

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 27, 2014

Major League Baseball as It Used to Be: I first remember Major League Baseball in the 1930s when the New York Yankees were starting to dominate, as they did for several decades. I always rooted against the Yankees, which meant for the National League team fortunate enough to face them in the World Series. Things were simpler then. All games were afternoon games, all travel between big-league cities was by train, and each league had only eight teams, all east of the Mississippi except those in St. Louis. The season was completely fair, with each team playing each of its seven competitors 11 games at home and 11 games at the competitor's ballpark. There was no Interleague play (except the best-of-seven World Series), no Wild Card teams, and no Division Championships. At the end of the 154-game season, a chart would appear on the sports page, showing how many games were won and lost with each of seven competitors.

Unfortunately, the south and west of the country were left out. The Pacific Coast League, with about eight teams from Vancouver to Southern California, played almost at the major league level. I went to one of those games in Sacramento in 1945 while stationed for a few days at nearby Mather Field. The eastern half of the American League consisted of the Boston Red Sox, the New York Yankees, the Philadelphia Athletics, and the Washington Senators. The western half included the Cleveland Indians, the Detroit Tigers, the Chicago White Sox, and the St. Louis Browns. In the National League, those in the East were the Boston Braves, the New York Giants, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and the Philadelphia Phillies. The western teams in the "National" were the Pittsburgh Pirates, the Cincinnati Reds, the Chicago Cubs, and the St. Louis Cardinals. Even in the American League, the pitcher had to bat, and there was no designated hitter until sometime around 1970.

In the early 1930s, Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics were a dominant team. The team was broken up, supposedly to make the competition more even. After that, the "A's" never did well until the team was relocated to Kansas City and finally to Oakland. The Phillies were a poor team for much of their history, in the same class with the St. Louis Browns and the Boston Braves. When Bob Carpenter bought the Phillies about 1943 and sought the services of former Yankees pitching great Herb Pennock of Kennett Square to help him build a new team, spirits looked up. Establishing the Wilmington Blue Rocks as a farm team, the Phillies improved, and the "Whiz Kids" finally won the pennant in 1950. They lost the Series in four straight games to the mighty Yankees, each game by a one-run margin. It took 30 years before they won the pennant again, but in 1980, they went all the way, first having to win a best-of-five play-off series against the Houston Astros and then defeating the Kansas City Royals, four games to two.

During World War II, we could listen to the afternoon games of the World Series on the radio, and if you went to the movies, short action clips of the games would be shown by Fox Movietone News or one of its competitors. In 1942, the St. Louis Cardinals finally beat the mighty Yankees, losing the first game and winning the next four. In '43, the tables were turned with the Yankees defeating the Cardinals, also four games to one. The 1944 Series was all St. Louis, the Cardinals against the lowly Browns. Some were tight games, but the Cardinals prevailed, four games to two. On Okinawa in 1945, I brought down the wrath of other members of my crew when I told them who won a game while it was progressing. The Armed Services News report had given the score; the game was re-broadcast later (our time zone was 14 hours ahead of where the games were played). The Detroit Tigers won the series four games to three over the Chicago Cubs. In 1946, the Cardinals won against the highly favored Boston Red Sox in seven games with Harry "The Cat" Brecheen winning three of those games. Except when the Phillies were in it, the World Series from World War II to the present time are a blur. At present writing, it appears the 2014 World Series is going back to Kansas City with San Francisco leading, three games to two. I am really not a "dyed-in-the-wool" baseball fan; I have known a lot of them.