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Introduction

What Golden Age?

The New York Yankees have dominated Major League Baseball in recent years, leaving many fans waxing nostalgic about a time when the sport was not ruled by teams with large payrolls. Many fans born just before and during the postwar baby boom remember the era fondly. Major League Baseball of that time conjures images of a golden age filled with great new stars—Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays, and Duke Snider—as well as holdovers such as Bob Feller, Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, and Stan Musial. Roger Kahn’s poignant *The Boys of Summer* (1972) captures the mood of the Brooklyn borough during the early 1950s. More recently, Doris Kearns Goodwin’s memoir, *Wait till Next Year* (1997), describes the pains and joys of growing up rooting for the Dodgers. Gary David Goldberg’s television show *Brooklyn Bridge*, which aired from 1991 to 1993, also recalled growing up rooting for the Bums. In 1968 songwriter Paul Simon celebrated Joe DiMaggio in “Mrs. Robinson,” while a decade later his contemporary Dion DiMucci recorded the nostalgic tune “(I Used to Be a) Brooklyn Dodger.” New York Giants fans savored Bobby Thomson’s playoff-winning home run in 1951 and Willie Mays’s wondrous catch in the 1954 World Series. Rooting for the New York Yankees, with their cool efficiency and large payrolls, was likened to rooting for U.S. Steel, although in

2001 actor Billy Crystal paid tribute to two beloved members of the team, Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle, in his movie *61**.

These heroics played out against a backdrop of changing social and economic patterns. Higher incomes, greater racial equality, changing gender roles, technological changes, and major demographic shifts transformed the nation, even affecting baseball.

Cold war metaphors colored attitudes about the game, with baseball owners lashing out at “socialism,” whether Soviet-style or within the national pastime. Baseball assumed mythic proportions. United States senators imbued baseball with the ability to combat the godless Reds; Senator Karl Mundt of South Dakota claimed, “I believe baseball has become very definitely a factor in the cold war we are fighting because we have sent baseball teams abroad with universally useful results.”¹ Nor was baseball’s power relegated to fighting communism; it was also fighting the good fight against that other scourge of the 1950s—the juvenile delinquent. The inanity reached a peak in an exchange during a Senate hearing, when Wisconsin Senator Alexander Wiley asserted, “Public interest is a matter of keeping the youth in action, keeping them mentally alert, particularly now when we are talking about this Khrushchev problem. We can’t be diverted from the big issue, which is maintaining the peace.” To which baseball entrepreneur William Shea responded, “You, sir, know that baseball probably constitutes one of the greatest deterrents to juvenile delinquency, because baseball is played, primarily, during the summer when the youths are out from school; when they don’t have the day-to-day activity of going to school.”²

If the American legislators seemed to be employing hyperbole, their Soviet counterparts were acting just as silly. During the middle of September 1952 the *New York Times*, along with other major American newspapers, reported that a Russian magazine, *Smena*, claimed that “Beizbol” was a “Yankee perversion of an ancient Russian village sport called lapta.” Presumably, the perversion consisted of the Americans transforming the quaint village sport into a “bestly battle, a bloody fight with mayhem and murder.” Although Americans cherished the

sport's ability to inculcate (good) character among its youth, the Russian reporter claimed, "American businessmen 'intensively implanted' this bloody sport among 14-year-old and 15-year-old adolescents who 'supplemented their lack of technique by a surplus of rough play.'" While lamenting the sad fate of "Tai Kopb" (Ty Cobb), whose body was "covered from head to foot with scars," the article excoriated the Yankee businessmen for exploiting athletes.³

