \$125,000 plus a \$300,000 personal loan for Frazee to finance the musical *No, No Nanette*. As security for the loan, Frazee even put up Fenway Park as collateral. Although the show was a success, the deal was one of the most short-sighted in baseball history.<sup>77</sup>

Red Sox management was not necessarily sorry to see Ruth go, however. He was a difficult player, prone to drinking and late nights before his starts, and then picking a fight with the

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<sup>75</sup> Crepeau, *Baseball: America's Diamond Mind*.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Rader, *Baseball*; Ward, *Baseball*.

umpire to get himself thrown out of the game, allowing him to sleep it off in the dugout or clubhouse. As a matter of fact, in 1917, Babe Ruth walked the first batter of a game, picked a fight and was ejected. He was replaced by Ernie Shore. The runner was thrown out attempting to steal second, and Shore went on to retire the next 26 batter without allowing a baserunner. Shore was denied a perfect game because he had inherited Ruth's baserunner, and so the two are listed in the Major League record books as having "combined" to throw a no-hitter.<sup>78</sup>

More importantly, Ruth preferred hitting. When rosters were depleted by World War I, he played in 95 games, 75 as a position player, batted .300, and led the league with eleven homeruns. This convinced him that his talents were better used at the plate, not throwing over it. Management thought that he was too insistent, and did not contest Frazee's decision to sell his contract.<sup>79</sup>

Ruth was a brilliant hitter who helped revolutionize the sport. Between 1918 and 1934, he led the American league in homeruns twelve times, with an average of more than forty homeruns per season. He also compiled a lifetime batting average of .342. Unlike Cobb, who favored a game of small-ball and speed, Ruth always swung for the fences. He kept his hands closed and nearer to the base of the bat, favoring a longer swing.<sup>80</sup>

Fans came to the ballpark in droves. The Yankees played in the Polo Grounds at the time, and outdrew the original residents, the New York Giants. Outraged by Ruth's ability to draw one million fans in a season – a record at the time – John McGraw tried to force the Yankees out. The Yankees opted to build their own stadium, right across the McCombs-Dam Bridge

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<sup>78</sup> Crepeau, *Baseball: America's Diamond Mind*

<sup>79</sup> Rader, *Baseball*.

<sup>80</sup> Tygiel, *Past Time*, pp. 85-86.

in the South Bronx. Adding insult to injury, as Yankee Stadium continued to outperform the Polo Grounds in attendance, the rival ballpark was visible from John McGraw's window.<sup>81</sup>

Ruth was an extraordinary physical figure. At six-feet, two inches, and 215 pounds, he was seen as a giant. As Benjamin Rader observed, he had an "appetite for all things of the flesh. He transcended the world of ordinary mortals and yet was the most mortal of men. He loved to play baseball, swear, drink, eat, play practical jokes, and fornicate."<sup>82</sup> Ruth ignored Prohibition; his hotel suite at the Astoria in New York was always stocked with beer and liquor.

Ruth suffered no shortage of personality; biographer Marshal Smelser referred to him as "our Hercules, our Samson, Beowulf, Siegfried." His appetites were legendary, though the press kept his sexual encounters private so as to protect Ruth's – and baseball's – reputation. Instead they wrote about gorging on junk food, smoking cigars, and making outrageous purchases to accommodate a lavish lifestyle. Ruth was alleged to have eaten as many as eighteen eggs in a breakfast sitting, and washed them down with seven or eight bottles of soda pop. In his memoir *My Life in Baseball*, Ty Cobb recalled the wish that Ruth "would eat and drink himself into a stupor and be unable to get the bat around his stomach." Though that never came to pass, Ruth did suffer from an intestinal abscess during while traveling through Asheville, North Carolina, prior to the 1925 season. His physician, Dr. Edward King, attributed the abscess to Ruth's diet, which sportswriters simplified to a "hot dog overdose," and called it "the bellyache heard 'round the world." (Some privately speculated that it may have been gonorrhea).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Rader, *Baseball*.

<sup>82</sup> Rader, *Baseball*.

<sup>83</sup> Tygiel, *Past Time*, pp. 75-75; Crepeau, *Baseball*, pp. 88-89; Irving Rein and Ben Shields, "Re-connecting the Baseball Star," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Fall 2007): pp. 62-77.

Many have argued that Ruth's excesses made him a symbol of the Roaring Twenties, and contributed to his tremendous popularity. Yet Richard Crepeau proposed it was more complicated than that: the 1920s were a period of tension and conflict, as the shift from a largely agricultural and local society to a more urban-industrial society caused massive changes in living conditions and values. In Crepeau's estimation, Ruth was an attempt to bridge this gap between old and new: "Deify the rugged individual in a mass ritual set on a stretch of grass in the middle of a concrete-and-asphalt urban center. Personify all of these feelings in a larger-than-life figure, and what begins to appear is the outline of the 'The Great Babe Ruth.'"<sup>84</sup>

Ruth was therefore a symbol, or as Crepeau suggested a series of symbols, on which different audiences might project their values and see a successful figure reflected back at them. Nevertheless, as much as these behaviors endeared him to the public, they often ran afoul of baseball management. In addition to his acrimonious break with the Red Sox, American League President Ban Johnson considered Ruth "crude, uncultured, ill-educated, [and] unrefined," and possessing "the mind of a fifteen-year-old." Another baseball official characterized him as having an "utter disregard of regulations...and course escapades."<sup>85</sup> Ruth was baseball's savior and lead troublemaker; his talent and personality attracted press and fans, but his behavior countered the message of clean-living and hard work that baseball had been promoting.

This messaging often targeted young boys. The connection between baseball and boys was apparent from the days of rounders, but needed nurturing, particularly in the aftermath of Black Sox scandal. Commissioner Landis implored sportswriters to be mindful of the boy who "builds a shrine to some baseball hero, and before that shrine a candle always burns," and en-

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<sup>84</sup> Crepeau, *Baseball*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>85</sup> Tygiel, *Past Time*, p. 76.

couraged ballplayers to maintain their heroic reputations. A short passage from a standard player contract, printed by the *American Mercury's* Arthur Mann, highlighted the relationship between boy and athlete:

If any special responsibility rests upon the ball player it is a responsibility to young America. The boy in the bleachers is in school, even if he doesn't realize it. The heroes of the diamond are his teachers. By them his ideals of sport are powerfully affected. But the influence of the powerful player goes much further than this. The standards which the boy accepts on the bleachers he will carry into his life. As the national game is played, so the life of the nation will be lived. Nothing is good enough for baseball that is not good enough for America.<sup>86</sup>

Young boys were learning morals and values through baseball, Judge Landis and his colleagues argued, and so players and sportswriters must work together to present only the best American values to the public. Ruth's "Rabelaisian nature," as identified by John B. Sheridan of *The Sporting News*, instead presented a "prototype of the baseball man who ate, smoked, caroused, and hit the ball enormously,"<sup>87</sup> and therefore his presentation needed to be periodically remedied.

Ruth understood this, and often sought rehabilitation of his public image by visiting with children, for whom he appeared to have a genuine affinity. Compiling Ruth's obituary in 1948, *New York Times* reporter Murray Schumach declared that Ruth "worshipped [the youngsters] possibly as much as they worshipped him." During an exhibition game in Waco, Texas, Ruth stopped play to invite the children in attendance to run on the field and roll in the grass. His invitation was met with such enthusiasm that local police had to try and restore order, but the game was eventually called. Ruth was also famous for signing autographs and visiting hospitals. The most recounted story was of a young boy named Johnny Sylvester, who was so ill that doctors worried he would not recover; his uncle, knowing the boy's love of baseball and Babe Ruth, con-

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<sup>86</sup> Crepeau, *Baseball*, p. 40.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.



tacted Ruth. As the *Times* recalled: “The next day the Babe, armed with bat, glove and half a dozen signed baseballs, made one of his frequent pilgrimages to a hospital. The boy, unexpectedly meeting his idol face to face, was so overjoyed that he was cured—almost miraculously.”<sup>88</sup> Such heroics, recounted by the press and often accompanied by photographs, were significant in adding to Ruth’s legend and atoning for public indiscretions.

The press was therefore a significant part of Ruth’s fame and longevity as an American icon. Not only did he know how to use the media to his advantage, he also benefited from the transformation in communications and media, which helped these stories reach mass audiences. During the 1920s, sports content in newspapers expanded and action photography accompanied game stories; motion pictures and newsreels broke down regional barriers in popular culture; radio broadcasted its first baseball games; agents, ghost writers and public minders promoted baseball and ballplayers in new ways; and advertising (of which New York was the hub) doubled its revenues in less than a decade. Ruth was at the epicenter of emerging mass culture, and was the right personality to be appear on an increasingly national stage. In 1922, *Literary Digest* proposed that more Americans could recognize Ruth’s picture than that of President Warren G. Harding. In 1929, the *New York Evening World* ranked Ruth’s contributions with those of Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Charles A. Lindbergh, and Harvey Firestone. Ruth was an Ameri-

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<sup>88</sup> Murray Schumach, “Babe Ruth, Baseball’s Great Star and Idol of Children, Had a Career Both Dramatic and Bizarre,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1948. Later versions of the story, many told by Sylvester himself, said that Sylvester asked Ruth to hit a home run for him; Ruth responded that afternoon with three home runs against the St. Louis Cardinals in Game 4 of the 1926 World Series. See: Robert McG. Thomas, Jr., “Johnny Sylvester, the Inspiration for Babe Ruth’s Heroics, Is Dead,” *New York Times*, 11 January 1990; Nicholas Hirshon, “Babe Ruth’s Home Run Vow to Sick Jersey Boy Confirmed,” *New York Daily News*, 19 June 2008.

can symbol, and baseball (as a cultural product) was on par with the light bulb, automobile, and man-made flight.<sup>89</sup>

The Yankees rewarded Babe Ruth handsomely for this. He signed a five-year contract paying him \$52,000 a season between 1922 and 1926. Colonel Jacob Ruppert then signed him to a three-year contract for \$70,000 each season, making Ruth the highest salaried player to that point. Ruth held out for a higher deal in 1930, despite the stock market crash and coming of economic depression. He claimed that hitting sixty home runs in 1927 and reaching 500 career home runs in 1929 entitled him to a raise. The press balked, and when asked if Ruth realized that he would be making more money than President Herbert Hoover, he responded, “I had a better year than he did.”<sup>90</sup> Despite his nonchalance toward the economic crisis, Ruth successfully negotiated a two-year deal for \$80,000 a season. From that point forward, however, his salaries declined, marking not only the end of the Era of Ruth, but that of American prosperity.

## SURVIVAL AND SACRIFICE

Like many popular entertainments, baseball struggled during the lean years of the Great Depression. By 1932, when one in four Americans was out of work, Major League Baseball’s attendance was down 45 percent, and teams had lost more than \$1.2 million dollars in revenue, approximately 15 percent of league’s value.<sup>91</sup> Team owners and MLB executives turned to new initiatives to keep fans’ interest, even if they could not generate ticket sales. These included continued exposure through radio broadcasts, the creation of the annual All-Star exhibition and the

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<sup>89</sup> Tygiel, *Past Time*, pp. 66, 74, 77; Crepeau, *Baseball*, p. 77.

<sup>90</sup> Tom Meany, *Babe Ruth: The Big Moments of the Big Fellow* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1947), p. 139. Additional salary information from Schumach, “Babe Ruth, Baseball’s Great Star and Children’s Idol.”

<sup>91</sup> Alexander, *Breaking the Slump*.

completion of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York. The more financially secure teams also entered into partnerships with minor league affiliates, creating the farm system and consolidating the white baseball talent pool. The Negro Leagues, in contrast, suffered a brief collapse in 1933, but were revived with an influx of gambling money and made into a star attraction that rivaled Organized Baseball (as the newly combined white major and minor leagues were referred) in attendance. By the time war broke out in Europe, Major League Baseball was again profitable, and used their participation in the war effort to continue their branding as “America’s game,” even going so far as reaching out the female population through promotions and a minor-league circuit of women’s baseball.

Baseball executives hoped to boost sagging ticket sales through extensive self-promotion, and radio proved an important tool. Broadcasts had begun in the 1920s, but some executives worried that “giving the game away for free” would keep fans from entering the turnstiles. Larry MacPhail, general manager of the Cincinnati Reds (1934-1937) and Brooklyn Dodgers (1939-1941), disagreed, believing that radio broadcasts were the key to generating interest in local ball clubs. He hired Red Barber to provide play-by-play commentary for the Reds in 1934, then took him to Brooklyn in 1939, when MacPhail broke a five-year anti-broadcast agreement among the three New York franchises. That year the Dodgers finished third in the National League, but drew 955,000 fans (up from 660,000 in 1938), 100,000 more than the American League’s pennant-winning Yankees.<sup>92</sup> Other executives followed MacPhail’s lead, with the St. Louis Cardinals and Chicago Cubs building extensive radio networks to reach fans outside of Major League

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<sup>92</sup> Red Barber and Robert Creamer, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1968), pp. 10-11, 24-26.

Ball's geographical boundaries, and broadcasters were even hired to simulate ballgames they were unable to witness.<sup>93</sup>

MacPhail also popularized the use of night games to draw crowds. Some games had been played under artificial lights as early as 1880, but it was not until 1929 that the Negro League's Kansas City Monarchs, with a portable lighting system, demonstrated its profitability. Several minor league teams installed their own lighting systems in 1930, including the American Association's Columbus, Ohio, team (of which MacPhail was then general manager). Though these teams did not see significant profit, but kept the team solvent; the Columbus affiliate even out-drew the major league St. Louis Cardinals. By the time he took over the Reds' organization, MacPhail was convinced, and seven night games were added to Cincinnati's schedule. The first, on May 24, 1935, drew more than 20,000 fans, ten times above the average attendance for the poor-playing and financially desperate Reds.<sup>94</sup>

MacPhail was cautious that too many night games might lessen the quality of play, and no other team installed lights for another three seasons, but night baseball grew in popularity during the 1930s. By 1939, forty-two night games were played before a total 987,955 fans. It expanded to seventy-seven night games across eight ballparks during the 1940 season. The Philadelphia Athletics' owner and manager Connie Mack remarked, "None of us...are particularly pleased with the arrival of the night game, but we cannot close our eyes to the demands of the

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<sup>93</sup> Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Times Books, 1999; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 202-203, 210; Tony Silvia, "The Art and Artifice of Early Radio Baseball Recreations," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Spring 2007): pp. 87-94. Radio broadcasting is the subject of Chapter 3.

<sup>94</sup> Rader, *Baseball*, pp. 151-152.

public.”<sup>95</sup> Instead, owners voted to limit the number of night games. Each team hosted no more than seven night games (out of seventy-seven home games) per season until 1942, when it was expanded to a fourteen-game cap as a wartime concession.<sup>96</sup>

Other attempts to lure fans included the introduction of All-Star exhibition game, featuring the best players from the American League and National League in 1933. Two years earlier, the Baseball Writers of America began awarding the Most Valuable Player Award to one player from each league. In 1936, the writers were granted the responsibility of voting for the inaugural class of the Baseball Hall of Fame, to be located in Cooperstown, New York. The writers selected a small class of Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson, and Walter Johnson; by 1939, “baseball’s centennial celebration,” another twenty-one players, executives, and prominent people (including A.G. Spalding, Henry Chadwick, and Alexander Cartwright) were selected. Following the large induction ceremony on the steps of the new National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, some of the newly-minted Hall of Famers staged an all-star exhibition game at the nearby Doubleday Field. Both the museum and field were the planning of local hotelier and businessman Stephen C. Clark, who was looking to improve tourism to the small lakeside town, after the impact of the Great Depression and Prohibition decimated the demand for locally-grown hops. Clark secured funds from the Works Progress Administration and cemented Cooperstown’s place as baseball’s “home,” despite all evidence to the contrary. The

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<sup>95</sup> Alexander, *Breaking the Slump*, p. 240.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 240-241; Rader, *Baseball*, p. 152.

United States government further offered its seal of approval by issuing a commemorative stamp making 1839 the official birth date of baseball.<sup>97</sup>

The Hall of Fame generated excitement and nostalgia, and gave fans a place to look upon the history of the “national pastime.” Yet perhaps the most significant of the Great Depression initiatives to keep baseball alive was the creation of the farm system. Major League Baseball teams, when able, entered into partnerships with minor league teams to create a chain of player development from the lower leagues to the parent ball club. The system, known as the farm system, originated in St. Louis during the 1920s under Cardinals general manager Branch Rickey. Opponents, including Commissioner Landis, worried that this progression would have a negative impact on the romanticism of the game, in which talented players could become overnight sensations; now they were part of a corporate machine. Nevertheless, by 1940, the Cardinals alone had direct ownership or working agreements with thirty-two minor league teams. The Brooklyn Dodgers, Detroit Tigers, New York Yankees, and Boston Red Sox had between nine and twelve affiliates each, while poorer franchises relied on year-to-year working agreements.<sup>98</sup> These relationships provided a constant development of talent for the majors and financial security for the minors. This talent, however, consisted entirely of white players. Despite the presence of the Negro Leagues, which would have welcomed the opportunity for financial partnership, Organized Baseball remained an all-white enterprise.

A Gentlemen’s Agreement prohibited owners from signing black (and “too dark” Latin American) players to major and minor league rosters since the 1890s. Black teams and circuits

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<sup>97</sup> Rader, *Baseball*, pp. 94-95, 152-153; Alexander, *Breaking the Slump*, pp. 174-175; Robert S. Kossuth, “Boondoggling, Baseball, and the WPA: Cooperstown’s Doubleday Field,” *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History & Culture*, vol. 9, no. 1 (March 2000): pp. 56-71.

<sup>98</sup> Crepeau, *Baseball*, pp. 108-109; Alexander, *Breaking the Slump*, p. 239.

existed, but were usually reliant on white executives' sponsorship and barnstorming against white teams. Pitcher and entrepreneur Rube Foster created the Negro National League in 1920, with teams from Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, Kansas City, and other Midwestern cities, to bring the business into African Americans' hands for the betterment of the entire community. Black baseball became a source of racial pride: "Within the African-American community, the officials, players, and teams of black baseball symbolized pride and achievement while creating a sphere of style and excitement that overlapped with the worlds of black business, politics, religion, and entertainment."<sup>99</sup>

Despite its cultural importance, the Negro National League competed against Major League Baseball for fan support, and often experienced hardship because it was reliant on the discretionary income of black Americans. When they were among the hardest hit by the Great Depression, the NNL briefly collapsed in 1933. Few members of the black community were able to provide funds, with the exception of the numbers racket. Unlike Major League Baseball, where Commissioner Landis had declared "no player who sits in conference" with gamblers would be permitted to play professional white baseball, professional black baseball was heavily reliant on the illegal lottery kings. These bankers used their investments in black baseball to gain respectability within their community; they aimed to be involved in legitimate business ventures, and contested any accusation that games were not played fairly.<sup>100</sup>

In 1933, Gus Greenlee, of Pittsburgh's Hill district, spent \$100,000 to build the first completely black-owned stadium in baseball. He also persuaded his friends, including Abe Manley of Camden, New Jersey, Tom Wilson of Nashville, Ed "Soldier Boy" Semler of New York,

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<sup>99</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Extra Bases*, pp. 51-72; quotation, p. 72.

<sup>100</sup> Gai Berlage, "Effa Manley: A Major Force in Negro Baseball in the 1930s and 1940s," in *Out of the Shadows*, ed. Bill Kirwin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), pp. 129-130.

and Sonny “Man Jackson,” of Homestead, Pennsylvania, to invest. By 1935, there were twelve black teams operating across the country. They were reorganized and divided into two leagues, the Negro National League (NNL) and the Negro American League (NAL). Each league office had a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Originally, there was one commissioner for both leagues; however the office was abolished in 1938 because the club owners found it difficult to relinquish their authority.<sup>101</sup>

The Second World War brought significant change to both black and white baseball. Workers flocked to northern industrial cities, the country was near full employment, and consumer goods were scarce. With money in their pockets and few places to spend it, many African Americans went to the ballpark. Gas rationing also kept people from traveling, making them more likely to see their hometown teams in minor league cities.<sup>102</sup>

Attendance in Negro League ballparks grew exponentially as a result. Three million fans crossed through the turnstiles to watch Negro League teams play ball in 1942, and more than 51,000 attended the 1943 East-West game, black baseball’s annual all-star game. In 1944, the East-West game outdrew the MLB All-Star game, 46,247 to 29,589.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps the greatest example of black baseball’s World War II rise occurred in Philadelphia in 1945: nine Negro League weekend games at Shibe Park drew 101,818 fans; MLB’s Philadelphia Athletics and

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130; Effa Manley and Leon Herbert Hardwick, *Negro Baseball...Before Integration* (Chicago: Adams Press, 1976; reprint ed. by Robert Cvornek, Haworth, NJ: St. Johann’s Press, 2006), p. 56.

<sup>102</sup> Manley and Herbert, *Negro Baseball*, p. 58; Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), p. 119; Tygiel, *Touching Bases*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>103</sup> The 1944 All-Star game was played in Pittsburgh’s Forbes Field. Although its capacity was only 38,000—making it impossible to match the East-West game’s attendance in its venue—it remains significant because the Organized game’s greatest exhibition failed to sell out, indicative of the war’s impact on MLB rosters.



Phillies combined to draw 773,030 all season. By the war's conclusion, black baseball had become a \$2,000,000 industry, and one of the largest black businesses in the nation.<sup>104</sup>

The Negro Leagues benefited from a Major League decline. The upward shift of the economy in 1940 and 1941 spurred attendance—one million more fans attended American League Games in 1940 than in the previous high season of 1924, and overall attendance reached 10.5 million in 1941. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, however, many major and minor league players enlisted or were drafted into military service. Over the course of the war, approximately 5,400 of the 5,800 players on professional rosters at the time of Pearl Harbor served in the armed forces.<sup>105</sup> Without them, their teams operated skeleton clubs, relying upon veterans whose time had passed, rookies too green for the field, or—in the case of the St. Louis Browns—a one-armed outfielder, Pete Gray. Owners anxiously awaited the return of their high-priced personnel, who would fill the stadiums with fans. In the meantime, their fans often went elsewhere to watch the summer sport.<sup>106</sup>

Major League Baseball was not defeated, however. Instead, they used the war as an opportunity to demonstrate their devotion to the United States and its endeavors. Baseball's patriotic displays began in 1942, when the "Star Spangled Banner" was first played before an MLB game on Opening Day in Washington, D.C. Later that year, play was halted at the Polo Grounds so that all in attendance could listen to a forty-five minute radio address by President Franklin Roosevelt declaring an "unlimited national emergency" played over the loudspeaker. American

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<sup>104</sup> Tygiel, *Extra Bases*, p. 68; Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, p. 274; Berlage, "Effa Manley," p. 136.

<sup>105</sup> J. Ronald Oakley, *Baseball's Last Golden Age, 1946-1960: The National Pastime in a Time of Glory and Change* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1994), p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> Alexander, *Breaking the Slump*, p. 260, 275; Tygiel, *Extra Bases*, pp. 68-69; Manley and Hardwick, *Negro Baseball*, p. 64.

League owners agreed to offer free admission to all members of the military who arrived in uniform. In the National League, the Cardinals gave free admission to “some 10,000 women who showed up with pieces of aluminum to donate to the War Department’s collection campaign; by game time, a small mountain of aluminum had accumulated at the main entrance to Sportsman’s Park.”<sup>107</sup> Chicago Cubs owner Philip Wrigley also made a significant donation to the War Department: he gave the \$185,000 worth of lights, steel towers, and wiring he intended to have installed at Wrigley Field, preventing the Cubs from playing night games at home for years to come.<sup>108</sup>

Most significantly, however, Major League Baseball emphasized its sacrifice in personnel. Detroit’s Hank Greenberg had actually been serving in the Army in 1941, and was discharged and placed in the active reserves just prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. He reenlisted on December 8, at age thirty. The Tigers released a formal press announcement in which Greenberg stated: “We are in trouble, and there is only one thing for me to do—return to the service. I have not been called back. I am going back of my own accord.”<sup>109</sup> He was joined by the Cleveland Indians’ star pitcher, Bob Feller, who enlisted in the Navy despite having been granted a deferment (his father was terminally ill). Other players enlisted or were drafted thereafter, though not all exhibited Greenberg’s and Feller’s enthusiasm; Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams both played the 1942 season before joining the Army Air-Corps and Marines, respectively. Feller and Greenberg both saw combat—Feller on warships in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters, and Greenberg flying in a B-29 bomber unit out of western China. Most major league ballplay-

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<sup>107</sup> Alexander, *Breaking the Slump*, p. 264.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 264, 279-280.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 279-280.

ers, however, were safe. DiMaggio and many of his colleagues actually spent the war playing baseball for service teams, touring bases and boosting morale through interservice games.<sup>110</sup>

Major League Baseball did not think such promotional duties lessened their players' sacrifice, however, and regularly promoted their activities. They also publicized a letter from President Roosevelt to Commissioner Landis in 1942, responding to Landis's query if Major League Baseball should be suspended during the war. The letter, now known as the "green light letter," gave the President's support for baseball: "I honestly feel that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going. There will be fewer people unemployed and everybody will work longer hours and harder than ever before. And that means that they ought to have a chance for recreation and for taking their minds off their work even more than before." Roosevelt directed Organized Baseball to continue, recognizing that individual players may be called for service, but to provide entertainment and morale for those who were home. He also advised that more night games be added to the schedule so those working day shifts might also experience a game (and thus the move from the seven-game cap to fourteen).<sup>111</sup>

As they had during the Depression, baseball executives looked for new ways to generate enthusiasm in the absence of their best players. They held special games to raise funds for war-bonds and armed-service relief funds and added pregame entertainment such as military bands and marching soldiers. They also held special promotions for women and children. Ladies Days – half price or free tickets to female attendees – had been a promotional event dating back to the nineteenth century. It was renewed during the Great Depression and continued throughout the war. Baseball executives had been trying to reach a larger female audience through radio, hop-

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280; Oakley, *Baseball's Last Golden Age*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>111</sup> William B. Mead, *Baseball Goes to War: Stars Don Khaki, 4-Fs Vie for Pennant* (New York: Broadcast Interview Source, 1998): pp. 35-38.

ing that homemakers might listen to the games while performing housework, learn the rules and become interested, and then join their husbands (or friends) for a live game. *The Saturday Evening Post* said that the Dodgers' Red Barber had been successful at converting female fans, stating that Dodgers games 'resembled a For Men Only preview' before he started broadcasting, but by the end of the war as many as 15,000 women might attend one game.<sup>112</sup>

Of course, women had always been among the baseball crowds. The Ladies Days started as an attempt to bring women into the ballparks with the hope that they would civilize the unruly men in the audience. In upper-classes, women played baseball in country clubs and college, and even on barnstorming teams. By 1908, baseball fever had reached enough women that Tin Pan Alley composer Jack Norwith penned "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" about a young "baseball mad" woman named Katie Casey, who wanted her suitors to take her to a baseball game.<sup>113</sup> Yet like African Americans, women were excluded from Organized Baseball, and often overlooked among fans unless circumstances required. Losing talent, attendance, and profits during the war caused management to look to women to fill the gaps, even those on the field.

In 1943, the Chicago Cubs' and Wrigley's Chewing Gum owner Philip K. Wrigley invested between \$200,000 and \$250,000 to create the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. The AAGPBL was a minor league circuit in the Midwest to potentially replace existing minor leagues if the draft threatened their viability, but it was presented as a patriotic endeavor to provide baseball to working men and women. Five million women had joined the labor market to provide the necessary labor; so, too, female athletes were called upon to "serve" as ballplayers. Promotional materials, articles, and broadcasts all reinforced this idea, and should any doubt

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<sup>112</sup> Douglas, *Listening In*, p. 210.

<sup>113</sup> Jean Hastings Ardell, *Breaking Into Baseball: Women and the National Pastime*, foreword by Ila Borders (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 2005), pp. 28-39.

remain, the two teams assembled down the first and third base lines before each game to form a “V for Victory” salute.<sup>114</sup>

The presence of women in baseball was not permitted to upset the gender order, however. Women were only permitted to play with the AAGPBL, so play remained sex-segregated. They were permitted to serve as players or chaperons, but not hold positions of power such as managers or coaches. Most importantly, the athletes were expected to maintain a “socially acceptable athletic femininity.” This meant that they were to be chaperoned off the field, required to attend Helena Rubenstein’s charm school to learn to apply makeup properly, fix their hair in feminine styles, and present themselves in a proper, polite, and “ladylike” manner.<sup>115</sup> The dress and behavior codes for female athletes were stricter than men’s and emphasized femininity:

1. ALWAYS appear in feminine attire when not actively engaged in practice or playing ball. This regulation continues through the playoffs for all even though your team is not participating. AT NO TIME MAY A PLAYER APPEAR IN THE STANDS IN HER UNIFORM, OR WEAR SLACKS OR SHORTS IN PUBLIC.
2. Boyish bobs are not permissible and in general your hair should be well groomed at all times with longer hair preferable to short haircuts. Lipstick should always be worn.
3. Smoking or drinking is not permissible in public places. Liquor drinking will not be permissible under any circumstances. Other intoxicating drinks in limited portions with after-game meals only, will be allowed. Obscene language will not be allowed at any time.
4. All social engagements must be approved by the chaperone. Legitimate requests for dates can be allowed by chaperones.<sup>116</sup>

Such demands reinforced a heteronormative view of women. Male executives were worried about any associations with lesbianism and so demanded that the women not appear “mannish,”

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<sup>114</sup> Marilyn Cohen, *No Girls in the Clubhouse: The Exclusion of Women from Baseball* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2009), Kindle edition, loc. 531; Kathryn Jay, *More Than Just a Game: Sports in American Life Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 15-16.

<sup>115</sup> Cohen, *No Girls in the Clubhouse*, loc. 545; Rader, *Baseball*, 174.

<sup>116</sup> Cohen, *No Girls in the Clubhouse*, loc. 581.

and transgressions could lead to fines or even dismissal. These “patriotic pinch hitters,” as historian Marilyn Cohen labeled them, were instead to “exert a Betty Grable quality reminding America what it was fighting for.”<sup>117</sup>

The AAGPBL averaged 2-3,000 spectators per game, justifying owners’ faith in women’s baseball for a little while. Baseball leagues generally, regardless of race or sex, were thriving as the war concluded. Greenberg, Feller, and their colleagues returned to major league rosters beginning in 1945. All of the efforts to establish baseball as the national pastime and demonstrate patriotism proved successful. In 1945, as the war drew to a close, Major League Baseball set an attendance record of 10.8 million fans. The following year, that figure nearly doubled (18.5 million), and peaked in 1948 with 20.8 million customers. Attendance during the Depression had averaged only 6,578 per game; between 1946 and 1949, it averaged 16,027. Women’s baseball peaked in 1948, and the Negro Leagues remained so popular they drew the eye of Organized Baseball.<sup>118</sup> In the years that followed, Major League Baseball leaned on its image as the national pastime to present itself as safe entertainment in an increasingly threatening world. To do so, they embraced rhetoric and integration, while pushing women back to the sidelines and defining also defining baseball as a man’s world.

## BASEBALL AND THE COLD WAR

As the war concluded in August 1945, American servicemen began the process of discharge and reconversion. The public, as it had in the 1920s, was eager to return to “normalcy,” but the emerging ideological threat of communism and the physical threat of nuclear weapons posed by the Soviet Union required the nation (particularly men) to remain at the ready. At the

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 531; see also 563, 615, 632.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 819; Jay, *More Than Just a Game*, 15; Tygiel, *Past Time*, pp. 148-149; Oakley, *Baseball’s Last Golden Age*, p. 13.

same time, demographic changes--the increase in white-collar workers, movement to the suburbs, and booming consumer economy, among others--raised fears that American men were at risk of becoming "soft." Sports remained important in this environment: the Olympics provided an opportunity for peaceful competition between the superpowers, the National Football League's rise to prominence provided a prescription to the Organization Man's ills, and Major League Baseball was boosted by nostalgia, democratic rhetoric, and masculine role models. Between 1945 and 1962 (the last year of the New York Yankees' dynasty), Major League Baseball retained its standing as the "national pastime," becoming more inclusive through integration, reaching more fans through television, and receiving congressional support. The years were not without problems, however, as minor league circuits struggled, women were excluded, and several major league franchises shifted location. Yet Major League Baseball adapted to external circumstances, as it had throughout the century, and the image presented to the public was one of continuity and commitment to the dominant values of "American character" and masculinity as they were then being defined.

