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CRASHSMITH DOPE:  
THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL  
BASEBALL IN NEW YORK FROM 1919-1929

BY

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B.A., University of Mississippi, Oxford, 2009

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
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In the Meek School of Journalism

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## ABSTRACT

John McGraw's New York Giants were the premier team of the Deadball Era, which stretched from 1900-1919. Led by McGraw and his ace pitcher, Christy Mathewson, the Giants epitomized the Deadball Era with their strong pitching and hard-nosed style of play. In 1919 however, *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News* chronicled a surge in the number of home runs that would continue through the 1920s until the entire sport embraced a new era of baseball.

This thesis details the role played by these two newspapers in the rise of the Live Ball Era, the New York Yankees, and Babe Ruth. *The New York Times* was a daily newspaper located in New York, the heart of the Live Ball movement, while *The Sporting News* was the primary publication of choice for baseball enthusiasts throughout the country. The research chronicles the 1919-1929 baseball seasons provided by commentary and game accounts from both publications. It examines the shift in values of the sport of baseball from John McGraw's Deadball Era to Babe Ruth's Live Ball Era.

In addition to discussing the role of newspapers and baseball following World War I, the research will show the media's role in the rising popularity of Babe Ruth as John McGraw saw his power wane in the press and on the field with the Giants. As the newspaper accounts will reveal, the sports coverage of *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News* reflected the shift in baseball styles as the Deadball Era Giants yielded to the Live Ball Era Yankees from 1919 to 1929.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
II.	1919-1920: THE EMERGENCE OF THE MAULING MASTODON ...	20
III.	1921-1924: THE GIANTS MAKE A STAND .....	47
IV.	1925-1929: THE AGE OF RUTH .....	97
V.	DISCUSSION .....	141

**LIST OF FIGURES**

1. FIGURE 1 ..... 151

## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

The media and professional baseball have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship for nearly 150 years. As early as 1869, team owners, coaches, and players have welcomed media members, and have given them an all-access pass to report on the daily proceedings of their franchises. In turn, the reporters produced content that accomplished a dual purpose: it sold their own, specialized media product while promoting professional baseball to an audience the franchise could never before have reached. Both ownership groups prospered. In fact, media and baseball franchise owners can draw many of the same comparisons – they both work to improve their respective organizations’ bottom lines.

Today, media outlets and the sports’ magnates have capitalized on that relationship by brokering deals with media moguls like the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN). In 2006, Major League Baseball negotiated a seven-year, \$3 billion deal with the Fox Broadcasting Company and Turner Broadcasting System to televise both regular season and postseason baseball games.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the numerous amounts of television and radio coverage provided by these national outlets, local and national daily, weekly, and monthly publications provide information to individual teams’ markets, thus supplementing their bottom lines by notifying fans of upcoming games and promoting their star players. It leads to an all-important question: if not for the sports media, would baseball have prospered?

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<sup>1</sup> “Fox, TBS have seven-year, \$3 billion TV deal with MLB,” ESPN.com, accessed April 11, 2011, <http://sports.espn.go.com/mlb/news/story?id=2516552>.

While not easily answered, it is a question that elicits discussion of an earlier time for both the news media and professional baseball. Before the turn the century, the media and baseball were experiencing their own growing pains.

Instead of radio or television reporters colorfully describing play-by-play accounts of baseball games, newspapers sent reporters that “showed extreme partiality to the home club’s cause.”<sup>2</sup> Media owners, while they may have understood the power of the sport as an entertainment industry, tended to allot more coverage to foreign and domestic news affairs. Only after the formation of the Associated Press in 1900 did sports sections grow to about nine percent of the total paper and fifteen percent of all news coverage.<sup>3</sup>

The sport was struggling with its own problems. David Quentin Voigt argues that the entire country had embraced baseball as its pastime as early as 1869, but corrupt owners and on-going feuds between leagues soured some members of the American public. Baseball researcher Harold Seymour says the sport catered to the masses and that “among the wealthy and middle class there still lurked a notion that baseball and baseball playing were lowbrow.”<sup>4</sup>

“The Deadball Era,” (as it is referred to by baseball historians) which encompassed the years of 1900-1919 in organized baseball, was a reflection of the resistant mentality of the sport, its players, and coaches, toward change. The term alluded to a style of the game characterized by dominant pitching performances and hard-nosed play.

Following the end of World War I, however, the media and baseball changed. Whether because of the desire of the public to forget the horrors of the Great War, or merely because they had more free time available, America turned to baseball as its savior.

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<sup>2</sup> Voigt, David Quentin, “Cash and Glory: The Commercialization of Major League Baseball as a Sports Spectacular, 1865-1892” (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 1962), 82.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>4</sup> Seymour, Harold, *Baseball: The Golden Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 5.



The sport relied on newspapers to provide their burgeoning audience with an insatiable desire for more information.

Of the first five individuals elected to the inaugural Baseball Hall of Fame in 1936, Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, and Walter Johnson made their mark on the game during the 1920s. Ruth, Cobb, and Johnson were exalted as baseball gods and covered as such by the media. From 1919 to 1929, local and national newspapers played a crucial role in the narration of the sport's evolution. From a World Series scandal to widespread conspiracy theories about the ball, the media reflected the changing nature of the game; the death of the Deadball Era and the rise of the "Live Ball Era," the style of the modern-day game.

Set against this backdrop was the city of New York, the site of the paradigmatic proving ground between the Deadball Era New York Giants and the Live Ball Era New York Yankees.

Through the 1920s media coverage of these two teams and their respective players and coaches, it may be evident that both the media and the sport of baseball evolved together during the Roaring Twenties.

### **Research Question**

Researchers and historians have found it difficult to pinpoint the factors and chain of events that lead to the evolution of the game from the Deadball Era to the Live Ball Era. While author William Curran holds that Ruth changed the sport during a May 1919 performance, historian Robert Weintraub and sportswriters of the time dispute the integrity of the game's overseers, alleging the introduction of a livelier ball.<sup>5</sup>

Former catcher and major league manager Al Lopez was the last remaining link to the 1920s. His death in 2005, combined with the death of Phil Caverretta in December 2010, the last person to play against Babe Ruth, erased all first-hand player accounts of the era. Although

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<sup>5</sup> Weintraub, Robert, *The House That Ruth Built* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2011), 36.

direct connections no longer exist, newspapers of the period present narrative that is unequalled in quantity and quality of information.

Through the lens of their coverage of the contrasting styles of the Giants and Yankees, these outlets should provide distinct evidence that the game of baseball, in direct correlation with the sporting press, evolved during the 1920s. Specifically, does the sports coverage of *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News* reflect the shift in baseball styles as the Deadball Era Giants yield to the Live Ball Era Yankees from 1919 to 1929?

### **The Study and Methodology**

James D. Startt and William David Sloan broadly define communication history to be an integration of subject matter into the general currents of history. Startt and Sloan go on to say that historians must acquire an understanding of the context of the time period being studied in order to write “good history.”<sup>6</sup> The two say, however, that practitioners of sound history subscribe to no single methodology.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Startt and Sloan state that all historical research should include a number of standards of which historians should subscribe.

Startt and Sloan suggest that the topic of the research should be clearly defined and significant. All primary and secondary sources relating to the topic should be exhausted, thus providing the researcher with a sense of historical understanding. By compiling a complete record and evaluating the meaningful and accurate sources, Startt and Sloan explain that the researcher’s writing will include an explanation of the time and setting.<sup>8</sup>

This qualitative study will examine trends in newspaper coverage of baseball from 1919-1929 to determine if change occurred both in the media and the sport. After evaluation of

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<sup>6</sup> James D. Startt and William David Sloan, *Historical Methods in Mass Communication* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1989), 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

secondary sources pertaining to the period of 1919-1929, *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News* will act as the primary sources of the study. The immediate, eyewitness accounts of the journalists provided by both newspapers will allow for accurate comprehension and explanation of the period and the sport, concepts that Startt and Sloan say are “at the core of historical understanding.”<sup>9</sup> Written histories of selected topics from this period by notable baseball researchers and authors will provide an understanding of content of the newspapers as well as a contextual comprehension of the records. Other historians’ opinions regarding the period and how baseball changed are crucial to the interpretation of records.

The primary sources of *The New York Times* hail from microfilm archives accessed at the J.D. Williams Library at The University of Mississippi. Due to sheer volume of coverage, only Sunday and Monday sports pages of the *Times* from 1919-1929 were analyzed due to the larger amount of baseball coverage and editorial commentary appearing those days.

*The Sporting News* archives were accessed via Paper of Record, a subscription-based online newspaper archive that contains original published form of publications in a digital format. Sadly, some pages from *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News* archives during the period, now almost 100 years old, are illegible.

Communication history does not come without its pitfalls; criticisms and weaknesses still exist within the historical research. As Martha C. Howell and Walter Prevenier point out in *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*, perfect objectivity by both the journalist and the researcher is unrealistic. The two say that each historian has different abilities and skills; both of which they afford to their respective research and interpretation. More factors

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 45.

like individual experiences and outside influences also make complete objectivity unattainable.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Startt and Sloan assert that history cannot illicit the complete truth due to the segmented nature of written records.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, Gilbert Joseph Garraghan and Jean Delanglez write in *A Guide to Historical Method* that researchers must criticize the credibility and reliability of sources utilized. Garraghan says that criticism can be divided into six inquires including when and where the source was written, the author of the record, how the author came about writing the material and if the records were authentic.<sup>12</sup> Applying both external and internal criticism to the accounts within the publications about the New York Yankees and New York Giants provide the historian with a dilemma. According to Startt and Sloan, newspapers have published an inordinate amount of articles without giving credit to authors.<sup>13</sup> Because bylines were not used by many newspapers until the mid-1920s, stories appearing in newspapers until and after that point may or may not be linked with an individual author within this research. Therefore, this research will not provide complete credibility and reliability of primary sources due to the unwillingness of sports editors at the respective newspapers to give credit.

However, the commentary and articles provided by the two newspapers will still provide evidence for the closest presentation of truthful and genuine records as possible. The research will be presented in a chronological format with individual game accounts, social commentary, and player statistics from both franchises during a selected period in order to provide a more in-depth understanding of the primary sources.

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<sup>10</sup> Martha C. Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 145-146.

<sup>11</sup> Startt and Sloan, *Historical Methods*, 46.

<sup>12</sup> Gilbert Joseph Garraghan and Jean Delanglez, *A Guide to Historical Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1946), 168.

<sup>13</sup> Startt and Sloan, *Historical Methods*, 118.

January 1, 1919, to October 15, 1929, will act as the parameters of the study. Curran cites the date upon which Babe Ruth altered the sport and ushered in an entirely new era. During the second game of a May 30, 1919, doubleheader, Ruth hit a towering home run off Philadelphia Athletics' pitcher Scott Perry at Shibe Park in a "performance that stamped him as a the first truly modern ballplayer."<sup>14</sup> Others, like author Peter Williams, say that Ruth did not even begin to symbolize the age until the mid-1920s, specifically the seasons of 1925 through 1929.<sup>15</sup>

Still other researchers will contend that a different, livelier ball was introduced to the professional baseball ranks immediately following World War I, which was the primary reason why the sport experienced change. This research will not confirm or deny that the baseball itself was changed; rather, the research will contribute extensively to the information available on primary media accounts from this decade, and more specifically, the evolving styles of baseball on display in New York during that time. By following the seesaw battle of the Giants against the Yankees that took place between the sports pages of *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News*, this paper will introduce the showdown between New York's most successful franchises, as well as providing commentary on the simultaneous evolution of the sporting press.

### **The Deadball Era vs. The Live Ball Era**

At the heart of the debate between the two different styles of play exhibited by the Giants and Yankees, writers and historians point to a conspiracy theory that constantly resurfaced within the media coverage of these two franchises throughout the 1920s. A survey of what both eras encompassed will provide background information on the state of baseball before the parameters of the study commence.

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<sup>14</sup> Curran, William, *Big Sticks: The Phenomenal Decade of Ruth, Gehrig, Cobb, and Hornsby* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, Peter, *When the Giants Were Giants* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1994), 66.

Professional baseball fans have enjoyed a standardized game for more than 120 years. During that time, the sport has resisted fundamental rule changes. Aside from subtle changes the distance of the mound to home plate and the height of the mound, the layout of the diamond has remained fairly consistent, as has the positioning of the nine players on the field. Although the game may be the same, the ways in which the sport is played have changed dramatically.

At the turn of the century, crowds were welcomed at the park by the Deadball Era style of play. It became synonymous with individual players and teams alike.

Christy Mathewson, Cy Young, and Honus Wagner were heroes that stand in complete contrast to the sluggers of today's era. Pitchers profited from, among other things, an enlarged strike zone, "trick" pitches like the spitball to take advantage of the foul-ball rule, and improved fielding techniques.<sup>16</sup> The best hitters of the period learned to shorten their swings. More importantly, the most successful teams of the period adapted to the pitcher's game, also known as "Scientific Baseball." According to Weintraub, the Giants, with McGraw steering the ship, played Scientific Baseball by mentally mastering the sport.<sup>17</sup> As Weintraub points out, speed, skill, savagery, and strategy were key principles to the style.<sup>18</sup> Historians point to New York manager John J. McGraw and his National League Giants as the embodiment of the era.

In 1911, professional baseball experienced a surge in hitting. Most researchers point to the introduction of the cork-center ball late in the 1910 season as the reason. In the National League, the number of home runs jumped 32 percent from 214 hit in 1910 to 316 in 1911. According to Curran, the surge continued into 1912, before "gradual adjustments" were made to

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<sup>16</sup> Rader, Benjamin G, *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 2002), 99.

<sup>17</sup> Weintraub, *House*, 61.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

the game in 1913. The adjustments were not identified (most likely the emery ball)<sup>19</sup>, but baseball saw the instant gratification of increased attendance during the short time of experimentation with a new ball. Most importantly, it would instill a conspiracy theory in the minds of baseball writers in the wake of the Black Sox scandal of 1919 and World War I.

Upon the United States' entrance into World War I on August 6, 1917, baseball was enjoying consistent success.<sup>20</sup> In the midst of the 1918 season, it was declared by U.S. Secretary of War Newton Baker that professional baseball was "a nonessential occupation" and players were not exempt from military service.<sup>21</sup> The 1918 season was shortened due to the war, but not before Babe Ruth and his league-leading 11 home runs led the Boston Red Sox to a world championship title.

In 1919, Ruth again shook the foundation of the sport. In addition to throwing 133 innings, he hit 29 home runs, shattering all other major league home run records. Leading baseball historian Bill James remarked that, "fans were galvanized by the Ruth phenomenon."<sup>22</sup>

Soon, newspapermen "warned of a threat to the integrity of the national pastime." Curran says the "rabbit" ball conspiracy theory tale began when the writers said baseball owners met secretly to liven the ball across both leagues.<sup>23</sup> Weintraub, author of The House That Ruth Built, said more tightly wound baseballs were produced.<sup>24</sup> The players said there was no difference. Even after hitters like Rogers Hornsby and Ruth vehemently denied a change in the ball, writers continued to charge that the baseball-manufacturing Reach Company was tampering with the

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<sup>19</sup> James, Bill, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 94.

<sup>20</sup> Sullivan, Dean A, *Middle Innings: A Documentary History of Baseball, 1900-1948* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 84.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> James, *Abstract*, 120.

<sup>23</sup> Curran, *Big Sticks*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Weintraub, *House*, 36.

production process.<sup>25</sup> The government was called in to inspect the baseballs leading to the United States Bureau of Standards announcement that the official ball of 1920 was no different than the ball used in 1917.<sup>26</sup>

Curran and Weintraub both agree that while an increase in better materials following the war probably allowed for a better-made ball, the spike in power was most likely due to a number of other reasons. The spitball and other illegal pitches were outlawed in December 1919 (except for a handful of old-timers who relied on the pitch to make a living),<sup>27</sup> thus providing new, clean balls for hitters throughout the 1920s. Seymour also cites the death of Ray Chapman during a game between the Yankees and the Cleveland Indians in 1920 as a turning point for the sport.<sup>28</sup> The ball that struck Chapman was dark due to the spit and other hi-jinks of trick pitchers and tough to pick up out of the pitcher's hand. After Chapman's unfortunate end, new balls were more frequently put into play. In 1922, the two leagues combined for more than 1,000 home runs, an increase of 68 percent since 1917.<sup>29</sup> Upon first glance, and as Curran states, it would seem that hitters in both leagues were attempting to capitalize on the same success exhibited by the new-look New York Yankees.<sup>30</sup>

## **The Media**

Two publications at the forefront of the sporting press during the period were *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News*. Both were heralded as progressive in the field of sports journalism. Published daily, *The New York Times* was at the heart of the New York baseball scene during the 1920s, and meticulously chronicled all three New York teams: The New York

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<sup>25</sup> Curran, *Big Sticks*, 53.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Seymour, *Golden Age*, 424.

<sup>29</sup> Curran, *Big Sticks*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.



Yankees, the New York Giants, and the Brooklyn Dodgers. *The Sporting News*, a weekly national magazine, also played an important role in the growing New York rivalry with its biting commentary. *The Sporting News* was a publication that reported upon baseball alone, and became, as Curran notes, the self-appointed guardian of the game's welfare.<sup>31</sup>

### **The New York Times**

After Adolph S. Ochs became owner of the *Times* in 1896, it experienced rapid growth during a period in which many other New York newspapers were floundering. In 1894, two years previous to Ochs taking over, the *Times* had a daily circulation of only 9,000 copies, a figure that placed them twelve spots behind the city-leading *Evening World*.<sup>32</sup> Ochs, a former *Knoxville Chronicle* printer's devil, quickly bounced competitors and increased the *Times* circulation to 82,000 within only four years.<sup>33</sup>

During 1917, Ochs left out an estimated 60-70 columns of advertising per day in order to allow for the newspaper to publish foreign news about the war.<sup>34</sup> However, the sports section was a bit further down his list of important items to include in the *Times*. Ochs employed hundreds of staff members by 1921.<sup>35</sup> Even with the expansion of the *Times* sports department "responding to the great increase of interest in sports which followed the coming of peace,"<sup>36</sup> his staff (only six writers when Bernard William St. Denis Thomson became Sports Editor in 1916) was much smaller than papers of comparative size. Ochs, "in the same cold anonymity with which he shielded the men who covered routine city beats,"<sup>37</sup> chose not to print bylines of most reporters. Managing Editor Carr Van Anda was perhaps even less impressed with sports than his

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<sup>31</sup> Curran, *Big Sticks*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Berger, Meyer, *The Story of the New York Times: The First 100 Years, 1851-1951* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), 112.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>35</sup> Davis, Elmer, *History of The New York Times, 1851-1921* (New York: J.J. Little & Ives Co., 1921), 412.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>37</sup> Berger, *Story of the New York Times*, 190.

boss when it came to attributing credit for stories. “Gentlemen, the *Times* is not running a reporters’ directory.”<sup>38</sup> The first byline on a *Times* baseball story did not appear until 1924.<sup>39</sup>

## **The Sporting News**

Alfred Spink began publication of the St. Louis-based weekly, *The Sporting News*, on March 17, 1886.<sup>40</sup> At the time, the publication covered multiple sports and even theater, but began reporting only baseball following the decline of another baseball weekly, *The Sporting Life*. The paper sold for five cents per issue and \$2.50 per yearly subscription. In 1894, Al Spink sold his entire stock to his brother Charles, whom he had hired in the 1880s to be his business manager.<sup>41</sup> When Charles Spink died in 1914, his son, J.G. Taylor Spink, took over daily operations of the “Bible of Baseball.” Until 1937, *The Sporting News* produced only eight pages of content per week. Now a biweekly publication with an online, daily newspaper called *Sporting News Today*, *The Sporting News* now produces almost 70 pages of content and boasts sales of more than half a million.<sup>42</sup> The success of the online properties of the publication even allowed the newspaper to acquire content of America Online’s (AOL) FanHouse website in early 2011.

## **Team Histories**

Other historians have composed publications about the pre- and post-World War I New York Yankees and New York Giants. A brief examination of both team histories will provide

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Cooper and Frederick Ivor-Campbell, *Baseball’s First Stars* (Cleveland: The Society for American Baseball Research, 1996), 156.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Burgess, Bill, “Henry Chadwick,” February 14, 2007 (6:47 A.M.), comment on Bill Burgess, “History of the Game,” *Baseball Fever*, accessed Jan. 5, 2011, <http://www.baseball-fever.com/showthread.php?57538-Meet-The-Sports-Writers>.

researchers with background information about New York's most dominant baseball teams in the 1920s.

### **New York's Giants**

Besides Seymour's *Baseball: The Golden Age*, writer Frank Deford provides the most in-depth look into the story of the Giants and their rags-to-riches story in his book *The Old Ball Game: How John McGraw, Christy Mathewson, and the New York Giants Created Modern Baseball*. Deford declares that the Giants were the "home team" of the most populous city in the country following the turn of the century, while Seymour said the Giants, "with the advantage of a winning team and a good market, were probably the best money-making club in the National League..."<sup>43</sup> Roughly 3.5 million New Yorkers contributed more than half a million dollars to owner John T. Brush from 1906-1910 when they traveled to the Polo Grounds to see John J. McGraw's bunch beat up on the competition.<sup>44</sup> Bill James estimated that five million fans traveled to the Polo Grounds from 1900-1910, the highest mark of any team in the decade.<sup>45</sup> The Giants drew a major-league record 910,000 fans in 1908, the same year the Giants lost the National League pennant to the eventual World Series champion Chicago Cubs.<sup>46</sup> Deford contends that while the Giants may have only won one World Series title in the decade, the team, "...in good times and the few bad times, remained the crown jewel of baseball."<sup>47</sup>

The Giants however, had not always been the best team in the land. Tammany Hall's Andrew Freedman bought controlling interest in the Giants in 1895.<sup>48</sup> During his eight-year ownership, Deford described Freedman as "the most hated man in the sport, a distinction he had

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<sup>43</sup> Seymour, *Golden Age*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> James, *Abstract*, 75.

<sup>46</sup> Deford, Frank, *The Old Ball Game: How John McGraw, Christy Mathewson, and the New York Giants Created Modern Baseball* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 139.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>48</sup> Reisler, Jim, *Before They Were the Bombers* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2002), 18.

labored hard to achieve.”<sup>49</sup> When John T. Brush purchased the team following the 1903 season, Freedman had disposed of 15 managers, some more than once.<sup>50</sup> Brush hired John J. McGraw as his permanent manager. By then, McGraw was probably the most famous athlete in America, due to his headlining play with the Baltimore Orioles of the Gay Nineties when he led them to three championships.<sup>51</sup> He was, as Williams, author of *When the Giants were Giants* claims, “the virtual personification of the game of baseball.”<sup>52</sup> Deford quotes *The New Yorker* magazine, which later lionized McGraw as more than a manager.

He is the incarnation of the American national sport.... There is no man in baseball more coldly, cruelly commercial than John J. McGraw, manager and magnate, and no man more selflessly engrossed in the game for the game’s sake than Muggsy McGraw, baseball artist.<sup>53</sup>

Local and national press almost instantly changed their tone in coverage of the Giants upon the arrival of the “Little Napoleon.”

From 1904 to 1912, the year Brush died, he and part-owner McGraw brought a championship title and four pennants to the Polo Grounds. Brush’s son-in-law Harry Hempstead assumed control of the team and witnessed two more pennants by McGraw and his men before 1919. While retelling the 1921 season in their book *1921: The Yankees, The Giants, and the Battle for Baseball Supremacy in New York*, Lyle Spatz and Steve Steinberg dubbed the Giants as baseball’s flagship franchise well before the club was purchased by Charles A. Stoneham and his anything-but-honest National Exhibition Company in 1919.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Deford, *Old Ball Game*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>52</sup> Williams, *Giants*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Deford, *Old Ball Game*, 210.

<sup>54</sup> Lyle Spatz and Steve Steinberg, *1921: The Yankees, The Giants, and the Battle for Baseball Supremacy in New York* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 21.

## Ruppert and Huston's Yankees

If the Giants were the crown jewel of baseball for the first decade of the century, the cross-town Highlanders were baseball's blemish. In his cumulative early team history *Before They Were the Bombers*, Jim Reisler alleged that when American League President Ban Johnson first decided to move Baltimore's professional franchise to New York, he merely wished to dethrone National League prestige in the nation's biggest (and most corrupt) city.<sup>55</sup> The new franchise owners represented interests of the city well: ex-New York City Police Chief Bill Devery was "probably the most notorious police officer" in the city's history and fellow owner Frank Farrell was a pool hall bookie with an estimated 250 establishments.<sup>56</sup>

The Highlanders (as they were so aptly named) played at Hilltop Park in Washington Heights, the highest peak in northern Manhattan.<sup>57</sup> Hilltop claimed to seat audiences of 16,000, but, as Lawrence S. Ritter in *Lost Ballparks* notes, "standing was permitted on the field and fans were allowed to bring their own seats and sit in the outfield."<sup>58</sup> In fact, the park was erected in only six weeks.<sup>59</sup> After the Giants' Polo Grounds burned early in the season, Reisler asserts that Farrell contacted Brush and "swept aside years of animosity between the teams, ushering in a new era of good feeling" by letting the Giants use their park.<sup>60</sup> While the Highlanders only hosted the Giants for less than three months in 1911, the Giants would return the favor less than two years later when the lease at Hilltop Park expired. In 1913, Yankees (as they were now nicknamed) were in a sad state. They were too poor to renovate Hilltop and instead moved into

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<sup>55</sup> Reisler, *Bombers*, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Seymour, *Golden Age*, 54.

<sup>57</sup> Reisler, *Bombers*, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Ritter, Lawrence, *Lost Ballparks* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 93.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>60</sup> Reisler, *Bombers*, 188.

the Polo Grounds with the Giants, where they would stay until their new home, Yankee Stadium, opened in 1923.<sup>61</sup>

The Yankees, mired in poor ownership and managerial decisions, had front row tickets as John McGraw and his Giants collected six pennants and a world title in a 15-year span.

Owners Farrell and Devery finally gave up on the Yankees in 1915 and sold to a pair of businessmen who would rejuvenate the club: Colonel Jacob Ruppert, a brewer, and Captain Tillinghast L'Hommedieu Huston, an engineer. Interestingly enough, the two were introduced to each other by John McGraw; McGraw would later regret his own suggestion that the two purchase the seventh-place Yankees.<sup>62</sup>

According to Reisler, Ruppert and Huston bought the team “because it sounded fun.”<sup>63</sup> Their deep pockets were something never before seen by the handful of New Yorkers who called themselves Yankee fans. When the new owners took over, the club had finished in third place or better only three times in 13 seasons. Across that span, the team outdrew the Giants within the New York City limits only once (1906) while the rival Giants led the entire nation in attendance seven times.<sup>64</sup> Seymour indicates Ruppert and Huston’s early financial decisions made an immediate impact on the team and the bottom line.<sup>65</sup> They ascended in the standings quickly following the appointment of Miller Huggins as manager in 1918, and had their aim trained on George Herman “Babe” Ruth, a superstar slugger making headlines in nearby Boston.

By 1929, the Yankees had won worldwide acclaim for their long home runs. The members of Murderers’ Row were household names throughout the country. While the Giants

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>62</sup> Seymour, *Golden Age*, 446.

<sup>63</sup> Reisler, *Bombers*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>65</sup> Seymour, *Golden Age*, 436.

would still experience success, the Yankees were on their way to winning 24 more World Series titles and build what would become arguably the greatest dynasty in professional sports.

### **The Literature**

Numerous histories of baseball exist, but few analyze the years leading up to the Deadball Era, how the sport and the country matured together, how the game was played, and how it was reported on. A brief review of literature sheds faint light on the nature of both the media and baseball before World War I, when the two were still in their infancy. Notable baseball historian and researcher David Quentin Voigt best summarizes the period prior to the turn of the century in his dissertation “Cash and Glory: The Commercialization of Major League Baseball as a Sports Spectacular, 1865-1892.”

Voigt maintains that baseball became a million dollar entertainment industry as early as the 1880s, long before manager John McGraw and his team, but admits that the industry had only scratched the surface of what it would one day become. Only after a long struggle between now-defunct leagues and associations throughout the 1880s and 1890s did the sport begin to see a significant rise in attendance at baseball parks throughout the country.

Benjamin G. Rader contributed to the historical compendium with his 2002 publication, *Baseball: A History of America's Game*. Rader echoed previous research by Voigt, insisting that the sport had gained its foothold in the States as early as the Civil War following the success of the “New York game,” a form of the game played by the New York Knickerbocker Club.<sup>66</sup> Even General Fred Benteen, who followed Custer's charge at the Battle of Little Big Horn, fielded his own “Benteen Nine” throughout the course of the war.<sup>67</sup> By 1900, Seymour said the sport was

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<sup>66</sup> Rader, *America's Game*, 15.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

“was equated with Americanism, democracy, and the health and well-being of the young and old.”<sup>68</sup>

Between 1880 and 1900, the urban population in the United States ballooned from 14 to 30 million.<sup>69</sup> Seymour cites that these urban centers, which by 1900 made up approximately 40 percent of America’s population, embraced organized baseball.<sup>70</sup> Bill James provided powerful contextual information about the time period in his book *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, reporting that nearly 14 million new citizens entered the country (many through Ellis Island) between 1899 and 1914.<sup>71</sup>

In addition, these new Americans would enjoy more free time than their predecessors. From 1901 to 1921, the average workweek shortened by ten hours (58.4 hours to 48.4 hours).<sup>72</sup> More prospective fans with more time on their hands meant more revenue opportunities for all major league clubs. Nearly 70 percent of the entire country resided east of the Mississippi River,<sup>73</sup> thus allowing the 16 teams (all located east of the Mississippi) of organized baseball in 1903 to draw from ten of the most populous cities in the United States.

