

Chapter Seven Baseball

Lefty fell in love with baseball as a boy, then cars, The Beatles, Rock and Roll music in general, and girls as a teenager. He still loved baseball. He enjoyed many ballgames at County Stadium and at his beloved Wrigley Field, especially later when he lived nearby. Here, home run balls could be found in the gloves of the kids patrolling Waveland and Sheffield avenues. Sometimes these balls visited the Juniper bushes in the centerfield batters eye, or were caught by one of the bleacher bums. In this ballpark, doubles frequently bounced off, or were eaten by the Ivy covered brick walls. He took his daughter to Wrigley beginning at age two, when this stage of potty training resulted in trips to a sketchy men's room with a little girl, and many false alarms. He once caught a "fan-applauding"¹⁰⁰ ricochet foul ball at County Stadium off the bat of then future Hall of Famer Paul Molitor, thrown by future Hall of Fame pitcher Roger Clemens. Clemens, a hard thrower, reminded him of his earlier self on the mound. He owned home plate, hitters could crowd it at their own risk. Clemens would knock these batters down, including later his own rookie son reportedly "to give him a different view of the ball."

When the Brewers were moved from the American League into the National League, in his view this shameful thing should not have ever been allowed, it caused him to stop following the Brewers. The former team owner and then Commissioner, was on Lefty's permanent shit list next to the war criminals Nixon and Kissinger.¹⁰¹ This giveaway of public property and resultant tearing down of the 1950's vintage County Stadium building and the giveaway of the surrounding land was a shameful use of taxpayer money. As is the public tax imposed to pay for the ugliest and worst ballpark in the league, by common consensus.

¹⁰⁰ *This ball hit a concrete stair behind them and ricocheted back forward. He reached behind his buddy Randy in the aisle seat, and snatched it out of midair as it sped back towards the field. Normally he would have given the ball to a kid, as it is a good modern tradition, but his daughter had pleaded, "Daddy catch me a ball" as he had left home.*

¹⁰¹ *"The illegal we do immediately; the unconstitutional takes a little longer."* Henry Kissinger's quote released by WikiLeaks from a March 10, 1975 meeting with Turkish foreign minister Melih Esenbel in Ankara, Turkey.

The Insider

Lefty followed his loveable but losing two time World Champion Cubs on the NL senior circuit from the mid-seventies and now the NY Yankees from the AL junior league.

Yankee stadium

On my birthday, recently separated from my wife of 25 years, my dad dying, sad and a bit lonely, I flew to NYC out of Milwaukee on a Saturday afternoon on a Midwest¹⁰² nonstop. I visited the John Lennon Strawberry Fields memorial in Central Park. I was also able to have a long conversation with the doorman at the Dakota Apartments, where the Lennon's lived. I watched the Yankees play the next day before going back for work on Monday.

I arrived at the ballpark early to join a group tour of the center field monuments, called Monument Park. By the time I found the tour, the guide prevented me from joining the line, as he had arrived minutes late. I pleaded my case of being from out of town, but big city manners prevailed and I was denied entrance. I supposed in that moment, I felt a little like Clark Griswold.¹⁰³

Consoling myself with a beer and hot dog, I had an upper deck seat so high that a ballgame was not much more than a rumor. I did however notice the Yankee stadium 26-championship flags flying above the stadium, there are 27

¹⁰² This was in the days before yet another corporate merger, and they had two across leather seating and served free warm chocolate chips cookies.

¹⁰³ From the comedy film *Vacation*, which follows the Clark Griswold family as they take a long disastrous and hilarious cross-country trip to the theme park Walley World, only to arrive and find it closed for maintenance.

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now, and I watched Derek Jeter and the Yankees win. My grandpa had told me about Babe Ruth, my dad about Mickey Mantle, but little did I know at the time that I would be able to see the great Derek Jeter play the game we both loved. He played it so well, and for so long.

The Yankees, used the slightly *tired* tradition playing a recording of Kate Smith's God Bless America during the seventh inning stretch and a great but now well-worn tradition playing Sinatra's "My Way" when they won and Lisa Minelli's version when they lost. The Yankees also have their own great traditions. The Yankee Stadium Section 203 right field bleacher fans have something called, the Roll Call. At the top of the first inning, as the Yankee players take the field, and their starting pitcher is warming up on the mound, everyone seated in this section stands and claps their hands. These *Bleacher Creatures* then chant the name of each starting fielder in unison until the player acknowledges the crowd, even if this takes several minutes. The Creatures verbally move through the lineup, from the center fielder to the left fielder, right fielder, first baseman, second baseman, shortstop and third baseman in that order. The chant would be *Der ek Je ter*, and so on. With few exceptions, the pitcher and the catcher are busy and are not part of the roll calls.