Today's readers might respond to this depiction with amusement and perhaps derision, as did the *Chicago Tribune*, inserting editorial comments about the Soviet penchant for claiming priority of many inventions. American government officials, however, reacted with alacrity. While the secretary of defense took a humorous view of the Russian article, the State Department claimed it was part of the Soviet's "Hate America" campaign. Adding to the farcical nature of the situation, the new Soviet ambassador stated he would attend a baseball game.⁴ If he had attended a New York Yankees game, he would have found much propaganda fodder. Unless the Yankees played the Browns, White Sox, or Indians, for example, the ambassador would not have seen any black players. Indeed, during the following December Jackie Robinson created a stir by his blunt answer to the question of whether New York Yankees management was prejudiced toward black players, given that the team did not have any at the time: "Yes, I think they are."⁵ Hollywood audiences were already familiar with the dichotomy of blacks being shut out of good jobs but being drafted to fight and, possibly, die for the nation. In films portraying the Korean War, such as *The Steel Helmet* and *Pork Chop Hill*, the black GI often confronted a disturbing question, whether posed by a wily Commie captive or upon a character's own introspection: Why was he fighting for America when he was denied civil rights at home? The black GI character often responded by killing "Reds" because being an American, with all of its imperfections, was better than being Red. It was a good thing that the ambassador did not attend a Yankees game in 1927, with the famed "Murderer's Row" of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. By the time of escalating United States involvement in Vietnam, the golden

age of baseball was in eclipse. No senator would assert that baseball could convert the Viet Cong or deter hippies and yuppies from their sometimes violent political demonstrations.

Entire constituencies of Major League Baseball fans might find reasons to think of the legacy of the golden age as having been tarnished. Seven Major League franchises—Baltimore/St. Louis, Kansas City/Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago Cubs, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh—combined for five .500 and nine winning seasons during the 1951–60 period. In other words, each of these franchises averaged two seasons of .500 or better ball during the decade. There are no literary paeans to growing up in, say, Pittsburgh and rooting for the Pirates.

If you were a player, you were undoubtedly exploited, in the sense of having your pay determined in a rigged market. If you were an African-American player, you had to struggle harder to gain acceptance while enduring separate lodging and dining facilities during spring training. And while the owners might elicit little sympathy from many readers, the era was punctuated by almost annual congressional hearings challenging, if not threatening, their hallowed antitrust exemption.

The signs of decline, in retrospect, were obvious. The postwar era was a golden age primarily if you were a New York baseball fan. The New York Yankees and their National League neighbors, the Dodgers and Giants, dominated the game much as the Yankees (and in terms of payrolls, also the New York Mets) do today. Aside from the eras of Columbia Broadcasting System CBS ownership and George Steinbrenner's exile from active management of the Yankees during the late 1980s, the Yankees have been paramount. The postwar era epitomized Yankee superiority. If you lived outside the area, in what New Yorkers considered the hinterlands, the era probably did not appear so golden. From 1949 to 1964 the only World Series not to feature a New York team was the 1959 match-up between the Chicago White Sox and the Los Angeles Dodgers—and of course, the Dodgers were formerly a New York baseball team. In the ten series held between 1949 and 1958 not only was there a New York team in every World

Series, but six of them were played by two New York teams. Of the remaining thirteen teams only the Philadelphia Phillies, Cleveland Indians, and Milwaukee Braves appeared in the World Series during these ten years.

Even after the Dodgers and Giants vacated New York, the original New York franchises dominated the game. From 1959 through 1966 at least one of the three teams was in the World Series, and twice the series had two of the three teams.

The American League was essentially a variation of the Yankees and the Seven Dwarfs. Bottom-feeding teams, such as the St. Louis Browns, Philadelphia Athletics, and Washington Senators, began each season hoping to finish within thirty games of the Yankees. Fan apathy to such mediocrity across these cities induced all three of them to relocate by 1961. After trying to bankroll a winning team in Boston, owner Thomas Yawkey gave up during the 1950s, and the Red Sox settled into a shabby genteel mediocrity. The 1954 season represented the culmination of American League imbalance. The Yankees won 103 games, their best record between 1943 and 1960, but the Cleveland Indians won 111 games. Five teams finished more than forty games behind the Indians, including the Senators, Orioles, and Athletics. These three teams finished a combined 162 games behind the Indians. New York, Cleveland, and Chicago never finished below fourth place and often finished first, second, or third between 1951 and 1960, aside from 1957.