Team owners were not the only profiteers during the early days of baseball. Beginning in the late 1870s, the reporting of baseball was ritualized with the publication of a lexicon of baseball jargon by Henry Chadwick,<sup>74</sup> who is known to most baseball historians as the sport’s first newspaperman. Mac Souders, member of the Society of American Baseball Research, says Chadwick’s other important contribution to the game came in the form of the first box score in

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<sup>68</sup> Seymour, *Golden Age*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Kraus, Richard, *Recreation & Leisure in Modern Society* (Boston: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1998), 197.

<sup>70</sup> Seymour, *Golden Age*, 42.

<sup>71</sup> James, *Abstract*, 73.

<sup>72</sup> Kraus, *Recreation*, 211.

<sup>73</sup> Seymour, *Golden Age*, 41.

<sup>74</sup> Voigt, “Cash and Glory,” 225.



1859,<sup>75</sup> which allowed fans and newspaper readers the opportunity to quickly find their favorite players' statistics from the previous day's games. However, while the sports writing of the time enjoyed a growth spurt, Voigt notes that the reporters "may also be criticized for their arrogant second-guessing and for editorializing,"<sup>76</sup> characteristics that would remain constant in news publications through the 1920s. According to Seymour, as the sporting press grew, so too did baseball and its players: "An increasing flow of detailed information in the press about the personal lives and diamond exploits of the players added to their heroic stature."<sup>77</sup> Connie Mack, the longest-serving manager in the history of baseball, said that sports like baseball owe a lot to the media. Anthony J. Connor cites an excerpt from Mack's autobiography in *Voices From Cooperstown*.

How did baseball develop from the sandlots to the huge stadiums from a few hundred spectators to the millions in attendance at professional games today? My answer is: through the gigantic force of publicity. News is a powerful momentum behind any enterprise ... the crowds in our ballparks grew and grew and grew. The professional sporting world was created and is being kept alive by the services extended by the press.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Souders, Mac, "Baseball's First Publicist Henry Chadwick," *Society of American Baseball Research Journals* Archive. Accessed February 21, 2011, <http://research.sabr.org/journals/baseballs-first-publicist-henry-chadwick>.

<sup>76</sup> Voigt, "Cash and Glory," 228.

<sup>77</sup> Seymour, *Golden Age*, 92.

<sup>78</sup> Connor, Anthony J, *Voices From Cooperstown* (New York: Macmillan, 1982), 118.

## CHAPTER II

### 1919-1920: The Emergence of the Mauling Mastodon

Before it could realize the success of the 1920s, the media and baseball had to first deal with the recovery of the sport following World War I. Conscription commenced in May 1917 and extended to cover more ages in August 1918. The loss of players, managers, and a paying audience during summer of 1918 was especially detrimental for the remainder of the baseball season. While the professional ranks continued an abbreviated season even with the loss of notable players like Ty Cobb, George Sisler, Gabby Street, and Hank Gowdy, the Pacific Coast League, one of professional baseball's premier minor leagues, suspended all operations shortly after the draft was extended.<sup>79</sup> Even the World Series of 1918 began in September in order for the sport to cease operation earlier. Following the armistice in November 1918, both leagues decided to play only 140 games in 1919. It was the fewest number of games the sport had ever played until that time.

Writers opined that while it had not completely destroyed the sport, the war had certainly robbed the 1918 season of its luster. One *Times* article on April 20 goes so far as to note that the sport's daily procedures were "indifferent" and "shirking" in 1918 due to the war.<sup>80</sup>

The owners and players of both major leagues were surprisingly optimistic about the upcoming 1919 season and used the media as their tool to reach an audience with war-torn afflictions. The Yankees' owner, Colonel T.L. Huston, took every available opportunity to boast of baseball's contribution to the successful war effort with the hopes of the returning troops

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<sup>79</sup> Spatz and Steinberg, *1921*, 219.

<sup>80</sup> *The New York Times*, April 20, 1919, Sec. 2, 6.

giving back to the game. “Today we appreciate fully that (baseball) supplied most of our fighters with the physical asset which enabled them to do those things which caused the German military machine to gasp in amazement from the outset.”<sup>81</sup> What else greeted owners, writers, and fans that season was an offensive game unlike anything they had seen during the world’s war, and would showcase the first step in illustrating the changing game.

### **America’s Boys’ Return**

With superstars returning from duty, the media had high hopes for the resurgence of fan interest in the game. The “doughboys” were returning home, too, and J.G. Taylor Spink of *The Sporting News* gladly welcomed an audience that had never ceased receiving the publication while overseas. St. Louis Browns owner Phil Ball, Cardinals owner Branch Rickey, and AL president Ban Johnson footed the bill to send copies of *The Sporting News* to troops during their time in the trenches. It was an important gesture for the future of the game for a number of reasons: It kept the beleaguered audience hungry for more baseball if and when they returned home, and it reflected how powerful newspapers were for baseball owners.

When possible, the papers were distributed through company headquarters, but some times when we were in the lines they had to be scattered by mail orderlies, who went through shell barrages to deliver them with other mail and the fellow who didn’t get a letter from home as he lay in his hole at least got a chance to read *The Sporting News*, which was the next best thing.<sup>82</sup>

The sportswriters were ready, too, and, if nothing more, simply desired something to report on. Chicago’s six daily newspapers sent two reporters each to spring training with the White Sox and Cubs, a move that, “shows a marked change in policy from the attitude of those

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<sup>81</sup> *The New York Times*, March 23, 1919, Sec. 2, 6.

<sup>82</sup> *The Sporting News*, December 19, 1918, 2.

papers last year, and is a sure sign that baseball is coming back with a rush.”<sup>83</sup> Not until March 16 did the *Times* make mention of either team traveling south for spring training, but both publications began conjecturing about New York teams long before March. It was an action that reflected the sheer excitement about the coming season throughout the country.

As evidenced by the coverage of both newspapers, the return of Christy Mathewson from World War I was a metaphor for the return of professional baseball to America. Although Mathewson had retired from playing the game in 1916, he and his manager John McGraw had ruled the New York baseball scene since his rookie year of 1900. “Matty” as he was affectionately called by sportswriters, and McGraw, his flat mate, were synonymous with baseball. One of the “First Five” elected to the Hall of Fame in 1936, Mathewson was the symbolic definition of the Deadball Era. As Deford opines, “Every American could want to be Christy Mathewson; every American could admire John J. McGraw.”<sup>84</sup>

As Donald Honig writes in *The Fireside Book of Baseball*, Mathewson’s 1905 World Series performance forever linked Mathewson’s name with baseball in New York. He won three games in the five-game series against the Philadelphia Athletics, and threw 27 innings of shutout baseball. “Monarch of the mound, he was as royal as a democratic people can allow, a hero to his peers, a model for American youth, an example cited from the pulpits of the land.”<sup>85</sup>

For the three previous seasons before entering the war in August 1918, Mathewson, New York’s All-American pitcher and first baseball idol, had managed the Cincinnati Reds. While he coached the team to winning records in his two full seasons, the baseball contingent was not impressed with his managerial abilities. But Matty was returning from war after being gassed

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<sup>83</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 27, 1919, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Deford, *Old Ball Game*, 3.

<sup>85</sup> Honig, Donald, “From Baseball America,” in *The Fireside Book of Baseball*, ed. Charles Einstein (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 170.

during his time in the Chemical Warfare Service (most likely occurred in a training drill). Not only was he a hero on the diamond, he was now a war hero. The media had their “darling” team with a “darling” coach.

The *Times* was the first newspaper to support the former Deadball Era and All-American hero, saying he would do well under the tutelage of the great John McGraw in 1919.

If Mathewson had any fault as a manager, it was that he was too gentle in dealing with his players. He was an easy-going leader, placing his players very much on their own initiative. The Simon Legree type of baseball leader is often more successful.<sup>86</sup>

That year, McGraw sent Mathewson to take care of his forces in their new spring training home of Gainesville, Florida. As was common for McGraw in later seasons until his retirement, he would join spring training later in the schedule because of his adventures in Cuba during the off-season. When he finally arrived in Gainesville, McGraw made his voice heard, thus shedding light on his Deadball Era-coaching pedigree.

Spring practice games do not amount to anything in the long run, and defeats in exhibition games are quickly forgotten, but baseball clubs that amount to anything do not take defeat kindly, and McGraw hates to lose games, whether they are exhibition games or real championship encounters. If the Giants put up many more such games as they did yesterday the little manager will boil over.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *The New York Times*, February 16, 1919, 4.

<sup>87</sup> *The New York Times*, April 7, 1919, 10.

Thankfully for the new recruits and contract players, McGraw had mellowed a bit since the days when umpires would describe him as a manager that “eats gunpowder every morning and washes it down with warm blood.”<sup>88</sup>

Meanwhile, a change from pre-war media coverage was on the horizon for the New York Yankees. The team was experiencing an upsurge in media coverage on their way to beginning the 1919 season. Miller Huggins’ crew had shown flashes of brilliance only a season before, and now local and national newspapers celebrated the previously dull Yankees. Already regarded as a team that hit for power (the group hit 20 home runs and claimed a .257 batting average in 1918), the *Times* now mentioned a Yankee pitching staff that turned heads. *The Sporting News* provided first insight that the Yankees may actually have a chance to change their bad luck, and challenge the Indians and Red Sox for the AL lead. “We have much respect for the Red Sox and the Clevelands, both magnificent baseball machines, but if the Old Hoodoo doesn’t come out of the ground again, the Huggins troupe will cause endless worry for leaders Barrow and Fohl.”<sup>89</sup>

### **The First Year**

As the first season began, it was evident that baseball followers were supporting the owners’ and writers’ leads. Furthermore, the fans’ willingness to support baseball on Sunday thrilled publications and their respective sports departments. Legalizing Sunday baseball had been a hot-button issue during the winter of 1918.

Newspapers began to exert their influence upon the governing body of baseball. According to *The Sporting News*, newspapers, laboring classes, city leaders and clergy with

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<sup>88</sup> Deford, *Old Ball Game*, 28.

<sup>89</sup> *The Sporting News*, April 24, 1919, 1.

“modern ideas” wished for the state to allow baseball on Sundays. “The only objectors are the narrow-headed kill-joys who can’t understand why any one should be happy or free.”<sup>90</sup>

Naturally, the majority (the newspapers) overruled the killjoys. More than 35,000 saw the Giants lose to the Phillies at the Polo Grounds on Sunday, May 4, 1919, the first Sabbath upon which New York clubs could ever play baseball.<sup>91</sup> It was the largest regular season crowd the stadium had ever seen. Now, the ability of all three New York clubs to play on Sundays would mean increased revenue for the Giants and Yankees owners, more opportunities for fans to travel to the Polo Grounds, and fill the Sunday sports pages of the *Times* with baseball coverage galore.

As attendance rose, so too did New York baseball stock within newspaper coverage. Hits and home runs were on the rise also, albeit ever so slightly. The National League New York squad, after hitting only 13 home runs in 1918, increased their home run total to 40 in 1919. *The New York Times* noticed the Giants were hitting more home runs.

The team led the way in the standings in early part of the season, only occasionally slipping when going up against trick pitchers, mainstays of the Deadball Era. Since pitches like the spitter were not yet outlawed, McGraw’s now hard-hitting crew proved no match to hurlers like the Cardinals’ Oscar Tuero. “Tuero’s saliva flings were strongly inclined to be incorrigible.”<sup>92</sup> John J. McGraw had his own spitballer in Phil Douglas, but was unaccustomed to fielding “power-hitting” teams. It was a small indication that McGraw, never one to enjoy change, understood the shift in playing styles. His 1919 New York Giants would prove to be the first of many slugging teams he would field in upcoming years to battle the cross-town Yankees.

Although the Yankees would soon be the team that ushered in the Live Ball Era, they did not completely turn from the Deadball Era in 1919. Pitcher Jack Quinn of the Yankees also

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<sup>90</sup> *The Sporting News*, November 14, 1918, 1.

<sup>91</sup> *The New York Times*, May 5, 1919, 14.

<sup>92</sup> *The New York Times*, May 25, 1919, 25.

profited from the spitball. He notched 15 wins that season and logged the most innings on the entire staff. According to *The Sporting News*, he was a key cog in the rise of the Yankees to the forefront of the New York sports scene in 1919, further proof that the Yankees were on the verge of challenging the much-loved Giants in the press.

On June 19, headlines on the front page of *The Sporting News* exclaimed “Gotham going mad over team.”<sup>93</sup> By July, the Yankees had a “tight hold on the affections of Manhattan’s baseball folk.”<sup>94</sup> As the *Times* asserted, “The baseball colony of New York may be classed as not ‘loving the Giants any less, but loving the Yankees more.’” The newspaper reported that the club sensed the change in the fan base. “Working for a demonstrative crowd is a long call from the silence of nearly empty stands, to which Yankee teams of years gone by have so frequently played.”<sup>95</sup> The media were quick to support the team owners for leading the club out of the doldrums. “The flock of jinxes long pursuing the Ruppert-Huston baseball troupe has been chased at last.”<sup>96</sup>

The swell in baseball (and Yankee) pride continued through the end of July. The *Times* embraced the season that had successfully pulled the country out of World War I. “The game has come back with a boom that has been beyond all expectations from an attendance standpoint, and even more so in events on the field of play.”<sup>97</sup> In early August, more than 33,000 showed up to see a Yankee game at the Polo Grounds, which was a “flattering indication of the Yankees’ hold on New York’s interest.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 19, 1919, 1.

<sup>94</sup> *The New York Times*, June 22, 1919, 20.

<sup>95</sup> *The New York Times*, July 7, 1919, 17.

<sup>96</sup> *The New York Times*, June 23, 1919, 16.

<sup>97</sup> *The New York Times*, July 27, 1919, 21.

<sup>98</sup> *The New York Times*, August 3, 1919, 17.



The *Times* denoted much of the success at the turnstiles to the surge in hitting; an indication that fans appreciated the Yankees' new style of hitting for power. It put more money in the pockets of the Yankee owners too, which would lead them to pull off one of the sport's most notable purchases of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On June 23, Huggins' "maulers" hit five home runs against the Connie Mack-led Philadelphia Athletics, a record of which writers could find no equal in the past 25 years. Yankee Roger Peckinpaugh led the hitting charge at the Polo Grounds. The shortstop was second in home runs to another slugger in Boston, "only one swatter, the mighty Ruth."<sup>99</sup>

In 1918, Babe Ruth, while still with the Boston Red Sox, split his time as an outfielder and pitcher. By 1919, Red Sox manager Ed Barrow finally gave him the opportunity to play in the field more. A quote appearing in the *Times* confirmed that Ruth was easily the most feared power hitter in the American League before the season began. "Colonel T. L. Huston of the Yankees was asked where he thought Babe Ruth ought to play on the Boston Club, and the Colonel, remembering what Ruth has done against the Yankees, promptly answered, 'On the bench.'<sup>100</sup> Ruth would go on to set the major league record for home runs during the 1919 season (29).

### **Summer Swoon**

Both New York clubs soon lost steam. The success that the two Yankee owners enjoyed during the spring and mid-summer months of 1919 would be short-lived. The Giants were heading in the wrong direction, too. By late August, the Giants showed no signs of clawing their way back into the pennant race with the league-leading Cincinnati Reds. Following a Saturday

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<sup>99</sup> *The Sporting News*, July 3, 1919, 1.

<sup>100</sup> *The New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1919, 4.

loss to Pittsburgh that dropped them eight games behind the Reds, the *Times* pointed out, “Aside from (Ross) Young, the Giants batted like a team of one-armed players.”<sup>101</sup>

The *Times* commentary about both teams during poor stretches like that of the Giants in 1919 are an important part of the Yankees-Giants debate; it was a seesaw battle in the New York press. When one franchise would lose ground, the other would attempt to gain a larger foothold in eyes of the media.

Meanwhile, the Yankees were in the midst of a league-wide debate involving AL President Ban Johnson, the man who had advocated an AL team in New York in the very beginning. Ruppert and Huston squared off with Johnson over a player that would make his mark on how the game was played and would later provide for game-altering commentary by both the *Times* and *The Sporting News*.

Harry Frazee, owner of the Boston Red Sox, was beginning his famous dump of players in order to raise money for his club. Red Sox pitcher Carl Mays, a premier player with a bad attitude and an even worse 1919 won-loss record, was first on his list. After one Red Sox loss in the middle of the season, Mays decided to take more than a two-week vacation from the club. American League President Ban Johnson wished Mays to be banned before the Yankees orchestrated a deal with Mays himself. When the deal was complete, Johnson voided the agreement and three AL teams took exception. They decided to take the matter to court. Playing the self-proclaimed guardian role, *The Sporting News* was nervous for the game. “The bitterest feeling has been aroused among the warring club owners which, naturally, is detrimental to the best interests of the game.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *The New York Times*, Aug. 24, 1919, 17.

<sup>102</sup> *The Sporting News*, Aug. 14, 1919, 1.

The controversy indicated another clue as to the Yankees' attempts to confront the Giants on the New York baseball stage. Ruppert and Huston were willing to do whatever it took to acquire talent, despite the possible repercussions that may hinder the entire sport.

*The Sporting News* claimed that players and fans were also bitter towards the Yankees' claims that the deal was square. Interestingly enough, the *Times* championed its local team and chided Johnson for his ignorance.

The American League head has been conducting affairs in a high-handed way for years, but he has made one serious mistake. He has failed to change with the times. Baseball cannot be conducted in the manner in which it was carried on when Johnson organized the American League.<sup>103</sup>

A week later and following court involvement, the *Times* alluded to a change coming none too soon for both major leagues. "Johnson never used his influence to promote American League popularity in this city... Some cool head should step in and control this baseball conflagration before it gets beyond control."<sup>104</sup> The league's board of directors met without Johnson when it decided that Mays would be allowed to play the rest of the season. It was the first step toward a change in the way the sport was governed, and, as evidenced, may have been brought on by the volume of coverage devoted to the situation by outlets like *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News*.

It would take almost an entire season and a World Series scandal before Kennesaw Mountain Landis was elected as the first baseball commissioner, but the Mays case planted a seed of unrest in the ways in which baseball was governed for at least three American League

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<sup>103</sup> *The New York Times*, Aug. 4, 1919, 13.

<sup>104</sup> *The New York Times*, Aug. 11, 1919, 13.

clubs. Mays' name would later become associated with the further evolution of baseball's rules and the end of hazardous pitching techniques following the 1920 season.

While the Yankees were exchanging blows with Johnson in the courtroom, the Chicago White Sox claimed the AL pennant. The *Times* noted the Yankee slump in power<sup>105</sup> and *The Sporting News* began noticing a hot seat for Huggins, indications that the Yankees would not claim the true power of the media's attention until the following season. "Until a short time ago we thought Huggins would hold over another year, but now the dope seems to be straight that he is doomed, and that Uncle Wilbert Robinson is to succeed him at a salary that will be about twice that Robinson is getting in Brooklyn."<sup>106</sup> New York media made little, if any mention, of disappointment with Huggins' managerial abilities and instead complimented the club. "The season just ended is the most successful the Yankees have enjoyed since they broke into the league. The season's attendance figures have surpassed all expectations, which shows that everything comes to him who waits."<sup>107</sup> The encouraging words from the *Times* were a positive sign for the Yankee franchise. While they would not yet usurp the Giants as the city's favorite team, it alluded to a growth in their fan base throughout New York.

### **The World Series of 1919**

Both publications may not have been accurate in regard to the "dope" that Yankees manager Miller Huggins would be fired following the 1919 season, but the *Times* and *The Sporting News* were correct in their championing of the Chicago White Sox as the best team either league had to offer. "Like a [unreadable] thread that can be traced through a bank note

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<sup>105</sup> *The New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1919, Sec. 9, 2.

<sup>106</sup> *The Sporting News*, Sept. 25, 1919, 2.

<sup>107</sup> *The New York Times*, Sept. 27, 1919, 14.

seems to be the conviction that the Reds, if they win, will have to overcome the class of a stronger team in a stronger league.”<sup>108</sup>

Giants coach Christy Mathewson, recruited to report the World Series for the *Times*, agreed with the general consensus that the White Sox had the upper hand on his former team. His general bewilderment at the lackluster showing of the White Sox during the first two games of the Series coincided with fans and writers everywhere.<sup>109</sup> The Sox played sloppily in losing the series to the Reds five games to three. In addition to Mathewson, the media recognized an inconsistency in the White Sox during the Series long before Hugh Fullerton, a Chicago writer, publicized in 1920 what was to become the Black Sox Scandal. “To the local baseball lovers there is no doubt that today’s explosion of the seemingly restored and compact White Sox machine was due to some uncanny miracle. Were they doped?”<sup>110</sup> *The Sporting News* had a tough time believing the Reds were good enough to defeat the White Sox, too. “But the Reds have been a revelation to us, and possibly they also have surprised even those who have followed their play all season.”<sup>111</sup> As early as October 16, 1919 some writers even hinted at deception following the Reds being crowned champion.

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<sup>108</sup> *The Sporting News*, Oct. 2, 1919, 3.

<sup>109</sup> *The New York Times*, Oct. 10, 1919, 15.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *The Sporting News*, Oct. 9, 1919, 1.

Naturally, when so many players play so wretchedly, there are bound to be ugly rumors placed in circulation, but such is the case after every big sporting event, and I feel sure that the American League officials will do their best to prove the falsity of the charges or, failing in that, to punish the guilty ones if, contrary to expectations, it is found that some of the players did not try sincerely to win for Chicago.<sup>112</sup>

The media coverage and hint of scandal during the 1919 World Series proved that newspapers were not only a reliable source; the writers were intuitive. Writers at both publications understood the sport had problems.

The threat of a World Series scandal and the showdown between Ban Johnson and the AL brought on by the Carl Mays case cast a shadow over the sport throughout the winter of 1919. The acquisition of Babe Ruth by the Yankees in late 1919 allowed the media refocus their attention on the field. Ruth would be the catalyst for the looming Yankees-Giants rivalry of the 1920s, thus bringing the game out of the dark time, and into a new era.

### **Ruth to New York**

The reports about Babe Ruth's departure from Boston and arrival in New York allow for an analysis of the sale. It would prove to be a significant transaction for a number of reasons. It was important for the future of baseball in New York, the changing style of the game, and signaled a change in how much money teams all over baseball were willing to spend on hitting alone.

According to an article appearing in *The Sporting News* on December 4, Ruth was still under contract with the Red Sox for the next two seasons.<sup>113</sup> On Christmas Day 1919, Frazee

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<sup>112</sup> *The Sporting News*, Oct. 16, 1919, 1.

<sup>113</sup> *The Sporting News*, December 4, 1919, 1.

announced to *The Sporting News* that the fire sale of almost his entire team would soon commence. The Babe, always the businessman, had other plans.

Ruth wanted a \$20,000 salary from Frazee. His price, while definitely an unheard of amount for the time, could actually have been a steal for the Red Sox. During his time in California, Ruth made a reported \$500 per game and had garnered \$7,000 in two short months. His newly-launched cigar-making business was going well, and he was considering starring in motion pictures.<sup>114</sup>

The Yankees' owners must have understood the power Ruth would immediately garner from fans and sportswriters. When the sale of Ruth to the Yankees was finalized, even Frazee said that only the Yankees could have afforded the \$100,000 sale price, plus Babe's contract, a statement that represented how other owners felt about the large amounts of money Ruppert and Huston had at their disposal.<sup>115</sup> It immediately started a verbal assault by Boston writers against the Babe and his larger-than-life ego. New York writers fired back, defending Ruth.

Now that (Ruth) has been sold, he is being branded as a trouble maker, and a braggart whom Miller Huggins will find exceedingly difficult to handle. Wonder if these scribes, who have experienced such a sudden change of heart, ever heard the fable of the fox and the grapes?<sup>116</sup>

Ruth was the local media's hero, too as he became a Yankee icon almost overnight. Much to the delight of the Yankees' owners, he was lauded as the "headline attraction" for the New Yorkers trip to spring training in Jacksonville, Florida. By January 20, the city of Jacksonville announced to *The New York Times* that it would launch an extensive advertising

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<sup>114</sup> *The Sporting News*, January 1, 1920, 1.

<sup>115</sup> *The Sporting News*, January 15, 1920, 1.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

campaign in order to boost attendance for Yankee-Dodger exhibition games.<sup>117</sup> Ruppert and Huston's ownership style, capitalizing on their large market by landing a big name in the sport, was paying off.

As evidenced by the newspapers, the acquisition of Ruth began the firestorm that pitted the Yankees against the Giants. According to *The Sporting News*, Giants' fans were hoping John McGraw would make a similar deal for their club. McGraw was still in Cuba and plans to acquire Rogers Hornsby from the St. Louis Cardinals were looking dim, even with the second largest financial backing in the game. With the media fanning the Yankees-Giants fire, McGraw seemed to be urgent in his failed attempts to coax the Cardinals into giving him their star slugger. "He wants Hornsby; he has to put over something big to match the Ruth deal by the rival Yankees, and he might offer another quartet of players who might, in the judgment of the manager of the Cardinals, be of some strength to the St. Louis team."<sup>118</sup> It would be years before McGraw would get his wish, far too long after Ruth made his mark upon the game and the New York market for Hornsby to have an impact for his club.

### **The Spring of 1920**

As spring training dawned in 1920, the *Times* was itching for the season to begin and mirroring public interest in the sport:

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<sup>117</sup> *The New York Times*, January 9, 1920, 18.

<sup>118</sup> *The Sporting News*, January 29, 1920, 2.



New York is anticipating a great baseball season and the ardent fans are hoping that one of the three local clubs will be able to land a pennant. Interest in the sport of all kind was never so keen as it is at the present time and, judging from the remarkable enthusiasm of the baseball public last year, the coming season will be the greatest in the history of the national pastime.<sup>119</sup>

Over the course of spring training, the media had built a metaphorical shrine to Ruth and his mammoth home runs. He was the talk of the town as the Yankees arrived home from Florida. During one of the final exhibition games against the Dodgers, the fans welcomed their new hero in a way the *Times* and *The Sporting News* could never have imagined.

With two Robins out in the latter half of the ninth, the crowd, which numbered about 16,000, took things into its own hands, decided that it could wait no longer for a close-up of Babe Ruth who had monopolized the calcium after his usual fashion throughout the fray, swarmed upon the field and made the completion of the contest impossible.<sup>120</sup>

The Yankees would continue to see a number of exhibition games that would end the same way as long as Ruth manned the outfield. Ruth was larger than life and the Yankees were creating a rift in the fan base of America's favorite baseball team, the New York Giants. A throng of 25,000 traveled to the Polo Grounds on April 22 to see Ruth, and, as the *Times* surmised, may not have cared who won the game. "Ever since that day last Winter when the headlines screamed that the far-famed fence buster had been bought by the Yankees for \$125,000, Manhattan was eagerly awaited the coming of this rare batting curio."<sup>121</sup> The media's love fest for Ruth continued throughout the season, and the park under Coogan's Bluff was never

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<sup>119</sup> *The New York Times*, April 11, 1920, 20.

<sup>120</sup> *The New York Times*, April 12, 1920, 18.

<sup>121</sup> *The New York Times*, April 23, 1920, 9.

silent when the Yankees were playing. The very next day, Ruth gave them what they wanted. He hit his 50<sup>th</sup> career home run in 396 games played.

The Polo Grounds have a new vocal accomplishment. It is the Babe Ruth roar.

When Babe leaves the bench to come to the plate it starts, and continues until the worst or the best is over. Down as far as 125<sup>th</sup> Street Harlem folks can now tell when Ruth comes to bat.<sup>122</sup>

### **The Giants Take Exception**

The Giants were largely forgotten by the *Times* during the early days of Ruth and the Yankees and perhaps team officials took exception to the lack of press. Stoneham and McGraw indicated they wanted the Polo Grounds all to themselves. On May 14, the Giants owners notified Ruppert that his team would not be permitted to play at the Polo Grounds in 1921. It was, according to the *Times*, a surprise to the Yankee owners to hear the announcement because the Giants would lose \$65,000 a year (the rental price of the Polo Grounds by the Yankees). The article says that while there was no noticeable falling off in the popularity of the Giants, the *Times* offered the only possible explanation to the Stoneham and McGraw's motives.

Ruth's remarkable accomplishments thus far this season at the Polo Grounds have done much to make the Yanks a powerful drawing card and the possibility of his making a new home run record at the Brush Stadium this season will prove a continuous magnet for the fans.<sup>123</sup>

Stoneham was confounded by the media's claim that a Yankee would attract more fans than a Giants player to his stadium. He denied that the desire for the Yankees to relocate was based upon jealousy and alleged it would be best for baseball if the Yankees would build their

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<sup>122</sup> *The New York Times*, May 1, 1920, 20.

<sup>123</sup> *The New York Times*, May 15, 1920, 18.

own ballpark. He cited other cities like Chicago that had two parks for both of its teams. McGraw provided no such insight into the decision.<sup>124</sup> Right on cue and much to the chagrin of the Giants owners, “baseball interest reached a point in upper Harlem that it never touched before.”<sup>125</sup>

However, the plan launched by McGraw and Stoneham backfired on the field and in the newspapers. The Yankees drew 38,600 fans to their game against Cleveland, breaking the previous attendance record set by the Giants during the 1911 World Series. According to the account, *Times* writers were willing to scale a fence in order to report on the game’s greatest drawing card: Ruth.<sup>126</sup> The same day, commentary appearing in the *Times* confirmed that the Yankees had made large strides to assume a foothold in New York that at least, according to the media, was big enough for their own stadium.

But Mr. Fan will travel far to see his favorite team play ball, and the new orders simply mean that he will regard the eviction as partly personal and go elsewhere when it becomes necessary. The game itself and the personnel of the team form the main attraction, with the field a secondary consideration.<sup>127</sup>

The Giants finally relented in their quest to banish the Yankees less than two weeks later when they listened to the appeal of August Herrmann, Chairman of the National Baseball Commission, and Ban Johnson “for the interest of baseball as a whole and make the sacrifice of their convictions and bury their opinions as business men for the sake of sportsmanship.”<sup>128</sup> While the media understood the power of the Yankees, their explanation allows for deeper insight: by banishing the Yankees from the Polo Grounds in 1921 and not allowing the franchise

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> *The New York Times*, May 17, 1920, 11.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>128</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 27, 1920, 1.

sufficient time to raise funds, *The Sporting News* understood it could mean the ultimate demise of the team within the New York market.