At Yankee stadium, they also have a somewhat annoying tradition of playing a whistle sound after each opponent strikeout. One electronics company, who is a sponsor, uses this whistle as their company jingle.



Old Yankee Stadium Street view

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The view from Section 203

The Brewers now dropped from his radar; he never watched them again, except when they played the Cubs or the Pirates. The Pittsburgh Pirates were after all Lefty's boyhood hero Roberto Clemente's team, who played at the Three Rivers ballpark.¹⁰⁴ They had an outstanding homegrown player named Neil Walker, since traded to the NY Mets, and later to the Brewers. Lefty wore his Clemente number 21 jersey to the game. When he got static from hometown fans, he would say, "Look at the number, read the name, and shut up." Clemente was a hero to anyone who called himself a baseball fan, he believed. He managed to call the rookie Walker over to the stands during batting practice and requested that he play more like Clemente. "I'll try," he offered. Walker knew of Clemente because his dad was a friend and just missed being on the fateful flight which crashed into the ocean. Lefty wore a Cubs shirt and a Yankee hat to Wrigley when they played each other in interleague games. Other fans thought him confused, but he told them he was just a "baseball" fan.

He also watched Braves baseball as they played on television frequently because of Ted Turner's superstition. He was fortunate to see some of the best pitching in baseball history watching Maddox, Glavine, and Smoltz on the mound for fourteen straight division titles throughout the nineties, and into the 21st century. The threesome would collectively win in excess of 800 games in their careers.

¹⁰⁴ *As a result, Lefty chose Pittsburg for a grade school report and learning a new vocabulary word, confluence. The city of Pittsburg was after all built at the confluence of three rivers, the Allegheny, the Monongahela and the Ohio.*

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Lefty and his older brother, made a road trip to visit the newest version of Bush stadium in St. Louis. He was dismayed to see the brick wall behind home plate was fake, unlike the real bricks at Wrigley. The new stadium unusually devoid of the signs of a great team history did have some old scoreboards displayed inside the concourse area. These old scoreboards depicted what they was displayed at the end of the last game in Old Busch Stadium complete with teams and scores. After a well-played and competitive game, the Cubs of course lost on a walk off grand slam homerun.

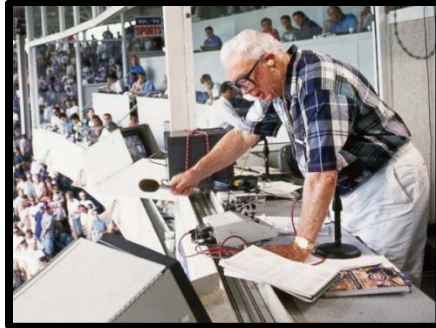


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30 MILWAUKEE											1		
57 PITTSBURGH											F 3		
36 LOS ANGELES	0	0	0	0							0		
53 SAN DIEGO	1	0	0	0							0		

Concourse area scoreboard

Wrigley Field

The Chicago Cubs have a great tradition singing "Take me out to the Ballgame." during 7th inning stretch, as opposed to the lame tradition of the Brewers Sausage Races and singing the Beer Barrel Polka. The Cubs long time play-by-play announcer Harry Cary has since passed away, but they have continued this grand tradition using guest conductors to sing and video replays of Harry on the new left field video screen.



Harry Cary singing during the seventh inning stretch

More recently, the Cub fans also created the tradition of singing "Go Cubs Go!" end of a winning game. During each of the past two seasons, the Cubs sent their fans out of their seats and back home singing, more than fifty times. Then a few more times during the post-season playoffs and in one World Series game. There is also a tradition of throwing home run balls hit by the other team back into the outfield and if you didn't, the bleacher bums would relentlessly chant "throw it back, throw it back" until you did.

The origins of this are said to have started in the 1970's during a game between the Cubs and the Atlanta Braves. It is said that the Hall of Famer Hank Aaron hit a home run into the bleachers in a 14-3 Braves loss. The Braves fan that caught it sought to return it to Aaron after the game but he wanted nothing to do with the ball since the team lost the game. The very next day the same fan caught another Aaron home run ball in the bleachers off the bat of Aaron. This time however knowing that Aaron would not want the ball, he through it back onto the field. This then became adopted as a tradition at Wrigley field that continues to this day.

