Outside the Lines

Editor Michael Haupert

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Yankee Stadium opened in 1923 as the House that Ruth built, but it also served as home to many other sports over the years

In This Issue

The St. Louis Browns Team Ownership History

Part 2 of 4
By Greg Erion and Dennis Pajot

The St. Louis Browns ownership history here is part of a joint project between the Business of Baseball Committee and the BioProject site. As they are completed, the histories will appear in this newsletter and be posted permanently at https://sabr.org/bioproj/topic/team-ownership-histories*. If you are interested in doing a team's history, or part of a team's history, such as the St. Louis Browns years of the current Baltimore franchise, please contact Andy McCue, at* agmccue48@gmail.com*, who coordinates the project. Several team ownership histories are already completed or under preparation, but many still need authors.*

The histories should be as comprehensive as possible, covering the changes in ownership, the price paid, the makeup of partnerships, the division of responsibilities among the partners, the reasoning of both the buyers and the sellers, and economically significant events within the era of each ownership group. There is no need to talk about events on the field unless they have a direct impact on the bottom line or a change in ownership. It is likely that arguments with cities over stadiums and threatened (or actual) re-locations will play a role in the essays. The histories should be long enough to tell the story but should be as tight as possible. There is no set word limit. The essays should include endnotes on sources. Heavy detail, such as the holdings of minor partners, might well be left to those endnotes.

Research guidance will be available if needed. Over the long run, it will be necessary to keep updating these essays and the original researchers will be given first opportunity to do those updates.

The St. Louis Browns, part II

Hedges Protégé: Branch Rickey

Branch Rickey came to St. Louis from the White Sox in 1905. A backup catcher, he was an oddity in the majors. Deeply religious, Rickey refused to play ball on Sundays and reported to the team only after he had completed coaching responsibilities at Allegheny College in the spring. He also proved to be a mediocre player.

Despite these drawbacks, Hedges was impressed with Rickey's incisive knowledge of the game and an uncanny knack for evaluating talent. After Rickey's playing career ended in 1907, Hedges and Rickey kept in touch while he continued coaching at Allegheny. Their association was one of mutual respect. Hedges admired Rickey's baseball acumen. Rickey appreciated Hedges' ability to advance in the world and run the Browns using solid business sense.[1] Eventually Hedges hired Rickey, who was failing as a lawyer in Boise, Idaho, to do part-time scouting work for the Browns in1912. The next year he offered Rickey a position as assistant and business manager to start in June, after he completed his coaching obligations.[2]

Branch Rickey cut his executive teeth with the Browns

Rickey's joining the Browns came at an inauspicious time. Arriving on the heels of Stovall's altercation with Ferguson and subsequent suspension, Rickey soon found himself in conflict with Stovall. Stovall sensed the precarious nature of his position. He chose to confront Hedges and by extension Rickey. Unhappy that Hedges would not grant him authority to make player transactions, he was dismissive of the talent Rickey wished to bring to the Browns, commenting, "I wasn't running a primary school of baseball in connection with my work as manager of a big-league club."[3] This, plus a growing realization that Stovall was working to recruit players to the newly forming Federal League while still employed by the Browns, forced Hedges' hand. He dismissed Stovall in September, replacing him with Rickey.[4]

Hedges' decision to bring Rickey to St. Louis was sound, but events and situations limited the progress he could make. During Rickey's time with the Browns, the team improved, but Hedges' constrained financial situation and the emergence of the Federal League hampered progress. Although baseball history notes Rickey's ultimately successful career, he was at the time a relative novice in the business of the game, experimenting with what worked and what didn't. Although his ultimate loss to the Cardinals proved fatal to the Browns, there is no assurance that had he stayed with them he would have enjoyed the same success he later experienced with the Cardinals. The Browns were undercapitalized.

This was for the future. Rickey's first order of business was to improve a club that had again finished last. Hedges felt the best way to do this was through development of a farm club or system. He had earlier explored purchasing the Kansas City Blues, asking Rickey to run the operation. Rickey, still tied to his coaching duties, turned Hedges down; the deal later fell through.[5]

The Browns, like all major-league teams, could protect only a limited number of players on their roster, placing excess talent on minor-league teams, rights to the player going to the minor-league club. Handshake agreements between major-league owners and their minor-league counterparts allowed return of the players should the player prove to be of big-league caliber. Frequently, however, this practice did not work. Players were often sold to the highest bidder; the work of scouts and teams who had found prospects went for naught. Such was the case with Hedges, as teams with more capital to draw on routinely outbid him.[6]

The need to establish a system to protect prospects grew more acute with the hiring of Rickey. He had a wide range of connections from his college-coaching days who referred players his way. Even before joining the Browns, Rickey had referred a player to Hedges, only to see him outbid.

In seeking to resolve this matter, Hedges and Rickey attempted another arrangement. An opportunity presented itself to fund local businessmen in Montgomery, Alabama, to purchase the Montgomery Rebels. Under the proposed arrangement, the Browns could acquire players off the roster for $1,000 at the end of the season. That deal fell through, as the prospective owners could

[1] Lee Lowenfish, *Branch Rickey: Baseball's Ferocious Gentleman* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 32.
[2] Lowenfish, *Rickey*, 59.
[3] Jones, "Stovall."
[4] Golenbock, *Spirit of St. Louis*, 69.
[5] Lowenfish, *Rickey*, 62-63.
[6] Golenbock, *Spirit of St. Louis*, 67.

not agree on financial terms. Subsequently, in January 1914, baseball's then ruling National Commission ruled these types of agreements illegal.[7] Although he was stymied, Hedges' thoughts for working relations between major- and minor-league teams would see fruition under Rickey at another time and another place.

One player would not get away from the Browns. In 1912 George Sisler began to play for Rickey at the University of Michigan. Upon graduating, Sisler signed with the Browns, an act that eventually caused chaos in baseball's hierarchy. Previously, when Sisler was still in high school, he had signed a contract with a minor-league club although he did not receive any money or play in any games. The contract eventually progressed through the minor leagues to the Pittsburgh Pirates, whose owner, Barney Dreyfuss, argued that Sisler belonged to him. After a protracted battle, which finally came to the National Commission for adjudication, it was ruled that the contract was invalid as Sisler was underage at the time of the signing. Having played for Rickey, who was by now with the Browns, Sisler signed with St. Louis. The commission's decision proved so acrimonious that it was a contributing factor in the replacement of the commission by the commissioner system. Sisler went on to be the Browns' greatest player. Once again, Hedges' Browns had been in the middle of controversy.[8]

George Sisler followed Rickey from Michigan to St. Louis

[7] Murray Polner, *Branch Rickey: A Biography* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), 66.

[8] For details on the Sisler controversy, especially on it being a factor leading to dissolution of the commission, see various sources including Bob Burnes, "The St. Louis Browns," *Sport Magazine*, April 1951: 64; Huhn, *Chalmers*, 60; Lowenfish, *Rickey*, 58-59; and Polner, *Rickey*, 71-72.

While these developments took place, spring training for the 1914 season had begun; Rickey applied his college-honed training techniques to major-league players. Sprinting exercises, sliding practices, various pitching drills, and lectures on baseball theory characterized St. Louis's preparation for the 1914 campaign. These were radical concepts for which Rickey drew much ridicule. Cardinals manager Miller Huggins said, "I believe Manager Rickey has a lot of very good ideas, but I am not strong for theory." On Rickey's use of specifically designed sandpits to improve sliding skills, Huggins said, "No ballplayer can learn these things sliding in pits."[9] Despite such criticism, Rickey continued his training strategies.

It was a mark of Hedges' management style that he not only backed Rickey's unorthodox methods but also encouraged him to challenge the status quo. Hedges' willingness to stand out from the crowd, to initiate a unique way of doing things, did not set well with his contemporaries. Rickey's approach paid off as the Browns climbed out of the cellar into fifth place in 1914, winning 71 games, their best performance since 1908's run for the pennant. Normally the Browns' improvement would have been the source of great satisfaction. However, times were uncertain for established major-league baseball as the fledgling Federal League was competing for players and fans.

Unfortunately for the Browns, one of the better-financed Federal League teams was located in St. Louis. Underwritten by businessman Phil Ball, the St. Louis Terriers made serious inroads in the Mound City's fan base. The Terriers' emergence came just as Hedges seemed to be making headway in developing a contending team.

Prior to 1910, the Browns yearly attendance averaged well over 300,000. In their 1908 challenge for the pennant, it rose to more than 600,000. The team's subsequent deterioration dropped attendance to near 200,000 each year from 1910 to 1913, the worst in the league and a drag on the American League's overall financial viability. The team's-fifth place finish in 1914 improved attendance, an accomplishment that might have been greater except for the Terriers' presence.

[9] Lowenfish, *Rickey*, 69-70.

However, in 1915, the Terriers became a contender, narrowly losing the championship to the Chicago Whales as both their St. Louis rivals finished sixth. Hedges' club drew just 150,358 patrons, the lowest since he purchased the team.

As the 1915 season neared completion, plans developed to resolve conflict with the Federal League. Establishment of the league had hurt the two senior circuits as their gate dropped from over 6 million in 1913 to less than 5 million in 1914 and 1915.

The decreased attendance, coupled with escalating player salaries, strained most teams financially. At the same time, the Federal League's failure to attract significant National and American League players, coupled with aggressive legal actions and indifferent attendance, contributed to a dubious future for the upstarts.[10]

Hedges had played his part in holding players within the American League. The Browns did not lose a single player off their roster to competing leagues. It was not for the lack of trying.

In 1914 Stovall, now associated with the Federal League, persuaded one of Hedges' players, Earl Hamilton, to sign a three-year contract with the Kansas City Packers at twice what he was making with the Browns. Despite being in the midst of a three-year contract with St. Louis, Hamilton agreed. Upon hearing of the defection, Hedges met with Hamilton's parents with an offer to renegotiate the contract. He convinced them that it was best not to sign with an "outlaw" league, and they persuaded Hamilton to stay with the Browns.[11]

All these factors led to demise of the Federal League. Fed players were dispersed to American and National League teams. What was not part of the agreement but understood by all parties to be a major factor in reaching settlement was that Phil Ball could purchase a major-league team, initially thought to be the Cardinals. This turn of events came out of meetings Ball and Johnson had beginning on the eve of the 1915 season. Years later, J.G. Taylor Spink related that in an attempt to hasten the end of the Federals, he arranged to have Ball and Johnson meet on a social basis at McTague's, a local "gathering place for sportsmen."[12]

Philip De Catesby Ball viewed owning a team as a hobby

It was an unlikely pairing of two iron-willed individuals but they found they enjoyed each other's company. The two met on subsequent occasions and came to agree that the "ruinous war," as Spink described it, needed to end. Johnson realized that if Ball were to become an owner in the majors, the transaction might aid in resolving the conflict. Likewise, Ball understood his rather substantial advantage in the situation.

Ball's interest in the Cardinals failed to carry when their owner, Helene Britton, after showing initial interest in selling, decided to hold on.[13] Johnson, who held considerable sway over American League owners, persuaded Hedges to sell. He likely had an easy time of it as Federal League competition had worn Hedges down. Toward the end of the 1915 season, after rain cancelled a lucrative doubleheader, he shared with sportswriter Sid Keener, "I don't think I can take this much longer. This "war" with the Federals, a losing ballclub, and now a rained-out Sunday."[14] Tired, realizing that Rickey might be on the right track but that it would take too long to create a winning club, Hedges wanted out.