Stoneham and McGraw watched as Coogan's Bluff filled with Yankees fans that summer. The Ruppert clan was barely playing above .500 baseball, but the media reported fans were not necessarily traveling in droves to see Yankees; instead they wished to see the "Yankee blunderbuss," Babe Ruth.<sup>129</sup> As pointed out by the *Times* in late May, even the Deadball Era superstar Ty Cobb had fallen from the grace of the fans at the Polo Grounds.<sup>130</sup> Newspaper testimony to the shift in fan appreciation in the newly emerging Live Ball Era came when the *Times* deemed Ruth "the greatest attraction in the history of the game."<sup>131</sup> In fact, Ruth's actions on the baseball diamond were making "the names of Presidential candidates a secondary matter."<sup>132</sup>

### **The Writers Cry Wolf**

Ruth's astonishing success at the plate prompted the *Times* to feel uneasy about the number of home runs being hit. The media felt power hitting was dominating the sport, but fans were flocking to the Polo Grounds in droves to see Ruth hit. Another local attendance record was broken when 38,688 saw the Yankees defeat the Senators in a doubleheader on a Monday afternoon.<sup>133</sup> Following the first series in June with William Griffith's Senators, the writers tallied the damage against pitchers. Over the course of the five-game series in three days, more than 85,000 fans flocked to the park to see 15 home runs fly out of the Polo Grounds.<sup>134</sup> The media desperately searched for an explanation.

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<sup>129</sup> *The New York Times*, May 22, 1920, 12.

<sup>130</sup> *The New York Times*, May 23, 1920, 12.

<sup>131</sup> *The New York Times*, May 31, 1920, 13.

<sup>132</sup> *The New York Times*, June 1, 1920, 11.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *The New York Times*, June 3, 1920, 12.

The *Times* attributed the heavy hitting of the Yankees to a livelier ball on June 5,<sup>135</sup> a charge debunked by *The Sporting News* only two days later. Benjamin Shibe's son, Thomas, an official in the A.J. Reach Company that manufactured the league's baseballs, said that the balls were not changed "one iota" from previous years and instead claimed the elimination of freak pitching was a more accurate reason.<sup>136</sup> Despite the charges of the livelier ball, later commentary by the *Times* supported Ruth's raw power as a unique trait that no other hitter, previous or current, possessed. "He is hitting to spots where no other player of the past or present ever has been able to hit, and the short right field wall at the Polo Grounds has not been of any real assistance."<sup>137</sup>

The "Wizard of Wallop" was true to form by mid-July. His record-breaking 30<sup>th</sup> home run came on July 19 against the Chicago White Sox. The Ruth legend was building with each game. Since the *Times* could not prove a change in the way the ball was manufactured and could only make assumptions, it celebrated the new home run king. Concurrently, the fans embrace Ruth's new status. The club averaged 32,000 in attendance during the four-day long series with the White Sox. Sportswriters at the *Times* attempted to best each other by coining new nicknames for Ruth – the "Titan of Thump," the "Bazoo of Bang," the "Prince of Pounders" and the "Samson of Slam." Game stories in the *Times* were no longer about the Yankee team defeating their opponents, but read more like a bedtime story telling tales of Ruth's heroic hits.

The media, along with the scientific world of 1920, searched for reasons as to why the fans of New York were so enthusiastically following Ruth's home runs. A report given to the *Times* by the United Hospital Fund said that the crowd, "displaying mass emotional

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<sup>135</sup> *The New York Times*, June 5, 1920, 20.

<sup>136</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 10, 1920, 1.

<sup>137</sup> *The New York Times*, July 12, 1920, 11.

instability,”<sup>138</sup> acted along the lines of mob psychology, which could have even justified the death of one fan upon seeing a Ruth homer.<sup>139</sup>

His on-field actions were subsidized with an almost constant media commentary of his off-the-field exploits. Ruth’s celebrity status elevated him to new heights of media coverage not previously enjoyed by any New York baseball team or player and, even more tellingly, never before seen on a national sports stage. On July 26, the *Times* announced Ruth would sign a motion picture contract for \$50,000.<sup>140</sup> If fans weren’t able to see Ruth at the Polo Grounds during his record-breaking season, they could see him on the big screen. The Babe starred in the Tex Rickard-directed production “Headin’ Home,” which debuted in September of 1920 at Madison Square Garden.<sup>141</sup>

### **Giant Problems**

Across town, McGraw’s disappointment with his team and the rising Yankees was evident in newspaper coverage.

The *Times* warned the Giants of a new favorite team in town. When the Philadelphia Phillies visited the Polo Grounds for a game against the Giants, the Yankees were playing to an overflow crowd of 28,000 at Fenway Park. The New York fans at the Giants game watched the game, but were also “keeping close tabs on what the Yanks were doing up in Boston, and the news...was highly satisfactory.”<sup>142</sup> The *Times* noted a noticeable shift in Big Apple fan sentiments between the speedy, scrappy Giants of old and the new, more powerful Yankees. “Meanwhile New York fandom has surrendered to the Yankees just as it did to the Giants in the

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<sup>138</sup> *The New York Times*, September 10, 1920, 12.

<sup>139</sup> *The New York Times*, August 20, 1920, 10.

<sup>140</sup> *The New York Times*, July 26, 1920, 12.

<sup>141</sup> *The New York Times*, September 15, 1920, 12.

<sup>142</sup> *The New York Times*, May 30, 1920, 10.

days when John McGraw's great teams were battling for their championships."<sup>143</sup> On Tuesday, June 8, only 8,000 showed up to see the seventh-place Giants beat the Reds.<sup>144</sup>

The media noticed the fans were even becoming depressed with the on-field actions of the Giants and, as a result, went to Yankees games instead. On Sunday, June 13, while the Indians entertained the Yankees and 30,000 fans, the largest crowd ever recorded at League Park in Cleveland, the 18,000 fans that came to see the Giants face the St. Louis Cardinals were called "lugubrious" by the *Times*.<sup>145</sup> "In the sixth and seventh the fickle fans were again with the Giants, rooting hard for a victory, but the earlier attitude of the crowd was far different from that which New York teams have been accustomed to while playing at the Polo Grounds."<sup>146</sup> On the same day the Giants played before less than 3,000 fans in lowly Philadelphia, more than 18,000 entered the turnstiles during a four-game series between the Red Sox and Yankees at the Polo Grounds, bringing the total attendance to well over 100,000.<sup>147</sup>

By the end of June, *The New York Times* had turned on John McGraw, his team, and his supporters, something the Giants had not experienced during the days of the Deadball Era. Not even *New York Sun* writer Joe Vila, a regular contributor to *The Sporting News* and noted McGraw worshipper,<sup>148</sup> escaped the attacks of other baseball writers when he suggested the pitiful Giants should begin looking for other teams with which to trade. "Vila is a New Yorker, loves the ball clubs there as much as he does the town, and one can not blame him for striving to give the Giants a helping hand, but he is not going to do it at the expense of other teams in the league." Oscar Reichow assailed McGraw in the same column, saying the Giants may actually be

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<sup>143</sup> *The New York Times*, June 7, 1920, 18.

<sup>144</sup> *The New York Times*, June 9, 1920, 12.

<sup>145</sup> *The New York Times*, June 14, 1920, 19.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>147</sup> *The New York Times*, June 30, 1920, 9.

<sup>148</sup> Weintraub, *House That Ruth Built*, 10.

contending if not for McGraw's winter trip to Cuba.<sup>149</sup> Mercifully for John McGraw, his nightmare had a deadline. His star infielder Frank Frisch was recovering quickly from an appendicitis operation on April 26.

The Little Napoleon had his team turned around by August most likely because, according to *The Sporting News*, he decided "to return to the old sound system of developing his Giants from the abundant raw material instead of buying them on the hoof from other clubs."<sup>150</sup> The media commentary on McGraw's decisions communicated a stark contrast between the financial preferences of both New York teams and how the media portrayed them that year. As indicative of the Yankees' purchase of Ruth, they used owner money to buy their way into contention. McGraw, although he would still buy players but not at the same rate he once did, wished to scour the nation for talent – a preference he would later alter when the Yankees began to win more baseball games.

Despite John McGraw being served a subpoena to testify in court, the Giants took seven of nine games from the Cubs and Reds and were climbing steadily back into the pennant race. Reports alleged that the Giants manager punched a Broadway comedian outside his apartment, knocking the man to the ground and fracturing his skull.<sup>151</sup> Luckily for McGraw, the media did not blame him and *The Sporting News* even protected the manager, saying he had been "misrepresented" and he would soon be shown to be "blameless for the injuries received by his friend."<sup>152</sup> No other mention of the altercation was made in the *Times* or *The Sporting News*, most likely because of a tragic event that altered the game forever less than a week later.

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<sup>149</sup> *The Sporting News*, July 15, 1920, 1.

<sup>150</sup> *The Sporting News*, July 29, 1920, 4.

<sup>151</sup> *The New York Times*, August 13, 1920, 10.

<sup>152</sup> *The Sporting News*, August 26, 1920, 1.



## **“The Pitch That Killed”**

On Monday, August 16, Cleveland infielder Ray Chapman was hit in the head with a pitched ball and died later that evening. None other than Yankee pitcher Carl Mays, who, up until that time, had always warned opposing hitters of crowding the plate, was blamed for intentionally hitting Chapman.

Mays claimed it was an accident; he said the ball was wet and sailed when he delivered the pitch. Mays and the Yankees had seen almost the same occurrence earlier that year, when teammate Chick Fewster was struck in the head during Spring Training. A metal plate was inserted into Fewster’s head after a blood clot was removed and he did not return to the team until July. But the Indians’ Chapman never regained consciousness and became the first major league player to be fatally injured on the field.

Blame was passed around the diamond. Mike Sowell, author of *The Pitch That Killed*, said that when Carl Mays tried to place the blame of the beaming on umpire Tommy Connolly, fellow umpires Billy Evans and Will Dineen fought back. Evans and Dineen said Mays used more trickery than any other pitcher in the AL and routinely roughed up balls to result in a bigger break on his pitches. Sowell quoted both Evans and Dineen as stating that the owners were as much to blame as anyone on the field. “A short time ago, the club owners complained to President Johnson that too many balls were being thrown out. President Johnson sent out a bulletin telling the umpires to keep the balls in the games as much as possible except those which were dangerous.”<sup>153</sup>

Sportswriters saw the instant repercussions that Chapman’s death was having upon the playing of the game. “Indeed, it may be conjectured that for some time to come pitchers all

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<sup>153</sup> Sowell, Mike, *The Pitch That Killed* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 199.

through the league will be a little more careful not to graze a batter's head, and that will probably mean more batting."<sup>154</sup>

The sports media drew battle lines in the sand. On one side were those that supported Mays and on the other, those who wished him banned for the rest of the season. According to the media, Ty Cobb was one of the players who blamed Mays for the incident. Yankee fans voiced their displeasure with Ty Cobb when the Tigers visited the Polo Grounds on August 21 and Cobb, in turn, blamed newspapers for misquoting his stance on the issue. *The New York Times* took the opportunity to clear Cobb's name, but did not shy away from an opportunity to remind him that Babe Ruth now cast a shadow over Cobb's former Deadball Era hero status:

Heretofore, since he first became one of baseball's leading figures, the headliner in fact, until Babe Ruth usurped the heights, Cobb has always been welcomed with much applause in Harlem. He declared yesterday that the treatment was due to a misstatement of fact, but he seemed inclined to put most of the blame on New York writers rather than those of Boston, where the story originated.<sup>155</sup>

Following the untimely passing of Ray Chapman, new balls were more regularly used by umpires. As the *Times* hinted, the cleaner baseballs allowed hitters to see pitches more easily.

The death of Ray Chapman foreshadowed baseball's darkest hours leading up to public's knowledge of the story behind the 1919 World Series.

### **Scandal Breaks**

The Dodgers clinched the 1920 NL pennant when the Giants lost to the Boston Braves on September 28, the same day the Black Sox scandal made the front page of the *Times*. A grand jury began its investigation into baseball gambling earlier in the 1920 season. The courts were

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<sup>154</sup> *The New York Times*, August 18, 1920, 8.

<sup>155</sup> *The New York Times*, August 22, 1920, 17.

originally examining scandals involving other games before the Black Sox story made headlines. The story of the scandal could not have come at a worse time for the sport on the eve of the 1920 World Series. However, the commentary provided by *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News* aided the advancement of the sport in the wake of the 1919 Black Sox scandal.

As the *Times* pointed out on October 3, the corrupt members of the 1919 Chicago White Sox were on trial as was the entire sport during the 1920 World Series. “For the good of the game, these players have got to make good and they know it.”<sup>156</sup> Both publications called for punishment of all parties when found guilty. The *Times* made certain to communicate that the crooked players were a select few. “A sport that has honesty of endeavor as its crowning virtue has been contaminated by crooks, but in the main it will be found to have been as honest as the American public has always regarded it.”<sup>157</sup> *The Sporting News* lauded the grand jury investigation of the game and deemed it “fortunate, rather than deplored,” that the court system intervened in the matter.<sup>158</sup>

Talks of reorganizing the politics of professional baseball resurfaced in *The Sporting News*, and, while the publication may not have played a role in the reorganization of league politics, it provided a scope of sentiments throughout professional baseball ranks. A movement of reform was launched within the sport, and 12 teams threatened to leave organized baseball. As the publication sarcastically remarked, even John McGraw endorsed the plot to “purify” baseball.<sup>159</sup> Not long after the Cleveland Indians captured the 1920 World Series from the Brooklyn Dodgers, the 16 club owners unanimously voted Kennesaw Mountain Landis as baseball commissioner. The selection of Landis was immediately applauded by *The Sporting*

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<sup>156</sup> *The New York Times*, October 3, 1920, 20.

<sup>157</sup> *The New York Times*, September 27, 1920, 11.

<sup>158</sup> *The Sporting News*, September 30, 1920, 1.

<sup>159</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 7, 1920, 1.

*News*. Writers warned the new commissioner of the tall task he would soon face as the media reflected the waning trust of baseball fans throughout the country. “He must pacify the belligerent club owners whose selfishness and small minds have caused heaps of trouble.”<sup>160</sup>

At the same time, McGraw’s team was dealing with its own scandal from 1919. McGraw testified against two of his players in late September for throwing games. Long regarded as corrupt players, New York Giants Hal Chase and Heinie Zimmerman were both released by McGraw before the end of the season.<sup>161</sup> It was a critical move by McGraw. Just as Landis was cleansing the game, McGraw was erasing corruption at the Polo Grounds and positioning his club to make a return to the national stage both on the field and in the minds of New York fans who wanted to see a “cleaner” game.

The winter of 1920 proved to be the busiest and most important off-season for baseball writers and baseball in New York. Toward the end of the season, newspapers prepared the fans of New York for the upcoming decade by introducing key role players: “The Yankees, with Babe Ruth as the star attraction, have more than divided the patronage with the Giants, who, until this year, monopolized it.”<sup>162</sup> Most of the coverage during the off-season would also pertain to new commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis, who was, most importantly, restoring the sport to order. Ruth and Landis would square off a number of times in the upcoming years. At the same time Landis assumed control, Ruth was playing for another important person who would figure prominently in the future Yankees-Giants clash: John McGraw. Ruth and McGraw’s Giants barnstormed together that winter, playing teams throughout the country in order to supplement their salaries.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> *The Sporting News*, November 18, 1920, 1.

<sup>161</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 7, 1920, 5.

<sup>162</sup> *The Sporting News*, September 30, 1920, 1.

<sup>163</sup> *The Sporting News*, November 18, 1920, 1.

## CHAPTER III

### 1921-1924: The Giants Make a Stand

The media coverage of the Giants' and Yankees' 1919 and 1920 seasons indicated the slight rise of Yankee support in the city of New York. Babe Ruth had staked his claim as a superstar hitter with the ability to attract paying crowds to baseball parks no matter where the Yankees were playing. According to Spatz and Steinberg, the people paying to see Ruth play were those who may not have ever seen the game before and were "less-knowledgeable" than fans of old.<sup>164</sup> It was a testament to not only his celebrity status, but also the power of the media that exalted him as such a formidable figure within the mind of the fans.

Even the venerable John McGraw recognized Ruth's appeal as evidenced by the extension of his invitation for the Babe to join the Giants on their barnstorming tour of Cuba in late 1920, however, McGraw was not impressed by Ruth's hitting that was changing his favorite pastime. The Giants, with McGraw still at the helm, embarked on a journey to regain the dignity of the sport they had known during the Deadball Era throughout the media, the city of New York, and the country.

The baseball seasons of 1921-1924 signaled a return of the Giants to greater prominence within the NL than the franchise had ever previously enjoyed. Media coverage of the Giants once again rivaled and sometimes triumphed over coverage of the Yankees. During the 1921-1924 baseball seasons, McGraw's team captured four consecutive pennants. However, by the end of

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<sup>164</sup> Spatz and Steinberg, *1921*, 33.

this period, the media coverage will reveal that even the Deadball-minded McGraw most certainly realized the entire sport had embraced a new style of play.

### **Spring of 1921**

As *The New York Times* waxed poetically about the coming of spring training in 1921 and complained of the “vicissitudes of fickle Winter” of the North,<sup>165</sup> John McGraw and Charles Stoneham welcomed the Yankees’ decision to leave the Polo Grounds and build their own ball park. As Frank Deford points out, the Yankees attracted more than a million fans to their Polo Grounds home games while the Giants sold 360,000 tickets less than their AL counterparts.<sup>166</sup> It probably made McGraw even happier when the *Times* identified the new park’s location nearly decided upon by Yankees owners Ruppert and Huston. The land was occupied by the Hebrew Orphan Asylum and 1,300 orphans whom, by September 1920, had yet to be relocated.<sup>167</sup> McGraw’s dream to have the Polo Grounds all to himself would not become a reality until 1923, and, as a previously quoted *New York Times* article foreshadowed, would result in a tremendous revenue blow to the Giants within the city.

Proof the media wished to thrust the Yankees-Giants rivalry to the forefront of all baseball talk came as early as March. *The New York Times* proclaimed the 1921 pennant race a two-team affair with no mention of the defending NL champions that made residence in their own backyard, the Brooklyn Dodgers.<sup>168</sup> Coverage of the Yankees took the place of Brooklyn reports within the sports pages as writers announced stories of Ruth losing weight. *The Sporting News* noticed the New York media bias leaning toward the Yankees. One article said the Yankees would “have to win the American League pennant on the field, not in the metropolitan

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<sup>165</sup> *The New York Times*, February 28, 1921, 12.

<sup>166</sup> Deford, *Old Ball Game*, 208.

<sup>167</sup> *The New York Times*, September 14, 1920, 13.

<sup>168</sup> *The New York Times*, March 1, 1921, 14.

newspapers.”<sup>169</sup> At the same time, McGraw was reported by the *Times* as having “the strongest club and the most promising one he has managed since the pennant-winning days of 1911, 1912 and 1913.”<sup>170</sup> The Yankees (Ruth) and Giants (McGraw) were the talk of the country in sportswriting circles.

### **A Season to Remember**

The local and national press took every possible opportunity to assert the game was recovering from the death of Chapman and the Black Sox scandal of 1919. In one column, the *Times* explained, “the pastime is to exceed this year even its tremendous record of popularity made in 1920.”<sup>171</sup>

The newspaper’s attempts to build fan awareness for the sport throughout the 1919, 1920, and 1921 spring training seasons may have started to pay off by April 1921. The *Times* noticed a new type of fan filling the stands at the Polo Grounds. In addition to Ruth attracting a larger audience of New Yorkers who may never have before seen a baseball game, one sportswriter guessed that 5,000 women were in attendance for a Monday, April 13 game. “If there were any old or homely ones who might have been seen, an apology is hereby extended to them for not noticing.”<sup>172</sup>

Later that week, newspapers hinted at signs that new commissioner Landis had successfully rescued the reputation of baseball following the Black Sox scandal. The *Times* declared that, “it is already an established fact that the public is convinced that crookedness has been eliminated from the sport.”<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 10, 1921, 1.

<sup>170</sup> *The New York Times*, April 10, 1921, Sec. 8, 1.

<sup>171</sup> *The New York Times*, April 14, 1921, 14.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *The New York Times*, April 18, 1921, 13.

The sporting press felt that if one larger-than-life home run hitter in New York could not excite the city into a frenzy, two dueling sluggers certainly would. Along with Ruth of the Yankees, the city enjoyed the emergence of another New York slugger – George Kelly of the Giants. *The Sporting News* recognized Kelly as a new power hitter who could possibly usurp Ruth’s hold on fan adoration in New York. “Still the fact that the Giants also have a prospective Home Run King has slightly discounted Ruth’s achievements and also has increased the interest in McGraw’s team.”<sup>174</sup> Although a column appearing in the *Times* on May 2 pointed out the disadvantages that Kelly would face if he battled Ruth for the home run title, the Giants instantly commandeered longer game stories and columns in the publication.<sup>175</sup> It seemed that John McGraw, while still despising the long ball, was willing to have his own slugger if it meant victories. By May 13, Kelly had eight home runs, two of which were grand slams.

The newly-contrived Ruth vs. Kelly debate caused the newspapers to notice the rise in power hitting. The influx in home runs at the Polo Grounds inspired *The Sporting News* to call on baseball to “standardize home runs.” They claimed that since the Polo Grounds right field foul line stood only 256 feet away from home plate, other hitters were placed at a supreme disadvantage playing in parks that were 50 to 125 feet larger.<sup>176</sup> Regardless of their concerns, the fans loved the home runs. More than 33,000 attended the Giants-Pirates match-up on Sunday, May 22 while *The Sporting News* called the Kelly vs. Ruth home run debate “as tiresome as the home run epidemic itself.”<sup>177</sup>

The *Times* had a completely different take on the subject. A *Times* column reflected the feelings of the fans that the home run was the primary facet of the game the fan wanted to see.

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<sup>174</sup> *The Sporting News*, April 28, 1921, 1.

<sup>175</sup> *The New York Times*, May 2, 1921, 19.

<sup>176</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 12, 1921, 4.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



The *Times* hoped that any restrictions on hitting would be acted upon slowly, further evidence that the fans, at least in New York, were more than willing for the surge in power-hitting to continue. “When the fans begin to stay away from the parks because of too much hitting it will be time to act, but that day apparently is far distant.”<sup>178</sup> The newspaper granted solid, paradigm-shifting evidence to the factor that inclined fans to travel to the ballpark: the home run.

### **A New Style**

Articles appearing in both publications alleged that baseball magnates (especially in the NL) inserted a livelier ball into play made from a better grade of Australian wool, but manufacturers denied all appeals that the cork and cover had been changed. Perhaps the simplest answer to their questions lie in a January 1, 1920 article appearing on the sports pages of *The Sporting News*, in which writer John Sheridan uncovered clues to the evolving style of hitting reflected in the sport.

Sheridan dissected Ruth’s swing and compared it with the Indians ill-fated shortstop, Ray Chapman. Sheridan observed that Ruth’s swing was longer, harder, and had more weight behind the ball as he connected than other hitters of the time. The position of Ruth’s hands and appropriate weight distribution throughout his swing led Sheridan to compare his bat motion to that of a golfer. It was a complete contrast to Chapman’s shorter, choppy swing.<sup>179</sup>

In addition to his swing, further research proved that Ruth was in a league by himself. In 1921, sportswriter Hugh Fullerton accompanied Ruth to Columbia University so that two members of the institution’s psychology department could perform numerous laboratory tests on the slugger. In his resulting article, later published in *Popular Science Monthly*, the researchers found that Ruth was as close to a perfect athletic specimen they had ever before seen both

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<sup>178</sup> *The New York Times*, May 23, 1921, 11.

<sup>179</sup> *The Sporting News*, January 1, 1920, 3.

physically and mentally. “The secret of Babe Ruth’s ability to hit is clearly revealed in these tests. His eye, his ear, his brain, his nerves all function more rapidly than do those of the average person. Further the coordination between eye, ear, brain, and muscle is much nearer perfection than that of the normal healthy man.”<sup>180</sup>

Not two years after the 1920 article and the appearance of the “practically perfect”<sup>181</sup> Babe Ruth on the New York stage, the entire sport was experiencing the new change in hitting style.

As evidenced in the newspaper coverage, while many hitters were not able to match the sheer power of Ruth, hitters like Kelly were able to copy his level swing, thus providing for the spike in home runs. In June, the *Times* even alluded to the ball being lively for some hitters, but not for many veterans, thus hinting that the problem may not be with the ball, but with how the ball was being hit.<sup>182</sup>

Both leagues attempted to squelch power hitting in different ways, a move that did not make the New York sporting press happy. The NL allowed pitchers the limited use of resin under the supervision of umpires with the hope that twirlers could regain control of a slick baseball. The AL instituted its own policy – special powder was applied to balls before being put into play by umpires.<sup>183</sup> Neither attempt to suppress hitting worked on the Yankees and Giants, who continued their batting spree. On the same day a *Times* column called for consistency in pitching methods amongst the two leagues, the “thumping twins” Babe Ruth and Bob Meusel hit home runs against the Senators.<sup>184</sup> The next day, the Phillies and Giants combined to hit seven

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<sup>180</sup> Fullerton, Hugh S, “Why Babe Ruth is Greatest Home-Run Hitter,” *Popular Science Monthly* 99 (4), 19-21, 110.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> *The New York Times*, June 20, 1921, 10.

<sup>183</sup> *The New York Times*, June 27, 1921, 10.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 9.

home runs in a 12-8 Phillies win. The home run was not only a tool used by both the Giants and the Yankees, but it was becoming a tool for newspapers to arouse the excitement of readers.

### **The Run to the World Series**

By mid-season, the Giants provided a new story line for the *Times* and *The Sporting News*; the team was returning to its winning ways of the Deadball Era, but not without aspects of the new era injected into their style of play.

Injuries and pitching had been a problem for the Giants the entire year and at one point, the Giants manager was so hard-pressed he had even allowed spitballer Phil Douglas back on the team following his desertion.<sup>185</sup> The pitching staff was finally rounding into form by mid-July. When McGraw's heavy hitters had bad days, pitchers like Arthur Nehf and Jess Barnes were there to pick up the slack, proving McGraw was not completely reliant upon the new style of hitting.

On Sunday, July 10, McGraw's team inched within 3.5 games of the league-leading Pirates. New York starter Bill Ryan surrendered only five hits to the Cubs in a 2-1 victory in "one of those old-fashioned ball games which were much in vogue before they started shooting a shell of hop into every new ball."<sup>186</sup> McGraw continued, rather hypocritically, to berate the slugging of the Yankees and other teams hitting for power in the media. Although his own team would go on to hit 75 home runs that season, McGraw said that "pitchers have thrown up their hands in dismay and many of the infielders actually fear that they will be injured by the cannon shots that whistle in their direction."<sup>187</sup>

Across town, Babe Ruth had his team back on track by September. The media put the Yankees and the Giants on a collision course to meet in the World Series. The Yankees were

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<sup>185</sup> *The Sporting News*, July 7, 1921, 1.

<sup>186</sup> *The New York Times*, July 11, 1921, 12.

<sup>187</sup> *The Sporting News*, July 7, 1921, 1.

lead by Ruth at the plate and Huggins' pitching staff was clinging to a one-game lead in the pennant race. A crowd dubbed "the greatest assemblage in New York's baseball history" flocked to Polo Grounds on Sunday, September 11, 1921 to see the Yankees fight the Red Sox in a doubleheader with the hopes of seeing the Babe break his 1920 home run record the same day.<sup>188</sup>

The Yankees, via their media coverage, were now providing both male and female fans with something to cheer about other than Ruth's home run records. While the team was anything but consistent down the stretch, the club managed to snatch three out of four games from the Cleveland Indians at the end of September. According to *The Sporting News*, "the death rattle could be heard in the throats of the Indians."<sup>189</sup> None other than Carl Mays, who also added three hits to the cause, defeated the Indians on September 25 by a score of 21-7 in front of 40,000 fans. The Yankees would not relinquish their regular season lead.

The sporting press again regarded McGraw as the best manager in baseball when the Giants won ten straight games from September 7-17, increasing their lead to 4.5 games over the second-place Pittsburgh Pirates. *The Sporting News* attributed the miracle run by the Giants to the front of the pack to Little Napoleon. "The entire success of the Giants is due to McGraw's mentorship and the assistance rendered by Coaches Jennings, Burkett and Dolan."<sup>190</sup> McGraw, according to the media, was back on top of the baseball world, and he would have the opportunity to prove it in the World Series against the team and the player who had stolen that honor the previous two seasons: the Yankees and Babe Ruth.

### **Plethora of Plot Lines**

Even before both teams had officially secured their respective pennants, *The New York Times* clamored for an all-New York World Series. "The results of a series between the Giants

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<sup>188</sup> *The New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1921, 9.

<sup>189</sup> *The Sporting News*, Sept. 29, 1921, 1.

<sup>190</sup> *The Sporting News*, September 22, 1921, 1.

and Yankees undoubtedly would be followed throughout the country with more interest than any world's series games ever played.”<sup>191</sup> New York, especially the media, was “baseball crazy.” According to *The Sporting News*, “the circulation of the metropolitan newspapers that make a big feature of the national game is going up steadily and when the Big Series comes there'll be new records for printing ‘extras.’”<sup>192</sup> The *Times* had good reason for printing those extras; every New Yorker wanted a copy. “Nevertheless, all the inhabitants of this city who are devoid of interest in this world's series could be counted on the hairs of Chauncey Depew's head.”<sup>193</sup>

Both publications took the opportunity to reveal a number of different story lines, generating an excitement for the game the city had never before seen. It was a World Series that pitted brother (New York Giants player Emil Meusel) against brother (New York Yankees player Bob Meusel) and Miller Huggins against John McGraw.