Not only did the Yankees routinely win pennants; they allegedly did so by pilfering star players from some of their hapless rivals. When Arnold Johnson purchased the Athletics and transferred the team to Kansas City, a series of trades with the Yankees induced fears that the Athletics were now lackeys of the Bronx Bombers. Such exploitative relationships between teams, however, were not new.

In the National League the Pittsburgh Pirates went eight consecutive seasons without rising above seventh place in an eight-team league. About the time that Roberto Clemente and others resurrected the Pirates, their cross-state rivals, the Philadelphia Phillies, fell into a four-

year skein as the worst team in the National League. The Cincinnati Reds sported losing records for every season between 1945 and 1955. Between 1947 and 1966 the Chicago Cubs had one winning season, going 82-80 in 1963, and one .500 season, in 1952. Without the magic of Branch Rickey's farm system, the St. Louis Cardinals became mediocre, despite the presence of Stan Musial. Yet unlike the American League, every National League team had at least a brief taste of championship success, as every one of the original eight franchises won a pennant between 1945 and 1964, including six different pennant winners between 1945 and 1951.

Even in New York City, however, epicenter of the golden age, fan apathy and frustration began to develop. Indeed, for Dodgers and Giants fans the so-called golden age had ended prematurely, when their beloved teams moved west after 1957. Even the haughty New York Yankees saw attendance fall by more than a third between the immediate postwar years to the mid-1950s. The monopolization of the city might have boosted attendance at Yankee Stadium during the last years of the 1950s, but any boost proved disappointingly small. In the hinterlands disappointment lurked. For Milwaukee Braves fans the era ended with the city retaining only a tenuous hold upon the team, while Kansas City fans waited for Charlie Finley to abscond with the Athletics.

Thus, by 1964 the Major Leagues were in turmoil. Television had proven to be an ally of dubious worth, bringing in revenue but also promoting competition from soap operas, situation comedies, westerns, professional wrestling, and professional football, which was capturing the imaginations of growing numbers of fans. An increasing proportion of Americans earned college degrees and worked in white-collar jobs with rising incomes and security. Americans left the inner cities in droves for the burgeoning suburbs. Greater proportions of Americans owned cars and enjoyed wider choices of leisure activities. The baby boom promised to deliver more fans but only at some indefinite future time. Initially, the baby boom may have altered leisure patterns of millions of young married adult fans. While black players now appeared

in the Major Leagues, the transformation was uneven. The Yankees and other American League teams delayed signing black players. In addition, the original sixteen teams played in old stadiums located in stagnating or declining neighborhoods; many of the stadiums lacked amenities that modern fans take for granted.

The Columbia Broadcasting System's purchase of the New York Yankees in 1964 seemed to exemplify the growing reach of corporate America. With its deep, deep pockets CBS seemed well positioned to extend the Yankees' dominance. After all, CBS was the nation's leading television network. Ironically, however, the purchase marked the end of the era.

What follows is a reexamination of Major League Baseball between 1946 and 1964 through the eyes of an economist. While an economist might not be most readers' first choice of whom they'd like to spend an afternoon with at the ballpark, economists can provide uncommon, and at times highly contentious, insights into the game. In particular, economists tend to view the reserve clause and drafts of amateur players with skepticism, being dubious of the need for "territorial exclusivity" for franchises, and they often view rising player salaries as a manifestation of rising revenues and ticket prices rather than as the factor triggering higher ticket prices.

Although it is easy enough to demonstrate that New York City baseball fans have been the chief beneficiaries of any hallowed age, important questions remain. Would players, for instance, have regarded the era as golden? During the postwar period and remaining a fixture of player's contracts until it was struck down in 1975, Major League Baseball owners enforced a reserve clause giving them the right to retain a player after his contract had expired during the postwar period. Owners and players testified before Congress that the reserve clause was crucial in maintaining competitive balance. Unlike many people, economists tend to believe that the distribution of playing talent to a large degree should be similar under either the reserve clause or free agency. Most economists believe that a crucial attraction of the reserve clause to owners was its diminution of a player's bargaining power.