[10] Dan Levitt, *The Battle That Forged Modern Baseball* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield), 206-246. Levitt gives a quite detailed description of major factors that influenced seeking resolution of the conflict between the older circuits and the Federal League.
[11] "Hamilton Recaptured," *Sporting Life*, April 25, 1914: 9. Alas for Hedges, Hamilton's record with St. Louis from then on was a lackluster 25-35.

[12] J.G. Taylor Spink, "Johnson Brought Ball Into American League," *The Sporting News*, July 25, 1951: 14.
[13] Robert Peyton Wiggins, *The Federal League of Baseball Clubs: The History of an Outlaw Major League, 1914-1916,* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 285-286. Britton apparently resolved to sell but undue pressure by fellow National League owners rather than persuasion changed her mind.
[14] Keener, Hedges Made St. Louis…" *The Sporting News*, July 25, 1951: 13-14.

Hedges owned approximately 60 percent of the team as negotiations began. Ball received an option on the team provided he put down a $30,000 deposit before Christmas. As Christmas came near, Hedges seemed to be having second thoughts about selling.[15] One of the Browns' stockholders delegated to pick up the deposit showed up at Ball's office right before Christmas, and said it was probably too late to go to the bank and get the $30,000. Ball asked if he wanted the deposit. "The banks are all closed, and you can't get it now," the stockholder said. Ball pulled out $30,000 in gold certificates. "Here it is." The Browns representative refused to take it, sweeping it to the floor. Ball replied, "It's okay. If you don't take it, the woman who cleans up this place will." Ball left the office. The Browns representative soon followed with the $30,000 in hand.[16]

The team sold for between $425,000 and $525,000. Various sources differ.[17] Either way, Hedges realized quite a return on his $30,000 investment. The deal did not go smoothly. During final negotiations, it came out that there was a $40,000 liability because Hedges had been helping his ballplayers over the years with advances and loans. That issue was resolved but there was one final hangup. At the last meeting, there was a dispute over a tax of $4.90. Ball recalled, "I had already given drafts for over half a million dollars, and was not only hungry but disgusted. I finally tossed a $5 bill on the table and said, "Pay it, let's eat."

After leaving the Browns, Hedges stayed in St. Louis and went into banking. He died on April 23, 1932, the victim of lung cancer. In a bit of irony, his son Robert Jr. married the daughter of Sam Breadon, who eventually came to own the Cardinals.[18]

Robert Lee Hedges was the only Browns owner who made money on the team. He followed his stated goal of running the ballclub like a business, and in so doing ensured that games were fit for the public's viewing. His innovations, providing announcers and electric scoreboards, and keeping rowdy elements out of the ballpark, helped popularize the game. Other ideas Hedges championed included the use of multiple umpires to officiate games and the establishment of a farm system to develop players. Both of these eventually came into being, the latter under his protégé, Branch Rickey. Shrewd in the business sense, generous, one who often saw a bigger picture than his contemporaries, Hedges twice took critical actions to end baseball warfare, in 1903 ceding Mathewson to the Giants and 1915 when he sold the Browns to Ball. Both steps brought peace to the game.

Philip De Catesby Ball, "For my own recreation"

Other than the fact that they were self-made men, Robert Hedges and Philip Ball were two distinct personalities. Hedges, while a perceptive businessman, was suave and smooth in his dealings. Ball showed an impetuous and short-tempered side while running the Browns. Their guiding light in running the Browns differed. Hedges saw it as a business endeavor, Ball a hobby to enjoy.

Under Hedges, the Browns were the more popular team in St. Louis. Although the Redbirds now have a rich history of pennants and World Series crowns, their performance during the first quarter of the twentieth century was dismal. During Ball's first several years as owner of the Browns, they would continue to hold the advantage in attendance and popularity.

However, by the time Ball died in 1933, not only had his team lost favor to the Cardinals, more importantly the franchise had become moribund. He was one of many owners who presumed that because that they had thrived in other endeavors, success would follow in baseball.

Ball's approach to running the Browns came out of an early drive to succeed and not a little bit of family heritage. Born in 1864, he came from

[15] Levitt, *Battle*, 241.
[16] Harry T. Brundidge, "Phil Ball, an 18-Karat Sportsman, Has Lost Money on Browns All but One Year of Ownership Since 1916," *The Sporting News*, October 20, 1932: 5.
[17] "The St. Louis Shift," *Sporting Life*, January 15, 1916. While figures between $425,000 and $525,000 are quoted as the sale price for the team, *Sporting Life* broke down the sale in a more detailed description. Hedges received $500 per share for his 484 shares in the team, or $242,000. Other owners in the team included John Bruce, C. J. McDiarmid, and Walter Orthwein. After having purchased an option on Hedges' stock, they sold all the stock to Ball for $425,000. For their part in the transaction, the three minority owners received $100,000 in commissions.
[18] Steinberg, "Robert Hedges."

Keokuk, Iowa. His father, Charles, was a captain during the Civil War and reputedly one of the most proficient poker players in the service. Ball's great-uncle, Thomas Ap Catesby Jones, fought in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War.[19] Jones partially inspired Ball's mother, who named her son Philip De Catesby, dropping the Ap for De.[20]

Ball's early years were adventuresome, embracing a wide range of experiences while roaming the country. He was a cowboy, worked on a railroad survey gang, and killed buffalo for their hides before getting into the ice industry.[21] Ball's interest in the business eventually led him to build refrigerated storage facilities. By the time his career ended, he directed a company that operated plants in over 150 locations throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico, becoming a millionaire many times over in the process.

During his early years, while working at an ice plant in Shreveport, Louisiana, Ball played catcher for a local team and entertained hopes of a professional career. That hope ended during an altercation involving a knife, his left hand almost severed. His prospects dashed, Ball maintained interest in the game, manifesting itself as the Federal League emerged. Otto Stifel, a brewer prominent in Mound City politics and a booster of its interests, assembled a group of local businessmen, including Ball, to endow the effort. They raised several thousand dollars as an initial investment. Although well-intentioned, most of the participants did not command the massive financial wherewithal to fund a third major-league team for St. Louis.[22]

When the requirement came to fully vest in the club, virtually all of the original investors except Ball and Stifel withdrew. They backed the Terriers through the Federal League's two seasons of existence, then purchased the Browns. Although Ball purchased the team from Hedges, he was not the sole owner, holding 2,850 (77 percent) of the 3,700 shares. Other owners included Stifel with 733 shares, James W. Garneau, 109 shares, and L.B. Von Weise and S.L. Swarts, 4 shares each.[23] He later reminisced, "Baseball is my hobby. I got into the game with the Feds for my personal recreation, and I'm going to stick."[24]

After Ball took ownership of the franchise, he wasted little time making changes. He named Fielder Jones manager, replacing Rickey. Jones had managed the White Sox to a World Series championship in 1906 and more recently nearly guided Ball's Terriers to the Federal League pennant in 1915. The move was probably beneficial for the Browns, as Jones had proven success running a team while Rickey's talents were best suited to front-office endeavors.[25]

Fielder Jones, his hiring pushed Branch Rickey from the dugout to the front office

[19] While there were several related ap Catesby Joneses in the military during the nineteenth century, Thomas ap (son of) Catesby Jones was a naval commodore and participated in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War.

[20] Harry T. Brundidge, "Phil Ball, an 18-Karat Sportsman, Has Lost Money on Browns All but One Year of Ownership Since 1916," *The Sporting News*, October 20, 1932: 5.

[21] Brundidge, "Phil Ball…" *The Sporting News*, October 20, 1932, 5; Arthur Mann, *Branch Rickey: American in Action* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), 84.

[22] "The Federal League: Leaders of the New Circuit," *Baseball Magazine*, October, 1915: 69-70.

[23] "St. Louis Sayings," *Sporting Life*, February 19, 1916: 7. Who owned how many shares varied from issue to issue of *Sporting Life*. Even the names changed. Garneau and Stifel held 800 shares. Swarts became Schwartz, and Von Weise became Van Weist. Garneau was prominent in St. Louis society, owned a meat-packing enterprise in the city, and had played professional ball in his youth. See "American League Notes, *Sporting Life*, January 22, 1916: 11. Swarts was a St. Louis attorney He had been involved in legal actions concerning the Federal League, and represented Ball in various legal matters. See I.E. Sanborn, "Judge Landis Dismisses Trust Suit," *Sporting Life*, February 8, 1916: 5, "Dope Heaped on Dope in Great Profusion at Chicago Meeting," *The Sporting News*, February 10, 1920: 3.

[24] Sid C. Keener, "St. Louis Key City After Outlaw Loop Folded," *The Sporting News*, August 1, 1951: 15; Keener, "Hedges Made St. Louis Paying Franchise in A.L.," *The Sporting News,* July 25, 1951:, 13.

[25] Rickey's mediocre record, first with the Browns as manager (139-179) and the Cardinals (458-485) bore this out. Only when he was replaced as manager of the Cardinals by Rogers Hornsby did they win the pennant.

The reorganized club had Ball as president with Garneau, Jones, and Stifle as vice presidents. Von Weise became the Browns secretary.[26] Ominously for Rickey, he was not included on the slate of key officers. Ball's opinion of Rickey was clear the first time they met. "So you're the God-damned prohibitionist!" said Ball, swiping at Rickey's teetotaler perspective on life.[27] Despite Ball's feelings, he was obligated to keep Rickey on the payroll thanks to a long-term contract signed under Hedges' aegis.

The Browns prospered in 1916. Settlement of the Federal League conflict and Ball's purchase of the team included transferring players from the Terriers to the Browns. The Browns gained pitchers Dave Davenport, Bob Groom, and Eddie Plank, whose combined 41-35 record helped generate a 79-75 record, their best since 1908. Attendance jumped to over 330,000, more than 100,000 better than the crosstown, last-place Cardinals.

Helene Britton may not have been ready to sell the Cardinals after the Federal League wars, but as the 1916 season concluded, she decided it was time to do so. She had just endured a painful divorce, the team was draining money from her estate, and, with attendance at a league low of 224,308, she wanted out.

A group outside St. Louis, collaborating with Cardinals manager Miller Huggins, showed an interest in purchasing the team. That option potentially included moving the franchise. Alarmed, local baseball-minded businessmen gathered and, working with Britton's attorney, began to generate a plan to purchase the team through a public stock offering. As this process began, a search commenced to find someone to run the team. An informal polling of several sportswriters and sports editors unanimously suggested Rickey would be the best choice.[28]

Accordingly, the prospective purchasers through their spokesman, James Jones, approached Rickey about whether he had interest in becoming president of the Cardinals. Rickey, who had long understood his future with the Browns was limited, said he would speak to Ball about obtaining release from his contract. According to Rickey's later recollection, Ball had assured him that if any opportunity came to improve his position, Ball would not stand in the way. And, Rickey said, Ball gave his permission, telling him, "I'll help you with the contract. Have another meeting with those bastards and get enough to make it good."