Major League Baseball's racial segregation had been a constant reminder that despite its claims of being the "national pastime" it was still limited. Although the Negro Leagues were originally founded in 1920 by Rube Foster as a means of instilling black pride and bettering the African American community, there were consistent rumblings for integration. Talk of integration became more serious during the Second World War, as Major League Baseball struggled with attendance and minor leagues—including the Negro Leagues—saw gate receipts increase. Newark Eagle owner Effa Manley recalled in her 1976 memoir, "With the huge scarcity of white baseball talent, it was inevitable that the campaign to get blacks into white baseball gained fur-

ther momentum.”<sup>119</sup> Outside currents were also impacting early civil rights campaigns, such as the Double-V campaign, the war against fascism’s spotlight on the fundamental American ideology of liberty and equality, and the success of black military units. Newly appointed MLB commissioner Albert “Happy” Chandler, former governor of segregated Kentucky, indicated as much in 1945, when he told an African-American reporter, “If a black boy can make it on Okinawa or Guadalcanal, hell, he can make it baseball.” Combined with black baseball’s increasing popularity and profitability, Organized Baseball gave thought to integration.

Baby steps were taken during the war, especially in California’s Pacific Coast League. In 1943, the Los Angeles Angels announced tryouts for three black players, and Oakland Oaks owner Vince DeVincenzi ordered his manager to consider black pitcher Chet Brewer. Both suggestions failed to materialize. Two years later, the Bakersfield club offered Brewer a position as player-coach, but this was defeated by the Cleveland Indians, Bakersfield’s parent organization. Ironically, the Indians would field the first African American ballplayer in the American League, when Indians owners Bill Veeck purchased Larry Doby’s contract from the Newark Eagles in 1947.<sup>120</sup>

Major League clubs also considered integration. Washing Senators owner Charles Griffith contacted Negro League stars Buck Leonard and Josh Gibson about playing for the Senators, and Pittsburgh Pirates owner William Benswanger arranged a tryout for catcher Roy Campanella and pitcher Dave Barnhill. As in the PCL, nothing ever came to pass; Griffith failed to contact Leonard or Gibson again, and Benswanger cancelled the tryout at the last minute. And while tryouts actually did occur with the Boston Red Sox (Sam Jethroe, Marvin Williams, and Jackie

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<sup>119</sup> Manley and Hardwick, *Negro Baseball*, p. 65.

<sup>120</sup> Tygiel, *Extra Bases*, p. 69; Overmyer, *Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles*, pp. 236-239.



Robinson) in 1944, and Brooklyn Dodgers (Terris McDuffie and Dave Thomas) in 1945, no signings resulted.<sup>121</sup>

In January 1945, Gus Greenlee announced the formation of a new black baseball league, the United States League (USL). Greenlee's Pittsburgh Crawfords went out of business in 1939, and he was unsuccessful in acquiring a new Negro League franchise. He announced six teams to compete in the USL: the Crawfords, Chicago Brown Bombers, Detroit Motor City Giants, Philadelphia Daisies, St. Louis Stars, and Atlanta Crackers. A seventh team was later announced: the Brooklyn Brown Dodgers, to be operated by Branch Rickey. Rickey's participation in the league was surprising—he was known for a “penny-pinching, psalm-singing” attitude, and had refused to accept the legitimacy of the Negro Leagues because of their associations with gamblers, yet here he was partnering with Greenlee, a known numbers banker. Several Negro League owners expressed concern that the USL was ultimately Rickey's doing, yet they were uncertain of his motivations. It was possible that he was using the USL to improve Dodgers' revenue by renting Ebbets Field and collecting a share of the gate receipts.<sup>122</sup>

When Rickey announced his participation in the United States League, he also pledged that “every attempt would be made to have the U.S. League become a working member” of Organized Baseball. The USL was really another means for Rickey, the originator of the Major League farm system, to scout talent. Many of Rickey's Brooklyn Dodgers were aging veterans. The new league provided him an opportunity to find new stars, improving his team while

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<sup>121</sup> Tygiel, *Extra Bases*, pp. 69-70; Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, pp. 254-258; Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, p. 331.

<sup>122</sup> Letter from Effa Manley to Vernon Green, business manager of the Baltimore Elite Giants, 25 January 1945, Newark Eagles papers, Newark Public Library; Manley and Hardwick, *Negro League Baseball...Before Integration*, pp. 68-69; Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, pp. 336-337; Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, pp. 269-270; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, p. 209.

strengthening its fan base (the USL would also acclimate the Brooklyn fans to black players). Black baseball was an untapped resource, and Rickey surely wanted to access it before his National League competitors.<sup>123</sup>

That Rickey would use the USL to mask his intentions to integrate Major League Baseball was not unthinkable. He had met with the Dodgers' Board of Directors as early as 1942, and received their permission to scout black talent for the organization. Initially scouting African-American players in foreign leagues in 1943 and 1944, Rickey acknowledged that the best players were actually in the American NNL and NAL. The USL provided him the means of discreetly searching for the player to cross Organized Baseball's color line, as well as a means to subvert Negro League contracts. As direct competition for Negro League baseball, the USL made it more difficult to hold on to their talent, especially with the thought of Major League play in their minds.<sup>124</sup>

Rickey's motivations may not have been purely economic. Anecdotal evidence suggested that Rickey thought about integration while serving as general manager of the St. Louis Cardinals (a post he held 1925-1942). As historian Lee Lowenfish noted: "The Rickey children and several of their friends have remembered sharing conversations at the Rickey dinner table at Country Life Acres about Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War, and the unfortunate continuing effects of slavery on African Negro life." Although he may have considered integration with the Cardinals, Lowenfish argued that Rickey found Brooklyn a more suitable location for such a

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<sup>123</sup> Manley and Hardwick, *Negro League Baseball...Before Integration*, p. 70; *Los Angeles Times*, 5 December 1976, Effa Manley file, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, New York; Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, pp. 206-207; Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, p. 336.

<sup>124</sup> Lee Lowenfish, "When All Heaven Rejoiced: Branch Rickey and the Origins of the Breaking of the Color Line," *Nine*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2002): p. 9

monumental change. And so when the USL failed to obtain the necessary ballparks and talent to mount a successful organization, it folded quickly, but Branch Rickey was undeterred. Without the cover of the USL, he began signing black players for his white Dodgers organization.<sup>125</sup>

Branch Rickey signed Jackie Robinson to a minor league contract in November 1945. The black press, which had long campaigned for black players' entry into Organized Baseball, rejoiced. Columns and articles highlighted the significance of the signing as well as the racial hopes attached to Robinson's ability to play in Organized Baseball; they also praised Rickey. In December 1945, *The Crisis* called Rickey the "John Brown of baseball," and the *Pittsburgh Courier* argued that "he was motivated by a firm conviction within that he was doing the right thing."<sup>126</sup>

When Robinson was promoted to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, his popularity was immediately apparent. The *Pittsburgh Courier's* Wendell Smith wrote: "Jackie's nimble, Jackie's quick, Jackie makes the turnstiles click." In four preseason exhibition games in 1947, the Dodgers drew 95,000 to Ebbets Field. Over the course of the season, the Dodgers saw a 400 percent increase among its black audience at Ebbets Field. Fans turned out all across the country to see this new national hero: the Dodgers drew 329,000 more fans on the road in 1947 than they had in 1946, a 21 percent increase. A Pittsburgh businessman made arrangements for 500 black fans to see Robinson's Forbes Field debut. Robinson's success as a ballplayer and as a gate attraction spurred other Major League teams to scout Negro League players, with Larry Doby debuting for

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>126</sup> Bill L. Weaver, "The Black Press and the Assault on Professional Baseball's Color Line." *Phylon*, vol. 40, no. 4 (Fourth quarter, 1979): pp. 306-307.

the Cleveland Indians just three months after Robinson took the field in Brooklyn.<sup>127</sup> Major League Baseball had been profoundly changed.

Through integration, Major League Baseball could promote itself as embodying the democratic and egalitarian ideals of the American nation. By breaking down the barriers of color, players were bringing the often-used sports metaphors of “fair play” and “level playing field” closer to reality. Yet status off the field was still somewhat questionable; African American players still faced discrimination in some cities’ housing policies, and received fewer endorsement deals than their white counterparts.<sup>128</sup>

Televised baseball (discussed in Chapter 4) promoted African American visibility at a time when it was largely unavailable in primetime viewing. Overall, the arrival of television in American homes was a mixed blessing for baseball: it provided increased revenue and gave fans a way of supporting their teams from the comfort of their homes, but it lessened the impetus for suburban fans to attend games in cities where parking was difficult. Attendance rates fell from their late 1940s peak, and several owners isolated television as the culprit. Between 1953 and 1961, six franchises relocated: the Boston Braves to Milwaukee, the Philadelphia Athletics to Kansas City, the St. Louis Browns to Baltimore, the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles, and the New York Giants to San Francisco, and the Washington Senators to Minneapolis. All but the Senators had crosstown rivals that pulled on their attendance figures; moving to a new city of-

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<sup>127</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, pp. 345-346; Overmyer, *Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles*, p. 234.

<sup>128</sup> Jay, *More Than Just a Game*, pp. 11-12, 106-107.

ferred the possibility of a new fanbase and media market. They also address a desire voiced by some member of Congress that MLB provide baseball to the new cities of the South and West.<sup>129</sup>

Major League Baseball was better equipped to handle the challenges posed by television than their minor league counterparts. Attendance declined rapidly after the war concluded and Major League players returned to their rosters; the appeal of the minors as a cheap amusement had lessened. The arrival of television worsened matters, as fans who previously had lived out of reach of Major League Baseball were now given access over the airwaves. Hoping to save the dying Class AA Harrisburg Senators in June 1952, general manager Howard Gordon did the unthinkable: he hired a woman to play men's baseball.

Eleanor Engle was twenty-four year old shortstop who attracted more attention for her figure than her play. She was called to practice, but never made it to game time; Senators manager Buck Erickson was adamant that his ball club was a "nowoman's land," and told reporters that Engle would play "when hell freezes over." The matter was brought before George M. Trautman, head of the minor leagues, who voided the contract and ended the possibility of women playing for MLB and its minor league affiliates.<sup>130</sup>

Howard Gordon had insisted to reporters that Engle's signing was based only on her ability to play. Yet, a photograph of Engle on the bench suggested that she was not destined to be "one of the boys." Her uniform had been modified to include shorts, highlighting her legs and setting her apart from her teammates. Furthermore, her presence on the far end of the bench, away from her teammates, demonstrated her isolation. Engle was disappointed in the experi-

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*; David G. Surdam, *The Postwar Yankees: Baseball's Golden Age Revisited* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), pp. 135-141, 192-200.

<sup>130</sup> *Cohen, No Girls in the Clubhouse*, loc. 842.

ence; she was confident in her ability to play alongside the other Harrisburg Senators, but regarded the whole event a mistake.<sup>131</sup>

By the 1950s, Major League Baseball had finally settled on its brand. It was a racially inclusive environment, with an increasing number of Latin American players joining rosters as well as African Americans, but for men only. Women were still counted among the stands as fans, but their position had been made clear: they were to support ballplayers, not become them. Baseball was a sport in which any man could rise to the top, provided he had the skill and temperament. It had a nostalgic appeal, propagated for years by the press, of open fields of green amid concrete jungles, and a life where time was not designated by the clock. Its stars were role models to America's boys, and sent around the world to extoll the virtues of their sport and society. It had taken 50 years after A.G. Spalding's Goodwill Tour, but baseball was finally in control of its identity: the all-American pastime, played by good, old-fashioned, gentleman.

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

Chapter 2:  
**The Knights of the Keyboard**  
The Baseball Writers Association of America and the Art of Baseball Writing

Much of professional baseball's success can be tied to its relationship to the press. Media coverage is significant to the development of any major sports organization, providing legitimacy and advancing spectatorship. For baseball's newspapermen, this relationship has been negotiated over time, and the Baseball Writers Association of America (the BBWAA, acronymed at a time when "baseball" was two words) has worked in cooperation with Major League Baseball, providing official scorers for games from 1920 through 1980, and conferring major awards such as the Most Valuable Player, Cy Young Award for best pitcher, and election into the National Baseball Hall of Fame since the 1930s. It was the writers themselves who forged this relationship, first by arguing for their place, and later demonstrating their (at least comparative) objectivity and respectability.

The BBWAA was founded during the 1908 World Series. The press had traditionally been allotted seats at ground level behind home plate, giving them the best vantage point from which to cover the game. During the National League playoff game between the New York Giants and Chicago Cubs at the Polo Grounds, the press arrived to find that their seats had been sold at a premium price. Supposedly undeterred by the spectators, the *Chicago Herald's* Hugh Fullerton sat down on an occupant's lap. After the Cubs won the playoff game, out-of-town writers visiting Chicago for the World Series found themselves relegated to the last row of the

grandstand; in the American League city, Detroit, they had to climb a ladder to the roof of the first-base pavilion, and were not shielded from the October rain and snow.<sup>132</sup>

On the morning of the fifth and final game, Fullerton and his fellow writers met in the Pontchartrain Hotel in Detroit. Writers from all ten major league cities were present for the organization of the Baseball Writers Association of America, and the writing of its first constitution. In December, they held their first formal meeting in New York, and presented themselves to the offices of the American and National Leagues (the commissioner's office had not yet been founded). Both league presidents promised to cooperate with the BBWAA, improve their press box conditions (which now fell under the jurisdiction of the BBWAA), and make scoring-rule reforms and establish uniformity in their application.<sup>133</sup>

The primary objective of the BBWAA was to establish and protect access for reporters. The press box was reserved for members of the press, telegraphers who transmitted copy to newspaper offices, and other personnel who needed access. Seating arrangements limited the front row of the press box to BBWAA members, and a sergeant at arms was responsible for enforcing the seating arrangements and confirming the credentials of those present. In recent years, control of the press box has fallen to ball clubs' public relations departments, but still under the guidelines of the BBWAA. Communication between the BBWAA, league offices, and later the commissioner's office, has been frequent and relatively open, and has concerned not only access to the press box but to managers and players in the clubhouse.<sup>134</sup> This has become a mutually

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<sup>132</sup> Leonard Koppett, *The Rise and Fall of the Press Box*, foreword by David Stern (Toronto: Sport Classic Books, 2003), pp. 10-11.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*; David Laurila, "Prospectus Q&A: Jack O'Connell, Part I," *Baseball Prospectus*, 20 January 2011, online <<<http://www.baseballprospectus.com/article.php?articleid=12753>>> accessed February 2011.

<sup>134</sup> Laurila, "Jack O'Connell, Part I."



beneficial relationship: the writers are granted prime viewing spaces and the ability to communicate with necessary personnel to promote the individual games and the sport generally, while the league and its clubs receive promotion through the press.

That league and club executives tolerated the press was evident from their concessions in 1908. That they valued them became apparent after the Commissioner's Office was established in 1920. During the 19teens and Twenties, there were multiple baseball awards given by non-baseball groups, such as Chalmers Automobiles, which had a Most Valuable Player award. Eligibility and voting were not sanctioned or uniform, and in 1930 voters were so confused no award was given at all. Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis then turned to the BBWAA during their annual meeting, and asked that they take responsibility for the Most Valuable Player Award. (The BBWAA has since added the Jackie Robinson Rookie of the Year Award, in 1947; the Cy Young Award, in 1956; and took over the Manager of the Year Award in 1983). Landis had previously demonstrated his faith in the writers' credibility by investing them with the responsibility of official scoring, beginning in 1920. Official scorers were responsible for making on-the-spot judgments about a hit or error, determined the winning and losing pitchers, and filled out the official boxscore and filed it with the league. Former New York baseball writer Leonard Koppett compared the responsibility of official scoring with that of umpiring, noting that although the umpire's decision might affect the outcome of a play, the scorer's decisions became the game's official history.<sup>135</sup>

Ford Frick's attitude toward the writers may have been biased, but his cooperation with the BBWAA had long-lasting effects. Frick began his career as a baseball writer for the *New*

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<sup>135</sup> David Laurila, "Prospectus Q&A: Jack O'Connell, Part II," *Baseball Prospectus*, 21 January 2011, online <<<http://www.baseballprospectus.com/article.php?articleid=12754>>>, accessed February 2011; Koppett, *The Rise and Fall of the Press Box*, pp. 134-135.

*York American* and the *New York Journal*, before transitioning into the National League office. He served as the National League President from 1935 through 1951, and then was appointed Commissioner of Major League Baseball, a post he held until 1965. Frick played a prominent role in the formation of the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, and it was he who trusted the BBWAA with the Hall's elections. Writers no longer held a media monopoly in baseball coverage by the time the first election was held in 1936, but radio broadcasters, who worked for sponsors, did not meet Frick's standards. (As commissioner, he also voiced misgivings about television as a potentially competitive medium.) Having been a member of the fraternity, Frick believed that the writers were the only group objective enough to determine Hall of Fame status. Hall of Fame voting remains the province of BBWAA active and honorary members who have served ten years; the election is conducted by the guild's Secretary-Treasurer and verified by representatives of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and the audit firm Ernst & Young.<sup>136</sup> Just as Koppett said of scorekeeping, the Hall of Fame vote elevated baseball writers from reporting on the game to establishing its history.

The writers did not always enjoy such esteem. Like Major League Baseball, the early years of sportswriting were conflicted. Nineteenth century sportswriters promoted baseball as virtuous and clean, but in prose completely divorced from the reality of the rough professional game. In the early twentieth century, baseball writers found their voice, mixing the traditional diction with slang from the players themselves, making baseball more accessible. This shift reflected the physical closeness between baseball talent, management, and writers. That closeness also led to corruption in the form of bribes. Still, many early baseball writers such as Heywood

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<sup>136</sup> Richard Crepeau, *Baseball: America's Diamond Mind* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), p. 194; Charles C. Alexander, *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 174; Laurila, "Jack O'Connell, Part II."

Broun, James Reston, or Damon Runyon, used the sports pages as a springboard to more venerable writing positions.

It was the next generation of baseball writers, taking over after the psychological decimation of the Black Sox Scandal and including the likes of Dan Daniel, Jimmy Canon, and Red Smith, who solidified the identity of baseball writers as objective intermediaries between Major League Baseball and the public. Major League Baseball needed the writers to uphold an image of the game as trustworthy and legitimate; they required the press's participation in marketing MLB as a brand embodying American values and traditions. The public, having learned of the dark underbelly at play in MLB, wanted the truth to be reported objectively. Writers had to navigate the murky waters in between. Their job was to report, but to do so without hesitation risked the access to players and management that was so necessary to doing that job, and so they held ballplayers and management to a set of standards conforming to the expectations of American masculinity, praising skills and accomplishment on the field but also values such as teamwork, fair play, and determination, and calling attention to those that failed to meet such standards.

This was not always an easy path to navigate. Some writers still allowed their relationships or bribes to infringe upon their objectivity. Others found that communication channels were shut down after criticizing players' behavior. The Boston Red Sox's Ted Williams had a particularly tempestuous relationship with the press, and sneeringly referred to them as the "knights of the keyboard," whose moral crusade impacted his reputation among the Fenway Faithful.<sup>137</sup> Although Williams's behavior was occasionally the subject of negative headlines, he was also granted opportunities for redemption by those same writers. Ultimately, by choosing

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<sup>137</sup> "Williams Bows Out as Player with Home Run," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 September 1960.

standards associated with American manhood, the writers were establishing guidelines for approach and action, but also a pathway back to virtue, if one was willing to take the first step.

## CREATING GENTLEMEN AND HEROES

Henry Chadwick was the son of a cricketer, but the “father of baseball.” Chadwick was credited with creating the boxscore, and his writing for the *New York Clipper* was essential to the spread in baseball’s popularity. He was not merely a chronicler of the game, but an avid promoter of it. Many of the early sportswriters followed Chadwick’s lead, which meant not only presenting baseball as a good form of entertainment, but a form of entertainment that was good for the nation.

Chadwick was a proponent of muscular Christianity, and he used his baseball stories as a way of promoting the sport as one of gentlemen. He not only supported baseball as a more democratic sport than cricket, he also promoted the New York version of the game over that of Massachusetts, claiming the former to be cleaner and more genteel. He frequently used statistics to support his purpose; even his construction of the boxscore enabled him to highlight those aspects of the game he thought most important, those that demonstrated ability, patience and control. Similarly he underplayed speed and power, which he considered brutish. For example, in the earliest form of the boxscore, a walk was an error on the pitcher – an attempt through statistics to force pitchers into greater control. His introduction of the Run Batted In (RBI) in 1891 represented “an act that brought out the best in man: taking action for the betterment of others (in this case, enabling one’s teammates to score runs).”<sup>138</sup>

Chadwick laid the foundation for early baseball writing, but for as much as his focus was on gentlemanly qualities, the profession grew out of the circulation wars between Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, often noted for their use of yellow journalism. Pulitzer and Hearst were spurred into competition by the growth in literacy rates over the second half of the

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<sup>138</sup> Mitchell Nathanson, *People’s History of Baseball* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), pp.183-186.

nineteenth century, and declining costs in the production of newspapers. The two men used a variety of carnival techniques to win audiences, and sports were a necessary feature. Pulitzer established the first sports department, in 1883 at the *New York World*; Hearst created the first sports section in the *New York Journal* two years later. It was not until 1920 that the Associated Press had established its first sports department, but by that point sports were taking over a larger percentage of the newspaper.<sup>139</sup>

Sports reporting was considered “safe” by newspaper standards, in that it generally avoided an ideological bias. As Americans tired of politics – their election of Warren G. Harding as president in 1920 was a “return to normalcy” and rejection of the Progressive politics that had dominated the previous decades – sports pages grew in size and influence. According to Lawrence Wenner, the average newspaper devoted 12 to 20 percent of its editorial space to sports in the 1920s, compared to .04 percent in 1880 and 4 percent in 1900. These pages were expected to be filled with color and excitement; objectivity was not yet a concern.<sup>140</sup>

The two schools of baseball writing that emerged in the early twentieth century were generally known as Gee Whiz and Aw Nuts. Their names indicate their tones: “The Gee Whiz! Writer is the optimist, anticipating heroics and triumph, yet somehow able to be both heart-broken and exhilarated in defeat. The Aw Nuts! Writer is the skeptic who writes with a how-can-you-let-these-guys-break-your-heart-they’re-scarcely-worth-the-bother sort of defiance.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Garry Whannel, *Media Sports Stars: Masculinities and Moralities* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 31.

<sup>140</sup> Lawrence A. Wenner, ed., *Media, Sports, and Society* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1989), pp. 52-54.

<sup>141</sup> Charles Fountain, *Sportswriter: The Life of Grantland Rice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 133-134.

Both groups were equally committed and passionate about the game, but only one was willing to admit it.

Grantland Rice was the epitome of the Gee Whiz school. A Phi Beta Kappa alum of Vanderbilt University who majored in Latin and Greek, Rice began writing his column “The Spotlight” in 1913. By the end of the 1920s, the column was syndicated in more than 250 newspapers around the country. In addition to baseball, he wrote a weekly column for *Collier’s*, reported for the *New York Herald-Tribune*, edited *American Golfer* magazine, contributed free-lance material about baseball, college football, and golf, and supervised a company called Spotlight Films, which produced monthly ten-minute newsreels about athletics. Rice was known for his use of verse, and his desire to create heroes out of athletes. His most famous piece of writing was not about baseball, but college football—specifically Notre Dame’s 1924 offense.

Writing for the *Herald-Tribune*, Rice began:

Outlined against a blue-gray October sky, the Four Horsemen rode again. In dramatic lore they are known as Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and Death. These are only aliases. Their real names are Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden. They formed the crest of the South Bend cyclone before which another fighting Army football team was swept over the precipice at the Polo Grounds yesterday afternoon as 55,000 spectators peered down on the bewildering panorama spread on the green plain below.<sup>142</sup>

The florid language was typical of Rice, who was guilty of myth-making on many occasions. Unsurprisingly, one of his favorite subjects was Babe Ruth. Though his enthusiasm was subject to derision (fellow writer Ring Lardner was known to recite “The Four Horsemen” opening in the press box and then question the vantage point from which they would “be outlined” against the sky), it was sincere. Rice was able to relate the actions of these sporting heroes because that was what he believed to be true. He enjoyed his access to athletes, he gained stories on golf

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<sup>142</sup> Grantland Rice, “The Four Horsemen,” *New York Herald-Tribune*, 18 October 1924.

courses and in bars, but he never considered his stories to be false, or their subjects to be anything less than what he was suggesting.<sup>143</sup>

In contrast, Ringgold Wilmer “Ring” Lardner was a representative of the Aw Shucks viewpoint. Lardner inherited his column in the *Chicago Tribune* upon the death of the very popular Hugh Keogh in 1913, and was immediately forced to produce seven columns a week. Rather than the verse employed by Rice, Lardner instead wrote in the vernacular – he was actually among the first sportswriters to do so. Whereas Rice gained many of his stories through his personal relationships with athletes, Lardner incorporated their voices into his writing. If Rice reflected the grand, hyperbolic nature of the 1920s, Lardner spoke to the common reader, and yet with equal regard. He even earned praise from Virginia Woolf, who commented to a friend that Lardner “writes the best prose to come our [Britain’s] way,” although often “in a language which is not English.” She continued, “Game gives him what society gives his English brother.”<sup>144</sup>

Woolf was referencing *You Know Me, Al*, which Lardner wrote in 1916. The book was based on a series of short stories Lardner had written for the *Saturday Evening Post*, written in the form of letters from a “busher,” a semiprofessional ballplayer. These stories were themselves derived from Lardner’s columns. He initially utilized the style while trying to fill column space. Familiar with the language of ballplayers, he created a fake dialogue between two players in the middle of a poker game as the team traveled from city to city. During the World Series, he invented a left-handed pitcher for the Giants, who offered his comments on the game to assist Lardner’s reporting. Readers began asking who the pitcher was, which led his friend Charles E.

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<sup>143</sup> Mark Inabinett, *Grantland Rice and His Heroes: The Sportswriter as Mythmaker in the 1920s* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), pp. 5-7, 14.

<sup>144</sup> Allen Barra, “The Forgotten Genius of Ring Lardner,” *The Daily Beast*, 1 September 1913, online <<<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/01/the-forgotten-genius-of-ring-lardner>>>.



Van Loan to recommend him to the *Post*. “Al’s” stories became a success for the periodical and the author – the *Saturday Evening Post* paid Lardner \$250 for his first story, then increased his pay by \$250 until he reached the top price of \$1,250.<sup>145</sup>

Though very different, Rice and Lardner provided role models for sportswriting. They produced some of the best sportswriting of their era, and reflected the color of the commentary that was common in the early twentieth century, though one was more jaundiced in his view than the other. As sports pages evolved, however, and sportswriters specialized, such viewpoints disappeared. By the 1930s, a new generation of writers would take over—and hold their positions over the next three decades—who promoted objectivity in their writing, even if that was a difficult task.

#### “STOP GODDING UP THE BALLPLAYERS”

No other baseball player (and few other athletes) cast a shadow as large as Babe Ruth. Part of this was due to Ruth himself; he was a larger-than-life athlete who helped revitalize Major League Baseball after the Black Sox Scandal and created a hitting revolution. He was also exceptionally personable, with enormous appetites and a penchant for self-promotion. Yet Ruth was also impacted by culture: his sale to the New York Yankees put him at the center of the emerging advertising world, and his propensity for bigness (in word and in action) was representative of the grandiose nature of the Roaring Twenties. As the Great Depression set in, Americans pulled back economically and culturally. Values shifted toward sacrifice, stoicism, and a general rejection of the Ruthian hyperbole. Part of the reason that there was only “one” Babe Ruth, then, was because there wasn’t the proper environment to create another.

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<sup>145</sup> Roger Kahn, *Memories of Summer: When Baseball Was an Art, and Writing about It a Game* (New York: Hyperion, 1997), 137; “Ring Lardner Dies; Noted as Writer,” *New York Times*, 26 September 1933.

In baseball, the Thirties heroes were what Richard Crepeau called “corporate heroes.” These new ballplayers, the *Sporting News* argued, had caused a loss of the “personal element” in baseball and came across as an interchangeable group of automatons. Crepeau’s prime example was Lou Gehrig, the New York Yankees’ first baseman and Ruth’s longtime teammate, who prior to his ALS diagnosis was compared to a banker.

Lou Gehrig was one of the best of McCarthy’s bankers. His career with the Yankees overlapped those of both Ruth and DiMaggio, and to a certain extent he played in the shadow of both these men. He became a dominant heroic figure only in the tragedy of his death. No one questioned the greatness of Gehrig as a player, yet it is significant that he is most remembered for his endurance: He played in 2,130 consecutive games. This earned him the name ‘Iron Horse,’ but he lacked color. Gehrig seemed destined to remain a figure in the shadows. In 1932 he hit four home runs in one game, only to be pushed out of the headlines by the retirement of John McGraw. In the World Series that same year Gehrig led the Yankees with three homers, nine hits, eight RBIs, nine runs scored, and a batting average of .529. But this was also the series in which Ruth hit his designated home run.<sup>146</sup>

Though Gehrig was often overshadowed, he showed no interest in attracting attention. He refused to make flashy plays, such as exaggerating his swing or diving for ground balls, saying that it was unnecessary. And although Joe DiMaggio would become a baseball icon in his own right, his early career did not generate the same press.

Major League Baseball heroes were comparable to others who emerged in the 1930s. Led by Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, there was an emphasis placed on the common man. The Hays Code in Hollywood attempted to protect the film industry from accusations of immorality, and though the decade began with horror films and gangster films, both violent, the end of the decade reminded audiences that bad men would always pay for their crimes. It also introduced the partnership between John Ford and John Wayne in *Stagecoach*, with Wayne beginning his long string of performances of world weary men fighting against nature and corruption for the

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<sup>146</sup> Richard Crepeau, *Baseball: America’s Diamond Mind* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), pp. 120-121.

sake of civilization. Perhaps most importantly, though, this was the era that produced Superman, the comic book superhero who fought for “truth, justice and the American way,” but whose human alter-ego was a simple reporter in glasses, frequently ignored by his colleagues.<sup>147</sup>

Cultural producers had scaled down their representations of manhood and its capabilities – or expectations, at the least. Baseball writers were among this group, and the Aw Shucks and Gee Whiz schools of journalism faded. Writers like Lardner and Rice were replaced by Red Smith and Jimmy Cannon, who emphasized the fun of the sport but never consciously tried to make it more than an entertainment form. This was not to say they did not take their jobs seriously; most reporters admitted that while being a sports reporter was the best job they could imagine, the writing itself was incredibly difficult. Smith, the syndicated columnist at home with the *New York Herald-Tribune*, could take as much as six hours to produce his column. He took the work seriously, but not himself. He once submitted the following biographical piece:

Red Smith, christened Walter Wellesley Smith on a cold day in 1905 in Green Bay, Wis., has been bleeding out a daily column for the *Herald-Tribune* for about three years. Previous conditions of servitude have included 10 years at hard labor at the *Philadelphia Record*, eight years on the *St. Louis Star-Times*, and a year with the *Milwaukee Sentinel*. He admires sports for others and might have been a great athlete himself except that he is small, puny, slow, inept, uncoordinated, myopic, and yellow. He is the proprietor of two small children, one large mortgage.<sup>148</sup>

Smith’s tongue-in-cheek approach was popular with fans – and editors. He was paid half of every dollar his work collected, as much as \$30,000 a year in the 1950s. To satisfy the many different deadlines of the *Herald-Tribune* syndicate, he often wrote his game stories beginning in the

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<sup>147</sup> Leroy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004): pp. 232, 258-260.

<sup>148</sup> Robert Schmuhl, ed., *Making Words Dance: Reflections on Red Smith, Journalism and Writing*, foreword by Terence Smith (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2010), p. xix.

middle. He then wrote his conclusion, and the lead came last.<sup>149</sup> It was a testament to his ability as a writer that Smith's work never felt so awkwardly assembled, but it undoubtedly affected the tone of each story.