Leading up to the World Series, Huggins' and McGraw's coaching styles were compared by *The Sporting News* upon learning that Huggins may be finished with the club if he did not present Ruppert and Huston with a title. *The Sporting News* held seven-time pennant-winning John McGraw in the highest regard, claiming he had a personality that made most newspaper writers love him. His generosity with former players down on their luck, but strict disciplinarian style of coaching, lead the *Times* to label him a born leader. In stark contrast, just as the *Times* called McGraw one of the most colorful and aggressive figures the sport had ever seen, *The Sporting News* called Huggins a manager who could not “do anything that is right in New York.”<sup>194</sup> Entering the Series, he not only ranked second in continuous service in professional

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<sup>191</sup> *The New York Times*, September 26, 1921, 13.

<sup>192</sup> *The Sporting News*, September 29, 1921, 1.

<sup>193</sup> *The New York Times*, October 5, 1921, 1.

<sup>194</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 6, 1921, 4.

baseball to McGraw, but Huggins was also the second-best manager in Harlem in the minds of the media.

The story line summarizing the entire decade was also exhibited in the coverage of the Yankees and Giants leading up to the 1921 World Series: Babe Ruth was squaring off against John McGraw on the playing field. The publications obviously favored McGraw's managerial style over Huggins' in the intra-city series, but both held that Ruth would be the catalyst of the 1921 World Series. In the final series against the Cleveland Indians, manager Tris Speaker had allowed his pitchers to throw to the Babe, and as *The Sporting News* pointed out, Ruth's .727 batting average in those games most likely cost Speaker the American League pennant.<sup>195</sup> The *Times* felt that attendance at the Series would soar, not because of the Giants or the Yankees, but because of the presence of the "mauling monarch." "Without Ruth the series would probably excite unusual interest as it will bring together the teams of the nation's metropolis, but add the greatest figure in baseball and the event assumes even greater importance."<sup>196</sup>

In addition, the days leading up to the World Series allowed the media to showcase the different styles of baseball the two clubs played. John McGraw's defensive-minded Giants were clashing with Babe Ruth's free-swinging New York Yankees. *The Sporting News* recognized the dilemma facing the New York Giants in the 1921 World Series. "Now, when the Giant pitchers face the Yankee batters, what good will an airtight infield defense accomplish for the Giants if the Yankees slug the ball to the uttermost reaches of the suburbs, as they are prone to do?"<sup>197</sup> Even with the leadership of John McGraw, the *Times* picked the Yankees to win the Series because of their ability to score runs. The same newspaper recognized the slight surge in fan appreciation for the upstart Yankees. "McGraw and his men have still as great a grip on one part

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> *The New York Times*, October 2, 1921, Sec. 9, 1.

<sup>197</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 6, 1921, 1.

of fandom as any Giant team of the past, but in the meantime a new army of fans has rallied to the Yankee standard where there once was a scattering few.”<sup>198</sup>

### **The First All-New York World Series**

The media “dope” on the Series remained accurate for the first two games, but Babe Ruth was a non-factor, proving it was all hype. The Yankees took both games by a 3-0 score with Carl Mays and Waite Hoyt on the mound. Ruth was hampered by an injured elbow and was held to one hit in the first game and walked three times in the second. While the *Times* hyped the Series too much (only 30,000 saw the first game even though the paper claimed that all tickets had been sold), one writer estimated that 400 media members were on hand for the first game.<sup>199</sup>

*The Sporting News* would later blame local papers like the *Times* for keeping larger crowds away due to reports of 100,000 people storming the Polo Grounds before the ticket office even opened. “One of these days New York will get next to the ‘We Boys’ and copper everything they write, though it takes a New Yorker a long time to get next to anything.”<sup>200</sup>

Beginning the Series with two losses did not bode well for the Giants, their manager, or their fans. According to *The Sporting News*, the media, thus reflecting the feelings of the Harlem fans, were prepared to jump from the Giants bandwagon following the shutout losses. It was yet another sign of the fickle nature of New York fans and sportswriters which is still evident even today. “All along Broadway one could hear that the day of the Giants had passed, that it was well John McGraw should hand over the management to some one else and devote all his time to scouting up some ball players.”

Interestingly, the publication criticized New York fans for supporting either team depending upon “the way the wind is blowing, though it is true that down in his heart, he regards

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<sup>198</sup> *The New York Times*, October 2, 1921, Sec. 9, 2.

<sup>199</sup> *The New York Times*, October 5, 1921, 1.

<sup>200</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 13, 1921, 5.

the Giants as a Manhattan ‘institution’ and the Yankees as something still and ever to be an added feature only.”<sup>201</sup> The commentary proved another important point - just like the Miller Huggins and John McGraw comparisons, the Yankees were still an afterthought to the Giants in the national sporting press. Regardless of the actions by Ruppert, Huston, Babe Ruth, and *The New York Times* attempts to oust McGraw’s Giants as the favorite, *The Sporting News* believed the Giants would remain the city’s team, win or lose. Almost simultaneously, John McGraw’s team substantiated *The Sporting News*’ claims.

The Giants awoke in the third and fourth games and assaulted the Yankees’ staff for 17 runs. A strong performance by Giants pitcher Jesse Barnes in the third game lead *The Sporting News* to comment that he “made ‘Murderers’ Row’ look like Indian cigar signs.”<sup>202</sup> The *Times* shifted their bias to side with McGraw’s Giants. For the rest of the Series, Ruth would catch the brunt end of the local and national media’s attacks, a marked change in the previous season’s coverage of the New York baseball scene.

Unfortunately for Miller Huggins, Ruth’s performance at the plate almost single-handedly defeated the Giants in game five. Before the game, the *Times* noted that Ruth was fit for a hospital ward. He re-injured himself so badly he was unable to start the rest of the Series.<sup>203</sup> For the remainder of the 1920s, sportswriters would claim that as Ruth went, so too did the Yankees. More than 36,000 saw the 2-1 victory secured by the Giants in the seventh game of the series, which the *Times*, still a leading advocate of the home run-hitting era, dubbed “drab, due to the mastery which two pitchers held from start to finish over the opposing batsmen.”<sup>204</sup> Plagued by four errors and a Ruth-less lineup for the final three games of the Series, McGraw’s pitchers

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>202</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 13, 1921, 1.

<sup>203</sup> *The New York Times*, October 11, 1921, 1.

<sup>204</sup> *The New York Times*, October 13, 1921, 1.



out-dueled the Yankee staff and won the series five games to three. *The Sporting News* searched for all excuses as to why the Yankees lost the Series. The publication claimed that the slugging efforts of Babe Ruth and the Yankees during the regular season was not due to the lively ball and instead blamed the sub-par talent of American League pitching.

But when the Bambino and his ball smashing companions went up against the Giants' pitchers...in the World's Series, the light was turned on and thousands of deluded fans suddenly realized how badly they had been fooled by the so-called supermen wearing the Yankee uniforms.<sup>205</sup>

John McGraw saw another opportunity to boost his club's stock in the eye of the media and did not mince words. "We won because we were the better ball club."<sup>206</sup>

### **A Yankee Road Block**

The loss of the 1921 World Series to the Giants signaled the beginning of a very dark time for Ruth. The off-season and the following year would prove to be the worst period Ruth would experience in his entire career along with the worst press, too.

Even though an injured Ruth hit in the final game (he flew out during a pinch-hit appearance), he was not able to escape the ire of *The Sporting News* after a press box skirmish between himself and an unnamed New York writer. The Babe had communicated to the media after game two of the Series that he would not return to the Yankee lineup. However, he started game three and hit a home run, thus making the newspapers look "foolish," according to *The Sporting News*. When the Bambino was chastised by one writer for his misleading statements about his ability to play the remainder of the games, Ruth ordered a public apology from the organization. *The Sporting News* called it a vain attempt by Ruth to bulldoze a writer in the press

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<sup>205</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 20, 1921, 1.

<sup>206</sup> *The New York Times*, October 14, 1921, 12.

stand and even called on the Baseball Writers Association to ban ghostwriters from the press box, media members who would write stories for popular players before the superstars signed their own name to the piece.

(Ball players) seem to think that they are entitled to the best of everything in the way of comment and criticism, but are quick to find fault if something appears in print that doesn't meet with their approval. Make all of the swelled heads understand just where they get off.<sup>207</sup>

While Miller Huggins was chided as the World Series goat in 1921, Ruth was similarly criticized because of his actions during the off-season. Never one to stay out of the media spotlight for long, Ruth made more headlines soon after the World Series when he announced he would play in exhibition games and disregard the warnings of first-year commissioner Landis. In fact, as the *Times* reported, Ruth could make the equivalent of his entire World's Series share in only two days of playing exhibition games (\$3,000 per game).<sup>208</sup> It would be a decision that Ruth and his teammates would regret during the 1922 season.

Comments found in the *Times* suggested John McGraw's reemergence on the baseball scene. The publication blamed the poor baseball played by the Yankees on Huggins, whom, they said, never gained the respect of his team during the Series. Instead, Huggins' counterpart, John McGraw, was the quintessential manager. "(The Yankees) are not known as a smart ball club, but National leaguers say the Giants are not a smart team. However the Giants listen to a smart manager and the Yanks listen to nobody."<sup>209</sup>

The bad press for the Yankees following their defeat in the 1921 World Series acted as a sobering reminder for team ownership and personnel. *The Sporting News* affirmed that John

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<sup>207</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 20, 1921, 1.

<sup>208</sup> *The New York Times*, October 16, 1921, Sec. 8, 2.

<sup>209</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 20, 1921, 2.

McGraw's Giants were still America's team. "Prestige of this kind will mean a lot in the next few years in this town, where the people have little or no use for losers."<sup>210</sup> The Deadball Era was still alive, but as proven in newspaper coverage of the entire 1921 season, George Kelly and aspects of the Live Ball Era were creeping into the Giants' lineup.

### **Spring of 1922**

As the spring of 1922 dawned, the *Times* noticed an "epidemic" of players holding out for higher salaries. It was an alarming trend throughout the sport. While players had always halted contract negotiations with the hopes of receiving more money from owners, more players, especially those from the ranks of the Giants and Yankees as specified by the *Times*, seemed to keep asking for raises. "Yearly the demands of the players have been going upward, until now they are asking for salaries that none thought to ask for only a few years ago."<sup>211</sup> Surprisingly, Ruth was not among the Yankees asking for more money. Instead, fellow Yankees Wally Pipp, Aaron Ward, Bob Meusel, Wally Schang, and Bob Shawkey asked for pay raises before they would sign their contracts. Carl Mays even asked for a new contract allowing him to barnstorm during the off-season due to his expected revenue losses upon joining the Yankees.<sup>212</sup>

The press noted the different style exhibited by the rival franchises when dealing with players. Miller Huggins did all he could to keep his players happy, but McGraw's stiff negotiation techniques were the antithesis of the Yankees' manager.

The Giants were not without their own holdouts. Phil Douglas, Jesse Barnes, George Kelly, Johnny Rawlings, Dave Bancroft, and Emil Meusel all attempted to capitalize on Charles Stoneham and John McGraw's financial successes in the World Series the season before. As Vice President of the Giants, McGraw had more power than other field managers. He quickly

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<sup>210</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 13, 1921, 1.

<sup>211</sup> *The New York Times*, February 20, 1922, 9.

<sup>212</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 2, 1922, 1.

dispelled Jesse Barnes' requests in 1922 when he put the pitcher up for sale. "Barnes then hurried to San Antone, declaring that he didn't intend to be unreasonable."<sup>213</sup>

Always attempting to guess the outcome of the upcoming season in spring training, the national press asserted that the round tripper had damaged baseball, and would not be missed by fans in 1922. New York Yankees Babe Ruth and Bob Meusel, the two leading sluggers of the Live Ball Era, had combined for 83 home runs the previous season and were suspended for the first month of the season for ignoring the rules of organized baseball and participating in barnstorming games following the 1921 World Series. Their suspension seemed to symbolize the suspension of the lively ball in the sporting press. "So much has been written about the 'lively' ball and the bad pitching of the 1921 races, together with the successfulness of the Giants against the Yankees in the World's Series, that the fans have opened their eyes in the fact that they have been fooled."<sup>214</sup>

### **Trouble for Ruth**

Media treatment of the Yankees soon got even worse. In addition to losing their main gate attractions in Ruth and Meusel, the Yankees managed to botch their first-ever pennant flag raising ceremony on April 20, 1922 at the Polo Grounds. Huggins' club opened the season at home against the Washington Senators in a gale. After raising the pennant, a rope snapped and the flag flew over the bleachers. "For the remainder of the game the flag staff was bare, and the Yanks had no more of a pennant to show than the Philadelphia Athletics."

Two weeks later, *The Sporting News*, the protector of the national pastime, took a different stance. In a blistering article that attacked New York newspapers and fans that wished Huggins to be fired during the previous season, *The Sporting News* said neither Ruth nor Meusel

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<sup>213</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 16, 1922, 1.

<sup>214</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 23, 1922, 1.

was being missed. In fact, according to the article, it was the leadership of Huggins that would keep the Yankees in the hunt in 1922. The Yankees were no longer a “one-man” team.

All things considered, Huggins has put together a winning combination that has surprised the metropolitan baseball public and bids fair to show the way to the other American League teams, regardless of the presence or absence of the Home Run Twins. In fact, some of the bugs are inclined to believe that the Yankees may begin to lose their fighting spirit and winning ways as soon as Ruth and Meusel return.<sup>215</sup>

While the coverage further illustrated Ruth’s fall from grace, his path was laid out before him; he would have to regain the confidence of writers and fans alike. When Ruth was allowed to return to baseball at the end of May (“carrying a roll of fat around his waist”<sup>216</sup>), he instead inspired disapproval of all audiences with his irreverent behavior. A week after his reinstatement to the field, Ruth was called out at second when he tried to stretch a single into a double. *The Sporting News* said Ruth’s resulting display of poor sportsmanship deserved “the frown of those who want to see the game played squarely.”<sup>217</sup>

He forthwith took out his vengeance by throwing a handful of dust in the umpire’s eyes, and when he clambered over the dugout into the grand stand after a group of chiding fans and was pulled back by policemen, his popularity went into still further discount.<sup>218</sup>

By early May, the Giants were ahead in the NL standings. *The Sporting News* cited proof that the Giants picked up where they left off in 1921. “It is difficult to see how they are to be

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<sup>215</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 4, 1922, 1.

<sup>216</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 8, 1922, 1.

<sup>217</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 1, 1922, 4.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

overtaken, for the chances are that they will get better instead of worse. With Frisch back in the lineup, and one or two of the pitchers showing certain improvement, McGraw does not appear to have a thing to worry about.”<sup>219</sup>

While Ruth and the Yankees suffered a number of early season set backs, the sporting press began to reflect the slow matriculation of the game to the Live Ball Era started in 1919. *The Sporting News* did not welcome the change and said the “burlesque batting” hurt the pastime. “Baseball, under present conditions, lacks the forming science which made the game so popular in the days of real teams.”<sup>220</sup>

Before *The Sporting News*’ scorching commentary appeared on its pages on May 4, the *Times* noticed that other teams outside of New York were quickly adopting the new style of swinging for the fences. “Whether the ball now in use is just as lively or whether the pitching is below standard is a moot question, but the fact remains that to date this year there has been plenty of hitting, and hitting of the distance variety.” The *Times*, ever-willing to cite the rising home run totals, totaled the damage. In the three short weeks of the 1922 season, both leagues had combined to hit 87 home runs. One St. Louis Browns player, Kenneth Williams, had already hit nine home runs in as many days.<sup>221</sup> *The Sporting News* remarked that even after Ruth had returned in late May, his reappearance did not cause “so much excitement in fandom, perhaps because everybody else is hitting home runs with careless abandon.”<sup>222</sup> The Bambino had not only become an afterthought within his own city, but within the entire sport that he had helped to alter.

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<sup>219</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 11, 1922, 3.

<sup>220</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 4, 1922, 1.

<sup>221</sup> *The New York Times*, May 1, 1922, 15.

<sup>222</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 8, 1922, 1.

## Success For Both Clubs

The Yankees were still up by two games in the AL race, but the media neglected to give credence to the younger, more powerful, but inconsistent Yankee hitters. The team would still hit almost 100 home runs and boast a .287 batting average during the season, but with the McGraw-led, consistent-hitting Giants in the driver's seat of the NL, *The Sporting News* attributed the small Yankee success to "a lot of bad hurling and that it is extremely doubtful if the new crop of boxmen that might be abstracted from the minors, sand lots and colleges next spring would include more than half a dozen really promising recruits."<sup>223</sup>

The trend in the media to support the "older" style of baseball was also seen on the pages of *The New York Times* less than a week later. On July 30, 1922, James C. Young of the *Times* penned an article entitled "Now It's a League of Elders." Young identified the older players of the league: Ty Cobb, Tris Speaker, Eddie Collins, and Walter Johnson, all notable Deadball Era players. The writer used words like "heady" and "fighting" to describe the style of the players now prospering in the "League of Old Men."<sup>224</sup>

No longer was the sporting press attempting to straddle the fence between the old game of baseball and the new generation of players. Ruth, the icon of the Live Ball, and his antics, were immature. The old way, the Deadball way, was a tradition in which they were not yet willing to part.

The tone in the coverage in both publications regarding the Giants and Yankees changed again in early August. Both teams made acquisitions that turned heads throughout the sport. Both newspapers launched into an uproar. The Yankees acquired outfielder Elmer Smith and infielder Joe Dugan from the Boston Red Sox, while the Giants obtained star pitcher Huge McQuillan

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<sup>223</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 15, 1922, 1.

<sup>224</sup> *The New York Times*, July 30, Sec. 7, 2.

from the Boston Braves. At the time, the Giants and Yankees were chasing St. Louis teams at the height of both pennant races. Naturally, the St. Louis-based *Sporting News* alerted their audience to the “dangerous super-eminence”<sup>225</sup> of the New York teams.

But the fact that the two New York Clubs have the pick of the young players in minor leagues, and in semi-professional and amateur baseball at their disposal is the real danger to the other major league clubs and to the very life of professional baseball. So long as this condition exists the other 14 clubs in the major leagues are a permanent disadvantage compared to which the possibility of a New York club securing an essential individual star from another major league team is negligible.<sup>226</sup>

Just like the epidemic of holdouts during the spring training of 1922, the publications reiterated that New York was the center of big business in baseball. The *Times* agreed that the act of buying players by the two New York teams were not helpful for the sport, but tempered its commentary by assuring fans that the clubs would still have to win the games on the field. *The Sporting News* took a more pessimistic approach and promised New York baseball dominance for years to come simply because of both teams’ increased revenues on Sundays. “Only a miscarriage of events can prevent the New York Clubs from becoming annual and perpetual winners of major league pennants year in and year out. Other teams will be but knots in the tail of the New York kite.”<sup>227</sup> Local media seemed to have no problem with the New York baseball supremacy. “May the best teams win and may they be the Giants and Yanks. This is as good a place as any for a loud ‘amen.’”<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> *The Sporting News*, August 3, 1922, 4.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> *The New York Times*, August 14, 1920, 8.



## McGraw's Stand

By way of the media, John McGraw played a big role in the promotion of the 1922 World Series as the regular season faded.

Just as he helped commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis eradicate corruption in the sport during the winter of 1920, he acted as the gatekeeper for the sport once again in 1922. McGraw banished pitcher Phil Douglas from the Giants when Douglas offered to desert the team for money. *The Sporting News* immediately praised McGraw for his decision.

The prompt action taken by McGraw, with the support of Landis, shows that the leaders of baseball intend to maintain the high standards of the game. Had the incident become known to the public before Douglas had been dismissed from the team, it would have given baseball an even more severe shock than that which it has just sustained.<sup>229</sup>

With the second public dismissal of a star player in three seasons, McGraw once again became baseball's savior in the eyes of the press. Just as they had been throughout the 1922 season, the press was on McGraw's side. By the media's standards, McGraw could do no wrong.

McGraw had mastered the art of using the media to his advantage. Even though his team was in a bad slump, the Giants manager propelled the club to the forefront of the media when he predicted another match-up against the Yankees. "Surely, you don't expect anything but an all-New York series, do you?"<sup>230</sup>

As expected, when the Giants hit another rough stretch in the middle of September, *The Sporting News* said McGraw would be the only manager for the job.

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<sup>229</sup> *The New York Times*, August 21, 1922, 8.

<sup>230</sup> *The New York Times*, August 28, 1922, 7.

Were the Giants handled by any other man than McGraw, no doubt their followers would have abandoned hope long ere this. No ordinary manager could pull through with an outfit like that at the Polo Grounds, but McGraw is no ordinary leader. He has accomplished great things before, and he may do it again. But he has a real pull ahead of him.<sup>231</sup>

McGraw pulled it out. Both clubs managed to capture their respective pennants and New York was set, once again, to host the 1922 World Series.

### **World Series of 1922**

The newspaper coverage of the World Series of 1922 provides some of the best clues for tracking fan sentiments in New York and the playing styles of the Yankees and Giants. In addition to a number of other reasons, the *Times* pointed out that Babe Ruth, “the greatest long-distance hitter in the history of baseball,”<sup>232</sup> would help the Yankees win the World Series. After a favorable season in the sporting press, John McGraw and his New York Giants would be playing the role of the underdog.

*The Sporting News* took the opportunity to build up the showdown between the two teams and again pit McGraw against a now healthy Babe Ruth.

It should be readily appreciated what the Giants must do to win the world’s title again. They must solve the most stringent pitching department in the American League and they must keep ‘Murderers’ Row’ from hitting the ball. Can they accomplish both of these things? If they do, then McGraw will be known far and wide as the wizard of baseball.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> *The Sporting News*, September 14, 1922, 3.

<sup>232</sup> *The New York Times*, September 28, 1922, 16.

<sup>233</sup> *The Sporting News*, September 28, 1922, 1.

The *Times* did its part to assist the owners of the Yankees and Giants at the box office for the upcoming World Series with articles comparing and contrasting both franchises. Also evident in the coverage was the attempt by the *Times* to pander to both sides of the growing Yankees-Giants debate. “Giants and Yankees will enter the coming series with hosts of followers cheering for their respective favorite’s victory, but the sentiment of many New York fans will be: May the better team win!”<sup>234</sup> It was an interesting statement for the newspaper to make; the sportswriters realized both teams were gaining equal footholds in New York baseball fan sentiment.

Just as the media did for the 1921 World Series, the *Times* heightened the baseball buzz in New York. According to the *Times*, the Giants-Yankees World Series rivalry was the best in the sport. “New York has surrendered to a baseball fever of alarming proportions. National interest may or may not be so keen as in other seasons, but New York itself hasn’t been so excited in years and years.”<sup>235</sup>

The New York Giants capitalized on fan interest in the second consecutive all-New York World Series by etching their name in sports history. While portrayed in the media as the series underdog, McGraw proved the newspapers wrong by taking the first four games. Because the sport returned to the traditional seven-game World Series format instead of nine games, the Giants won their second World Series in as many years.

The press likened the play of the Giants in the 1922 World Series to heroes of the Great War when the *Times* acknowledged the presence of General John J. Pershing during one of the games. “General John J. Pershing was an unexpected guest, and the General, who likes fighters, must have had the afternoon of his life. He saw men after his own heart in the Giants, who didn’t

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<sup>234</sup> *The New York Times*, October 2, 1922, 15.

<sup>235</sup> *The New York Times*, October 4, 1922, 19.

know when they were beaten and refused to accept defeat.”<sup>236</sup> If the Giants were the media’s soldiers, then McGraw was the greatest American general.

The media coverage of John McGraw following the 1922 season may draw comparisons of the coverage of Ruth during his 1920 campaign. Just like Ruth was mobbed by fans during his entire first season with the Yankees, John McGraw was the object of fan affection following the last out of the final game. The *Times* called it “the greatest managerial feat of the age” and McGraw’s “greatest triumph.”<sup>237</sup> An old woman broke through the throng of people surrounding John McGraw to shake his hand. “I can go home now. I’ve seen the greatest manager in baseball.”<sup>238</sup> The heroes of the pre-war era had not yet taken a backseat to the Yankees’ Babe Ruth in the mind of the sporting press. In fact, John McGraw was baseball royalty and the media intimated that Ruth, along with the Live Ball Era, was nearing his end.

The *Times* was equally stunned at how poorly the Yankees played in the 1922 World Series. “From that angle the series just ended furnished the most stunning baseball reversal of all time. There is no explanation that completely explains.”<sup>239</sup> The next day, the newspaper hinted that Ruth’s popularity had reached a ceiling in New York and throughout baseball.

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<sup>236</sup> *The New York Times*, October 5, 1922, 1.

<sup>237</sup> *The New York Times*, October 9, 1922, 1.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

Opinion was almost unanimous that Ruth had reached the lowest ebb of his career. His failing box office value makes the fat three-year contract which the Yanks gave him last Spring look like a dubious bit of business. The Babe's failure in the world's series, it was predicted, will work heavily against him next year. Some experts declared that the Yankee Colonels will be able legally to break the contract because of certain clauses which bind Ruth.<sup>240</sup>

The media commentary about Ruth's career was accurate, but it was a surprising one to make about his future with the Yankees. He, and his ability to hit the ball out of the park, was still a major attraction for the fans, as evidenced by coverage the following season.

### **The Year of Yankee Stadium**

As the 1923 season dawned, the media detected evidence that the sport of baseball was quickly becoming a more popular spectator sport with the erection of the 75,000-seat Yankee Stadium. The *Times* said there was "tons in interest" in the \$3 million ballpark.<sup>241</sup> An account appearing in the newspaper in late March (before the season began) cited as many as 10,000 visitors to the stadium on the previous Sunday.<sup>242</sup> Further coverage noted the significance of the new stadium and what it represented for New York.

The new stadium will not only be a landmark in this city but it will also stand as a monument to the enterprise of Colonel Jacob Ruppert and Colonel T.L. Huston who purchased the Yankees when they were little more than a failure and built them up into one of the most successful and prosperous teams in the game.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> *The New York Times*, October 10, 1922, 17.

<sup>241</sup> *The New York Times*, March 11, 1923, Sec. 1, 2.

<sup>242</sup> *The New York Times*, March 25, 1923, Sec. 1, 2.

<sup>243</sup> *The New York Times*, April 18, 1923, 1.

Local media also realized that Babe Ruth was to play an ever-important role in the future of baseball in New York. Both local and national press outlets felt that Yankee Stadium, with its short right field dimensions, was built specifically for Ruth. It was an affirmation that the Yankees' owners were catering to Ruth and the Live Ball Era he represented.

Pessimistically, the national media understood Ruth would play an important role in the sport with the new stadium, but they criticized local media for jumping the gun and making Ruth the home run king before the season began. While they said "New Yorkers will see the greatest testimonial to the popularity of the grand old game ever recorded in baseball history,"<sup>244</sup> *The Sporting News* also pointed out Ruth's slump (he hit only .250 with one home run in exhibition play).

His apologists say that he isn't in shape yet or that he has been waiting to surprise the home town fans. But take it from me, the reason for Ruth's weak hitting is the confidence of the enemy pitchers, who have learned what the big fellow couldn't do with the Giants' boxmen in the last World's Series. Briefly, Ruth looks like an exploded phenomenon.<sup>245</sup>

It was a testament that the press, at least nationally, still regarded pitching as the triumphant aspect of the game. The Live Ball Era was still on trial.

### **New York, the Nation's Baseball Capitol**

Media coverage throughout the 1923 season was much like that of 1922; the sporting press wanted another all-New York World Series. The owners of both clubs wanted it, too. Giants' President Charles Stoneham, an unusually soft-spoken owner for the time, encouraged the Yankee-Giant conflict within the press. "I hope the Yankees win another pennant and the

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<sup>244</sup> *The Sporting News*, April 19, 1923, 1.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

Giants can play them again for the world's championship next fall. Then there'll be plenty of room for the fans in the Polo Grounds and Colonel Ruppert...'"<sup>246</sup>

Before the season started, the press balanced their coverage of one New York club with coverage of the other. While sports coverage in the *Times* and *The Sporting News* still included team bias, it was evident with new Yankee Stadium that the Yankees were enlisting a larger fan and press contingent.

While Yankee sentiment grew, the media praised the Giants as the team to beat once again, claiming that the Giants "ought to come through to their third successive championship."<sup>247</sup> Never to be outdone and now seemingly in direct contention with the Yankees alone, Giants' ownership carried out renovations to the Polo Grounds that stretched into the 1923 season. In direct contrast to the Yankees' attempt to maximize home runs in their new Bronx stadium, Giants ownership elected to move the fences at the Polo Grounds back, thus making it even more difficult for teams subscribing to the Live Ball Era style to win.<sup>248</sup>

John McGraw made sure his team was playing his style of baseball in his newly-expanded ballpark. As the local press reflected following a 1-0 victory over the Cincinnati Reds, the fans preferred the Giants' style. "After nine innings of that kind of baseball, the 25,000 were as limp as a dishrag, for people who like good pitching, speed and fine fielding it was the best game of the season at the Polo Grounds."<sup>249</sup>

Following a slump in May, McGraw further cemented the Giants as New York's favorite team when he traded for war hero Hank Gowdy. Gowdy began his career as a New York Giant in 1910 before being traded to the Boston Braves. Described by the *Times* as a "smart and active

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> *The New York Times*, May 28, 1923, 13.

<sup>248</sup> *The New York Times*, April 15, 1923, Sec. 1, 2.

<sup>249</sup> *The New York Times*, May 20, 1923, Sec. 1, 2.

catcher,” Gowdy was exactly the type of player McGraw needed to continue his run to the 1923 World Series.<sup>250</sup> Just like McGraw did when Christy Mathewson returned from the war and perhaps sensing a surge in Yankee power in June, he wished Gowdy to win the hearts of New York baseball fans and members of the press.