Because teams could not merely sign established stars who were free agents, how did the Yankees maintain their competitive edge? Did they buy or trade for established stars, or did they sign the best amateur talent? If your team was not very competitive, could you at least hope to see your favorite hometown hero throughout his entire career? Was the comforting belief that teams had roster stability during the pre-free agency period true?

For baseball owners the golden age certainly lost much of its luster after the immediate postwar attendance boom between 1946 and 1950. Indeed, it was reasonable to ask, “What if the baseball gods put on a golden age and nobody came?” The “Boys of Summer” Dodgers played to just over a million fans per season during the 1950s. During their two pennant-winning seasons in 1951 and 1954, the New York Giants averaged just 1.1 million fans per season. For their final three seasons at the Polo Grounds the Giants averaged only seven hundred thousand fans, despite the marvels of Willie Mays. Indeed, it is fair to ask whether contemporary fans, even those residing in New York City, behaved as though they were living in a wondrous age. During the 1950s attendance fell off in both leagues, although the National League rebounded nicely as the decade unfolded.

What factors may have accounted for the attendance doldrums? Did owners, seeing the initial attendance boom, decide to exploit the increased demand and raise ticket prices? Did changing technology and demographic shifts affect attendance? Did television kill Minor League Baseball, or was the new medium falsely accused of “murder”? Did the growing ownership of automobiles and the concurrent shift to suburban living expand people’s choices of leisure activities and affect the ease of attending Major League Baseball games at downtown stadiums? In addition to being able to drive to games and finding readily available parking, what other amenities did fans want? Did the baby boom affect the leisure activities of American adults? How did owners respond to these changes?

If the attendance stagnation in the American League was due in part to the monotonous success of the New York Yankees during the

1950s, what steps did rival American League teams take in attempting to redress the imbalance? Did revenue sharing shrink the income gap between the wealthy Yankees and the ne'er-do-well Browns, Athletics, and Senators? Given the access to a new pool of talented black players, did American League rivals attempt to improve themselves via this relatively cheap source?

What if you lived in a burgeoning city in the West or South and wanted big league baseball? What chances did your city have of attracting a team, given baseball's long-standing sixteen-team, ten-city organization?

Unlike most businesses, Major League Baseball owners operated within a cartel, which barred the entry of new teams and should have bolstered the members' collective profits. Yet within the cartel teams had a good deal of discretion over quality and prices. The group also tried to prevent individual teams from acting in ways that could damage the other members. During the 1950s, however, issues arose that threatened the cartel's stability. Wealthy sportsmen throughout the country wanted their own teams. The scramble for the players that enjoyed the last vestige of a free market—talented amateurs—triggered escalating bonus payments. Teams in smaller or declining cities coveted new locales, especially the growing cities of the West Coast and Southeast, all the while cognizant of the fact that moving teams prematurely might injure the cartel by raising travel costs, generating public ill will, or, worst of all, encouraging congressional scrutiny.

All of these issues echo even today. Studying the past may help us understand how we got here, and fortunately, there is a wealth of data available for the period. Two congressional hearings required team owners to present financial data for several seasons between 1946 and 1956. Various sporting publications at the time also reported attendance, ticket prices, media coverage, and other relevant data. And teams produced more informative scorecards during the postwar era than they had previously.

This book differs from other discussions of the era in its greater reliance upon data, buttressed by statistical and economic analysis.

The most technical material can be found in the notes, so as to not disrupt the text. Because baseball fans in general appear to be comfortable with numbers, they will perhaps find that looking at financial and other data opens new vistas for thinking about the game. In addition, throughout the story the opinions of contemporary observers provide color and, more important, truer glimpses into the attitudes pervading the game.