It helped that Smith was not interested in producing the prose of Grantland Rice. He did admit that he was guilty of overdoing it early in his career, however. He received a telegram from his editor Stanley Woodward during spring training one year, demanding that he “stop Godding up those ballplayers.” Smith had not realized that the profiles he had been writing were guilty of such hyperbole, but the telegram made him reevaluate his style. As one of the most influential writers of his time (his career spanned multiple generations, writing from 1927-1982), his conscious effort to demonstrate the humanity of the ballplayers, always joined by wit and vivid description that cut to the heart of the story, became the common approach by many of his colleagues.<sup>150</sup>

Among his colleagues were Jimmy Cannon and Dick Young. Both were writers for the tabloids, the *New York Post* and *Daily News*, respectively, and so were permitted more leeway in crafting their stories. Young's “Clubhouse Confidential” was a gossip column full of blind items that allowed a look behind the clubhouse curtain. Yet neither he nor Cannon ignored the ethical standards of their profession. They reported primarily what happened on the field of play, and though were known to be close to ballplayers personally (as was common), did not allow those relationships to interfere with their work.

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<sup>149</sup> Roger Kahn, *Memories of Summer*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>150</sup> Jerome Holtzman, ed., *No Cheering in the Press Box*, second edition (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1974, 1995), p. 259; Eugene L. Roberts, Jr., “Writing for the Reader,” in Schmuhl, ed., *Making Words Dance*, p. 120.

Cannon was clear on this matter. Though he referred to sportswriting as being “entombed in a long boyhood,” and considered it the best profession because it allowed the writer access to an exclusive club he dreamed of as a child, he also said that the worst thing a writer could be was a fan. For Cannon, it was important for writers to tell the truth, that readers could believe their reporting. This did not mean that writers had to completely keep their distance—and Cannon was certainly a regular at Toot Shor’s restaurant, and one of Joe DiMaggio’s close associates—but there had to be a certain level of distance between the writer and his subject. He had to maintain his objectivity.<sup>151</sup>

Maintaining one’s objectivity was the greatest challenge. Writers and their subjects were constantly in contact. Young writers were often of the same age as the ballplayers they covered, not yet seasoned enough to write clearly and without sentimentality. Smith indicated as much when he wrote of Woodward’s telegram, but the *Washington Post*’s columnist Shirley Povich agreed. He told fellow sportswriter and MLB historian Jerome Holtzman that he had to personally mature before his writing lost its romantic tone. Admitting that he was not as critical in his early career as he should have been, Povich recalled his time covering the Washington Senators: “Some of them were worthless bums and shouldn’t have been my heroes, though they were all good ball players. I simply had to keep readjusting my values.” Povich said that becoming a father for the first time helped to put professional baseball into perspective, but that he also grew more confident in himself as a writer. He supposed that as a young man he was catering more to public taste, unable to fully assert himself. As the years passed he gained a sense of independence and confidence that he could write about the game or some facet of it without having to worry about the reaction it caused. It required separating himself from his subject, mentally if

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<sup>151</sup> Holtzman, *No Cheering in the Press Box*, pp. 275-278.

not physically, and writing for one's own satisfaction. To do otherwise, Povich insisted, was setting oneself up for a fall.<sup>152</sup>

This was a lofty goal, but required great care to reach. Beat writers were particularly in a bind, as they traveled with the teams they covered. For years, teams covered writers' travel expenses. In some instances (Jackie Robinson and Wendell Smith, for example), writers even roomed with ballplayers. To remain objective and critical was a tremendous challenge. Much has been made of writers' unwillingness to write about player antics off of the field, but the justification was one of the ethics: a sportswriter's job was to cover the game, anything off the field (unless permitted by the individual) would be intrusive. The most important factor, however, was one of access. The sportswriter's authority rested on his access to the team on a level denied the typical fan. Bad relationships risked access to necessary players, denying the writer his opportunity to work and threatening his position at the paper. This meant keeping sources happy. The *New York Times*'s Robert Lipsyte learned this lesson the hard way when dealing with Mickey Mantle.

In May 1960, a fan had jumped onto the field at Yankee Stadium, ran across the outfield, and punched Mickey Mantle in the jaw. Since the regular beat reporter, according to Lipsyte, "would never have troubled the twenty-eight-year-old center fielder by asking him what had happened," the *Times* dispatched Lipsyte from the night desk. He found Mantle at the bar and unwilling to address the topic. Mantle merely glanced over his shoulder and told the young reporter "why don't you go fuck yourself." Lipsyte assumed that the error was on his part, that he had somehow phrased the question incorrectly or indelicately, and tried again. "Mickey signaled to Yogi [Berra], and they began throwing the ball an inch above my head. I was scared at first of

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125-127.

being decapitated,” Lipsyte recalled, “then in awe of their control. They weren’t going to hit me unless I failed to understand that the interview was over.”<sup>153</sup>

The next day, Lipsyte joined a gaggle of more experienced writers as they asked Mantle about the incident. This time he was convivial, joking that he was still sore but capable of eating lasagna and hoping to move onto something more solid soon. This seemed to reaffirm Lipsyte’s idea that it was he who had made the wrong move the night before. It was not until two years later that a fellow writer confided in him, “We never write about him acting like a red ass because our editors know our readers don’t want to read about it. And we don’t want to lose access. Offend the Mick, and you’re dead in the Yankees’ locker room.”<sup>154</sup>

Such stories of Mantle abound, indeed they’ve filled biographies for the last three decades, but they spoke to the careful nature of baseball writing. Baseball writers had to relate the relevant team news, maintaining a balance between the demands of their papers and audience, while also keeping their sources content and willing to cooperate. To keep this balance took practice and careful form. Most writers returned to the standards established by Henry Chadwick in the nineteenth century to report: ballplayers were held to certain behavioral standards, and if they failed to live up to them they were subject to criticism. These failures were usually limited to those on the field, but if a player was guilty of fighting, swearing, or some other “un-sportsmanlike conduct” that was part of the story. Grievances of a personal nature were often omitted in these years, unless such behavior impacted the player’s ability on the field.

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<sup>153</sup> Robert Lipsyte, *An Accidental Sportswriter: A Memoir* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011): pp. 34-35.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

## HEROES, VILLAINS, AND FOOLS

Because sportswriters were crafting a narrative, it was necessary that their stories be populated by a series of characters. Frequently, ballplayers fell into one of a series of archetypes, not uncommon in literature. Generally grouped, and using the language of Orrin Klapp's analysis of postwar American social types, baseball narratives often cast ballplayers as heroes, villains, or fools.<sup>155</sup>

The "hero" of the narrative was easily identified, though his form was no longer comparable to the Ruthian figure of the Twenties. Instead, he appeared more as the "corporate man" that baseball historian Richard Crepeau argued emerged in the 1930s. This continuation was not surprising, considering many of baseball's stars began their careers before the war began and resumed their spots in the lineup after returning from service. The war actually became a part of the narrative for many of these men – it would be unusual to read a story of Bob Feller, for example, without reading of the time lost to his stint in the Navy. Much of Feller's public reputation had already been established by the time he enlisted in December 1941, highlighting his early life on an Iowa farm, his relationship to his father, who nurtured his early playing career, and his preparation for life in the majors through American Legion baseball. After the war, this stalwart image of Feller endured as a model of manhood, enhanced by his readiness to go to war, putting the needs of the nation above his own. Articles noted that Feller could have qualified for an exemption because his father was ill and Feller was the family's primary wage earner. Unlike some of his colleagues, Feller was actually in the line of fire, serving on warships in the Pacific. His war stories carried over into his baseball coverage, establishing for the reader that this was a

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<sup>155</sup> Orrin E. Klapp, *Heroes, Villains, and Fools: The Changing American Character* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962).



man of honor and courage, a hero among his teammates, but one who remained humble, was willing to laugh at himself, and often picked up the check for dinner and drinks.<sup>156</sup>

The “corporate man” therefore followed the common Fifties trope of the citizen-soldier returned to his normal life, as most notably created by Sloan Wilson in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Wilson’s novel and William Whyte’s sociological study *The Organization Man* identified the troubles of the white-collar world, where personality tended to override productivity in importance, and identity faded in with the collective. Baseball’s corporate man could be identified in many of the same characteristics, with much of sportswriting heralding the accomplishments of the “team player,” a man noted for his unselfishness, humility, and cooperative nature. However, by calling attention to one player’s role in structuring the narrative of an entire game, sportswriters were also offering a corrective to this limiting identity. Whyte’s study did not wish to see the collective broken down; he acknowledged that it was a necessary part of modern society.<sup>157</sup> What he wished to see, however, was opportunity for individualism. The corporate ballplayer of the Fifties, then, was not so interchangeable as Crepeau had argued of the 1930s. Stan Musial may have been polite when a writer spoke about his “down” season, but as Red Smith pointed out, a “down year” for Musial would have been a career year for many others.

Musial kind of took back at that, stiffening a trifle. But he didn’t protest and the discussion went on. Four or five times while they talked, something was said about Musial’s miserable year in 1947, and each time Stan stiffened a bit but said nothing.

That evening the guy was going through the records and discovered that in 1947 Musial batted .312 and knocked in ninety-five runs. So the next day he said to Musial: “Either I owe

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<sup>156</sup> Bob Feller as told to Ken W. Purdy, “Baseball a Game? What a Laugh!,” *Look Magazine*, 11 February 1956, pp. 37-38, 40-43; Robert C. Ruark, “Laments Military ‘Crybabyism,’” *World Telegraph-Star*, 8 September 1962; Bob Feller, “Bob Feller and American Legion Baseball,” *The American Legion Magazine*, June 1963, pp. 14-15, 45-48.

<sup>157</sup> Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Cambridge, MA: DeCapo Press, 2002); William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956).

you an apology or you should thank me for the compliment, calling it a lousy year when a fellow hits .312. Why didn't you call the record on me yesterday when I was knocking you?"

"For me," Musial said mildly, "it was a lousy year."

There was no vanity in that statement. He was merely reporting on a fact. Stan Musial is the sort of ball player to whom a batting average of .312 and a runs-batted-in figure of ninety-five represents failure. Last summer he played with appendicitis. This year he has demonstrated what's he's like when he has his health.<sup>158</sup>

Smith argued that there were not "isolated instances when Musial happened to excel himself." Over his twenty-two years with the St. Louis Cardinals, Musial set seventeen Major League records and twenty-nine National League records, and might have caused a shortage of ink in the Midwest covering his attributes, but the adjectives used to describe him were generally mild. His workman-like precision never created the enthusiasm devoted to Joe DiMaggio or the ire directed at Ted Williams.

Williams might be the closest person baseball writers had to a villain. He arrived in the Major Leagues a hitting phenom, and he knew it. Unlike DiMaggio, who was so private (or unpersonable) he allowed the press to craft his public identity for him, Williams was talkative and cocky. He wanted to be the greatest hitter that ever lived, he worked toward that goal relentlessly, but his personal manner was generally difficult. The Boston press was much smaller than that in New York, and but its Red Sox coverage was committed and intense. He openly complained about conditions, fans, and the writers themselves. In 1942, he told reporters that he was not given enough respect as a ballplayer and considered quitting to become a firefighter instead. (The Chicago White Sox mocked this suggestion by appearing in the dugout wearing fire helmets and carrying bells when the Red Sox came to town.) In 1956, he was fined \$5,000 for spitting in the direction of fans after he was booed for dropping a Mickey Mantle fly ball in the elev-

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<sup>158</sup> Red Smith, "When Stan Had His Health," *New York Herald Tribune*, 31 August 1948.

enth inning of a home game against the Yankees. Williams paid the fine, but refused to apologize.<sup>159</sup>

Yet even Williams could be redeemed—and by the very press he loathed. Ultimately, baseball players were evaluated on their level of play, and Williams was one of the best hitters to play the game. Later in his career, the *Boston American* offered a series of articles attempting to show Williams in a positive light. They reported his work with the Jimmy Fund, a charity devoted to aiding children with cancer and veterans, his military service, having flown combat mission in both World War II and Korea, and his commitment to the Boston Red Sox and promotion of Major League Baseball.<sup>160</sup> For as unlikeable as Williams could be, he could not be dismissed for his contributions to the sport, and so there were opportunities to alter his reputation. Baseball writers were crafting narratives and populating them with ballplayers as character types, and not all stars could be heroes in white hats, but by establishing off the field criteria as a way to judge a person's character, they also found pathways to make the unlikeable admirable.

A similar form of verbal gymnastics was at play when writing of baseball's fools. Every good tale needs levity, and when covering a 154- or 162-game season, the monotony of the corporate player became tedious. Thankfully, there were players and personnel to provide some color to the proceedings, notably the Yankees' manager Casey Stengel and manager Yogi Berra. Stengel was named Yankees manager in 1949, at the age of 59. Writers thought he was a stopgap; to that point he did not have a career that indicated he would create a dynasty. Part of it was

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<sup>159</sup> Arthur E. Patterson, "Ted Williams's Latest 'Pop-Off' Ignored by Yawkey and Cronin," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 14 August 1940; "Irate Williams Threatens to Repeat \$5000 Spitting Incident," *Pittsburgh Press*, 8 August 1956.

<sup>160</sup> Mike Gillooly, "The Case for Ted Williams," *Boston American*, 9 January 1958. Mike Gillooly, "Dr. Farber Tells How Slugger Inspires Kids," *Boston American*, 16 January 1958; Mike Gillooly, "The Case for Ted Williams: Slugger Best Medicine for Ailing Ex-Marine," *Boston American*, 23 January 1958.

his personal history (.284 batting average and 1,219 hits in a fourteen-year Major League career), and part of it was personality. Stengel was a throwback to the Lardner days – literally. In his busher tales, Lardner had included a lively character named Casey, and based him on Charles Dillon Stengel in his playing days. During that time, Stengel was a serviceable player, but more known for his antics than his playing. He once fielded a fly ball, then bowed and doffed his cap to the crowd, at which point a small bird flew off the top of his head. In another instance, Stengel was selected by the Brooklyn manager Wilbert Robinson to drop a baseball from an airplane to see if a fielder might catch it – Stengel dropped a ripe grapefruit instead. He was traded to the Pittsburgh Pirates shortly after.<sup>161</sup>

This was the man sportswriters believed had come to manage the Yankees, the most imperious franchise in Major League Baseball. Casey perfected his part, speaking to reporters in what they would dub “Stengelese.” Writing about Stengel required an act of translation; sometimes reporters just sat back and typed what he had given them, which was often performed but lacking in proper nouns. Roger Kahn recalled Stengel talking to reporters after Game 6 of the 1952 World Series, and Red Smith interrupting him to explain the “they” Stengel kept mentioning.

“Them outfielders is what I mean, Red. You can’t get away from that. They make those border-line catches and they beat you and you can’t kick on that. He [Charlie Dressen] had to have that outfield to win, buy maybe if it’s another day, they don’t win that day.”

Arthur Daley of the *New York Times* asked Stengel to be “a little more specific.” Some of us laughed, but Stengel took his *Times* coverage very seriously.

“On some other days,” he said, “the people out there in right aren’t so quiet. An outfielder from the other side goes up to make a catch, they grab his shirt, they go for his arm. They grab the glove. They twist his finger. They get the ball.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Clay Felker, “Lend an Ear to Old Case,” *Life*, 29 September 1952, pp. 106-118.

<sup>162</sup> Kahn, *Memories of Summer*, pp. 126-127.

It took three attempts to learn that Casey was talking about fan obstruction (which in this case he supported), and not the Brooklyn Dodgers' outfielders. Yet the anecdote also revealed how observant Stengel was. Underneath the foolish façade, Stengel was a capable manager who mastered the platoon, shifting his players among different positions to fit the game's needs. He could recall (and reenact) a game for reporters in the clubhouse or the hotel lobby. He missed very little – including his players' off-the-field activities. The “Ol’ Perfessor” was a role he played to perfection, but it could not completely obscure his tactical intelligence.

For Stengel and Williams, then, there was flexibility in the construction of their reputations. A sportswriter could adjust the copy according to the circumstance. Stengel's wisdom on a given day might override his zany manner. Williams' dedication to hitting might supersede his caustic nature. Corporate players could have bad days and still be heroes. It should be pointed out, though, that all of these players were white. Black players, beginning with Jackie Robinson's debut in 1947, had to stick to a much stricter script. In the early days of integration, what Rickey had labeled the “Noble Experiment,” African Americans had to keep to the idealized form, or risked playing into the prejudice of their audience.

Every biography of Jackie Robinson included his first meeting with Branch Rickey, in which Rickey questioned Robinson's temperament, and how he would respond to the vulgar and racist words he would hear from opposing players and fans. Rickey famously told Robinson he wanted a player “with the courage to not fight back.” When Robinson agreed that he could hold his temper, the two men shook hands and signed a contract that would forever change baseball. For three years, Robinson was forced to hold his tongue, to act beyond reproach by white fans and reporters. After those three years ended, he was free to be himself, but not everyone was happy with the more “aggressive” Robinson. Roger Kahn, recalling an article he wrote for *Sport*

magazine, said that Dodgers owner Walter O'Malley thought Robinson "a shameless self-promoter" and publicity speaker. Red Smith, quoted anonymously, said, "I'm fed up with Robinson fights and Robinson incidents and Robinson explanations. He's gotten boring. I'm going to heave a sigh of relief when he gets out of baseball. Then I won't have to bother with him anymore."<sup>163</sup> In a short span of time, Robinson had gone from the representative of baseball's democratic character to one of its villains – and it was a much longer road back than had been offered to Ted Williams.

Black ballplayers not only had to mind their manners on the field, but the company they kept off of it. Much less reported than the "courage to not fight back" story was Rickey's inquiry into Robinson's personal life. He asked if Robinson "had a girl," to which Robinson responded he did. Rickey then advised that the two get married as soon as possible. The reason given has always been that Robinson was about to undertake a monumental task, and that it was important that he have someone by his side to support him and remind him of his goodness and the goodness of his task. Given the lengths that Rickey went to scouting Robinson, looking for the "right" African American ballplayer and not merely the best, this explanation seems simplistic. It was just as likely that Rickey wanted Robinson to have a wife to allay white fears of black sexuality; black athletes had long lived under the specter of heavyweight black boxer Jack Johnson, as despised as he was talented, and convicted under the Mann Act in 1912.<sup>164</sup>

Other black ballplayers had similar emphasis placed on their home lives. It was not uncommon for newspapers to run photographs of ballplayers at home. Unsurprisingly, these pho-

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<sup>163</sup> Kahn, *Memories of Summer*, p. 209.

<sup>164</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 1-5; Jackie Robinson and Alfred Duckett, *Breakthrough the Big League: The Story of Jackie Robinson* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1956), p. 67.

tographs emphasized the qualities that Major League Baseball was interested in promoting. Many pictures featured athletes playing with their kids. Yet where Stan Musial was pictured at the center of his family in a beach scene, everyone hovering around him as the hero of the family, Willie Mays was pictured at the kitchen sink cleaning dishes, his wife tying an apron behind his back. Mickey Mantle was pictured celebrating his new contract with his sons, or Yogi Berra polishing his MVP trophy with his, while Jackie Robinson's son was riding him like a pony. The images overall portray ballplayers, black and white, as family men, but the white ballplayers represent the head of the household, while the African Americans are pictured more submissively.<sup>165</sup> Integration was new to baseball, and there had been many opponents, and so these photographs and corresponding stories often worked to alleviate white fears of black sexuality and physical dominance.

Sportswriters played an essential part in the establishment of baseball as the national pastime. They promoted the game as the “true, democratic” sport over cricket, with its British heritage, and helped the New York game become dominant because it was more “gentlemanly” than its Massachusetts counterpart. They connected it to masculine attributes, and shifted their content according to the needs of the game and their audience. In many ways, they created their profession – sports coverage did not need much more than the score and perhaps description of key plays. Sportswriters added color and dimension, which enhanced the experience of the fans and created others from casual readers. They created the Baseball Writers Association to protect their access and ability to perform their work. They established credentials for that access and worked

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<sup>165</sup> Many of these photographs are available in the Photograph Collection in the A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, New York.

both with teams and league management to maintain proper standards for reporting and the facilities it required.

Yet there were limits to this creation. Sports editors had final say over content, and could limit a writers' ability to write the "full story," especially when it undermined the message that baseball was a clean, all-American sport, played by all-American men. Relationships with teams, management, and players, also threatened objectivity. If access was necessary to proper reporting, alienating sources was detrimental to one's work. Writers therefore had to limit the negatives, framing their analyses in positive tones. The standards of fair play established early by the likes of Henry Chadwick, allowed this possibility. By maintaining that there were a certain set of values to which ballplayers should conform, sportswriters could then be critical and claim objectivity without too much fear of retribution or alienation.

Baseball writing was, therefore, narrative construction, with the writer maintaining a certain set of standards of play and behavior by the players. The players, in turn, became a cast of characters, filling various roles in the course of nine (or more) innings, and a long season. Though each day was subject to change, and the game itself was unbound by time, sports columns were bound by inches. It was necessary to draft these narratives with familiar personality types. These personality types shifted according to the time period, representing changes in American values and relationships to athletic stars.

Ultimately, baseball writing is literature. For more than a century, sportswriters have been telling a tale of men at play. They have told us heroes, villains, and fools. In recent years we have come to question the veracity of the commentary. The audience can turn to the box-score or read a game story for the basics, trying to omit the author's attempt at storytelling, trying to get to the "truth." Yet to do so is to lose what made baseball important to its audience at



the time. These were shared values, and ballplayers were held as role models. Whether they were “really” as depicted is of less importance than *how* they were depicted. The baseball archetypes placed an emphasis on individualism, strength, achievement, and commitment; those who failed to conform were either removed from the game or called to task by reporters. There was always a route back to goodness, a way for the prodigal son to return. That baseball and its reporters provided this opportunity was part of its cultural importance. It was through writing that baseball transformed from a game (and a children’s game at that) to a profession, and a vision of America as it aspired to be.

Chapter 3:  
**The Twenty-Sixth Man**  
The Storytellers of the Broadcast Booth

As Ernie Harwell drove to work on October 3, 1951, for the third game in a three-game playoff series between the New York Giants and Brooklyn Dodgers to decide the National League pennant, he sympathized with his broadcasting partner, Russ Hodges. The two had traded off the television (NBC-TV) and radio (WMCA) feeds, and for Game 3, Harwell was to telecast the first and final three innings, trading off with Hodges, who was responsible primarily for the radio broadcast. There were five different broadcasts for the game – the television coverage, the radio feeds for the Giants and Dodgers (Red Barber for WMGM), Liberty Broadcasting and Mutual Broadcasting, and Harry Caray’s coverage for KMOX in St. Louis.<sup>166</sup> Harwell felt fortunate to be the only televised voice in a sea of broadcasters – little did he know that Hodges would provide the memorable call.

The three game playoff series completed the Miracle at Coogan’s Bluff, the triumphant nickname for the Giants’ surprising march to the pennant. As late as August 11, the Dodgers held a thirteen game lead over the Giants, and had won twelve of fifteen contests between the two. Yet the Giants refused to yield, and embarked on a sixteen-game winning streak before the month concluded. The Dodgers slid but managed to hold the Giants at bay, and remained 4 ½ games ahead on September 20, with only ten games left to play. Unfortunately for Brooklyn’s Bums, they limped to the season’s finish line, losing six of those ten games, while the Giants

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<sup>166</sup> Tom Keegan, *Ernie Harwell: My 60 Years in Baseball* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2002), pp. 117-118.

won their last seven to force a playoff for the pennant. The teams split the first two games, and met at the Polo Grounds on October 3, for the rubber match.<sup>167</sup>

The Giants and Dodgers had battled to a 1-1 tie in the seventh inning, but the Dodgers scored three runs in the eighth and seemed poised to win the pennant. However, Dodgers starter Don Newcombe showed signs of wear in the bottom of the ninth, allowing an infield single to Alvin Dark and a line drive to Don Mueller that put runners on the corners, then a one-out double to Whitey Lockman that scored Dark and advanced Mueller to third. The Dodgers' manager Charlie Dressen then removed Newcombe, substituting relief pitcher Ralph Branca, who had already yielded a home run to Bobby Thomson in the first game of the playoff.<sup>168</sup>

When Bobby Thomson drove Ralph Branca's 1-1 pitch into the left field stands, Hodges erupted with joy over the Giants' improbably comeback:

There's a long fly...it's going to be, I believe...THE GIANTS WIN THE PENNANT! THE GIANTS WIN THE PENNANT! THE GIANTS WIN THE PENNANT! THE GIANTS WIN THE PENNANT! Bobby Thomson hits into the lower deck of the left-field stands. The Giants win the pennant! And they're going crazy!"<sup>169</sup>

It became one of the most famous calls in sports history, because unlike his colleagues', Russ Hodges's call was recorded. The story, circulated in part by Hodges, was that a Brooklyn fan listening to the game and convinced the Dodgers would win, recorded the final inning of the Giants' broadcast to be able to replay and torment his friends who were Giants fans. When the Dodgers lost, the fan (no longer needing or wanting it) sold the tape to Hodges for ten dollars. In fact, the fan, Flatbush native Lawrence Goldberg, was a Giants fan who had asked his mother to

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<sup>167</sup> J. Ronald Oakley, *Baseball's Last Golden Age, 1946-1960: The National Pastime in a Time of Glory and Change* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1994), pp. 136-142.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-144.

<sup>169</sup> *Baseball*, dir. and prod. by Ken Burns (1994, Hollywood: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2004), DVD.

record the ninth inning when he went to work. When he learned WMCA had not recorded the broadcast, Goldberg loaned the tape to Hodges, who made copies to give as Christmas gifts; the following spring, Hodges's sponsors at Chesterfield cigarettes bought a copy, with intention to distribute it, for 100 dollars and access to their box at the Polo Grounds for the 1952 season. Since then, Hodges's call has been attached to news- and highlight reel footage, making it *the* call of the "shot heard 'round the world" despite its limited, local origin.<sup>170</sup>

One should be careful, however, not to dismiss Hodges's historic call as a fluke in recording history. In the sixty years since the Miracle at Coogan's Bluff, Russ Hodges has been as much a part of the story as Ralph Branca or Bobby Thomson. His enthusiasm captured the moment when the underdogs triumphed and his voice soared as the fans around him cheered – it was a verbal cue to the audience at home of the dynamism of the moment. This was the broadcaster's function. Like print journalism, broadcasting showcased individual achievement that yielded team results; unlike print, broadcasting was of the moment, making it possible for any player to be the hero – or the goat. It was storytelling in real time.

Because the baseball season spanned three calendar-based seasons and was played almost daily and sometimes twice in a day, broadcasters built a relationship with their audiences. They were identified with the teams they covered and regarded as that team's "voice," its means of communicating with the fandom. When the Brooklyn Dodgers won the National League pennant in 1941, Red Barber was sent to cover the team's arrival at Grand Central Station. Barber had to fight his way through the crowding fans to gain access to the players. Once the crowds recognized him, however, they surrounded him, paraded him on their shoulders and then pulled

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<sup>170</sup> Keegan, *Ernie Harwell*, 117-118; Richard Sandomir, "The Shot Heard 'Round the World: A Call Is Born, and Saved by a Mom," *New York Times*, 1 October 2001.

his hair out to take as souvenirs. This was because, as former Milwaukee Braves announcer Earl Gillespie explained, “the essence of sport is community; the bond between fan and team.”<sup>171</sup> The announcer nurtured that community; he gained the listeners’ trust through objective reporting. Although hired by advertisers and entrusted by team and league officials with generating enthusiasm among fans, the baseball broadcaster had to gain the respect of his audience. It was important that he seem authentic, knowledgeable and fair—and a little charm went a long way.

The first radio broadcast of a live baseball game occurred in 1921, when the Pittsburgh radio station KDKA provided play-by-play for a game between the hometown Pirates and Philadelphia Phillies. The following year, RCA-Westinghouse capitalized on the popularity of the national pastime to fill airspace and sell radios when they sponsored the broadcast of the first two games of the 1922 World Series on WJZ, its pioneer radio affiliate. Respected newspaperman Grantland Rice was hired to call them game. The technology was still primitive—unable to secure the rights to transmit over telephone wires, WJZ instead used telegraph wires, which negatively impacted sound quality. Despite being a wordsmith on the written page, Rice was inexperienced in the new medium and reported the game exactly as it happened, allowing dead space between plays.<sup>172</sup>

Despite these initial hiccups, the broadcasts were popular, and in 1923, WEAJ learned from its predecessor’s mistakes. WEAJ was owned by American Telephone and Telegram and able to transmit over telephone wires. Although they similarly thought it important to trust a newspaperman broadcast duties, they hired Graham McNamee to sit with the *New York Trib-*

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<sup>171</sup> Richard G. Hubler, “The Barber of Brooklyn,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 21 March 1942, pp. 34, 60-64; Curt Smith, *the Storytellers from Mel Allen to Bob Costas: Sixty Years of Baseball Tales from the Broadcast Booth* (New York: MacMillan, 1995), pp. 161-162.

<sup>172</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Past Time: Baseball as History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 65.68.

une's W.O. McGeehan as a coach. McNamee, a trained concert singer with only four months of broadcast experience himself, was left full responsibility when McGeehan abruptly left during the fourth inning of the third game. Throughout the remaining innings of the six-game World Series, McNamee established a standard for baseball broadcasting, calling not only the game on the field but describing the atmosphere of the ballpark. McNamee explained: "You must make each of your listeners, though miles from the sport, feel that he or she, too, is there with you in that press stand, watching the movements of the game, the color, the flags; Gloria Swanson arriving in her new ermine coat; [New York Giants manager John] McGraw, apparently motionless, but giving signals all the time."<sup>173</sup>

McNamee's approach was not without detractors. Particularly critical were the baseball writers, who were bothered by McNamee's frequent mistakes—he mistook players and positions, made errors on the bases, and occasionally confused left- and right-handed batters. Yet what he lacked in accuracy he more than made up for in tone. McNamee was the voice of the World Series for a decade, and his popularity encouraged team owners to consider expanding radio broadcasts to the regular season. Undaunted by critics' concerns that radio broadcasts "gave the product away for free," the Chicago Cubs' owner William Wrigley allowed any radio station to broadcast Cubs' games free of charge; five different stations simultaneously did so in the late 1920s. In 1925, the Chicago Cubs and White Sox and the Boston Braves and Red Sox transmitted all of their home games via radio. By the end of the decade, St. Louis, Cleveland,

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-70.

Detroit, and Cincinnati joined them in regular broadcasts; the remaining East Coast teams holding out for a few more seasons.<sup>174</sup>

Because baseball coverage was not exclusive until Gillette bought the rights to the World Series in 1939, it was common to have a large broadcasting contingent in the postseason. In 1934, representatives from NBC, CBS, KMOX-St. Louis, WHK-Cleveland, WBBM-Chicago, as well as the broadcast teams representing the competing St. Louis Cardinals and Detroit Tigers, were called before the commissioner, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis. Landis had taken issue with CBS' Ted Husing, who made critical comments about the 1933 World Series' umpiring, and had banned him from future broadcasts. Landis made clear his expectations to the 1934 broadcasting teams:

Gentlemen, you report. Report everything you can see. Report what the players do, but don't feel sorry for them or rejoice for them. Report what they do. That's all the listeners want to hear—what the ballplayers do...By report, I mean you have the right to say what's going on, no matter what is going on, or where it is going on. But don't voice your opinions. Don't editorialize. Report."<sup>175</sup>

Red Barber, who began his career in baseball radio in Cincinnati at the start of the 1934 season, was part of the NBC team and greatly impressed with Landis's remarks. They became the foundation for his philosophy of broadcasting.

Walter Lanier "Red" Barber's career spanned four decades (1934-1966), three teams (Cincinnati Reds, Brooklyn Dodgers, and New York Yankees), and two media (radio and television), and he was among the most respected in broadcasting. He has been referred by baseball scholars Anna Newton and Jean Hastings Ardell as the "dean of standards" due to his writings about the tools of baseball broadcasting, all of which return to Landis's dictum, *report*. Having

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<sup>174</sup> The holdouts were the New York Yankees and Giants, Brooklyn Dodgers, Washington Senators, and Philadelphia Phillies and Athletics. See Tygiel, *Past Time*, pp. 70-72.

