

This book proposal came out of a pet project that combined my love for baseball and an obsessive attention to detail. It's dated now, of course, but still a fun read.

The Greatest World Series Never Played

*The All-Time All-Stars of Both Leagues
Face Off in Seven Games*

By

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Introduction

If baseball is the National Pastime, ranking players is the pastime within the pastime. The top 10, the All-Century Team, the 500 club, the Hall of Fame, and on and on. But the top 10, or 100, or 1,000 – what do those arbitrary numbers have to do with the game of baseball, with the pure joy of a day at the ballpark? Ah, but 25 – that’s a roster. And 50 – that’s a game.

Matchups are the soul of baseball. Pitching duels, pennant races, hitters versus pitchers, catchers versus runners, the National League and the American League, the All-Star Game, the World Series – matchups of the best of the best. So why not with rankings? Why not sort the greatest players by league affiliation, just like they do in the All-Star Game and the Series? Field the two best teams you can from the players of every era. Can’t decide between Bench and Berra? Mays and DiMaggio? No need. *They’ll play against each other.*

That’s what this book does. Once we’ve got those rosters set, we wind them up and watch them play in an all-time, all-star, seven-game series. You’ll find Rickey Henderson leading off for the American League, followed by Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth. Pete Rose bats first for the National League, then Honus Wagner and Willie Mays. The abundance of talent actually has Joe DiMaggio warming the bench and Tom Seaver in the bullpen. But everyone gets a chance at being the hero or playing the goat. That’s the magic of a short series.

Could Ted Williams get around on a Randy Johnson fastball? Could Ty Cobb run on Johnny Bench? It might be impossible to compare the eras of the deadball, the juiced ball, the big strike zone, and steroids, and who knows whether it was harder to play in a time of low pay and lousy facilities or in a time of stronger opponents and greater media demands. But here, we can actually watch those matchups play out with equal dashes of inevitability and surprise.

The story reflects many of the legends, quotes, relationships, feats, and face-offs we’ve all heard of – and many we haven’t. After all, there are histories here, old scores waiting to be settled, personalities clashing and meshing. Hank Aaron owned Whitey Ford, but couldn’t touch Jim Palmer. Rogers Hornsby scouted Ted Williams, Williams coached Reggie Jackson, Reggie advises A-Rod. Lou Gehrig despised Giants manager John McGraw for almost losing him his college scholarship. Mike Piazza will once more face Roger Clemens. The names are all familiar. What’s new is the unique situation of an all-time, all-star series, the interplay of the personalities, and the story that unfolds game by game – both on the field and in the clubhouse.

An extensive notes section provides attributions for the quotations, incidents, personalities, and relationships woven through the narrative. Some of the words we hear spoken were actually said by the players they're attributed to, some by other players. Some of the incidents happened in real life just the way they unfold in the story, some are adapted. Some of the relationships are real, some are imagined. But all are true to the spirit of the game and the spirit of the games. Hardcore fans may have fun identifying to whom quotes actually belong, or how a lifelong rivalry has been telescoped down to a single confrontation, or recognizing which play really happened and which is fanciful. Others will be astonished at how rich – and sometimes bizarre – the history really is.

The roster picks were made based on both tangible and intangible criteria, on statistics and achievements as well as things like entertainment value and importance to the game. The rules for inclusion on a team were simple and sensible, and the statistics used for comparison are the ones normal fans care about. A completely new statistical approach has been devised, one which looks at key stats for hitters by at-bat and for pitchers per-inning. This facilitates comparisons across eras, careers, and teams. It also reaffirms – and explodes – assumptions about many players. All this is explained in an appendix that includes the stats, the rankings, discussions of each player, as well as criteria for inclusion in the pool of candidates, what team they're associated with, and much more. So there's something for both stat-heads and more casual fans.

This book began as a hobby, and it's written by a fan, with a fan's perspective. The aim was not to be definitive or authoritative, just to have fun. Getting to know these great players as people, watching them form friendships and grudges, feeling for them when they fail, cheering when they succeed, grinding it out between those white lines for an edge in this all-time, all-star series, has been a pleasure.

Of course, it goes the full seven games. This is, after all, the greatest World Series that was never played.

The Rosters

	American League	National League
<i>Catcher</i>	Yogi Berra	Johnny Bench
<i>First Base</i>	Lou Gehrig	Pete Rose
<i>Second Base</i>	Eddie Collins	Rogers Hornsby
<i>Shortstop</i>	Derek Jeter	Honus Wagner
<i>Third Base</i>	George Brett	Mike Schmidt
<i>Left Field</i>	Rickey Henderson	Stan Musial
<i>Center Field</i>	Ty Cobb	Willie Mays
<i>Right Field</i>	Babe Ruth	Hank Aaron
<i>Bench</i>	Mickey Cochrane	Mike Piazza
	Jimmie Foxx	Willie McCovey
	Hank Greenberg	Johnny Mize
	Ted Williams	Joe Morgan
	Joe DiMaggio	Duke Snider
	Mickey Mantle	Frank Robinson
	Tris Speaker	Mel Ott
	Al Kaline	Roberto Clemente
<i>Rotation</i>	Walter Johnson	Christy Mathewson
	Randy Johnson	Sandy Koufax
	Pedro Martinez	Bob Gibson
	Lefty Grove	Warren Spahn
<i>Bullpen</i>	Ed Walsh	Pete Alexander
	Whitey Ford	Tom Seaver
	Jim Palmer	Mordecai Brown
	Roger Clemens	Steve Carlton
	Mariano Rivera	John Smoltz
<i>Manager</i>	Joe McCarthy	John McGraw

Brief Synopsis

The teams face each other in Yankee Stadium and Dodger Stadium, the two iconic arenas. They view this as an All-Star Game, basically a few days off with pay, fun and meaningless. They get to know each other in the clubhouses, at batting practice, in the dugouts and bullpens. They get to know their managers, John McGraw, skipper of the New York Giants and winner of 10 pennants and three Series, tough, dictatorial, a professor of aggressive, creative, winner-take-all, no-holds-barred baseball. And Joe McCarthy, the Yankees manager of Murderers' Row, winner of nine pennants and seven championships, an aloof but demanding father figure, master psychologist, and master tactician. We find out through the players how they got chosen, how they feel about their spot in the lineup – or on the bench – and about each other.

McCarthy and his Yankees-dominated lineup take this series lightly and winning for granted. McGraw looks at it as war, driving his players hard, and by the middle of the first game they are already beginning to despise him. They lose, 7-2. The second game is a pitching duel in which the only run scored is a first-pitch homer by Henderson. Koufax pitches a four-hitter and still loses, 1-0. Looks like a cakewalk for the American League.

Before, during, and after the games, the players fraternize (a breakfast eating faceoff between Ruth and Foxx), theological discussions alternating with spitball tips in the bullpens, a running pool on the day's game overseen by inveterate gamblers Rose and Hornsby, and a constant debate between Piazza and Ott over which era was best (they each think the others' peers were the best).

At Dodger Stadium, Cobb tears a gash in Morgan's leg sliding into second, drawing McGraw from the dugout and into a fight with Cobb, defending his player. McGraw's arm is broken, but the sentiment on the club has changed: they're going to win it for this guy. They chase the starter and beat the Americans, 8-3. McCarthy pulls a rabbit out of his hat and puts Ruth in to pitch for game 4 (he was the top lefty one year and some of his Series pitching records stood for half a century). A furious debate arises over whether it's allowed, and which Ruth will be playing: the pitcher who wasn't yet the slugger, or the slugger who hadn't pitched for years. The Nationals chase Ruth and win, 5-4, tying the series.

In the fifth game, a fight and a brushback pitch put everyone on edge, but Mathewson won't retaliate. In the eighth inning, the Nationals, leading 4-1, load the bases with two out, threatening to blow the game open. Jeter makes an eye-popping play that quashes the rally but breaks his ankle. He inspires the Americans, who go on to win, 5-4. After the game, the clubhouse gets heated with recriminations about Mathewson's team spirit, and McGraw defends his favorite pitcher.

Game 6 is back at Yankee Stadium. Many of the players (and one manager) are injured, but playing through it; Jeter's on crutches. More brushbacks, warnings, and ejections. Each team is grinding it out, taking this series very seriously. The Nationals win 3-2, once again tying it up.

The atmosphere for Game 7 is electric – no one wants to go home a loser. The umps warn everyone about brushbacks, beanballs, etc. All the players are at the top of their game, and the score seesaws. McGraw and McCarthy pull all the stops out with their benches and bullpens. After going ahead in the ninth, McGraw calls on Mathewson to hold the lead in the tenth on two days' rest. But the Americans load the bases, and McGraw wants to know if the pitcher can get the outs they need. Mathewson assures him yes, but after the fifth game Mathewson had admitted he lied in a similar situation – he'd gotten the outs he needed, but it was on fumes and luck. McGraw decides to bring in Koufax: he loves Mathewson, but he loves winning more. Koufax gets two outs, then faces Gehrig for the final showdown...

Excerpts

Second game, top of the 8th inning, 2 outs

Koufax looks like he's gotten stronger as the game has gone on, dispatching Berra on a groundout and Henderson with a strikeout. Now Cobb is up.

"Hey, Hans – you think bunt or swing?" Hornsby calls to Wagner.

"You cannot outguess this man," the shortstop calls back in his thick German accent. "But you can beat him." Hornsby shrugs, he knows the Pirates beat the Tigers in '09 and Wagner outhit and outstole Cobb. "Pete, Smitty!" he calls to the corner infielders. "Look alive in case he's bunting."

"Thanks for the heads up, Raj!" Rose yells back. "Is a bunt where he just kind of holds his bat out?"

Schmidt laughs – they're getting tired of Hornsby's helpful hints.

Cobb steps up to the batter's box. "Hey, dago, I'm running on you."

Piazza doesn't look up. Koufax turns from rubbing up the ball and toes the rubber, waiting for Cobb to step into the box. But instead, Cobb looks over at Ruth in the on-deck circle.

"Hey, George! You ever face this guy?"

"How the hell could I have faced him? Use your head, Cobb!"

"Oh, right. He played much later, didn't he?"

Piazza looks back at the umpire. "Could we play ball here?"

"Let's go, batter up."

Cobb looks at the ump. "Sorry, sorry, didn't mean to hold anything up." He steps into the box, holds his bat up, turns to the mound, then quietly: "Did I tell you I was running on you, dago?" Still, Piazza says nothing, just runs his signs, and sets his target.

Koufax winds up, and throws – and Cobb steps out and turns away.

"Strike!"

"Hey, George! He pitches like Smokey Joe Wood, doesn't he?"

"Get back in the box," the umpire yells.

“Sorry, sorry, it’s just he reminded me of someone.” Cobb gets set again, but Wagner has called time. He runs to the mound.

“Sandy, ignore this man, he is just trying to upset you.”

“Get back to your position,” Koufax snaps. “I’ll take care of him.” He toes the rubber, winds, and delivers. As he does, Cobb steps forward and chokes way up on the bat, meeting a curveball at eye level and directing it on a bounce halfway down the third base line. Schmidt yells for it and races in, snagging it barehanded, flipping across the diamond, but not in time to get Cobb.

Rose throws the ball back to Koufax and yells across to Hornsby, “I think he was bunting!”

Now Ruth steps up to the plate. “Afternoon, Mike.”

Piazza looks up at him. “Afternoon, Mr. Ruth.”

“Jeez, don’t call me that, makes me feel like my father!”

Cobb stands on first, and yells to Piazza, “Hey, dago, I’m going on the first pitch!”

Ruth looks out at him. “How about letting me swing first!”

Cobb laughs. Rose turns to him.

“Why don’t you shut up? You wanna run, run.”

“What’s that, caveman? They taught you to speak?”

“Can’t you just enjoy the game?”

“Sure, if I want to be a loser.” He takes a lead of a couple of strides.

“I’ve got three rings, how many’ve you got?”