### **Ruth Returns**

Up until mid-June, Ruth could not catch a break in the media. He was still stuck in a slump and *The Sporting News* was quite negative about his future. “Ruth never will equal his record of 59 home runs. He isn’t swinging at the ball like he used to do. The pitchers no longer regard him as a superman and are going after him like any other hitter, and Ruth is beginning to worry about it all, which doesn’t help.”<sup>251</sup> That changed following his return to 1921 form, and, as *The Sporting News* alleged, “a new epidemic of home runs.”<sup>252</sup> The publication said Ruth was “playing the game of his life.”<sup>253</sup>

Although the Yankees hit a slump, Ruth’s demeanor, especially as evidenced within coverage of the team, improved dramatically. His performance improved as well. Ruth was on his way to recording arguably his best season yet. He led the AL in seven categories and hit .393 that year. Ruth took this upswing in stride and attempted to promote his new offensive style throughout the game via his ghostwriters in the media. He used the press as his tool for change in an attempt to win over both fans and members of the media.

Both fans and writers noticed Ruth was being intentionally walked more than anyone else around the league (he would be given the intentional pass a record 170 times that season). In response to the trend, certainly a clue that a new sort of baseball was put on display by the

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<sup>250</sup> *The New York Times*, June 11, 1923, 11.

<sup>251</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 10, 1923, 1.

<sup>252</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 14, 1923, 1.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*



Yankees, some writers even called for the rules to be amended, thus putting the sport back in the hands of the hitters. In fact, it was Babe Ruth's ghostwriter (possibly Bill Slocum of the *Times*) who wished for the rule to be changed. As the writer stated, Ruth wished that when an intentional pass was given, the batter (Ruth), should be permitted to continue his at-bat and some other player sent to first base in his stead. Another suggestion included giving the batter two bases instead of one after a walk. *The Sporting News* assaulted the writers, proving the sporting press still preferred the game as it was played during the Deadball Era.

It is rather interesting to note that these reformers who would inflict penalties for passes that would not only bawl up the game, but lead to heavier scoring, are the same fellows who a year or two ago were howling because of the heavy hitting and large run totals. Home run hitting having declined, they now have to have something to write about, so they have picked on intentional passing, with an occasional venture into discussion as to which major league has the better pitching.<sup>254</sup>

Coincidentally, the *Times* remarked on the positive state of the sport in a July 2 column, stating that interest in the sport was "growing by leaps and bounds despite the banner season enjoyed by the major leagues last year."<sup>255</sup> According to the New York newspaper, it continued throughout the summer. By the end of July, the sport was still experiencing a great popularity amongst fans. The *Times* debunked the rumor that boxing was usurping baseball's place in the minds of Americans as their primary sport.

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<sup>254</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 28, 1923, 4.

<sup>255</sup> *The New York Times*, July 2, 1923, 11.

It is common knowledge that baseball owes its continued popularity to the fact that in America the great majority of the male population has had personal experience with the game. So long as baseball continues to be the first game which the schoolboy learns it is reasonably sure to retain its patronage.<sup>256</sup>

The *Times* commentary mirrored the increasing popularity of the sport with the return of Ruth during the middle of the 1923 season. “Ruth ruled the roost. He made no home runs, but he did everything else a ball player could. He is a different Ruth from the sullen, quarrel-picking Babe of 1922.”<sup>257</sup> Baseball and Babe Ruth were growing in popularity throughout the country. Ruth was having fun again and his performance at the plate proved it. He even hit right-handed (he was a left-handed hitter) during a game when he knew the pitcher would intentionally walk him.<sup>258</sup> American League President Ban Johnson tried to reign in Ruth’s home run performances by barring him from using a Sam Crawford bat (a bat made with four pieces of wood glued together). Ruth calmly accepted the ban and promptly hit a home run the next day.<sup>259</sup> It was a bad sign on many fronts for John McGraw’s Giants and their Deadball Era ways.

While neither the Yankees nor the Giants were playing particularly well, the media noticed the slight decline of fan interest in the Giants. *The Sporting News* pointed out that the decline could be because of the team’s poor play and tough schedule. However, the national publication’s comment illuminated a deeper problem facing the old Giants manager. Ruth was gaining fans and the Giants were losing them.

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<sup>256</sup> *The New York Times*, August 6, 1923, 8.

<sup>257</sup> *The New York Times*, July 30, 1923, 9.

<sup>258</sup> *The New York Times*, August 6, 1923, 7.

<sup>259</sup> *The New York Times*, August 12, 1923, 23.

Sporting men in this locality are betting on Pat Moran's team to win the pennant, and even the fans at the Polo Grounds, for some strange reason, are pulling for them and in their dilemma, the Giants miss the old enthusiasm which the home crowds used to display in their behalf. McGraw's men are daily recipients of wild razzberries (sic) in the Brush stadium, where heartless persons seem to glory in their threatened downfall.<sup>260</sup>

The Giants were not helping their own cause in the media following their club's alleged shady business in the summer of 1923. Giants' owner Charles Stoneham was indicted by a federal grand jury in late August in connection with a failing and fraudulent stock brokerage firm.<sup>261</sup> Not a week before, two Cincinnati Reds players were said to have accepted money to throw a game to the Giants.<sup>262</sup> While the two players were later acquitted, the stories did nothing to assist the Giants in the minds of fans and members of the media.

The myth of the "rabbit" ball was losing weight, too. Following the expulsion of Ruth's bat, one writer at *The Sporting News* talked to a baseball manufacturer who said nothing had been changed during the production of the ball. The article instead blamed the league for outlawing trick pitches and not allowing the pitchers to use as much resin as they should.<sup>263</sup>

As evidenced in the media, the era of the dead ball was coming to an end and the Giants' hold on the New York fan base was slipping. The Yankees and Babe Ruth were evening the playing field with John McGraw's Giants, not with the assistance of the lively ball, but in the purest of ways.

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<sup>260</sup> *The Sporting News*, July 26, 1923, 1.

<sup>261</sup> *The Sporting News*, September 6, 1923, 1.

<sup>262</sup> *The New York Times*, August 27, 1923, 9.

<sup>263</sup> *The Sporting News*, August 30, 1923, 1.

## The World Series of 1923

To the delight of the sportswriters, the Giants and Yankees had successfully clinched pennants by mid-September. In fact, neither team had trailed in its respective league since May 4. The Yankees dominated the AL competition and at one point of the season increased their lead to as much as 18.5 games. Both teams were elated with their big leads. The Giants decided to play a benefit game with the minor league Baltimore Orioles before the end of the regular season, and invited Babe Ruth to once again don their uniform, with the hopes that gate proceeds would increase. While Ruth accepted and would go on to hit a home run in the game, it was perhaps even more interesting that ownership and Miller Huggins allowed him to play.<sup>264</sup>

Once again, the national media built story lines leading up to the third consecutive all-New York World Series clash. It was the Yankees against the Giants and Ruth against McGraw. As *The Sporting News* acknowledges, it was old pitching against new hitting.

Sure Ruth has the weakness of all great and other hitters, a slow ball and a disposition to hit at anything that comes from the rubber. I have no doubt that the first man who pitched a baseball discovered this 65 years before McGraw “discovered” it on Ruth, just as endless generations of boys about the age of 13 have found out that there is something thrilling in the lips of women and in a bottle of champagne or whiskey. The old is ever new in baseball.<sup>265</sup>

Local media echoed national commentary, claiming the World Series of 1923 was strictly a Ruth-McGraw showdown. On Sunday, October 7, the *Times* teased readers with headlines like “Test for McGraw and Ruth,” and “Manager after 3d (sic) Straight Championship, While Babe

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<sup>264</sup> *The New York Times*, October 3, 1923, 18.

<sup>265</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 4, 1923, 4.

Seeks Revenge.”<sup>266</sup> According to the *Times*, it was McGraw’s opportunity to further exalt his legendary status.

Twenty years a manager in New York, veteran of seven championship struggles, McGraw faces now the chance of his lifetime. If he wins the series for the third time in succession, he will do something that no other baseball general has ever done. He will set up a record that will be just as permanent and more unique than any attendance records that may be achieved in the coming series.<sup>267</sup>

Subconsciously, the fans may also have understood what was at stake before the 1923 World Series. Local retailers like Lord & Taylor, the self-proclaimed “Man’s Shop,” exploited the Ruth-McGraw newspaper debate by running ads in the *Times*’ sports pages leading up the World Series. “Mr. McGraw’s smile is apt to be the most expansive. He is recalling what happened last year, and the year before. And he is counting on a 1923 chuckle, also at Mr. Huggins’ expense. The later, however, says, ‘This is my year!’ – and G. Hermann (sic) Ruth looms large behind him.”<sup>268</sup>

During the 1923 World Series, Ruth made history that would forever change the game and the media.

Following a 5-4 loss to the Giants in the first game, the Yankees and Ruth had lost eight consecutive World Series games to McGraw’s team since 1921. The lone bright spot was Ruth who tripled and scored a run in the game. It led the *Times* to observe that the fans once again embraced the Yankee slugger as their own, thus foreshadowing an impending fate for John

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<sup>266</sup> *The New York Times*, October 7, 1923, Sec. 1, 2.

<sup>267</sup> *The New York Times*, October 10, 1923, 1.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

McGraw's Giants and their Deadball style of play. "Evidently the hero of 1921, who fell from his pedestal, had regained his place in the mind of the baseball public."<sup>269</sup>

Ruth firmly established his mythic status in the second game of the 1923 World Series by hitting two home runs in three at-bats, proving, via the media coverage, that home run hitting was the new style. Headlines in *The New York Times* justified the claims: "Sheer Strength, Not Strategy, Beat the Giants, Analysis of Second Game Shows," "Ruth Leads the Attack," "His Two Home Runs the Deciding Margin – Inside Baseball Played No Part."<sup>270</sup> The national media reflected much of the same. "To the American League partisans it was demonstration that the game of "action" as demonstrated by the Yankees – the power of attack supreme – gets best results besides furnishing a most attractive spectacle."<sup>271</sup>

Not only had Ruth saved the Series for the Yankees with his home runs in the second game, the *Times* said he "showed that the Giants were not invincible, that their pitchers could be hit and that John J. McGraw's strategy, while superb, was not invincible."<sup>272</sup> He was the catalyst for the shift in New York fans to the Live Ball cause.

The National League champions were cheered lustily on every occasion, but when Ruth hit his two homers the thousands of spectators rose to their feet and cheered the Big Babe all the way around the bases. Papers were torn up and scattered, and men and women alike shouted as the great slugger hit the ball over the upper tier in the fourth and delivered a line drive into the lower tier in the next inning. It is still the slugging game that the baseball public seems to appreciate most.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> *The New York Times*, October 11, 1923, 17.

<sup>270</sup> *The New York Times*, October 12, 1923, 12.

<sup>271</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 18, 1923, 1.

<sup>272</sup> *The New York Times*, October 12, 1923, 1.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

In a span of only four years, Ruth had dethroned McGraw, and his Deadball tactics, as New York's baseball hero. Following the second game of the World Series, local media coverage reflected an overwhelmingly similar trend: Ruth had the upper hand on McGraw and it was Ruth's championship to win, not McGraw's to lose. The national press illustrated the importance of the moment in time:

It was a triumph even greater for Ruth than for the Yankees; the ascendancy of brute force, the power of the wallop, over the tactical genius of John McGraw, baseball's 'master mind,' for behind the struggle for premier diamond honors from the start has been the greatest drama of all, the matching of Ruth's dynamic individuality against the strategy of the gray-haired leader of the Giants.<sup>274</sup>

Following a 1-0 loss to the Giants in the third game (McGraw pitched around Ruth in the last inning), the press noticed a significant difference in the way the current Yankees were playing during the 1923 World Series compared to the 1922 team. "There is none of the indifferent attitude evident that several fans believed was the cause of their downfall last year."<sup>275</sup>

Much like the media reported the Giants dominating the 1922 World Series, newspaper coverage of the next three games was all about the Yankees. During that span, the Yankees scored 22 runs, winning their first world title at the expense of the Giants. Ruth never equaled his second game power, but topped off the Yankees' victory in the final game with a home run. For the *Times*, it was a Series good for the game of baseball. Dubbed the "recording breaking series" by the newspaper, it was the first series in the sport's history that garnered over one million

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<sup>274</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 18, 1923, 3.

<sup>275</sup> *The New York Times*, October 13, 1923, 10.

dollars in attendance revenues.<sup>276</sup> Baseball and the media were realizing the financial effects of the Yankee-Giant heyday. “Great as was this series in the tenseness of the games played and in the varying fortunes of the combatants, it was probably the most remarkable of all for the great interest it stirred in fandom.”<sup>277</sup>

### **John McGraw Salvages Reputation**

The media made certain to reiterate that McGraw ran second in popularity to Babe Ruth. For the *Times*, McGraw was still the best manager in the game, but he was losing his edge.

“Certainly McGraw was not outgeneraled by his less famous rival, but neither did he display so much genius that Huggins was left in a bad light, as he was during the two preceding years.”<sup>278</sup>

The local newspaper’s commentary represented a profound change in New York baseball.

“When McGraw’s ship went down, the colors were tacked to the top mast and every man was on deck. ‘The old guard dies but never surrenders’ – that was the slogan which the Giants carried on the field with them.”<sup>279</sup>

Coverage in *The Sporting News* did not reflect a decline in McGraw’s managerial skills. The publication agreed that he was still the best manager in the game and he did a job no one else could by taking the Giants to the postseason. “That the Giants should win out under these handicaps stamps them as the gamest and most resourceful team in the senior league, to say nothing of superiority in attack, speed and judgment on the bases, and of the skill and craft of the veteran manager, John J. McGraw.”<sup>280</sup>

A week later, the national press said the Giants’ day in the sun had since passed.

“‘Coming events cast their shadows before,’ and the World’s Series showed plainly and

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<sup>276</sup> *The New York Times*, October 22, 1923, 23.

<sup>277</sup> *The New York Times*, October 16, 1923, 1.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>280</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 18, 1923, 4.



unmistakably, that the Giants have reached the end of their reign in the National League, just as they have in the supremacy of the baseball world.”<sup>281</sup> *The Sporting News* illustrated his downfall in a poem.

And while all this was going on,  
Within the Giant dugout, John,  
Wise John McGraw, he sat and thunk,  
In ratiocination sunk.  
What did he think? That master mind  
Was thinking, (so I am inclined  
To think myself) that “brains is nix”  
The nasty way the Yankees did.  
Such batting makes the brain cells skid,  
And wallops right up on the jaw  
The strategy of John McGraw<sup>282</sup>

McGraw, much like Ruth following the 1922 season, was at a crossroads in his career. According to the press, his days, and his Deadball managerial style of strategy, were over.

### **McGraw Hangs On**

As early as February 1924, the local press echoed New York baseball fan preference. With Babe Ruth’s help, the Yankees had slugged their way to their first world title. No longer was John McGraw’s pitching-first mentality getting the job done. At the age of 50, the *Times* felt McGraw was too old for the job. His five-year contract, signed in 1922, was not scheduled to expire until 1927, but the *Times* pushed for the Giants to decide on a successor to McGraw’s

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<sup>281</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 25, 1923, 2.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

kingdom. Giant second baseman Frankie Frisch was hand picked by McGraw to assume the reins. If Christy Mathewson was John McGraw's pitching equal to the Deadball era, Frisch was his hitting equal. A small hitter who liked to slap the ball with the bat, Frisch never hit more than 12 home runs in a season, but, as his nickname attests, the Fordham Flash was fast.

Judging from the coverage, McGraw himself may have felt like he was losing his touch. When he arrived back from vacation in Cuba, McGraw weighed 220 pounds, the heaviest he had ever been, and had trouble fitting into his uniform.<sup>283</sup>

'It would not be true to say that I am contemplating seriously any move to quit as an active manager,' McGraw said, 'but at the same time I realize that the day is approaching when another man will have to take hold of the Giants. My present contract still has three years to run, and I am not sure whether I will serve it out. I may quit in one year or in three years or in five. I am not thinking of such a thing now, but it is entirely possible that I will not stick as long as my contract calls for.'<sup>284</sup>

McGraw may have changed his mind following the emergence of one hitter unlike any he had ever elected to use on his team prior to 1924. McGraw had discovered William "Memphis Bill" Terry the previous spring. Now, Terry was rounding into form. Like New York Giants first baseman George Kelly, Terry hit for power. John McGraw gravitated to his new phenom who would play a key role in the future of the Giants. McGraw elected to continue managing the team.

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<sup>283</sup> *The New York Times*, March 3, 1924, 20.

<sup>284</sup> *The New York Times*, March 10, 1924, 11.

## **The Giants and Yankees Prevail**

During Spring Training of 1924, *The Sporting News* provided insight as to why both the Giants and Yankees were dominating their opponents both on the field and at the ticket office. The commentary demonstrated a favorable shift toward the way in which New York ownership commanded national recognition within the press and championship teams on the field.

This condition naturally arouses some loud and raucous squawks from the fans of other big league cities. But how is it to be avoided? The owners of the New York clubs have the resources and are willing to use them. The Giants always have paid liberal salaries and liberal prices for players. The Yankees since their acquisition by the Ruppert-Huston combine set a record for prices paid for players. The New York owners are good business men, and it must be remembered that professional baseball is a business as well as a sport.<sup>285</sup>

The sporting press looked favorably upon the business leaders of the sport. No longer was it taboo for owners to pay for the best baseball players in the hopes of making money at the turnstiles. The success of the New York Giants and Yankees had ushered in a new age for baseball owners. Aiding in that success was the media that, ever since the two teams met in the World Series of 1921, never ceased building up the rivalry. The same held true for 1924. “Locally, of course, all interest again will be centered on the fight of our Yankees and Giants to stage a fourth consecutive All-New York World’s series next Fall. And here, too, early indications point to that end being accomplished.”<sup>286</sup>

Also at the core of both franchises’ success were two individuals whose popularity and status were not yet matched by any others throughout the baseball world: John McGraw, who,

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<sup>285</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 27, 1924, 4.

<sup>286</sup> *The New York Times*, April 7, 1924, 21.

according to the papers, seemed to be nearing the end of his career as the best manager in baseball, and Babe Ruth.

### **Ruth Overtakes McGraw**

Just like John McGraw showed up to spring training a bit overweight, the media said that Babe Ruth, too, was a few pounds heavier. As *The Sporting News* reported, Ruth weighed in at 233 pounds, 23 pounds heavier than his desired weight. In addition, he had contracted influenza and the national media traced the impending doom of the home run king and the Yankees before exhibition games even began. It was not a good sign for the reigning world champions. With their 1923 World Series title, the Yankees had assumed power as the leading team in the city and were hoping to showcase the players to a larger contingency throughout the country during the spring of 1924.

The national press said that without Ruth, it could mean a huge loss of the newly acquired Yankee fan base as well as expected revenue while they traveled in spring training.

It would be a terrific blow to the owner of the world champions if the big batsman couldn't participate in the exhibition games this month and early in April. Ruth has been advertised extensively as the home run king and his inability to appear in various cities and town not only would disappoint the public but also would deprive the club of golden gate receipts.<sup>287</sup>

The Yankees breathed a sigh of relief when Ruth returned before the beginning of the season to play before fans in Nashville, Tennessee in one of the final spring exhibition games against the Brooklyn Dodgers. More than 12,000 were reported by the *Times* in attendance and ground rules were necessary for spectators to sit in the outfield. The *Times* coverage supported *The Sporting News'* claims that Ruth was the main factor that drove profits for the Yankees.

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<sup>287</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 6, 1924, 1.

“With all the scurrying about the outfield, the game was something of a farce. Albeit a profitable farce for the Yankees and Brooklyn coffers.”<sup>288</sup>

Following the spring of 1924, the sporting press noticed baseball was gaining followers throughout the country. Along with Ruth and McGraw pushing the game to heights of fan interest never before seen in New York, Americans everywhere were traveling to ballparks en masse. According to the *Times*, it was because of the annual barnstorming tours of all big league clubs on their way north from spring training. “When towns of 50,000 population turn out crowds of 10,000 and 12,000 to see exhibition contests, the proof of baseball’s nation-wide popularity is pretty positive.”<sup>289</sup>

The national media echoed *Times*’ commentary when they surmised that, including minor league baseball fans, more than 272,000 Americans traveled to baseball stadiums on Opening Day 1924.

These impressive figures (unreadable) serve to show that the game is healthy – that there is no limit to its popularity. In the theatrical business the advance agent plays his trumps to the opening night. If the attraction has merit the show will “go” from word of mouth advertising. A game of baseball is always good show. There is no sport in any land in which such public interest obtains.<sup>290</sup>

The local media shed light upon why so many were traveling to see baseball games. “It was a typical New York baseball crowd. The kind that goes to see Babe Ruth hit home runs rather than for the fine points of the game and such a gathering always seems to enjoy itself

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<sup>288</sup> *The New York Times*, April 7, 1924, 20.

<sup>289</sup> *The New York Times*, April 21, 1924, 24.

<sup>290</sup> *The Sporting News*, April 24, 1924, 4.

somehow no matter what happens.”<sup>291</sup> It suggested that Ruth and his home run hitting abilities had elevated fan interest in the sport, at least in New York, to a higher level.

The Yankees took advantage of their novel attraction and celebrated Babe Ruth Day at Yankee Stadium on Wednesday, May 14, the same day they raised their first world championship flag.<sup>292</sup> It was a symbolic action for the city of New York and the sport of baseball; both the franchise and the sport were celebrating Babe Ruth, the cornerstone player upon which the Yankees had begun to build a dynasty and baseball had begun to create a new type of icon that celebrated the modern era of the sport.

### **The Decline of the Deadball**

Conversely, the Giants’ Deadball Era dynasty was beginning to show signs of age in the embodiment of their franchise, John McGraw. In late May, McGraw tripped near his hotel in Chicago and was told to return to New York to rest. He left the Giants in the hands of his assistant coach, Hughie Jennings, and the team proceeded to take three of four games from the Cincinnati Reds.<sup>293</sup> The Giants were proving they were a capable team without their manager of so many years.

In June, following McGraw’s return as field manager, the *Times* reported an event that may have stamped the Deadball Era’s fate. George Kelly of the Giants hit three home runs and drove in eight during one game against the Cincinnati Reds. The tone of the *Times*’ coverage was an obvious shift from that of 1919 when the media shunned home runs. “Kelly’s batting in Saturday’s game stands out as one of the most sensational exhibitions of offensive play in all the history of major league baseball.”<sup>294</sup> George Kelly, one of McGraw’s own players, had

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<sup>291</sup> *The New York Times*, April 28, 1924, 11.

<sup>292</sup> *The New York Times*, May 11, 1924, Sec. 1, 1.

<sup>293</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 29, 1924, 1.

<sup>294</sup> *The New York Times*, June 16, 1924, 12.

accomplished a Babe Ruth-like feat. The three home runs in one contest represented the evolving sport, and a turn from the old style of hit-and-run and pitching to win games. Concurrently, *The Sporting News* identified John McGraw as one of the game's premier base stealers during his day and remarked that, "base stealing, we are told, is no longer profitable in major league baseball. The lively ball and hard swinging, long hitting, large scores have made it necessary to play for runs in flocks of four or more."<sup>295</sup>

The Giants, with or without John McGraw, were adapting to the new game. The team's statistics reflected that change. The number of home runs the club was hitting had been increasing since the decade began and was on the rise again in 1924. The squad's stolen base figures were plummeting. In addition, the Giants pitching staff showed signs never before exhibited by a McGraw club. "Where are those Giant pitchers who can finish their own ball game?"<sup>296</sup>

McGraw's managerial style was shunned too. The national press reported that profanity was to be expelled from the field in order that the sport may create a more positive relationships with a growing clientele that now included women. "There has been too much profanity use this year on the benches. And the quicker players are made to realize that there is no place for in baseball, the better for the National Game."<sup>297</sup> Long regarded as a manager who would sarcastically berate and belittle his players in the middle of games, McGraw's world was being turned upside down.

By mid-July, Babe Ruth had 24 home runs to his credit and *The Sporting News* reported that, "the home running has not been curtailed even a little bit."<sup>298</sup> New York was the epicenter

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<sup>295</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 19, 1924, 4.

<sup>296</sup> *The New York Times*, June 29, 1924, 26.

<sup>297</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 26, 1924, 4.

<sup>298</sup> *The Sporting News*, July 17, 1924, 1.

of power. During six games, 18 home runs were hit between the Yankees and the Chicago White Sox. The local media may have embraced the changing dynamic in the game, but the national press despised it. “Never was the home run monstrosity more clearly illustrated than in those six side-splitting exhibitions. Sensible fans who enjoy smart baseball went home in disgust.”<sup>299</sup> While the sensible fans left, 71,000 others showed up to the six games at Yankee Stadium, all played in the middle of the week.

In the same article, *The Sporting News* pointed out that aside from Ruth, Meusel, and Wally Pipp, the Yankees were not playing up to their 1923 standards. As the Yankees stumbled, the Giants were thriving. “You can’t make the average New York fan believe that the Giants will not win their fourth straight pennant in a walk. The other National League teams have no standing here.”<sup>300</sup>

As the media shows, however, the success of the Giants was in part due more to their youth and hitting prowess, not, as in seasons past, to the managerial decisions of John McGraw. The 1924 team showed a distinct change from previous Giants’ teams, according to *The Sporting News*. “The Giants have played clean ball for the past three years. They have laid off the umpires and have treated their adversaries in a sportsman like manner. Lack of rowdyism and pugnacity has prompted some of the modern critics to say that McGraw’s team has no ‘color.’”<sup>301</sup>

Despite lacking “color,” the Giants kept winning into mid-September, mainly as a tribute to the club’s hitting. Following a George Kelly home run during a 12-2 victory over the St. Louis Cardinals in mid-September, the *Times* commented that “for those who like ‘rabbit-ball’

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> *The Sporting News*, August 21, 1924, 1.



baseball, long hits and suffering pitchers, it was an ideal game, although a trifle one-sided after the third inning.”<sup>302</sup>

As the media reflected, the Giants had developed into a home run hitting team. The once famous Deadball Era team would go on to hit only three home runs less than their cross-town rival, the Live Ball Era Yankees. The remaining press coverage of the 1924 season, along with reports from the World Series of 1924 would prove to be a startling reminder for John McGraw: his team was no longer the pre-eminent club of the sport or even the era for which he worked so hard to build.

### **The 1924 World Series**

The trend in the media once again shifted in the middle of September. After three years of the all-New York series, local media wanted new participants for 1924.

Sentiment throughout all of the rival cities in the two circuits is strongly against a victory for either of the New York teams, and many followers of the game even in this city also will admit that a victory for an outside team would be an excellent thing for baseball and would add new interest to the game.<sup>303</sup>

*The Sporting News* wanted different teams to cover, too. “So-called disloyalty to both New York teams still is manifested in this city. The baseball world craves something new.”<sup>304</sup>

The media received half of its wish when the Yankees, reeling from the loss of Earle Combs to a broken leg in June, could not defeat the Washington Senators and their superstar pitcher, Walter Johnson. John McGraw’s Giants clinched the NL pennant on September 28,

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<sup>302</sup> *The New York Times*, September 14, 1924, Sec. 10, 1.

<sup>303</sup> *The New York Times*, September 15, 1924, 25.

<sup>304</sup> *The Sporting News*, September 18, 1924, 1.

1924. It was McGraw's fourth consecutive pennant and tenth overall. The *Times* called it the hardest season yet for McGraw's club and it was about to get even harder.<sup>305</sup>

Walter Johnson was a fan favorite around the country and he would be made the media's "Cinderella" when the Senators, the first team in three years besides the Yankees to face the Giants, traveled to the Polo Grounds. Just as John McGraw was the Giants' managerial representative of the Deadball Era, Walter Johnson was the pitching embodiment of the Deadball Era. Johnson began his career at the height of the era in 1907, and was one of the few remaining active players from the period. In 1924, he won 23 games for the Senators as he led the team to the World Series. The *Times* confirmed the love of Johnson throughout the sport. "The Senators and Walter Johnson are the present idols outside of New York, and it is known that the fans are rooting for them."<sup>306</sup>

In addition to the popularity of the Senators, the Giants were again mired in talks of scandalous activities throughout their ranks. Before the series began, starting outfielder Jimmy O'Connell, along with assistant coach Cozy Dolan, were expelled from the sport by commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis. It would cast a shadow over the team in the eyes of the media and, therefore, the fans, for the remainder of the postseason.

Once again, the cards were stacked against John McGraw. Although the *Times* picked the Giants to win the series, McGraw was not the Series' favorite figure in the national media or even with fans outside of New York. It was a role he was not accustomed to playing, especially when his team did not subscribe to his preferred style of baseball. The *Times* again hinted at his fading status. "All other things being equal, McGraw's experience would count heavily and

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<sup>305</sup> *The New York Times*, September 28, 1924, Sec. 9, 2.

<sup>306</sup> *The New York Times*, September 22, 1924, 24.

might turn the balance. But McGraw has lost more world's series than he has won, proving that even the greatest manager has his limitations."<sup>307</sup>

More commentary found in the *Times* that day showed the game experienced change following World War I, and the winner of the 1924 World Series must straddle the fence between two contrasting eras.

Before the era of the lively ball – the Babe Ruth of home run era – pitching was 80 per cent of a world's series. The team that had three superfine pitchers could play tight, sound defensive baseball and bat out two or three runs a game was almost assured of the October championship. But since 1921 that has changed. 'Give me a fast attack with a zip to it and a fairly good pitching staff that can be carefully worked into top form, and I'll win,' is the cry of the modern manager.'<sup>308</sup>

Interestingly, the media portrayed the Senators as representatives of a by-gone era. The *Times* said they "stole more bases than the New Yorkers" and "have the speed but not the power of the Giants." The Giants, however, "have developed into a team that must bat its way along."<sup>309</sup> The entire role of the Giants, as evidenced by a lack of fan and media interest in their cause, was reversed. While McGraw and the Giants had adapted to the Live Ball Era, the Washington Senators had not; the Live Ball Era and the Deadball Era would again take center stage in the 1924 World Series.