Those Damn Yankees

Dominance and Submission in the American League

Almost every American has heard of the mighty New York Yankees. Even those who are not baseball fans know that the Yankees epitomize championship baseball. The team's resurgence beginning in 1996 has created the usual hand-wringing and cries to "break up the Yankees." Yet the current team has a long way to go before rivaling the records of past Yankee teams, particularly those that won fifteen pennants in eighteen seasons between 1947 and 1964. The Boston Celtics' eleven National Basketball Association titles in thirteen years is the only skein in professional sports that comes close to rivaling the Yankees. Between 1996 and 2003 the Yankees appeared in six World Series, winning four of them. Since then, the team has disappointed its owner, George Steinbrenner, and its fans, despite its gaudy collection of stars (with matching salaries). Judging from statistical data drawn from the Yankees championship runs, the current streak of success is not as illustrious as previous streaks have been, especially in terms of win-loss records (see table 1.1 in the appendix). The "games ahead" figures for both the 1976-78 and 1998-2001 eras in table 1.1 are inflated by the divisional structure, in which only four to six teams compete directly for a divisional title instead of eight to ten teams competing for a league title. At least the current Yankees dominance over baseball has paid off in terms of attendance.

This chapter provides a brief history of the New York Yankees, from their modest beginnings through the Jacob Ruppert ownership and Babe Ruth. I examine the team's record on the field during the postwar era and consider the effect of the team's repeated pennant success on fans' interest and appreciation. Despite being the only team at the time in New York City, having four more home games than in previous seasons, and featuring Mickey Mantle's and Roger Maris's pursuit of Babe Ruth's single-season homerun mark, attendance at Yankee Stadium in 1961 failed to recover to the levels of 1946–51.

The New York Yankees' Early Record

The New York Yankees' early history was one of disappointment. The team failed to win any pennants during the American League's first two decades. From 1903 to 1918 the Yankees won fewer than 48 percent of their games. Thanks to the alleged impecuniousness of Boston Red Sox owner, Harry Frazee, the new Yankee owners, Capt. Tillinghast Huston and Col. Jacob Ruppert, were able to buy virtually an entire starting lineup and pitching staff. The Red Sox had been the American League's most victorious franchise between 1903 and 1918. According to legend, in 1920 Frazee supposedly needed money to fund his Broadway efforts, so he sold Babe Ruth for a reputed \$125,000 (plus a \$300,000 loan). In fact, according to the New York Yankees' financial records, the team paid four installments of \$25,000 for Ruth, and there is no evidence of a loan.¹ Before this sale, the Yankees had purchased Duffy Lewis, Carl Mays and Ernie Shore from the Red Sox for a combined \$55,000; the Yankees also threw in some players who would help the Red Sox to second-division finishes. After purchasing Ruth, the Yankees bought Joe Dugan, Herb Pennock, George Pipgras, and Elmer Smith and traded for Waite Hoyt and Wally Schang. Many of these players joined holdovers Frank Baker, Wally Pipp, and Bob Shawkey, who had been purchased from the Philadelphia Athletics and Detroit Tigers, to form the bulk of the Yankees' first pennant-winning squad in 1921. Later the Yankees would buy Red Ruffing from the Red Sox.²

The Yankees began successfully to introduce new talent such as Bob

Meusel and, later, Lou Gehrig and Tony Lazzeri. By the 1930s the growing Yankees farm system and judicious purchases of some Minor League players produced Bill Dickey, Lefty Gomez, and Joe DiMaggio as well as a host of lesser-known players. The talent probably peaked with the 1936–39 editions, led by DiMaggio and Dickey (see table 1.1 in the appendix). In each of the four years the Yankees led the league not only in scoring but also in fewest runs allowed. The Yankees also outscored their opponents by 2.14 runs per game during this period, topped by the 1939 edition that outscored its foes by 2.72 runs per game; even the storied 1927 Yankees had only outscored their foes by 2.44 runs per game. These Yankees also led the league in homeruns and earned run average (ERA) in each of the four seasons. The 1927 Yankees had dominated in such a fashion, but the 1926 and 1928 teams had struggled to finish first, although the latter team won 101 games. The 1936–39 Yankees were the class of the baseball world, yet falling attendance was a troubling aspect of the streak. Not only did the league's attendance fall by 10 percent between 1937 and 1939, but the Yankees' attendance fell by almost 14 percent during the same period. The 1941–43 teams did quite well too, winning by an average of over thirteen games per season. Again, while both the league's and Yankees' attendance fell between 1941 and 1943, the Yankees' attendance fell by a greater proportion. Clearly, repeated championships did not necessarily deliver greater attendance. During the latter half of the American involvement in World War II, the Yankees fell to third and fourth places in 1944 and 1945, but their attendance perked up considerably. The war reduced the disparity between incomes for Americans in general and, in the American League, created the most radical "income redistribution" of all—the moribund St. Louis Browns won their only pennant in 1944.