<sup>175</sup> As told by Red Barber, in *The Broadcasters* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1970), pp. 81-83.

spent so many years at the microphone, Barber had accumulated many stories and accolades, but did not shy from criticism and was vocal in his distaste for overly effusive commentary and elaborate recreations of ballgames that were common in the early years of his career.<sup>176</sup>

Until 1947, when Barber convinced Brooklyn Dodgers' general manager Branch Rickey to send him on the road with the team, Major League Baseball teams only broadcasted live home games. This was a cost-saving measure: rather than spend thousands of dollars in line fees to carry the game live, teams paid roughly 25 dollars to recreate it instead. When the team traveled, its broadcaster would go to a studio, where he was paired with a Western Union telegrapher who received transmission of the game and translated it shorthand for the broadcaster ("S1C" meant "strike one, called"), who relayed it to the audience. Broadcasters stretched their listeners' imaginations by describing a game they were not seeing played at a stadium they may never have visited. Because they could not rely upon the crowd or game noises, some broadcasters endeavored to create them artificially and hired sound effects artists, who might simulate the crack of the bat by hitting a wood bloc with a drumstick.<sup>177</sup>

Unfortunately, the wires were not always reliable and broadcasters scrambled when transmission was interrupted. Ronald Reagan once recalled a Cubs-Cardinals game he was recreating as an Iowa sportscaster: the wire went out and Reagan worried about losing his audience to another station—which would displease his sponsor Wheaties—so he kept the play going with

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<sup>176</sup> Anna R. Newton and Jean Hastings Ardell, "Taking the Measure of Baseball Broadcasters: What It Takes to be a Five-Tool Announcer," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Spring 2007), p. 80. Red Barber's books include *The Broadcasters; Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968); *1947, When All Hell Broke Loose* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982); and *Show Me the Way to Go Home* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971).

<sup>177</sup> Tony Silvia, "The Art and Artifice of Early Radio Baseball Recreations," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Spring 2007), pp. 87-94.



“the one thing that doesn’t get in the scorebook—a foul ball.” Reagan wasted time by describing the game’s pitcher, Dizzy Dean, using the rosin bag or shaking off pitches and calling foul balls for six minutes and 45 seconds before the wire came back on line to reveal that the epic battle he described had actually ended with a pop-out on the first pitch.<sup>178</sup>

While Reagan admitted his primary concern was the advertisers, baseball recreations provided fans many miles from even their “home” team an opportunity to experience a game. Gordon McLendon recreated games for the Liberty Broadcasting System, a network of 300 stations in 1949, that grew to 431 one year later. McLendon provided baseball to an audience, many in the West and Southwest, outside the reach of teams’ network feeds. He created ballgames where they were not found, and provided color, such as the time he told listeners that a foul ball struck a woman’s parasol, and she calmly picked it up and threw it to the umpire. He also sent staffers to ballparks to record crowd noises for future use.<sup>179</sup>

Despite its usefulness and popularity, Red Barber claimed elaborate game recreations were distasteful. “I didn’t care for that simulated reality,” Barber wrote in 1968. “It offended something in me—perhaps a sense of honesty, perhaps just the idea that listeners were a lot brighter than these fellows seemed to think they were.” Barber explained that he had the studio microphone positioned above the telegraph so that audiences could hear the “dots and dashes.” While it was true that Barber told his audience he was recreating a game, and he was honest about loss transmission, refusing to call fake pitches and instead turning the airspace over to mu-

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<sup>178</sup> Smith, *The Storytellers*, p. 26.

<sup>179</sup> Silvia, “The Art and Artifice of Early Radio Baseball Recreations,” p. 92; Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Time Books, 1999; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 210.

sic to fill long gaps, his recreations were not devoid of showmanship. In 1970's *The Broadcasters*, Barber explained his process of recreating games:

I always had with me a rapidly running series of mental pictures. I always saw the park in my mind...when the batter's name was typed... 'Lombardi up'...I saw Lombardi from the many times I had studied him, and from seeing him mentally, I spoke audibly—"the next batter is Old Schnozz, Ernie Lombardi...a big towering, right-handed batter...he takes his stance with his back foot close to the catcher...he is the only fellow in the big leagues who uses an interlocking finger grip...which goes back to when the index finger on his left hand was broken, and he needed to protect it from his top hand...his right hand. Lom is hitting against a seven-man outfield...he is the slowest runner in the league, so all four infielders are playing back on the outfield grass...the defense is around into left...he always pulls the ball. How he won that batting title last year when he never gets a leg hit, I'll never know. Everything he hits has to be sharp, clean, into a hole or over the fence...Lombardi sets...pumps the big bat...takes the pitch...it's wide for ball one...Lom goes down and gets a handful of dirt, rubs his hands together, throws the dirt away...gets in again...One ball...no strikes...no one out in the fourth inning...no score...<sup>180</sup>

Given that the Western Union telegrapher likely only told Barber that the first pitch was a ball outside the strike zone, his own recollection revealed that he was as likely as his contemporaries to add detail to a game he did not actually witness. He sensed no disconnect, however, between his objection to the false foul balls or simulating sounds others used and his own style because he was relying on observations he had made many times.

All of this is to say that Barber, with all of his emphasis on reporting, also understood that part of his job was to entertain. Red Barber always wanted to be an entertainer. He enrolled at the University of Florida at the age of 21, but wanted to be an endman in a minstrel troupe, even going so far as to learn the trombone. He had secured a job with the famous J.A. Coburn blackface troupe after graduation, but the troupe went bankrupt before he could join. Barber reluctantly fell back on radio broadcasting, which he began at the University of Florida when he stepped in at the last minute to read a paper ("Certain Aspects of Bovine Obstetrics") on air for an unavailable professor. As a broadcaster, Barber was serious in his craft, but light in his tone.

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<sup>180</sup> Barber, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat*, p. 240; *The Broadcasters*, pp. 109-111.

The Southern tenor introduced Brooklynites to terms such as *rhubarb*, meaning disturbance, and *catbird seat*, which he said meant “sitting pretty,” and described the bases as *F.O.B.—full of Brooklyns*. His colloquialisms provided a folksy manner, but also served a practical purpose: in 1932, Barber suffered an abscess that forced him to broadcast without his two front teeth. Barber cleverly expanded his—and baseball’s—vocabulary to call a game of *fouls*, *first basemen*, *fast-balls*, and *fielders* while unable to pronounce the letter F. His diction and style endeared Barber to baseball fans across the country, but none more than in Brooklyn, where he served as the Dodgers’ first broadcaster in 1939, and stayed through the 1953 season. Analyzing Barber’s popularity in the borough, broadcaster Bob Costas remarked, “Red’s appeal soared because Brooklynites sensitive about the image of ‘Dees and dems guys—I’ll meet ya’ at Toydy-toyd and Second Avenue’—were delighted that this erudite man represented their borough...It put a gentler touch on Brooklyn.” Susan Douglas echoed Costas’s observation that Brooklyn natives were insecure about their linguistic reputation and argued that having a successful team in the Dodgers and a voice in Barber during the 1940s and early 1950s provided a positive identity and means of fighting back against the superiority expressed by the culture-makers in Manhattan and Hollywood.<sup>181</sup>

New York had been slow to accept radio broadcasting, holding out until Dodgers general manager Larry MacPhail hired Barber and ended an existing agreement between the city’s three teams to keep baseball off the radio. During baseball’s second Golden Age, 1947-1963, when New York teams captured 22 of the 34 pennants, the sounds of baseball could be heard throughout the city—and usually with a Southern lilt. Florida’s Red Barber called games in Brooklyn

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<sup>181</sup> Hubler, “The Barber of Brooklyn,” p. 61; Barber, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat*, pp. 28-29, 178; Smith, *The Storytellers*, pp. 53-54; Douglas, *Listening In*, p. 213.

and later the Bronx, teaming with longtime Yankees' broadcaster and Alabama native Mel Allen in 1954 (Allen was the "Voice of the Yankees" from 1939 to 1964). Georgia's Ernie Harwell began his Major League broadcasting career in Brooklyn (1948-1949), before leaving for Harlem, where he called New York Giants games (1950-1953) with Kentucky-bred Russ Hodges. After the Dodgers and Giants left New York for the West Coast, National League baseball was reborn in Queens with the introduction of the Mets in 1962; Tennessee's Lindsay Nelson was their radio voice. Harwell attributed the number of southerners in baseball broadcasting to the storytelling tradition of the region: "I think it goes back to the generation we came from where people grew up in a mostly rural atmosphere. You sat on the porch and you heard all the kinfolk tell all these stories. You became a storyteller because of it."<sup>182</sup> Because baseball is unbound by a clock, that storytelling tradition has been an essential part of its broadcasts since its inception, and after the Second World War, would help to fill even more airspace.

Locally operated AM radio networks doubled between 1945 and 1950, and baseball was often used to fill gaps in programming. The St. Louis Cardinals were arguably the largest beneficiaries, having cultivated a relationship with radio since the 1920s, and benefitting geographically as the westernmost and southernmost team in Major League Baseball until 1958 and 1962, respectively. During the 1950s and 1960s, Cardinals fans could listen to a ballgame on one of 124 affiliates across fourteen states. St. Louis's KMOX, from which Harry Caray and Jack Buck broadcasted, reached listeners in eight states. In parts of the West Coast, baseball fans were not limited by team or time—a listener could find baseball broadcasts from 11 am to 11 pm.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Newton and Ardell, "Taking the Measure of Baseball Broadcasters," p. 84.

<sup>183</sup> Benjamin G. Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 176-177; Robert V. Bellamy and James R. Walker, "Baseball and Television's

Advancements in technology and a population shift greatly aided baseball's popularity on the left coast in the postwar period. Radios became increasingly portable, with numbers produced by American manufacturers quadrupling between 1949 and 1960, and transistor radios imported from Japan increased sevenfold. Fans were no longer tied to their parlors or porches, which was helpful because many spent time on the congested roadways of Southern California. Because many eastern and central games began on the West Coast around 5 or 6 PM, many drivers were in their cars, often in traffic, and could tune in for a radio broadcast. When the Dodgers and Giants abandoned New York for the open markets of Los Angeles and San Francisco, respectively, baseball fans were already familiar with the big names in the game—Willie Mays, Stan Musial, Ted Williams—but they did not know many of the day-to-day details. For many of these fans, Vin Scully became the necessary link between the West Coast and Major League Baseball.<sup>184</sup>

Vin Scully always wanted to be a broadcaster. He recalled, as a child, trying to sit *under* the family's radio, trying to get as close to the action as possible, and being asked by the nuns in his Catholic grammar school what he wanted to be when he grew up; while the other children answered with professions like doctor or lawyer, young Vin said he wanted to be a sportscaster. Born and raised in the Bronx, New York, Scully was inspired by Red Barber: "I sensed his justness...But what I admired most was how he made broadcasting a conversation with the listener, chatting as around a potbellied stove." Scully cut his teeth as a broadcaster while a student at Fordham University, and interviewed with Barber himself for CBS's *College Football Roundup*

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Origins: The Case of the Cubs," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Fall 2001), p. 36.

<sup>184</sup> Douglas, *Listening In*, p. 17; Curt Smith, *Pull Up a Chair: The Vin Scully Story* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2009), pp. 15-16.

after graduating. Although there was not a fulltime position available at the time, Barber was taken enough with the young broadcaster that he found him some work. When Ernie Harwell left the Dodgers' booth after the 1949 season, Barber approached general manager Branch Rickey about hiring Scully as his protégé.<sup>185</sup>

Barber was not an easygoing mentor, however. Scully admitted that he received “on-the-job training” from Barber, who showed him the importance of proper reporting. If Scully handed Barber the lineup card and a player had been shifted in the order, he expected to know why. Barber emphasized preparation, knowing the players professionally but not losing objectivity by spending time with them socially, not being afraid of dead air, and, above all, finding his own voice. “Don’t copy,” Scully recalled Barber advising, “You’ll water your own wine.” Barber, for his part, credited Scully with his own success, writing, “Whatever made him the fine broadcaster he is, he had when he started.”<sup>186</sup>

When he was permitted to broadcast, Scully was handed the microphone and left to his own devices. Barber would leave the booth to check video or confer with colleagues, and Connie Desmond, Barber’s second, would often take a coffee break. Still green and uncertain, Scully started cultivating anecdotes to fill the time. Those anecdotes became the hallmark of his broadcasting career. Barber’s contract was not renewed in 1953 (Barber claimed it was because Dodgers owner Walter O’Malley resented his close affiliation with Branch Rickey, who left the ball club amid a dispute with O’Malley in 1950), and O’Malley fired Desmond before the 1955 season, leaving Scully as the lone voice of the Brooklyn ball club. As of 2016, Scully was the last major baseball broadcaster to work alone, and more than 60 years after his career began, he

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<sup>185</sup> Smith, *The Storytellers*, p. 55; Smith, *Pull Up a Chair*, pp. 19, 28-29; Barber, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat*, pp. 261-262.

<sup>186</sup> Smith, *Pull Up a Chair*, pp. 32-33; Barber, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat*, pp. 261-262.

is still not at a loss for words. According to a 2009 study by the *Wall Street Journal*, Scully led all baseball broadcasters in words spoken during one full nonscoring inning with 143.51 words per minute. The decline in verbosity was immediate; second place was reserved for Dan McLaughlin of the Cardinals at 109.93, Ryan Lefebvre of the Royals was third with 96.71, and the Braves' Chip Caray was fourth with just 78.80.<sup>187</sup>

As Scully learned from Barber, however, it was *what* one said, not *how much*, that mattered. The native New Yorker in a sea of southerners, Scully became the Homer of baseball broadcasting, substituting literacy for the others' folksy charm. At times he compared a pitcher's style to tailoring, "a little off here, a little off there, and you're done," or referred to a shortstop's catch as "gingerly, like a baby chick falling from the tree." A walk to start a ballgame was "a sour note to begin any concert," and twilight revealed "little footsteps of sunshine." He captivated audiences for being familiar and yet finer. *Boston Globe* columnist Thomas Oliphant described Scully as "a bar pal, but with Einstein's wisdom." When the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles, Scully went with them and introduced southern Californians to his ball club. Fans brought their transistor radios to the ballpark and listened to Scully call the game, a way of familiarizing themselves with the players. Even the concession stands offered Scully's broadcasts. Steve Bisheff of the *Orange County Register* remarked that the whole ballpark might erupt in laughter if Scully made a joke, so complete was its immersion in his broadcast.<sup>188</sup>

In addition to his obvious talent, Scully was aided by team management. Walter O'Malley, convinced that the Dodgers had lost fans to television in Brooklyn and the New York

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<sup>187</sup> Smith, *Pull Up a Chair*, p. 33; Barber, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat*, pp. 279-280; Eldon L. Ham, *Broadcasting Baseball: A History of the National Pastime on Radio and Television* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2011), Kindle edition, location 2754-2769.

<sup>188</sup> Smith, *Pull Up a Chair*, 19, 68-73.

suburbs, refused to televise games in Los Angeles. The only way to witness a Los Angeles Dodgers game was through the turnstiles or over the radio, amplifying Scully's impact.

O'Malley's objection to television was not unusual. Although televised baseball was popular among viewers in the 1950s, owners and league officials increasingly blamed the medium for declining attendance. They tried to gain control over baseball telecasting, limiting it to outlying areas so as not to interfere with the turnstiles, but ultimately could not contend with its popularity, particularly that of the *Game of the Week* and its beloved "commentator," Hall of Fame pitcher Dizzy Dean.

The first Major League Baseball game was telecast locally from Brooklyn in 1939, but it was not until 1947 that networks carried regular games. Initially teams, bolstered by radio's success at attracting new fans, were eager to partner with television networks. In 1947, the Brooklyn Dodgers, Chicago Cubs, Detroit Tigers, New York Yankees and Giants, Philadelphia Phillies and Athletics, the St. Louis Cardinals and Browns, and the Washington Senators all televised home games. By 1949, 31 of 77 total television stations televised the games of fifteen out of sixteen Major League teams (the Pittsburgh Pirates were the only holdout); additional coverage of minor league baseball was also available. As had been the case in the early days of radio, baseball was used to fill gaps in programming. National network stations used day games to fill programming locally before national programming took over in the evenings. As night baseball became more common, however, the networks found baseball conflicted with their schedules, and dropped coverage of home games. Telecasts were then more commonly found on non-network and independent stations in cities like New York and Chicago. For those who lived in smaller



markets where there were not many (if any) independent stations, televised baseball was harder to find.<sup>189</sup>

As the weakest of the national networks, ABC determined baseball could be a partner, not a hindrance, to programming and worked to fit it into its schedule. The *Game of the Week*, which debuted in 1953, was a means for viewers to watch Major League Baseball on a national network. ABC signed deals with the Philadelphia Athletics, Cleveland Indians, and Chicago White Sox, and was on the precipice of signing the New York Giants to a six-game contract for \$100,000 when Major League Baseball interceded and banned broadcasts within 50 miles of any major league ballpark, causing the Giants to walk away from the deal.<sup>190</sup>

Attendance had been steadily declining for five seasons when MLB enacted its ban. Between 1947 (the first season of regular telecasts) and 1950, attendance at major league ballparks fell by over one-eighth; attendance in 1953 had lost more than a quarter of its 1947 numbers. MLB officials were quick to label television the culprit, although sports historians have since argued that it was most likely a normalization of attendance figures from a postwar surge.<sup>191</sup> St. Louis Cardinals owner Fred Saigh had proposed a one-year television blackout to analyze the

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<sup>189</sup> James Robert Walker and Robert V. Bellamy, "Baseball on Television: The Formative Years, 1939-1951," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 1-15.

<sup>190</sup> Ham, *Broadcasting Baseball*, location 2013.

<sup>191</sup> Between 1946 and 1950, more than twice as many fans flocked to major league ballparks per season than at any point during the previous attendance boom in the 1920s. Other factors that have been associated with the 1950s attendance decline were the lack of competition due to the dominance of the Yankees, who were responsible for 24 percent of the league's total attendance by the late 1950s; suburbanization; the lack of adequate parking facilities and accessible public transportation; shifts in demographics; and the influence of air conditioning on leisure patterns. For the most thorough analysis of postwar attendance figures, see David G. Surdam, *The Postwar Yankees: Baseball's Golden Age Revisited* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), pp. 12-30, 85-90, 136-141.

effect of television on attendance. He also proposed revenue sharing, with the visiting ball club receiving a share of broadcasting receipts. Saigh argued that larger markets, such as New York, were able to obtain more lucrative television contracts because of the number of potential viewers, but visiting teams provided half of the talent. The owners rejected Saigh's proposals during the 1952 winter meetings, but agreed to form a committee of major and minor league representatives to survey television's influence on minor league baseball.<sup>192</sup>

The survey was instigated by Senator Edwin C. Johnson (Democrat of Colorado), who was also the president of the Western League, who decried the major leagues as a "heartless monopoly motivated by avarice and greed." Johnson charged that the three New York ball clubs, "in cold blood have already killed minor league clubs in their own area, in Newark and Jersey City," through telecasts, and was the first to disclose ABC's plans for the *Game of the Week*. He also hinted that he would use his power in Washington to protect the interests of the minor leagues, which had already seen a 40 percent decline in gate receipts and in which only six percent of teams turned a profit in 1952. (Twenty-six leagues, nearly 45 percent of minor league circuits from AAA to Class D, folded by 1955, and 60 percent of minor league teams had disbanded by 1957; critics claimed the availability of free major league telecasts discouraged fans from paying to see minor league baseball games.) Although the Yankees' general manager George Weiss, who was appointed the American League representative on the major-minor committee, quickly dismissed Johnson's claims and reaffirmed the majors' commitment to the

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<sup>192</sup> "Saigh Urges One-Year Blackout of Baseball TV: Card Owner Cites Attendance Drop," *New York Times*, 27 November 1952, p. 53; James P. Dawson, "Survey of Effect on Television on Minor Leagues to Be Started," *New York Times*, 3 February 1953, p. 28.

minors, Major League Baseball executives were eager to address the attendance and television questions and avoid congressional oversight.<sup>193</sup>

Senator Johnson had an ally in Ford Frick, the former sportswriter and radio broadcaster who became Commissioner of Baseball in 1951. Frick succeeded the former U.S. Senator Happy Chandler, who had negotiated a six-year, six million dollar contract for World Series broadcasts on NBC beginning in 1951. Frick worried that televised baseball was a threat to minor league baseball and because those leagues provided training grounds for future major league ballplayers, television was therefore a threat to the majors themselves. He commissioned a survey, mailed to 45,000 fans in thirteen states and reaching countless others when printed (along with the Commissioner's office address) in an Associated Press column, to gauge the impact of television on major league baseball, going one step further than the major-minor committee; he implemented the ban on *Game of the Week* telecasts within 50 miles of MLB games in 1953; and he unsuccessfully lobbied Congress in 1958, for legislation that would give Major League Baseball the ability to curb radio and television broadcasts. The Justice Department had threatened to investigate MLB for collusion as early as 1954, allowing teams to negotiate television contracts individually but not as an organized body. However, as air rights increasingly became a source of revenue—from 17 percent of income in 1952, to more than 40 percent of income in 1962--Frick relented, agreeing to contracts with both NBC and ABC for as much as \$4 million per season, with a portion of the funds financing a players' pension fund.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*; "Radio-TV Curb Law Urged to Preserve Baseball," *New York Times*, 7 May 1953, p. 41; Murray Schumach, "Big League Baseball Facing Shutout by TV," *New York Times*, 18 September 1955, p. E9; "Frick Says Unlimited Telecasts Will Kill Baseball in Ten Years," *New York Times*, 17 July 1958, p. 21.

<sup>194</sup> Surdam, *The Postwar Yankees*, p. 128-130; John Drebing, "Frick Criticizes Players, Owners, and Courts in Baseball Dinner Speech," *New York Times*, 1 February 1954, p. 27; "Unlim-

Ultimately, despite his best efforts, Frick was unable to establish barriers between baseball and television because the fans demanded it. ABC's *Game of the Week* was an immediate hit, despite being blacked out in major league cities. In 1953, its first year on air, the *Game of the Week* drew a healthy overall rating of 11.4; after adding the Dodgers, Giants, Philadelphia Phillies and Washington Senators to their lineup, ABC drew even more viewers in 1954, and was the fourteenth most-watched program on television with the blackout still intact.<sup>195</sup>

ABC broadcast the *Game of the Week* across 100 stations nationwide, but it was still one of the smaller networks. The success in their programming attracted the attention of CBS, who created their own version of the *Game of the Week* for the start of the 1955 season. The following year, CBS's *Game of the Week* reached fans via 175 stations. It featured games from thirteen of the sixteen Major League teams, with the defending American League champion Yankees and World Series champion and Dodgers, appearing most often over the course of 26 weeks.<sup>196</sup> The central figure in televised baseball, however, was Dizzy Dean.

Born Jay Hanna Dean and allegedly nicknamed "Dizzy" by an army sergeant who caught him practicing pitching by throwing potatoes during KP duty, Dean was a six-foot, two-inch, 182-pound right-handed pitcher who won 150 games with the St. Louis Cardinals and Chicago Cubs, and led the National League four times in strikeouts, victories, and complete games. He

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ited TV Hit as Baseball Peril," *New York Times*, 9 September 1954, p. 43; "Baseball Survey Due," *New York Times*, 18 May 1955, p. 37; Associated Press, "Fans to Prescribe Baseball Remedy," *New York Times*, 26 June 1955, p. S3; "Slow Games Irk Baseball Fans, Survey Ordered by Frick Shows," *New York Times*, 2 August 1955; John Drebing, "Minors Call on Congress to Reopen Inquiry on Baseball," *New York Times*, 6 December, 1957; "Frick Says Unlimited Telecasts Will Kill Baseball in Ten Years," *New York Times*, 17 July 1958, p. 21.

<sup>195</sup> Ham, *Broadcasting Baseball*, locations 2027-2055.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, location 2055; James R Walker and Robert V. Bellamy, Jr., *Center Field Shot: A History of Baseball on Television* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), pp. 103-104.

won the 1934 National League Most Valuable Player Award, and that year combined with his brother Paul “Daffy” Dean to lead the Cardinals to a World Series Championship, winning a combined 49 games (of which Dizzy claimed 30) during the regular season and all four of the Cardinals’ victories in the Series. After retiring with the Cubs in 1941, Dean signed a three-year contract with Falstaff Brewing Company to call games for the St. Louis Cardinals and Browns.<sup>197</sup>

Dizzy Dean was the antithesis of Red Barber in the broadcast booth. He never prepared for a game, refused to keep score during it, and regularly editorialized. Dean was especially critical of the St. Louis Browns, regularly at the bottom of the American League standings, when calling a game in 1947. Browns owner Bill Veeck, one of the most notorious showmen in baseball history, challenged Dean to make good on his claim that he could still pitch better than 90 percent of the Browns’ squad. Dean obliged, and pitched four scoreless innings in the final game of the 1947 season before pulling hamstring rounding first on a single. He left the game and returned to the broadcast booth in 1948.<sup>198</sup>

Dean got his start broadcasting on radio, but television gave him the opportunity to shine. Having already built a reputation by 1953—the same year he made national headlines with his induction to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown—Dean was hired by ABC’s *Game of the Week*. Television was a welcome place for Dean’s antics, which included everything from calling the game and telling stories about his playing days to eating a watermelon or steak on air, falling asleep, abruptly leaving the booth for a bathroom break, and bursting into

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<sup>197</sup> Ham, *Broadcasting Baseball*, loc. 1644-1659; “Dizzy Dean,” *BaseballReference.com*, online <<<http://www.baseballreference.com/>>> accessed 25 November 2013; Patrick Hubler, “A Glimpse of Ol’ Diz’: Dizzy Dean on St. Louis Radio, 1947,” *Gateway Heritage: The Magazine of the Missouri Historical Society*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Fall 2001), pp. 60-65.

<sup>198</sup> Ham, *Broadcasting Baseball*, loc. 1659-1674.

song, usually the “Wabash Cannonball.” Unlike radio, which required the broadcaster to provide information regarding the sights and sounds of the game, television showed audiences the ballpark, batters, and defensive alignments. Early television coverage was noteworthy for what the broadcasters *did not* say. Just as newspapermen were entrusted with the new medium of radio in the 1920s, radio broadcasters were the first telecasters in the 1940s and 1950s. Yet renowned storytellers like Mel Allen and Red Barber were minimalist in their approach to television; they did not waste time on what one could see for oneself. Dizzy Dean, who had once filled an hour rain delay with broadcasting partner Johnny O’Hara without ever mentioning the rain, was never at a loss for words.<sup>199</sup> What those words might be, however, was anybody’s guess.

Dean was raised in Chickalah, Arkansas, a small town in the mountains northwest of Little Rock. He struggled in school as a child and was frequently punished with the hickory stick (a common practice in 1919) or being forced to stand for hours with his nose in a ring drawn on the blackboard. Dean dropped out of school after the second grade, and between the ages of ten and sixteen worked with his father and brothers as a sharecropper and migrant cotton picker across Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. The lack of formal education never hurt Dean, however; he turned it into an asset. On air, he made frequent use of the colloquialism *ain’t*, much to the annoyance of Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis, who banned him from broadcasting the 1944 World Series for his “oral atrocities.” He conjugated *throw* to *throwed*, and *slide* to *slud*; players returned to their *respectable* bases and batters stood *confidentially* at the plate. He regularly mispronounced players’ names: he referred to Stan Musial as “Moo-zeel,” Phil Rizzuto as

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<sup>199</sup> Smith, *The Storytellers*, p. 60; Curt Smith, *The Voice: Mel Allen’s Untold Story* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2007), pp. 97-98; Barber, *The Broadcasters*, pp. 97-98; Frank X. Tolbert, “Dizzy Dean—He’s Not So Dumb!,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 14 July 1951, pp. 25, 102-104.

“Rizzooti,” and once called Chico Carrasquel “that hitter with the three Ks in his name.” He signed off broadcasts reminding his listeners, “Don’t fail to miss tomorrow’s game.”<sup>200</sup>

Dean’s playfulness with language was not a problem for his advertisers, either. In 1943 Falstaff Brewing Company published a booklet titled *The Dizzy Dean Dictionary and What’s What in Baseball*. The booklet translated Dean’s mangled English, with the publisher promising, “Any similarity to good grammar is purely coincidental.” The *Dizzy Dean Dictionary* was so popular, in fact, that it was reissued in 1949. The following year, sponsors gave Dean written copy of advertisements to read over the air. They quickly learned this was not productive when Dean skipped words he could not pronounce, so the advertisers encouraged him to adlib instead. “If them sponsors want me to sell their stuff, they ain’t no use for them to write out pieces for me to read,” Dean was quoted. “If they’ll leave me alone I’ll really sell that stuff just as fast as a monkey can shin up a tree.” And he was right: it was estimated that advertisers made approximately twenty dollars for every one they paid Dean.<sup>201</sup>

It was not that Dean was incapable of proper English or in-game analysis, however. His former broadcasting partner Bud Blattner recalled a game in which Dean did a full half-inning of polished play-by-play. After the inning concluded, he turned to Blattner and said, “That’s enough ‘a that poo. Now Ol’ Diz is gonna make some money,” and slid seamlessly into his vaudevillian persona. “If you answer to ‘Dizzy,’ you’re not supposed to be Phi Beta Kappa,” Blattner reflected, “so he rarely got out of character.” Easily identified by his trademark western at-

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<sup>200</sup> Tolbert, “Dizzy Dean,” pp. 103-104; Barber, *The Broadcasters*, pp. 97-98; Patrick Huber and David Anderson, “‘Butcherin’ Up the English Language a Little Bit’: Dizzy Dean, Baseball Broadcasting and the ‘School Marms’ Uprising of 1946,” *Missouri Historical Review*, vol. 96 (April 2002), pp. 211-220.

<sup>201</sup> Hubler and Anderson, “‘Butcherin’ Up the English Language,” p. 29; Tolbert, “Dizzy Dean,” p. 104.

tire—Stetson hat, cowboy boots, and string tie—and post-baseball 300-pound frame, Dean was everybody’s *pod-nuh*.<sup>202</sup>

He also reflected a shift in broadcasters that occurred with the advent of television. Retired ballplayers increasingly occupied spots in television booths. Advertisers wanted recognizable names, which sometimes meant replacing broadcast veterans with retired players with little dictional dexterity. The New York Yankees were in a late chase for the pennant in 1956 and released 39-year-old shortstop Phil Rizzuto, the only player on their roster who had played in each of the famed Yankees-Dodgers World Series, to make room for Enos Slaughter. At the urging of Carl Badenhausen, an executive at Ballantine Beer, Rizzuto was added to the Yankees’ broadcast booth. This meant firing veteran Jim Woods and teaming Rizzuto, who had never called one inning of play, with Mel Allen and Red Barber, both of whom resented him. Rizzuto did little to endear himself to his fellow broadcasters; he stole signs and interrupted Allen or Barber as they called a pitch. He also trailed off during play-by-play to wish happy birthday to fans and friends, frequently those who owned restaurants or bakeries and sent him snacks. He was easily distracted and was accused of being “both awkward and vacuous.” Rizzuto’s commentary was full of generalities such as, “It’s been some kind of game,” or “Situations like this are really something for the manager.” Allen said that Rizzuto’s biggest concern was finding a trademark phrase. He eventually settled on “Holy cow,” which had long been used by St. Louis’s Harry Caray and tried to dissuade Rizzuto from using it, but much to Caray’s chagrin, Rizzuto refused.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Smith, *The Storytellers*, pp. 59-60; Allen Churchill, “Close-Up of the Undizzy Mr. Dean,” *New York Times*, 22 April 1951, pp. 15, 54.

<sup>203</sup> Smith, *The Voice*, p. 109-110; Smith, *The Storytellers*, p. 61; Barber, *The Broadcasters*, pp. 115-116; J. Anthony Lukas, “How Mel Allen Started a Lifelong Love Affair,” *New York Times*, 12 September 1971, p. 83; Jack O’Connell, “‘Scooter’ Rizzuto Dies at 89,” *MLB.com*, online <<<http://www.mlb.com/news/articles/>>> 14 August 2007, accessed 25 November 2013.