Armed with Ball's encouragement, Rickey soon signed with the Cardinals; only to have Ball suddenly go back on his word. Ball's about-face came after he heard from Ban Johnson. Ball told Rickey, "I've just talked to Ban Johnson. It's all off. He said under no circumstances must this fellow be lost to the American League." Rickey told Ball he had just signed a contract, there was no turning back. The Browns owner, fearing Johnson's wrath, told Rickey he would deny ever having encouraged him to go with the Cardinals. Rickey, stunned by Ball's about-face, responded, "Mr. Ball, whether or not I ever go with the Cardinals, I'll never work another day for you!"[29]

Ball sought an injunction to prevent Rickey from breaching his contract. Ball winced as Rickey recounted their conversations in court, including his denigrating opinions of the prospective Cardinals owners. Faced with an increasingly uncomfortable position – Rickey would not work for him even if he won the case – Ball's attorneys obtained an injunction delaying Rickey's joining the Cardinals for 24 hours. Ball may have saved face on legal grounds but he lost overall. Because of this, more than any other factor, the Browns would eventually be lost to St. Louis. It was not apparent at the time or for a few years, but with Rickey's move, the Cardinals franchise began to ascend at the Browns' expense. It was telling that Johnson, not Ball, knew of Rickey's potential.

One of the first things Rickey did after going over to the Cardinals was help put in place "The Knothole Gang." This program, sponsored by Cardinals stockholders, allowed poor youngsters to attend games. Lifetime Cardinals fans came out of this promotional initiative, whose ramifications the Browns realized only too late.

Ball replaced Rickey with minor-league executive Bob Quinn. Quinn had been the longtime business manager for Columbus in the American

[26] "Baseball Skies Clearer as Results of Week's Developments," *The Sporting News*, January 13, 1916: 3.
[27] Mann, *Rickey*, 84.
[28] Golenbock, *Spirit of St. Louis*, 85.
[29] Mann, *Rickey*, 89.

Association. While he was not as broad a visionary as Rickey, Quinn's reputation as a solid baseball executive and shrewd judge of talent attracted Ball.

Scrupulously honest, Quinn quickly set Ball straight on his business philosophy while negotiating to join the Browns organization. The Browns owner told Quinn, "There's really nothing to the job. All you need is bunk and bluff." Quinn replied, "I have never practiced bunk or bluff in my life."[30] That exchange reflected the different perspectives each had on running the ballclub. Moreover, it showed that Quinn knew how to deal with the aggressive and demanding Ball, who only respected those who stood up to him. Over the next several seasons, Quinn, interrupted by World War I and Ball's occasional meddling, gradually assembled the great 1922 club that narrowly missed winning the pennant.

Bob Quinn, only he could handle the cranky Phil Ball

One never knew what Ball might do. Early in his ownership, Ball, who enjoyed flying, decided to fly into Detroit to see his team. Arriving at the team hotel, he went into the dining room to see his players. None were there. He learned that they took their $5 daily meal money, went to a cheap restaurant, spending about 75 cents, and pocketed the rest. Incensed, feeling he was being cheated, Ball dropped the per-diem arrangement, instead forcing players to sign for their meals in the hotel. Often generous, he balked at what he saw as being taken advantage of in matters as trivial as this.[31]

Quinn's first year with the club, 1917, tested his resolve. The team fell to seventh, owing in part to several key injuries. As if this were not challenge enough, Ball's meddlesome nature made a poor season miserable. The team had fallen into last place in September when Ball responded to the question "what was the matter with his team?" He responded that "he didn't know, and wasn't competent to judge, but that a lot of people had been telling him the players were 'laying down' on the manager and he meant to kid (*sic*) them where it would hurt – in their pay checks."[32]

As a *TSN* article pointed out, it was one thing for "a thousand or two" other people to point out that the level of play was indifferent. It was quite another for the owner of the team to share such sentiments publicly. Ball subsequently claimed he had not said players were performing indifferently. However, by giving credence to the comments of others and saying that financial repercussions for apathetic effort might follow, he essentially endorsed those observations. Further exacerbating the situation, Ball made it known he thought only three players on the team, Jimmy Austin, Hank Severeid, and Sisler, were giving their all.

Del Pratt once sued his boss, Phil Ball, for libel

The next day Johnny Lavan, Del Pratt, and Burt Shotton, each of whom resented Ball's comments, asked that he apologize. Ball backed off, and offered to have a retraction printed. Despite this, several days later Lavan and Pratt sued Ball for libel, setting off a chain reaction.[33]

Before the 1918 season began, St. Louis traded all three players – Lavan and Shotton to Washington, Pratt to the Yankees. The trial for libel began during spring training with plaintiffs commencing their efforts by deposing rival players to offer their opinions of Lavan and Pratt's play. Ty Cobb averred during deposition that the pair "had always been honorable" and that Ball had "rushed into something without thinking."[34]

Under the specter of additional players testifying throughout the season, pressure commenced to

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[30] Rory Costello, "Bob Quinn," SABR Baseball Bioproject, sabr.org/bioproj/person/74c33d89; Carl Lammers, "Bob Quinn and the Farm System," SABR Baseball Bioproject, sabr.org/bioproj/topic/bob-quinn-and-farm-system.
[31] Bob Burnes, "The St. Louis Browns," *Sport Magazine*, April 1951: 65.
[32] "Can't Keep Browns Off the Front Page," *The Sporting News*, September 13, 1917: 2.
[33] Steve Steinberg, "Del Pratt," SABR Baseball Bioproject, sabr.org/bioproj/person/32b3be5d.
[34] "Ty Cobb Backs Pratt and Lavan in Their Action Against Ball," *Washington Post*, March 7 1918: 8.

settle the case as soon as possible. Ban Johnson, Yankees owner [Jacob Ruppert], and manager [Clark Griffith] of the Washington Senators pushed Lavan and Pratt toward resolution of the matter.[35] Under pressure from their new teams, they agreed to settle the matter for $2,700 apiece.[36] Significantly, Johnson worked the details out with Quinn, not Ball.

Although Ball claimed he did not have to pay a cent to settle the dispute, the American League footing the bill, he lost a fine player in Pratt. Part of the challenge St. Louis faced in the early '20s was finding a serviceable second baseman. This incident reminded all that Quinn not only had to deal with the business of running a ball club, but managing an impetuous owner as well.

The Browns, and all of baseball, felt the effects of World War I. At first the war had little impact on the game but as it continued, the draft, enlistments, or pressure to work in war-related defense jobs increasingly affected player availability. Additionally, in 1918, the government "advised" the major leagues to shorten the season by a month. Attendance at American League games in 1917 dropped 50 percent, from 3.4 million in 1916 to 1.7 million. Browns attendance decreased from 335,000 to 122,000. Amid these and other war-related incidents, Sisler biographer Rick Huhn wrote, attendance further suffered from race riots in the city, which helped deter fans from going to games at a segregated Sportsman's Park. Ball and Quinn could do nothing more than bide their time on improving the franchise.[37]

Phil Ball is often recalled for his irascible tendencies, for speaking without thinking or interfering in the team's operations, as he did in the case of Lavan and Pratt. Often overlooked is that Ball had the wherewithal to trust Quinn, giving him authority to make deals. It was Ball's money to spend – he trusted Quinn to do it wisely. Once the war ended, Quinn resumed improving the team through trades and acquisitions. He obtained [Wally Gerber], [Bill Jacobson], and [Ken Williams] out of the military. Williams, second only to Sisler in ability, came to St. Louis as a pairing of Quinn's ability to recognize talent and Ball's willingness to spend $4,500 to obtain it.[38] Quinn subsequently purchased second baseman [Marty McManus] from the minors as well for $5,000, a high figure at the time.[39]

Ray Gillespie, a sportswriter for the *St. Louis Star*, commented on Quinn's role in running the Browns, "He and he alone could handle Phil Ball during his cranky spells."[40] On one occasion, he asked Ball to okay a $2,000 bonus for pitcher [Urban Shocker]. Shocker, obtained by Quinn from the Yankees in a deft deal, had won 20 games, one of four times he would do so for St. Louis. Ball sarcastically retorted, "What are you trying to do with my money – get generous?" He felt that players were not worthy of their salaries because they did not work as hard as those employed in his ice-plant business.[41] Quinn was having none of that. "Not generous – only honest," Quinn replied. Shocker received the bonus.[42]

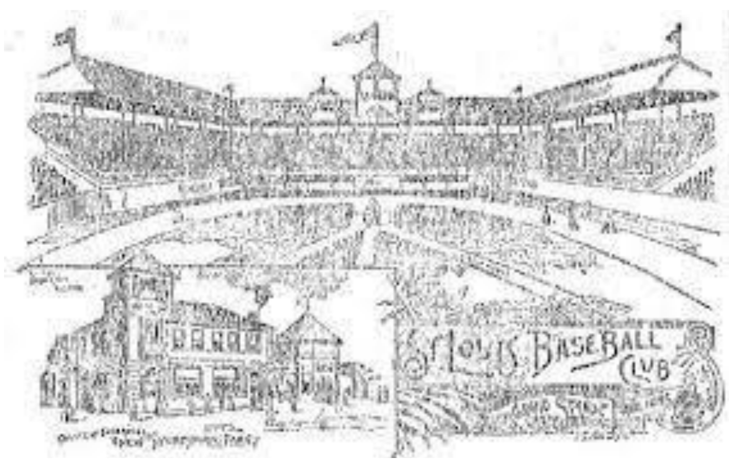
Toward the end of his life, Ball claimed he made money on the Browns only once, in 1922, "not before or since" however, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* said that the 1924 season "marked the eighth time in eleven seasons the team earned money for the present ownership." Presumably, that time span included Ball's ownership of the Federal League Terriers.[43]

Ball's outlook on how little he cared about making a profit made itself felt during Quinn's tenure. As a story goes, Quinn called off a game with the Red Sox because of rain. An angry Ball asked, "What's the reason for this? Why isn't there a game?" Quinn told Ball there were only a few hundred fans in the stands and that the game would be part of a doubleheader, making the event more profitable. Ball roared at Quinn, "Bob Quinn, let me tell you

[35] "Pratt and Lavan Suit Upset League," *New York Times*, April 3, 1918: 14.
[36] "$2,700 Each for Lavan and Pratt from Suit," *Washington Post*, April 10, 1918: 10.
[37] Rick Huhn, *The Sizzler, George Sisler, Baseball's Forgotten Great* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 68.
[38] Joe Wancho, "Ken Williams," SABR Baseball Bioproject, sabr.org/bioproj/person/4a926ed9.
[39] Bill Nowlin, "Marty McManus," SABR Baseball Bioproject, sabr.org/bioproj/person/3567429b.
[40] Roger A. Godin, *The 1922 St. Louis Browns, Best of the American League's Worst,* 35.
[41] Godin, *The 1922 Browns*, 6.
[42] Frederick G. Lieb, "Quinn's 60-Year Record in Game One of Best," *The Sporting News*, March 24, 1954: 13.
[43] Dick Farrington, "Phil Ball, Whose Ambition Was Pennant, Dies With Club in Last Place for First Time," *The Sporting News*, October 26, 1933, 6; "Wray's Column," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 10, 1925.

something. I worked myself to a frazzle at the office so I could see this game, and if you want to keep your job, don't ever do anything like this to me again."[44]

While Quinn was building a contending team, Otto Stifel sold his minority interest in the Browns to Walter Fritsch.[45] Stifel had induced Ball to become owner of the Terriers, then joined with him to purchase the Browns. For the most part, his was a silent presence. Prominent in local politics, he saw his finances begin to unravel over the years. Described as a "sportsman," he lost heavily on horse racing. Stifel's brewery interests fell victim to the imposition of Prohibition in 1918. Anticipating its impending passage, he converted his commercial activities to manufacturing of oleomargarine and butter substitutes, which proved far less lucrative. Less than a year after severing his connection with the Browns in December 1919, Stifel killed himself. He left a somewhat confused suicide note blaming his financial fall on Prohibition, banks, family, and friends. The note said, "I lost my head and appealed to Walter Fritsch and Phil Ball." No further explanation of how they were involved in this tragedy ever surfaced.[46]



Robison Field, abandoned by the Cardinals when they became tenants of the Browns at Sportsman's Park

Fritsch, to whom Stifel referred, had purchased Stifel's shares. A longtime acquaintance of Ball's, Fritsch was associated with the Benjamin Moore paint company in St. Louis, specializing in promotion of their products for auto and rail manufacturers. More of a fan than anything else, he had little influence in running the club. Content with being treated as "one of the boys," Fritsch often joined in spring-training drills, socialized with players and traveled with the club during the season.[47] He maintained a box down the third-base line, often the first to buy his season ticket each year, even after selling his interest in the club.