The roles dictated by the press played out in the first game. The Giants defeated Walter Johnson by a 4-3 score as they rode George Kelly and Bill Terry's solo home runs to victory. Johnson, the Deadball Era pitcher, pitched all 12 innings and struck out 12 batters. No mention

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<sup>307</sup> *The New York Times*, October 1, 1924, 15.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

of McGraw was made during first game coverage in *The Sporting News*. Instead, it focused on Walter Johnson. “The game marked the first appearance of Walter Johnson as a World’s Series pitcher in the 18 seasons he has been a member of the Washington team, and he was beaten, but in defeat the veteran did himself proud.”<sup>310</sup>

The Senators turned the tables on the Giants in the second game and again, a Washington Senator overshadowed the great John McGraw in the national media. “The American League champions, who seemed more unnerved by the fuss and ceremony of the opening than did the Giants, played with sparkling dash and spirit under (manager Bucky) Harris, whose dynamic personality and all-around brilliance stood out as one of the highest spots of the contest.”<sup>311</sup>

Media coverage of the third game of the 1924 World Series disclosed insight into baseball’s future path. It was one of the final World Series’ victories in John McGraw’s career, but it provided proof that the team was no longer in a transitional period; the Giants were now a modern team with a Deadball Era manager.

General John McGraw and Captain Frank Frisch marshaled their men in the lee of Coogan’s Bluff and beat the invaders back in a free-for-all ball game, 6 to 4.

Captain Frisch looked after the defense in person. All McGraw had to do was to sit back in the dugout and let Frank do it. It was a battle of bats and gloves, not of strategy. There was just one reason that the Giants won. They made the most runs.<sup>312</sup>

Following the loss in game three, Goose Goslin of the Senators hit a three-run home run in the third inning of the fourth game to tie up the series, two games to two. While Goslin led the Senators in home runs throughout the season (he hit 12), it was out of character for a member of

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<sup>310</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 9, 1924, 3.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>312</sup> *The New York Times*, October 7, 1924, 16.

Washington club to hit the ball out of the park. The *Times* said it was not Goslin that hit the home run, but “the ghost of Babe Ruth.” As the *Times* reported, Ruth had been watching the Senators’ outfielder closely in the series and helped him to correct his hitting stance before the fourth game. It was a fitting end to McGraw’s final World Series appearance. Although he did not face Ruth and Yankees, Ruth helped the Washington Senators to victory over the Giants.

As that white ball rode out of the playing field the Giants’ chance of victory rode with it. There were two marks on that ball. The trade-mark and the one where Goslin hit and they were both in the same place. But it was The Babe that told Goose how to do it. Ruth knew that John McGraw’s black magic ends where those seats begin. Didn’t he hit two home runs into them in one game of the 1923 series and help to make the Yankees rulers of the baseball world for 365 days?<sup>313</sup>

Just as Ruth helped turn the tide on the field against McGraw, the local media reflected the fans turning on the Giants. A headline appearing in the *Times* read, “New Yorkers’ Hostility to the Giants grows as the Series Progresses.” According to the hometown newspaper, the New York fans at the Polo Grounds were largely pro-Washington.<sup>314</sup>

Two Senators’ wins later, Washington claimed the 1924 championship title and, as the *Times* commented, “the little Napoleon met his Waterloo.”<sup>315</sup> McGraw and the Giants hit rock bottom in local press. “In the end the greatest baseball machine of the last four years slipped a cog, and youth went on ahead to win. For McGraw it must have been a bitter defeat.”<sup>316</sup> *The Sporting News* perceived an about-face of fan preference away from the Giants.

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<sup>313</sup> *The New York Times*, October 8, 1924, 12.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> *The New York Times*, October 11, 1924, 1.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Imagine, if you can, a crowd of nearly 50,000 spectators watching the Giants in battle with the Senators in President Stoneham's magnificent ball park and practically all of them pulling against the New York players! During three World's Series games here, on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of last week, this strange shifting of public sentiment prevailed not only inside the Polo Grounds, but among the thousands of fans who watched the newspaper bulletin boards in the streets.<sup>317</sup>

The publication pointed out that the scandal previous to the World Series may have been the main reason for the public's spurning of the Giants, but the damage to the Giants and John McGraw's reputation had been done.

With McGraw at the helm, the Giants would never again reach the postseason. As the media excerpts reflected, he had been beaten at his own Deadball Era game during much of the 1924 World Series. For New York media and the teams they covered, the Deadball Era was over.

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<sup>317</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 16, 1924, 1.

## CHAPTER IV

### 1925-1929: The Age of Ruth

Journalists heavily chronicled Babe Ruth's activities both on and off the field from 1919-1924, but media coverage of Ruth during the 1925-1929 seasons soared to a completely different level when his status rose from New York celebrity to All-American baseball idol of almost mythic proportions. As previously mentioned, author Peter Williams says Ruth did not begin to symbolize the 1920s until the 1925-1929 seasons. His rise as a baseball hero in the local and national media coincided with the rise of the Live Ball Era, the New York Yankees, and advancements within the sporting press.

Conversely, evidence in the media showed a steady decline in John McGraw's New York Giants as the team grasped for a new identity. As the Yankees and Ruth grew in popularity within the national and local sporting press, the coverage reflected that McGraw was no longer able to endorse the Deadball Era style of play.

#### **Ruth and the Media**

The 1925 season was a rollercoaster ride for Babe Ruth, the media, and the sport of baseball. It was a strange trend exhibited by the sporting press as Ruth was constantly being exalted by the media as a hero one week and one of the worst things to happen for the sport during the next.

In the spring of 1925, the media loved Ruth. While it was not out of the ordinary for both publications (especially the *Times*) to report on Ruth's whereabouts in early spring, the sheer

volume of coverage about Ruth was staggering. Spring training was more than a month away, but when the Yankee slugger departed for a two-week vacation to Hot Springs, Arkansas at the beginning of February, the *Times* said he was accompanied by a writer.<sup>318</sup> The local newspaper reported Ruth was taking the time to get in shape for the upcoming season. Meanwhile, he had other interests. “For the present he will devote himself to those nice exercises of golf and hot water bathing with which the modern player prepares to prepare to play ball.”<sup>319</sup>

Along with the increase in the coverage of Ruth, newspapers and their staffs were expanding. Until the end of the decade, the *Times* continued to increase the number of pages in the sports section. As evidenced in both the *Times* and *The Sporting News*, photography was quickly becoming a main facet in sports pages rather than a fad. Writers at the *Times* would soon enjoy their own bylines above their own stories, thus making a sportswriter position at the *Times* a more lucrative and attractive job than it was before the war. Much like baseball, the media industry was evolving into a bigger business.

Outside observers began to understand the important role the media played in the success and promotion of the game. On Sunday, February 15, 1925, a host of baseball notables gathered in at the Hotel Roosevelt for the second annual New York Chapter of the Baseball Writers’ Association of America dinner. Along with baseball commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis, Will Rogers and Senator James J. Walker were also in attendance. Walker’s comments that evening lauded Landis’ administration, but also said the media played an important part to the integrity of the game. “‘Baseball,’ he said, ‘urges always a cleaner and better game because it is American. I also believe the men who write the game will do their part to keep it clean.’”<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> *The New York Times*, February 1, 1925, Sec. 9, 1.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> *The New York Times*, February 16, 16.



Keeping Ruth slim and out of trouble was another of the local newspaper's tasks for spring training in 1925. The coverage reflected his growing waistline (he checked in at 225 pounds that season) and a marked change in his confidence levels as he predicted himself to win another batting title. "Anyway, if the American League pitchers walk me as much as they did last year, I won't have to be in condition. Anybody can walk to first base."<sup>321</sup>

Some outlets were not as prudent in their coverage of Ruth. The national media noticed the rise in the number of false stories coming from multiple sources, including reports that Ruth (who made \$70,000 a year) was bankrupt.

On top of the bankrupt yarn came another under the signature of a New York sporting editor to the effect that Ruth and other members of the Yankees at St. Petersburg, Fla. Were the more interested in guzzling Scotch than in practicing and training for American League season; also that these alleged rule breakers had ignored Miller Huggins so completely that the latter, in a fit of desperation, had sent for Colonel Jacob Ruppert.<sup>322</sup>

*The Sporting News* went on to describe the press hoopla concerning Ruth as "nauseating,"<sup>323</sup> especially when Ruth injured a finger. The publication, however, changed its tone when Ruth collapsed on a train on his return to New York. He had contracted influenza at spring training, a recurring trend for the Yankee hitter throughout his career. According to *The Sporting News*, the entire sport was "grieving over the latest illness of Ruth," especially when one newspaper falsely reported that the Yankee slugger had died.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> *The New York Times*, March 2, 11.

<sup>322</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 19, 1925, 1.

<sup>323</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 26, 1925, 1.

<sup>324</sup> *The Sporting News*, April 16, 1925, 1.

Ruth has done more for the national game in recent years than any other player. He has made the American League wonderfully prosperous here and in all of the other cities. His tremendous batting stunts have helped the Yankees to win four consecutive pennants and his popularity has made possible the building of Colonel Ruppert's magnificent stadium.<sup>325</sup>

The *Times* coverage included a similar trend; other sporting news, including news of the New York Giants, was secondary to Ruth's sickness. Commentary revealed that Ruth's illness was actually "casting a shadow over the opening of the major league baseball season," for the Yankees and the owners of the seven other AL teams who would desperately miss Ruth because of a loss of gate receipts.<sup>326</sup> New York baseball fans were required to follow the press coverage of Ruth closely for the simple reason that it took precedence on the sports pages. As the 1925 season began, the entire sport of baseball was waiting for the return of their Live Ball Era hero, Babe Ruth.

*The Sporting News* reported Ruth underwent an operation to remove an intestinal abscess on April 17 and the *Times* said it could be as long as a month before Ruth was again able to play. The national media proved that the Yankees were already feeling his absence. "At any rate, the loss of Ruth is a terrible blow to the patronage at the Yankee Stadium, and seems to have taken the starch out of the Hugmen, at least for the time being."<sup>327</sup>

When Ruth did return to action on the final day in May, the 1925 fate of the Yankees had already been sealed. Only 40 games into the season, the team was in seventh place and already 13.5 games behind the AL-leading Philadelphia Athletics. Yet the local newspaper held high hopes for Ruth on his first day back with the club. "He will be asked, by his inspiring presence

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> *The New York Times*, April 13, 1925, 16.

<sup>327</sup> *The Sporting News*, April 23, 1925, 1.

and batting and fielding skill, to lift an outfit from seventh place to a place among the pennant contenders.”<sup>328</sup>

The local media noted his wilted figure, yet strong ability to continue to hit the ball even after his prolonged illness. The *Times* provided more fuel to the Ruth-McGraw debate with its commentary on June 8, when the newspaper said the frail Ruth brought on comparisons of an aging McGraw.

Ruth is now a perfect illustration of the fact that player’s batting eye is the last part of him to weaken. He can hardly move faster than a labored trot; his fielding is done under intense difficulties, yet his hitting has been almost as lively as ever. In physical condition the Bambino is about in the same class as a retired veteran – like John McGraw, for instance, who can still hit a ball with vim and éclat but can do none of the other necessary things.<sup>329</sup>

Although the Yankees’ poor season was already halfway complete and they would never gain any ground in the AL pennant race, the media would continue to focus on Ruth for the remainder of the 1925 season, thus reflecting that both the *Times* and *The Sporting News* wished to cater to fan interest.

### **McGraw Unsuccessful at Ticket Office**

Unlike media coverage of Babe Ruth during 1925, John McGraw received mostly negative press. His Giants were enjoying a good season by June, although many fans, as noticed by the national media, were not willing to travel to the Polo Grounds to see them play. “And that reminds me of the comparatively small crowds at the Polo Grounds. The Giants are playing

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<sup>328</sup> *The New York Times*, June 1, 1925, 11.

<sup>329</sup> *The New York Times*, June 8, 1925, 12.

magnificent ball, yet the fans are not enthusing as in days of old.”<sup>330</sup> According to *The Sporting News* coverage in the same issue, the Golden Jubilee, a celebration “marked by the introduction of the Old-Timers,” was less than well received by an uninterested fan base of only 10,000.<sup>331</sup>

McGraw was sick, but press coverage of the illness of Ruth vastly overshadowed the old manager. *The Sporting News* observed that just as the Giants had excelled when McGraw missed games the previous season, they won 21 games for interim manager Hughie Jennings during their long-tenured coach’s absence.

The Deadball Era and John McGraw had reached their lowest ebb, and as shown by *Times* commentary in mid-June, the game had swung towards the hitters. The owners were taking advantage of it.

There you have one cause of the big-score plague: short fences over which disappear flies that in the old days would have been a putout and a triumph for the pitcher. But to seek out one main reason for the epidemic is to waste valuable time. One may view with alarm but one cannot point the finger of condemnation at any particular spot in the fabric of baseball.<sup>332</sup>

By July, the *Times* criticized the Giants’ crowds with more intensity. The fans that traveled to see John McGraw’s club were described as “bored and languid.”<sup>333</sup> According to the media, there was something different about the fans that watched the Giants play in 1925 as opposed to those who watched the team in previous years.

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<sup>330</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 21, 1925, 1.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> *The New York Times*, June 22, 1925, 12.

<sup>333</sup> *The New York Times*, July 13, 1925, 23.

Now the Pirates have come up in the great strides and the Giants aren't the team they were – maybe strong enough to win the pennant again but not so strong that they can breeze along. Being in second place has made a difference. When the Giants get behind in the third inning now, Mr. Fan has a sinking feeling that they may stay there.<sup>334</sup>

Although the Giants were playing well enough to stay close to the top of the NL standings, the fans had dismissed the team and their manager. The *Times* warned the Giants' manager of impending doom following a tough July. "Waterloo lies just around the corner for Little Napoleon McGraw."<sup>335</sup> By mid-August, the Giants were still in the hunt, but the local media were showing signs of souring on the team.

What is good for baseball and what actually happens on the ball field are sometimes two different things. John McGraw has practically the entire world of baseball lined up against him. Public opinion says "No" to McGraw's greatest ambition – to win five straight pennants. Natural forces, the law of averages, human nature, precedent, human experience, even Fate herself (witness the uncanny list of Giant injuries) are arrayed against McGraw. One man against the world.<sup>336</sup>

Yet as John McGraw explained to *The Sporting News*, he had no future plans to retire. "I am going to stay on the bench and will manage the Giants as long as I live. Why should I retire?"<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> *The New York Times*, August 9, 1925, Sec. 9, 1.

<sup>336</sup> *The New York Times*, August 17, 1925, 18.

<sup>337</sup> *The Sporting News*, July 9, 1925, 1.

### **Ruth Takes Press Precedence Again**

Evidence of Ruth's rollercoaster ride through the sports pages occurred again in the middle of the summer of 1925. On Monday, June 29, newspapers across the country reported that Ruth could be sidelined for the rest of the year with sore ankles. The *Times*' commentary was ominous. "The Babe is right in what he says. There is pathos in his case, for no player ever started with brighter prospects and ended with darker ones than the big fellow."<sup>338</sup> His benching did not last long following a trip to a Boston doctor who told the Yankee hitter that no fractures were evident. Ruth declared himself fit for duty less than 10 days later and hit two home runs in Fenway Park.

The Yankees were losing ground in the AL pennant race, but Ruth's legacy in the press grew each time he returned to the field from his ailments. In late July, a game story appeared in the *Times* claiming that the Yankees were "down among the lowly" and the 1925 season was a wash.<sup>339</sup> Ruth took center stage in the media. *The Sporting News* cropped up more comments about the lively ball and asked Ruth why he felt the game had seen such change from the era of quality pitching to an era of "pure slugging for individual profit and glory."<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Harrison, James B., *The New York Times*, June 29, 1925, 9.

<sup>339</sup> *The New York Times*, July 27, 1925, 9.

<sup>340</sup> *The Sporting News*, July 30, 1925, 4.

The ball is all right, nothing the matter with it. It is the same as it was ten years ago. The only reason for increased hitting, especially of home runs, is that where seven of every ten batters who used to choke their bats, nine out of every ten now swing from the hip. Very few 'hit-and-run' batters are seen today. Of course, they continue to call the 'hit-and-run' play but very few batters are able to hit [unreadable] the spot vacated by a fielder going to cover the base. The reason is you cannot place your hits when you grab your bat by the handle and [unreadable] with all your strength.<sup>341</sup>

If July was the best month Ruth and proponents of the Live Ball Era of baseball witnessed throughout the 1925 season, September was the worst. Subscribers to *The Sporting News* were greeted with the headline "The Babe Gets a Spanking" on September 3. During a road trip, Ruth was ordered back to New York by Yankees manager Miller Huggins when he arrived at the team hotel late one night. Ruth claimed that the manager was merely attempting to shift the blame of the poor season upon his shoulders and called him incompetent. *The Sporting News* said, "The axe has fallen at last and Babe Ruth, once a baseball idol, is in disgrace."<sup>342</sup> Ruth threatened to quit the Yankees unless Huggins was fired and found that he had lost favor within his own city and newspaper.

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> *The Sporting News*, September 3, 1925, 1.

All in all, a chastening experience for the Bambino. He has found out that he is not a Pershing, but only a private in the ranks, albeit a mighty important private. Ruth is constantly running afoul of authority with a capital A. Three years ago with was Judge Landis; some time later it was Ban Johnson; now it is Miller Huggins. The ring of authority and discipline is growing tighter around the playboy of baseball.<sup>343</sup>

Ruth was fined \$5,000 and suspended for a week following his argument with Huggins. The commentary of the media caught on with the fans when, according to the *Times*, “only 10,000 were sufficiently interested in Ruth’s return from Siberia to hike to the Yankee Stadium. Secondly, many of the 10,000 paid little homage to George when he first came to bat.”<sup>344</sup>

Multiple writers in *The Sporting News* further castigated Ruth, but one made mention that when Ruth’s batting average and home run figures dropped, so too did the patience of Yankee administration.

Yet, when he starts to hit the skids, with his home run hitting only a shadow of what it was, when his batting average tumbles more than 100 points, and when the seventh place Yanks go into a Western city and draw no more people than the eighth place Red Sox, then virtue reasserts itself and the Yankees moguls decide that his indiscretions and unwillingness to observe the rules constitute a felony.<sup>345</sup>

Ruth certainly did not assist his reputation in the minds of media members or fans with his outburst against Miller Huggins, but the aforementioned passage proved that Ruth’s transgressions would most likely be forgiven in due time. The team, due to a lack of participating in the Live Ball style of play, was to blame. It was a tribute to the power Ruth commanded in the

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<sup>343</sup> *The New York Times*, September 7, 1925, 9.

<sup>344</sup> Harrison, James B., *The New York Times*, September 14, 1925, 23.

<sup>345</sup> *The Sporting News*, September 10, 1925, 4.



national media and what he symbolized for the pastime. The Deadball Era took another hard hit when former Giants star pitcher and coach Christy Mathewson died in early October.

The *Times* was reverent in its reporting of his death, but one excerpt characterized the nature of the sport in its coverage of the game at the Polo Grounds that day.

But even the memory of such a star as the old master must give way to the present-day celebrities, and once the battle of home runs got under way, with the Pirates fighting uphill from the start, the crowd turned from the past to the present. There was no room for memories in the heat of the struggle.<sup>346</sup>

The next season would act much like the Pirate hitters did during that game: After Babe Ruth and his Yankees' surge to power in 1926, there would be no room for memories of John McGraw or Christy Mathewson in the minds of the fans or the media.

### **Young Players, Old Holdouts**

The development and re-signing of players was at the top of the agenda for both John McGraw and Miller Huggins following their disappointing seasons in 1925.

The media noticed the Yankees' willingness to seek out and utilize young talent. "Columbia" Lou Gehrig was a hit the previous spring and had been inserted into the regular lineup during 1925, only a season removed from college at Columbia University. Although overshadowed by Ruth in the newspapers the previous year, Gehrig would prove during his sophomore season of 1926 to be Ruth's powerful ally in the Yankee lineup. "Gehrig already has displayed sufficient natural ability to warrant the belief that he'll develop into one of the greatest hitters in the game."<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> *The New York Times*, October 9, 1925, 19.

<sup>347</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 4, 1926, 1.

Other young players caught the eye of the Yankees and they soon had amassed a more potent “Murderers’ Row.” Colonel Ruppert was putting the pieces of the legendary Yankees together and forming a lineup that would cement the era of modern baseball. According to the *Times*, Huggins was “betting the roll on flaming youth”<sup>348</sup> when he dumped older players in favor of second baseman Tony Lazzeri and infielder Mark Koenig in the Spring of 1926. The newspaper coverage of the Yankees in 1926 showed a distinct change in the way the team was acquiring baseball players, especially hitters; instead of opting to purchase veterans from other teams who were asking for more money, the Yankees bought the contracts of young players with a tendency for extra base hits and power. Before the end of the summer of 1926, the *Times* would report that the Yankees had developed six of their eight starters in the field: Gehrig, Lazzeri, Koenig, Bob Meusel, Earle Combs, and Pat Collins.

Coverage in the *Times* claimed that John McGraw was finding young talent, too (like 17-year-old and future Hall of Fame member Mel Ott), but was struggling with veteran players that wished to take advantage of Stoneham and McGraw’s money. “The success of the players in the land boom has tended to make them a bit more independent than usual, and that is why there are so many unsigned players on the Giants roster this season.”<sup>349</sup> The sportswriters reflected McGraw’s growing frustration with his holdouts, who seemed unwilling to take “no” as an answer like many of his former players had in years past. “Mr. McGraw did not mince words. (Starting pitcher Jess) Barnes, he said, for all he cared could stay in Circleville, Kan., indefinitely before he would meet his demands.”<sup>350</sup> In addition to Barnes, other Giants like Frankie Frisch and Bill Terry also felt snubbed by the team and held out during the spring of 1926. McGraw’s

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<sup>348</sup> *The New York Times*, March 8, 1926, 14.

<sup>349</sup> *The New York Times*, March 1, 1926, 14.

<sup>350</sup> *The New York Times*, February 22, 1926, 22.

inability to reason with his players and seething remarks about them in the sporting press would ultimately lead to the mid-season trade of his on-field manager Frankie Frisch.

### **Yankees Dominate on Field and in Press**

*The Sporting News* caught up with Jacob Ruppert in early April and the Yankees' owner took the opportunity to applaud Babe Ruth's new look. As the newspapers claimed, Ruth was in the best shape of his life and coming into spring training with less weight than ever before. "It would be unfair to the other players to say that the success of the Yankees depends entirely on Ruth's comeback. But Ruth, battling like he did in 1924 and playing every day, will help the club wonderfully. I have every reason to believe that this will be one of his best years."<sup>351</sup> *The New York Times*' Harry Cross disagreed with Ruppert and said Ruth was much more important for the team's success. Cross said the "Yankee collapse of 1925 was about 75 per cent attributable to Ruth."<sup>352</sup>

Ruth and his younger teammates proved their worth to New York fans and reporters when the club beat the Dodgers 12 straight times and 18 times overall during the spring training of 1926. It led *Times* writer James Harrison, in those less sensible days, to call the Yankees a group of "homicidal maniacs."<sup>353</sup> The Yankees, due to their Live Ball team of young power hitters, were called the "best box office attraction"<sup>354</sup> of the city by a *Times* headline. "If they keep winning, they will draw, for New York likes best of all a winner that has surged through from the rear."<sup>355</sup> A seventh-place finish in the AL pennant race a season before proved that even in defeat, the Yankees were the local media's hometown team.

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<sup>351</sup> *The Sporting News*, April 1, 1926, 1.

<sup>352</sup> Cross, Harry. *The New York Times*, April 11, 1926, Sec. 10, 3.

<sup>353</sup> Harrison, James B. *The New York Times*, April 26, 1926, 15.

<sup>354</sup> *The New York Times*, April 26, 1926, 17.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*

At the beginning of May, the Yankees reeled off 13 wins in their first 16 contests. Ruth sparked a chord in local and national newspapers after hitting 12 home runs by mid-May. As evidenced in this research, *The Sporting News* had long been a proponent of the Deadball Era. Now, it gave credit to the Live Ball Era for the increasing fan interest in the sport.

We are perfectly frank to admit that the home run hobby can be run into the ground and that the home run is the last thing to be encouraged in purely scientific baseball, but it is the mob demand in baseball just the same, and it has yet to decrease the gate receipts one penny.

Berate it as we will, some of us, and sharpen the knife to remove baseball of some excrescence as we would like to remove it, we can find absolutely nothing objectionable in the home run to the fan who cannot go to a baseball game more than once in a week and who wishes to see something heroic.<sup>356</sup>

Not only was the commentary by *The Sporting News* a tribute to the Live Ball Era's influence on the changing game, it was a tribute to its influence upon the new fans who wanted to see heroes like Ruth hit the ball out of the park. The Yankees' manager Miller Huggins was piggybacking off Ruth's success on the field and in the media. "In fact, if Huggins were to retire now from baseball, the present Yankees would be the best monument that he could leave behind."<sup>357</sup>

Concurrently, the Giants' manager John McGraw was dealing with his own sickness as well as the injuries of his team. His beleaguered pitching staff managed only two wins during an 11-game stretch in early May. McGraw's team suffered heavy losses in the sporting press as they were pushed to the bottom of teams to watch in 1926.

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<sup>356</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 6, 1926, 4.

<sup>357</sup> Harrison, James B. *The New York Times*, May 24, 1926, 17.

Despite the early season setbacks, *The Sporting News* reported that McGraw signed a three-year contract as manager of the Giants on May 10.<sup>358</sup> It did nothing to increase the morale of his team. In June, the *Times* said that the Giants' "winning spirit has sadly been missing."<sup>359</sup> The next day, the local newspaper noticed that the Giants' championship reputation of the Deadball era no longer garnered the interest of fans in New York as it once did. "The Giants have won so many pennants that their present lowly position does not inspire much sympathy among the fans in general."<sup>360</sup> The reporter and fan unrest with the club continued into early July as they sensed a difference in the way the team was playing. "The failure of McGraw's team to take advantage of a loose struggle has been a keen disappointment. The Giants of a few years ago would be so far ahead in this disorganized race that the other teams would need binoculars to see them."<sup>361</sup>

Right as the Giants were "beginning to look like the Giants of old," disaster struck for John McGraw.<sup>362</sup> *The Sporting News* reported on September 2 that McGraw erupted on his field captain Frankie Frisch after he missed a sign during a game in St. Louis. Frisch deserted the team, not because the single incident, but most likely because of McGraw's tough managerial ways. The press was giving up on McGraw's tactics and so were his players.

By August, the Giants' cross-town rivals were enjoying press of the opposite kind. Babe Ruth had already hit more than 30 home runs and, as evident in the local newspapers, he could do no wrong. He was caught fishing out of season while the team was in Detroit, but the commentary was light-hearted about the matter. It was significantly different from commentary

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<sup>358</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 3, 1926, 1.

<sup>359</sup> *The New York Times*, June 13, 1926, Sec. 9, 1.

<sup>360</sup> *The New York Times*, June 14, 1926, 16.

<sup>361</sup> *The New York Times*, July 5, 1926, 8.

<sup>362</sup> *The Sporting News*, August 12, 1926, 1.

of previous seasons when Ruth was the press scapegoat. “George will probably get out of it with a light fine and a reprimand – neither one a new experience in his career.”<sup>363</sup>

Both publications even attempted to aid their hero’s pocket book. *The Sporting News* pointed out that Ruth was in a contract year and it did everything possible to quantify his worth for the Yankees. “To the American League magnates, said one man in the group, Ruth is the first and perhaps the only player ever to be valued \$1,000,000. He not only helps his own team but makes the turnstile spin wherever he goes.”<sup>364</sup>

The newspaper love affair of Ruth and the Yankees continued throughout the month of September and into the World Series of 1926 when the Yankees squared off against the St. Louis Cardinals.

### **The 1926 World Series**

The Fall Classic of 1926 included two teams that were nothing like the Giants and Senators in 1925. While the Cardinals had ace pitcher Grover Cleveland Alexander, they also had free swingers like Rogers Hornsby, Jim Bottomley, and Les Bell. So, too, did the Yankees with Ruth, Tony Lazzeri, Lou Gehrig, and Bob Meusel. Ruth had supplied 47 home runs during the regular season but, to the chagrin of the local media and fans, the first three games of the Series were pitching duels like “the kind the fans saw before the lively ball era.”<sup>365</sup>

The fourth game brought on a slugfest that the media and the fans wanted to see. Ruth hit three home runs in a 10-5 victory as the Yankees tied up the Series two games to two.

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<sup>363</sup> *The New York Times*, August 8, 1926, Sec. 9, 2.

<sup>364</sup> *The Sporting News*, August 26, 1926, 4.

<sup>365</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 7, 1926, 3.

With the greatest home-run hitter of them all hitting three homers, it was, naturally enough, a lively occasion. The game was long and one-sided, but it was a good one – a great game, indeed, with attacks and counterattacks, a seesawing score. Twenty eight hits on both sides and sensation following sensation, even to the almost disastrous collision of two Cardinal outfielders.<sup>366</sup>

In the same game, *The Sporting News* said Ruth “rose to his greatest heights as a long distance batter.”<sup>367</sup> Just like New York fans had rallied around media reports of Babe Ruth throughout the 1926 season, Ruth’s performance sparked the interest of St. Louis baseball fans. The next day, Ruth reported to the *Times* that he had received 813 messages of congratulations.<sup>368</sup> A tribute to his powerful effect upon the sport, it led *The Sporting News* also to remark, “We hope Babe keeps the end away.”<sup>369</sup> Both the national and local media understood his significance to the sport.

Ruth was not able to stem the Cardinals’ attack, however. The Cardinals took the seventh and final game, 3-2. Interestingly enough, with Bob Meusel at the plate (he had already hit one home run that afternoon) Ruth was caught stealing second base for the third and final out of the 1926 World Series. The press did not label Ruth the scapegoat, though. Instead, they turned on Meusel, saying the final play was a hit-and-run not executed by the hitter and heralded Ruth for his home runs in St. Louis. It was a testament to Ruth’s heroic status and his ability to hit the long ball. Others, like Meusel, were merely in the wrong place at the wrong time.

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<sup>366</sup> *The New York Times*, October 7, 1926, 20.