Despite his shortcomings, Rizzuto was popular among fans. Audiences viewed the player-turned-broadcaster with respect, and regarded him as an authority on the game. These new voices in the broadcast booth were seen as more authentic, although they lacked the preparation, erudition, and experience of their radio veteran partners. “When Phil Rizzuto describes the strategy of a double steal,” the *New York Times*’ James Tuite observed, “the viewer knows his commentator wears the spike scars of such combat.” Fans were also more forgiving of former athletes’ partisanship. Where one might criticize Harry Caray or Mel Allen for demonstrating too much enthusiasm for their teams, Dizzy Dean did not receive angry letters for openly cheering for the Cardinals, or Phil Rizzuto for displaying camaraderie toward his former teammates. Tuite concluded: “Some of them lack a mellifluous voice and a smooth delivery, but their know-how, their enthusiasm and their love for sport have brought a new dimension to broadcasting.”<sup>204</sup> In actuality, this was not an innovative approach to broadcasting, but something broadcasters had previously avoided in the name of objectivity; television, with its emphasis on broadcast personalities, merely provided more flexibility.

In time, the Yankees’ broadcast booth shifted entirely toward former players. In November 1964, the Yankees decided not to renew Mel Allen’s contract, after 25 seasons, which included eighteen pennants, twelve World Series titles, and nearly 4,000 games on the air. When Allen had been removed from the World Series’ coverage a month before his contract’s termination, the Yankees recommended Phil Rizzuto as a replacement. That left Red Barber with Rizzuto, Jerry Coleman (who worked for three seasons on the *Game of the Week* before signing with the Yankees in 1963), and the newly-signed Joe Garagiola. Coleman was prone to slips of the tongue, but was otherwise effective. Garagiola worked at developing an on-air personality. He

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<sup>204</sup> James Tuite, “From Playing the Field to Announcing: Then and Now,” *New York Times*, 11 August 1964, p. 101.

lacked formal education, but applied colorful language to his commentary. Rather than say, “the fielder tagged the base runner,” for example, he said, “the guy stapled him to the bag.” Garagiola also brought humor to his broadcasts, and Bob Wolff, who later partnered with Garagiola on NBC’s *Game of the Week*, said he studied timing by watching comedians at nightclubs. According to Wolff, Garagiola insisted on practicing, recalling moments during a game and telling Wolff, “if you’d said this I’d have come back with that.”<sup>205</sup> Over time, the two developed a rapport.

Garagiola did not have the same relationship with Red Barber, however. Barber was fired by the Yankees in 1966 amid reports of discord in the Yankees’ broadcast booth. Although Barber denied the claim, Mike Burke, the Yankees’ president, insisted otherwise. Burke was vague about the team’s decision to cut ties with the popular Mel Allen, saying only, “he wasn’t what he used to be.” Regarding Barber, however, he was more assertive: “I fired Barber personally because he was giving us a terrible time in the broadcast booth, squabbling with Rizzuto, going out of his way to embarrass Garagiola on the air and make him look stupid.” For his part, Barber claimed that Garagiola constantly interrupted him mid-sentence, and that he told Burke, “you have fired the wrong broadcaster.” Although Barber never revealed who he thought should be fired, all signs pointed to Garagiola.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Val Adams, “Yankee Schedule Omits Allen,” *New York Times*, 25 November 1964, p. 75; Val Adams, “Red Barber Dismissed After 13 Years as Yankee Broadcaster,” *New York Times*, 27 September 1966; Smith, *The Storytellers*, p. 65; Smith, *The Voice*, p. 3.

<sup>206</sup> The *New York Times*’ Val Adams also suggested that Barber was fired for pointing out that there were only 413 fans in attendance at Yankee Stadium for a game against the Baltimore Orioles. Barber had called attention to the low attendance and asked the cameramen to pan the stadium to show viewers the empty seats. The director and cameramen refused to comply. In calling attention to the poor attendance, Barber was accurately reporting, but also going against team executives and advertising officials, who never wanted to call attention to losing teams or negative characteristics for fear of losing viewership. Val Adams, “Red Barber Says Ex-Athletes

Barber's firing left the Yankees with a broadcast team comprised entirely of former ballplayers. This was a noteworthy change of direction for the team that had branded itself on professionalism, and employed two radio broadcasting titans (Allen and Barber) during their dynasty. With that dynasty in decline, CBS bought the Yankees from Dan Topping and Del Webb in 1964. The ownership transfer signaled a literal merger of baseball and television. Barber and Allen were famous voices, but in this new age of broadcasting, advertisers wanted famous faces, and former ballplayers filled that void.<sup>207</sup>

Though the styles differed between radio and television broadcasts, the effects were essentially the same. The most notable was that the game, as told by a broadcaster, was broken down into a series of one-on-one confrontations: pitcher vs. batter; batter vs. fielder; runner vs. fielder. This was the nature of the competition, the fundamentals of baseball as a sport, and it heightened and personalized the drama. As a result, the broadcaster related individual action that generated team results. In that famous playoff game in October of 1951, Bobby Thomson and Ralph Branca competed against one another – each a representative of a team, reliant on an individual to win the game. Although the home run was Thomson's, and reflected in his individual box score, the Giants as a team won the pennant.

This was true in other broadcasts, as well. During Game 7 of the 1952 World Series, Red Barber credited Duke Snider's hitting – setting a record for total bases in the Fall Classic – with

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Take Over Sports Broadcasting," *New York Times*, 30 September 1966, p. 78; Adams, "Red Barber Dismissed"; J. Anthony Lucas, "How Mel Allen Started a Lifelong Love Affair," *New York Times*, 12 September 1971, p. 82; Val Adams, "Red Barber Attacks Garagiola in Book; TV Reunion Canceled," *New York Times*, 21 March, 1968, p. 64.

<sup>207</sup> Lukas, "How Mel Allen Started a Lifelong Love Affair," p. 83; Ham, *Broadcasting Baseball*, loc. 1973.

keeping the Dodgers alive, as the rest of the team was offensively unreliable. He similarly singled out Mickey Mantle as a difference maker, having hit a game-winning home run in Game 6. Such commentary was often means of filling time between the batter stepping up to the plate and the pitcher delivering the ball. Broadcasters routinely filled this space with descriptions of the batter's stance, the pitcher's actions toward the ball or his defense, or a summation of the game to that point (score, inning, number of outs, runners on base, the batter's previous successes or failures at the plate). Yet the effect of this chatter was to break down the game into a contest between two figures. As Barber himself remarked, "It's remorseless. All the years building a team, all the competition, grinding year after year, to rely on one play from one player could cost you the Series."<sup>208</sup>

Four years later, in another battle of the New York rivals, Bob Wolff and Bob Neal were tasked with calling Don Larsen's perfect game. The perfect game is the ultimate expression of baseball's individualism. It refers to a minimum nine innings of play in which an offense failed to get a runner on base, through hit, walk, error, or hit batsman. In the record books and statistical compilations, the pitcher is credited with the perfect game, despite his reliance on the eight other players on the field as defense, as well as his offense generating runs to secure victory.

There had long been a taboo about calling a no-hitter – specifically, that it was bad luck to acknowledge it was happening. In 1956, broadcasters faced the challenge of selling the action to fans outside the stadium without outright naming the event in progress. Several references were made instead to the crowd, "keeping a watchful eye on the field and the scoreboard," until finally, at the end of the eighth inning, Wolff commented on the "tremendous roar" of the crowd

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<sup>208</sup> "World Series, 1952: Game 7 (Brooklyn Dodgers vs. New York Yankees)," 7 October 1952, catalog ID B:09462, Paley Center for Media, New York, NY.

as “Larsen has retired 24 in a row.” After Larsen struck out Dale Mitchell to end the game, Wolff summed up the pitcher’s performance as “tremendous, superb, gorgeous, wonderful, magical, perfect. You supply the adjectives because we saw something here at the Yankee Stadium this afternoon that has never happened in all of the history of baseball and in 52 World Series.”<sup>209</sup>

Pregame commentary had focused on Larsen, who exited Game 2 of the series after an abysmal one and two-thirds innings in which he squandered a 6-0 lead by walking four batters and allowing a hit to Gil Hodges and sacrifice fly to Roy Campanella. Wolff and Neal declared Game 5 a “must-win” for the Yankees, who would be heading back to Brooklyn for the final game(s) of the series, and Yankees’ pitchers were unaccustomed to working within the much smaller confines of Ebbets Field. The two broadcasters repeated this narrative throughout the game, referencing Larsen’s control and use of an abbreviated delivery (no windup), quickening his movement to the plate and aiding in throwing consistency. They also reminded made comparisons to Larsen’s work in Game 2, providing previous matchups as they traveled the lineup. By the time Larsen struck out Mitchell, the narrative had been firmly established, even if the broadcasters had avoided using the terms *no-hitter* or *perfect game*. They began with a game of heightened importance for the Yankees, placed on the shoulders of an as-yet-unsuccessful pitcher, who redeemed himself on the mound by pitching the most unlikely and masterful game in postseason history. Bill Corum further lauded Larsen in the postgame wrap-up: “California here he came and down the Dodgers went. Throwing only 97 pitches in a ballgame in which no man reached first base, this somewhat in-and-out pitcher, who came to the Yankees from the Balti-

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<sup>209</sup> “1956 World Series, Game 5 (Brooklyn Dodgers vs. New York Yankees), part 3 of 3,” 8 October 1956, catalog ID R:8776, Paley Center for Media.

more Orioles as a bit of a throw-in on the Bob Turley trade, made history this afternoon that may never be repeated again.”<sup>210</sup> Little mention was made of the Yankees as a team, and coverage in the “World Series Wrap-Up” hosted by former Dodgers Charlie Dressen and Rex Barney only deviated from Larsen to briefly mention Mickey Mantle’s fourth-inning home run, which was itself a segue to a commercial for Viceroy cigarettes. The awkwardness of the commercial demonstrated the unpredictability of the game, which made a hero out of an unlikely player.<sup>211</sup>

The radio and television media necessitated careful summations of action that allowed the narrative to change at any moment and a hero (or scapegoat) to emerge unexpectedly. Unlike print journalism, which had the benefit of hindsight, broadcasts were minute-by-minute breakdowns of the game. Baseball, with its unusual relationship to time, allowed the announcer the freedom to set the scene for his audience, but still required quick reflexes and astute analysis. The announcer was also responsible for directing his audience’s attention and understanding. In the ballpark, the fan can grasp the entirety of the field; one can watch any of the ten or more players on the field at any given time. The fan at home, or in the car, was reliant on the broadcaster’s voice as their eyes. If his attention was on the runner at first, so was his audience’s; if he focused on the pitcher as he took the rosin bag, so did his audience. Radio announcers had more

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<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*; “1956 World Series, Game 5 (Brooklyn Dodgers vs. New York Yankees), part 1 of 3,” 8 October 1956, catalog ID R:8774, Paley Center for Media; “1956 World Series, Game 5 (Brooklyn Dodgers vs. New York Yankees), part 2 of 3,” 8 October 1956, catalog ID R:8775, Paley Center for Media.

<sup>211</sup> During the “World Series Wrap Up,” Dressen and Barney said Mantle’s home run was reminiscent of Eddie Matthews, then launched into the advertising copy, “Hey, did you know Eddie smokes Viceroy cigarettes?” Wolff and Neal had greater difficulty segueing to a commercial after the eighth inning. The broadcasters had finally acknowledged the lack of Dodgers baserunners and then had to pivot awkwardly about Larsen not needing a pickoff move to a pre-recorded Gillette commercial of Whitey Ford explaining his (a different kind of “close shave”). “1956 World Series Game 5, part 3 of 3,” 8 October 1956, Paley Center for Media.

flexibility in this than their television counterparts. As Red Barber explained to Bob Costas: “In radio, the broadcaster is the supreme artist. The listener gets nothing the broadcaster does not give him...as though he were a painter. On radio, you paint the whole canvas any way you want to paint it.”<sup>212</sup> In contrast, television broadcasters responded to their directors, who chose camera angles and dictated commentary by their choices. Nevertheless, it was the announcer’s job to provide an explanation of what the audience saw and, where possible, *why*.

For broadcasters like Barber, this required thorough pre-game preparation. One could not adequately report the game on air without doing sufficient research prior to it. “Seventy-five to ninety percent of a play-by-play broadcast is done before you get to the booth,” Barber wrote, “done by deep and thorough pregame preparation.”<sup>213</sup> This preparation was necessary because of the audience’s dependence on the broadcaster for all of their game information; he had to be aware of the players, their strengths and weaknesses, and any relevant contextual information. The broadcaster had to provide his audience with the game details, defensive alignment, weather, and even crowd responses. He also was responsible for setting the tone. Perhaps no broadcaster was (or is) better at this than the Dodgers’ Vin Scully. Calling Larsen’s perfect game, Scully conveyed the tension of the final inning: “Well, all right...Let’s all take a deep breath, as we go to the most dramatic ninth inning in the history of baseball. I’m going to sit back, light up, and hope I don’t chew the cigarette to pieces.” When the final strike was called, Scully, a disciple of the minimalist Barber, declared, “Got him! The greatest game ever pitched in baseball history by Don Larsen,” and then let the crowd noise take over.<sup>214</sup> Scully adhered to the dictate not to men-

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<sup>212</sup> Douglass, *Listening In*, p. 216; Barber, *The Broadcasters*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>213</sup> Douglass, *Listening In*, p. 211.

<sup>214</sup> Smith, *Pull Up a Chair*, p. 50.

tion the no-hitter while in progress, but he still managed to convey the atmosphere of the game, creating a tone of anxious anticipation and then allowing the celebratory crowd to do the rest.

For listeners, Scully has generated many images, through victory and defeat, of hope, wonder, sadness and longing. When calling the final game of between the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants before the teams departed for the West Coast in 1957, Scully said: "I don't know how you feel about it at the other end of these microphones, where you're sitting at home or driving a car or on the beach or anywhere, but, I know, sitting here, watching the Polo Grounds, you want 'em to *take their time*... You just feel like saying, now, don't run off the field so fast fellahs, let's take it easy, we're going to take one long lingering look at both of you." He interspersed his play-by-play with color commentary of the Polo Grounds and his own memories as a kid growing up in the Bronx. Here Scully was identifying himself with the fans, recognizing the sadness of the last game in New York between these crosstown rivals and invoking nostalgia. By combining baseball with his memories of childhood, Scully recognized that the final game at the Polo Grounds was a cultural moment and gave it symbolic weight. It was not that the Giants and Dodgers were disbanding as teams, nor that they would never play against one another again, but that they were tied to their neighborhoods and fans, and in leaving marked an end of that relationship, and potentially of youth.

Scully, of course, went with the Dodgers to Los Angeles to build ties to a new community. He was on hand at Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on May 7, 1959, to cover a night celebrating Roy Campanella, the Brooklyn catcher who was paralyzed in a car accident in 1958. Campanella had never played in Los Angeles, and had happened with the other Dodgers, it fell to Scully to introduce him to the West Coast. On Roy Campanella Night, the New York Yankees played an exhibition game against the Los Angeles Dodgers before 93,000 spectators, with the



proceeds going to pay Campanella's medical expenses. Before the game, Campanella was wheeled onto the field and to the mound by his former teammate Pee Wee Reese, as the lights were dimmed and members of the crowd lit matches. Poetically, Scully described the scene:

The lights are going out in this final tribute to Roy Campanella, and everyone at the ballpark, 93,000 people, are asked in silent tribute to light a match. And we would like to think that as 93,000 people light a match, that would be 93,000 prayers for a great man...The lights are now starting to come out, like thousands and thousands of fireflies, starting deep in center field, glittering around to left, and slowly the entire ballpark—a sea of light at the Coliseum. Let there be a prayer for every light, and wherever you are, maybe you in silent tribute to Roy Campanella can also say a prayer for his well-being...Roy Campanella, for thousands of times, made the trip to the mound to help somebody out: a tired pitcher, a disgusted youngster, a boy perhaps who had his heart broken in the game of baseball. And tonight, on his last trip to the mound, the city of Los Angeles says hello.”<sup>215</sup>

He ended with “hello,” a mark of greeting, promise, and optimism. Although Campanella's career had ended tragically with a skid on ice, this was not a night for tears. It was a night for prayers, yes, but also hope. Scully, whose job description required the blow-by-blow of competition, was now directing his audience to something entirely different: camaraderie, friendship, and respect. He did so by calling attention to Campanella, first as a player and figure of support for his teammates, and then as a man deserving the same after a career-ending and life-altering accident.

Scholar F. Scott Regan called baseball broadcasters America's “griots,” referring to the revered “keeper of the tales” in parts of Western Africa, and examining some of Scully's broadcasts one might understand why. For Regan, the pacing of a baseball game required “an announcer to “transform himself into a storyteller, using the pauses to entertain and to provide contextual significance, to create a sense of communion between the event and the listener.” He lik-

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<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

ened announcing to the Homeric tradition, arguing that “the game must be reported accurately, but reported through the eyes of an historian and described by a poet who has an ear for the romance of the game.” In doing so, the broadcaster fulfilled the griot’s role of sharing history and singing songs of praise, while also entertaining and representing traditional values.<sup>216</sup> Broadcasters conveyed values from a position of authority. This was especially true in radio, where the broadcaster served as the listeners’ eyes and ears. As Susan Douglass argued, listening is an active experience – words and tone of voice are one’s only clues, requiring the audience to use their imaginations to envision people actions and emotions, and use their other senses to create the setting within their minds. By giving him their attention, the audience allowed themselves to be influenced by the broadcaster and his perspective on proper conduct. If baseball was a cultural metaphor, as Regan contended, broadcasters also drew conclusions about American life.<sup>217</sup>

Baseball fans were, in effect, placing their trust in salesmen. Broadcasts sold the game of baseball, the individual teams, and their sponsors’ products. From its onset, team officials believed they could reach new fans by making their games available on radio and television. Sponsors’ names were mentioned at the outset of the program, and commercials were laced throughout. The broadcaster had to be careful not to sour his audience; he had to build their trust and maintain it through objectivity. Some had more difficulty with this than others. Mel Allen and Harry Caray faced criticism for being homers – broadcasters who were fans of their teams and accused of bias in their commentary. Neither denied partisanship. Allen argued that he was not prejudiced, however; his support of the Yankees did not deter him from positive commentary

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<sup>216</sup> F. Scott Regan, “The Baseball Announcer: America’s ‘Griot,’” in *The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, 1990*, ed. Alvin Hall (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991), pp. 212-217.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217; Douglass, *Listening In*, pp. 4, 200-201.

toward their opponents. Caray went even further and said that he believed his responsibility was ultimately to the fans, and that he took his privileged position as a way of mirroring their experience: “I always contended that if you put a microphone in front of anyone sitting in the bleachers and told him to start talking about the game he was watching, he would sound very much the way I do.” Caray also acknowledged that successful ballclubs were good for business, and so cheering for his employer was partially in self-interest, because if the team won, the audience increased and so did the broadcaster’s value.<sup>218</sup>

Allen’s and Caray’s exuberance, admired or abhorred, was a means of promoting the team, and by extension, selling beer, cigarettes, and razor blades. In fact, Caray won his job in St. Louis by telling an advertiser that he was right for it because it was impossible to ignore him. Caray set himself apart from broadcasters he found bland and boring, who he thought called a baseball game the way they delivered the morning crop reports. Working as a staff announcer at KXOK in St. Louis in 1944, Caray met with Edward K. Griesedieck of the Griesedieck Brothers Brewery to apply for a job broadcasting Cardinals games. Griesedieck was initially hesitant, telling Caray he preferred announcer Frank Laux because he did not have to break his concentration from his cup of coffee and newspaper while listening to Laux call a game. Caray countered that Griesedieck could not read the newspaper while Caray announced because

I make you pay attention to the game, I don’t *let* you read a newspaper! Yet here you are, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to sponsor baseball, and when your commercial comes on, when your handpicked announcer is selling your product, you’re busy reading the paper! You’re wasting your money with that kind of announcer...You need someone who’s going to keep the fan interested in the game. Because if they’re paying attention to the game, they’ll pay attention to the commercial!<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Smith, *The Voice*, p. 90; Harry Caray and Bob Verde, *Holy Cow!* (New York: Villard Books, 1989), pp. 73-74.

<sup>219</sup> Caray, *Holy Cow!*, p. 64.

Harry Caray identified with the fan through his broadcasting style, which was characterized by excitement in winning moments and disappointment at losses. Having built this relationship with fans, and maintaining their attention by through volume, he was able to sell his advertisers' products as well as the call the play-by-play.

Having captured the audience's attention, Caray and his colleagues were then able to realize Larry MacPhail's vision of turning a "game played by two teams into a contest involving interesting personalities who had hopes, fears, families, troubles, blue or brown eyes."<sup>220</sup> The broadcaster was a mediator of the ballplayer's reputation. Fans did not have the access to players that broadcasters had, and many, like Caray's broadcast partner Jack Buck, considered it an essential part of their role to take advantage of that proximity and provide fans answers to their questions. He specifically mentioned talking to the Cardinals' Stan Musial about his transition from outfield to first base and Musial's discomfort with a first baseman's glove. "He doesn't like it," Buck reported. "A new glove is being designed for that position. It will be more like a fielder's glove. Stan may use it one of these days."<sup>221</sup> The comment may have seemed like chatter, but for Buck it was the product of putting himself in his audience's place and asking questions they would want to know; the answers were given a privileged spot in his telecasts to the play-by-play, because the audience could see whether the ball would drop for a hit, or be turned into a double play. In this particular example, Buck also served to humanize the figure of Musial, explaining an awkward moment of transition for a great ballplayer to a new position.

The broadcaster had to be careful not to humanize his subjects too much, however. After all, advertisers sold their products by selling the game of baseball, and wanted to be linked to

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<sup>220</sup> Barber, *The Broadcasters*, 126-127.

<sup>221</sup> John P. Shanley, "Baseball Announcer Makes a Hit," *New York Times*, 15 June 1958, p. X11.

winners. Broadcasters created this image of “winners” by speaking to communal values. Harry Caray lauded Stan Musial for putting the team before his batting average and swinging at a ball one or two inches off the plate if he thought it would drive in runs. Ernie Harwell praised Willie Mays’s joy for playing as much as his talent. Mel Allen commended Yogi Berra for fine play after “the goat horns were on him” for a misplay that led to two runs.<sup>222</sup> In such instances, broadcasters extended the accomplishments of ballplayers beyond the feats of the field, and toward such noble goals as sportsmanship, dedication, and fortitude.

Not every team fielded such players, however. Broadcasters were challenged by losing teams. They were required to remain upbeat, could never let on that a game failed to excite, for fear of losing their audience and upsetting their advertisers. Yet many broadcasters said that while this was a hurdle, it was not insurmountable, and ultimately made them better storytellers. “Less game drama means the sportscaster has to work harder to hold viewership with stories,” Bob Wolff said. Red Barber broke into Major League Baseball with the 1934 Cincinnati Reds, and credited their shortcomings with improving his reporting. This was fodder for critics, though, who expressed disbelief at cheerful broadcasts of plodding games and outright reproach during telecasts, when audiences could see mediocrity for themselves. The skilled broadcaster could turn such mediocrity to his advantage, however, by seeing baseball as a male soap opera, “a daily saga of victories and defeats and triumphs and losses” in which “every day connects with the day before, and every day connects with the next day, and one year connects with the next.” By placing it in such a context, the broadcaster was able to build drama over the course of

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<sup>222</sup> Caray, *Holy Cow!*, p. 110-111; Keegan, *Ernie Harwell*, pp. 112-113; “World Series, 1952: Game 6, Raw Master Reel (Reel 1&2), Brooklyn Dodgers vs. New York Yankees,” 6 October 1952, catalog ID B:09465-A, Paley Center for Media.

the season, making the team victories and individual triumphs much more meaningful when they happened.<sup>223</sup>

Few broadcasters would be likely to characterize their work in such a matter. Most thought of their work as a combination of storytelling and baseball reporting. Even Red Barber, the only broadcaster to really analyze his work, saw it in the most simple terms. When reflecting on Branch Rickey's decision to sign Jackie Robinson, Barber admitted that he considered quitting his job with the Dodgers. As a man born in Mississippi and raised in Florida, he struggled with the idea of integration, though ultimately determined that it was only an "accident of birth" that he had been born to white parents. Upon further reflection, Barber concluded that it was not his job to broadcast Jackie Robinson, but rather the ball: "[B]asically, primarily, you broadcast the ball—*what* is happening to it. All you have to do is tell the people what is going on...All I had to do when he came—and I didn't say *if* he came because after Mr. Rickey talked to me I knew he was coming—all I had to do when he came was treat him like a man, a fellow man, treat him as a ballplayer, broadcast the ball."<sup>224</sup> Yet in filling in the details of what happened to the ball and by whom, Barber and his colleagues did much to influence their audience's understanding of the game and build the reputations of ballplayers.

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<sup>223</sup> Smith, *The Storytellers*, p. 160; Barber, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat*, p. 211; Lukas, "How Mel Allen Started for a Lifelong Love Affair with Baseball," p. 82; Douglass, *Listening In*, p. 202.

<sup>224</sup> Barber, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat*, pp. 273-274.

Chapter 4:  
**Baseball Gets Boyish:**  
Bouton's *Ball Four* and the End of Baseball Hagiography

The 1960s saw tremendous social change in the United States. The Civil Rights Movement, women's liberation and sexual revolution changed the ways people related to one another and their government. Social movements were leading the country toward freedom of expression and information.

As the Sixties became the Seventies, university students, politically active in the Civil Rights and antiwar movements, began the push for free speech. This movement, led by students at the University of California at Berkeley declaring their rights to participate in social and political debates,<sup>225</sup> coupled with revelations about war atrocities in Vietnam, and created a desire for public disclosure throughout the nation. The "public disclosure" movement, as it might be called, manifested itself in the publication of the Pentagon Papers, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's exposure of the Watergate scandal, and biographies exposing the personal lives of some of America's most popular figures. As a consequence, it toppled authority figures, be it in the resignation of Richard Nixon in the aftermath of Watergate, or the lessening of heroes, such as former Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, following the publication of books about their extramarital affairs.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> For more information, see: Robert Cohen, Robert and Reginald E. Zelnik, ed., *The Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); David Lance Goinces, *The Free Speech Movement: Coming of Age in the 1960s* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed, 1993).

Marjorie Smelstor and Carol Billman proposed that the movement toward public disclosure and its publications was a product of changes in culture created by the media. The public, according to the authors, had come to relish the gossip provided by the media, labeled “personality journalism.” This 1970s phenomenon changed the public’s attitudes toward its leaders, and gave “life and vicarious experience to our more ordinary existences.”<sup>227</sup>

Personality journalism was not limited to politics, however. In 1970, Jim Bouton, described by sportswriter Marty Noble as a “personality who could pitch, not a pitcher with a personality,”<sup>228</sup> published *Ball Four*, and revolutionized the sports biography by telling all about his life—and those of his teammates—on and off the field. Like Jim Brosnan’s *The Long Season*, published ten years before *Ball Four*, Bouton’s book took an insider’s look at professional baseball; however, Bouton was willing to divulge much more about the clubhouse and traveling lives of ballplayers than Brosnan, making his book radically different than its predecessor, and forever altering the format of the sports biography and memoir.

Jim Bouton had come up as a fastball pitcher in the New York Yankees’ organization. Between 1963 and 1964, Bouton won 38 games and two in the World Series. However, as the Yankees began their decline in 1965, so did Bouton, falling to a mysterious arm ailment (also known as a sore arm). The Yankees sold his contract in 1968. After a brief stint in the minor

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<sup>226</sup> Marjorie Smelstor and Carol Billman, “Ballyhoo and Debunk: The Unmaking of American Political and Sports Heroes,” *North Dakota Quarterly* 46 (Summer 1978), 5-6; Jeffrey Potter, *Men, Money and Magic: The Story of Dorothy Schiff* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1976); Judith Exner, *My Story* (New York: Grove Press, 1977).

<sup>227</sup> Smelstor and Billman, “Ballyhoo and Debunk,” pp. 6-7.

<sup>228</sup> Marty Noble, interview by author, e-mail correspondence, 12 December 2007. Mr. Noble is currently a features writer for MLB.com. He began covering sports in 1970 for the *Herald-News* in Passaic, New Jersey, although he was predominantly covering high school sports when Bouton’s book was published. He began traveling in 1974 as a reporter for the *Bergen Record*, and became a traveling beat reporter for Long Island’s *Newsday* in 1981, covering mostly the Mets until moving to MLB.com in 2004.



leagues, Bouton made it back on a Major League roster as a relief pitcher—now favoring a knuckleball instead of a fastball—on the expansion Seattle Pilots in 1969. During that season, in which he was traded to the Houston Astros in July, Bouton kept a diary of his daily experiences and memories of his time with the Yankees. The diary was published with the title *Ball Four* the following season, while Bouton was still an active player. It sent shock waves through baseball, telling all about the national pastime, which had fiercely guarded its wholesome image.<sup>229</sup>

Consistent with personality journalism and public disclosure in the 1970s, Bouton's book revealed that baseball's heroes were flawed individuals. Bouton did not hesitate to name names, and his frankness bothered those in Organized Baseball—players, coaches, managers, executives and, especially, Commissioner Bowie Kuhn. Audiences devoured the book, and most enjoyed its realism, although some took exception to Bouton's comments, particularly those about the All-American hero Mickey Mantle.

*Ball Four's* revelations undermined the popular understanding of the athlete-as-hero. Bouton revealed players as immature, sex-obsessed young men who liked to drink and had to stifle laughter after losing, or when listening to their managers and coaches. *Ball Four* is much less a text that celebrates masculinity than it was an emasculating text; rather than celebrate baseball's heroes, it presented them as boys who never grew up. Given this insight, as well as the manner in which the book was written, it was of little surprise that Bouton's book met with such criticism. Bouton, though seldom directing his comments inward, was just as weakened by *Ball Four* as his former teammates, not for what he told about himself, but because he broke the clubhouse code and betrayed a trust that was far more important than pitching statistics or games won.

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<sup>229</sup> Jim Bouton, *Ball Four*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, ed. Leonard Shecter (New York: MacMillan Books, 1991).

## BOUTON AND THE CHIPMUNKS

Prior to *Ball Four*, the conventional sports biography followed, as trained paleontologist and moon-lighting baseball historian Stephen Jay Gould once commented, a hagiographic model. This convention limited “treatment to the heroic aspects of on-field play, told as an epic, so that the tragedies of defeat (borne with stoic honor) received equal space with the joys of victory.”<sup>230</sup> The sports biography reinforced the Horatio Alger myth of the self-made man, who, through dedication and determination was able to rise above his circumstances and become an American hero. *Ball Four*, however, dismissed this concept of heroism, and reflected changes in journalism to create a new form of sports biography, the “kiss-and-tell” biography, or, as baseball traditionalists sneered, the “sweat-and-snitch” biography.

Professional sports heroes affirmed the Alger myth. Many biographies suggested that baseball’s heroes had arisen from lower positions in society; Babe Ruth promoted his reputation as an orphan (although he was actually a saloonkeeper’s son who was sent away to a reform school at a young age), and Lou Gehrig and Joe DiMaggio were the sons of immigrants. Their ascent up the social ladder supported the Alger myth and value of social mobility, while also becoming symbols of group and national pride. DiMaggio went from an Italian baseball player to a national hero through changing images in the press; reporters applied the archetypes of national hero and DiMaggio was no longer seen as an ethnic hero, precisely at the time the United States was unifying in the Second World War, and maintain this reputation throughout the 1950s.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, “Good Sports and Bad Sports,” *New York Times Review of Books* 42 (March 1995).

<sup>231</sup> Joseph C. Carroll, “Two Sociological Perspectives on Sports Hedonism,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 2 (Spring 1983), pp. 44-47; Anthony Yoseloff, “From Ethnic Hero to National Icon: The Americanization of Joe DiMaggio,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 16 (September 1999), pp. 1-20.

The writers were also responsible for sports biographies, contributing to the hagiographic model seen before *Ball Four*. Player memoirs were often longer versions of popular “as told to” articles, reinforcing hero myths and conveying “the gratitude of men who might never have emerged from the coal mine, or debarked from the fishing boat, if God had not granted, and the public appreciated, their fortunate skills of body.”<sup>232</sup> However, beginning with Jim Brosnan’s *The Long Season*, player memoirs shifted to reflect the ordinary aspects of the game; by the time Bouton produced *Ball Four*, a new breed of sports journalism was taking an irreverent look at the national pastime.