Cobb, leaning over, inching toward second, doesn’t answer, but his squint becomes tighter. Suddenly, Koufax wheels and throws to first, Cobb dives back in, and Rose slaps Cobb’s head with his glove.

“Oops.”

Rose throws the ball back to Koufax, and Cobb stands and dusts himself off.

Wagner steps over to Hornsby, talking behind his glove. “If he steals, I will take the throw – he likes to come in low.” Hornsby nods.

Cobb takes his lead. “Hey, Jew! Let’s hurry things up here!” Koufax sets, looks over, looks back in...

“Cobb!” Ruth throws his bat down. Cobb has made a sudden move down the basepath, prompting Koufax to whirl, ready to throw to first. But Cobb skitters back to first, having spotted Wagner taking a step to second: now he knows who’s covering.

Ruth picks up his bat. “It’s a damn circus out here, huh Mike?”

“Yup.”

Ruth gets set again, way back in the batter’s box, his feet together, bat high over his head. Koufax also sets again, looks over to first base, looks back in – and throws a strike to first. Again, Rose slap-tags Cobb, but again, he’s back in time. Cobb gets up, dusts himself off, and without looking at Rose says, “You do that again, I’ll break that hand.”

Again, everyone gets set. Again, Koufax whirls and throws to first –

“COBB!”

Cobb is already on his way to second. Rose snares the ball, pivots and throws to second. But Cobb is coming in standing up, his eyes on the Dutchman’s eyes as he races toward him. At the last moment, he dives to the left, the ball hits off the edge of Wagner’s glove, and Cobb slaps at the base as his legs slide by. Hornsby scoops up the ball. Cobb calls time to brush himself off.

Wagner mutters to Hornsby, “This man is the devil himself. He watched my eyes and blocked me from seeing the ball.”

Hornsby throws the ball to Koufax, who has stepped off the mound toward second. The pitcher calls over to Cobb. “I don’t like being shown up.”

“What’s that, Jew? Gotta speak up.”

“You do that again, and you’re going down next time up.”

“Thanks for the warning, Jew.”

Koufax looks at him for a moment, his black eyes sizing Cobb up. Then he returns to the mound.

“Hey, dago! You ready for that long throw to third?” Piazza, crouching, takes a bit of dirt in his fingers, lets it go, says nothing.

Cobb, a few feet off second, looks over at Schmidt. “How about you, beer boy? Ready for me?”

Ruth steps forward in the batter’s box. “Dammit! You’re taking the bat out of my hands!”

“So swing, you fat baboon! I’m coming home either way!”

Ruth shakes his head, gets set in the box, Koufax sets and winds –

“COBB!!”

Cobb is off to third. Piazza springs up and fires the ball to Schmidt. But the throw is wide and pulls him off the bag. Cobb flies right by, never intending to stop, and heads home. Piazza flips his mask off and parks himself on the third base line, three feet from home plate. Schmidt fires the ball home. Piazza catches the ball an instant before Cobb barrels into him, shoulder first, but the catcher meets his momentum with a powerful thrust of his own shoulder, and it’s as if Cobb has hit concrete. He bounces off, landing on his back a few feet away.

Ruth slams his bat down, and stalks back to the dugout. The fielders slap their gloves and run in.

Piazza stands, steps toward Cobb, and looks down at him.

“You’re out.”

He drops the ball next to a still blinking Cobb and walks to the dugout.

Before Game 5

In the American League clubhouse, players were already getting ready for the game. The room was quiet save for some muffled conversation. The Dodger-blue carpeting absorbed the sounds of the cleats of those players who'd put them on, but it was more than that: no one liked dropping two games in a row, and spirits were subdued. At his locker, Williams buttoned his jersey slowly, his hawk eyes watching himself in his mirror as he did so.

"Be nice to show Mathewson up again," he said to no one in particular.

Next to him, Foxx was working diligently on a knot in his shoelace. "Don't much care to show anyone up. I'd be happy to just to get in again, knock a coupla guys home. Jumpin' Jesus, I can't get this thing out." He yanked on the shoelace from both directions and a loud pop could be heard as the shoelace tore through the eyeholes. He looked down at the damaged shoe in his hand. "Well, *now* what?"

A sudden bump and a loud giggle from around the corner made them both look up. Mantle and Ford, wearing white lab coats and carrying test tubes, rounded the corner and stopped in the middle of the room.

"Dr. Flugelhoffer!" yelled Ford, in a terrible Austrian accent.

"Ya, Dr. Blumenbaumenbaum!" Mantle's accent was even worse.

"Not Blumenbaumenbaum, you moron," Ford stage-whispered. "Just Blumenbaum." They clearly wanted to draw a crowd, and had drawn one.

"Ya, Dr. Just-Blumenbaum!" The shoulders of both men shook as they fought off the giggles.

"I see you have today's soil sample, Dr. Flugelhoffer."

"Ya, I just take it from in front of home plate."

Some of the players watching from their lockers nudged one another, glancing at Williams to see his reaction. Williams betrayed no emotion at all as he eyed the show.

"Have you tested the soil, Dr. Flugelhoffer?"

"Ya, and it is perfect for hitting slow grounders to shortstop."

The room broke up, laughter booming off the walls. Randy Johnson hit his head on the top of his locker, continued laughing as he squinted in pain and rubbed his scalp.

“Hey, they got your number, Teddy boy!” Cobb shouted viciously at Williams. Williams’ head snapped to where Cobb was standing, arms folded, a malicious smile on the Georgian’s face – Williams’ slight the day before clearly still rankled. Then he looked back at Mantle and Ford, his face tensing, saying nothing.

“Quiet down!” Grove glared at them, standing at his locker in only his underwear, street clothes in hand.

Ford looked at Grove in surprise, then appraisingly up and down. “Does ze patient want to give us a sample of his own? I see you are dressed for it.”

Again, the room broke up.

“I said, quiet!” Grove roared. “A man can’t think.”

Foxx stood up. “Boys, let it go.” He leaned over to Mantle and Ford, trying to signal with his eyes. “Lefty gets a little wound up before he pitches.”

“It’s only an all-star game, buddy,” said Ford. “Just trying to have a little fun.”

Grove gripped his street clothes as though he might pitch them at Ford. “There’s nothing funny about an all-star game and there’s nothing funny about baseball.”

Mantle let off a low whistle. “Seems to me you could use some of Dr. Flugelhoffer’s Tension Tonic.”

The watching players chuckled, then looked back at Grove, hoping to see him take the bait.

Cochrane stepped over to him. “Lefty, take it easy. Let’s go over our signals.”

“Tell them to shut up.”

“Sure, sure.”

Ford and Mantle bowed to each other and shook hands.

“Goodnight, Dr. Flugelhoffer.”

“Goodnight, Dr. Blumen-justin-baumen.”

“I SAID SHUT UP!” Grove leaped at them but was stopped in mid-air as Foxx and Cochrane grabbed him from front and back. “LET ME GO!”

Mantle and Ford laughed, watching Grove’s increasingly red face, his slit eyes actually bulging, arms flailing helplessly as he was held in place by his two big friends. Mantle thumbed his nose at him and Ford stuck out his tongue. Grove snarled and struggled harder. Across his writhing body, Foxx looked calmly at Cochrane.

“How many times you reckon we had to do this on the A’s, Mike?”

“Lost count, Beast. Let’s cool him off in the whirlpool.”

As they carried him out of the room, Mantle ran over and snapped Grove’s underwear from behind. A howl of rage was heard as they left the room. The players laughed and clapped, and Mantle and Ford headed to their lockers, taking off their white coats. The hubbub of the room reached normal levels, as the rest of the players trickled in, small talk and jibes were traded, the bad mood broken.

Before Game 6

DiMaggio and Jeter sat in a corner of the clubhouse, conferring quietly with Rivera and Greenberg. The group nodded, seeming to have reached consensus on something. DiMaggio looked up at Berra.

“Yogi, come here.”

Berra got up from his locker, came over to the group.

“What?”

“We think someone should say something to Lou.”

“People say something to Lou all the time.”

“No,” said Jeter. “About – you know, what happened.”

“Why, what happened?”

“To *him*,” Jeter said. “ALS. The speech. Everything.”

Greenberg leaned down to Berra, a full foot shorter than him, his sad, serious eyes reading sympathy for his rival. “It’s the elephant in the corner, Yogi. People are walking on eggshells around him, and I think it’s making him nervous. You saw what happened the other day.”

“It’s not fair to him,” added Jeter, “and it’s costing us on the field.”

Yogi stole a look at Gehrig, who was lacing up his shoes, lost in thought.

“You’re probably right. Someone should say something. Get it out of the way.”

DiMaggio winked at him. “Good for you. Start out real conversational.”

“Me?!”

“Yes,” replied DiMaggio. “We all think you should do it.”

“Why me?”

“ ’Cause you’re a nice guy. I can’t do that heart-to-heart stuff. And you’re a Yankee. And a good talker.”

“People only think I’m a good talker because they don’t know what I’m talking about.”

“Exactly,” said Jeter.

“Yogi,” Rivera spoke for the first time. “Look at thees.” He showed Berra his glove. It had been inscribed in marker, “Phil. 4:13.”

“Who’s Phil?”

“Not Phil, Yogi. Philleepians. ‘I can do all theengs through Christ, who strengthens me.’ Talk to Lou. God will help you. He helps me.”

Berra looked around at the group’s faces. They were serious.

“Okay.”

He turned to walk back to his locker, passing Henderson, who was now taking his naked cuts in front of the full-length mirror. “Who’s the best? Who’s the best?”

The squat catcher sat down at his locker next to Gehrig, who sat on his stool, flipping through a magazine.

“Say, Lou.”

“Huh?” Gehrig looked up. “Hey, Yogi.”

“Good magazine?”

“I don’t know, I wasn’t really paying attention.”

“I know how it is.”

There was a long pause. Berra glanced at the group of players who had given him this task. They were casually not looking his way. Then he caught DiMaggio’s eye, who urged him on with a nod. Berra scratched his ear, tried again.

“Lou, there’s something I always wanted to tell you.”

“What’s that?”

“I mean, not just me. All the guys. I don’t think there’s a guy here isn’t rooting for you.”

“That’s a nice thing to say, Yogi. I appreciate it. I think we have a nice bunch of fellows on the team.”

“Right.” Yogi took a breath. “And you know, we all thought you got a bad break with that ALS.”

There was a pause, as the words hung in the air. Gehrig looked at Yogi, his expression impossible to read. Then he looked down at his shoes. After a moment, he nodded, almost to himself, then looked up at Yogi, opened his mouth to speak.

“I had some bad ALCS’s too!” It was Henderson, still in front of the mirror, bat cocked over his shoulder. “The Series was my game. Those ALCS’s were nasty.”

Berra regarded Henderson, dumbfounded. Gehrig seemed puzzled. Jeter, DiMaggio, Rivera, and Greenberg stood open-mouthed.

“Naaa-sty.”

Yogi looked from Henderson to Gehrig and back again, then scowled.

“Not ALCS! ALS.”

“Huh?”

“*ALS*,” Yogi bit out, trying to will Henderson to understand, glancing nervously at Gehrig. This was going all wrong.

“What the hell is that? And why should Rickey care?” He took another swing. “Who’s the best? Rickey is the best!”

“ALS!” yelled Yogi, “Lou Gehrig’s disease!”

The clubhouse went quiet. Rickey stopped swinging. He looked at Yogi.

“Oh.”

Everyone froze. Could Yogi really have just yelled that? They’d all been carefully avoiding the subject, keeping it in the shadows, and now here it was under a spotlight in the middle of the room. Still, nobody moved. Tension crawled on every skin, seemed to slowly fill up the room, suck the air out of it. No one could bear to look at Gehrig, they dreaded to see how the Iron Horse was taking this.

After an eternity, he cleared his throat.

“Um, what’s ALCS?”

No one answered. The silence seemed unbreakable. Gehrig looked around. Finally, Jeter stepped forward.