Under Quinn's patient efforts, the Browns slowly improved, finishing fourth to reach the first division in 1920; they had not finished that high since 1908. They were still the favored team in St. Louis. The Cardinals under the management of Rickey on and off the field were steadily improving and drawing better, in no small part because of Rogers Hornsby, arguably the best player in the National League. The Browns countered with George Sisler, probably second only to Babe Ruth in the American League. More often than not, they continued to draw more fans than the Cardinals, in 1920 by over 90,000 fans.

In 1920 Ball made another decision that was a major factor in the eventual demise of the Browns franchise. Robison Field, the Cardinals' ballpark, had fallen into a state of severe disrepair. Sam Breadon, by now the Cardinals' president, did not have the wherewithal to refurbish or refinance a new ballpark. He estimated that it would cost over half a million dollars to overhaul the facility.[48] By 1920, the place had become a firetrap, ready to collapse, Breadon was told by a building inspector friend that the ballpark would not pass a fire inspection.[49]

Desperate, not having the cash to fix the ballpark, Breadon approached Ball to see if he could rent Sportsman's Park for the Cardinals' home games.

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[44] Godin, *1922 Browns*, 9. For a somewhat similar version to this see, Bob Burnes, "*The Baltimore Orioles*," in Ed Fitzgerald, ed. *The American League* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1955), 211, which has the game being played for the benefit of Ball, his friends, and a few fans.

[45] "Averages Distress Fans of St. Louis," *The Sporting News*, December 25, 1919: 2; "Stifel Sells His Browns Stock to Walter Fritsch," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 16, 1919: 30. No details of the transaction were announced. Presumably, Fritsch bought the 733 shares Stifel had originally purchased as part of the deal with Hedges.

[46] "Otto Stifel Kills Himself at His Farm," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 18, 1920.

[47] "Obituary: Walter E. Fritsch," *The Sporting News*, February 6, 1952: 22.

[48] Joan M. Thomas, "Robison Field," sabr.org/bioproj/park/88929e79.

[49] Mark Armour, "Sam Breadon," in *The 1934 St. Louis Cardinals: The World Champion Gas House Gang*, (Phoenix, Arizona: Society for American Baseball Research, 2014), 239.

Ball rebuffed him: "Are you crazy, Sam? I wouldn't let Branch Rickey put one foot inside my ballpark. Now get out yourself." Facing financial calamity, Breadon was persistent. After several attempts, he finally asked Ball to listen to his plea. Ball relented.

Sportsman's Park, the center of St. Louis baseball for three decades

"I was a poor boy – a very poor boy – in New York. I came here to St. Louis, nearly starved at first, but eventually made some money in the automobile business. I got into the Cardinals with that fan group – soon got in over my head – and much of my money is in the club. We're heavily in debt, and our only chance to salvage what we put into it is to sell the Cardinals' real estate (the ballpark) for $200,000, get out of debt, and move to Sportsman's Park. You're a rich man, Mr. Ball; money doesn't mean anything to you, but I'm about to go broke, and only you can save me."[50]

If anything over the years, Ball respected determination, and often behind his blustery façade resided the temperament of a caring individual. Breadon's entreaty hit the mark.

"Sam, I didn't know you were hooked so bad. I admire your frankness, and what's more I admire a fighter, a man that doesn't quit easily. Get your lawyer to draw up a contract, insert a rental figure you think is fair and I'll sign it. Even if it included having that Rickey around the place."[51]

With Ball's agreement to take on the Cardinals as tenants, Breadon was able to sell Robison Field for $275,000, clear outstanding debts, and provide working capital for the future. One of the main initiatives Breadon – and Rickey – could now pursue was establishment of a minor-league system that generated competitive clubs for decades to come.[52]

The team improved in 1921, finishing third, and in 1922 came in second, one game behind the Yankees, setting an attendance record of almost 713,000. The Browns had reached the zenith of their popularity in St. Louis. Although various numbers were shared over the years, it was estimated that Ball made more than $300,000 in 1922.[53] He was generous in sharing profits with players and management, an action that further contributed to undoing the franchise. A large bonus for Quinn enabled him to join a consortium of investors who bought the Boston Red Sox. Quinn was replaced by William Friel, a former player and minor-league executive. Friel never gained the level of confidence with Ball that Quinn had enjoyed. He lasted with the club until 1932 before being eased out of the organization.[54]

The Browns proved a one-year wonder. In 1923 they tumbled to fifth, wracked by dissension and the devastating loss of Sisler for the entire season due to sinus maladies. Ball blamed manager Lee Fohl for the team's decline and began interfering in management of the team, firing Fohl in midseason. Ball's meddling, kept in check with Quinn running the team, gradually increased over the ensuing years

Sisler returned to the team in 1924, never the same player who averaged .400 between 1920 and 1922. Ball made him the Browns' player-manager. It was a position Sisler did not want and for which he was temperamentally unsuited. The team, however, finished fourth and third the first two years of his tenure.

After the 1922 season, Ball considered expanding the capacity of Sportsman's Park. It was around this time that he faced a personal crisis. His doctors told him he was going to die soon. Convinced this was the case, he sold all his business holdings; *TSN* estimated they were in the range of $5 million.

[50] Golenbock, *Spirit of St. Louis*, 267.
[51] Lieb, *St. Louis Browns*, 191-192.
[52] Armour, "Breadon," 239.

[53] Sid Keener, "St. Louis Key City After Outlaw Loop Folded, *The Sporting News,* August 1, 1951: 16.
[54] Averages Explain Cardinals' Plunge,*The Sporting News*, January 5, 1933:, 8; "Daguerreotypes," *The Sporting News*," April 19, 1934: 2.

When the doctors' prognosis proved faulty, Ball got back into the ice-plant business.[55] Convinced he was on the road to recovery, Ball plunged ahead with plans he had been contemplating to refurbish Sportsman's Park.

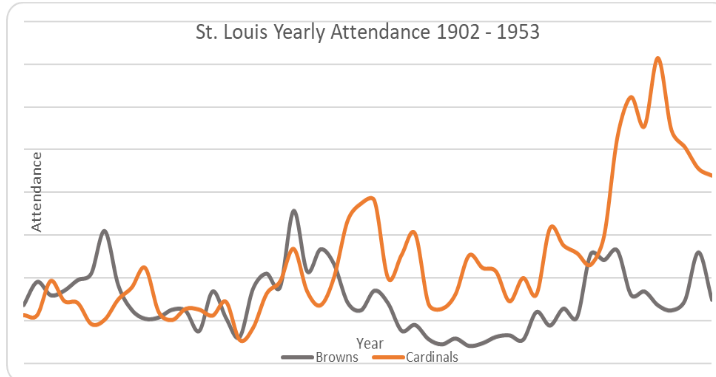
The $500,000 project began in 1925. Expansion of the grandstands increased seating by 10,000, with extension of the second deck going all the way down the foul lines. Plans went forward despite the Cardinals having balked at a rent increase to cover the improvements. Ball finally decided to start the project without their cooperation.[56] The project finished in time for the 1926 season. It proved a boon – to the Cardinals. That season the dynamics of major-league baseball in St. Louis underwent a seismic shift in fan loyalty – a shift that remained permanent for the remaining life of the Browns franchise.

1926 and Beyond: Ascendancy of the Redbirds

As the 1926 pennant race began, every major-league team except the Browns and Cardinals had won at least one pennant since the modern baseball era began in 1901. During the 1925 season, the Browns finished third behind the Senators; the Cardinals came in fourth behind the pennant-winning Pirates, showing marked progress over their sixth-place effort the year before.

It was still a Browns town. From 1902 through 1925, the Browns' attendance averaged nearly 60,000 more than that of their National League counterparts.[57] Figures for 1925 reflected the same relationship, the Browns drawing over 50,000 more than the Cardinals. In 1926, however, this would all change as St. Louis's allegiance irrevocably shifted to the Redbirds.

The Cardinals won the pennant and a thrilling seven-game series against the Yankees, and in the process generated an attendance nearly 400,000 greater than that of the seventh-place Browns. Rickey's farm system came to fruition. From 1926 until the Browns left St. Louis in 1953, the Cardinals won eight more pennants. The Browns won one. Over that time the Browns averaged about 250,000 yearly attendance; the Cardinals nearly 660,000. Only once did the Browns outdraw the Cardinals – in 1944 when they won their lone pennant. From 1926 through 1953, their attendance was the lowest in the league save for two seasons during World War II.[58]



Source: Retrosheet

The remaining years of Ball's ownership saw the team's fortunes decline. Several factors contributed, including Ball himself. Without the calming presence of Quinn, Ball's abrasive and at times eccentric personality became more pronounced. One person with whom he clashed was Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the commissioner of baseball.

Their quarrel originated when Landis, then a federal judge, presided a case brought by the Federal League owners against the National League. Landis's inaction in resolving the case had a decided influence on the Federal League's eventual demise. While Ball was able to transfer his ownership from the Terriers to the Browns, there was no love lost for Landis.

Ball's animosity toward Landis continued after Landis became commissioner. He was the only owner not to sign the document that made Landis commissioner. When Landis and Ban Johnson engaged in a power play, Ball backed the increasingly beleaguered American League president.

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[55] Ball's illness in the 1920s, while mentioned several time,s was never specifically identified. See Harry T. Brundige, "Phil Ball, an 18-Karat Sportsman, Has Lost Money on Browns All but One Year of Ownership Since 1916," *The Sporting News*, October 20, 1932: 5.

[56] Huhn, *The Sizzler*, 198,208; Scott Ferkovich, "Sportsman's Park" in *The 1934 St. Louis Cardinals* (Phoenix, Arizona: Society for American Baseball Research, 2014), 18-19; Curt Smith, *Storied Stadiums: Baseball's History Through Its Ballparks*, (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2001), 132.

[57] Browns attendance for 1902-1925 was 8,353,058. The Cardinals for the same period were 6,919,713.

[58] In 1944 their attendance of slightly over 500,000 ranked them fifth in attracting fans; in 1945 approximately 20,000 less placed them seventh in league records.