*The Long Season* was Jim Brosnan’s diary of the 1959 season, which he spent with the St. Louis Cardinals and Cincinnati Reds. Brosnan was a rarity in baseball; he was an intellectual, nicknamed “Professor” by his teammates and known to have a small library in his locker. While his teammates were reading comic books, Brosnan was reading Civil War histories. *The Long Season* reflected the author’s intelligence; eschewing a ghost-writer, Brosnan published his own account, a well-written diary indicating a love of language.<sup>233</sup>

Brosnan’s memoir was unique in that it offered an inside-the-clubhouse view of professional baseball, from an informed observer and rather ordinary ballplayer. Brosnan presented himself as an average ballplayer, which he was; prior to the 1959 season, he had a 29-29 career record as a pitcher. Brosnan arguably became well-known only through his writing, which astonished audiences who were as much amazed by his literary ability as they were by the book’s revelations. In response to *The Long Season*, Brosnan encountered players who felt he had be-

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<sup>232</sup> Gould, “Good Sports and Bad Sports.”

<sup>233</sup> Jim Brosnan, *The Long Season*, third edition (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1960; Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001); *Washington Post*, 7 April 2004.

trayed the “clubhouse code,” that creed which read, “What you say here, what you see here, let it stay here when you leave here.” Brosnan offered stories of clubhouse meetings in which coaches discussed signs and base running; he talked about “dusting,” an intentional pitch designed to move the hitter away from the plate; most significantly, he failed to uphold the saintly image of ballplayers.<sup>234</sup>

Although Brosnan’s book failed to keep the clubhouse code and dared to present ballplayers as they actually were, it would be misleading to suggest that the hagiographic model of baseball biography was all that was available prior to *The Long Season*. In actuality, while the saintly portrayal of ballplayers was standard, authors did acknowledge flaws in their heroes. For example, biographies of Ruth did not ignore his enormous appetite (physical or sensual), although they did not extensively pursue it. Admission of flaws was necessary to heroic depictions, however, because, as Marshall Smelser wrote:

Every hero must have his human flaw which he shares with his follows. In Ruth it was hedonism, as exaggerated in folklore and fable. If he had been nothing more than an exceptional hitter, he would have been respected, but he attracted more than respect. The public love of Ruth approached idolatry, and his reputed carnality was necessary to the folk hero pattern...He fit the public image of what a highly paid ballplayer *ought* to be, and, if he didn’t really fit, the people wished to believe any legend that would shape the image. (They still do.) The combination of great skill on the field and a shared flaw off the field made him the most admired and theatrical man in the game.<sup>235</sup>

As in most other instances, Ruth was again an exception in baseball biography, his legend exceeding that of all others and his hedonistic reputation therefore undeniable (although still not

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<sup>234</sup> Brosnan, *The Long Season*; *Washington Post*, 7 April 2004; Noble, interview by author; Moss Klein, interview by author, e-mail correspondence, 7 December 2007. Mr. Klein is a sports-writer for the *Star-Ledger* in Newark, New Jersey. He covered baseball more than for 35 years, beginning as a New York Yankees’ beat writer and columnist for 17 years, from 1976-2002. He is co-author of the book *Damned Yankees: A No-Holds Barred Account of Life with ‘Boss’ Steinbrenner* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), about the Yankees in the George Steinbrenner era.

<sup>235</sup> Marshall Smelser, “The Babe on Balance,” *American Scholar* 44 (Spring 1975), pp. 299-304.

fully disclosed). Yet other heroes also had publicized human flaws, including Joe DiMaggio and Mickey Mantle. In both instances, these flaws were physical, as the players suffered injuries. These concessions humanized their subjects,<sup>236</sup> and yet also promoted them in that they now had another source of adversity to overcome. While heroes like DiMaggio and Mantle had to deal with physical pain and aging much the same way their fans did, their ability on the field in the face of such adversity made them all the more impressive to the public. Brosnan's decision, therefore, to depict players as they were was not novel, but the manner in which he described their lack of sobriety or loyalty differed from the humanizing flaws commonly associated with baseball heroes.

At least one group of writers appreciated Brosnan's approach to sports writing. The "chipmunks" were a group of young writers predominantly from evening papers with leisurely deadlines, so named by veteran sportswriter Jimmy Cannon because they chatted in the pressbox during games while others, with early deadlines, had to write. Included in this group were Vic Ziegel of the *New York Daily News*, the *New York Times*' George Vescey, and *Newsday*'s Stan Isaacs and Steve Jacobson. Chipmunk journalism began in the early 1960s and was characterized by an irreverent view of the game; the chipmunks were always looking for a new approach, and broadened the spectrum of baseball coverage to include more than game stories.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Yoseloff, "From Ethnic Hero to National Icon," p. 14; Smelstor and Billman, "Ballyhoo and Debunk," pp. 8-9.

<sup>237</sup> A famous story, noted by both Jack O'Connell and Marty Noble, was the "breast or bottle" question. It was during an exchange the writers were having with Ralph Terry, the Yankee pitcher and MVP of the 1962 World Series. During the session, Terry was called away because of phone call from his wife, congratulating him on being named World Series MVP. When he returned he explained that his wife had been at home, feeding their newborn. "Breast or bottle?" asked a chipmunk, most likely either Stan Isaacs or Stan Hochman, a Philadelphia reporter. This story is meant to characterize the irreverence of chipmunk journalism, and their willingness to detail those personal and occasionally trivial factors that traditional reporters eschewed in favor

Leonard Shecter, the sports editor of *Look* magazine was also a member of the chipmunks, although he did not seem to share their joy in sports. Shecter has been described as a bitter and anti-establishment figure who, according to the *New York Daily News*' Bill Madden, "took such a jaundiced view of sports and the people in it. He seemed to take particular pleasure in destroying idols."<sup>238</sup> Shecter's book, *Jocks*, was a no-holds-barred account of professional sports and its coverage. Shecter's book criticized the commercialism of sports and the deifying of its stars. In his introduction, he described the book as follows:

It's about the cynicism of American sports, the dump, the fix, the thrown game, the shaved points, the cross and the double cross and the 'I've got mine, bub.' It's about the newspapers and the newspapermen who shill for sports. It's about television, the conscienceless and ruthless partner of sports. It's about the spoiled heroes of sports, shiny on the outside, decaying with meanness underneath. It's about the greedy professionals and posturing amateurs, the crooks, the thieves, the knaves and the fools.<sup>239</sup>

*Jocks* was first published in 1969, one year before Shecter collaborated with Jim Bouton on *Ball Four*. Actually, it was on Shecter's recommendation that Bouton wrote *Ball Four*.

In an editor's note to *I'm Glad You Didn't Take It Personally*, Bouton's follow-up to *Ball Four*, Shecter admitted that he believed the world was ready for a new baseball diary, a "down-to-earth, honest-to-goodness report of the day-to-day activities of a real, live, sweaty baseball

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of impersonal, objective journalism. See also, George Plimpton, *The Norton Book of Sports* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), p. 19.

<sup>238</sup> Bill Madden, interview with author, email correspondence, 11 December 2007. Mr. Madden wrote for the *New York Daily News*, and has been with the paper since 1978, serving as the Yankees' beat writer, 1980-1988, and then columnist until 2015. He had previously spent nine years with United Press International, having written about baseball, track and field and the Olympics. He is the co-author of *Damned Yankees* with Moss Klein, as well as the author of *Pride of October: What It Was to Be Young and a Yankee* (New York: Warner Books, 2003); and *Bill Madden: My 25 Years Covering Baseball's Heroes, Scoundrels, Triumphs and Tragedies* (New York: Sports Publishing, 2004).

<sup>239</sup> Leonard Shecter, *The Jocks* (New York: Paperback Library, 1970), p. 9.

player.”<sup>240</sup> Shecter believed that Bouton, who had always been a favorite of the chipmunks, with his own irreverent style and comfort dealing with the press, was the perfect person to write this diary. Bouton, Shecter thought, would be willing to write an honest diary, and would not back down from what he had written. When the editor approached the pitcher about keeping a diary, Bouton said, “Funny you should mention that. I’ve been keeping notes.”<sup>241</sup> The result was *Ball Four*. It was Bouton’s honesty and pride in his own work, both qualities Shecter had acknowledged, that made the book into a sensation.

#### THE BOUTONIAN REVOLUTION AND “MASCULINITY” IN BASEBALL

Jim Bouton’s *Ball Four* was a revolutionary clubhouse exposé disguised as a player’s diary. It was irreverent and humorous, revealing baseball as it really was, and not how it was portrayed. In the process, however, the revelations of *Ball Four* contradicted the popular notions of masculinity and the depictions of athletes as embodying the masculine ideal. Instead, Bouton’s memoir revealed the childishness of professional baseball and its heroes, and celebrated boyhood in all its forms.

*Ball Four* reveled in clubhouse gossip; Bouton brought the reader into intimate conversations and allowed one to see his heroes uncensored. In its most benign revelations, Bouton’s book told of baseball players’ love of gory details, and following one another into the trainer’s room or forming crowds around an injured player, hoping to get a glimpse of an unsightly injury. For example, Bouton recalled teammates gathering during spring training when Jake Gibb was hit on the thumb and the trainers attempted to relieve the pressure by drilling a hole through his

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<sup>240</sup> Jim Bouton, *I’m Glad You Didn’t Take It Personally*, ed. Leonard Shecter (New York: William and Morrow Company, 1971), pp. 148-149.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

nail. “The drill boring through the nail started to smoke, and when it hit paydirt Jake jerked his hand and here’s Jake’s hand waving in the air with the drill still hanging from the hole in his nail,” Bouton recalled of “one of the great thrills of spring.”<sup>242</sup>

Ballplayers also amused themselves by gossiping about other players. One bullpen conversation focused on the “all-ugly nine,” a roster compiled of baseball’s least attractive players. In a later conversation, Jim Pagliaroni, who joined the Seattle Pilots after the season began, described a teammate’s date as a “Joe Torre with tits,” to which Bouton added: “This joke can only be explained with a picture of Joe Torre. But I’m not sure any exist. He dissolves camera lenses.”<sup>243</sup> Torre, a National League catcher, and Yogi Berra, a member of the “all-ugly nine” who retired in 1965, were not opponents, nor was it their playing ability that was being mocked. These conversations targeted their physical appearances, showing the superficiality of ballplayers and their joy in idle gossip. While this in itself was not surprising, Bouton’s decision to include it in his publication made his book different than other memoirs that came before it.

If these were the most revealing passages of *Ball Four*, however, it would not have drawn the attention it did. Instead, Bouton’s book pushed much further, disrespecting the game’s authorities and questioning its stars, while also revealing a drug subculture, cheating, and an obsession with sex. As such, *Ball Four* demonstrated that baseball players were hardly paragons of virtue; they failed to meet the masculine ideal that was commonly associated with sports heroes.

In an age when questioning authority became common, particularly with war in Vietnam, Jim Bouton was not alone in looking cynically at his elders. There was a running commentary about the futility of coaches. Whether it was mocking Eddie O’Brien’s advice (“The secret to

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<sup>242</sup> Bouton, *Ball Four*, p. 54.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57, 182.



pitching, boys, is throwing strikes.”), detailing his contract negotiations with Yankees’ general manager Ralph Houk or Pilots’ general manager Marvin Milkes, or illuminating the Yankees’ players dislike of manager Johnny Keane, Bouton expressed his disgust with baseball’s management. His decision to do so was another example of *Ball Four*’s willingness to step away from the traditional baseball memoir.<sup>244</sup>

Furthermore, Bouton criticized some of the game’s biggest stars and questioned their work ethic. Carl Yastrzemski and Roger Maris were selfish players, according to Bouton, and loafed when they were slumping.<sup>245</sup> These were not marginal players taken to task—Yastrzemski, the Boston Red Sox outfielder, won the American League Triple Crown in 1967 (leading the league in batting average, home runs, and runs batted in), and Maris had set the single-season home run record during the Yankees’ 1961 championship season.

Yet the criticism that drew the most attention in the wake of *Ball Four* was not directed toward Maris or Yastrzemski, but baseball’s Golden Boy, Mickey Mantle. Mantle was a baseball giant and a fan favorite, but more than that, he was revered by his teammates. His monument in Yankee Stadium’s Monument Park bears arguably the greatest testament any ballplayer can receive: “A great teammate.” For all his talent and accomplishments, however, Mantle’s career frequently inspired baseball commentators and fans to wonder “what if.” What if Mantle hadn’t been hurt for much of his career? What if he had never suffered from osteomyelitis, or fallen in the drain in right field at Yankee Stadium during the 1951 World Series? Mantle, for all that he accomplished, might have done more, or so it was reasoned.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> O’Connell, interview by author; Bouton, *Ball Four*, pp. 2-10, 85, 88-89.

<sup>245</sup> Bouton, *Ball Four*, pp. 196, 289, 296.

<sup>246</sup> O’Connell, interview by author.

In *Ball Four*, Jim Bouton offered another “what if” regarding Mickey Mantle. Bouton pondered, “if he might have healed quicker if he’d been sleeping more and loosening up with the boys at the bar less.” While Bouton was not wholly critical of Mantle, recalling the way in which the center fielder laid down a path of white towels for Bouton after he had won his first game, or commending Mantle’s sense of humor and practical jokes, his questioning of Mantle’s time off the field raised many eyebrows. Furthermore, he challenged Mantle’s integrity and revealed that he had been difficult with the press, ignored fan requests for autographs, womanized, drank too much, and played hung-over.<sup>247</sup>

Although the Mantle comments occupied very little of 398 page text, they were seized upon by the media when the book was released. Players jumped to defend their teammate, with former Yankees’ catcher Elston Howard charging Bouton with an inferiority complex. Whitey Ford, the Yankee pitcher and Mantle’s close friend, was particularly bothered by Bouton’s remarks. Responding to excerpts of *Ball Four* printed in *Look* magazine before the book was released, Ford told the *New York Daily News* that Mantle’s wife Merlyn had been hurt by the story, and that Mantle had tried to befriend Bouton, who was otherwise generally disliked within the Yankee clubhouse. “In my eighteen years with the Yankees, there has never been a player who was as generally disliked as much as Bouton was,” Ford was quoted. “Because of that, Mickey and I, especially Mickey, went out of our way to be nice to him...Mickey was always involving Bouton in his little pranks in the clubhouse. You don’t do that to a guy if you don’t like him. Now he says these things about Mickey. They’re uncalled for.”<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Bouton, *Ball Four*, pp. 29-31, 38-39.

<sup>248</sup> *New York Daily News*, 22 May 1970; see also *New York Times*, 16 July 1970; *New York Daily News*, 31 May 1970.

Interestingly, Ford did not defend himself, also a target in *Ball Four*. Prior to a three-game series between the Pilots and the Yankees, Bouton wrote, players in the Seattle clubhouse were discussing Whitey Ford's attempts to "get an edge," a player's euphemism for cheating, toward the end of his career. Bouton revealed that Ford used a mud ball—a ball loaded with mud and thus impacting its flight from the pitcher's mound to home plate—as well as scuffed balls. The balls were scuffed either by Ford, using the diamond in his wedding band, concealed in his jock strap, or by Elston Howard, who Bouton alleged used the sharpened buckle of his shin guard.<sup>249</sup> Bouton's comments were not critical, however; he seemed impressed by Ford's ability to manipulate the scuffed or loaded ball, not put off by the pitcher's attempt to deceive the batter, umpire or audience.<sup>250</sup>

Indeed, it appeared as though Bouton accepted cheating as a part of the professional game, as was collaboration between opponents. Bouton told a story in which Rich Rollins played against Rich Rollins in the Carolina League. Rollins had hit two home runs in the first game of a doubleheader and would receive a \$300 bonus if he managed to hit a third home run that day. His teammates convinced him to talk to Bouton's catcher, Norm Kampshor, to see if the catcher would tell him what pitch to expect. Although initially hesitant, Rollins offered the catcher half of his bonus if Kampshor could tell him what was coming; Kampshor not only agreed, he let Rollins call his own pitches. "In the end, though," Bouton recalled, "the joke was on Rollins. Calling my game for me, he managed only one double in four times at bat. And if he had come to *me*, I probably would have grooved one for him. Not for money, just for the hell of

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<sup>249</sup> Howard refuted Bouton's comments regarding scuffing the ball against his shin guard, claiming that it was not possible to sharpen a buckle on his shin guards. He admitted, however, that he did dirty the ball for Whitey Ford—and Jim Bouton. See *New York Daily News*, 22 May 1970.

<sup>250</sup> Bouton, *Ball Four*, pp. 213-214.

it.” Should the reader be disappointed by this confession, Bouton offered no regrets, “Sorry kids, things like that happen.”<sup>251</sup>

The desire to get an edge also created a drug subculture in baseball. Bouton admitted that he had tried numerous drugs to heal a sore arm. Among them were butazolidin, an anti-inflammatory drug that was used to treat horses; dimethylsulfoxide, an anti-inflammatory cream that penetrated the skin so readily the wearer actually tasted it; novocaine, cortisone, and xylocaine. While these drugs were taken with the intention of alleviating pain, other drugs, such as amphetamines (called “greenies”) were also popular. Players valued greenies for their short-term boosts of energy and increased stamina, but they could also lead to rage and irregular heartbeats. Although all of these drugs put the user at serious risk, Bouton said that players relied on them because of the (false) sense of security they provided. Ballplayers were willing to take the risks if it meant better performance in the immediate future.<sup>252</sup>

Bouton’s final revelation, and arguably his most explosive, was in regards to another prominent social change in the 1960s: sexual liberation. The ballplayers’ preoccupation with sex was a major focus of the book, and *Ball Four* introduced Americans to the phrase “beaver-shooting,” which the players’ term for voyeurism, which could mean peering over the top of the dugout to look up dresses, placing a mirror in the gap underneath a hotel room door, or even drilling holes in doors, and, in one case, the home dugout in the Astrodome. In the most extreme example, Bouton recalled the story of teammate Jim Gosger, who hid in the closet of his hotel room as he watched his roommate entertain a young woman. The most popular place for baseball’s Peeping Toms to congregate, however, was the roof of the Shoreham Hotel in Washington,

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<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 157, 221; O’Connell, interview by author.

D.C. The architecture of the hotel, with L-shaped wings, was amenable to voyeurism, because one could see inside several windows while standing on the roof. The Shoreham's roof was so popular, Bouton's Seattle teammate Gary Bell once remarked that one could stock an entire league with the guys who have stood there—including Mickey Mantle.<sup>253</sup>

Ballplayers were not limited to watching, however. Stewardesses and “Baseball Annies,” or baseball's camp followers, were cited by Bouton as providing company. Stewardesses, the more respectable of the group, often stayed in the same hotels as players, according to Bouton, and were available, although it was not considered beneath a player's dignity to be seen with a stewardess. In contrast, the Baseball Annies were looked down upon; players did not mind their affections, but felt no obligation to return them, or even to respect these women:

It is permissible, in the scheme of things, to promise a Baseball Annie dinner and a show in return for certain quick services for a pair of roommates. And it is just as permissible, in the morality of the locker room, to refuse to pay off. The girls don't seem to mind very much when this happens. Indeed, they seem to expect it.<sup>254</sup>

Baseball Annies were to be used on the road, and stewardesses were potential wives—if the player wasn't already married. Infidelity, as Bouton revealed, was common in professional baseball; players were away for long periods of time and sought the company of women, whether or not they had made vows to another who was waiting for them back home.

This was a far cry from the stoicism and restraint that was representative of the masculine ideal. Much of what Bouton wrote contradicted the popular understanding of masculinity in sports. Sports were prominent stages of masculinity because of the emphasis placed on the physical body as representative of one's character; physical strength connoted strength of character.

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<sup>253</sup> Bouton, *Ball Four*, pp. 37-39, 190, 196-197, 354.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

Athletes were supposed to represent manliness in its highest forms, and yet virtue was missing from Bouton's memoir.

Studies of masculinity have found that, since the nineteenth century, the male body has been an important symbol of virtue. The theory of physiognomy, following from the Enlightenment ideal of unity of the body and soul, emphasized the visual appearance of a man—physical beauty was representative of morality, moderation and cleanliness. This theory was incorporated by the modern middle class, who viewed the male body as an example of virility, strength and courage.<sup>255</sup>

Sports required discipline and team-work, highly regarded virtues. The physically conditioned body was representative of this self-sacrifice, as well as stoicism in the face of discomfort and ability to conform to a strict set of rules. As such, sports provided an important means of socialization for young men, and could function as a stand-in for war in aiding a young man's development because they required, in theory, the same discipline as military preparation; the socialization process underwent through physical activity and participation in organized sports enabled a boy to control selfish or sensual impulses.<sup>256</sup>

Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* did not reflect this self-sacrificing, disciplined goal. By opening the clubhouse doors to the public and allowing the reader to see the reality of ballplayers' lives,

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<sup>255</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 5, 23, 25-26; Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 139; Roger Horrocks, *Male Myths and Icons: Masculinity in Popular Cultures: Masculinity in Popular Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 150.

<sup>256</sup> E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), pp. 239-242; Horrocks, *Male Myths and Icons*, p. 150; Ralph R. Donald, "From 'Knockout Punch' to 'Home Run': Masculinity's 'Dirty Dozen' Sports Metaphors in American Combat Films," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2005), p. 20.

Bouton contradicted the concept of the male athletic body symbolizing strength of character. In particular, his discussion of drugs reversed this perception. Bouton and his teammates were willing to do anything to succeed athletically, including taking drugs. This was hardly weight lifting to achieve physical perfection; ballplayers were using creams meant to treat horses and amphetamines in the hopes of compiling a few extra hits or wins. The desire to win and the need to maintain one's livelihood caused men to cheat, raising questions of honor and authenticity.

Furthermore, Bouton's book revealed that ballplayers were unable—or unwilling—to control their sensual desires, which also contradicted the prominent understanding of masculine virtue. To think that ballplayers were meeting on rooftops to spy into hotel room windows, or drilling holes into walls to see women undressing—this reflected an adolescent sexuality, not that of a grown man. Nor was this activity limited to baseball's bachelors; married men were also peeping, or consorting with Baseball Annies. Sex drives were supposed to be sublimated, according to the masculine ideal, but *Ball Four* does not support this understanding.

The sublimation of sensual desires is a psychoanalytic understanding of modern masculinity. Sexual desire was viewed as a powerful force in young men, and was capable of distracting them from their work and, ultimately, their ability to carry out the male role. “Thus, the pursuit of pleasure among youthful males seemed a threat to the basic integrity of society.”<sup>257</sup> The transition to adulthood and healthy sexuality required the sublimation of the sex drive and other aggressions, for uncontrolled impulses led to excess and would distort the body and mind, resulting in the opposite of the manly ideal, whether it be an effeminate identity, or, more likely, a youthful, boyish identity.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, p. 72.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21, 71-72, 241-242; Mosse, *The Image of Man*, pp. 48, 62, 86.

Ultimately, this was what Bouton's book revealed about masculinity in baseball: rather than celebrating masculinity, *Ball Four* was a celebration of the childishness of the game. It reflects not the socializing rituals of sport that transitioned boys into men by teaching them discipline. Instead, professional baseball players were depicted as overgrown boys, ruled by their impulses. Nor was Bouton apologetic about his observations; the author was seldom critical of his subjects. While he criticized those players he believes to be lazy or unproductive, he was unmoved by the players' overactive libidos, drug use, cheating (be it through ball scuffing or consorting with the enemy) or mean-spirited mockery of others. These are all part of the fun of the game, and Bouton maintained that "sharing the fun" was his reason for writing *Ball Four*; he was not out to change it.<sup>259</sup> Bouton's book did change baseball, however. At the very least, it changed the way people perceived the game.

This understanding of *Ball Four* as an emasculating text was not unpredictable, however. The popular understanding of masculinity was already in flux at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to E. Anthony Rotundo, masculinity as it was then constituted, stoic and disciplined, was seen as pompous, and men sought to reform it. Although other scholars maintain the constancy of the masculine ideal from the nineteenth century, Rotundo argues that boyhood came to be glorified at the turn of the century, and this embracing of boyhood virtues developed a more natural connection between boyhood and manhood.<sup>260</sup> Seen in this context, Bouton's book illuminates a transformed masculinity; ballplayers were embracing the fun of the game as much as they were driven by the competition and thrill of victory.

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<sup>259</sup> Will Balliett and Thomas Dyja, eds., *The Hard Way: Writing by the Rebels who Changed Sports*, foreword by Jim Bouton (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999), p. xii.

<sup>260</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, p. 256.



Another possibility, though, was that the nature of professional baseball was such that it encouraged boyishness, not manliness. Bouton argued that athletes easily lost perspective because “being a professional athlete allows you to postpone your adulthood.” After all, these are grown men paid to play a children’s game. Ballplayers have had accommodations made for them since childhood; they reach a prominent place in society at a young age and are not emotionally equipped to handle it. As a consequence, they are trapped in adolescence and are susceptible to drugs and infidelity. Bouton cautions his reader to think of a ballplayer as a fifteen-year-old in a twenty-five-year old’s body.<sup>261</sup>

Whether it was the nature of baseball to trap young men in adolescence or a reflection of changes in masculinity over the course of the twentieth century that opened men to self-expression, professional baseball players as observed through Jim Bouton’s *Ball Four* reflect a non-normative masculinity. If the masculine ideal was physical and mental strength derived by discipline and sublimation of desires, Bouton’s diary revealed an *emasculated* sport; Major League Baseball is the Never Never Land where superstars cheated and caroused, never accepting responsibility for their actions. It was all part of the game.

#### THEY TOOK IT PERSONALLY...

Bouton’s *Ball Four* was met with mixed reviews. While it was praised by audiences, people within baseball took exception to his candid account; and while the chipmunks celebrated Bouton’s irreverence, many veteran sportswriters bristled at his willingness to tell secrets other than his own. Although it was meant to be a diary about Bouton’s attempt to return to the Major Leagues in the spring of 1969, it may have actually contributed to his retirement in the summer of 1970. Bouton was optioned to the Houston Astro’s minor league affiliate in Oklahoma City in

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<sup>261</sup> Bouton, *Ball Four*, p. 447.

August 1970, two months after the book was published. Although the Astros were adamant that his demotion had more to do with his Earned Run Average (which was over 6 run per 9 innings pitched) than it did his publication, manager Harry Walker acknowledged that the book may have been a distraction for Bouton—requiring public appearances and divided attention—which may have contributed to his decline. Rather than go back to the minors, Bouton retired, and turned his attention toward his second publication, *I'm Glad You Didn't Take It Personally* and a budding career as a sportscaster for New York's "Eye-Witness News."<sup>262</sup>

Excerpts from *Ball Four* were printed in *Look* magazine in advance of the book's publication. Players were unhappy about what they read in these advances, although Bouton would argue that most complained about the book without ever reading it in its entirety. Regardless, players reacted strongly. In May, playing against the Cincinnati Reds, Bouton was taunted by Reds stars Johnny Bench and Pete Rose, among others, who considered him a "no-good rat-fink." When the Astros traveled to Los Angeles, they found the remnants of a fire the San Diego Padres, the previous team in the visitors clubhouse, had set—the team had left the ashes of *Ball Four* waiting for Bouton.<sup>263</sup>

Players were bothered by Bouton's violation of the clubhouse code. Trust was very important to these men, and Bouton had violated that trust by detailing the pranks and conversations of the clubhouse, as well as stories players told or Bouton witnessed. "Is this guy an author or a teammate?" Astro second baseman Joe Morgan was quoted. "Why, I've told him stuff I'd

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<sup>262</sup> *Washington Post*, 2 August 1970; *New York Times*, 11 August 1970; *New York Times*, 4 October 1970.

<sup>263</sup> Bouton, *I'm Glad You Didn't Take It Personally*, pp. 60-61; *Boston Globe*, 26 July 1976.

never tell a sportswriter.”<sup>264</sup> Although Bouton would insist that players knew he was writing a book, it was questionable whether they knew *what kind* of book he was writing, or that their secrets were just as likely to be published; for example, if the book is about Bouton, why was there a story of Jim Gosger hiding in the closet?

It was on these grounds that traditional sportswriters were most upset. Dick Young, the influential *New York Daily News* columnist, probably aided Bouton’s book sales with his many columns criticizing *Ball Four*. Young found the book to be “muck-stirring,” questioned the author’s integrity and called him a “social leper.” Wells Twombly, a San Francisco writer, found Bouton’s diary an example of the excesses of chipmunk journalism: “What started out to be a refreshing trend is in danger of becoming a smutty torrent of poor taste.”<sup>265</sup>

If these critiques did not send people to the bookstores looking to see what all the fuss was about, baseball Commissioner Bowie Kuhn certainly did. Kuhn, who considered it his job to guard baseball’s image, expressed his disappointment with *Ball Four*, and insisted on meeting with Bouton to discuss it. The Commissioner told the author that he would not punish him for his publication, but he did warn him against future publications. In his follow-up publication, *I’m Glad You Didn’t Take It Personally*, Bouton detailed the meeting with Kuhn, ridiculing the Commissioner’s futility.<sup>266</sup>

Bouton claimed that his teammates knew he was writing book, and that he was just as much a part of the book and the stories as anyone else. However, Bouton presented himself as an outsider, and if he considered himself a part of the voyeuristic stories or those involving infi-

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<sup>264</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, 20 June 1970.

<sup>265</sup> *New York Daily News*, 29 March 1970, 28 May 1970, 31 May 1970; *San Francisco Examiner*, 20 June 1970.

<sup>266</sup> Bouton, *I’m Glad You Didn’t Take It Personally*, pp. 68-69; *Chicago Tribune*, 2 June 1970; *Washington Post*, 3 June 1970.

delity, this was one way his writing was subtle. Instead, Bouton seems to present himself as an objective observer, not part of the group, but looking in on it. Perhaps if he had been more self-critical, he would not have garnered the same negative responses.

Bouton never backed down from his writing, though. He defended his right to tell the stories of things that happened to him; that by witnessing these events and hearing these stories they became his intellectual property as much as that of the person actually at the center of the activity. He argued that he never named a player who was cheating on his wife, and that if a player had problems in his marriage, it was ultimately not Bouton's fault but rather a symptom of larger problems. He also defended his violation of the "sanctity of the clubhouse" by declaring that the clubhouse was full of mindless activity, and that there was much he could have written but ignored—such as anti-Semitic remarks or racial slurs in the integrated game.<sup>267</sup> In the end, *I'm Glad You Didn't Take It Personally* was as much a defense of *Ball Four* as it was a sequel.

Bouton deserved credit for his honesty and his insight, but he was too smart to believably hide behind claims that he did not know the book would inspire such visceral reactions among the baseball establishment, players and reporters. As a matter of fact, Bouton acknowledged that part of his intention in writing *Ball Four* was to alter people's perceptions of their heroes—not necessarily destroy heroes, but at least tear down the façade of saintly folk heroes.<sup>268</sup> Was it then not disingenuous for Bouton to claim that he did not mean to hurt anyone when in the next breath he admitted that his intention was to draw attention to these flaws in the hopes of enlightening the public as to the reality of their heroes' character and actions?

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<sup>267</sup> Bouton, *I'm Glad You Didn't Take It Personally*, pp. 80-87.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

In many ways, *Ball Four* made Bouton a pariah. Such is the price of revolution. The pitcher-turned-author's willingness to expose the realities of baseball did not sit well with those in professional baseball, but it did forever change the way the public saw the game. Following what Stephen Jay Gould called the "post-modern Boutonian revolution," sports biographies took new forms, becoming uncensored chronicles of the athlete's life and experiences. As a consequence, those reading *Ball Four* in 2016 for the first time, might find it dated, nearly as revealing or explicit as other biographies. Yet it stood as the catalyst for this adjustment in writing. Bouton's book reflected changes in American culture in the 1960s and 1970s, a time when the public was engrossed in gossip and emphasized public disclosure. *Ball Four* belonged to the literature of that time, revealing heroes were not always what they were thought to be, questioning the masculine ideal in the professional game, and encouraging the reader to look beyond the media's interpretations. In this way, it was one of the most significant sports histories written, and well deserving of its place in the academic's library, as well.

Epilogue:  
**Where Have You Gone, Joe DiMaggio?**  
Major League Baseball from the “Golden Era” to the Steroid Era

The late 1960s’ popular culture legacy was one of rebellion. Signifiers such as long hair, miniskirts, beards and behavior including drug abuse and liberated sexuality marked a turn away from the dominant middle- and upper-class values of the previous decade. As Kennedy’s Camelot faded into memory, American youth protested the materialism of the American Dream and the confining, conforming world of their parents.