“It’s the playoffs. American League Championship Series.”

Gehrig let this register. Then, “Oh.”

Still, no one moved.

Suddenly, Gehrig chuckled.

“ALCS, ALS. For godsake, Rickey,” said Gehrig, laughing, “what kind of idiot are you?”

“Hey, Rickey don’t do spelling!” and he laughed too.

This broke up Gehrig even more and he and Henderson started laughing in earnest. The other players looked at each other, amazed and not a little relieved. Gehrig and Henderson became hysterical.

“The damn thing killed me,” Gehrig snorted, pointing at Rickey and almost falling off his stool.

Henderson, bent over, leaning on the mirror, hands on his knees to support himself, cackled, “And it’s killin’ me!”

That sent the two into greater paroxysms of laughter, now completely unable to speak. Others were laughing too, mostly at this bizarre exchange and the camaraderie of least likely comrades. Gehrig’s distinctive high-pitched laugh could be heard above all. After a few minutes, Gehrig and Henderson got control of themselves, wiped their eyes, took a few deep breaths, shook their heads.

Gehrig looked around at the rest of the team. “Don’t worry about it, fellas. I had a good run. I knew it couldn’t last.”

Henderson walked over to him, put his fist out. Gehrig looked at it quizzically for a moment, then with an “ah” of recognition, bumped Henderson’s fist with his own.

“Hey,” said Henderson, “you’ll get ‘em today.”

Gehrig smiled, nodded, and Henderson moved off.

Near the food table on the other side of the clubhouse, Ruth had been watching. He turned to Brett, standing next to him.

“The kid was always like that. Everything going so great for him, he was always waiting for something bad to happen. Guess he was right. Great roommate, though. Didn’t snore and could sleep on a meat hook.”

Seventh game, series tied, National League ahead 9-7, bottom of the 10th, men on first and second

Ball four and Henderson jumps out of his crouch and trots toward first, the potential winning run. Brett and Berra both move up. Mathewson just stands on the mound, rubbing up the ball, always working quickly, next batter, next batter. But McGraw pops out of the dugout, calling for time, and walks to the mound.

“This oughta be good,” says Rose and jogs in. Berra, standing on second, smiles in spite of himself at Rose’s exuberance.

Bench and the other infielders also make their way to the mound, where the Little Napoleon stands face-to-face with his pitcher, conducting an intimate conversation in front of 55,000 eavesdroppers.

“Can you get these guys?”

“I can get ‘em.”

“Matty, tell me the truth. Have you got it? Can you do it?” Mathewson puts his hands on his hips.

In the on-deck circle, Collins, shifting his weight from foot to foot, forever antsy, talks to Ruth, who leans casually on his bat as though it’s a spring training game.

“What do you think, Babe?”

“Beats me. McGraw loves Matty, but he loves winning even more.”

“They’ve got Superjew throwing. Any other day, I think I’d rather face Matty, but a pitcher on no days’ rest? Could be.”

“Just do me a favor, Cocky.”

“Yeah?”

“Don’t drive in more’n two runs.”

“Why?”

“It’ll leave me something to do.”

Collins laughs. “I’ll see what I can do.”

On the mound, McGraw stands almost nose-to-nose with Mathewson. “Can you do it?”

Mathewson’s hard blue eyes fix on McGraw’s. “I’ll get ‘em for you, Mac.”

McGraw’s jaw sets, his mind working furiously. All his brains don’t make a bit of difference now. It’s gut all the way.

The infielders gathered at the mound are silent, nothing they can say will help, anything they say might be a distraction. Musial, Mays, and Aaron, standing together, look in from the outfield, feeling far away from the action, anxious to get going, get some outs, just avoid mistakes. At his place at the center of his bench, McCarthy stares out at the scene, arms folded as always, the Sphinx, impossible to read. There are no more stratagems to deploy, no psychology necessary, just a little patience, just a little impossible, excruciating patience.

McGraw shifts his gaze from Matty's, looks around the field, trying to calculate the incalculatable. The game, the Series, is on the line. The winning run's on first. The lead is in his favor. His favorite pitcher – his best friend – is on the mound, the fair-haired boy of baseball, a man who would never admit defeat, certainly not now... He looks at Mathewson again, that famous poker face revealing nothing, waiting, waiting.

Then McGraw turns away, and touches his left arm: bring in Koufax.

The noise in the stadium jumps a level. Schmidt and Hornsby exchange a glance and Bench looks away. McGraw doesn't look at his pitcher. He walks slowly back to the dugout, his face grim, and sits down, staring out at the scoreboard.

Mathewson stands on the mound, impassive, watching McGraw go. He finally drops the ball into Bench's glove and walks back to the dugout, sitting at the other end, watching Koufax begin his warm-ups, never looking at McGraw.

Perhaps both men are thinking: maybe winning will make it all better.

Koufax finishes warming up. His conversation with Bench was brief: "You call 'em, I'll throw 'em."

The fielders are back in position. The runners stand on their bases till the home plate umpire yells "play" and they take a step or two off. Not too far – no one's running on the pitch with no outs and nowhere to put 'em.

Collins steps back into the batter's box and goes through his usual routine, tugging on his cap, hitching his pants up, tapping the plate with his bat, finally ready – Koufax leaning in all the while, waiting. Bench puts down the sign, Koufax rocks and delivers, and Collins, clearly going after the first pitch, punches a liner that arcs foul of the third base line. Hornsby, playing close to hold the runner, launches himself at the crack of the bat and gloves the ball a foot off the ground, his body stretched impossibly. All four runners are stunned. The stadium erupts. The National players in the dugout pump their fists and yell.

“Attaway, Rajah baby!” Rose yells across the din.

Hornsby picks himself up and throws the ball back to Koufax, who points to him: you. Hornsby nods back, gets himself set, and glances at Schmidt who gives him a shrug and disdainful look: routine. Hornsby smiles and looks in.

Ruth’s up now, taking his time before stepping in. He looks around at his House, soaking up the noise, the flashes popping like the twinkling of stars, the big stage. Gehrig on deck smiles to himself: you gotta love the Big Monkey. Ruth taps his big bat on the plate and holds it aloft, his feet together in that odd, cramped stance. Strike one, a fastball, rising to the letters. Then a ball, low and away, the same place Seaver put it when he caught Ruth swinging. This time he isn’t going for it. Koufax sets, rocks, then drives to the plate, and Ruth swings, connecting with the ball with a sound like gunfire, and watches it fly toward deep center field. Everyone seems frozen watching the flight of the ball – Ruth at home, the runners waiting to see if it’s gone, all except Mays, who appeared to be already running when the ball was hit. But it’s not the gargantuan swat the Stadium wanted, it’s a just a fly ball that Mays has actually come back in on to give himself the momentum for a javelin throw to home that chases Brett back to third.

Ruth kicks the dirt and walks back to the dugout. “Up to you, Biscuit Pants!” he says as he passes Gehrig.

Koufax had nodded when Mays snagged the ball and held the runner. Two down, just one more to go. Yet no one watching isn’t thinking the same thing: those were no strikeouts, they were good wood on the ball. Koufax has pitched with little rest before, but two days in a row? Even if it was only a few innings? He’s got to be hurting. And there are bodies in the pen, better rested. Is one more batter a batter too many? But McGraw still sits, so uncharacteristically quiet, staring grimly out at the field, making no moves.

Gehrig steps into the batter’s box, twists his left foot into the dirt as though he’d like to screw it in place. Bench puts down his sign, and the pitcher winds and delivers. It’s a huge, looping curve that Gehrig swings through with such force that he almost staggers. He steps out and just stares at Koufax. Now the onlookers share a crazy thought: could it be he’s overmatched? Koufax could be untouchable. Is he now?

The count goes to 3-2. It has all come down to this.

And quite suddenly, the stadium goes quiet.

No one is sitting, every hand grips a scorecard or a railing or a neighbor's hand. The vendors have put down their crates. Every eye is on the pitcher or the batter, or nervously looking from one to the other. Even the Bleacher Creatures are silent, straining with the intensity of the moment. In this cathedral of the sport, it is an unsurpassed instant of agonizing rapture. There are no words. It has all come down to this. After six games, nine and two-thirds innings, countless clutch hits, spectacular strikeouts, astonishing catches, injuries, pranks, gaffes, a brushback war, and military-like bonding, it has all come down to this. Lou Gehrig at the plate, holding his deadly bat on one shoulder, his face a mask of grim determination, his body tensed to uncoil, the greatest post-season hitter of all time, crusher of more grand slams than any other player, a man who has lived to drive in runs, now with the chance to do it one more time. And Sandy Koufax, staring in at his catcher, his face a study of shrewd intensity, methodically rotating the ball in his hand behind him, pushing the stitching with his thumb, then two fingers, then thumb, then two fingers. He shakes off the sign, then another, then finally a nod, and he squares.

He has chosen his out pitch. The pitcher with all those no-hitters, all those winning seasons, the eye-popping strikeouts, the postseason domination, a man who once stared down an entire team – yet without a win this series to show for all his efforts. He has chosen his out pitch.

Baseball is a game of last-moment exaltation and crushed hopes, of vindication and redemption. The pitchers in the bullpens know this as they peer through the chain links at the tableau across the field, their fingers white-knuckled as they hang on the fence.

Alexander whispers a prayer, and Seaver steals him a look.

“Time for everything,” Alexander mutters and turns back to the field.

The players in both dugouts know it too, as they strain against the railing, willing the action to proceed, to go their way.

“Come on, Lou,” breathes Jeter, shifting his weight off the cast on his foot.

“Get this guy,” murmurs Mathewson, across the diamond, “show ‘em your stuff.”

At the plate, Gehrig waggles his bat slightly. Crouched behind him, Bench adjusts his footing. At second base, Rose pounds his glove. The runners dig in. The infielders lean over. On the mound, Koufax raises his glove above his head, and the stadium hold its breath. He

kicks his leg high, rears back, his front foot lands, his arm follows through, the ball hurtles to the plate, Gehrig starts his swing...

In a flash it is over. The winners scream and jump in the air. The losers stand frozen, unbelieving. One team swarms in to embrace each other in a mass of jubilation. The other slumps in place, or begins the long walk to the clubhouse, eyeing with disbelief and envy and disgust their celebrating opponents.

Baseball is about vindication and redemption, yes, and it is about how you play the game and the beauty of practiced professionals executing marvelous feats for the entertainment of the fans. But most of all it is about winning and losing. And so often it is about the fine, the oh so achingly fine, line between the two. The winners who have won and the losers who have lost have this in common: they know that this at-bat, this pitch, this inning, this game, this season – once they are over, they belong to the record books, and baseball goes on, with or without them, next year and the year after that.

Notes to Seventh Game Excerpt (Sample)

Mathewson pitching quickly

“In the box, Matty wastes no time or surplus energy, and he pitches as soon as a batter takes his place at the plate.”

“Pitchers I Have Faced, by Eddie Collins,” *American Magazine*, July, 1914

McGraw/Mathewson showdown

In Game 3 of the 1996 World Series, bottom of the sixth, David Cone had just loaded the bases, and manager Joe Torre visited him on the mound:

“ ‘This is very important,’ Torre said, staring into Cone’s gray-blue eyes, searching for honesty. ‘I need the truth. How do you feel?’ Again Cone told his manager he was fine and revealed that his slider had abandoned him, but he had enough other choices. With all the John Wayne-ish conviction he could muster, Cone locked on his manager and said, ‘I’ll get this guy for you.’

“That was not enough for Torre, who appealed one more time for the truth. ‘Don’t B.S. me,’ he said.

“Cone still did not flinch, never losing eye contact. ‘I can get him. I can get out of this inning.’

“Satisfied, Torre responded, ‘Okay, go get ‘em.’

...

“ ‘It was a lie,’ Cone says of his side of the conversation with Torre. ‘But you have to trick yourself into believing you can get Fred McGriff out in that situation. Because if you don’t believe it, what are you doing out there?’ ”

Birth of a Dynasty, Joel Sherman

Collins on deck

“He was a nervous, edgy man... couldn’t sit still.”

