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Preface

I lived for nights like these, moving across the city's great broken body, making connections among its millions of cells. I had a crazy wish or fantasy that some day before I died, if I made all the right neural connections, the city would come all the way alive.

Ross MacDonald, *The Instant Enemy*

Reconstructing a life is a fascinating exercise. Edward Grant Barrow spent fifty years in baseball as a central character in many of its most interesting and entangled situations. During the first half of the twentieth century, the baseball establishment was run by a tight circle of executives. These men argued, schemed, collaborated, and traded. The ever-evolving relationships between them shaped the baseball environment of the era. Because Barrow was an actor in the middle of so many key events, following him allows us to decipher their origin and effect. Barrow's life strings together two critical metaquestions of the half-century: how did baseball's competitive environment evolve? and how did the Yankees come to dominate it?

He held practically every job, except player. As president of the International League during the second decade of the twentieth century, Barrow led the battle against the upstart Federal League, a self-declared Major League backed by some of the biggest industrialists of the era. He managed Babe Ruth and the Boston Red Sox to their last World Series championship before the "curse."

During the first eighteen years of their existence, the New York Yankees had never won a pennant. In October 1920 bickering Yankees owners Jacob Ruppert and Tillinghast L'Hommedieu Huston hired Barrow from the Boston Red Sox as de facto general manager. Under Barrow's leadership, the Yankees captured their first pennant in 1921 and went on to become the most successful sports franchise in American history. The story of Barrow's assembling and maintaining the great Yankees dynasty affirms his genius

for organizing, for recognizing baseball talent, and for taking advantage of the economic environment in which he operated.

Note on money: Throughout this book I often refer to dollar amounts. Because of economic differences between Barrow's era and today, these amounts can have meaning only if put in context. In his book *How Much Is That in Real Money*, John J. McCusker has spliced together several price series to create a price index back to colonial times. Based on McCusker's index, the following table indicates the factor by which to multiply a dollar in the shown year to adjust to a 2006 dollar.

1900	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930	1935	1940	1944
24	21	20	10	11	12	15	12	11

For example, one dollar in 1930 is equivalent to twelve dollars in 2006 in terms of the goods one could purchase.

To some degree, however, converting prices to 2006 dollars, even with a price index, can be misleading. The price index accounts for the effects of inflation over the past century. The overall economy, however, now has much more money in the system, not just because of inflation but also because the economy itself has expanded tremendously. The growth of the economy can be broadly attributed to two factors: an increase in population and an increase in productivity. Because of the increase in productivity, incomes have increased much faster than inflation. That is, an average income today can purchase many more goods than an equivalent (i.e., inflation-adjusted) income could have in the past. For example, adjusting Babe Ruth's then-astronomical salary of \$80,000 in 1930 to \$960,000 today implies an equivalent purchasing power; it does not mean \$960,000 would be his current salary. As professional sports revenue has exploded due to many factors (larger attendance, television, luxury boxes, etc.), team revenues and salaries have jumped by much more than inflation alone would suggest.

Barrow spent several years in Canada. During his time there, both the United States and Canada were on the gold standard, which pegged the two countries' dollars at parity. Thus, a Canadian dollar was equivalent to a U.S. dollar.

I. "The Best Deal the Yankees Ever Made"

Boston Braves rookie manager Dave Bancroft believed he had pilfered a budding pitcher from his old manager, John McGraw, when, in 1924, he claimed Dinty Gearin on waivers from the New York Giants for the four-thousand-dollar waiver price. Unfortunately, Bancroft was not familiar with the waiver rule. A team claiming a first-year player like Gearin also had to reimburse his original purchase price. The Giants had paid twenty-five thousand dollars to the Minor League Milwaukee Brewers to acquire Gearin's contract. Thus the Braves were technically on the hook for the full amount the Giants had spent on him.

The impoverished Braves of the mid 1920s had no interest in shelling out twenty-five thousand dollars for Gearin's services. To recoup as much as possible, the Braves sent Gearin back to Milwaukee, salvaging ten thousand dollars in return. They quickly sent these funds to the furious Giants, who naturally demanded the remaining fifteen thousand dollars as well. In the end, the Braves weaseled out of their obligation by arguing that Bancroft was not authorized to make a waiver claim, and that the claim should never have been accepted by the league in the first place. They successfully contended that unless otherwise delegated, only the team president was authorized to make waiver claims (although as this story makes clear, this rule was not always adhered to).