In 1967, Mike Nichols’s *The Graduate*, the first of what would become known as “alienation films,” was released to critical claim and tremendous box office success. *The Graduate* told the story of a recent college graduate, Benjamin Braddock, who rejected the upper-class in which his parents lived (symbolized by the one-word career advice, “Plastics”), had an affair with the much older Mrs. Robinson (the wife of his father’s law partner), and escaped with her daughter Elaine, to an uncertain future, on a common city bus. The film’s soundtrack, featuring songs by Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, reinforced the filmmaker’s suggestion that Benjamin Braddock was “a cipher in a world of mass conformity and control, the mode of being alienated young people claimed a technological and technocratic society was imposing on them.”<sup>269</sup> The soundtrack also featured an abbreviated, slightly modified version of “Mrs. Robinson,” which was later included on the album *Bookends*. In the track, an homage to days gone by, Simon and

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<sup>269</sup> *The Graduate*, dir. Mike Nichols, (1967; Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD; Michael Ryan and Douglas Kelner, “Films of the Late 1960s and Early 1970s: From Counterculture to Counterrevolution, 1967-1971,” in *Hollywood’s America: Twentieth-Century American through Film*, eds. Steven Mintz and Randy W. Roberts, fourth edition (St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1994; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 258.

Garfunkel opined, “Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio? / A nation turns its lonely eyes to you.”<sup>270</sup>

Although he retired in 1951, DiMaggio was symbolic of the purity of baseball and its dominance in World War II- and postwar America. DiMaggio himself did not appreciate the lyric; in his estimation he had not gone anywhere. After retiring, he had a brief career as a television broadcaster, became the national face of Mr. Coffee, and married Marilyn Monroe in 1954 (they divorced in less than a year, but had allegedly planned to remarry shortly before her death in 1962). Yet in many ways, DiMaggio had disappeared; always private, the New York Yankees legend moved back to San Francisco, where he lived a quiet and guarded life.<sup>271</sup>

In 1965, DiMaggio consented to an *Esquire* profile by Gay Talese, which was later heralded by David Halberstam as the vanguard of the New Journalism, dedicated to journalistic realism. Talese revealed that DiMaggio was not the warm, graceful, likeable hero of the New York sports pages, but a rather difficult and deeply suspicious man who nevertheless awed those with whom he came in contact, possessing a mystique Talese likened to a “male Garbo.”

They know that he can be warm and loyal if they are sensitive to his wishes, but they must never be late for an appointment to meet him. One man, unable to find a parking place, arrived a half-hour late once, and DiMaggio did not talk to him again for three months. They know, too, when dining at night with DiMaggio, that he generally prefers male companions and occasionally one or two young women, but never wives; wives gossip, wives complain, wives are trouble, and men wishing to remain close to DiMaggio must keep their wives at home.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Paul Simon, “Mrs. Robinson,” on *Bookends*, Simon and Garfunkel, Columbia Records, 1968.

<sup>271</sup> Paul Simon, “The Silent Superstar,” *New York Times*, 9 March 1999, p. A29; David Halberstam and Glenn Stout, eds., *The Best American Sports Writing of the Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), xix-xxii; Robert Huber, “Joe DiMaggio Would Appreciate It Very Much If You’d Leave Him the Hell Alone,” *Esquire*, June 1999, p. 82-88.

<sup>272</sup> Gay Talese, “The Silent Season of a Hero,” reprinted in *The Best American Sports Writing of the Century*, p. 16.

DiMaggio's strict rules for his friends and companions allowed him to maintain a carefully crafted public persona. Talese also recognized that DiMaggio's reputation, as constructed across media, had a larger impact.

[An] "immortal," sports writers called him, and that is how they have written about him and others like him, rarely suggesting that such heroes might ever be prone to the ills of mortal men, carousing, drinking, scheming; to suggest this would destroy the myth, would disillusion small boys, would infuriate rich men who own ball clubs and to whom baseball is a business dedicated to profit and in pursuit of which they trade mediocre players' flesh as casually as boys trade players' pictures on bubble-gum cards. And so the baseball hero must always act the part, must preserve the myth, and none does it better than DiMaggio.<sup>273</sup>

Talese's article was more than thirty years old when DiMaggio passed away in March 1999, and had been followed by a number of biographies purporting to tell the "truth" of the "real DiMaggio." Yet for all that had changed in baseball and America in the nearly fifty years since he played his final game, DiMaggio remained an "immortal." Contributing an op-ed to the *New York Times* in which he reflected on "Mrs. Robinson's" famous lyric, Paul Simon explained: "DiMaggio represented the values of that America: excellence and fulfillment of duty (he often played in pain), combined with a grace that implied the purity of spirit, an off-the-field dignity and a jealously guarded private life."<sup>274</sup>

DiMaggio's death closed the door on an era of baseball history, one that has recently been reconstructed as the "golden age." Perhaps fittingly, the Yankee Clipper passed away following the 1998 season, in which Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa enthralled fans with a home run assault on a postwar single-season record—and raised questions about *how* they were able to accomplish the feat, naturally or chemically-enhanced? It was yet another sign that baseball had changed. Free agency, new stadia, cable-television revenue, higher ticket prices, costly conces-

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<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>274</sup> Simon, "The Silent Superstar."



sions and merchandise, and performance-enhancing drug scandals have changed the fans' relationship to the game, and its players.

In contrast, postwar baseball was the era in which the game truly became the "national pastime," with the arrival of integration; it was a family entertainment in the age of suburbs and the baby boom; it appeared more wholesome, its players less financially driven. It was pure, simple, and clean—or, at least, that was the perception created and maintained by the media. As the generation of historians led by Harold and Dorothy Seymour (whose acclaimed 1989 baseball history considered baseball's golden age to be the era of Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth, from the first World Series in 1903 until the onset of the Great Depression) and Jerome Holtzman gave way to that of John Thorn, Doris Kearns Goodwin and even Ken Burns,<sup>275</sup> nostalgia and childhood memories have combined with friendly media to construct a field of dreams, an era of baseball in which everything was "as it should be."

## BASEBALL STRIKES OUT

Major League Baseball's cultural dominance waned in the 1960s. Baseball faced stiff competition from the National Football League, which was better for television, and a changing society found political and social revolutionary heroes in football, boxing, and tennis, while MLB tried to maintain its "all-American" reputation. Loyal fans then felt betrayed when the 1970s saw ballplayers' halos slide, and nostalgia set in quickly.

Part of baseball's popularity was derived from its pastoral setting. Becoming popular among the middle- and working-classes in late nineteenth century America, the ballpark was a field of green in an urban jungle, and the game unbound by time in an every-industrializing soci-

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<sup>275</sup> Harold Seymour and Dorothy Z. Seymour, *Baseball's Golden Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Jerome Holtzman served as the official historian of Major League Baseball from 1999 until his death in 2008; he was succeeded by John Thorn.

ety. In the 1960s, however, these qualities became liabilities. Many ballparks lacked sufficient parking facilities for fans commuting from the suburbs, and open schedules made timing train travel more complicated and worrisome, as many stadia were located in crumbling centers of urban decay. Television, then, offered opportunities—and consequences.

For the dyed-in-the-wool fan, televised baseball offered an opportunity to enjoy games from the comfort of one's living room. This kept fan interest in the game, and encouraged attendance when schedules permitted. For the average viewer, however, baseball made terrible television. As Kathryn Jay observed, there were not enough game cameras to follow the game, nor capture the many interactions that occurred between players, coaches and fans with each pitch. Furthermore, the small white baseball was easily lost on the black-and-white screen. Baseball was a game better experienced in the ballpark, but the business of television was likely to work against fan interests.<sup>276</sup>

In recent years, a game's first pitch has been pushed back to accommodate television audiences. In 2000, Major League Baseball signed a six-year, \$2.6 billion contract with Fox Sports, which included the rights to broadcast the World Series and midseason All-Star Game. To justify the expense of such a deal when viewers have so many other options, games have been pushed into primetime viewing on the east coast (which contained almost half of all television households), and bloated with commercials, pregame shows and ceremonies that pushed the first pitch towards 8:40 P.M., and in-game advertisements.<sup>277</sup> Although network executives have rea-

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<sup>276</sup> Kathryn Jay, *More than Just a Game: Sports in American Life Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 90.

<sup>277</sup> The 1970 World Series was the last to exclusively hold day games. In 1971, one game was played in prime time, followed by two games of the 1972 World Series. In 1973 and 1974, 3 games were played under the lights, and in 1975, five of the seven-game series between the Cincinnati Reds and Boston Red Sox were played at night. Between 1977 and 1984, two weekend

soned that the NBA finals, NCAA basketball tournament and Monday Night Football all started times after 9:00 P.M., those games ran on fixed schedule and generally concluded within three hours, whereas baseball is open-ended in its duration. The result has been many night games that have turned into early morning games. The first game of the 2000 World Series, a twelve-inning matchup between the New York Yankees and the New York Mets, ran four hours and fifty-one minutes, concluding on the east coast at 1:04 A.M. The Nielsen ratings showed that New Yorkers were excited to see the first subway series in 44 years (and the first between the Yankees and Mets), but not many others shared their enthusiasm, as the 2000 World Series generated the lowest ratings for a World Series to that point. The Fall Classic's ratings consistently fell during the decade, hitting a low in 2008, when the Philadelphia Phillies defeated the Tampa Bay Rays in five games. The third game of that series was plagued by rain and did not begin until 10:06 P.M. in the east, finished at 1:47 A.M., and drew the fewest viewers of any televised World Series game with only 9.8 million watching. Declining ratings demonstrated an increasingly regional

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games were played during the day, but none during the next two years. By 1987, the World Series was exclusively prime time viewing.

The *New York Times*' Richard Sandomir detailed the pregame show before Game 4 of the 2005 World Series between the Chicago White Sox and the Houston Astros: "Fox's pre-Game 4 hoo-ha and commercial breaks lasted nearly 16 minutes, which was followed by the introduction of the Latino Legends team, which took 12 minutes. The national anthem (1:34) gave way to more commercials (3:40), an on-air preview by Joe Buck and Tim McCarver (3:22), still more commercials (3:07) and another 1:16 of preview and chatter until the first pitch was thrown at about 8:40 pm." Game 3, played the night before, had been a fourteen-inning affair, lasting until after 1:00a.m. No attempts were made to start the game earlier. Richard Sandomir, "Money Dictates that World Series Games Won't See the Light of Day," *New York Times*, 28 October 2005, p. D3; see also, "Recall Days Games? Well, Forget About It," *New York Times*, 26 October 2000, p. D4.

interest in the World Series, and made it unlikely that the next generation of fans – school-aged children – would watch games in their entirety.<sup>278</sup>

Television has had a similar effect on the All-Star Game, a midseason exhibition between player representatives from the American and National Leagues. The 2002 All-Star Game ended controversially with a tie after eleven innings of play. Managers Joe Torre and Bob Brenly had used all of the players in their roster and were worried about relying too heavily on pitchers Freddie Garcia and Vicente Padilla (both starting pitchers who had pitched two innings of relief), neither of whom played for Torre or Brenly's home clubs. The managers conferred with the umpires and commissioner Bud Selig, who decided to call the game when the National League failed to score at the bottom of the inning; the Milwaukee crowd of more than 47,000 booed and chanted, "Let them play!" During the offseason, Selig negotiated with the Players Association and determined that the winner of the All-Star Game moving forward would decide home field advantage in the World Series. Selig claimed the decision was to give the game meaning, but many argued that it was to appease network executives and advertisers and ensure that such a calamity would not happen again. Such a prospect was raised again, in 2008, when the All-Star Game was hosted by the New York Yankees in the final year of Yankee Stadium. Pregame ceremonies included the introduction of 49 Hall of Fame players as well as the 64 players on the American and National League rosters. The Yankees' ailing owner George Steinbrenner was

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<sup>278</sup> Despite its length, Game 1 of the 2000 World Series was the highest-rated televised program in New York since the series finale of *Seinfeld* in May 1998, drawing a 62 share in the market (*Seinfeld* drew a 63 share). Nevertheless, by Game 3, the WS was showing a 26 percent decline in national ratings from the previous year, when the Yankees defeated the Atlanta Braves. The 2000 World Series drew an average of 18 million viewers. The average viewership for the 2008 World Series plummeted to slightly over 13 million. Sandomir, "Recall Day Games?"; Mark Herrmann, "It's Yanks in a Thriller," *Newsday*, 22 October 2000, p. 03; Steve Zipay, "Opening Game Gets Big Ratings in NY," *Newsday*, 23 October 2000, p. H31; Richard Sandomir, "The World Series Has Not Found Its Audience," *New York Times*, 28 October 2008, p. D3.

then driven around the outfield warning track in a golf cart before delivering baseballs to be used by the four Yankees' Hall of Famers in attendance to throw out the ceremonial first pitches. The game itself then lasted fifteen innings, or four hours, fifty minutes. All twenty-three available pitchers had been used, but managers Terry Francona and Clint Hurdle had been told firmly before the game that it would have a conclusion. Both managers said after the game that they had considered using position players as pitchers had the game gone any further. Because the game was now tied to the World Series, this would have caused derision among baseball purists, who would claim that the game had been sullied to appease television's interests.<sup>279</sup>

The greatest impact of televised baseball, however, has been in relocating franchises, which began in 1953 and resulted in ten franchise departures before league expansion in 1973. The 1948 Boston Braves won the National League pennant and drew 1.5 million fans to home games over the course of the season. In 1951, management sold the television rights to all of the team's games in 1951 and 1952, and most of the 1953-1954 seasons. The Braves continued to be a successful team on the field, finishing in the first division in three out of four seasons, but their home attendance fell under three hundred thousand in 1952. The Braves relocated to Milwaukee, a popular site of minor league baseball, in 1953, but management was careful not to allow any broadcasts for much of the decade.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Jack Curry, "No Winner, Loser or M.V.P., but Plenty of Boos," *New York Times*, 10 July 2002, p. D1; Curry, "Frustrated, Bud? There Are Ways to Avoid a Repeat," *New York Times*, 11 July 2002, p. D3; Murray Chass, "The Best Players Showcased with the Worst Rule," *New York Times*, 13 July 2004, p. D5; Jack Curry, "All-Nighter, With Wright and Drew in the Pen," 17 July 2008, p. D1; Curry, "Steinbrenner, 78, Appears to Hugs, Kisses and Cheers," *New York Times*, 16 July 2008, p. D3.

<sup>280</sup> Benjamin Rader, *In Its Own Image: How Television Has Transformed Sports* (New York: Free Press, 1984), p. 60.

Limited television exposure could not keep the Braves in Milwaukee, however. Baseball historian Benjamin Rader noted that the Milwaukee Braves were the highest-drawing team in the National League for six consecutive years, but a new team of owners relocated the club to Atlanta in 1966. Former owner Lou Perini had moved the Braves from Boston because of what he believed to be television's impact on stadium revenue; the new management moved the team to Atlanta specifically for television revenue. "Milwaukee, the new owners reasoned, had a media market circumscribed by Chicago in the South, Lake Michigan to the east, Canada to the north, and Minneapolis-St. Paul to the west. While the Braves had garnered \$525,000 from broadcast rights to Milwaukee, Atlanta offered them \$1.5 million for their television-radio rights," while also offering a media market of eight states without a Major League franchise.<sup>281</sup> The moves were financially lucrative for Perini and later Braves ownership but for fans, they were disruptive, forcing them to find alternative means of following their favorite players, or searching for a new team altogether.

If baseball teams used television revenue to compete with one another (and the size of media markets influence the resources available to teams to sign and maintain talent), the National Football League used its television revenues to compete with Major League Baseball for the title of "America's game." Unlike baseball, televised football was able to follow the ball and make sense of huddles and on-field confusion. Fields of play were generally narrower, and television announcers helped explain strategy to even the casual fan. Advancements in technology paved the way for replays, slow motion and different camera angles, and increased television revenue helped the sport to grow. When the AFL signed a five-year, \$42 million contract with NBC, teams used the money to lure the best college players. In 1965, the New York Jets signed

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<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

a young quarterback from the University of Alabama for a record three years and \$420,000. “Broadway Joe” Namath not only became a football star, but a cultural icon.<sup>282</sup>

Namath represented a growing counterculture, celebrating the life of the playboy. He held press conferences while lounging poolside, made bold declarations and guaranteed victories, grew outlandish facial hair, wore a full-length fur coat on the sidelines, starred in advertisements for Noxema and pantyhose, and was sports’ most well-known ladies’ man. Yet for his dominant image, Namath never spoke publicly on political matters—a void filled by Billie Jean King and her fellow tennis stars on the Virginia Slims Tour, which sought equal pay for female athletes in USTA-sanctioned tournaments; Juan Carlos and Tommie Smith, who boldly offered the Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, and Muhammad Ali, the charismatic heavyweight champion who blended athletic prowess, political sentiment and personal dynamism better than any athlete of his generation (arguably, his lifetime). A fierce advocate of racial justice, Ali embraced the Nation of Islam and the rhetoric of Malcolm X. In 1966, when popular opinion still supported the war in Vietnam, Ali refused to be drafted, citing religious opposition to the war; for his actions he was stripped of his heavyweight title, had his boxing license revoked, and was convicted of draft evasion in Texas, with the maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine imposed. Although the conviction was unanimously overturned by the US Supreme court in 1971, Ali’s defiance transformed his reputation with tremendous public consequences.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Jay, *More than Just a Game*, pp. 97-112; LeRoy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006) pp. 366-367.

<sup>283</sup> Jay, *More than Just a Game*, pp. 117-136; Ashby, *With Amusement for All*, pp. 368-369.

While Ali was taking a stand against racial injustice and the Vietnam conflict, major League Baseball embraced patriotic rhetoric. MLB had made significant sacrifices for the Second World War; by 1945, approximately 5,400 of the 5,800 professional baseball players at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor had served in the military. During the Vietnam War, Major League players were not encouraged to enlist, and many avoided conscription by enlisting in the National Guard. However, front offices were concerned with competition in other sports, and sought to reaffirm their commitment to the consensus by sending delegations of former superstars such as Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams to visit troops and take photo-ops with military personnel and artillery. Player-led tours throughout Southeast Asia were popular until the end of the 1971 season—reminiscent of contemporary celebrities on USO tours, players generally praised the troops while remaining silent about general politics. Baseball owners purchased thousands of subscriptions to the *Sporting News*, the “baseball bible,” for servicemen, and the Chicago Cubs began the tradition of playing the “Star-Spangled Banner” before each home game, not just holidays and special occasions.<sup>284</sup>

Baseball was not completely immune to the changes, however. Commissioner Bowie Kuhn faced great difficulty in preserving baseball’s decades-old reserve clause. The reserve clause held that once a player was signed to a professional contract, the team held the rights to the player, potentially for the length of his career. This system denied players the right to negotiate freely with other teams; Mickey Mantle, for example, could only negotiate a contract with the New York Yankees, until the point the team released or traded him. The system was a boon to owners, but it robbed players of any power in renegotiating their contracts.

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<sup>284</sup> Ron Briley, “Baseball and Dissent: The Vietnam Experience,” *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Fall 2008): pp. 54-69.



Ralph Kiner led the National League in home runs (42) in 1951, but the Pittsburgh Pirates lost 112 games. During the offseason, Kiner met with the Pirates' general manager Branch Rickey. Instead of offering him a raise as reward for his offensive success, Rickey actually presented Kiner with a pay *decrease*. When Kiner balked at the terms, an indifferent Rickey responded, "We finished last with you, we can finish last without you."<sup>285</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, Kiner served as a player representative in a fledgling union and was part of the decision to retain J. Norman Lewis's legal services in 1953 after commissioner Ford Frick refused to provide a full accounting of the players' pension fund and the owners refused to raise the minimum salary. The following year, the players founded the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA), for which Lewis negotiated a larger share of media revenues for the players' pension fund, until severing ties with the group in 1959.<sup>286</sup>

The players would not have serious representation until 1966, however, when they voted 489-136 to appoint economist and former United Steelworkers Union negotiator Marvin Miller as their executive director. Within two years, Miller forced the owners to sign a Basic Agreement, a two-year contract which raised the minimum salary from \$7,000 to \$10,000 per season, gave the players the right to an agent in contract negotiations, and established a formal grievance procedure. In 1969, Miller began his assault on the reserve clause, filing suit on behalf of St. Louis Cardinals outfielder Curt Flood; Flood, an African-American, refused a trade to the Philadelphia Phillies because he did not want to subject himself or his family to what he thought beligerent and racist fans. The lawsuit, filed in federal court and argued by former Supreme Court

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<sup>285</sup> Neil deMause, "Do High Salaries Lead to High Ticket Prices," in *Baseball Between the Numbers: Why Everything You Know About the Game Is Wrong*, ed. Jonah Keri (New York: Basic Books, 2007), p. 208.

<sup>286</sup> Rader, *In Its Own Image*, pp. 203-204.

justice Arthur Goldberg, argued that the reserve clause violated antitrust law. The case reached the US Supreme Court in 1972, where it was defeated by a five-to-three vote upholding baseball's exemption from antitrust law, which had been established in 1922.<sup>287</sup>

Flood's defeat proved only a temporary setback. Two years later, Jim "Catfish" Hunter went to arbitration with Oakland Athletics owner Charlie Finley, alleging a contract violation. The arbitrator ruled in Hunter's favor and declared him a free agent. Although several owners conspired to try and force Hunter's return to the Athletics, the New York Yankees' brash owner George Steinbrenner interfered, offering the right-handed pitcher a five-year contract worth \$3.75 million. It was ironic that an owner would be so helpful in advancing the cause of free agency, but Steinbrenner quickly became known for his desire to win at all costs.<sup>288</sup>

The reserve system was ultimately overturned after the 1975 season. Pitchers Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally refused to sign contracts for the 1975 season, but were forced to report for spring training anyway because of the reserve clause; both players went through the years without a signed contract. At the season's end, Messersmith filed a grievance (McNally retired), and was heard by an arbitration panel consisting of Miller, owners' representative John J. Gaherin and arbitrator Peter Seitz, who had previously ruled in Hunter's hearing. According to Seitz, "there was no specific provision for baseball's reserve system in player contracts and that the reserve clause bound a player for only one year after the expiration of his prior contract...the decision meant that every player in baseball (except those with multiyear contracts)

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<sup>287</sup> *Flood v. Kuhn*, 407 U.S. 258 (1972).

<sup>288</sup> Benjamin G. Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game*, second edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 208-209.

could become a free agent simply by playing the 1976 season without a contract.”<sup>289</sup> Worried about the potential of complete free agency at the end of each season, the MLBPA and owners compromised on a modified reserve system in which a player would become a free agent after six years of play, and teams that lost players to free agency would be compensated with rookies via the amateur draft.<sup>290</sup>

Free agency, a financial and institutional triumph for baseball’s laborers, came with great cost to their reputations. Fans were reminded that sports are a business, for players as much as owners. Dodgers owner Walter O’Malley was Brooklyn’s greatest enemy after he moved the franchise to Los Angeles in October 1957, but the media gave little negative attention when Joe DiMaggio held out for a higher salary, missing three weeks of the 1938 season. In the age of free agency, many fans have complained that players’ salaries have gotten out of hand and that big market teams buy all of the talent. Furthermore, labor struggles led to eight lockouts and strikes since collective bargaining began, the most severe of which, in 1994-1995, last 232 days and saw the cancellation of the 1994 World Series.

#### SOMETIMES YOU WIN, SOMETIMES YOU LOSE, AND SOMETIMES IT RAINS.

Fans were not entirely without baseball, however. In September 1994, as the players and owners continued their standoff, PBS aired Ken Burns’s nine-part, eighteen-hour documentary *Baseball*. In his trademark style, Burns mixed archival footage with interviews, music, artwork, and actors reading letters, speeches, or diary entries in voiceover. He gathered former ballplayers and coaches, executives and editors, as well as academics and public intellectuals moonlight-

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<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-209.

ing as baseball historians. Although the documentary intended to trace the evolution of baseball from its nineteenth century origins to the early 1990s, ironically celebrating baseball's ability to overcome obstacles, there was a clear arc in its presentation. Early segments analyzed the racial divide in the game, building to the integration of professional baseball as examined in the sixth installment, and then focusing on the dominance of Major League Baseball and particularly the three New York franchises in the seventh. When professional baseball stadia were dark, and the only hope of watching fall ball for fans was on PBS, Ken Burns heralded a midcentury golden age.<sup>291</sup> The narrative reflected not only the age of its filmmakers and participants – happily recalling their memories from childhood – but nostalgia for a bygone era that was manifesting itself in the national pastime.

Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin contributed to the Burns documentary, and was inspired by the experience to publish *Wait Till Next Year*. The title referred to a popular saying in Brooklyn, where the Dodgers were frequently competitive but seldom victorious. *Wait Till Next Year* was not a sports history, but a personal story of her childhood on Long Island and her relationship to her family and community. Goodwin listened to the games and kept score so that she could report the day's events to her father, a pastime she regarded as significant for her future as an historian, but also demonstrated to her audience the way baseball bound families in an era associated with togetherness.<sup>292</sup> Therein lay the significance of *Wait Till Next Year*: childhood memories infused the Baby Boomers' understanding of postwar baseball, but baseball also became a way of remembering one's childhood.

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<sup>291</sup> *Baseball*, dir. and prod. by Ken Burns (1994; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2004), DVD.

<sup>292</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Wait Till Next Year: A Memoir* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

In 1955, when it was finally the Dodgers' year, Goodwin was preparing for her First Communion and related her First Penance as absolution for a baseball fan's baser instincts. She recalled telling the priest:

“I wished harm to Allie Reynolds [the Yankees' pitcher]. I wanted him to break his arm...I wished that Robin Roberts of the Phillies would fall down the steps of his stoop, and that Richie Ashburn would break his hand...I wished that Enos Slaughter of the Cards would break his ankle, that Phil Rizzuto of the Yanks would fracture a rib, and that Alvin Dark of the Giants would hurt his knee...I wished that all these injuries would go away once the baseball season ended.”

The priest ordered two Hail Marys, three Our Fathers, and a special prayer for the Dodgers.<sup>293</sup> The story conveyed Goodwin's innocence. She was at a time in her life when her concerns were small, her biggest worries were the fates of her favorite players (and their opponents), and when she believed that one could keep a ledger of prayer credits and debits to mark one's goodness. Her preoccupation with baseball filtered into this, sometimes comically but not always.

Two years later, after the Dodgers announced their move to Los Angeles, Goodwin suffered a greater loss with her mother's passing. When discussing their own plans to move out of the family home and into a garden apartment, Goodwin's father spied her collection of score-books: “They were so close, so many times,” she recalled him saying. “Remember we said, if they just kept fighting, they'd make it in the end. And they did. We'll just have to do the same.”<sup>294</sup> Although she could not prepare for her mother's death and was too young to understand it, her father tried to relate it in terms that a child could comprehend, and he chose the language of baseball. By framing her memoir against her love of the game, Goodwin reminded her audience that some of life's fundamental lessons – disappointment, loss, perseverance, respect,

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<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 240-251 (quote is found on p. 250).

loyalty, character – could be learned at the ballpark. For her and many others, baseball was a thread that bound life’s milestones, happy and sad.

The Brooklyn Dodgers were Major League Baseball’s “every team” in the Fifties. They were constant contenders, but fell short of victory every year but one. This made them relatable, and provided structure for Goodwin’s narrative as well as arguably the greatest baseball book, Roger Kahn’s *Boys of Summer* (1972). Kahn, who had covered the Dodgers for the *New York Herald-Tribune*, suggested the book idea to Otto Friedrich, an editor at the *Saturday Evening Post*, who mistook it for proposed magazine article. Friedrich dismissed him saying, “Those Dodgers are no more special than, say, the Boston Red Sox of 1948. You only think they’re special because you covered them. They’re only special to you.”<sup>295</sup> While it was true that Kahn could have chosen any team for his subject, it was precisely because the 1995 Dodgers were special to him that his project was so successful. For Kahn, like Goodwin, they were tied to his identity. He explained: “I began to consider the Dodgers not as baseball players but as baseball-playing men, as some are poetry-writing men, or painting men or men who make decisions of state. The experience of traveling with them was not something to dismiss, nor to let anyone dismiss in arrogant ignorance. It had become part of myself; it was something to be proud of.”<sup>296</sup>

Like *Wait Till Next Year*, *Boys of Summer* revealed Kahn’s relationship to his father through their shared love of the Brooklyn franchise. The second part of the book, however, was a different trip down memory lane. Kahn acknowledged the passing of time, which can be particularly devastating to a ballplayer, and the end of baseball in Brooklyn: “The team grew old.

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<sup>295</sup> Roger Kahn, *Boys of Summer*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972; reprint, New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), pp. 197-198. Kahn later worked at *Sports Illustrated*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Newsweek*.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

The Dodgers deserted Brooklyn. Wreckers swarmed into Ebbets Field and leveled the stands. Soil that felt the spikes of Robinson and Reese was washed from the faces of mewling children. The New York *Herald-Tribune* writhed, changed its face and collapse. I covered a team that no longer exists in a demolished pall park for a newspaper that is dead.” He tracked down the players on the 1955 roster, to see what had become of the borough’s old heroes. “In the 1970s, our own confusing, crowded present, I have been able to seek out the 1950s, to find these heroic Dodgers who are forty-five and fifty, in lairs from Southern California to New England, and to consider them not only as old athletes but as fathers and as men, dead as ballplayers to be sure, but still battling, as strong men always battle, the implacable enemy, time.”<sup>297</sup>

Brooklyn’s Bums were ordinary men by 1970. Many worked, unable to retire on their baseball salaries. Some had faded into anonymity, briefly rescued by Kahn, who could attest that their stories of professional baseball were not tall tales. Even the giants were humbled by time. Pee Wee Reese, whom broadcaster Red Barber said came from Kentucky a boy and grew into a captain among men in Brooklyn, sat on his front porch and wondered as a brown telephone truck passed, “I still can’t figure out why the guy driving that thing isn’t me.” Roy Campanella, the Dodgers catcher who was paralyzed in a 1958 car accident, went through a terrible divorce in 1960, but remarried and had come to accept his life. Kahn described him as possessing a “curious gentleness,” a “vaulting human spirit, imprisoned yet free, in the noble wreckage of the athlete, in the dazzling palace of the man.” Jackie Robinson, who Kahn thought the best prepared to “trample down the thorns of life,” was a man caught in the middle. A political activist, the Republican Robinson felt displaced by the nomination of Barry Goldwater in 1964. Working with the NAACP, he was too radical for the conservatives and too conservative for the radicals. Even

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<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xix-xxi.

his family life saw hardship, as his oldest son, Jack Robinson, Jr., struggled with addiction. Jackie Robinson once told reporters, “I’ve had more effect on other people’s kids than on my own,” before reconsidering: “I couldn’t have had an *important* effect on anybody’s child if this happened to my own.” Although the younger Robinson would enter rehab and commit himself to helping others, he passed away in a car accident in June 1971, at age 24.<sup>298</sup>

By including these stories and not simply revisiting the 1955 season while sitting on the front porch drinking lemonade, Roger Kahn’s *Boys of Summer* reminded its audience that life can challenge even the biggest of stars. Yet the humility of their circumstances also heightened the memory of their triumphs: once, Jackie Robinson and Pee Wee Reese stood arm-in-arm in defiance of society’s racial barriers. Roy Campanella was a three-time Most Valuable Player and a feared presence at the plate. In the Fifties, they were kings. In the Seventies, they were ordinary. Although Kahn intended to bring their story full-circle, he was also highlighting that the best years of their lives were behind them.

*The Boys of Summer* was part of a wave of Fifties nostalgia that emerged in the 1970s. Other popular culture iterations included the films *American Graffiti* and *Grease* (adapted from the Broadway show), the television program *Happy Days*, and the introduction of “oldies” radio stations, which shifted their formats from contemporary Top 40 songs to those of the 1950s and early 1960s. Many Americans contemplated a mythic postwar America as an escape from the fragmented society in which they lived.