Further conflict emerged when Ball took Landis to court in 1930 over the status of a minor leaguer in the Browns system. Landis ruled in favor of the minor league club. Ball took Landis to court, arguing that he had no authority to act on the matter. Ball lost and planned an appeal. Landis summoned American League owners to his office and told them to live up to their agreement giving him broad authority to run the game or he would quit. The owners backed Landis.[59]

Since the departure of Quinn. nobody had been able to blunt Ball's harsher side. In 1928 Ball brought Lee Carle "L.C." McEvoy into the Browns organization as vice president. McEvoy began his career as a college athletic director before getting into the oil industry in Oklahoma in 1913. He did quite well financially, and his interest in sports, particularly baseball, led him to become a minor-league executive. In 1920 he became president of the Western League. His work attracted Ball's attention and in 1928 Ball put him in charge of the Browns' minor-league affiliates.[60] Within a few years, McEvoy took over Friel's functions as business manager. Friel resigned in December of 1932, his role with the club having become superfluous after what the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* described as "several bad seasons – financial as well as artistic."[61] McEvoy proved somewhat able to curb Ball's rougher side on occasion but not always.

McEvoy's joining the club coincided with a jump in the Browns' fortunes. After two seventh-place finishes, the Browns jumped back into the first division in 1928, helped by the solid performance of players like pitcher Alvin Crowder and outfielder Heinie Manush. But their finish was no match for the Cardinals, who won their second pennant.

In mid-1930 Manush supposedly snubbed Ball when the owner wanted to visit with him. Almost simultaneously, Ball attended a game when Crowder was pitching. Crowder, outraged after an umpire called a ball on a crucial pitch, threw the ball into the stands. It narrowly missed hitting Ball and his guests. Angered, Ball called Clark Griffith, owner of the Senators, and dealt Crowder and Manush from the club at a decided disadvantage to his team. In 1929 Crowder went 17-15 and Manush hit .355. After they left, the Browns never finished higher than fifth under Ball's watch.[62]

By then Ball had soured on the team, expending minimal funds on their operations. In 1931 only 27 players were brought to spring training. Offering minimum contracts, Ball sought to improve performances by offering bonuses to play better. Former major leaguer Bill Killefer had been hired to manage the club but his ability to lead the team was hampered by Ball's increasing interference. Killefer recalled, "Phil Ball, the owner, had a bonus arrangement with every player on the club, but I didn't know it. I'd give the bunt sign to someone like Red Kress, and he'd look at me like I was crazy and then swing from the heels. His bonus, it seemed, paid off on so many home runs."[63]

While the Cardinals won consecutive pennants in 1930-31, the Browns went downhill. By 1933, attendance was just over 88,000 fans. The Depression compromised Ball's ability to spend money on the team. As the season entered the closing weeks, Ball contracted septicemia at his summer home in Minnesota. Also suffering from high blood pressure, Ball died on October 22, 1933, his 69th birthday. A year earlier, in an interview with Harry T. Brundidge for *The Sporting News* about his ambitions, Ball responded, "To win a pennant, of course." His obituary in *TSN* a year later closed with this observation: "And Ball

Rogers Hornsby, outspoken skipper

[59] Golenbock, *Spirit of St. Louis*, 268-269.
[60] Frederick G. Lieb, "L.C. McEvoy Dies; Official of Browns, Aid to Harridge," *The Sporting News*, May 29, 1957: 28.
[61] James M. Gould, "Bill Friel, business Manager of Browns, Leaves Club January 1," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 29, 1932: 16. After leaving the Browns, Friel tried unsuccessfully to obtain ownership of a minor-league team, managed a minor-league team in 1940, and was thereafter out of the game. He died in 1959. Ray Gillespie, "Bill Friel, Brownie Official for Ten Years, Dies at 83," *The Sporting News*, January 1, 1960: 28.
[62] Golenbock, *Spirit of St. Louis*, 269.
[63] Charlie Weatherby, "Bill Killefer," sabr.org/bioproj/person/5ae1b077.

the true sportsman, went away without that pennant. Instead he had his first cellar champion in 1933."[64] Indeed he had, as the Browns finished nine games behind the seventh-place Boston Red Sox. It was their first eighth-place finish in 20 years, a sad ending for Ball's tenure as owner of the Browns.

Interregnum: The Phil Ball Estate

Ball's estate immediately assumed ownership of the club. Given the right deal, Mrs. Ball would sell the Browns. Immediate speculation centered on oil mogul Harry F. Sinclair as a potential buyer.[65] Sinclair, owner of Sinclair Oil, had been a heavy financier of the Federal League.[66] Speculation on Sinclair's possible interest noted his close relationship with Ball and suggested there had been financial dealings between the two – even to the point that Sinclair may have held part-ownership in the Browns. However, the same article noted that Sinclair's "attitude toward costly sporting ventures had cooled" in recent years. Nothing ever developed out of that line of conjecture.

Within several weeks of Ball's passing, the Browns' board of directors named Louis B. Von Weise president. Von Weise had been a minority stockholder in the club since Ball's takeover in 1916. Having a business background, he and his brother initially operated a department store; subsequently Von Weise became associated with Ball's business ventures. Gradually he became known as Ball's "right-hand man," a trusted confidant serving in various capacities as a director and vice president of Ball's far-flung concerns.[67] At the time he was named president, Von Weise was director of the City Ice and Fuel Company of Cleveland. Neither Von Weise nor McEvoy had any experience in running the baseball side of the club.

Von Weise immediately made it clear that the board would defer to manager Rogers Hornsby. "(Hornsby) knows the ropes, is an aggressive, sound thinking man and I propose to let him have full sway with the teams and the players he will work with," Von Weise said.[68]

One of Ball's last actions as owner of the team had been to hire Hornsby as manager in July 1933. He had been recommended by various individuals, had been successful as manager of the Cardinals' World Series team in 1926, and still had the ability to pinch-hit occasionally. Ball hoped to lure local fans to the ballpark on the strength of Hornsby's accomplishments with the Cardinals.

On the face of it, Von Weise's pronouncement seemed wise. The challenge facing him and Hornsby did not so much concern the players Hornsby had to work with but rather the financial health of Ball's estate. It could not support the ballclub in a manner required to improve its lot. While *TSN* noted the estate's desire to sell, timing was poor – 1933 was in the depths of the Depression and "waiting till better times came" became the operative strategy.[69] Von Weise, perhaps hoping to set the tone for negotiations, indicated a tentative feeler to purchase the club at $300,000 was out of the question – he suggested that even a price tag of $400,000 was well below the mark.[70] This maneuvering did nothing to generate interest in a club that was no longer investing in its future or making bids for the talented players necessary to improve, if not maintain, the franchise's worth.

The Browns struggled through the next several years, selling off promising players to meet financial obligations as the estate continued withholding capital from the ailing club. In 1935 only 80,922 came to Browns games. At one, just 34 people showed up. As Hornsby later put it, "[W]e were under the estate of Mr. Ball and had to sell

[64] Brundidge, "Phil Ball an 18-Karat Sportsman…"; Farmington, "Phil Ball Whose Ambition Was Pennant…"
[65] "Death of Ball Leaves Future Control of Browns in Doubt," *The Sporting News*, October 26, 1933: 1.
[66] Sinclair is more prominently known for having been involved in the Teapot Dome Scandal. He was accused of having improperly gained an oil lease on lands in Wyoming. Ultimately convicted of contempt of court, Sinclair was fined and served six months in prison. After serving his time, he resumed his presidency of Sinclair Oil. Whether this or his involvement in the Federal League is unknown. In any event, nothing further surfaced on his being interested in ownership of the Browns.
[67] "Von Weise, New President of Browns, a 'Rookie' With Human Prescription for an Ailing Ball Club," *The Sporting News*, December 28, 1933: 3.
[68] Ibid.
[69] "Fans Eagerly Await Card Trade Moves," *The Sporting News*, November 9, 1933: 2.
[70] Dick Farrington, "$300,000 Bid For Browns Turned Down By Ball Heirs As Too Low," *The Sporting News*, January 11, 1934: 1.

some players to keep going."[71] The downward spiral continued through the 1936 season.

Von Weise tried to revive interest in the club, announcing a "Phil Ball Memorial," which gave deserving high-school students passes to Browns games. It was an attempt to emulate the Cardinals Knothole Gang, which had started nearly 20 years earlier, but in the overall scheme of things it was too little, too late.[72] Lack of commercial savvy hurt the club as well. When Von Weise was asked about continuing radio broadcasts of games, he observed, "I think the radio has its good features – then again we have our paying clientele to look after. It might even have been that we were giving away the thing we were trying to sell.[73]

In fairness to Von Weise, he was in the unenviable situation of trying to maintain an impoverished asset and at the same time run his own business interests. By the middle of 1934, he was spending much of his time out of town overseeing various ice operations and felt he needed to relinquish the presidency of the Browns.[74] Plans were floated to have William R. Cady, Ball's son-in-law, assume the presidency, but opposition from the Ball estate prevented this action, forcing Von Weise to stay on.[75] This evidence of internal discord, and Von Weise's occasional interference with player transactions counter to Hornsby's recommendations, did not engender a needed sense of stability.

The American League openly pushed for sale of the club. League President William Harridge, committed to finding a buyer, felt that "the club would gradually decay, lose prestige and become a drain on the heirs." He thought that an estate running the franchise robbed the club of the clear leadership St. Louis required.[76]

At the end of 1935, a syndicate headed by one Walter M. Smith, described as "general manager for Woolworth Stores in the Southwest," was prepared to offer $325,000 for the club; the estate's asking price was $375,000. After meeting with representatives of Ball's estate, Smith commented, "We have already made considerable progress. … I am confident we can raise sufficient money to put over the deal. Much remains to be done of course, but at our next meeting considerably more progress should be made." The article describing Smith's interest noted that if the purchase went through, Smith would become president and George Sisler, vice president. This most popular Brownie was living in St. Louis and running a sporting-goods store.[77] Within weeks the deal collapsed as Smith backed out of negotiations. While Sisler was mentioned as trying to arrange a new group of investors, nothing came of the effort.[78]

There the matter stood through 1936 as the Browns remained moribund, playing in the lower echelons of the second division. In late August, Von Weise was interviewed while visiting St. Louis. His remote control of the club was illustrated when he mentioned attending his first game of the season. He said the franchise was "in good financial condition." However Von Weise's glowing commentary fell on deaf ears. It was observed that after Von Weise said everything was doing fine, "the newspaper fellows ran right back to their offices, swallowing their hot dogs on the way to make the editions." Sportswriter Dick Farrington wrote sarcastically, "So you see, the Browns are not so bad after all. They are ahead of the Athletics and there is no ninth place."[79]

After the 1936 season, criticism was no longer limited to external comments: Hornsby began to take aim at the team's leadership. In an interview carried in *TSN,* the manager bemoaned the lack of

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71 Rogers Hornsby, *My War With Baseball*, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1962), 50.
72 Dick Farrington, "Browns Establish Memorial to Ball," *The Sporting News*, February 15, 1934: 3.
73 Dick Farrington, "St. Louis Clubs Sign off On Radio Believing It Has Run Its Innings," *The Sporting News*, February 8, 1934, 1. Von Weise was not alone in his observation – the Cardinals did not renew their radio contract either.
74 Dick Farrington, "Both St. Louis Clubs "Can Be Purchased," *The Sporting News*, September 13, 1934: 1.
75 Dick Farrington, "Browns in Discord, Von Weise Stays On," *The Sporting News*, December 27, 1934, 2; Denman Thompson, "Griffith Declines to Be Santa Claus," *The Sporting News*, December 20, 1934: 1.
76 Dick Farrington, "Browns Home Gate – 76,000 At 52 Games," *The Sporting News*, August 6, 1936: 2.
77 Dick Farrington, "Syndicate Being Formed to Buy Browns, Plans $325,000 Offer," *The Sporting News,* December 5, 1935: 1.
78 Dick Farrington, "Hornsby Gives Sox Best Route to the West," *The Sporting News*, December 19, 1935: 8.
79 Dick Farrington, "There's Nothing Blue About the Browns," *The Sporting News*, August 20, 1936: 1.

talent, especially pitching, and then ventured into areas beyond the playing field. "There are three or four playboys on the team. They are fellows who must be handled like a chain gang. But you couldn't put all these fellows in their places by continuing to fine only one of them." The article said that front-office interference prevented disciplinary actions from taking place. It added, "A breach seems to have come between Rog (Hornsby) and Louis Von Weise, remote control president of the club," an unmistakable comment on the team's absentee control.