The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract, Bill James

Koufax’s nickname

Koufax was called “Superjew” by his teammates.

Jews and Baseball, Vol. II, Burton Boxerman and Benita Boxerman

Outfielders’ nerves

Kirby Puckett on playing center field in the bottom of the ninth of the seventh game of the 1987 World Series:

“For the first and last time in my career I was pleading that the ball *not* be hit to me. I was terrified I’d make the critical mistake.”

I Love this Game, Kirby Puckett

McCarthy in the dugout

“He was still the frosty-eyed, all-seeing, silent Buddha. He sat on the bench, an empty space on either side of him, more unapproachable than ever.”

“The Lost Yankee,” *Time Magazine*, April 5, 1948

Collins at bat

“I go through habitual movements, fix my cap, hitch my trousers, tap the plate, and I am accustomed to do these things as I wait for the pitcher to wind up.”

“Pitchers I Have Faced, by Eddie Collins,” *American Magazine*, July, 1914

Gehrig referring to Ruth as “the Big Monkey”

“What do you think of the nerve of that big monkey? Calling his shot and getting away with it?”

Lou Gehrig, quoted in *Baseball: An Illustrated History*, Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns

Ruth calling Gehrig “Biscuit Pants”

List of Yankee player nicknames. (This particular nickname was a jibe at Gehrig’s large posterior.)

Big Book of Baseball Lineups, Rob Neyer

Full Synopsis

Game 1

National League	American League
SS Wagner	LF Henderson
CF Mays	CF Cobb
RF Aaron	RF Ruth
2B Hornsby	1B Gehrig
LF Musial	DH DiMaggio
DH Ott	2B Collins
3B Schmidt	SS Jeter
C Bench	3B Brett
1B Rose	C Berra
P Mathewson	P W. Johnson

Yankee Stadium, hours before the game, as quiet as a sunrise. A single player appears from the dugout, hikes himself up on to the railing, and sits, perched, surveying the field, the stands, the sky. A groundskeeper begins to work a patch of grass out in left field. A stadium worker fixes a seat in the bleachers beyond center field. A few other players emerge, the early risers, the overprepared, the ones who treat every game, even an all-star game, as the *only* game. Hornsby, Williams, Gibson, a few others. They're checking out conditions on the field: what's the dirt like in front of home plate, is it hard or soft? Is the wind blowing in or out? Is the grass high enough to slow down a groundball? Some know each other (Hornsby scouted Williams, Rose and Jeter were on the All-Century Team together), or are just meeting, or, in Gibson's case, have no interest in fraternizing, not even for an All-Star game, or All-Star Series, as the case may be.

They talk about this series. Attitudes differ: a couple of guys say they're honored to be on the teams, a couple feel it's a foregone conclusion, but all of them are happy there's baseball to be played. Williams has done his homework on the opposing pitchers and seems fixated on it, Hornsby just wants to talk baseball of any kind. Joe McCarthy, skipper of the American League team, breaks up the discussion: I've got 10 rules posted in the clubhouse, and one of them is no fraternizing, even for an All-Star game. Gibson gives a damn-right look and walks off. Jeter and Rose wink at each other and head off to their dugouts. Superstars all, many of them millionaires, but the manager is still the manager.

In the clubhouses a little later, almost everyone has arrived. Pregame rituals are as varied as the players. In the American clubhouse, Lou Gehrig sits quietly beside his locker, deep in thought, what modern players call "getting into the zone," what used to be called "shy." A naked Rickey Henderson stands before a full-length mirror, taking cuts with a bat and declaring, "Rickey's the best! Rickey's the best!" In the National's clubhouse, Christy Mathewson and Warren Spahn battle it out on a checkerboard. Mike Piazza reads a Civil War buffs magazine. Several players gather around a wall where everyone's stats have been posted. There's a little bit of awe, a little trash-talking. Someone explains the criteria for inclusion on

the teams: only MLB players (meaning no Negro Leagues players; they agree it's a shame – Satchel Paige once struck out Hornsby five times in an exhibition game – but the stats are too unreliable), at least 10 seasons at the position, 100 games a season. Someone says to Rose, “Hey, Pete, no offense, but Keith Hernandez was the best first baseman ever.” Rose says, “It’s not the best first baseman, it’s the best player who ever *played* first base. And I took second, right, and left, too.” “Well, you weren’t the best at those either!” Roger Clemens says half his stats are missing. Evidently, the years he was said to be using steroids don’t count, and that’s why Barry Bonds isn’t on the team. Clemens flips out, throwing things around. Babe Ruth comes over, asking what’s all the ruckus. Clemens screams that they’ve stolen half his stats! Ruth hears about the steroids issue and roars, “If I coulda hit two hundred dingers in a season, I’d’ve stuck the needle in my butt myself!”

We meet John McGraw, the manager of the New York Giants when they won ten pennants and three championships, chosen as the skipper of the National League team. He’s short, round, tough, dictatorial, a practitioner (when he was a great player in his own right) and now a professor of aggressive, creative, winner-take-all, no-holds-barred baseball. The players in this clubhouse (those who never played under him) regard McGraw’s bluster and authoritarian approach with some amusement – it’s just an exhibition series, after all. We also get to know Joe McCarthy better, the Yankees manager of the Thirties and Forties, winner of nine pennants and seven championships, an aloof but demanding father figure, master psychologist and master tactician. Think of McCarthy as Joe Torre with more rules and less emotion. Think of McGraw as Billy Martin with a bigger ego and no neuroses.

At batting practice, guys argue over the grain of the bat, how wide it should be, what kind of wood is best. In the bullpens, the pitchers carry on the arguments over the picks, the stats, the criteria. Why isn’t Nolan Ryan on the team? Spahn says he was Ryan’s pitching coach at Anaheim and tried to get him to throw his curveball and his change to set up his fastball. “But Nolan had such a big ego, he wanted to strike people out instead of win.” The teams playing this series are made up of winners.

The game begins. The pitchers are Walter Johnson for the American League, Christy Mathewson for the Nationals. The American team has five Yankees in the starting lineup, including Joe DiMaggio at DH (gives you an idea how good the starting lineup is). Of the position players starting and on the bench for the American League, only one is black. The majority are lefties. The Nationals have six black position players. The majority are righties. Hard to explain.

The game doesn’t go well for the Nationals. Johnson’s deceptive, sling-shot delivery keeps them off-balance. The strikeouts rack up. Mathewson has some great innings, but he’s always been best when he’s faced a batter before: his incredible memory and intelligence are fearsome tools. And he’s a righty facing a lineup of lefties. But McGraw started him because he’s a favorite: they were best friends on the Giants and Mathewson was the fair-haired boy of baseball. Now, he struggles.

On the bench, Piazza and Mel Ott banter about whether players really were better in the old days. Piazza, a history buff, a baseball romantic, the recipient of coaching from Ted Williams at the age of 12, says the old players were better. Classier, more heart, more talent. Ott, a

good-natured soul with a drinking problem and a 20-year ringside seat for McGraw's antics, believes the new players are better. Better behaved and in better shape. The banter will continue throughout the series, each man defending the others' peers.

The game doesn't get better for Mathewson. Gehrig and Jeter hit home runs. McCarthy's enjoying what he sees, rarely moving from his position at the center of the bench, arms folded. He sees this series as a *fait accompli*, a romp in the making – most of all, a nice break from the real season. McGraw sees it as war. He hates to lose anything, and what's more, he's up against McCarthy and a bunch of Yankees, who ended his and his beloved Giants' run as kings of baseball way back when. He drives the players hard, calling for tricky plays, swearing, pacing up and down the dugout. The players find him annoying, and then downright detestable. He's losing the game and he's already losing his team.

Mordecai "Three-Finger" Brown relieves Mathewson. The Nationals scrape together a couple of runs, there are some good plays, but little excitement. The game is lost, 7-2.

The mood in the American clubhouse afterward is light – it's good to win, even when it's only an all-star game. There's some good-natured ribbing and discussions of where to go at night. Whitey Ford and Gehrig are both locals – and they agree it's nice to play for a team in your hometown – as are Hank Greenberg and Jim Palmer. The talk turns to great New York baseball moments and then to great moments in baseball in general, and for some it's the same: Gehrig's famous speech about being the luckiest... But no one wants to finish the thought. It's the elephant in the corner, what happened to Gehrig, and they're avoiding it.

Over in the National clubhouse, McGraw announces: "There'll be two buses coming to the park tomorrow. The two o'clock bus will be for those of you who need a little extra work. The empty bus will be leaving at five o'clock." The players roll their eyes or shoot each other looks: they don't like losing, but hey, it's just an all-star game, what's with this guy?

Game 2

National League

SS Wagner
 CF Mays
 RF Aaron
 2B Hornsby
 LF Musial
 DH F. Robinson
 3B Schmidt
 C Bench
 1B Rose

P Koufax

American League

LF Henderson
 CF Cobb
 RF Ruth
 1B Gehrig
 DH T. Williams
 2B Collins
 SS Jeter
 3B Brett
 C Berra

P R. Johnson

Next afternoon, late-comers trickle in to the American League clubhouse to find a crowd gathered around the food tables. Ruth and Jimmie Foxx are facing off in an eating contest. The Babe and the Beast are each renowned for their ability to put away prodigious amounts of food. After several rounds each of ham, eggs, pancakes, oatmeal, waffles, and coffee, Foxx gives up. Ruth says it's not over. "Let's go!" and grabs Foxx around the neck till their heads are side by side, and the two belch thunderously in unison. The whole place falls down in laughter.

At BP, Rose and Hornsby – who share only two passions in life, baseball and gambling – get up a pool on the outcome of the game and the series. Some guys can't believe their nerve, some ignore it, some place bets. Koufax and Randy Johnson are pitching today, and bettors ask contemporaries of the two pitchers for some insight to help figure the odds. They compare career and postseason stats: both pitchers' World Series ERAs are almost a *third* of their career ERAs. These are big-game pitchers. Koufax, with more experience, is given the edge. Could there be a no-hitter for both teams?

The game starts, Johnson gets a one-two-three inning. Henderson leads off for the American League and hits Koufax's first pitch out of the park. The Americans think the floodgates are open, Koufax doesn't have it today. The Nationals exchange looks: is this going to be a sweep? In both dugouts, the bettors try to change their bets. Mickey Cochrane emerges as a major bench jockey, riding Koufax.

But Koufax gets the next three guys, and soon it's clear it's a pitching duel as Koufax and Johnson match 0's. Guarding their tiny lead, the Americans show off with two astounding plays. With one out in the third inning, the National League's best baserunners, Mays and Wagner, are on first and third, with Aaron at bat. The Americans know that McGraw loves the running game and wants to get on the board. They also know that if Mays tries to steal and Bench throws to second, Wagner will run home. Collins, covering second, could run in to be close enough to throw Wagner out, but Wagner would then stick to third and Mays would be safe at second, both of them now in scoring position with the National's best RBI guy and best postseason hitter up. There's a quick conference on the mound. Berra calls a pitchout and fires

to Collins, who runs in a step, looks to third to hold Wagner as Mays takes off for second, but Collins then flips the ball between his legs to Hornsby covering at second, who tags out Mays. Aaron's long fly ball that would have brought Wagner home is now the third out of the inning. Cobb slaps Collins' back on the way in, "You got me on that play once, glad to be on the same side this time." Collins gives him a nod but nothing more – he remembers how angry Cobb was at the time, and the spikes he caught on his shin the next time Cobb slid into second.

In the sixth, Robinson's on second and the infield's playing back. With no one holding him on, Robinson takes a big lead when Berra suddenly fires the ball to second, and Speaker – known for playing a shallow center, though obviously not to Robinson – has sneaked in, takes the throw and tags out Robinson who has belatedly dived back to the bag. Piazza tells Ott it's a demonstration of the "details" that players of another era were better at.