<sup>367</sup> *The New York Times*, October 14, 1926, 3.

<sup>368</sup> *The New York Times*, October 8, 1926, 16.

<sup>369</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 14, 1926, 4.

The Yankees were outbatted and outfielded, but their superior experience and balance carried them along. Even those assets were failing them until Ruth completely turned the tide with his St. Louis homers. Those three pitched balls almost cost the Cardinals a title. Ruth is still the Yankee team.<sup>370</sup>

With the help of the sporting press during the 1926 season, Ruth now represented a change in baseball – the Live Ball Era. Ruth, even in a losing effort, had stolen the thunder of an entire team’s World Series win. Whenever Ruth was intentionally walked during the Series, Cardinal pitchers were booed. Ruth usurped the power of pitching great Grover Cleveland Alexander, who, like the Senators’ Walter Johnson, was somewhat of a fan favorite and on the last leg of a long career.

The next season, Ruth would claim dozens more headlines from both the national and local press, but with a different outcome in the 1927 World Series.

### **More Change, More Money**

The media and baseball exhibited signs of growth by spring 1927. The new season included a new addition for the sporting pages of *The New York Times*. “Sports of The Times,” written by John Kieran, was the first bylined column in the history of the newspaper. It appeared in January of 1927 and Kieran would continue writing the column until 1941. Kieran’s unique writing style quickly became a staple in the sports section and both New York clubs were regularly the subjects of his column. One of his first stories that spring put Yankee slugger Babe Ruth in a positive light for his upcoming contract negotiations.

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<sup>370</sup> Harrison, James B. *The New York Times*, October 11, 1926, 24.



He is certainly the greatest hitter and perhaps the greatest all-around player in the history of the national pastime. He is as fond of children as they are of him. The last man away from the ball park every day is Babe Ruth. He has to autograph baseballs, scorecards and torn bits of paper for the ragged kids who waylay him outside the dressing-room door. All of which will make it rather tough for Colonel Jacob Ruppert in the coming financial debate.<sup>371</sup>

Some members of the media said the sport was on the verge of signing its first \$100,000 player. As *The Sporting News* reported, Babe Ruth would ask for the outrageous sum from Colonel Ruppert before spring training. Thanks to the media, baseball was watching every move made by the Yankees and Ruth.

The ballyhoo of the century shows no signs of abatement as the time approaches for the contract interview between George Herman Ruth and Colonel Ruppert, owner of the New York Yankees. Ruth, after a lucrative season on the stage, topped off with a still more lucrative period amid the klieg lights, or eyes, whatever it is, in Hollywood, is to see his employer sometime this week.<sup>372</sup>

Owners across baseball had struggled with the value of players. Ruth, although he would garner only \$70,000 for his two-year contract, became the highest paid player in the game. It was all about attracting fans to games, and owners like Jacob Ruppert were seeing the rising value of the home run. Ruth, with the help of newspapers like the *Times* and *The Sporting News*, put an expensive price tag on the Live Ball Era.

Later commentary in *The Sporting News* revealed its dislike of the vast amounts of money being spent by the New York clubs. The national publication attacked the New York

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<sup>371</sup> Kieran, John. "Sports of the *Times*," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1927, 17.

<sup>372</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 3, 1927, 1.

teams by saying neither one was abiding by the rules of the reserve clause, the rule which maintained that all players had an obligation to uphold the contracts they signed with their team following the completion of that contract. Instead, as *The Sporting News* noted, the Yankees and Giants were “raping” clubs with smaller budgets and yanking the best players from their rosters with the allure of money and fame. “Further, if money alone is to rule in baseball, New York will always have the pennant winner – Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit will follow. Cincinnati and Washington will inevitably finish last.”<sup>373</sup>

Two weeks later, the *Times* wrote a story about how Ruth’s contract and the influx of more money into the sport were in the best interests of the game. The story provides researchers with some of the best comments about the evolution of the sport since the end of the Deadball Era. According to Yankees’ owner Jacob Ruppert, the fans, the players, the owners, and, most importantly, the sport as a whole had changed since 1915 upon the understanding of baseball as a business.

Then it dawned upon me that baseball had wonderful possibilities. The business opportunity in it became apparent and it wasn’t long until I perceived that others had discovered the same thing and I knew that baseball was on the way to becoming a big industry. And it has. I still love the game for itself, but as a business man I consider it a real industry. People speak of commercialized sports, but do so unthinkingly. Sports, baseball for one and probably as the best example, simply grew into big business because the people demanded it. We pay players high salaries. And why? Because the public demands the best and the best always costs money.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 3, 1927, 4.

<sup>374</sup> *The New York Times*, March 13, 1927, Sec. 9, 3.

Ruppert went on to tell the newspaper that he estimated the total worth of the AL to be close to \$25 million, a staggering figure since he purchased the Yankees for only \$260,000 in 1915. “This couldn’t have been done fifteen or twenty years ago. Even twelve years ago when I became a club owner, it would have been impossible. The popularity of baseball did not warrant such an investment. Today it is good business.”<sup>375</sup> Ruppert goes on to highlight his best investment of the previous three years and who he had just recently decided to continue to protect for the next two seasons: Babe Ruth.

With Ruth in its backyard, the *Times* made him a mainstay in local sports pages that spring, proving his name alone incited public interest. Sportswriters reported on his diet almost daily. Headlines appearing on the front page of the *Times*’ sports section read “Ruth Starts East; His Diet Disclosed” and “Glass of Orange Juice, Cereal With Skimmed Milk, Hot Drink and Toast His Breakfast.”<sup>376</sup>

Ruth’s contract negotiations and his oft-reported spring training regimen allowed John Kieran of the *Times* to note a distinct difference in how the Yankees’ and Giants’ camps were run by their respective managers. McGraw was again running a tight ship during Spring Training. The Kieran-dubbed “Watch and Ward Society” was McGraw’s futile attempt to keep his players in their hotel rooms every evening. Now, in coordination with the reports of Ruth’s diet, McGraw was checking the diets of his pitchers. Miller Huggins’ system, as Kieran reports, was much different. The lax manager’s regulations were nothing like McGraw’s overbearing and undercover activities and had produced four pennant-winning teams in the last six seasons. “There is no curfew law on the Yankee club, but the players are supposed to allot themselves

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> *The New York Times*, February 27, 1927, Sec. 9, 1.

enough sleep to enable them to play at their best the next day. But nobody tucks them into bed or watches the fire-escapes between midnight and dawn.”<sup>377</sup>

The local newspaper illustrated that McGraw, like his old-school managerial ways, was losing touch with his team as well as a firm grip on his job. The Giants’ acquisition of player-manager Rogers Hornsby in the Frisch trade during the off-season led *The Sporting News* to boast of a new working relationship in New York. As the *Times* pointed out in early March, McGraw was in his 25<sup>th</sup> year of professional baseball and could not continue managing forever. “It doesn’t take a cross-word puzzle dictionary to figure out who will be McGraw’s successor.”<sup>378</sup> Both publications had a very favorable view of the new situation in Harlem and *The Sporting News* said Hornsby as field captain and McGraw as bench manager would make for a winning combination in the new season. “(McGraw) will run the team exclusively and direct its plays from the bench, but he says he now has the field leader for which he has yearned.”<sup>379</sup>

### **The Greatest Team of All?**

As the Yankees continued to build a team around the “Mighty Mauler of Manhattan,” newspapers said John McGraw’s Giants were said to be turning the corner at the plate.<sup>380</sup> The addition of Hornsby led both papers to provide John McGraw with more coverage at the beginning of the season than he had experienced since his last pennant run of 1924. The Giants-Yankees press rivalry was stirred again.

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<sup>377</sup> Kieran, John. “Sports of the *Times*,” *The New York Times*, February 27, 1927, Sec. 9, 2.

<sup>378</sup> *The New York Times*, March 7, 1927, 23.

<sup>379</sup> Bulger, Bozeman. *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1927, 5.

<sup>380</sup> *The New York Times*, March 13, 1927, Sec. 9, 3.

McGraw has welded together what appears to be one of the greatest teams he ever has managed and barring accidents he ought to make things hot for the other contenders representing St. Louis, Pittsburg (sic), Chicago and Cincinnati. New York betting men are backing the Yankees and Giants with growing confidence.<sup>381</sup>

No longer were the Giants attempting to play a style of baseball that included aspects of both the Deadball and Live Ball eras. Now, the Giants had their own “Murderers’ Row” according to the *Times*.<sup>382</sup> The Yankees had their normal share of power hitters, which led the *Times* to remark that, “their batting is explosive rather than compact and consistent.”<sup>383</sup> The fans wanted to see both clubs hit the ball out of the park as evidenced in stories printed by the *Times* in early May. More than 100,000 traveled to see the Giants play the Cubs at the Polo Grounds and the Yankees and White Sox square off at the newly expanded Comiskey Park in Chicago.<sup>384</sup>

John McGraw’s team was called the “mighty maulers” until they tripped at the end of May and would never regain a lead in the NL race. The damage to McGraw’s former Deadball Era style had been done. The Giants hit more than 100 home runs. Bill Terry and Rogers Hornsby hit more than 20 apiece. The team stole less than 75 bases and the pitching staff’s ERA hovered near 4.00 for the season. McGraw had finally given in to the Live Ball Era, and rightfully so; his inner city rivals were thriving in the home run race.

“Herman the Great” continued his assault on pitchers throughout the AL and the *Times* and *The Sporting News* noticed more fan adulation for the New York hero throughout the country. “The local taxpayers were deeply pained by the atrocious antics of their pets, but G. H.

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<sup>381</sup> *The Sporting News*, April 14, 1927, 5.

<sup>382</sup> *The New York Times*, April 25, 1927, 28.

<sup>383</sup> *The New York Times*, April 10, 1927, Sec. 10, 5.

<sup>384</sup> *The New York Times*, May 9, 1927, 16.

Ruth brought balm to the Cleveland wounds by elevating Homer No. 10 over the right field fence in the sixth with a playmate on base.”<sup>385</sup> *The Sporting News* saw the changing of the guard. Although baseball had long been America’s pastime, Ruth’s celebrity was now eclipsing other sport celebrities whom sportswriters believed would never be dethroned.

And thus do boyhood’s ideals change. Twenty or 30, even ten years ago, the then heavyweight fighter of the world, whoever he might be, was the hero of the youth of the land. Today, the crowd goes to baseball’s most notable figure. Nowadays a bat and a ball are valued more in a boy’s equipment than is a set of boxing gloves.<sup>386</sup>

By mid-June, McGraw’s reputation was the antithesis of Ruth’s. A column by John Kieran in “Sports of the *Times*” said that McGraw “should be allowed to slip in a few bad guesses” and have disappointing seasons now and then.<sup>387</sup> The same column allowed reader commentary on select days. One letter displayed the increasing dissatisfaction amongst Giants fans with manager John McGraw.

I am under the impression that (McGraw’s) methods of dealing with his players are not of the kind to bring success in these days. McGraw made a wonderful record in the past, but he will never again manage a winner. The Giants need a change. I have been a fan since 1872 and this is not a hasty judgment.<sup>388</sup>

While John Kieran of the *Times* protected McGraw in his response by saying the Hornsby-McGraw experiment needed a longer trial, the fan’s letter proved that the newspaper reports of John McGraw’s now-dated, Deadball Era methods were not falling upon deaf ears

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<sup>385</sup> Harrison, James B. *The New York Times*, May 23, 1927, 16.

<sup>386</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 19, 1927, 4.

<sup>387</sup> Kieran, John. “Sports of the *Times*,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 1927, Sec. 9, 2.

<sup>388</sup> “OLDTIMER.” “Sports of the *Times*,” *The New York Times*, July 3, 1927, Sec. 9, 2.

within the baseball public. *The Sporting News* also protected the long-tenured McGraw and on his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as Giants manager, attempted to instill a new pride in wavering New York fans.

So when the Little Napoleon receives a fitting reward for his long fight to provide first-class baseball at the Polo Grounds, old-timers will remember how he came to the rescue of the National League just at the right moment and how he never swerved in his loyalty to the Giants and their faithful friends.<sup>389</sup>

More *Times*' reader comments poured into John Kieran's column by late July, calling for the expulsion of McGraw as manager. After protecting the Giants' coach at first, Kieran's writing reflected his shifting allegiance in the argument.

Disguise or ignore it as one may, the chief charge in the above indictment is that Connie Mack and John McGraw are old. Well, that's true, and Connie Mack hasn't a chance in the world for any plea except guilty with palms. John McGraw may appeal and win a technical reversal, but John McGraw is 'old' compared to the John McGraw not only of the 'good old days' but also the John McGraw of recent pennant-winning campaigns.<sup>390</sup>

The *Times* put the Yankees-Giants rivalry to the test that summer when they ran two articles side-by-side; one article was about the Yankees leading the AL race by so far a margin that it is a "laughing matter," while the other article was about the Giants' quick descent in the standings.<sup>391</sup> Both Harrison and Richards Vidmer, another *Times* sportswriter, admitted that the Yankees and Giants lacked pitching; however, Harrison states the reason as to the Yankees' success. "Yet there is one important department where the Yankees are away ahead of other

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<sup>389</sup> *The Sporting News*, July 21, 1927, 1.

<sup>390</sup> Kieran, John. "Sports of the *Times*," *The New York Times*, July 24, 1927, Sec. 9, 2.

<sup>391</sup> Harrison, James R. *The New York Times*, July 3, 1927, Sec. 9, 3.

great teams of baseball history. This is in hitting. The combination of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig has never been equaled in batting power, long-distance hitting and general destructiveness.”<sup>392</sup>

Dubbed the “Prince of Punch” by the *Times*, Lou Gehrig’s performance at the plate in 1927 assisted in the empowerment of the Live Ball Era. After hitting a combined 37 home runs during four seasons of professional baseball, Gehrig was on his way to 47 home runs and 175 runs batted in 1927. One sportswriter also commented on his modesty, a weak characteristic of his fellow teammate, Babe Ruth, and New Yorkers in general.

We can gather from that the opinion that Gehrig is not wholly like his tribe of Gotham where modesty too often consists in holding that a visitor may be a Rube, even when the Gothamite barely takes ten steps away from his own fireside without confusing all sense of property rights and despoiling his country neighbor’s garden and orchard of its most treasured flowers and fruits.<sup>393</sup>

Gehrig, in the most unassuming of ways, was winning the hearts of the toughest sportswriters and toughest fans in the country, those of *The Sporting News* and New York, respectively. Gehrig and Ruth continued to engage in what the *Times* called the “Great American Home Run Handicap.”<sup>394</sup> On August 1, 1927, Gehrig led Ruth in the home run race, 35 to 34. The friendly rivalry between the two had been growing since the beginning of the season, but it now sparked the *Times* to remark that when the “Buster” and the “Babe” hit home runs, “it’s the greatest act in baseball.”<sup>395</sup>

*The Sporting News*’ John Sheridan changed the argument of both publications and refocused national and local newspaper attention back to the lively ball. “Yes, Ruth hits fast

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> *The Sporting News*, July 21, 1927, 4.

<sup>394</sup> *The New York Times*, July 17, 1927, 13.

<sup>395</sup> *The New York Times*, August 1, 1927, 13.



balls, slow balls or medium paced balls, high low, wide or outside, higher and farther than any man I ever have seen hit, but he has been hitting against a new, white, high-powered ball.”<sup>396</sup>

John Kieran of the *Times* agreed that a more lively ball made a difference in the new style of game.

The lively ball made almost as much difference in baseball strategy as the adoption of padded gloves did in the prize ring. Where are the stolen bases of yesteryear? The Pirates have a club composed of probably the fastest players in the game, but they steal few bases. They don't need to steal bases. They play a different game.<sup>397</sup>

It was a different game that, at least according to both newspapers, the Yankees and their home run hitters were dominating. Regardless of the kind of ball they were hitting, the team did not cease to hit the rest of the season. The Yankees set the AL record for most wins in the regular season with 110 wins (a mark that would not be broken until 1954) on their way to their second consecutive World Series appearance.

### **The 1927 World Series**

Richards Vidmer of the *Times* concluded that the Yankees would defeat the NL champion Pittsburgh Pirates in the World Series of 1927 on Monday, October 3. As Vidmer ended his article, “And then after all these advantages have been chalked up to their credit, there is still Babe Ruth.”<sup>398</sup>

Five days later, the Yankees and Ruth proved him right when they swept the Pirates in four straight games. The *Times* remarked that “they may not be far wrong who assert that these

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<sup>396</sup> Sheridan, John. *The Sporting News*, August 25, 1927, 4.

<sup>397</sup> Kieran, John. “Sports of the *Times*,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 1927, 17.

<sup>398</sup> Vidmer, Richards. *The New York Times*, October 3, 1927, 28.

Yankees are the greatest team in the more than fifty years of baseball history.”<sup>399</sup> It was Ruth’s eighth and arguably, greatest, World Series appearance.

Although Ruth set nine World Series records, *The Sporting News* and *The New York Times* comments following the 1927 World Series provided contrasting sportswriter accounts of Ruth’s supposed influence on baseball. Never a publication to follow the rest of the media “dope,” *The Sporting News* refused to accept Babe Ruth’s increasing prominence in the baseball world.

No one man makes baseball. No one man ever has unmade it. One man may leave his influence upon it either for good or bad. Yet in many a city 30 men can leave no impression whatever from season to season except as they combine to make success. That is all there is to baseball.<sup>400</sup>

After pointing out Babe Ruth’s “old” age (32), John Kieran disagreed with the national newspaper’s commentary. Instead, Kieran said that the Yankees of 1928 would probably be better than the Yankees of 1927 due mostly to one man. “In the world of finance Charles M. Schwab said: ‘Never sell the United States short.’ In the baseball world one might say: ‘Never sell Babe Ruth short.’ The Babe generally rises to the occasion. Or above it. He is in a class by himself.”<sup>401</sup>

### **Spring of 1928**

Babe Ruth and the New York Yankees once again fueled newspaper opinion about the upcoming 1928 season. The rise to power by the 1927 Yankees allowed owner Jacob Ruppert to increase the capacity of Yankee Stadium by 7,000 during the winter. Ruth’s name appeared

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<sup>399</sup> *The New York Times*, October 9, 1927, Sec. 10, 4.

<sup>400</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 13, 1927, 4.

<sup>401</sup> Kieran, John. “Sports of the *Times*,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 1927, Sec. 10, 2.

alongside the story about Yankee Stadium expansion, and, as one sportswriter reported, the entire AL pennant race depended upon his health.

They used to say, 'As Ruth goes, so go the Yankees.' Today that observation is obsolete. The modern version reads, 'As Ruth goes, so goes the pennant race.' Ruth lean, and Ruth fat, are figures that throw different shadows athwart the American League. No one will be able to make a decent forecast of next season's winner without permission to string a tape measure around the Bambino's lunch basket.<sup>402</sup>

An article appearing in *The New York Times* explained *The Sporting News'* anxieties about Ruth.

The Babe is the only man in the lot who will not put on a uniform. He plans to spend a week at golf to get his legs into condition before trying his hand on the diamond. By way of a starter, he played eighteen holes this morning, going to the golf course within an hour of the time of his arrival. As golf goes, his round today was no howling success, but as a conditioner it was A1. He worked up a good perspiration and took off two pounds, according to the clubhouse scales.<sup>403</sup>

In fact, the entire Yankee team seemed to be fishing or golfing into late March even after the team began to play exhibition games. According to the *Times*, the team believed it had nothing to worry about in the upcoming season. "Tomorrow the Yanks are going against the St. Louis Cardinals. They're a good club too. But whether the Yankees win, lose, or draw, it is doubtful if they will change their expressions of utter satisfaction and supreme confidence."<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> *The Sporting News*, February 9, 1928, 4.

<sup>403</sup> *The New York Times*, February 27, 1928, 11.

<sup>404</sup> Vidmer, Richards. *The New York Times*, March 26, 1928, 16.

At the same time, sportswriters at the *Times* had lost all confidence with the New York Giants. Rogers Hornsby and Burleigh Grimes, the two superstar players of the 1927 Giants, were gone, traded away by McGraw in the off-season. While the newspaper did express hope for McGraw's team in 1928, it was proof that the Giants' stock had again tumbled in New York media. "For the first time in many years the Giants are not the spring favorites in the National League, and that may be a good omen. Since 1924 the Giants have been winning their pennants in March and losing them in September."<sup>405</sup>

Another media thorn in McGraw's side was his new second baseman. Andy Cohen had only received 35 at-bats the previous season when he was backing up Hornsby. In 1928, he was poised to start at second, but was making waves in the press before he had really made a name for himself on the field. It allowed *The Sporting News* to compare Cohen with Babe Ruth, an athlete that, unlike McGraw's young rookie, was able to back up his overconfidence with his "lordly hitting prowess."<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> *The New York Times*, April 8, 1928, Sec. 10, 3.

<sup>406</sup> *The Sporting News*, April 26, 1928, 4.

In this particular case it would seem a limit had been reached. Andy Cohen, a youngster just breaking in, and described as one conscientious writers as being ‘as green as a player on a town lot,’ is advertised to sign his name as a possible critic of the style and stance of Rogers Hornsby and the craft of Grover Alexander. He is to analyze the strategy of team leaders who were masters of baseball play, some of them, before he was born, and who have forgotten more baseball than Andy Cohen will ever know, and who are men who probably will be remembered when Andy’s present rabid and rampant worshippers will be asking in the tomorrows, ‘Oh that Cohen; whatever has become of that feller now?’<sup>407</sup>

### **1928: The Media Embraces the Live Ball Era**

Up until 1928, sportswriters at both *The Sporting News* and *The New York Times* had dissenting opinions on the exorbitant amount of hitting showcased by Ruth and the Yankees. As the 1928 season dawned however, articles in both publications were beginning to assume a more positive outlook of Ruth, the Yankees, and the Live Ball era. As the newspaper accounts reflected, the Yankees’ style of play was well-worth the price of admission for fans that had to decide whether to see Ruth and the Yankees or McGraw and the Giants.

The Yankees made it easy on the national and local media in the early part of 1928. They won 40 of their first 50 games and *Times*’ reporters were impressed with the team’s heavy display of artillery following a 7-0 victory over the Chicago White Sox in early May. “There’s nothing small about the Yankees. They do things in a big way. Perhaps that why 30,000 fans turned out at the Yankee Stadium yesterday to see the Manhattan maulers maul the White Sox into submission. They knew they would get full value for their money.”<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Vidmer, Richards. *The New York Times*, May 6, 1928, Sec. 11, 1.

Later commentary provided by the *Times* claimed that the “only thing that will stop (the Yankees) is an amendment to the Constitution.”<sup>409</sup> The national publication echoed local sportswriters’ sentiments. *The Sporting News*’ John Sheridan gave credit to Babe Ruth as the best hitter of the era. “Any man who can hit balls over the wall as Ruth has been doing for ten years now, is some hitter. There were great long-distance hitters before Ruth, but none of them could hit long balls so consistently as the giant Yankee has hit them.”<sup>410</sup>

Conversely, the Giants’ performance on the field did not help their cause in the local media. “There were two blows struck at Redland Field this afternoon. The Reds hit the Giants and the Giants hit the ground, from which horizontal position our lads could hear the birdies chirping right merrily in the tree tops.”<sup>411</sup> A week later, game stories of the Giants and Yankees again appeared alongside each other and the lead of the Yankees’ article overshadowed a Giants’ loss to the Chicago Cubs. “The Yankees won another of those pulsating, heart-throbbing ball games that give you high-blood pressure, at the Yankee Stadium yesterday, but it took Gehrig’s fifth homer of the season, Ruth’s eighth, three pitchers, nine full innings and something over three hours in which to do it.”<sup>412</sup> Vidmer’s article showed how the game had evolved by the 1928 season: the fans viewed the three-hour long, home-run packed Yankee games as thrilling baseball while the Giants’ style was no longer in vogue.

Worse news for the Giants came in mid-May when John McGraw was hit by a taxi while crossing the street in Chicago. The Giants’ manager was relegated to rest for the next six weeks and *The Sporting News* felt his injury had a direct effect upon the play of the Giants.

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<sup>409</sup> *The New York Times*, May 28, 1928, 29.

<sup>410</sup> Sheridan, John. *The Sporting News*, May 31, 1928, 4.

<sup>411</sup> Harrison, James R. *The New York Times*, May 6, 1928, Sec. 11, 1.

<sup>412</sup> Vidmer, Richards. *The New York Times*, May 13, 1928, Sec. 11, 1.

McGraw, still on crutches, continues to direct his team from the club house in center field. He sits at a window, with his broken leg propped up on a chair and watches every move. His orders are phoned to the dugout. But the Giants cannot be expected to travel at their fastest gait until McGraw puts on a uniform and takes his usual seat on the bench.<sup>413</sup>

Assistant coach Roger Bresnahan commanded the team until McGraw's return to the dugout in July, and while he was able to keep the Giants aloft in the pennant race, but the team would never assume a lead in the NL following McGraw's accident.

The Yankees were still in first place and cushioned by an 8.5 game lead in the middle of June. The entire team was hitting over .300, which led John Kieran of the *Times* to remark, "instead of groping through the records for an all-star team, a man could save a lot of time and energy by picking the Yankees as they stand."<sup>414</sup>

The AL New York club tripped down the stretch run in the late days of August. For almost the entire decade, both publications, whenever one of the teams hit a bump during the season, opined that a lack of pitching was the main issue. This time, however, the *Times* noted a different reason as to why the Yankees experienced the skid. "There has been a good deal of talk about Yankee pitching, or the lack of it, but the real trouble is the falling off in hitting. When the Yanks were far out in front of the league they were also far ahead of all other teams in the matter of bouncing base hits off the far-flung barriers."<sup>415</sup> Hitting had become the mainstay for the New York Yankees.

At the same time, the Giants had managed to pick up some steam during a 25-game stretch in which they were able to win 19 games. The same day the *Times* identified the real

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<sup>413</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 14, 1928, 1.

<sup>414</sup> Kieran, John. "Sports of the *Times*," *The New York Times*, June 10, 1928, Sec. 10, 2.

<sup>415</sup> Kieran, John. "Sports of the *Times*," *The New York Times*, August 26, 1928, Sec. 9, 2.

problem with the Yankee team, the newspaper assaulted the Giants for falling back in the race following a 7-1 loss to the Pittsburgh Pirates. “The Giants may be Giants still, but they looked like the Singer Midgets today.”<sup>416</sup>

The Yankees’ lead was trimmed to less than two games by early September until they defeated the Philadelphia Athletics during a doubleheader. *The New York Times* pointed out that the more than 85,000 people that crammed into Yankee Stadium for both games was the largest crowd ever. One *Times* reporter even said that there was no place for a man who had ridden his bicycle from Reading, Pennsylvania all the way to the ballpark.<sup>417</sup> *The Sporting News*’ report on the crowd added to the excitement surrounding the Yankees.

No games in this city, excepting those for the world’s championship, ever aroused so much general excitement and that attendance of 85,264 was the biggest ever seen at a sporting event in the East, barring the Dempsey-Carpentier fight in Jersey City seven years ago.<sup>418</sup>

No longer were fans traveling to Yankee games to see only the home run swings of Ruth and Gehrig; they wished to see winning baseball. The Giants were not able to fight their way back into the race and the *Times* picked out manager John McGraw as the loneliest man in New York. “And so it was that John J. McGraw, eager to get back to the wars of a World’s Series, sat on the bench yesterday and saw another baseball season pass on with that ambition unfulfilled.”<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> *The New York Times*, August 26, 1928, Sec. 9, 1.

<sup>417</sup> *The New York Times*, September 10, 1928, 17.

<sup>418</sup> *The Sporting News*, September 20, 1928, 1.

<sup>419</sup> *The New York Times*, September 30, 1928, Sec. 11, 1.



## The 1928 World Series

McGraw saw the rival Yankees clinch the AL pennant on September 30, 1928. It was the presence of the Yankees in their third consecutive World Series that spurred the *Times* to raise the Fall Classic to a new level. “In other words, this is baseball week and a little thing like a national election can wait.”<sup>420</sup>

Both the *Times* and *The Sporting News* said the Yankees really limped to the 1928 World Series against the St. Louis Cardinals. The *Times* said the Yankees hoped to be the first team to win a World Series “in wheelchairs.”<sup>421</sup> According to *The Sporting News* in early October, Ruth, who was injured, played a key role in the ascension of the Yankees at a pivotal point in the late season. “Ruth, in the Detroit series, knocked the ball out of the lot four times. It made him forget his gimp underpinning and he did some great outfielding. Incidentally, the Babe encouraged his companions to tear into the dejected Tigers like a pack of bull dogs.”<sup>422</sup> The Ruth legend was growing. Ruth’s mentor in his school days, Brother Gilbert, published “The Million Dollar Babe.” One writer in *The Sporting News* went so far as to rank it as highly as “those classics of the Lincoln of the rude log cabin and the Al Smith of Oliver street.”<sup>423</sup>

The city of New York witnessed the highest grossing single game in World Series history for the first game of the 1928 World Series at Yankee Stadium.<sup>424</sup> The Yankees won the first two games during which James Harrison of the *Times* provided an analysis of the Yankees’ Live Ball style of attack.

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>422</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 4, 1928, 1.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>424</sup> *The New York Times*, October 5, 1928, 18.

The Yanks went into the trenches yesterday with murder in their hearts and TNT in their bats. Not for them the gentler artifices of baseball strategy. Their idea was to walk up to the plate, take the old toehold and see how far they could knock the leather sphere. Rough methods, but simple and effective.<sup>425</sup>

In the third game, Gehrig hit his second home run in the Series. He and Ruth had combined to go 12-for-20 at the plate and it led *The Sporting News* to applaud their efforts.