The Postwar Yankees and Attendance Trends

Major League Baseball enjoyed a stunning resurgence of popularity immediately after the war. The two leagues attracted more than twice as many fans per season during 1946–50 as during the previous boom of the late 1920s. The Yankees had their first attendance

of over two million in 1946, despite the fact that the team finished a distant third (perhaps fittingly) to the Boston Red Sox (see table 1.2 in the appendix). In each of the five seasons from 1946 to 1950 the Yankees attracted over two million customers. Unfortunately for subsequent Yankee owners, the franchise would not attain this level again for another twenty-five years, and in one year attendance would actually drop below one million, albeit in the slightly strike-shortened 1972 season. The Yankees attendance peaked in 1948 at 2.37 million fans. Ironically, the team finished third that season, only two and a half games behind the Cleveland Indians, as the tight pennant race spurred attendance.

The Yankees hit their stride in 1949, en route to five consecutive pennants. The team was initially centered around aging veteran Joe DiMaggio, who had had a superb year in 1948 but was simply not the same player that he had been before the war. By 1949 injuries and aging limited him to half the season. Still, the Yankees rallied around Yogi Berra, Tommy Henrich, and Phil Rizzuto as well as pitchers Eddie Lopat, Vic Raschi, and Allie Reynolds. Relief pitcher Joe Page led the league in saves. This team won the pennant after a torrid race with the Boston Red Sox, an arguably more talented team. Author David Halberstam wonderfully recounts the pennant race in *Summer of '49*. He chronicled how the Yankee players were especially motivated by World Series money to supplement their paychecks.³

None of the subsequent eight pennant-winning teams crushed the opposition in the fashion of the 1936–39 squads, nor were these Yankees loaded with “superstars.” What the Casey Stengel and George Weiss Yankees had was a balance of hitting, fielding, and pitching. In some cases the Yankees would have five or six hitters with more than ten homeruns as well as five or more pitchers with ten or more wins. Just once during the five pennants between 1949 and 1953 did the famed “Bronx Bombers” lead the league in homeruns. In fact, the Yankees of the postwar era were almost as likely to boast the league’s best earned run average (ERA) as they were to lead the league in homeruns. The team’s hitters led the league in homeruns seven times, while its pitchers

recorded the lowest ERA six times during the 1946–64 era. The five pennant-winning teams of 1949–53 won by an average of just under four games per season and never cracked the one-hundred-win barrier. Casey Stengel's best record with the Yankees occurred in 1954, when the team won 103 games. The Cleveland Indians won 111 games that year, however, burying the Yankees. The Indians had set an American League attendance record in 1948 with 2.6 million fans, but the team drew just half this number in its pennant-winning season of 1954.