With little action other than this, and little likelihood their services will be needed, the American League pitchers chew on sunflower seeds in the bullpen and talk spitballs. Walsh and Ford are the only ones who use it regularly – in fact, it was Walsh's stock in trade, and legal in his day. Beechnut is better than Wrigley to get the saliva going, they agree. Rivera says a loogey works best of all. Ford says the real hero is the catcher brave enough to call for it.

In the National bullpen, the talk turns to religion, as Mathewson and Smoltz are both serious Christians. Seaver is too, and though he and Mathewson are similar in many ways – All-American boys, a couple of Boy Scouts – the easy-going Seaver has more of an affinity for Pete Alexander, old before his years, a devout atheist, but a little more fun.

Desperate for a run, McGraw puts Piazza in to pinch hit. He comes through, but they can't get him home. Next inning, he's catching. With two outs, Cobb is up and tells him, "I'm running on you, dago." Piazza says nothing. Cobb bunts up the third base line and beats the throw. Ruth comes up. Cobb yells to Piazza same thing. Piazza says nothing. Cobb steals second. Ruth yells that Cobb's taking the bat out of his hands. "So swing, you fat baboon! I'm coming home either way!" Cobb takes off for third, but Piazza's throw pulls Schmidt off the bag, Cobb never stops, heads home. Piazza parks himself three feet up the line, and Cobb bounces off him, lands flat on his back. Ruth slams his bat down, the fielders start running in. Piazza walks over to Cobb, and stands over him: "You're out." He drops the ball next to a blinking Cobb and walks to the dugout.

Still nursing a 1-0 lead in the eighth, McCarthy tells Johnson he understands pitchers nowadays usually don't finish their games. Is that the case with him? Johnson says mostly. McCarthy calls the bullpen: get Rivera up! It's a one-two-three ninth, and the Americans are up two games to none.

Mantle lines a path from the dugout to Randy Johnson's locker with towels. The clubhouse is jubilant. Koufax pitched a four-hitter and still lost.

It's a more subdued in the National League clubhouse, to say the least. Mize says pitching always dominates in a short series, not much you can do about it. McGraw snarls: no excuses! They're being embarrassed, and it's unacceptable. The players grumble. McGraw stares them

all down: “If you have anything to get off your chest, say it now. If you don’t like me, it’s tough. If you don’t agree with what I’m doing, if you don’t want to play, you can sit down for the rest of this series. I’ll make it miserable for you. I’ll fight every one of you!” No one says a word. And no one is enjoying this series.

In the shower, Rose soaps up with his uniform on. What the hell is he doing, someone asks. He explains he went hitless today and he’s washing away the evil spirits.

Game 3

American League

LF Henderson

CF Cobb

RF Ruth

1B Gehrig

2B Collins

SS Jeter

3B Brett

C Berra

P Martinez

P Martinez

National League

LF Rose

2B Morgan

SS Wagner

RF Aaron

C Piazza

CF Snider

1B McCovey

3B Schmidt

P Gibson

P Gibson

The series shifts to Dodger Stadium. Many of the players are happy to trade the New York chill for the LA sunshine. Because it’s the National League’s home park, there’s no DH for the next three games. Piazza likes this better: the DH is a travesty, it takes away from strategy, it takes away from tradition. Ott thinks he’s crazy: the DH gives the fans what they want, more action, more home runs – and besides, it extended Piazza’s career by two seasons! Piazza says he’d give ‘em up if baseball could go back to the old days.

As the teams warm up, Rose and Hornsby work up today’s pool. The odds are even today: Gibson is a better hitter than Martinez, but the Americans have the momentum. Williams tests the soil around home plate with his hands, and Mantle and Ford make fun of him. Behind the stretching and sprinting players, a throwing contest forms: a basket has been placed on home plate, and some of the fielders vie to land a ball from center field in the basket with the least number of bounces. Speaker and DiMaggio manage to get it in the basket on two bounces (DiMaggio says his brother Dom was always the better fielder). Ruth and Clemente make it on one bounce. Rose and Hornsby take all comers on this excellent new betting opportunity. Only Mays and Kaline are left. Mays, on three different throws, can’t even get it within five feet. The fielders are astounded. On his first try, Kaline’s throw lands directly in the basket and it bounces *out*. A good-natured fight takes place among the bettors over whether that counts and who has to pay up.

McCarthy goes by, sees the fraternizing and looks the other way, whistling all the while. He can afford to be generous. He’s always said the third game is the most important in a seven-

game series because you can break a tie, take a commanding lead, or prevent an opponent from taking it. He's in the catbird seat, and he knows it. His lineup for game 3 is identical to 1 and 2. He was once called the "Push Button Manager" since with Murderers' Row on his bench he didn't have to do much more than pencil in his stars. But he doesn't care: he's going with what works.

In the National League dugout, McGraw is saying exactly the same thing about the third game being pivotal. So he's rejiggering his lineup, to hell with the first-stringers. Mays, Hornsby, and Cochrane aren't hitting, and are notorious postseason underachievers, so Snider, Morgan, and Piazza are in. Hornsby is outraged: We got picked to start, you can't change it! McGraw says your stats might have gotten you here, but so did mine: the manager determines who plays, when, and where. That's baseball. McGraw likes Rose's fire, bats him leadoff on a hunch, despite his oh-for the previous game. Play ball.

It's another pitching duel. Gibson is in his World Series form, and the Americans, complacent and not a little baffled by Gibson, get their at-bats over quickly. Despite McGraw's new lineup, Martinez handles the Nationals easily: they're off-balance from the start, as the pitcher is almost a foot shorter than Randy Johnson, and pitches as much on guile as raw power. The Americans get a couple of runs, but little else happens. McGraw is beside himself: are they going to get shut out again and be down 3-0?

In the sixth, Aaron falls chasing down an easy fly ball. It rolls to the wall and the runner is on with a triple. Aaron comes running in, yelling to the umpire and pointing to the field. Ruth left his glove on the grass, and Aaron tripped on it. The umpire says the play stands. McGraw comes racing out. (He doesn't know what the hell Aaron's complaining about – doesn't everyone leave their glove on the field? – but that's his big hammer out there and he's going to defend him.) Aaron, never one to argue, nevertheless wants to know how the call makes any sense. The ump explains that players play by the rules in place during their career. Before 1954, fielders left their gloves on the field. Aaron says he's going to break an ankle. The ump says he'll just have to be careful. McGraw tells Aaron to leave his glove out there too and maybe Ruth will break *his* ankle. The ump says he can't – when Aaron played, it was no longer allowed. Aaron shakes his head and goes back to position as McGraw vents at the umpire. "If my man breaks his ankle, I'll break yours!" McGraw's comment registers on some of the players gathered around.

From his place at the center of the American dugout, McCarthy sits passively and enjoys the entertainment.

Pedro continues to shut out the Nationals. In the top of the eighth, Cobb leads off first base and baits Morgan at second: "I'm coming your way, shoe shiner!" Next pitch, Cobb takes off and slides into Morgan spikes up, tearing a huge gash in his leg. McGraw explodes from the dugout, screaming, "You can't do that to my player!" He jumps on Cobb from behind and the two slug it out, McGraw, short, round, and graying, getting the worst of it as the younger, bigger Cobb viciously pounds away at him, yet McGraw fights all attempts to pull him away as much as he fights Cobb. Finally, there's a crack, McGraw screams, and the crowd around them finally separates the two. McGraw sits on the ground, his arm clearly dislocated. The umps throw them both out of the game, and McGraw has the last word, pointing to the American

dugout and promising to fight any of them who dares hurt one of his players. He walks through the dugout, and the players look at him in a new way, giving him a pat or a nod: “Way to go, Skipper,” “You take care of that.” Cobb walks through his dugout on the way to the clubhouse and the other men look at him with disgust or disdain. McCarthy’s been watching both dugouts. He’s concerned.

The next inning, Rose leads off with a hit. Then Hornsby does the same, batting for Morgan. Wagner walks, and Aaron knocks them all in with a double. The Nationals, more grim than celebratory, have just scored more runs than they had the whole series, and they have no intention to stop there. They chase Martinez, and go up 5-2. Their determination shows in the field too. Schmidt, perhaps inspired by the fancy fielding last game, holds a runner at third, then fields a bunt up the line, fakes a throw then whirls and tags out the runner trying to score behind him. On a shot to right center, Mays races toward the warning track, his hat flying off, leaps, pirouettes, catches the ball with an outstretched glove as his back slams against the wall, recoils off, and fires the ball toward the plate just before he falls facefront on the ground. The man on third has tagged up, but Mays’ throw is a strike into the glove of a waiting Bench. He couldn’t hit the basket from a standing position before the game, but this is different: this *is* the game.

By the end, the Nationals have bested the Americans 8-3. There will be no commanding lead. In their clubhouse, the mood is jubilant, but it’s more than that, there’s pride too, and a feeling that they were a *team* out there for the first time. Rose was the star, with three hits – and eight players take a shower in their uniforms.

Game 4

National League

1B Rose
SS Wagner
CF Mays
L Aaron
2B Hornsby
C Piazza
RF Clemente
3B Schmidt
1B Rose

P Spahn

American League

LF Henderson
RF Cobb
P Ruth
1B Gehrig
CF Speaker
2B Collins
SS Jeter
3B Brett
C Berra

P Ruth

In the National clubhouse, Morgan is showing off his wound to a crowd of eager onlookers. They all compare war stories: the collisions and broken fingers and how in the old days if you got spiked you just rubbed some tobacco juice on it and kept going. Piazza and Ott start arguing over who’s tougher, the old or new players. “Geez, here they go again,” and the crowd disperses while the two go at it. McGraw shows up with a sling and a black eye. He gathers them around, tells them he’s proud of them. “You came through for me.” He tells them he’d

lose a limb a day if they kept playing to win. The players are moved in spite of themselves. McGraw is impossible to deal with, and he's corny as hell. But the damn guy's sincere.

Across the stadium, Foxx and Ford stagger in, clearly hung over from a night on the town. Mantle is fast asleep on the bench next to his locker. McCarthy comes over with a head of steam, demands to know if they were out drinking with Pete Alexander last night? Ford says yes, and could the skipper hold it down a little? McCarthy gets dangerously quiet: "You perform on the field and I don't care if you drink yourself out of a liver. But don't you ever fraternize with a member of the opposing club while we're in a series." Brett turns to Gehrig: What's the matter with him? Lou says, He hates to lose. Greenberg leans in: Don't we all? Brett thinks about it, then nods: Yup. Ford, shielding his eyes from the light, says, "Oh please, it's only an all-star game."

At BP, Ruth is conspicuously missing. Maybe he was out with the guys last night? But they say no. Spahn and Lefty Grove are scheduled to pitch today and Rose and Hornsby make their rounds.

McGraw and McCarthy exchange lineup cards. Is this a joke? Ruth is pitching for the American League? Sure enough, there's the Babe warming up in the bullpen. All hell breaks loose as word goes round the stadium. A furious argument erupts at home plate: he can't pitch, he's here as a fielder! It's supposed to be the best man at each position. Sure, Ruth was a good pitcher – but was he one of the best ever? The proof is he was picked as a hitter, not a pitcher. McCarthy says his hitting stats might have gotten him here, but there's nothing says the manager can't determine who plays, when, and where. That's baseball. McGraw says that's a load of crap and appeals to the ump – who confirms there's no reason why Ruth can't pitch. McGraw continues to berate the umps, McCarthy, Ruth, and the Baseball Commissioner. In the dugout, players check the stats: Ruth wasn't just a good pitcher. For three years, he was the best lefty in the league, and for one year he was probably the best pitcher overall. Some of his World Series pitching records stood for half a century. This means the Americans will have nine great hitters to the Nationals' eight. Spahn can hit, but he's no Ruth. The big question is, which Ruth will it be? Since each player in this series is in his prime – which prime is it? As position player/hitter or as pitcher? Does it depend on the position he's playing? Will it be the Ruth who threw shutout after shutout? (Walter Johnson says, he beat me every time.) Or will it be the slugger who hadn't thrown off the mound in years? At the plate, McCarthy says little, enjoying McGraw's impotent rage. In the bullpen, Ruth soaks up the cheers and the curses raining down on him from the stands. He yells up to the fans: I'll murder these National League bums! At home plate, the umpires say they've never thrown a manager out of a game *before* the game, but they'll make an exception if McGraw doesn't shut up. He stalks back to the dugout and throws himself on the bench. "Ah, that fat SOB will wear himself out pitching and won't hit a lick." You think so?, someone asks. McGraw: Geez, I hope so.