Hornsby observed that nothing had been done to improve the Browns, and probably wouldn't until winter meetings in December, a rather dismal outlook. Farrington's article observed that there had been some rumors on potential buyers of the club but that at that point they were just rumors.[80] Things were about to change rather quickly.

Other clubs in the league suffered from St. Louis's poor attendance. Trips to Sportsman's Park consistently lost money as traveling costs easily outpaced the visitors' share of the gate. Pressure mounted on Von Weise and the estate to sell a franchise decreasing in value. Von Weise, desperate to unload the Browns, offered a $25,000 fee to anyone who could produce a buyer for the club.[81]

Parts III-IV will appear in the next two issues of Outside the Lines

Recently Published Research

This column highlights recently published articles on topics that may interest members of the Business of Baseball Committee. If you are aware of a source that publishes articles of interest to the readership, please alert me so that I can monitor it.

Peter Michael Scott, "Not going out: television's impacts on Britain's commercial entertainment industries and popular leisure during the 1950s," *Social History* 48, no. 4 (2023): 475-500

The 1950s was a pivotal decade for Britain's entertainment industries, with the rapid diffusion of television and sharp declines for hitherto dominant urban venue entertainments. This had important social consequences, including the acceleration of the trend from community-based socialising to more sedentary, family-based, entertainment – the last essential component of the 'industrialisation of the home'. However, the disruptive impact of television varied considerably among different incumbent urban entertainments, with variety theatre and cinema facing catastrophic declines, while spectator sports and dance halls continued to flourish. This article examines television's differential impact on incumbent entertainments using a variety of new sources, including Customs and Excise data; unpublished government social surveys; and trade sources. The differential impact of television on incumbent entertainments can be largely explained by the degree of 'commitment' demanded of consumers for different leisure activities; the degree to which television was a strong substitute; the presence of addictive elements (gambling); and the extent to which the activity appealed to a youth audience. However, the rapid collapse of variety theatre and cinema can only be fully explained by television enabling strong latent preferences for commercial entertainment in the home, which were now satisfied by television.

Stuart M. Blumin and Glenn C. Altschuler, "When Sunday Baseball Came to Brooklyn," *New York History* 104, no. 1 (Summer 2023): 28-52

On Sunday, May 3, 1874, police in Brooklyn, New York, arrested seventeen boys, ranging in age from ten to seventeen, and hauled them to court where each was fined the nontrivial sum of $2. The boys were not accused of stealing, disturbing the peace, trespassing, interfering with the services of a nearby church, or uttering foul language within earshot of respectable citizens. The "green fields in the suburbs" where they had gathered were remote from stores, churches, homes, and tender ears. Their crime? They were playing a game of baseball. Sunday baseball, it seems, was illegal in Brooklyn, New York.

Damir Galaz-Mandakovic and Francisco Rivera, "Baseball in the Atacama Desert: From Elitist

[80] Dick Farrington, "Hornsby No Longer Swinging Big Stick," *The Sporting News*, October 22, 1936: 5.
[81] Sid C. Keener, "Hornsby's Magic Failed to Boost Browns," *The Sporting News*, August 8, 1951: 15.

Sport to Popular Identity in Tocopilla, Chile (1915–1971),” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 40, no. 4 (2023): 289-308

During the second decade of the twentieth century, with the industrialization of the Chuquicamata mine (Atacama Desert, Chile), workers from an American mining company introduced baseball to the inhabitants of the city of Tocopilla. From an elite sport practised by the Americans and embodying social segregation, baseball evolved into a widespread social practice that identified the city at a national level. Local communities adopted baseball, becoming a sport with solid labour, ethnic, economic, and political identity. In addition, the mining capitalists instrumentalized the popular triumph of baseball to create better social relationships between American and local workers and to improve the company’s corporate image.

Geoffrey Propheter, “Sports Facilities as a Housing Amenity: Do Prices Follow Facilities?” *Journal of Sports Economics* 24, no. 4 (May 2023): 443–474

The sports facility amenity theory predicts that when facility sites change, home prices nearer the prior site decline while home prices nearer the new site increase. Using home sales data in the vicinity of two proposed facility sites for the Golden State Warriors in San Francisco, the data are generally supportive of the amenity theory. The study also shows that Euclidean and walking distance can yield dissimilar treatment effect sizes, thus compelling researchers to justify their distance measurement choice. Finally, the data provide weak support that home buyers respond to changes in facility re-designs towards increased public benefits.

Hoon Lee Young and Rodney Fort, “Division Play and Outcome Uncertainty in Sports Leagues,” *Journal of Sports Economics* 24, no. 5 (June 2023): 639–663

The analysis of outcome uncertainty (OU) and competitive balance (CB) has been of overwhelming importance in sports economics. Surprisingly, there is little work on the impact of the structure of play on either OU or CB. Balanced and unbalanced schedules, and division play have been used to analyze biasedness of CB measures. And the impact of the introduction of unbalanced schedules on OU has been analyzed. But the *impact* of the introduction of both unbalanced schedules and division play on OU has not been analyzed. In this paper, we assess the impacts on OU, for given choices of CB (OU/CB) of moving to division play. This includes the impact of schedule imbalance, division strength, the number of teams, and the number of divisions. We also obtain estimates of their marginal impacts on OU/CB via numerical analysis and regression. The results are compared to OU/CB from unbiased estimators, for the case of the introduction of division play in Major League Baseball. The results suggest that the approach is useful and there are policy implications.

Scott C. Ganz and Kieran Allsop, “A Mere Fan Effect on Home-Court Advantage,” *Journal of Sports Economics* 25, no.1 (January 2024): 30-53

The existence of a home-court advantage is one of the most durable empirical patterns in all of sports. Yet, the mechanisms explaining its strength and persistence remain a mystery in large part because of well-known challenges with statistical identification. We use attendance restrictions in place during the 2020–2021 National Basketball Association regular season as an instrument in order to identify the effect of fans and crowd size on home-court advantage. We show that home teams win by 2.13 points, on average, when fans are present at games compared with 0.44 points when no fans are present. This equates to winning approximately 2.2 additional home games over the course of a regular season. In fixed effects instrumental variables regression models, we estimate that the marginal effect of an additional one thousand fans on home-court advantage is 1.7 points. We conclude that the mere presence of home fans, on its own, explains a larger share of home-court advantage than previously thought.

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Team Ownership Histories Project

By Andy McCue

The project (https://sabr.org/bioproj/topic/team-ownership-histories) continues to grow and evolve.

In recent months, we have added work that reflects the breadth of the project -- Bruce Allardice's essay on the 1884 Richmond Virginians of the American Association and Andy McCue's piece on the Seattle Pilots. From a failed 19^{th} Century league to a bankrupt 20^{th} Century franchise.

In the beginning, we set out to do ownership histories of the current 30 major league franchises. We've gone well beyond that. Our researchers have created pieces on franchises from the Negro Leagues, AAGPBL, defunct 19^{th} Century teams and those from leagues that are long past. There are a lot of possibilities out there.

The newest work joins earlier essays on the Mets (Leslie Heaphy), the Boston Braves (Bob LeMoine), the Red Sox and Yankees (Dan Levitt and Mark Armour), the Indians (Dave Bohmer), the Dodgers (Andy McCue), the New York Giants (Bill Lamb), the Diamondbacks (Clayton Trutor), San Francisco Giants (Rob Garratt), Miami Marlins (Steve Keeney), Philadelphia Phillies (Rich Westcott), Blue Jays (Allen Tait), Mariners (Steve Friedman), St. Louis Browns (Greg Erion), both versions of the Washington Senators (Andy Sharp), the Montreal Expos (Joe Marren), the St. Louis Cardinals (Mark Stangl), Kansas City Royals (Dan Levitt), San Diego Padres (John Bauer) and the Minnesota Twins (Gary Olson). Mike Haupert has written the Cubs before the Wrigleys and is working on the later years.

Current work includes the Reds to 1968 (Brian Erts), the Reds since 1968 (Ed Edmonds), the Rangers (Steve West), the Tigers (Nick Waddell and Jeff Samoray), the White Sox (Ken Carrano), Colorado Rockies (Dana Berry), Houston Astros (Brian Axell), Baltimore Orioles (John Bauer), Milwaukee Brewers (Dennis Degenhardt) and Washington Nationals (Jason Horowitz).

Charlie Bevis has contributed three 19^{th} Century NL franchises (Worcester, Providence and Troy) as well as Boston teams of the 1884 American Association and the 1890 Players league, which moved into the 1891 American Association. John Zinn wrote a piece on the Brooklyn Players League team of 1891. Bill Lamb has completed the Newark Peppers and Indianapolis Hoosiers of the Federal League. Mike Haupert has done the Negro Leagues' Hilldale Club and is working on the South Bend Blue Sox of the AAGPBL. Duke Goldman is working on the Negro Leagues' Newark Eagles.

Anyone interested in contributing should contact Andy McCue at mccue@sabr.org.

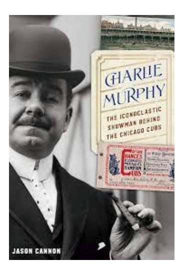
A Call for Submissions

The Business of Baseball Committee has more than 700 registered members. We are sure many of you are doing research that would be of interest to your fellow SABR members. Please consider sharing your work in the newsletter, which is especially well suited to preliminary versions of work you may wish to publish elsewhere. *Outside the Lines* is an excellent outlet for the publication of your research on any topic of baseball that occurs "outside" the playing field. Submissions can be directed to Mike Haupert at mhaupert@uwlax.edu.

MLB Team Employee Directory Project Update

The Business of Baseball Committee has embarked on building a historical database of major league baseball employees. The committee is close to releasing a beta version of a historical database of major league baseball off-field employees. Details will be forthcoming as we approach the release date.

Book Reviews



Jason Cannon, Charlie Murphy: The Iconoclastic Showman behind the Chicago Cubs, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022, 376 pages

Reviewed by Rich Arpi

The subtitle of Jason Cannon's 2002 biography of Chicago Cubs owner Charles Webb Murphy is entitled, "the Iconoclastic

Showman behind the Chicago Cubs”. While others may disagree, I consider myself reasonably intelligent. I have to admit, I ran to the dictionary to make sure I knew the precise meaning of iconoclastic. Webster defines the word as one who challenges cherished beliefs. Cannon may not have proven this point to my satisfaction, but I learned quite a bit about the Cubs in the dead ball era, nonetheless.