At the time, most baseball teams were still run like small businesses. As American business historian Alfred Chandler has pointed out, prior to the explosive growth of American corporations in the half century after the Civil War, even the largest firms were directed by a president or a treasurer, and a general superintendent, who "personally supervised the labor force." Baseball teams were similarly directed well into the twentieth century. Nearly all were administered by the president, typically the controlling member of the ownership group, and the manager, who guided the players (the labor force) on and off the field. The distribution of authority between manager and president depended mainly on the level of control the president wished to retain for himself. Many owners (I often use "owner" and "president"

interchangeably in this book), such as Barney Dreyfuss in Pittsburgh or Charles Comiskey in Chicago, prided themselves on their baseball smarts and maintained control over player personnel moves and decisions. Others, like Charles Stoneham of the New York Giants, employed a manager such as the willful genius John McGraw. Outside of a veto on significant cash outlays, Stoneham allowed McGraw essentially free rein on all personnel matters.

Teams also employed a business manager in their front office. Historically the business manager's job had been to administer the team's back-office functions such as accounting, ticket sales, and stadium operations. He also arranged travel, booked hotels, and oversaw the bats, balls, and uniforms. The business manager had no responsibility for the acquisition or disposition of players; his was a purely back-office position. The president and the manager were responsible for the product on the field.

Baseball ownership syndicates prior to the First World War were generally made up of upper-middle-class professionals and businessmen. Most included local politicians or those well connected to them. The syndicate typically named its largest investor or most baseball-knowledgeable man as team president. By the second decade of the century, as Organized Baseball became more accepted within upper-class society, several wealthy industrial magnates began to covet the prestige of owning a baseball team. Furthermore, with competition from the self-declared major Federal League, the established leagues actively sought wealthy owners to bolster undercapitalized franchises. When Organized Baseball accepted a few well-heeled owners as part of the Federal League dissolution settlement, these new men began to rethink the composition of their front office, that branch of a baseball team's operation responsible for the product on the field.

In the wake of the Federal League's demise, ice-plant builder Philip DeCatesby Ball acquired the St. Louis Browns. Ball recognized his lack of baseball knowledge and the potential drawbacks of saddling his manager with both personnel acquisition and on-field duties. Accordingly, he hired Bob Quinn to run the club and granted Quinn the powers of a modern-day general manager—a role he had fulfilled successfully for Columbus in the high Minors. Chewing-gum magnate William Wrigley also joined the baseball ownership fraternity when he purchased a controlling interest in the Chicago Cubs. Wrigley brought in sportswriter Bill Veeck Sr., ini-

tially as vice president and treasurer. Wrigley soon promoted Veeck to the position of president, but like Quinn, he functioned as a modern-day general manager.

One of the central dilemmas—if not the central dilemma—for any organization is the level of centralization of decision-making authority. Over-centralize and one loses the flexibility and spontaneity of smart employees on the front lines; decentralize too much and the organization can lose its focus and necessary administrative constraints. Wealthy industrialists such as Wrigley and Ball, who faced this conundrum in their own businesses, recognized the value of adding a front-office executive with responsibility for player procurement.

By late 1920 New York Yankees co-owners Jacob Ruppert and Tillinghast Huston realized they needed a seasoned baseball man to run their franchise. Over the first six years of their ownership, the duo spent considerably to improve the team, culminating in the purchase of Babe Ruth prior to the 1920 season. And although the team improved significantly that season, the pennant again eluded them. When business manager Harry Sparrow died in May 1920, Huston himself hoped to assume a leading role in the front office. Trained as an engineer and with numerous outside interests, he lacked the skill and dedication for the position. With Ruppert's prodding, Huston grudgingly accepted his unsuitability for the task. Moreover, the relationship between the partners was becoming difficult. Ruppert and Huston had contracted a marriage of convenience to purchase the team, but they were not particularly close. A recent managerial disagreement and its carryover further stalemated the decision-making process of the team.

Ruppert, a brewery owner, in particular recognized the opportunity for better administration. He had observed firsthand the struggles of American corporations to develop an efficient management structure. Organizational administration must address two distinct areas: oversight of day-to-day operations and attention to the long-term. As baseball evolved into a more mature business after World War I, Ruppert realized that a more sophisticated front-office structure was required. No longer could a manager and an amateur owner maintain sustainable excellence from a baseball team.