The game starts. The Americans have the same problem with Spahn as the Nationals did with Martinez: Spahn is shorter than Gibson, a lefty not a righty, and more of a finesse pitcher. In the bottom of the inning, the Nationals bench-jockey Ruth mercilessly. He just feeds off it. Johnny Mize is the loudest and most obnoxious. Someone yells something about Ruth's wife, Mize demands to know first or second? Huh? First or second wife? The guy says, how the

hell should I know, and yells to Ruth: All your wives! Pow! Mize decks the guys. Ruth's second wife was Mize's cousin.

The game goes on – it's no shut out, but it's no blowout either. Looking to goose his offense, McCarthy sees Mantle and Foxx bleary-eyed and commiserating at the end of the bench. He puts Mantle in to pinch hit. Foxx laughs as Mantle stumbles to the bat rack, then holds his head: laughing hurt. Mantle hits a home run. When he stumbles back to the bench, he tells Foxx he saw three balls and just hit the one in the middle.

McGraw stalks the National's dugout, making signs for stealing, hitting and running, bunting, taking chances, explaining to his men what he's doing, ripping them for mistakes, bucking them up, trying to bury the other team. The Nationals start to touch Ruth for hits, and McCarthy decides the experiment is over. He calls Ford in for long relief. During the pitching change, Jeter, playing second, shares a laugh with Wagner, the baserunner. McCarthy sees this and sends out Foxx to replace Jeter. Foxx looks lost at short, and now it's Mantle's turn to laugh: there are at least three guys on the field who can barely see straight. In the dugout, Jeter sits down, stone-faced. DiMaggio sits next to him, explains McCarthy has no tolerance for disrespect of Baseball. Jeter: what about disrespecting me in my own house? DiMaggio says he should just apologize to Mr. McCarthy, everyone on this bench is going to be watching what you do. The two are becoming friends.

At bat next inning, Foxx hits a screaming liner, pulling Hornsby's glove right off his hand. Spahn swears in disbelief. Next time Foxx is up, all the infielders play way back on the grass. Bench calls for a slow change, but Spahn shakes him off: he doesn't want to be killed. Again, Bench calls for a slow change, then Spahn sees Bench is laughing behind his mask.

Clemens pitches in relief in the eighth inning. The National dugout rides him relentlessly, pretty much everyone but Piazza, whose history with Clemens is too deep for bench-jockeying. McGraw coaches at first, to make sure Clemens can hear him, constantly calls for umps to watch Clemens's moves, until finally Clemens, distracted, balks. As the batter takes his base, Clemens throws the ball at McGraw and gets ejected. McGraw trots back to the dugout, his work done.

Smoltz works the ninth, gets the save, and the Nationals take the game, 5-4, tying up the series. Momentum is theirs.

Game 5

American League

2B Collins
 LF Henderson
 RF Ruth
 1B Gehrig
 CF Mantle
 SS Jeter
 3B Brett
 C Cochrane
 P Grove

P Grove

National League

1B Rose
 SS Wagner
 CF Mays
 LF Aaron
 2B Hornsby
 RF Clemente
 3B Schmidt
 C Bench
 P Mathewson

P Mathewson

In the American clubhouse, the players gather, a little more subdued, not happy about dropping two in a row. Mantle and Ford play a practical joke, lampooning Williams' soil-testing, but before he can respond, Grove goes ballistic over their antics – he's got no sense of humor and old teammates Foxx and Cochrane have to carry him out of the clubhouse. Everyone's entertained by it, however, and the team's mood is now lighter.

In the National clubhouse, Mathewson's playing checkers with five different guys, blindfolded. McGraw comes in, his arm still in a sling though his eye's a little better. "Any of you geniuses beating my boy here?" Mathewson's opponents all shake their head. McGraw slaps him on the back, "Nobody beats my boy! Now let's put those arrogant junior leaguers on their backsides!"

In the American dugout before the game, Jeter comes over to McCarthy to apologize, ask that he let him play. McCarthy says he has no intention of sitting him again. He sees that Jeter's a class act. And besides, we need you out there – Foxx is a lousy shortstop! They laugh and Jeter grabs a bat and runs to take his swings. McCarthy pulls out his lineup card, he's shaking things up: Collins will lead off (he was considered the greatest leadoff hitter ever till Henderson came along), Henderson with his power will bat second, Mantle will play center, and Cochrane, Grove's old battery mate, will catch. Cobb's furious he's not playing.

The game begins, and Grove is having control problems. By the third inning, he's given up two runs. He takes it out on Cochrane, who responds by alternately yelling back or trying to placate his pitcher. He starts getting down, feeling like he's calling a bad game – he always gets stressed when his team's losing. He makes a wild throw to second, has a passed ball. The National League bench jockeys ride him. In the dugout, he throws his mask through a plywood divider, knocks over the water cooler, and sits down, fuming. DiMaggio sits next to him and quietly tells him to knock it off. If you're mad, you take it out on the other team.

Top half of the inning, Rose taunts Cochrane from third and on a Mays double comes barreling home. Cochrane blocks the plate, and just before collision, shifts, plants one leg, tags Rose out and kicks him in the rear at the same time, sending him flying. Watching from the dugout,

Snider says he saw Campy do that a million times, now he knows where he got it from. Rose jumps up from his sprawl and whirls on Cochrane, who's only too happy to flip his mask and fight. The benches clear and they break it up. Rose's nose looks broken, and Cochrane's finger is hanging, the trainer says the tendon's ruptured. Cochrane tells him to tape it to the next finger, he'll be damned if he's coming out. He looks at McCarthy, who nods and returns to the dugout.

Clemente hits a home run and showboats as he rounds the bases. Next time up, Grove throws at him. Clemente glares as he takes his base. Next inning, Grove is up at bat, but Mathewson doesn't retaliate. McGraw won't call for it – Matty has never thrown at a hitter, and besides he's pitching great. Some of the Nationals grumble about it. A couple of innings later, Grove throws at Clemente again and he charges the pitcher. The benches clear once more, but order is restored. Grove is thrown out and Jim Palmer relieves.

By the eighth inning, the American league is losing 4-1 and they're feeling the weight of "momentum." The Nationals load the bases with two outs. A hit will break the game wide open and give them the series lead for the first time. Mathewson's up. Collins had noticed McGraw whispering to Mathewson in the on-deck circle. He tells Jeter Mathewson's going to try a Baltimore chop. McGraw's betting he can get it high enough to beat the throw to first and the run will score. He's seen McGraw try this before – he actually *invented* the Baltimore chop. Sure enough, Mathewson swings down hard at a curve and it arcs high in the air over the pitcher's mound. Jeter yells to the pitcher to get out of way, races to the mound, leaps off the top a good eight feet off the ground, snags the ball with his bare hand and fires to first in one move, then falls hard on the edge of the mound where it meets the grass. Gehrig, fully extended, catches the ball a moment before Mathewson touches the bag. He's out. The runner on third already crossed the plate, but it doesn't count because of the force at first. Everyone's stunned – how the hell did Jeter do that? The Americans suddenly whoop and run in around Jeter. What a play! But Jeter can't get up. His ankle's already swollen and he has to be helped off the field. McCarthy doesn't have any other shortstops, and sends Speaker in.

Both teams can't stop talking about the play. They say The Jump will be talked about just like The Flip and The Dive. The Nationals can't believe how close they were to a blowout. The Americans hate to lose Jeter – but you know what, they hate to lose, period. They're charged up and in their half of the inning, they come out swinging and score two quick runs. Mathewson's struggling, maybe the sprint to first last inning took something out of him. There are two runners on. Both went to 1-2 counts, and he couldn't finish them. Ruth is up. McGraw comes to the mound: Can you get out of this inning? Mathewson tells him he can get this man out. McGraw looks him in the eye. Okay, then do it. Mathewson gets Ruth on a slow roller to third. They're still winning, 4-3. Smoltz relieves in the ninth, but he can't stop the Americans either and blows the save. The Americans win 5-4 and regain the series lead.

In the National clubhouse after the game, tempers flare: why the hell didn't Mathewson retaliate after Grove went after Clemente? Mathewson says he prefers to let his pitching do the retaliating and get a man out the honest way. Clemente says he's a coward, no one's throwing a ball at *his* head. Guys take sides – we've got a chance to *win* this thing – and McGraw jumps in, he won't let anyone talk that way about Mathewson. He's the greatest pitcher who ever lived – didn't you see how he held them? Mathewson admits he lied to McGraw: he had

nothing left. Then why did he say he could get Ruth? Because what's he *supposed* to say? "If I can't say I can get Ruth out there, what business do I have being on a mound?" Mize says, hey, will you all calm down, it's just an all-star game. Rose says that's BS, the day you say that is the day you stop being a winner.

Game 6

National League

2B Rose

SS Wagner

L Musial

RF Aaron

DH Ott

CF Mays

1B Mize

3B Schmidt

C Bench

P Koufax

American League

SS Collins

LF Henderson

RF Ruth

1B Gehrig

2B Speaker

DH Greenberg

CF Cobb

3B Brett

C Berra

P W. Johnson

The series moves back to Yankee Stadium, where the Americans will have home field advantage. The DH is in play. Both teams are hurting. Rose has a bandage on his nose, his eyes are black, Morgan's still limping, and McGraw's arm is in a sling. Cochrane's finger has swollen to twice its size, but he refuses to wear a splint in case he has a chance to get in the game. Jeter's on crutches, his foot in a cast. It's the war of the walking wounded.

In the American clubhouse, a group, led by Jeter and DiMaggio, is worried about Gehrig: he hasn't been hitting like they know he can and they feel he's distracted by people tip-toeing around the subject of the end of his career. They put Yogi up to talking to him about it. Yogi approaches Gehrig, tells him, I always thought you got a bad break with that ALS. Henderson, taking his naked swings in the mirror nearby, yells over, "Yeah, I had some lousy ALCS's too." Yogi says, not ALCS! ALS. Henderson doesn't know what they're talking about. ALS, *Lou Gehrig's Disease!* Henderson says, oh. There's a long, awkward pause. No one intended to shout this out, they can barely look at Gehrig – how's he taking this? Gehrig finally says, um, what's ALCS? Someone explains. Oh, he says, then starts laughing: ALCS, ALS, jeez, what kind of idiot are you? Henderson laughs too: Rickey don't do spelling! Now they're both hysterical, and everyone joins in. Finally, Gehrig tells them all, "Hey, don't worry about it. I knew it couldn't last." Rickey gives him a fist bump and says, you'll get 'em today. Across the room, Ruth tells Brett, "The kid was always like that. Everything going so great, he was always waiting for something bad to happen. Guess he was right. Great roommate, though. Didn't snore and could sleep on a meat hook."

The lineups are set for this do-or-die game, the first time one of the teams has a chance to take the series. Mays hasn't been hitting so he's been moved down the lineup. Ott's the DH since he has experience against Walter Johnson. Speaker will play short in place of Jeter.