By the mid-1950s the disparity between the Yankees and the rest of the American League clubs was entrenched. Only a super year by the Cleveland Indians in 1954 prevented ten consecutive Yankee pennants from 1949 to 1958. *Sports Illustrated* commented,

Bluntly, the Athletics of 1954 somehow managed to be terribly terrible in the horribly weak American League, which only half deserved to be called a major league. Only the Indians, the New York Yankees and Chicago White Sox consistently played big-league baseball last summer. No wonder disenchantment struck fans in Baltimore, boredom entered the Washington scene, and absenteeism was rife in Philadelphia. . . . The fans did not weary of major-league baseball. They wearied of the dreary games played by the A's against rivals almost as dreary. . . . The feeble American League can be just as feeble with the A's in Kansas City or Wounded Knee.⁴

The New York Yankees had enough good pitchers that Whitey Ford, arguably their best pitcher ever, made more than thirty starts in only one season between 1953 and 1960. He made thirty-three starts in 1955, pitching 253 innings; in the other seasons between 1953 and 1960 he never threw for more than 225 innings. When Ralph Houk became the manager in 1961, Ford's starts jumped to thirty-nine. He averaged thirty-seven starts and almost 260 innings per season between 1961 and 1965. The longer season probably accounted for two extra starts per season, but Ford clearly worked more during the waning days of the Yankees' postwar dynasty.

During the 1946–54 period the American League had three relatively

weak franchises in the Philadelphia Athletics, St. Louis Browns, and Washington Senators (see table 1.3 in the appendix). Note that these prolonged disparities occurred in the absence of free agency. The first two teams shared their cities with National League teams. The Boston Red Sox, Cleveland Indians, and New York Yankees consistently finished with winning records. The Chicago White Sox and Detroit Tigers fielded mediocre teams throughout the nine years, although the two teams were heading in opposite directions, as the White Sox improved between 1950 and 1954. The 1955–64 era saw a tightening of the win-loss distributions, after netting out games with the expansion Los Angeles Angels and Washington Senators. The standard deviation in win-loss percentage shrank between 1946–54 and 1955–64, from .088 to .068.

Although the league became a little more competitive in the later period (1955–64), even as the Yankees continued to dominate, there were some significant shifts. While the Browns/Orioles improvement was not surprising, the declines of Boston and Cleveland were marked. Chicago improved dramatically. All three cities shrank in population between 1950 and 1960, although the metropolitan areas grew. Boston shrank by about one-eighth in population, but the Red Sox were now the sole Major League occupants of the city because the National League Boston Braves relocated.

The Yankees' domination of the American League occurred as attendance was falling throughout the league. The cry "Break up the Yankees" assumes a plaintive aspect in light of the dwindling attendance. Both leagues enjoyed large attendance gains after the war; after drawing over ten million fans in both 1948 and 1949, however, American League attendance fell below seven million in 1953, the last of five straight Yankee pennant years. The American League, which usually had higher attendance, fell behind the National League that year. Although the novelty of a new pennant winner in 1954 bolstered American League attendance by almost one million and the tight race of 1955 increased it by another million, the National League recaptured the attendance lead in 1956 and would maintain it, with one exception,

for another twenty seasons.⁵ The exception to larger National League attendance occurred in 1961, when the expanded American League drew more total fans than the still eight-team National League. Yet the National League still attracted more on a per-team basis. While American League attendance peaked again in 1955, being higher than any season since 1950, the next three years concluding a Yankee four-year pennant run saw attendance plunge by over 18 percent between 1955 and 1958.

The Chicago White Sox's surprise pennant of 1959 bolstered attendance by 25 percent, with the Chicago franchise alone drawing 625,000 more fans in 1959 than in 1958. The attendance hike held during the 1960 season, even with the return of the Yankees to the top. New York's attendance reached 1.63 million in 1960. This Yankee team—with Mantle, Maris, and Ford—was beginning the last Yankee championship streak until the late 1970s. The first four pennants (1960–63) were won by an average of eight games per season. The 1961 Yankees feasted on the diluted talent of the expanded American League and won 109 games out of the lengthened 162-game schedule. The Detroit Tigers finished eight games back, but now there were six teams finishing over thirty games behind the Yankees. While overall league attendance rose by nine hundred thousand, attendance fell slightly on a per-team basis. By 1964, even with a tight pennant race, which the Yankees won by a single game over the Chicago White Sox, the attendance was at the same level as in 1960, despite the two additional teams. In spite of the collapse of the Yankees and a new champion in Minnesota in 1965, overall league attendance continued to drop, reaching 8.86 million. This attendance level was the lowest of the original expansion era of 1961–68.