While the average bleacher bum might know about Tinker to Evers to Chance, largely through some acquaintance with the Franklin P. Adams poem, nine chances out of ten you would get blank stares when mentioning Charlie Murphy. I admit I only had a faint knowledge of Charlie Murphy before reading this book. I might have scanned through and even read Lenny Jacobsen’s bio of Murphy in SABR’s Deadball Stars of the National League when it was published in 2004. But I had long forgotten the particulars and Cannon’s biography covers in detail incidents in the life of Charlie Murphy that could only be touched upon in Jacobsen’s three-page article.

When perusing this book, published by the University of Nebraska Press, some readers might be intimidated by 376 pages on a baseball owner they never heard of. However, when one notices a six-page introduction, 30 pages of source notes, 13 page index, two page bibliography, three page acknowledgement, and a two page epilogue the 320 pages of actual text is more manageable. Divided into 14 chapters that cover Murphy’s life from a young boy in Wilmington, Ohio to his return many years later it is an interesting and informative read. Twelve pages of black and white photographs are found in the center of the book.

When reading this well researched book, I was struck by how quickly Murphy moved from a small-town clerk to a sportswriter for two Cincinnati newspapers, to press agent for the New York Giants, and then owner of the Chicago Cubs. He must have impressed the right people at the right time, particularly Charles Phelps Taft, the owner of the Cincinnati Enquirer and older half-brother of soon to be President William Howard Taft. Taft helped finance Murphy’s acquisition of Cubs stock from Jim Hart in 1905. On the other hand, Murphy had a particular talent for antagonizing people and saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. It got to the point where other owners, the press and his own players began to dislike his bombastic ways and the chaos that he caused.

When analyzing his baseball career, he must have been doing something right between 1906 and 1911 when the Cubs won four pennants in five years. The year they didn’t win the National League flag they won 104 games. I am not sure anything Murphy did was particularly innovative. Certainly, he can be credited with listening to his manager, Frank Chance, particularly when it came to acquiring players to strengthen the Cubs roster. Murphy, like some owners we all know, was tolerable when his club was winning, but less so when the club started to get older. Cannon documents the on-going feuds with Frank Chance, that were ironed out time after time until there was a breaking point. Other disputes with Johnny Evers, Joe Tinker, and Johnny Kling are also discussed in depth. The ticket scalping incident during the 1906 World Series and the Horace Fogel affair are well chronicled. Whether you believe the Murphy baseball legacy is positive or negative, he certainly knew when to get out. He must have been clairvoyant to see the Federal League war coming.

Among the things I didn’t know that this book discusses are that Murphy had financial interest in Philadelphia’s Baker Bowl while still owning the Cubs and his contribution to the construction of a fabulous theater in his home-town of Wilmington, Ohio. That theater may have more positive impact than anything he did in baseball. Colorful owners are nothing new in baseball; witness George Steinbrenner, Charles O. Finley, and Bill Veeck to name only a few. Murphy and his era deserve to be studied and this book advances our understanding immensely. Anybody who has the devotion of a stray dog named Bum (a shepherd-collie mix) that followed him around in his Cincinnati days cannot be all bad.

If you are interested in reviewing a book for the newsletter, please contact Mike Haupert at mhaupert@uwlax.edu.

BUSINESS OF BASEBALL COMMITTEE

The Business of Baseball Committee co-chairs are Dan Levitt dan@daniel-levitt.com, and Mike Haupert mhaupert@uwlax.edu, who edits *Outside the Lines*. The committee’s website is at http://research.sabr.org/business/. Stay in touch with the site as we improve it and add content.

100 Years Ago
The Opening of Yankee Stadium

By Michael Haupert

Yankee Stadium opened on April 18, 1923, with a late afternoon tilt between the Yankees and the rival Red Sox. Opening day festivities included John Philip Sousa conducting the Seventh "Silk Stocking" Regimental band in a rousing rendition of *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and concluded with a 4-1 Yankee victory, sparked by Babe Ruth's three-run homerun, the first in stadium history. But this is not a history of the stadium. There are plenty of sources for that (see reading list below). This story focuses instead on the tremendous business success that Yankee Stadium became.

Brief History

This story begins with the purchase of the Yankees by a pair of well-heeled businessmen – Colonel Tillinghast L'Hommedieu Huston and Colonel Jacob Ruppert in 1914. Equally as important as their wealth was their business acumen. Ruppert had been raised in the brewery business, and Huston was a successful engineer. Both men had an interest in baseball, but were businessmen at heart, and saw an opportunity to combine their interest in the national pastime with an opportunity to earn a tidy profit.

Left to Right: Ruppert, Landis and Huston

The sale price of the franchise was reported at various times and by various sources as ranging from $360,000 to $500,000. The most reliable sales figure seems to be $460,000. It is known that the previous owners, Frank Farrell and William "Big Bill" Devery, originally sought the latter figure, but it is unlikely they actually received it. In 1914 the team was a dismal on-field failure and was on the brink of bankruptcy.[82]

Newspapers reported that the Yankees had only earned a profit once in the previous decade. Primary information from the Yankee financial ledgers from 1913 and 1914 suggests that the profits are not quite as bad as news reports implied, but the balance sheet was dreadful none-the-less. The Yankees earned a profit of almost $22,000 in 1913 but had a loss of nearly $96,000 in 1914. The franchise was $83,273 in the red just before the sale. Attendance at Yankee games varied widely from a bit over 200,000 to half a million under Devery and Farrell, so it seems likely that they earned a profit more than once in 10 years. However, the Yankees clearly were not profitable overall and would have been unable to pay their bills in 1915. They had almost no liquid resources ($5,000 including cash and receivables) and over $300,000 in debt.

The lack of financial success under Devery and Farrell was no accident. The team contended for a pennant in two of its first three years in existence, but thereafter never came closer than 21 games of first place. The last three years were particularly dismal as the Yankees averaged finishing 41 games behind.

The before- and after-sale ledgers show the terms of the deal between the colonels and Devery and Farrell. The colonels got the Yankee franchise and the Yankees' debts were paid off. Devery and Farrell got to keep Muscoota Realty, an asset listed on the Yankee books, and got some cash. Muscoota seems to be unrelated to the Yankees, although the term does refer to the north of Manhattan. Using the reported purchase price of $460,000, Devery and Farrell received about $160,000 for the franchise and rid themselves of all its debts.

It seems like poor negotiation to pay $460,000 for a bankrupt franchise that had rarely earned a profit. But while the Yankee franchise was unprofitable, it was still valuable because of the operating leverage. Yankee attendance had the potential for substantial increases, which would cause revenues to increase faster than expenses. It is also a reasonable conjecture that the price is overstated, as most reported (but unverifiable) figures about baseball finances are. The data from the ledger suggests how this could be. The colonels paid $160,000 in cash and took on $300,000 in outstanding debt for a reported sale price of $460,000. But this total sale "price" assumes that the colonels paid 100 cents on

[82] Haupert, Michael, and Kenneth Winter, "Yankee Profits and Promise: The Purchase of Babe Ruth and the Building of Yankee Stadium," in Wm. Simons, ed., *The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2003, pp 197-214.

the dollar to settle the debts. With the creditors holding off bankruptcy pending the sale, it seems unlikely that they received anywhere near 100 cents on the dollar. Thus, the reported price of $460,000 must be taken as an upper bound. In turn, this means that the calculated return to the purchase of the Yankees (Table 1) is a lower bound estimate. The actual returns are almost certainly higher.

Under the Colonels' leadership the Yankees went from floundering to phenomenal on the field. The team had never won a pennant before the colonels purchased them, but captured nine flags before Ruppert's death in 1939.

As impressive as their on-field accomplishments were, they pale when compared to the financial success of the Ruppert-Huston Yankees. After acquiring Babe Ruth for the then-record sum of $100,000 prior to the 1920 season, they led the American League in attendance sixteen times during the next two decades, and built Yankee Stadium, considered at the time to be the grandest baseball venue in the game. In the process, they turned the Yankee franchise into a virtual money-making machine.


Yankee Stadium, which opened in 1923, was constructed in less than one year

Yankee Stadium

The first declared intention of new owners Ruppert and Huston was to build a new stadium, which they promised in the near future. In fact, it took nearly a decade to fulfill this promise. The delay was caused by the lack of success of the Yankees in the first few years and by World War I. It was, however, worth the wait. Yankee Stadium was the grandest edifice in the game at the time – an achievement that would set a new trend in stadium construction and prove to be a source of profit in its own right.

A big advantage the Yankees had in building the Stadium was the wealth of Colonels Ruppert and Huston and the support of the American League to allow them access to credit. Both elements allowed the Yankees to borrow nearly half a million dollars to complete construction of the edifice in less than one year.

By the time the stadium opened, Ruppert and Huston had already negotiated the sale of Huston's share in the team to Ruppert. The beginning of the end of their partnership was the hiring of manager Miller Huggins in 1918. Ruppert had hired Huggins while Huston was serving in the U.S. army in Europe, and Huston was not pleased. This rift was widened during disagreements concerning the construction of the stadium. Huston, an engineer, took a great interest in the daily operation of the stadium construction. However, he did not have final say in the plans, since he was not a majority owner of the team (he and Ruppert were equal partners, with no minority shareholders). Ultimately, Huston sold his share of the team to Ruppert for $1.25 million. The deal was finalized in May of 1923. From then until his death in January of 1939 Jacob Ruppert was sole owner of the Yankees.

The Yankees had moved out of their own stadium, Hilltop Park, to become tenants of the New York Giants at the Polo Grounds in 1913. By the early 1920s, relations were souring between the Yankees and their landlords. Both teams wanted out of the arrangement. In the spring of 1922, the Yankees purchased a ten-acre plot in the Bronx from William Waldorf Astor for $600,000. The lot was located just across the Harlem River, meaning the new stadium would be within sight of the Polo Grounds. Construction began on May 5th and the first game was played a mere 348 days after groundbreaking. Construction costs were $1.7 million, bringing the total cost to $2.3 million.[83] In contrast, the current

[83] Haupert, Michael, and Kenneth Winter, "Yankee Profits and Promise: The Purchase of Babe Ruth and the Building of Yankee Stadium," in Wm. Simons, ed., *The Cooperstown*

version of Yankee Stadium took 958 days to complete at an estimated cost of $2.3 billion.

The stadium was set up as an asset and depreciated over the minimum life for tax purposes. The seats and other improvements were depreciated over ten years while the building itself was depreciated over 30 years. The depreciation for Yankee Stadium is overstated for the first decade, and thus profit understated, because of the short life accorded the seats and improvements.

Yankee Stadium was a great financial investment, but not for the reasons that might seem obvious. It was not a boon to Yankee attendance, and in fact, was not much larger than the Polo Grounds.[84] The Yankees set their season attendance record in the Polo Grounds in 1920 and did not break that record for more than two decades. More than serving as a magnet for larger crowds, Yankee Stadium was a highly profitable investment because it provided new streams of income for the team. Some of this was from baseball, mostly in the form of concessions and more frequent Sunday home dates. Yankee concession income increased more than tenfold from a high of $8000 in 1921 to an average of more than $94,000 a year over the first five years in Yankee Stadium.