From the start, it's clear both teams mean business. They grind out the runs, working against the two of the greatest fastball pitchers in history. Speaker at second is a disaster. Jeter apologizes to McCarthy for getting hurt. McCarthy tells him he won the game yesterday, don't sweat it. In the sixth inning, Cobb elbows Rose in the nose on a play at second. Morgan goes in for him, but the players are outraged. McGraw calls for a brushback, but Koufax refuses. McGraw brings in Brown who dutifully plunks the next batter. The umps warn both sides. The next inning, Walter Johnson is expected to retaliate, but doesn't. He never has. Piazza says to Ott this would never happen without the DH. In the American dugout in the bottom of the inning, DiMaggio and Jeter sit down on either side of Johnson and make it clear to him he's part of the team and the team needs to be defended. So Johnson plunks Schmidt in the top half of the seventh. McGraw runs out to argue that Johnson should be ejected, since that's the rule for Schmidt – just like with the stupid glove. The ump says the rule applies to the player doing the action, not the victim – just like with the stupid glove. McGraw runs furiously to the dugout and back to the ump, carrying the rule book. He rips up some pages and throws them at the ump's feet: Well, if we're not going to go by the rules, I've got no use for this! Ump: ain't nothing in the rule book about this, Mac.

It seems every play is hard and brutal. Wagner slap tags Cobb, and on the next play he's upended, lands on his head, his neck twisted, but he stays in. The violence rattles Johnson, and McCarthy looks for a replacement. Clemens volunteers, but McCarthy looks at Jeter, who knows Clemens well and shakes his head – they're looking for retribution, not headhunting. McCarthy brings in Ford with two men in scoring position and Mays up. What Mays and Ford know and McCarthy doesn't is that Mays owns Ford in all-star games. Ford's two-strike pitch comes in at eye level, drops and hits the plate. Mays is out and McGraw again pops out of the dugout: That was a spitter! The ump asks for the ball, Ford throws it over his head to Berra, who throws it to Brett, who tosses it Speaker, back to Ford, then to the ump. He's looks at it and shrugs at McGraw: Nothing.

Bottom of the ninth. Greenberg's up. Brown throws inside, Greenberg takes a few steps toward the National dugout and yells to McGraw: If he hits me, I'm coming after you. Brown comes inside again, and is ejected. Seaver relieves, there are two outs, a man on, and Ruth is at bat. Seaver makes a pickoff attempt at first, and Ruth steps out, confused – it's not a steal situation and Greenberg is no threat to run – and Seaver promptly strikes him out. Gehrig seems to have broken his slump, going four-for-four, but the Nationals take the game and tie the series once again.

In the clubhouse, they celebrate. Everyone wants to know what Seaver was thinking. He explains he knew the pickoff would confuse Ruth and make him overanxious and susceptible to a pitch low and away. The players feel like they got their mojo back – but McGraw says they haven't won anything yet. Tomorrow's the game that counts. Rose agrees: after game 6 in '75, the Red Sox thought they won the Series, but all they won was a good game.

Game 7**National League**

2B Rose
 RF Aaron
 LF Musial
 DH F. Robinson
 1B McCovey
 SS Hornsby
 C Piazza
 CF Snider
 3B Schmidt

P Gibson

American League

LF Henderson
 2B Collins
 RF Ruth
 1B Gehrig
 CF DiMaggio
 DH Cobb
 3B Foxx
 SS Brett
 C Berra

P R. Johnson

The atmosphere in both clubhouses is electric. This is no longer an all-star exhibition, it's a *Series* and neither side wants to go home a loser. Mantle and DiMaggio are playing in pain, just as they did through much of their careers. All they care about is that no one tells McCarthy.

At batting practice, Hornsby and Rose hawk their pool, but there are no takers. It's too hard to call, and everyone's too tense. So they bet each other on the spread.

The lineup cards are exchanged. McGraw goes for offense, with Snider in center and Piazza catching. If they get the lead, he'll make defensive replacements. Wagner's neck is completely stiff, so Hornsby will play shortstop, with Rose at second. McGraw keeps his fingers crossed. Since Brett has played some short and Foxx has played third, McCarthy puts them in those positions, and Collins goes back to second. McCarthy keeps his fingers crossed. Someone looks at the lineups: jeez, that's a lot of talent on the field.

As the game starts, the umpires reiterate their warning: no brushbacks, no knockdowns, no beanballs. Nothing inside. The problem is, Gibson lives on the corners and Johnson has always had control problems. The game's hardly begun when Johnson throws over the batter's head. The ump's not sure what that means. Berra says it's his fault: I set the target too high. The ump laughs, okay try it again. Two batters later, Johnson throws it in the dirt. Ump: let me guess, you set the target too low? Berra: Nah, he thinks it's cricket.

Everyone's straining, playing at the top of their game. The score seesaws. Jeter, on the DL in his cast, is the loudest cheerleader, inspiring the others with his team spirit. In the fifth, Hornsby blows a play, McGraw goes on the field, talks to the infielders, switches him and Schmidt. The ump comes out: jeez, Mac, you're on the field more than your players. McGraw snaps: I'm trying to win a game here.

The Nationals take the lead in the eighth, and McGraw puts in his defensive replacements: Bench for Piazza, Mays for Snider. Hold that lead! Let's go out of here champs. Both managers use their benches and bullpens, trying to get an edge.

The Americans tie the game in the ninth, sending the game into extra innings. The Nationals score two in the top of the tenth. McGraw calls on Mathewson, with two days rest, to hold the lead. But the Americans load the bases, no one out. Collins is up, with Ruth and Gehrig on deck. Koufax is warming up. McGraw comes out. Can you get these guys? Mathewson says he can. McGraw: Matty, tell me the truth. Have you got it? Can you do it? Mathewson: I'll get 'em for you. McGraw looks around the field, taking it all in: the game, the Series, on the line, the lead in his favor, his favorite pitcher – his best friend – on the mound, a man who would never admit defeat. He looks at Mathewson, then looks away and touches his left arm: bring in Koufax. He turns without looking at Mathewson, walks back to the dugout and sits down, uncharacteristically quiet. Matty stands on the mound watching him go, then slowly walks back and sits at the other end of the dugout, staring out at the field, watching Koufax take his warm-ups. The tension is unbearable. Maybe winning will make it all better.

Koufax gets two quick outs, but they're line drives, a screamer down the third base line that Hornsby barely snags, and a shot to center that Mays pulls in on the run. Koufax must be tired, hurting, having pitched the day before. Then Gehrig looks bad missing on a huge looping curve. Is he overmatched by possibly the best postseason pitcher ever? The count goes to 3-2. The entire stadium goes quiet. Koufax pitches, Gehrig swings...

Sample Player Discussion

American League Shortstop

Derek Jeter

For Yankee haters and fans who tire of media hype, this pick may be controversial, but history will show that Derek Jeter was not only the greatest player to take shortstop in American League history, but an icon in the class of Mantle and DiMaggio. Remember, Yankee-hating is an old tradition, and plenty of people couldn't stand DiMaggio for the same reason they hate Jeter: he was a class act that made others look bad, a relentless winner, aloof and untouchable. And Mantle was considered by many as a spoiled party boy, and later on as a broken-down hanger-on. No less an expert than Yogi Berra, who played with both, said, "Mickey and Joe were popular, but nothing like it is for Jeter." He is the squeaky-clean Ambassador of Baseball, carrying the Yankee legacy, and, barring an unlikely scandal, serving as an actual role model among peers with clay feet and syringed buttocks.

It's hard to argue that Jeter isn't the best offensive American League shortstop ever. He holds the record for the most hits at that position, and is well on his way to joining the 3,000 club. He has scored over 100 runs 12 times. He has always been in the top 10 in almost all offensive categories. He has over 300 stolen bases, with an almost 80% success rate. Jeter's postseason and career numbers are comparable, and he's had enough important moments to be called "Mr. November" with some element of truth. His 14-game Series hitting streak ties him with Roberto Clemente for third-best all-time. And at the age of 35, Jeter batted .355 for the 2009 postseason, .407 in the World Series. Seven pennants and five championships are amazing numbers in this age of expansion, luxury tax, roster turnover, and endless playoffs.

His fielding has been good enough to win four Gold Gloves. Detractors who rightly criticized his declining abilities in the field had to zip it in 2009 when his off-season work turned him into the best shortstop in the league, with a fielding percentage a whopping 14 points better than the league average. Perhaps most important in this regard is the entertainment factor – what icons like Babe Ruth and Willie Mays had in spades. As ESPN put it, "That jumping spinning throw Jeter does to first while his legs are three feet off the ground is the most aesthetically pleasing play in baseball." Not every play has been The Flip, or the

Dive, of course. Then again, not every play Mays made was an over-the-shoulder basket catch – but the great ones are remembered for the great plays that seemed to personify them.

An argument could be made for Cal Ripken, who by breaking Gehrig's consecutive-games streak almost single-handedly brought America back to Baseball after the strike, or Robin Yount, who batted .300 and drove in 100 runs eight times. Both have two MVP awards to Jeter's none. But Ripken, unlike Gehrig, was often a liability to his team when he refused to sit out during the streak. He was never a team player, and his one Series appearance was nothing to write home about. Yount spent half his career in the outfield (where he earned his second MVP), and no one was writing home about him during his entire career.

	Team	WS	Career per AB				World Series per AB			
			BA	OBP	HR	RBI	BA	OBP	HR	RBI
SS Derek Jeter	Yankees	5-2	.317	.388	.03	.12	.321	.384	.02	.06
SS Robin Yount	Brewers	0-1	.285	.342	.02	.13	.414	.452	.03	.21
SS Cal Ripken	Orioles	1-0	.276	.340	.04	.15	.167	.286	0	.06
SS Joe Cronin	Red Sox	0-1	.301	.390	.02	.19	.318	.318	0	.09
SS Lou Boudreau	Indians	1-0	.295	.380	.01	.13	.273	.333	0	.14

The Stats

AMERICAN LEAGUE LINE-UP AND BENCH

	Team	WS	Career per AB			World Series per AB			Postseason per AB			Improved	Improved			
			BA	OBP	HR	RBI	BA	OBP	HR	RBI	BA			OBP	HR	RBI
C	Yogi Berra	10-4	.285	.348	.05	.19	.274	.359	.05	.15						
1B	Lou Gehrig	6-1	.340	.447	.06	.25	.361	.477	.08	.29	X					
2B	Eddie Collins	4-2	.333	.424	.00	.13	.328	.376	.00	.09						
SS	Derek Jeter	5-2	.317	.388	.03	.12	.321	.384	.02	.06		.313	.384	.04	.10	
3B	George Brett	1-1	.305	.369	.03	.15	.337	.397	.06	.14	X	.373	.439	.02	.08	X
LF	Rickey Henderson	2-1	.275	.401	.03	.10	.339	.448	.03	.10	X	.284	.389	.02	.09	
CF	Ty Cobb	0-3	.366	.433	.01	.17	.262	.314	.00	.14						
RF	Babe Ruth	7-3	.342	.474	.09	.26	.326	.467	.12	.26	*					
			.320	.410	.04	.17	.319	.403	.05	.15						
Bench:																
C	Mickey Cochrane	3-2	.320	.419	.02	.16	.245	.382	.02	.06						
1B	Jimmie Foxx	2-1	.325	.428	.07	.24	.344	.425	.06	.17						
1B	Hank Greenberg	2-2	.313	.412	.06	.25	.318	.420	.06	.17						
LF	Ted Williams	0-1	.344	.482	.07	.19	.200	.333	.00	.04						
CF	Joe DiMaggio	9-1	.325	.398	.05	.23	.271	.338	.04	.15						
CF	Mickey Mantle	7-5	.298	.421	.07	.19	.257	.374	.08	.17						
CF	Tris Speaker	3-0	.345	.428	.01	.15	.306	.398	.00	.04						
RF	Al Kaline	1-0	.297	.376	.04	.16	.333	.373	.06	.19	X					
			.320	.421	.05	.20	.284	.380	.04	.12						
			.321	.416	.04	.17	.300	.391	.04	.14						