The National League did not have such a dominant team; the Dodgers were the closest approximation during the 1950s and 1960s. After 1956 the National League consistently drew more fans than did the American League, reaching a peak in 1965–66, when the National League drew almost five million more fans per season.

What was the game like on the field? Did changing the balance

between pitchers and batters affect attendance? Table 1.4 shows summary statistics for the National and American leagues during the years 1946–64 (see appendix). For comparison three recent National League seasons are included; modern American League statistics are not used for comparison because of the designated hitter rule. Baseball in recent years has featured high levels of homeruns and respectably high numbers of stolen bases, a mix not found during the postwar period, when other features of the game were emphasized.

National League batters hit more homeruns than did the American League hitters in every season between 1947 and 1959; eventually, the American League became the homerun league, especially in 1964. Although the National League often featured more stolen bases than did the American League, the differences were usually small. The influx of black players did not immediately transform the National League into a base-stealing league, despite Jackie Robinson's base-running exploits. Maury Wills and, later, Lou Brock helped widen the National League's advantage in stolen bases, but stolen bases were much rarer during the postwar era than they are in today's game.

The postwar American League game relied on high on-base percentages from many walks and a reasonable amount of homeruns, especially in 1950. Today's baseball officials who rely on on-base and slugging averages, such as general managers Theo Epstein and Billy Beane, would have embraced 1950s-style baseball. Slow-footed sluggers found their niche during the postwar era.

As the Yankees' excellence waned toward the end of the postwar era, the game itself changed. During the 1960s baseball in general was entering an offensive "ice age." After the homerun binge of 1961 in the American League, both leagues watched offensive numbers plummet in 1963. Through July 1963 hitters in both leagues were putting up the lowest batting averages since 1908–9. *Sports Illustrated* hired Joseph S. Ward and Associates, engineering consultants, to test baseballs. The firm found that the balls were heavier, bouncier, and firmer in 1961 than in previous seasons.⁶ A similar set of tests done in 1963, however, revealed that the newer balls were lighter than in

1961. According to the engineer testing the balls, “A lighter ball is a deader ball.” The engineer concluded that “5% of the old bounce is definitely not there. This means that a ball Roger Maris hit into the seats 400 feet away in 1961 would fall 20 feet short of the seats today.”⁷ In addition, baseball tinkered with the strike zone before the 1963 season: “Officially, the top of the strike zone was raised from the letters on the uniform to the top of the shoulder.” Philadelphia Phillies manager Gene Mauch claimed, “The new strike zone is helping the pitchers, all right. The batters are panicking on that high pitch. They don’t know whether to swing or not.”⁸ By 1968 American League hitters would set records for futility; the season would be known as the “Season of the Pitcher.” Despite the low offensive numbers, attendance was higher on a per-team basis in 1968 than in 1961. The anemic offensive numbers did not appear to be the main culprit of the American League’s attendance woes of the early 1960s, as the league’s attendance rebounded when different teams won pennants during the worst of the offensive slump of 1965–68.

The Effect of Pennant Races on Attendance

By the late 1950s attendance at Yankee Stadium had settled around 1.5 million. While many baseball fans viewed themselves as “Yankee haters,” the team’s drawing power on the road was on the rise. As New York sportswriter Til Ferdenzi observed, “It would appear that every knocker is becoming a booster for the hated Yankees.” The Yankees road attendance accounted for 24 percent of the league’s total attendance.⁹ Even so, too much dominance within a season and across seasons eventually discouraged fans. An examination of some pennant races illuminates the phenomenon.

The Yankees sprinted to the pennant in 1958. With the Dodgers and Giants gone from the city, the Yankees expected a big increase in attendance. Unfortunately for the team, it ran away and was ten games ahead of the Chicago White Sox on September 12. A late-season slump and fan disinterest combined to curb attendance. When the season finished, Yankee officials were bemoaning a drop in season attendance