The Stadium produced lucrative sources of income beyond Yankee games. It was built with a quarter-mile track around the field of play (effectively serving as a "warning track" to outfielders chasing down deep fly balls) to host track and field meets, as well as an electronic infrastructure buried under the infield to facilitate the staging of boxing matches.

Boxing matches proved to be spectacularly profitable, with the Yankees clearing as much as $50,000 for a single evening of fights. This was equal to five percent of total home attendance revenue in an average year at Yankee Stadium.[85] The most famous of these matches was the second Louis-Schmeling heavyweight tilt on June 21, 1938, when Joe Louis knocked out Max Schmeling in the first round to retain his title. Yankee Stadium played host to more than 30 championship fights during its lifetime. The first took place before some 58,000 fans on July 24, 1923 when Benny Leonard defended his lightweight title against Lou Tendler.[86]

College football was another profitable venture. The dominance of SEC football today relegates to distant memory the fact that many of the best college football teams during the 1920s and 1930s were in and around New York City, and Yankee Stadium was a popular venue for their games. The Notre Dame-Army game was an annual affair from 1925-1946, drawing as many as 85,000 rabid football fans.[87] From the first contest in 1923 through the end of the decade, more than 40 college games were played at Yankee Stadium, every one of which was pure profit for the Yankees.[88]


Ruth hit the first homerun in Yankee Stadium history

The fledgling National Football League, and what the Yankees referred to as "colored baseball" also served as occasional tenants. The Yankees list "colored baseball" as a revenue item in 1927, 1929, and 1930 with a maximum of just under $4,000 in rental income. They list revenue from pro football at just over $7,000 in both 1927 and 1928 (Table 2). Because the Yankee records are incomplete, detailed revenue data is available for only a few years, which restricts my ability to analyze the impact of such extracurricular activities on the bottom line.

The Financial Impact Yankee Stadium

A complement to owning a major league baseball team in the 1920s, as it is now, is owning (or in the

Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2003, pp 197-214.

[84] When it opened, Yankee Stadium had a capacity of 58,000. When the Yankees abandoned the Polo Grounds at the conclusion of the 1922 season it had a seating capacity of 34,000, which was expanded to 55,000 for the 1923 season. The total capacity of the Polo Grounds could exceed 34,000 by roping off the outfield for standing room patrons.

[85] Yankee Financial Records.

[86] Yankee Financial Records; Fleischer, Nat, and Sam Andre, *An Illustrated History of Boxing*, Citadel Press, New York, 2001 (revised ed).

[87] It was nearly an annual affair. Army and Notre Dame met at Yankee Stadium every year from 1925-1946 except for 1930. The attendance fluctuated between 65,000 and 85,000 and averaged more than 77,000.

[88] The standard arrangement for use of Yankee Stadium was for the renters to cover all operating costs and pay a percentage of the gate to the Yankees.

contemporary case, leasing) a stadium. Stadiums are a necessary component in the production of a ballgame, but can also serve as a source of additional income on the 280 odd days on which the team does not play in it. The colonels were pioneers in the variety and frequency with which they monetized their stadium on days the Yankees were not at home.

In an attempt to gauge the returns earned purely from the rental of Yankee Stadium, I have calculated a return to capital on the stadium focusing only on non-Yankee revenue. Over the years there were many uses of Yankee Stadium, including professional and college football, boxing matches, track meets, wrestling matches, NHL hockey, and Negro League baseball games. There were also non-sports uses of the stadium, for concerts and civic and religious events. The financial records of the Yankees, which are used for this study, cover the years of the Ruppert ownership. Alas, the records, while substantial, are not complete enough to make a detailed analysis of stadium finances for all years.

Louis v Schmelling at Yankee Stadium

Table 1 provides a summary of the Yankee's financial performance during the period of Ruppert and Huston's ownership. The separate profits on the operation of the stadium as a rental property (Table 2) can only be calculated for the years 1927-30. In other years there is not sufficient financial detail to make the necessary calculations.

Of course, the stadium also contributes to increased revenue for the team during the season. A modern stadium is an attraction in and of itself. At the time of its construction, Yankee stadium was the largest and most modern ballpark in professional baseball – a castle fit for its king, one George Herman "Babe" Ruth. Hence its designation as the "House that Ruth Built," and it certainly contributed to the increased crowds at Yankee games. For the purposes of the analysis here however, I am estimating a lower boundary for the return on the stadium. For that reason, all Yankee baseball income will be ignored. The stadium profits will be calculated solely on the income earned from non-Yankee baseball sources.

The calculated returns on the stadium investment are downward biased on two margins. First, the revenues are understated, as they include only the non-Yankee game revenues mentioned above. Second, all stadium costs, apart from game-day expenses, are attributed to the stadium profit calculation. These stadium costs included annual maintenance and improvements, most notably the 1928 expansion project which enlarged the stadium seating capacity at a cost of $320,000.

The return on the stadium investment was modest for the four years for which we have data, with positive returns of 8.8%, 5.1% and 5.5% and a negative return of 9.6% in 1928 when the Yankees expensed a $320,000 expansion of the stadium. This expense should have been capitalized and amortized over 10-30 years, which would have made the 1928 return positive, and slightly decreased the returns for the following years. The bottom row of Table 2 presents the hypothetical returns if the expansion had been amortized over ten years.

While these are modest returns when compared to the team as a whole or the investment in Babe Ruth[89], they do compare favorably with corporate bond rates, which were about 4.5% during the period covered in Table 2. In addition, keep in mind that these are returns based only on non-baseball uses of the stadium. In other words, these are minimum estimates of the returns the Yankees would have earned on the stadium had they built it but never played baseball in it.

The importance of various sources of Yankee revenues changed substantially over time. During the first decade of ownership, Ruppert and Huston took in two-thirds to three-quarters of all their

[89] For a detailed discussion on the financial ramifications of the Ruth purchase, see Haupert, Michael, "The Sultan of Swag: Babe Ruth as a Financial Investment," *The Baseball Research Journal* 44 no. 2, (Fall 2015), pp 100-07 and Haupert, Michael, "Sale of the Century: The Yankees Bought Babe Ruth for Nothing," Bill Nowlin, ed., *The Babe*, Phoenix: SABR, 2019, pp 79-82

revenue at the gate. After the construction of Yankee Stadium, gate receipts declined to about 50% of total revenues as the importance of rental income from the stadium increased. (Table 1)

The accounting records reveal a hitherto unknown financial gain from the stadium. In 1926 the Yankees sold part of the land they had originally purchased from Astor to Stanley Murray for $250,000. The original value of that plot was $125,575. After subtracting a small expense ($3343) related to the sale, Ruppert realized a profit of $121,082 on the transaction. The problem for this analysis is whether to reduce the investment in Yankee Stadium by the cost of the real estate ($125,575) or the price for which it was sold ($250,000) less the expense related to the sale. I chose to reduce the investment by the cost, which resulted in a larger denominator against which to measure returns. I chose this method because my goal is to calculate the lower bound return. For the same reason, I used the gross investment (cost) rather than the net investment (cost – accumulated depreciation). The result is a capitalized value of Yankee Stadium of $2,174,425, which is the cost of the land and construction less the cost of that portion of the land that was eventually sold.

What is not included in any of these calculations of the profitability of the stadium is the opportunity cost of renting the Polo Grounds. From 1913-1922 the Yankees were tenants of the Giants at the Polo Grounds. Not only did they not have any non-baseball income earning ability as tenants, but they were paying annual rent of $55,000 beginning in 1913 and increasing to $100,000 per year in 1921 and 1922. If we consider the savings of the rent the Yankees were paying in 1922, the annual return to the stadium would nearly double. In addition, concession income increased dramatically with the opening of the new stadium. The rental agreement at the Polo Grounds gave the Yankees only a token share of the concession income, peaking at $8000 in 1921. As noted earlier, Yankee concession income increased by a factor of ten when they moved to Yankee Stadium.

Conclusion

The construction of Yankee Stadium by Ruppert and Huston was a bold financial gambit. But it was only the latest in a series of bold moves the colonels made, beginning with the purchase of a nearly bankrupt franchise in 1914, and moving on to the record-setting purchase of Babe Ruth three years earlier. Coming on the heels of the first profitable years that finally turned the financial corner for the team and after the enormous Ruth purchase, the colonels pushed in all their chips, and invested nearly five times as much money in a stadium as they had in the team and the Ruth purchase combined.

Ruppert and Huston made money with the Yankees by spending money. Their two most famous investments were the purchase of Babe Ruth, arguably the greatest player in baseball history, and the construction of Yankee Stadium. The former transaction was completed in January of 1920 for a total of $100,000. The latter was completed in the early spring of 1923 for a total cost of $2.3 million. That same year Ruppert bought out his partner for $1.25 million, netting Huston a capital gain of nearly a million dollars in less than ten years. It was a good deal for Ruppert too. He earned over $3 million in profits during his years as sole owner of the ballclub. Those profits were generated by a successful Yankee team on the field as well as savvy use of the stadium all year around.

Yankee Stadium under construction in July of 1922

Further Reading

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Table 1: Yankee Financials 1915-1936

Year	Profit after taxes and depreciation	Annual Growth Rate of DJIA	Return to Capital Yankees	Home Gate/TR
1915	$(73,362)	1.8%	-16.0%	63.4%
1916	$40,995	78.2%	8.9%	71.9%
1917	$(58,036)	-2.4%	-12.6%	65.7%
1918	$(46,651)	-22.4%	-10.1%	74.9%
1919	$106,971	10.2%	23.3%	76.9%
1920	$374,079	32.0%	81.3%	72.2%
1921	$176,502	-33.2%	38.4%	66.3%
1922	$270,875	8.6%	58.9%	65.82
1923	$464,885	24.3%	107.4%	
1924	$319,589	-1.6%	76.5%	
1925	$68,982	23.7%	16.9%	
1926	$473,139	32.9%	85.5%	
1927	$521,294	-2.3%	78.7%	44.8%
1928	$297,060	31.2%	34.1%	46.0%
1929	$229,919	46.3%	42.5%	49.4%
1930	$153,484	-16.7%	38.5%	56.7%
1931	$53,782	-31.2%	11.7%	
1932	$(4,730)	-58.1%	-1.0%	
1933	$(68,047)	-17.2%	-14.8%	
1934	$32,681	63.2%	7.1%	
1935	$(45,843)	9.5%	-10.0%	
1936	$338,649	35.2%	73.6%	

Table 2: Yankee Stadium Revenues

Item	1927	1928	1929	1930
College Football	$108,543	$140,612	$101,750	$87,841
Boxing	$124,451	$52,142	$45,345	$60,568
Professional Football	$7063	$7648		
Colored Baseball	$2500		$52	$3989
Total Non-baseball Receipts	$242,581	$200,403	$147,147	$152,399
Stadium general expenses (not including game day expenses	$50,592	$88,731	$36,804	$32,000
Expansion expenses		$320,821		
Stadium Net Profit	$191,989	$(209,149)	$110,343	$120,399
Stadium Net Profit (if expansion capitalized over 10 years)		$79,590	$78,261	$88,317
Capitalized value of Stadium	$2,174,425			
Return to Stadium Investment on non-Yankee revenue if expansion expensed	8.8%	-9.6%	5.1%	5.5%
Return to Stadium Investment on non-Yankee revenue if expansion capitalized	8.8%	3.7%	3.6%	4.1%

Contributors

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