AMERICAN LEAGUE ROTATION AND BULLPEN

	Team	WS	Career per Inning			World Series per Inning			Postseason per Inning					
			W-L %	ERA	SO	WHIP	W-L	ERA	SO	WHIP	W-L	ERA	SO	WHIP
R	Walter Johnson	1-1	.599	2.17	0.59	1.06	3-3	2.16	0.70	1.42				
L	Randy Johnson	1-0	.646	3.29	1.18	1.17	3-0	1.04	1.11	0.70	X			
R	Pedro Martinez	1-1	.687	2.93	1.12	1.05	1-2	3.71	1.12	1.06				
L	Lefty Grove	2-1	.680	3.06	0.58	1.28	4-2	1.75	0.71	1.02	X			
			.653	2.86	0.87	1.14	.611	2.17	0.91	1.05				

Bullpen:																	
L	Whitey Ford	6-5	.690	2.75	0.62	1.22	10-8	2.71	0.64	1.14	X						
R	Ed Walsh	1-0	.607	1.82	0.59	1.00	2-0	0.60	1.13	0.87	X						
R	Jim Palmer	3-3	.638	2.86	0.56	1.18	4-2	3.20	0.68	1.34		8-3	2.61	0.72	1.22	X	
R	Roger Clemens*	0-1	.634	3.06	0.93	1.16	-	3.24	0.99	1.08	X		1-2	3.96	0.83	1.25	
R	Mariano Rivera	5-2	.577	2.25	0.95	1.01	2-1	0.99	0.89	0.96	X		8-1	0.74	0.80	0.77	X
			.629	2.55	0.73	1.11	.621	2.15	0.87	1.08							
			.640	2.69	0.79	1.13	.617	1.76	0.86	1.03							

Manager:																	
	Joe McCarthy	7-2	.615														

*84-96

NATIONAL LEAGUE LINE-UP AND BENCH

	Team	WS	Career per AB			World Series per AB			Postseason per AB			Improved	Improved		
			BA	OBP	HR	RBI	BA	OBP	HR	RBI	BA			OBP	HR
C	Johnny Bench	2-2	.267	.342	.05	.18	.279	.340	.05	.16	.266	.335	.06	.12	
1B/OF	Pete Rose	3-3	.303	.375	.01	.09	.321	.388	.02	.08	.269	.356	.01	.06	
2B	Rogers Hornsby	1-1	.358	.434	.04	.19	.245	.288	.00	.10					
SS	Honus Wagner	1-1	.323	.390	.01	.16	.275	.393	.00	.18					
3B	Mike Schmidt	1-1	.267	.380	.07	.19	.220	.283	.04	.17	.236	.304	.03	.11	
LF	Stan Musial	3-1	.331	.417	.04	.18	.256	.347	.01	.09					
CF	Willie Mays	1-3	.302	.384	.06	.17	.247	.323	.01	.11	.239	.308	.00	.08	
RF	Hank Aaron	1-1	.305	.374	.06	.19	.364	.417	.05	.16	.362	.405	.09	.23	X
			.307	.387	.04	.17	.276	.347	.02	.13					

Bench:															
C	Mike Piazza	0-1	.308	.377	.06	.19	.273	.273	.09	.18	.242	.301	.05	.13	
1B	Willie McCovey	0-2	.270	.374	.06	.19	.200	.250	.06	.06	.310	.412	.10	.24	X
1B	Johnny Mize	5-0	.312	.397	.07	.21	.286	.362	.07	.21					
2B	Joe Morgan	2-2	.271	.392	.03	.12	.235	.347	.04	.09	.182	.323	.03	.07	
CF	Duke Snider	2-4	.295	.380	.06	.19	.286	.351	.08	.20					
RF	Frank Robinson	2-3	.294	.389	.06	.18	.250	.349	.08	.15	.238	.356	.07	.15	
RF	Mel Ott	1-2	.304	.414	.05	.20	.295	.377	.07	.16					
RF	Roberto Clemente	2-0	.317	.359	.03	.14	.362	.383	.03	.12	.318	.354	.03	.13	
			.296	.385	.05	.18	.273	.337	.07	.15					
			.302	.386	.05	.17	.275	.342	.04	.14					

AMERICAN LEAGUE POSITION PLAYER RUNNERS-UP

	Team	WS	Career per AB				World Series per AB				Postseason per AB				Improved		
			BA	OBP	HR	RBI	BA	OBP	HR	RBI	BA	OBP	HR	RBI			
LF	Al Simmons	2-2	.334	.380	.04	.21	.329	.375	.08	.17							
SS	Alex Rodriguez	1-0	.305	.390	.07	.21	.250	.423	.05	.30	X		.302	.409	.08	.18	X
1B	Frank Thomas	-	.301	.419	.06	.21	-	-	-	-			.224	.443	.06	.10	
RF	Reggie Jackson	4-1	.262	.356	.05	.17	.357	.457	.10	.24	X		.278	.358	.06	.17	X
LF	Carl Yastrzemski	0-2	.285	.379	.04	.15	.369	.447	.06	.17	X						
2B	Charlie Gehringer	1-2	.320	.404	.02	.16	.321	.375	.01	.09							
SS	Robin Yount	0-1	.285	.342	.02	.13	.414	.452	.03	.21	X		.344	.419	.02	.11	X
C	Bill Dickey	7-1	.313	.382	.03	.19	.255	.329	.03	.17							
3B	Brooks Robinson	2-2	.267	.322	.03	.13	.263	.289	.03	.18	X		.303	.323	.03	.15	X
LF	Joe Jackson	1-1	.356	.423	.01	.16	.345	.368	.02	.15							
1B	David Ortiz	2-0	.287	.382	.06	.21	.321	.441	.04	.29	X		.293	.401	.05	.20	
CF	Kirby Puckett	2-0	.318	.360	.03	.15	.308	.393	.04	.13			.309	.361	.05	.15	
CF	Ken Griffey Jr.	-	.285	.371	.06	.19	-	-	-	-			.290	.367	.05	.10	
1B	Harmon Killebrew	0-1	.256	.376	.07	.19	.286	.444	.05	.10			.250	.444	.08	.15	
2B	Nap Lajoie	-	.327	.373	0	.14	-	-	-	-							
3B	Wade Boggs	1-1	.328	.415	.01	.11	.286	.362	0	.12			.273	.337	.01	.10	
1B	George Sisler	-	.340	.379	.01	.14	-	-	-	-							
SS	Cal Ripken	1-0	.276	.340	.04	.15	.167	.286	0	.06			.336	.411	.01	.07	
SS	Joe Cronin	0-1	.301	.390	.02	.19	.318	.318	0	.09							
1B	Jim Thome	0-2	.279	.406	.07	.20	.255	.352	.06	.13			.221	.315	.08	.18	
3B	Paul Molitor	1-1	.306	.369	.02	.12	.418	.475	.04	.20	X		.368	.435	.05	.19	X
SS	Lou Boudreau	1-0	.295	.380	.01	.13	.273	.333	0	.14							
CF	Earl Combs	3-1	.325	.397	.01	.11	.350	.444	.02	.15	X						

NATIONAL LEAGUE POSITION PLAYER RUNNERS-UP

	Team	WS	Career per AB				World Series per AB				Postseason per AB				Improved	Improved
			BA	OBP	HR	RBI	BA	OBP	HR	RBI	BA	OBP	HR	RBI		
3B Chipper Jones	Braves	1-2	.307	.406	.05	.18	.273	.391	.02	.11	.288	.411	.04	.14		
1B Todd Helton	Rockies	0-1	.328	.427	.05	.18	.333	.412	0	.06	.211	.303	0	.07		
C Roy Campanella	Dodgers	1-4	.276	.360	.06	.20	.242	.310	.04	.11						
2B Jackie Robinson	Dodgers	1-5	.311	.409	.03	.15	.234	.335	.01	.09						
RF Larry Walker	Rockies	0-1	.313	.400	.06	.19	.357	.438	.14	.21	.230	.347	.07	.16		
RF Chuck Klein	Phillies	0-1	.320	.379	.05	.19	.333	.333	.08	.17						
3B Eddie Matthews	Braves	2-1	.271	.376	.06	.17	.200	.385	.02	.14						
RF Tony Gwynn	Padres	0-2	.338	.388	.01	.12	.371	.436	.03	.09	.306	.339	.01	.10		
SS Ernie Banks	Cubs	-	.274	.330	.04	.17	-	-	-	-						
LF Barry Bonds*	Giants	-	.290	.413	.06	.18	-	-	-	-	.200	.323	.01	.06		
1B Jeff Bagwell	Astros	-	.297	.408	.06	.21	-	-	-	-	.226	.354	.02	.12		
1B Keith Hernandez	Cardinals	2-0	.296	.384	.02	.15	.245	.349	.02	.23	.265	.370	.02	.18	X	X
LF Willie Stargell	Pirates	2-0	.282	.360	.06	.19	.278	.359	.05	.15	.315	.381	.06	.15		
1B Bill Terry	Giants	1-2	.341	.393	.02	.17	.295	.338	.03	.11						
RF Paul Waner	Pirates	0-1	.333	.404	.01	.14	.333	.294	0	.20					X	
RF Vladimir Guerrero	Expos	-	.323	.389	.06	.19	-	-	-	-	.240	.329	.01	.09		
CF Hack Wilson	Cubs	0-2	.307	.395	.04	.22	.319	.385	0	.06						
3B Pie Traynor	Pirates	1-1	.320	.362	.01	.17	.293	.333	.02	.10						
LF Joe Medwick	Cardinals	1-1	.324	.362	.03	.18	.326	.354	.02	.11						
1B Albert Pujols	Cardinals	1-1	.334	.427	.07	.22	.267	.421	.03	.07	.322	.431	.07	.18		

*86-98

NATIONAL LEAGUE PITCHERS RUNNERS-UP

	Team	WS	Career per Inning			World Series per Inning			Postseason per Inning							
			W-L %	ERA	SO	WHIP	W-L	ERA	SO	WHIP	W-L	ERA	SO	WHIP	Improved	
R	Greg Maddux	Braves	1-2	.610	3.16	.67	1.14	2-3	2.09	.47	0.92	11-14	3.27	.63	1.24	
R	Curt Schilling	Phillies	3-1	.597	3.46	.96	1.14	4-1	2.06	.90	0.90	11-2	2.23	.90	0.97	X
L	Carl Hubbell	Giants	1-2	.622	2.98	.47	1.17	4-2	1.79	.64	1.04					
R	Juan Marichal	Giants	0-1	.631	2.89	.66	1.10	-	0.00	1.00	1.00	0-1	1.50	.83	0.67	X
R	John Smoltz	Braves	1-4	.579	3.33	.89	1.18	2-2	2.47	1.02	1.28	15-4	2.67	.95	1.14	X
R	Don Sutton	Dodgers	0-4	.559	3.26	.68	1.14	2-3	5.26	.61	1.25	6-4	3.68	.61	1.08	X
R	Ferguson Jenkins	Cubs	-	.557	3.34	.71	1.14	-	-	-	-					
R	Dizzy Dean	Cardinals	1-1	.644	3.02	.59	1.21	2-2	2.88	.56	1.00					
R	Nolan Ryan	Astros	1-0	.526	3.19	1.06	1.25	-	0.00	1.43	1.43	2-2	3.07	1.09	0.91	X
R	Don Drysdale	Dodgers	3-2	.557	2.95	.72	1.15	3-3	2.95	.92	1.22					
R	Robin Roberts	Phillies	0-1	.539	3.41	.50	1.17	0-1	1.64	.45	1.27					
R	David Cone	Mets	5-0	.606	3.46	.92	1.26	2-0	2.12	.66	1.24	8-3	3.80	.85	1.36	
R	Bruce Sutter	Cubs	1-0	.489	2.83	.83	1.14	1-0	4.70	.83	1.25	2-0	3.00	.58	0.75	
R	Trevor Hoffman	Padres	0-1	.459	2.78	1.07	1.05	0-1	9.00	0	1.50	1-2	3.46	1.08	1.23	
R	Lee Smith	Cubs	-	.436	3.03	.97	1.26					0-2	8.44	1.37	1.96	