In late October 1920, with the blessing of the financially strapped Harry Frazee, the owner of the Boston Red Sox, the Yankees' owners offered Bos-

ton field manager Ed Barrow a job as the Yankees' business manager. Although he may not have recognized it, Barrow had trained his entire life for the position. He was almost the antithesis of what we think of today as a professional manager, and he would have bristled at the characterization. Nevertheless, he proved the perfect fit. Then fifty-two, Barrow had begun organizing baseball teams and leagues in Des Moines as a teenager and had successfully held just about every conceivable baseball job (except that of player) since then. At the time sportswriter Dan Daniel may have best characterized Barrow as "forceful, alert, crafty, and when required, vitriolic." Barrow was a large man who, in his youth, boxed and relished physical confrontation. His demeanor and occasional vitriol could intimidate even robust professional athletes.

The quality that most impressed Ruppert and Huston, however, was his workaholic dedication to excellence. Barrow had proven his administrative capabilities as a Minor League owner, Minor League president, and big league manager with significant autonomy in team operations and player procurement. Barrow also had a surprising eye for detail; for example, since his youth he had prided himself on his penmanship. In Barrow the Yankees' owners landed a competent administrator who was also a knowledgeable baseball man with a competitive spirit.

Like Quinn and Veeck, Barrow was thrust into a baseball position that remained largely undefined. The Yankees' owners recognized they needed more than just a business manager; they also needed a baseball man to help make player personnel decisions and mediate between the owners and the manager. They willingly delegated much of their authority over the players to Barrow and over time allowed him to reorganize and assume control over nearly all of the front office. Immediately after his hiring, Barrow and the two owners restructured the Minor League and amateur scouting system to be more geographically regionalized. During his years in New York, Barrow aggressively oversaw the scouting department. Perhaps more than any other single factor, Barrow's energetic administration of the player acquisition function sustained the longevity of the Yankees dynasty. The Ruth purchase placed America's best baseball player and biggest sports celebrity in its largest city. The Barrow acquisition a year later ensured that the short-term boost from Ruth would be solidified and prolonged into one of the great sports dynasties of the twentieth century.

“THE BEST DEAL THE YANKEES EVER MADE”

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Many years later sportswriter Joe Williams called the Barrow hiring “the best deal the Yankees ever made.” Before Barrow the Yankees had never won a pennant; after his addition they became one of the legendary dynasties in all of sports: “The Ruths had done the hitting, the Pennocks the pitching, the Dickeyes the catching, and the Lazzeris the fielding, but it was Barrow who knitted the organization together, gave it pattern and a far-seeing program, directed its overall energies. That’s why we say he represents the best deal the Yankees ever made.”

Questions for Daniel R. Levitt

Author of [*Ed Barrow: The Bulldog Who Built the Yankees' First Dynasty*](#)

Why did you pick Ed Barrow for your biography?

I've always been fascinated by team building. Why do some franchises win consistently while others spend years without making the playoffs? My first book, [Paths to Glory: How Great Baseball Teams Got That Way](#), which I coauthored with Mark Armour, focused on a number of teams, some great, some not so great, and examined why they developed the way they did. As the architect of the Yankees' dynasty--one of the longest runs of sustained success in the history of American sports--Barrow makes for a terrific subject.

When did Barrow take over the Yankees, and what level of success did he achieve?

The Yankees hired Barrow as their de facto general manager after the 1920 season. Up to that time the franchise had never won the pennant. With Barrow on board the Yankees captured the 1921 pennant and during his tenure won a total of fourteen pennants and nine World Series victories.

So how did Barrow create such a dominant team?

There were two questions relative to Barrow and the Yankees that I sought to answer: how did baseball's competitive environment evolve; and how did the Yankees come to dominate it. The economics of team building at the time were quite fluid. In the early 1920s Barrow followed up on the purchase of Babe Ruth from the Boston Red Sox and spent over \$400,000 acquiring owner Harry Frazee's best players. When that avenue dried up and major league teams were under little pressure to sell off their talent during the roaring twenties, he needed another talent source. Barrow and his great scouts correctly identified the top players in the then independent minor leagues, and Barrow purchased several future Hall of Famers. When the rules for minor league team ownership changed in the early 1930s, Barrow, at the instigation of owner Jacob Ruppert, developed the best farm system in the American League.

Anything interesting in the process of changing those ownership rules?

In the book I quote and analyze at some length the 1931 winter meeting that led to the new rules governing minor league ownership, effectively eliminating the obstacles to a functional farm system. The meeting itself reads more like farce than any rational analysis of the situation as the owners and baseball commissioner Landis struggle not only with what rules they want, but what the existing rules actually were and how they were enforced.