Both of these crashsmiths hit above the .600 mark in the first three games and every one of the victories can be traced to their destructive bats. Ruth, limping and running with difficulty, gave one of the grittiest displays ever seen in a series. He forgot his injuries and staggered around the bases and did everything expected of him.<sup>426</sup>

It was the coverage of the fourth and final game that confirmed New York's complete embrace of the Live Ball Era. Ruth hit three home runs, along with a third Series home run from Gehrig, and the Yankees won their third world title of the decade. The *Times* expressed its elation with the two sluggers. "What a pair! What men! Between them they had made this world's series a shamle, a source of humiliation and sorrow for the National League, which in eight straight games against this unbelievable Yankee team had met nothing but one-sided defeat."<sup>427</sup>

As the local newspaper asserted, the Yankees were again atop the baseball world as they were in 1927. This time, however, it was a position they would never relinquish. Ruth had successfully instituted a new era in baseball and, as *The Sporting News* reported, was a national icon. The national publication wrote that when the Yankees departed St. Louis on a special train

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<sup>425</sup> Harrison, James R. *The New York Times*, October 6, 1928, 1.

<sup>426</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 11, 1928, 1.

<sup>427</sup> *The New York Times*, October 10, 1928, 22.

bound for New York, it had “become a mad house on wheels” and that Ruth was “on the top wave of popularity.”<sup>428</sup>

Meanwhile, *The Sporting News* said John McGraw was brooding over the passing of the Giants as the nation’s team.

There is no news of any kind concerning the Giants. Most of them have gone away from here. McGraw is taking a needed rest, but finds time to express bitter disappointment over the outcome of the World Series. He still opines that the Giants would have made a far better showing than the Cardinals.<sup>429</sup>

Further commentary by *The Sporting News* following the 1928 World Series provided evidence that the home run was a galvanizing aspect of the new style of baseball. Ruth and Gehrig were barnstorming and one writer at the national newspaper reported that businesses at burlesque and movie houses suffered when the Dynamite and Gold Dust Twins put on their display of power at the local baseball fields. *The Sporting News* noted a new trend in the average baseball fan.

(Ruth and Gehrig) have developed cash customers for themselves on their barnstorming trip, but the cash customers they have developed just want to see them hit and don’t seem to have any desire for any other aspect of the well known and costly pastime.<sup>430</sup>

Although disparaging about the state of the game, the column proved that Ruth’s and Gehrig’s hitting abilities would not be supplanted by any others in the history of the game. “The

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<sup>428</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 18, 1928, 1.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>430</sup> *The Sporting News*, November 1, 1928, 4.

principle of the home run never can lose its place in baseball. It is an established factor of the game, as much so as the two-base hit and the three-base hit.”<sup>431</sup>

### **A Changed Game**

Neither the Giants nor the Yankees made the postseason in 1929. It was only the second time in the entire decade that a New York team had not participated in a World Series. While both teams were more than ten games behind their respective league’s leader at the end of the season, *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News* coverage of both teams and baseball reflected the changed nature of the sport.

As *The Sporting News* noted, there was now a deep rift in the New York fan base as compared to earlier coverage from the decade.

There are indications of intense partisan feeling between the followers of the Giants and Yankees. Fans are writing letters to the newspapers setting forth their views as to what will happen. In a majority of these communications received by one afternoon newspapers, the wish is expressed for an all-New York World’s Series next fall.<sup>432</sup>

Giants’ manager John McGraw had showed signs of change as well according to the *Times*. The local newspaper was hopeful that he would once again be able to steer his team to another World Series berth. “Indeed, not only does McGraw keep abreast of the times, changing his tactics as exigencies demand, but it is probable that he has introduced more innovations than any other man associated with baseball.”<sup>433</sup> The commentary by the *Times* was proof that McGraw indeed had altered his style of game in an attempt to adapt to the Live Ball Era.

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 14, 1929, 1.

<sup>433</sup> Drebing, John. *The New York Times*, February 17, 1929, Sec. 11, 1.

Some things never change, though, as proven by accounts of Babe Ruth in late February of 1929. The *Times* reported more of Ruth's antics off the diamond on February 24. He and boxing legend Jack Dempsey went two rounds at a Kiwanis Club benefit at West Palm Beach, Florida.

It took Babe Ruth to make Jack Dempsey jump out of the ring. In the first round of their great bout in Florida the Babe was a catcher instead of a hitter. But he came out of his corner for the second round prepared to swing in his usual manner – with a baseball bat. As soon as Dempsey saw the bat, he dove through the ropes to safety.<sup>434</sup>

Following his three consecutive World Series and his three home runs in the final game of the 1928 World Series, Ruth's heroics preceded him in Florida. The press reflected the royalty and acclaim of Ruth.

The supreme big spot of Ruppert's Rifles has been a Florida scenic point of interest these past several weeks. Bulking big against some golf course skyline, breezing down some boulevard in his car, strolling the local rialto with Hichard de Marquis de Marquard, the Bambino has been a species of phantom to his teammates, a shadowy figure, glimpsed for a moment, then gone.<sup>435</sup>

*The Sporting News* came to his side too, by heralding his efforts not only with the bat, but also with the glove and his base running abilities. "He is one of the greatest players that ever lived, in my opinion."<sup>436</sup>

The sport was enjoying consistent success and was looking to expand its borders beyond The United States. The *Times* reported on the New York Giants' jaunt to Mexico<sup>437</sup> and *The*

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<sup>434</sup> Kieran, John. "Sports of the *Times*," *The New York Times*, February 24, 1929, Sec. 11, 2.

<sup>435</sup> Brandt, William E. *The New York Times*, March 4, 1929, 28.

<sup>436</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 14, 1929, 5.

*Sporting News* published a small story in early March about McGraw and the Giants returning to play spring training games in Mexico City the next season.<sup>438</sup>

Other things, such as McGraw's resentment toward Ruth and his new tactics with the bat, still lurked in the shadows as John Kieran of the *Times* clarified. "John McGraw wasn't so sick last week that he couldn't have his little joke. In ranking his twenty all-time starts he put Babe Ruth in fifth position."<sup>439</sup>

McGraw was sick for a long period of time as in previous seasons. In 1929, McGraw was away from the Giants for three weeks due to sinus issues. As evidenced in the press, his managing style had shifted since the early years of the 1920s. "As soon as McGraw appeared at the Polo Grounds next day he had a heart to heart talk with his men in the dressing room. He did not berate them, but encouraged them. He told them that they could do much better if they kept their heads up and fought like fury."<sup>440</sup> Dubbed Little Napoleon for so many years by the press, McGraw's softer technique was a new side of the fiery manager.

Coincidentally, the National League, long the holdout between the two leagues in the home run race, seemed to be embracing the new style in full force. "The National League president is pleased to see four or five youngsters up among the heavy home-run hitters and thinks it has a good deal to do with the increased attendance, but the American League did pretty well in gate receipts for half a dozen seasons by having more of the homers hit by one man. The name is Ruth – G. H. Ruth."<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> *The New York Times*, March 10, 1929, Sec. 12, 5.

<sup>438</sup> *The Sporting News*, March 7, 1929, 2.

<sup>439</sup> Kieran, John, "Sports of the *Times*," *The New York Times*, May 12, 1929, Sec. 11, 2.

<sup>440</sup> *The Sporting News*, May 30, 1929, 1.

<sup>441</sup> Kieran, John. "Sports of the *Times*," *The New York Times*, June 9, 1929, Sec. 10, 2.

*The Sporting News* opined that the home run was beginning to grow horns. One writer tallied 241 home runs for the NL in the 1929 season compared to only 175 at the same time the previous year. Neither suggestion provided by the publication to rid the sport of the long ball problem seemed reasonable.

If curtailment is to be had, two avenues are open. The first and most satisfactory would be the removal of some of the jack rabbit from the ball. The second would be the zoning of the fields. The latter probably would not appeal to the fans, for it would take from the game much of the naturalness that belongs to it, and in time, you might expect to hear Brick Owens or Charley Rigler calling ‘thirty love.’<sup>442</sup>

Just as the rest of baseball had already embraced the home run as a key element to winning games, members of the Giants were increasing home run totals for the former Deadball Era team. Lead by Mel Ott at the plate, who hit 42 home runs that season, the Giants hit 136 home runs as a team in 1929. During one doubleheader against the Philadelphia Phillies in late June, the team hit eight home runs in one day.<sup>443</sup> Following a doubleheader between the Giants and the Chicago Cubs in which 39 runs were scored, *The New York Times* printed an Associated Press survey of league managers about the “home-run epidemic.” The *Times*, however, astutely pointed out that the survey was conducted by the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, a neighboring publication of *The Sporting News*. The two regularly mirrored each other’s views about the growing home run problem across baseball. Presumably though, Giants manager John McGraw decried the new era, saying, “The present hitting is ruinous to the game. There can be no doubt the present ball is livelier. Discoloring the balls might help some.”<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> *The Sporting News*, June 13, 1929, 4.

<sup>443</sup> Brandt, William E. *The New York Times*, June 23, 1929, Sec. 10, 1.

<sup>444</sup> *The New York Times*, July 14, 1929, Sec. 11, 5.

As both publications noted, more home run hitters were stepping into the limelight. While Babe Ruth was spending more and more time away from the Yankees due to a fatigue-related illness in early June, guys like Chuck Klein (43 home runs in 1929), Mel Ott (42), Jimmie Foxx (33), and Chick Hafey (29) were becoming sluggers. As the *Times* reported, Ruth read the newspaper accounts and perceived he may be losing ground. “A friend of Babe Ruth’s brought some baseballs into the Yankee dugout for the home-run king to autograph a few days ago. ‘Better hurry up with ‘em,’ said the Babe. ‘I see by the papers I’m falling so fast I may not be able to even lift a fountain pen in a few days.’”<sup>445</sup>

Coverage suggests another factor that may have sidetracked the New York Yankees on their quest to return to the World Series in the years immediately following 1929, was the unexpected death of Miller Huggins at the end of the season. According to the *Times*, Huggins entered a New York hospital on Friday, September 20, 1929 for treatment of an eye infection and died the next Wednesday, succumbing to blood poisoning.<sup>446</sup> The coverage of Huggins’ career during the 1920s drew comparisons to the coverage of his famed slugger Babe Ruth as well as the Yankees.

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<sup>445</sup> Kieran, John. “Sports of the *Times*,” *The New York Times*, August 4, 1929, Sec. 10, 2.

<sup>446</sup> *The New York Times*, September 26, 1929, 1.



Here was a man who came into town with everybody giving him the cold shoulder and a few interested persons out gunning for him. Players, fans, and writers were against him. Hew as a stranger in a strange town and he was given a sixth-place ball club to manage. He won three pennants and the credit was given to somebody else. He smiled and said nothing. His team fell apart and he built another pennant-winning machine that won three times in a row. This time he got the credit.<sup>447</sup>

The death of Huggins allowed for sports writers to set up one last rivalry for the decade. It was Ruth against McGraw for the leadership of the Yankees, and, therefore, the continuation of the Live Ball Era.

According to the press, Babe Ruth, while surpassing the Giants on the field, had surpassed McGraw in his own realm: the dugout steps. The sports writers wanted Babe Ruth to manage the Yankees. *The Sporting News* claimed him a good candidate to replace Huggins.

There are plenty of baseball men who will tell you that Babe will make a good manager. They will tell you that he has the natural talents for leadership, just as he had the talents to make him a super ball player – the greatest long-distance hitter of all time. Babe has not always been a model in deportment, but during the last four or five years has cut out the foolishness and applied himself strictly to business. He is instinctively smart as a baseball man; born to the game. Then, too, he is a forceful physical figure, cast in a heroic mold and knows enough about men to understand them.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Kieran, John. "Sports of the Times," *The New York Times*, September 26, 1929, 23.

<sup>448</sup> *The Sporting News*, October 31, 1929, 4.

Ruth declined his interest in the position to the *Times* and *The Sporting News* and instead opted to return to the field as a team leader in 1930. “But don’t forget: Some day I hope to realize a great ambition by having my name listed in the managers’ column along with one of the greatest in baseball history – Miller Huggins.”<sup>449</sup>

In the place of Huggins, the *Times* reported earlier in October that Colonel Jacob Ruppert would extend a job offer to Giants manager John McGraw.<sup>450</sup> McGraw opted to stay with the New York Giants. After having a chance to purchase the New York Yankees before World War I and now having an opportunity to manage the team that ousted his era during the 1920s, John McGraw’s career had come full circle with the Yankees.

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<sup>449</sup> *The New York Times*, October 14, 1929, 27.

<sup>450</sup> *The New York Times*, October 15, 1929, 25.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

By tracing the commentary of both *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News* from 1919-1929, it is possible to pinpoint the factors and chain of events that led to the evolution of baseball from the Deadball Era to the Live Ball Era. Contrary to William Curran's statement that Babe Ruth successfully ushered in the Live Ball Era due to his performance in one game in May, 1919, press coverage of the New York Yankees and the New York Giants throughout the 1920s reflected a shift in baseball styles as well as a change in the way newspapers covered each team.

It was a perfect storm for the press as well as the sport of baseball. While interest was high in baseball following World War I, increased newspaper coverage took the sport to a popularity it could never before imagine. Both the press and baseball saved face following the Black Sox scandal when the media was quick to say that baseball was changed for the better with the hiring of Kennesaw Mountain Landis. Only a few seasons after Babe Ruth burst onto the New York scene, the local and national newspapers recognized what he represented: a new era for the sport. That recognition coincided with John McGraw and the Deadball Era's fall from grace. If not for *The New York Times'* and *The Sporting News'* mythic accounts of Ruth and the constant commentary on the Ruth and McGraw debate, the modern era of baseball would never have assumed the status it now enjoys.

The two seasons immediately following World War I, at least in New York, would act as the foundation for the Live Ball Era as well as a new age of sports writing.

During 1919 and 1920, coverage in *The New York Times* suggested that baseball and newspaper owners were in a dire situation following World War I. While the heroes of the Deadball Era were returning to the sport, both ownership groups may have understood the need for a stronger, more unifying game; a sport around which the nation could rally. The legalization of baseball played on Sundays further aided in the cause for celebration for both newspapers and owners. The legislation was some of the first proof afforded researchers that both destinies of newspapers and the sport during the decade were intertwined.

The Yankees, a season before Ruth arrived in New York, had finally experienced success in professional baseball due to their financially stable owners and were able to form a unique fan following due to the willingness of sportswriters to create a rivalry of epic proportion.

Ruth's appearance in New York before the beginning of the 1920 season brought a tsunami of fan interest to baseball's biggest scene. Two of America's sports heroes now resided in New York: Babe Ruth and John McGraw. It was a rivalry that developed within the media at the backdrop of the Live Ball and Deadball debate. As the decade and the sport progressed, Ruth versus McGraw became a national story. As evidenced in press reports, *The Sporting News*, *The New York Times*, and even individual sportswriters chose sides. Writers like Grantland Rice epitomized the tone and style of stories during the period and Rice became a legend around the same time that Babe Ruth and John McGraw came to power on the New York sports scene. As Mark Inabinett, author of *Grantland Rice and His Heroes*, writes, Rice began syndication of his column in 1913 and had become the first nationally famous sportswriter by the 1920s.<sup>451</sup>

Inabinett goes on to say that Rice's creative approach and style undoubtedly altered sports

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<sup>451</sup> Inabinett, Mark, *Grantland Rice and His Heroes: The Sportswriter as the Mythmaker in the 1920s* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 7.

writing during that time.<sup>452</sup> Sportswriters modeled their craft after the example of Rice and the newspaper accounts of *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News* reflected a major shift from the previous decade.

The appeal of these heroes and legends reached beyond the hard-core sports fan, who had the inside knowledge of the games needed to evaluate their abilities and place in context their achievements. The sports star became household names as the sportswriters conveyed more than the game to the readers. The personalities of the heroes, projected by the sportswriters, enhanced their appeal.<sup>453</sup>

Writers at both the *Times* and *The Sporting News* subscribed to either Rice's Gee-Whiz (characterized by a celebration and glorification of subjects) or Aw-Nuts (a typically skeptical style) schools of writing.<sup>454</sup> Babe Ruth and John McGraw were at the epicenter of the writers' focus.

*The Sporting News*, always looking out for the best interests of the sport of baseball, sensed a change in the way the game was played as early as 1919 when Babe Ruth set a new home run record with the Boston Red Sox. Much like its readers, *The Sporting News* wanted a return to the "old" days when the game was played between the diamond and in front of the fences. Writers at the publication decried the new game and said a livelier ball was to blame. Due to his Deadball practices, John McGraw was *The Sporting News*' hero. Babe Ruth and the Yankees, meanwhile, were the antitheses to that which the publication stood and its tone of writing reflected allegiance to the Aw-Nuts school of thought.

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 22

Furthermore, the research dictates that *The Sporting News* took every opportunity available to attack the New York Yankees and the era the club represented while protecting John McGraw. *The Sporting News* wrote extensively about the erosion of the sport as the national pastime when Yankee owners Ruppert and Huston were able to lure pitcher Carl Mays to the team in late 1919 and made little mention of the manager's legal issues when he assaulted a Broadway comedian in 1920.

*The New York Times*, however, reveled in the success of the Yankees. For the *Times*, two successful, or, in the case of 1920, three successful New York area baseball teams would mean more paper sales. The daily made mention of a livelier ball in its sports section during the two seasons, but the newspaper also noticed an increase in the number of baseball fans primarily driven to the Polo Grounds to see Babe Ruth hit the long ball. Attempting to capitalize on Grantland Rice's success, the *Times'* Gee Whiz writers targeted Babe Ruth as the center of attention.

Newspaper coverage of the four baseball seasons from 1921-1924 suggested that the sport was beginning to experience change in many different ways.

Almost in direct correlation to Kennesaw Mountain Landis cleaning up the sport and the rise of Babe Ruth, the Yankees were the first to enjoy baseball as big business. Increasing attendance and gate receipts allowed Colonel Jacob Ruppert to build Yankee Stadium in 1923, thus allowing the franchise to leave the Giants' Polo Grounds. It allowed the Yankees to create a niche following of fans via local newspapers that had never before seen the game of baseball.

The press coverage found in this research shows that the Giants-Yankees rivalry created in newspapers was essentially a proving ground in which proponents of John McGraw's Deadball Era squared off against Ruth's Live Ball Era. In order for either respective proponent to

prosper on the field, they would have to win over writers and fans within the sports pages of newspapers like *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News*.

Coverage of Ruth during the 1920s was a rollercoaster ride for the press, and as Ruth went, so too did the Live Ball Era. John McGraw and the Giants dominated during the first two years of the rivalry, winning nine out of 12 World Series games against the Yankees and dealing crushing blows to Ruth in the press and on the field.

The World Series of 1923, however, was a turning point for Ruth and the Yankees. Ruth hit three home runs in six days, thus cementing his popularity within the local and national press and providing the Yankees with the first of their 27 world championship titles. Meanwhile, John McGraw's stock was slipping in the press.

Following the loss of the Giants to the Yankees in the 1923 World Series, *The New York Times* reporting exhibited a pro-Yankees slant while writers in *The Sporting News* still tended to favor John McGraw and the New York Giants. Both publications were neither fair nor balanced in their coverage, but game accounts and commentary provided an in-depth understanding of the changes occurring within the sport.

The *Times* capitalized on the interest in the Yankees and the Live Ball Era by increasing its sports staff and providing writers with bylines. The *Times*' writers flocked to Babe Ruth, whose larger-than-life personality sold newspapers. It was a symbiotic relationship for the Yankees and the *Times*.

By 1924, *The Sporting News* still held that the home run was bad for the sport. Many times, its reporting still echoed the sentiments of John McGraw, who not only had a vested interest in how the game was played before World War I, but who saw his own team's previous press and fan popularity fading quickly. At this time, *The Sporting News* and other journalists'

charges of the lively ball grew out of fear for a changing state of the game – idols like John McGraw of the Deadball Era seemed to be on loose footing. McGraw's World Series loss the Washington Senators in 1924 led sports writers to ask if he was losing his touch.

The 1925-1929 seasons proved to be the period in which baseball and the media embraced the Live Ball Era, Babe Ruth, and the Yankees. With the emergence of the Yankees' Lou Gehrig and the Giants' Mel Ott among countless others, the hitting statistics reflected a changed sport. Ruth was the epicenter of the changing game. As coverage in the media reflected, his ability to hit the ball was being duplicated by others who wished to alter the outcome of the game with one swing of the bat.

During the final five seasons of the 1920s and with the help of Gee-Whiz writers, Ruth was exalted to an incredibly high status within the sports media and constantly labeled as the greatest hitter the game had ever seen by both publications. Along with his rising popularity and home run totals, the Yankees thrived. By 1927, the third installment of Murderers' Row became the most famous. The 1927 Yankees became arguably the greatest team of all time and the team again captured the World Series in 1928, the third Yankee championship of the decade. The sport was expanding as the Yankees increased the size of their foothold and teams were even playing exhibition games in Mexico by the end of the decade, a trend that even *The Sporting News* hoped would continue.

John McGraw was never able to regain his previous popularity with the *Times* or New York fans. The local newspaper accepted reader comments about how poorly the Giants were playing and attributed their bad showing to McGraw. In addition, even McGraw's very regimented spring training schedules fell under the microscope of the *Times*, which championed other Giant coaches and players like Hughie Jennings and Rogers Hornsby instead of McGraw.



While *The Sporting News* continued to back McGraw on the national scene, the sport instead seemed to be focused on the other New York team and their style of hitting the ball out of the park. By the end of the decade, he no longer commanded the same influence in the sport than he did prior to World War I, or even as late as 1922. Coverage in *The Sporting News* showed that McGraw was resentful of Ruth and the way he had altered the sport. McGraw continued to lobby in the publication that owners had inserted a livelier ball into play.

Meanwhile, press coverage of Babe Ruth and the New York Yankees by *The New York Times* persisted in the wake of negative commentary by *The Sporting News*. At the close of the decade, even writers and contributors to *The Sporting News* at least realized the home run and Babe Ruth were acting as the catalyst that drove new fans to the ballpark. By 1929, baseball was a big business with big hitters and Ruth had convinced the stiffest of critics that America loved the long ball.

According to William Curran, “the idea often touches off debate on whether the man helped create the time or the time the man.”<sup>455</sup> Curran goes on to say that Ruth did not create the Roaring Twenties, but the decade did not create him, either. Curran says Ruth merely appeared at precisely the right moment. This research proves that the media was on hand to document that moment, thereby successfully communicating the events that would ultimately lead to the evolution of the game throughout the 1920s.

Alternate explanations like boosterism, quantification, record keeping, and general economic growth are also important to consider for the period.

Tim Delaney and Tim Madigan cite a number of aspects that characterize modern sports. Steven Reiss’s concept of boosterism would match well with the New York writers of the 1920s.

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<sup>455</sup> Curran, *Big Sticks*, 56.

According to Reiss, boosterism occurs when sport is used a tool to link the pride of a hometown with the country.<sup>456</sup> Sportswriters perhaps only favored the winning team, whether it was the Giants or the Yankees, thereby promoting either New York team and their respective athletes.

Delaney and Madigan also point out a number of Allen Guttman's seven characteristics of modern sports, which could coincide with the rise in baseball popularity during the decade. Quantification provided the players and the fans alike specific goals to strive toward while the concept of record keeping by baseball scribes during the 1920s mirrored society's idea of progress.<sup>457</sup>

The United States economy basked in seven prosperous years from 1923 until October 24, 1929 (Black Thursday), which signaled the beginning of the Great Depression in The United States.<sup>458</sup> A number of tabloid newspapers like the *New York Daily News* (1919) and general interest magazines like *Time* (1923) began publishing shortly after World War I, all the while looking to capitalize on more advertisers that were hiring movie and sports stars to promote their brands during the postwar boom. Publications like the *Times* and *The Sporting News* may have wished to exploit both Ruth and McGraw's superstar status in an attempt to benefit their bottom line.

Whether it was merely coincidence, a conscious effort to take advantage of the game's biggest stars, or a by-product of the era itself, the research suggests that the press coverage of the Yankees and Giants and the shift in playing styles during the 1920s acted as a savior for the sport in the wake of the Black Sox Scandal and the death of Ray Chapman. Both of the publications as well as the owners were quick to act following these events, and each played a role in the hiring

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<sup>456</sup> Tim Delaney and Tim Madigan, *Sociology of Sports: An Introduction* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 51.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

<sup>458</sup> Seymour, *Golden Age*, 343.

of commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis. The newspapers refocused public attention from scandal and death to the Ruth and McGraw, Live Ball and Deadball debate. The research supports Seymour's claims that "it was Ruth, as much as Judge Landis, who revived public interest in baseball on the muddy heels of the Black Sox scandal and who revolutionized the style of play in the process."<sup>459</sup> In fact, the newly-formed rivalry acted much like the 1998 home run race between Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa which caused sportswriters to claim that game was "saved" following the Major League Baseball work stoppage in 1994.<sup>460</sup>

The media attention of the 1920s would eventually translate to worldwide acclaim for the Yankees, whose style ultimately won out. Today, the Yankees are known as the most successful franchise in sports history, having won 27 World Series titles and 40 pennants in 110 seasons.

The Deadball Era fizzled and the New York Giants, along with the Brooklyn Dodgers, relocated to California following the 1957 season and a bitter court debate. The franchise has won only three world titles since John McGraw retired after the 1932 season.

The Live Ball Era of the 1920s, attended by Babe Ruth and his power hitting accomplices, allowed the Yankees to seize the allegiance of New York fans who, during the Deadball Era, had devoted their love to the Giants. The Live Ball Era Yankees quite literally overpowered the Deadball Era Giants on the field and within the media during the 1920s. The home run, Babe Ruth, the Yankees, and the sportswriters that covered them, all played a critical role in the evolution of the Live Ball Era. Media accounts of the teams and players brought the sport and the newly-emerging Live Ball Era into a larger number of homes than any decade previous to the 1920s. America needed a saving grace following a World War, death on the

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<sup>459</sup> Seymour, *Golden Age*, 433.

<sup>460</sup> Andrew C. Billings, Paul D. Turman, and Michael L. Butterworth, *Communication and Sport: Surveying the Field* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE, 2012), 73.

baseball field and a scandal during the World Series. Ruth and the Yankees successfully furnished that need.

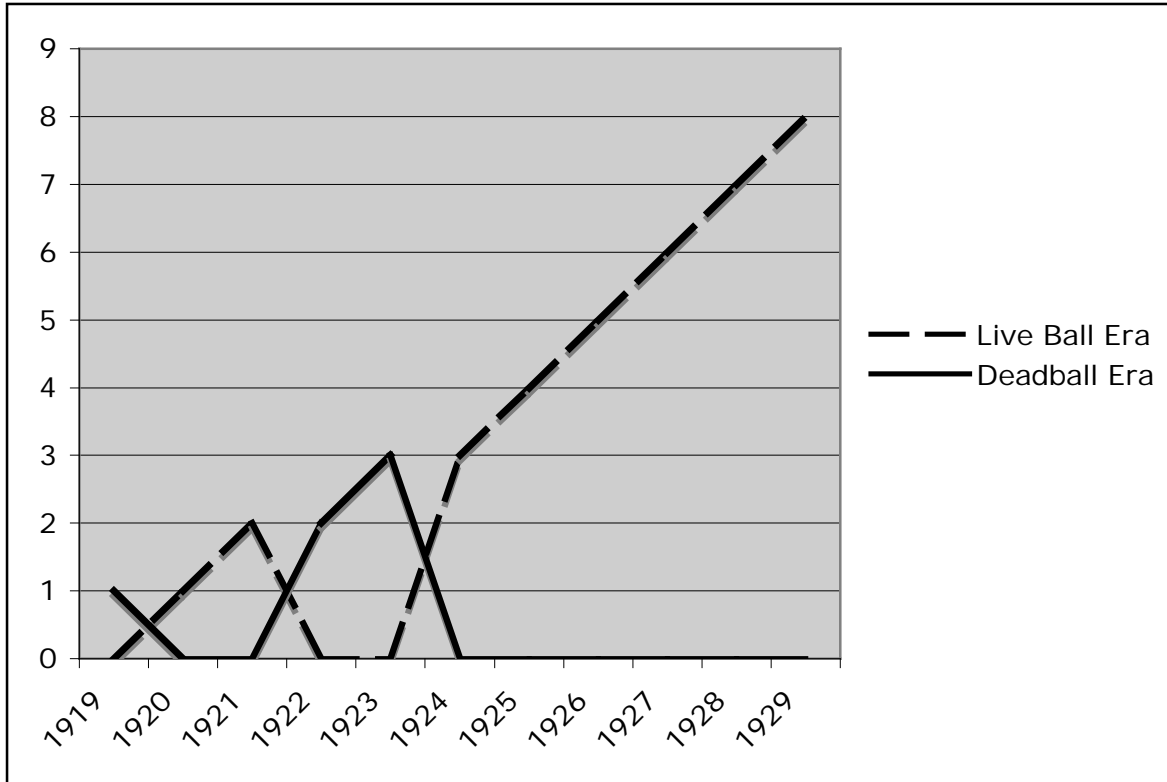
This research provides the following conclusions:

- The press and baseball evolved together during the 1920s.
- The press acted as a sounding board for the Live Ball Era. The game was changing and the press mirrored that change.
- The reporting of the period supports previous research regarding the Gee-Whiz and Aw-Nuts schools of thought.
- The newspaper commentary from the 1920s proves that hitters during the period were attempting to duplicate Ruth's swing, therefore aiding in the rise of the Live Ball Era.
- The newspapers played a role in refocusing public attention to the Babe Ruth vs. John McGraw debate following the Black Sox Scandal in 1919 and the death of Ray Chapman. More research is required to understand just how influential the press may have been to the shift in public opinion following those events.
- While it was a gradual shift that ultimately led to the rise in the Live Ball Era and the decline of the Deadball Era, Babe Ruth successfully altered press opinion about the Live Ball Era in both national and local publications following his performance during the 1923 World Series against John McGraw's New York Giants.

The contrasting styles of each team were reflected within the sports pages of *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News*. The two news publications successfully provided distinct evidence that the game of baseball, in direct correlation with the sporting press, evolved during the 1920s as the Deadball Era Giants yielded to the Live Ball Era Yankees from 1919 to 1929.

## FIGURES

Figure 1



Media Reflection of Live Ball and Deadball Eras During the 1920s

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