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Rumor held that some bleacher ticket holders brought along an old ball along to throw back, just in case they caught one. This was ironic as Wrigley was the first place, which finally allowed fans to keep balls hit into the seats sometime in the early 1900's.¹⁰⁵ Prior to this time, the game would be stopped until the ball was retrieved. This was not unlike playing Home Run Derby as a kid, I thought.¹⁰⁶

The newest tradition involves dancing bullpen pitchers. Now when the Cubs hit a home run, the relief pitchers all dance in the enclosed pen and the video is displayed on the left field video board for the crowd to enjoy. The video board is also a newer addition. The newest renovations to the Wrigley ballpark moved the bullpens from foul territory along the first and third base lines to under the outfield bleachers. This is a replacement for the previous macho gone awry show by the bullpen pitchers. They would challenge each other to be the last to move when a foul ball line drive or ground ball came screaming into the bull pen.

Another new Cub player antic, is the mock interviews in the dugouts by other players after home run balls. These are completed with fake microphones and air cameras.

His Cubs were recently playing better than ever, the best in the forty years plus years he watched and rooted for

¹⁰⁵ On average, twelve dozen balls are now used per game, from the 2.4 million hand assembled a single factory in Costa Rica each year. The average use of a new baseball in an MLB game is now 5-7 pitches.

¹⁰⁶ During the time, the Cubs were owned by the Spaulding family, who just happened to be in the business of producing baseballs, among other sports gear.

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*them. They had made some good choices in the player draft.
The brought in some veteran free agents to fill out the team.*

*The Cubs brought in a new veteran manager to shape
the team. He had some Maddonisms, a flashback to the
pervious century's Yogisms, and some were eventually
made into t-shirts to raise money for the Cubs charities.*



*This dynamic brought back hundred-year-old stories of
the better times in the 1907 and 1908 World Series.*

Baseball's Sad Lexicon

*These are the saddest of possible words
Tinker to Evers to Chance¹⁰⁷
Trio of bear cubs, and fleeter than birds
Tinker, Evers, and Chance
Ruthlessly pricking our gonfalon¹⁰⁸ bubble
Making a (NY) Giant hit into a double (play)
Words that are heavy with nothing but trouble
Tinker to Evers to Chance*

Franklin Pierce Adams

¹⁰⁷ *After a 1905 fistfight, Tinker and Evers would never speak again even while continuing as teammates for the Cubs for the next ten years through four pennant titles. Frank Chance would later manage the Cubs.*

¹⁰⁸ *Gonfalon: a banner suspended on a crossbar. Today called a pennant flag.*

Then in November, the 108-year curse of the goat¹⁰⁹ was finally broken, and the Cubs won the World Series coming back from trailing 3-1 in the seven game series. The game seven finale was a 4-hour, 28-minute thriller and epic battle against the Cleveland Indians complete with lead changes, a rain delay¹¹⁰, and an extra inning. In typical Cubs fashion, they made us all wait. In the end, all that was needed was a 17-minute rain delay to wash away a 108-year championship drought. There are also exactly 108 stitches in a baseball, and match the 108 diamonds mounted on the Cubs World Series rings.

This game was thought by many, including the baseball commissioner and the Cubs president Theo Epstein, to be the one of the best World Series baseball games ever played.¹¹¹ The first extra-inning game seven win since the Pirates Bill Mazeroski's walk off homer beat the Yankees in

¹⁰⁹ *The Curse of the Billy Goat was supposedly placed on the Chicago Cubs baseball franchise in 1945 by Billy Goat Tavern owner. Because the foul odor of his pet goat Murphy was bothering other fans, he was asked to leave Wrigley Field, during the 1945 World Series. Outraged, he allegedly declared, "Them Cubs, they ain't gonna win no more," which has been later interpreted to mean that they would never again win a World Series.*

¹¹⁰ *An adhoc team meeting was called during the delay, where the veteran player encouraged teammates hit the reset button, and that they were good enough to go out and win this thing. After the game, the players all agreed this meeting was critical to their eventual win.*

¹¹¹ *"Look, I think we just saw one of the great World Series of all-time," Commissioner Rob Manfred opined. "It's got to be a top three game of all time," General Mgr. Theo Epstein bragged. "Everyone's prone to hyperbole at moments like this, but I think it really was. It felt like it. I died like six times. It was pretty remarkable."*

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1960. Loveable losers no more, they became World Champions and my 42 year wait as a fan was finally over.



No one thought this could ever happen