What did Barrow do before joining the Yankees?

Prior to jumping to the Yankees at age 52, Barrow had held just about every job in baseball except player. In late nineteenth century he managed and owned a minor league team and later became a minor league president. To help generate interest for his league he brought in heavyweight boxing champion Jim Corbett and female pitcher Lizzie Arlington. He also participated in one of the first attempts at night baseball in 1896. During the American League's bid for equality with the National in 1901, Barrow ran the Toronto franchise in the high minor leagues. During this chaotic period, Barrow spent his time trying to get his Toronto team into the American League and battling to keep his players from jumping to the majors.

In 1903 Barrow received his first shot at the majors when the Detroit Tigers hired him as manager. In midseason 1904 Barrow resigned under pressure from Frank Navin, destined to become one of the key executives in the history of Detroit baseball. Like Barrow, Navin was young and ambitious, and the two would cross swords many more times until Navin's death.

Later Barrow became president of the International League, a minor league just below the level of the majors. He led the International league during its disastrous conflict with the self-proclaimed major Federal League in 1914 and 1915. To survive Barrow schemed to have a modified version of his International League recognized as a third major league within Organized Baseball. Despite his best efforts, Barrow's political talents were not up to the task, and after some apparent successes, the major leagues rejected his pleas.

Anything else?

Maybe most importantly in 1918 Barrow managed the Babe Ruth and the Boston Red Sox to their last World Series title before the "curse." During his years at the Red Sox helm he had several high profile confrontations with the childlike Babe. Barrow was also at the center of the Carl Mays controversy that nearly tore the American League apart.

Was Barrow involved in the sale of Babe Ruth to the Yankees?

When Red Sox owner Harry Frazee sold Babe Ruth to the Yankees after the 1919 season for \$100,000 and a loan of \$300,000, Barrow was still manager of the Sox. When Frazee broke the news to the frustrated, but not completely surprised Barrow, Barrow maintained some hope that Frazee might release some of the cash proceeds to help rebuild the team. Unfortunately, the cash-strapped Frazee plowed little if any of his windfall back into the Red Sox.

What about the sale itself; why did Frazee sell the greatest player in the history of baseball?

For roughly eighty years after the sale of Ruth the notion that Frazee sold Ruth and other players because he needed the money moved beyond conventional wisdom and into the realm of historical fact. I am not aware of any serious baseball histories that disputed this view. More recently however a revisionist history has taken root suggesting that in fact

Frazer was financially well-off and did not sell Ruth because he needed the money but because he actually believed the team would be better without the youthful star. Shockingly, this revisionism has now been accepted by many as the new conventional wisdom.

Using recently available and unexamined information--including the New York Yankee financial records on file at the Baseball Hall of Fame and the Frazer papers at the University of Texas--I debunk the new revisionism and show conclusively that Frazer sold Ruth because he was in desperate need of the money.

At the time of Barrow's hiring by the Yankees, how were baseball franchises run, and how did Barrow fit in?

Most baseball teams were still run like small businesses. They were run by a team president, typically a major stockholder, and the manager. The distribution of authority between manager and president depended mainly on the level of control the president wished to retain for himself. As a de facto general manager, Barrow was thrust into a baseball position that remained largely undefined. The Yankee owners recognized they needed a baseball man to help make player personnel decisions and mediate between the owners and manager. They willingly delegated much of their authority over the players to Barrow and over time allowed him to reorganize and assume control over nearly all of the front office.

How did Barrow's reign end?

With the death of owner Jacob Ruppert in 1939, the ownership of Ruppert's estate passed to a trust for the benefit of three beneficiaries, two nieces and a young lady friend. The trust named Barrow president of the Yankees, and for several years he sat the pinnacle of his beloved franchise. Estate tax issues quickly materialized, however, and the trust began evaluating sale options. Several potential sale alternatives were languishing when America entered World War II, virtually eliminating all non-war related economic activity.

Nevertheless, the estate tax issues could not be postponed indefinitely, and Barrow and the trust began discussions with a triumvirate of construction magnate Del Webb, wealthy sportsman Dan Topping, and baseball maverick Larry MacPhail. Barrow and MacPhail had feuded publicly for many years and Barrow hated to see "his" team go to his rival. At one point early in the sale negotiations Barrow had declared that MacPhail would control of the franchise "over his [Barrow's] dead body." Nevertheless, in January 1945 the trust sold the Yankee organization to the three for the war-depressed price of only \$2.4 million.