Seventies postwar nostalgia may be attributed to economic differences in the two decades. Memory of the booming economy overshadowed that of racial segregation, political paranoia, gender discrimination, and religious intolerance. After almost two decades of deprivation

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<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 311-312, 359-373, 386-409.



and sacrifice, the 1950s saw a tremendous rise in the standard of living—the net expendable weekly earnings for a (white) worker with three dependents had risen 41 percent—and the availability of consumer goods such as the automobile, television, vacuum cleaner, washing machine and dryer, air conditioner and frozen foods. But in 1969, the economy declined; by 1974-1975, unemployment stood at 7.5 percent, and inflation at 12.4 percent.<sup>299</sup>

The emerging Cold War had also produced, in popular memory, the illusion of postwar unity. Americans had emerged from a war against fascism to face a communist threat—a clear enemy that could be defeated by supporting democracy, capitalism, and the family. This unity was reinforced in popular culture through the nuclear family television sitcom, Norman Rockwell's *Saturday Evening Post* covers, and the film industry's use of allegory in westerns and science fiction. By the 1970s, however, this culture of conformity, as scholars would call it, had broken down and reflected the changes brought by a decade of social movements. To some, this was a mark of progress; an acknowledgment of diversity in America. To others, it signified division and degradation of values. On television, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* starred an unmarried heroine and casually referenced the Pill, while *All in the Family* satirized the white working-class bigot. In film, gritty realism of urban decay, sex, and violence took over the screen in the work of the “auteur,” the directors of the New Hollywood who included Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, and Sidney Lumet, as well as subgenres such as Blaxploitation. In music, Bruce

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<sup>299</sup> James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore*, the Oxford History of the United States series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 3-11; Mary Caputi, *A Kinder, Gentler America: Melancholia and the Mythical 1950s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 2-17.

Springsteen emerged as a voice for the discontented and pessimistic working class. And sports, as previously noted, promoted new heroes to match the social diversity.<sup>300</sup>

The idea of a *national* hero, someone who represented the values and virtues of the American people as a whole, faded. Politics, which had produced so many in the past, was at a loss. The Left had been disenchanted by the Vietnam War and the failures of the Great Society. Richard Nixon, who had claimed to represent the “silent majority” and promised to defend American values, resigned in disgrace in 1974. Disillusionment resulted in the presidential election of a political outsider, Jimmy Carter, in 1976. Four years later, Ronald Reagan conquered the White House, and told the public “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.”<sup>301</sup> Americans were not to look to politicians for answers, nor expect national heroes to emerge among them.

Yet if Reagan spoke pessimistically about the effect of government, he also promised an “era of national renewal.” He spoke for Americans who faulted the Left, youth, and counterculture for the state of American society, but who believed that “restoring” the nation could be accomplished by “returning” to its values. As political scientist Mary Caputi explained, “If the 1960s and 1970s had sought to subvert our American heritage—if they had cast doubt on the Founding Fathers and Christopher Columbus, on Lewis and Clark and Daniel Boone—neoconservatism was here to reaffirm these, proclaiming that the old was new again and that our

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<sup>300</sup> Patterson, *Restless Giant*, p. 13; Caputi, *A Kinder, Gentler America*, pp. 11-14.

<sup>301</sup> Ronald Reagan, “First Inaugural Address,” *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, online <<[avalon.law.yale.edu/20<sup>th</sup>\\_century/reagan1.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/reagan1.asp)>> accessed 24 May 2012. See also, Alan Edelstein, *Everybody’s Sitting on the Curb: How and Why America’s Heroes Disappeared* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1996), pp. 3-7, 15-16, 157-166.

nation could again ride tall in the saddle.”<sup>302</sup> Many neoconservatives sought to restore America by returning to the values and practices of the mythic 1950s. With no national heroes emerging – indeed, with none expected – Americans fell back on those of the past.

Redemption as achieved by acceptance of the past was a common theme in 1980s popular culture, and not surprisingly found expression through baseball. To be sure, the transparency that had caused uproar among fans was still present in the national game, and baseball comedies such as *Bull Durham* and *Major League* played the flaws and absurdities of baseball life to full effect. Baseball dramas, however, embraced redemption as a theme.

*Field of Dreams* was a 1988 film adaptation of W.P. Kinsella’s novel *Shoeless Joe*. In the novel, the main character, Ray Kinsella, built a baseball field in his Iowa cornfield to allow Shoeless Joe Jackson and the other disgraced Black Sox the opportunity to play again. His companion on this journey was the reclusive author J.D. Salinger, of whom the mysterious voice told Ray: “Ease his pain.” Kinsella was first inspired to find Salinger after reading one of the author’s uncollected essays, “The Girl with No Waist,” in which one of the characters was named Ray Kinsella, and determining that there was a cosmic link between the two. When a later interview surfaced in which Salinger revealed his devastation at the destruction of the Polo Grounds, Kinsella explained to the *Catcher in the Rye* author that taking him to a baseball game would be a chance to regain some sense of community he had lost: “It wasn’t just the baseball game. I wanted it to be a metaphor for something else: perhaps trust, or freedom, or ritual, or faithfulness, or joy, or any other thing that baseball can symbolize. I only wanted to make you hap-

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<sup>302</sup> Caputi, *A Kinder, Gentler America*, p. 2.

py.”<sup>303</sup> Later in the novel, Salinger happily accepted an invitation to journey into the cornfield with the ghostly players. He had found his redemption and inspiration through baseball.

When the novel was adapted into the film *Field of Dreams*, Salinger’s lawyers assured that his name would not be used and the character of Terrence Mann, the reclusive author whose work defined a generation, was played by James Earl Jones. The character also became tied to the *protagonist’s* redemption—a major departure from the novel. In *Shoeless Joe*, Ray Kinsella was born and raised in Montana; he and his father never saw a professional baseball game together, but shared a strong bond around the sport. The younger Kinsella attended the University of Iowa, and settled down in the state when he met his wife Annie. His failed attempts to become a corn farmer led him to hear “the Voice,” and from the outset he wanted Shoeless Joe to give his father an opportunity to come out of the cornfield and serve as the catcher—the tenth man—to the Black Sox and his favorite player, Joe Jackson. In the film, Kevin Costner’s Ray Kinsella attended Berkeley and drove not a Datsun as in the novel but a Volkswagon bus (both Berkeley and the bus are cultural signifiers of rebellion). He had a tempestuous relationship with his father that came to a head after he read Terrence Mann’s writing. He abandoned baseball because of its association with his father, and later said he never forgave his father for getting old. There was no hint that the older Kinsella would take off his catching gear in the end, signaling that the ultimate narrative was Ray Kinsella’s quest for redemption.<sup>304</sup>

The greatest example of transforming narratives to tales of redemption, however, was the 1984 adaptation of Bernard Malamud’s *The Natural*, itself an adaptation of the Percival myth. In the film, Roy Hobbs, played by Robert Redford, overcame greed, desperation, and internal

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<sup>303</sup> W.P. Kinsella, *Shoeless Joe* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982; reprint, 1999), p. 96.

<sup>304</sup> *Field of Dreams*, dir. by Phil Alden Robinson (1988; Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2004), DVD.

bleeding to hit a towering homerun that crushed a light and sent sparks flying all over the ballpark. The hero had not only redeemed himself, but won the pennant for his team and saved his manager Pop Fisher's financial interest in the New York Knights by ridding the team of his menacing business partner, the Judge.<sup>305</sup>

Malamud's novel was a work of precision, carefully weaving myths with contemporary baseball stories to create a tale in which the hero ultimately failed. It was a reminder, in a period in which baseball heroes were treated as immortals, that these were just men, after all. Yet by the 1980s, the story had to be rewritten. Baseball dramas allowed audiences to follow a tale of redemption; lessons learned on the ball field promoted honesty, integrity, and honor. When the real ballparks went dark during the 1994 season, Ken Burns's documentary *Baseball* appeared on televisions throughout the United States, reiterating this message. But the association was with days gone by; questions lingered about the game's future. When baseball returned – *if* baseball returned – would the fans follow? Would audiences reject the modern game and its very visible commercial interests? Was there anyone left who played the game “as it was meant to be” played? Luckily for Major League Baseball, it did not wait long for its answer, and its salvation.

Major League Baseball returned April 24, 1995. Despite reduced ticket prices, promotions and giveaways, many fans stayed away from the turnstiles. Throughout the country, home openers saw a twenty-percent decline compared with the 1994 season, and that number held throughout the season. The fans were holding own strike. The protests took difference forms: in San Francisco, a camper parked outside of Candlestick Park displayed a sign, “I'm On Strike One Full Season”; in Cincinnati, a plane flew over Riverfront Stadium carrying a sign that read, “Owners and Players, To Hell With All of You.” At the New York Mets' Shea Stadium, three

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<sup>305</sup> *The Natural*, dir. by Barry Levinson (1984; Culver City, CA: Columbia TriStar, 2001), DVD.

fans ran onto the field, stopped at second base and threw \$150 in dollar bills at the players before being apprehended by security. One of them later explained, “We were trying to think of a good fan protest, and I remembered Abbie Hoffman throwing money on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange.”<sup>306</sup>

Fans did have reason to cheer late in the season, however, when the Baltimore Orioles’ shortstop Cal Ripken, Jr., made his run at Lou Gehrig’s record for consecutive games played. On September 6, Ripken played his 2,131<sup>st</sup> consecutive game, a milestone that thirteen years to reach, and forever linked him with Gehrig, a model of steadfast devotion and humility. It was the right record at the right time, and Ripken was the right man to break it.

Media outlets across the country reported the story, anointing Ripken as baseball’s savior.

All that fans ever asked was the baseball players come to play, and the fans came Wednesday to honor the player who has come to play for more consecutive games than anyone in history. When the top of the fifth inning ended in Baltimore and the game became official, when Ripken homered and turned a double play and played in his 2,131<sup>st</sup> consecutive game, one more than Lou Gehrig, two days after Labor Day, it became impossible to stay mad at baseball.<sup>307</sup>

Baseball had been broken by greed; for years, fans had heard about players’ drug use, and read about divorces, consorting with strippers and even a story of wife-swapping. Ripken was a family man who had driven his daughter Rachel to her first day of kindergarten the day he broke Gehrig’s record. Seizing on this reputation, which had been the subject of a *Sports Illustrated* cover story the month before, the Orioles arranged for five-year-old Rachel and her two-year-old brother Ryan to each throw a ceremonial “first pitch” to their father before the game. After the

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<sup>306</sup> Mark Maske, “After the Strike, Baseball’s Disgusted Fans Decide to Strike Back,” *Washington Post*, 30 April 1995, p. A1; Richard Sandomir, “Biggest Drop for Attendance in Major Leagues Since the 1995 Season,” *New York Times*, 1 October 2002, p. D3.

<sup>307</sup> Kevin Scarbinsky, “Ripken Shows Baseball Does Have a Heart,” *Birmingham News* (Alabama), 7 September 1995, p. 1C.

game, Ripken credited his parents with his success, saying that everything he was as a person and player could be attributed to the lessons and values taught to him in childhood.<sup>308</sup>

It was significant that Ripken's record was for something fundamental: going to work every day. If Major League Baseball's reputation had been stained by the appearance of players more concerned with their individual salaries and achievements, the presence of a player who ran onto the field everyday for thirteen years, despite aches and pains, jet lag and other concerns, was welcomed. To be Baseball's Iron Man differed from the single-season records for home runs or stolen bases or the league batting title because it was not so much about ability as it was dedication; this was a record for the common man. And so it became noteworthy that Ripken was not a flashy player, that he did not fit the reputation of the superstars around him, that he chose to stay in Baltimore, where his father had once been his manager, rather than seek the limelight in New York or Los Angeles. Ripken, in the sports pages across America, was baseball's common man.<sup>309</sup>

This was not actually true. One must make significant contributions to remain in the lineup every night for thirteen years, and Ripken's career reflected this. By the time he broke the Iron Man record, Ripken had been the American League Rookie of the Year (1982), won two American League Most Valuable Player Awards (1983, 1991), two Gold Gloves (1991, 1992), eight Silver Slugger Awards (1983-1986, 1989, 1991, 1993-1994), and a World Series champi-

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<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*; Tim Kirkjian, "Man of Iron," *Sports Illustrated*, 7 August 1995, pp. 25-37; "Cal Ripken, Jr.; Class on the Grass," *The Herald Sun* (Durham, NC), 8 September 1995, Editorial A10.

<sup>309</sup> Scarbinsky, "Ripken Shows Baseball Does Have a Heart"; Bill Lyon, "Baseball's Redemption, If Not Its Salvation," *Calgary Herald*, 7 September 1995, p. C1; Bryan Burwell, "All Sports Continue to Produce Magic with Right Heroes," *USA Today*, 8 September 1995, p. 6C; "Cal Ripken a Hard-Working, Decent Man," *Omaha World Herald*, 8 September 1995, Editorial p. 20; Mitch Vingle, "Hopefully, Ripken's Moment Will Make an Impression," *Charleston Gazette* (West Virginia), 8 September 1995, p. 1B.

onship (1983); he had set eleven fielding records and played in thirteen All-Star Games.<sup>310</sup> Yet these achievements were often downplayed in September 1995, in service to a greater narrative that made the Orioles shortstop a more fitting hero for baseball's troubled times. In many papers, writers and columnists compared him to players of previous eras. Many drew the obvious comparisons to Gehrig, while invoking the group as a whole:

At a time when the game is played by self-trumpeting egomaniacal boors wearing sausage skin pants and sneers—also vain, overpaid malingerers without the slightest sense of history or obligation—now a standard for persistence and simple hard work has been set by a man who, ironically, conjures up visions of what the game was like when Gehrig played it, when modest men in baggy flannels humbly tipped their caps as they crossed home plate and ducked their heads in embarrassment when their names were chanted.<sup>311</sup>

By comparing Ripken to the faceless players of simpler playing days, these writers humanized his accomplishment. He was extraordinary for his ordinariness, and in celebrating him, professional sports and media were also celebrating the fans who also went to work every day, who sacrificed their time and dedicated their efforts. For a brief moment, baseball was not a game played by professionals with six-figure contracts, but an anchor to the American Dream that hard work would bring rewards. By revitalizing this message, Cal Ripken, Jr., had brought baseball “back.”

Ripken was named *Sports Illustrated's* Sportsman of the Year in 1995. Interestingly, he appeared only in one photograph inside the issue giving him the honor. Instead, the *SI* editors opted to use the space to salute eleven other athletes, all of whom were deemed “old-fashioned, all seem[ed] to be playing for something other than the money.” To be sure, the accompanying article was dedicated to Ripken, but to anyone leafing through the magazine, they would never

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<sup>310</sup> “Cal Ripken, Jr.,” *Baseball-Reference.com*, online <<<http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/r/ripkeca01.shtml>>>, accessed 17 May 2012.

<sup>311</sup> Lyon, “Baseball's Redemption, If Not Its Salvation.”



know.<sup>312</sup> The photographic layout followed the trend of using Ripken's milestone to celebrate unsung heroes. Ripken was not to so much an icon as an impression – a way of seeing more than a concrete image. *Sports Illustrated* had already made this point in their September “Iron Man” coverage. No photograph of Ripken appeared in that edition, including the cover. Instead, the magazine printed artistic renderings of the Oriole shortstop, reminding the reader that it was not so much who Ripken was, but what he represented, that mattered.<sup>313</sup>

## THE POWER AND THE GLORY?

Cal Ripken, Jr. was a throwback hero, exactly what Major League Baseball needed in 1995. Within three years, however, Major League Baseball's worries had been forgotten. Fans gradually returned to the ballparks, and by 1998, the steadiness of Cal Ripken had been overshadowed by the Herculean strength of the St. Louis Cardinals' Mark McGwire and the Chicago Cubs' Sammy Sosa. The two battled each other for the single-season home run record, much to the fans' delight, with McGwire reaching the milestone of 62 first, in the second week of September (he finished the season with 70 home runs, Sosa with 66). It was an exciting chase for one of baseball's most hallowed records, and yet it was not free of ethical questions. In the years that followed, Major League Baseball, its fans, and the media have questioned the legitimacy of home run hitters' power, and struggled to determine its legacy.

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<sup>312</sup> Richard Norris, “Hand It to Cal,” *Sports Illustrated*, 18 December 1995, pp. 72-90. The other athletes pictured in the article are Jerry Rice (NFL), Hakeem Olajuwon (NBA), Pete Sampras (tennis), Rebecca Lobo (NCAA women's basketball), Greg Maddox (MLB), Cigar (horse racing), Tiger Woods (golf), Miguel Indurain (cycling), Eddie Robinson (NCAA football), and Michael Johnson (track and field).

<sup>313</sup> Richard Ben Cramer, “A Native Son's Thoughts About Baltimore, Baseball, and the Steadfast Perfection of Cal Ripken Jr.,” *Sports Illustrated*, 11 September 1995, pp. 59-68.

In August, Associated Press reporter Steve Wilstein spotted a bottle of androstenedione, a testosterone-producing pill, in McGwire's locker and set off a debate about whether or not the substance, which was legal in Major League Baseball but banned by the NFL, NCAA and International Olympic Committee, constituted cheating. Wilstein quoted John Lombardo, the NFL's advisor on steroids as saying, "Androstenedione is a steroid...It has anabolic qualities. Therefore it is an anabolic steroid."<sup>314</sup> Many in baseball, including the media, were critical of Wilstein's report, and disagreed with the characterization of the pill as an anabolic steroid, referring to the lack of scientific studies that indicated such. Yet the question had been raised as to the legitimacy of the home run chase. McGwire and Sosa both used creatine, an amino acid powder that aided in muscle-building, and spent many hours lifting weights. Were these supplements responsible for their power? Column inches were dedicated to analyses of previous seasons' statistics and the impact of testosterone-producing supplements on the body. Most importantly, reporters and MLB officials debated the ethics of taking such substances – whether taking something that was legal in baseball but banned in other sports was a good message for MLB's young fans particularly.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Steve Wilstein, "'Andro' Pill OK in Baseball, But Not in Other Sports," *Associated Press*, 22 August 1998.

<sup>315</sup> Most reports were favorable to McGwire; many questioned Wilstein's motives and methods in revealing McGwire's use of androstenedione. A sample of articles include: "Mark McGwire's Pep Pills," *New York Times*, 27 August 1998; Bernie Miklasz, "Drug Report Miffs McGwire," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 23 August 1998, p. F6; John Hoberman, "Mark McGwire's Little Helper: The Androstenedione Debate," *Think Muscle*, online, <<[www.thinkmuscle.com/articles/hoberman/mcgwire.htm](http://www.thinkmuscle.com/articles/hoberman/mcgwire.htm)>> obtained 18 April 2011; "While Serious, Dietary Aids Can't Steal Home-Run Thunder," *USA Today*, 25 August 1998, p. 10A; Jeff Krupsaw, "Kids, eat your spinach, forget Androstenedione," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 28 August 1998, p. C2; Bernie Miklasz, "Everyone Seems Pumped Up About McGwire and Andro," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 29 August 1998, Sports p. 3; Dave George, "Pro & Con: Has Mark McGwire's Use of Androstenedione Tainted His On-the-Field Achievements? Thousands of Pros Have Been There, Done That," *Palm Beach Post* (Florida), 31 August 1998, p. 2C;

Whatever debates had been raised during the season, the consensus at its conclusion was that the home run chase was good for baseball. It had restored excitement in the national pastime and brought fans all over the country together – some even praised it as baseball’s salvation, completely ignoring (or forgetting) the same praise having been lavished on Ripken in 1995. In December, *Sports Illustrated* unanimously selected McGwire and Sosa as its Sportsmen of the Year. This time, the magazine eschewed the subtlety of their Ripken coverage. Instead, the cover featured the two athletes clad in togas, their heads crowned in laurels.<sup>316</sup>

The home run ball proved profitable, and over the next several years, home run totals were up across the league. While Roger Maris’s single-season home run record stood for 37 years, McGwire’s lasted only three; Barry Bonds slugged his way to 73 home runs during the 2001 season. Six years later, Bonds became Major League Baseball’s career home run king, passing Hank Aaron’s 755 home runs and finishing his career with 762. In neither instance did *Sports Illustrated* crown Bonds’s head with laurels; instead they selected the Arizona Diamondbacks’ pitching duo of Curt Schilling and Randy Johnson, and the NFL’s Bret Favre as their Sportsmen of the Year in 2001 and 2007, respectively. In truth, *Sports Illustrated*’s coverage of Bonds’s home run pursuits demonstrated a decline in the home run’s perception among the media and fans. While the magazine had done much to present Ripken and McGwire as dedicated family men as they approached their milestones, no so effort was found on behalf of Bonds in 2001. Instead, Tom Verducci acknowledged Bonds’s ambition and aloofness, and at one point

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“McGwire Controversy Sparks Big Debate,” *Orange County Register* (California), 31 August 1998, p. C10; Kirk Johnson, “As Drugs Proliferate, So Do Ethical Questions,” *New York Times*, 31 August 1998.

<sup>316</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 21 December 1998.

referred to the “arrogance and condescension he has smithed into his sword and shield.”<sup>317</sup> As Bonds approached the record for home runs in a career, *Sports Illustrated* opted to dedicate its July 23, 2007 issue to Hank Aaron, “The Heart of 755.” Verducci’s article, titled “The People’s King,” explained, “In simple mathematical terms Barry Bonds will have outhomered Aaron and every other player who has swung a bat in the majors. Everything else about the new record, however, dissolves into the murkiness of interpretation.”<sup>318</sup>

In less than a decade, the home run had gone from savior to scandalous. After years of watching baseballs smack the scoreboards or exit the ballparks, including by players who had been known as primarily singles-hitters, fans speculated about the source of this new power. Some argued that the new ballparks were built with smaller dimensions and benefited hitters. There was also a conspiracy theory that proposed the balls were being wound tighter and made of rubber at the center, making them fly farther than previous balls.<sup>319</sup> Yet the most likely culprits were the players themselves, and reports circulated that the players were taking more than creatine or androstenedione.

In 2003, the U.S. Attorney’s Office began investigating the Bay Area Laboratory Cooperative (BALCO) in connection with their development of the then-undetectable steroid tetrahy-

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<sup>317</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 17 December 2001; *Sports Illustrated*, 10 December 2007; Tom Verducci, “Pushing 70,” *Sports Illustrated*, 8 October 2001, online <<sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1023848/index.htm>> obtained 18 April 2011;

<sup>318</sup> Tom Verducci, “The People’s King,” *Sports Illustrated*, 23 July 2007, online <<sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article /magazine/MAG1103791/index.htm>> obtained 18 April 2011.

<sup>319</sup> Jayson Stark, “Why all the runs? The balls are juiced, of course!” ESPN.com, 21 October 2002, online <<static.espn.go.com/mlb/columns/stark\_jayson/1449183.html>> accessed 18 April 2011; Stephen Cannella, “The Hot Corner,” *Sports Illustrated*, 24 April 2000, online <<sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1019038/index.htm>> accessed 18 April 2011; Richard Hoffer, “Take Back the Plate!,” *Sports Illustrated*, 15 May 2000, online <<sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1019193/index.htm>> accessed 18 April 2011.

drogestrinone, known as “the Clear.” Leaked information from the grand jury proceedings found that BALCO had allegedly distributed the Clear to a number of high-profile athletes, including Olympic sprinters Marian Jones and Tim Montgomery and MLB players Barry Bonds, Gary Sheffield and Jason Giambi. Spurred by the BALCO allegations and the 2005 publication of Jose Canseco’s memoir *Juiced*, in which Canseco not only detailed his own steroid use but named former teammates McGwire, Giambi, Juan Gonzalez, Rafael Palmeiro, and Ivan Rodriguez as fellow users, the House Committee on Government Reform convened hearings on steroid use in baseball, and threatened MLB’s anti-trust exemption. Congress subpoenaed Canseco, McGwire, Palmeiro, Sosa and pitcher Curt Schilling, who had been an outspoken critic of performance-enhancing drug use, as well as MLB commissioner Bud Selig and MLBPA director Donald Fehr. The assembled ballplayers failed to produce any meaningful testimony: Canseco held to the claims in his book; Schilling hedged and said that while it was possible to speculate, one could not say that anyone conclusively “knew” that steroids were used unless they were guilty; Sosa struggled with his second language; Palmeiro adamantly denied steroid usage; and McGwire, on advice of counsel, refused to answer most questions. Members of the Committee were outspoken in their contempt for McGwire’s silence particularly, and took Selig and Fehr to task for failing to create an effective drug policy if they were serious about providing a drug-free national pastime.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>320</sup>Major League Baseball introduced a drug-testing policy in its collective bargaining agreement of 2002. The policy called for “surprise” testing during the season. If players tested positive, they were given a second chance; if the second test was negative, the original positive was nullified. If five-percent of players tested positive, MLB and the Players Association would implement a stronger testing policy. However, the introduced policy did not test for human growth hormone and Congress argued that the proposed 10-game suspension as punishment for a first offense was not actually part of the existing policy. Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams, *Game of Shadows: Barry Bonds, BALCO, and the Steroid Scandal That Rocked Professional Sports* (New York: Gotham Books, 2007); Jose Canseco, *Juiced: Wild Times, Rampant ‘Roids*,

Following the hearings, Commissioner Selig authorized former Senator and member of the Boston Red Sox Board of Directors George J. Mitchell to investigate steroid use in Major League Baseball and its affiliates. Despite lacking any legal authority to compel participation, the Mitchell Report was a 311-page summation of previous drug problems in MLB history, sports journalism speculating about performance-enhancing drug use, findings from interviews with Kirk Radomski, a former batboy and clubhouse employee for the New York Mets, and Brian McNamee, the former personal trainer for New York Yankees Roger Clemens, Andy Pettitte, and Chuck Knoblauch. The Mitchell Report named almost 90 players (some of whom were still active at the time of the 2007 publication) said to be associated with steroid use, but did not delve into management's role or discuss executive knowledge on the matter. Nevertheless, the report did contribute to a revision of the MLB drug policy and testing.<sup>321</sup>

Focusing on the players' role in the performance-enhancing drug scandal not only absolved management from any part of the problem, it also reinforced the image of ballplayers as greedy and morally-bankrupt. The ballplayer had fallen from his privileged position in Ameri-

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*Smash Hits, and How Baseball Got Big* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005); Anne E. Kornblut, "Two Parties in Congress Are at Odds Only Against Witnesses," *New York Times*, 18 March 2005, p. D6; George Vescey, "Avoiding the Past, a Role Model Is History," *New York Times*, 18 March 2005, p. D1; Dave Anderson, "When It Comes to Crises, Baseball Ignores the Signs," *New York Times*, 19 March 2005, p. D1; Richard W. Pound, "The New Testing Does Not Begin to Solve the Drug Problem," *New York Times*, 20 March 2005, p. H11; Wilson Duff, "Congress Call Steroid Policy Misleading," *New York Times*, 17 March 2005, p. D1.

<sup>321</sup> Under the new policy, which was approved by MLB and the MLBPA in 2006, all players were subjected to random testing. Those who tested positive for a performance enhancing substance were suspended for 50 games; a second positive test result received a 100-game suspension, and a third positive test result lead to expulsion from Major League and Minor League Baseball. George Mitchell, "Report to the Commissioner of Baseball of an Independent Investigation into the Illegal Use of Steroids and Other Performance Enhancing Substances by Players in Major League Baseball," 13 December 2007, printed by the Office of the Commissioner, Major League Baseball; "Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program," online <<[mlbplayers.mlb.com/pa/pdf/jda.pdf](http://mlbplayers.mlb.com/pa/pdf/jda.pdf)>> accessed 18 April 2011.

can culture by the end of the twentieth century. He was no longer viewed as the virtuous figure of the mid-century Golden Age, who sacrificed self for the good of the team. Yet by highlighting the shortcomings of the contemporary ballplayer, the media have also reinforced the heroism of the mid-century players, such as the contrasting views of Bonds and Aaron in the 2007 *Sports Illustrated* editions.

The scandal-plagued years of the early twenty-first century have also been problematic in determining Major League Baseball's legacy during those years. Sports writers and sports scholars have tried to determine the legitimacy of what they have observed on the field. At stake was also induction into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, the most exclusive organization in sports. Since 1936, members of the Baseball Writers Association of America have been tasked with voting on players who played a minimum of ten years at the Major League level and have been retired for at least five years. In casting their votes, BBWAA members were not only to consider the playing ability of the candidates, but also such factors as character, sportsmanship and integrity.

As players from the PED era retire and become eligible for the Hall of Fame ballot, voters have been forced to think about the possibility of hanging a plaque in their honor next to the likes of Willie Mays, Jackie Robinson, and Stan Musial, among many other baseball immortals. This has raised a great debate among sports writers as to whether they have the right to ignore the performance-enhanced statistics or omit some of the game's most famous players from the Hall of Fame. To date, no player associated with steroid or performance-enhancing drug use has

been elected to the Hall of Fame.<sup>322</sup> Many sports writers have been outspoken about their refusal to vote for such players, often citing the sportsmanship criterion.

Players like Bonds and Clemens, however, have presented a problem because neither has admitted steroid use nor failed a drug test. Furthermore, their usage was said to come later in their careers, which has allowed some voters to justify potentially voting for them based on the careers they had before the alleged juicing. Others have found fault with this logic, and say that it is not the writers' responsibility to make sure that those who had a place in history are enshrined among baseball's immortals. As *Sports Illustrated's* Tom Verducci explained:

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<sup>322</sup> According to the press releases from the Baseball Writers Association of America, players associated with steroids have fallen far short of the 75% plurality necessary for election. Mark McGwire reached a high of 23.7% of the vote in 2010, but shortly admitted to steroid use shortly after the ballots were counted. In the two years since, his plurality has fallen to 19.8% in 2011, and 19.5% in 2012. Rafael Palmeiro, one of only four players in Major League history to have both 500 home runs and 3000 hits, but who failed a drug test shortly after his congressional testimony in 2005, received on 11% of the vote in 2011, his first year of eligibility, and 12.6% in 2012. (The other three 500/3000 hitters were Hall of Famers Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, and Eddie Murray, who received 97.8%, 94.7%, and 85.3% in their respective induction years.) BBWAA voting statistics are available online, at "Hall of Fame," *BBWAA* <<[bbwaa.com/hof](http://bbwaa.com/hof)>>, accessed 20 May 2012.



Some people will vote for them if they believe “they were great players before they started juicing.” That kind of thinking condones steroid use based on talent—that a voter endorses players corrupting the basic fairness of the game and the record book as long as they reached some nebulous level of achievement. When did it become okay for Bonds to get on the most meticulous, scientific PED regiment in documented history that made the home run record inauthentic? Three hundred homers? Four hundred?...Hall of Fame enshrinement is different from the Hal of Fame Museum, which tells the history of the game very nicely, even with non-Hall of Famers such as Pete Rose and Joe Jackson and steroid users represented. A Hall of Fame vote is the endorsement of a career at the highest level. And no one is “wiping out” an era. Plenty of players from the Steroid Era have and will be represented.<sup>323</sup>

Verducci pointed to the fundamental issue of fairness. It has always been necessary for fans to perceive that what they were watching was an actual competition between players, a battle of strength and wits, in which the better man (or woman) won because of his superior skill – not because of any tricks or cheats.

In many ways, today’s writers are trapped by the generations that preceded them. Media contributed to a construction of the ballplayer’s image throughout the twentieth century, but one that was revised in the early Cold War to present the games heroes as middle-class American heroes. Baseball writers and broadcasters focused their work on the field of play, and devoted little attention to life off the field. Movies and literature mythologized real and fictional players. *Life* magazine featured articles and photo essays showing the ballplayers at home, surrounded by a happy wife and children. Baseball was celebrated in the media for its consistency—although the teams changed and the players had individual personalities, they all conformed to general codes of conduct and represented the idealized American man: an individual who would nonetheless sublimate his own desires for the good of his team; a dedicated athlete who persevered through pain and showed courage and adapted when his body failed him; and a family man who devoted himself to his wife, his children, and his community when he was not on the field. In determining which of today’s Hall of Fame candidates are worthy of having a plaque hang next to such players’, BBWAA voters are not only forced to contend with contemporary controversies, but a mythologized view of the past. Yet that myth was written in real time, when America’s superpower status was being solidified, and American men were called upon to defend democracy and capitalism. In that environment, popular culture presented models of masculinity, and the Major League Baseball player was held as a Man among Men.

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<sup>323</sup> Tom Verducci, “Answers about Barry Larkin, Steroids and Hall of Fame Voting,” *SI.com*, online <<[http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2012/writers/tom\\_verducci/01/09/barry.larkin.hall.of.fame/index.html](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2012/writers/tom_verducci/01/09/barry.larkin.hall.of.fame/index.html)>> accessed 20 May 2012.

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Paley Center for Media. New York, New York.

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