

## CHAPTER 1

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# October 1912

The mood of many of the fans filing into Fenway Park that October afternoon mirrored the foul weather. Even by Boston's often-dank fall standards, it was a dreary day. Heavy clouds hung over the Back Bay all morning and afternoon, further dampening already soggy spirits. The previous day's game at Fenway had been played in fog and drizzle so impenetrable that even Bostonians in the best seats had trouble seeing what was happening on the field. Considering the way their Red Sox had played, that was probably a blessing.

Boston's "Olde Towne Team" hadn't merely lost the last two games; it had disgraced itself in a way that enraged the city. The past forty-eight hours had been a fiasco. Days that had started with so much promise for Red Sox fans had ended in bitterness and recrimination.

The Red Sox, the American League champions, and the New York Giants, the National League champions, were concluding the 1912 World Series – or, as it was known back then, the "World's Series." It had been a hotly contested postseason that riveted fans throughout the country. Extra trains had to be added to shuttle all the hangers-on between Boston and New York. Torchlight parades drew huge crowds in both cities. Special platforms were erected in Times Square and along Boston's "newspaper row" on Washington Street so that tens of thousands of passersby, in those pre-radio days, could follow the action on mammoth boards with diamonds carved into the middle. Pitch-by-pitch and base-running updates were flashed to board operators via telegraph, then displayed on the diamond, triggering deafening roars and groans. The Times Square board was hailed as a technological marvel; it was run by electricity.

Boston mayor John Francis "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, whose yet-to-be-born grandson would become the thirty-fifth president of the United States, and New York mayor William Gaynor engaged in good-natured public jousting. Thousands of people – quite likely the two mayors

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among them – engaged in not-so-good-natured private betting. Saloon-keepers, bookmakers, and sportswriters all agreed it was the most heavily wagered event they'd ever seen. Gamblers hung out in Fenway's bleachers, hollering out the odds. Scalpers were hawkng tickets for as much as fifty or even sixty bucks a throw – double the take from the '11 Series. Many commentators were calling the '12 Series – the ninth ever played – the finest yet.

The Red Sox had gone into the previous day's game holding a 3–2 lead in games won in the best-of-seven series. (The second game, lengthened by a nasty scuffle that cleared both benches, had been called a tie and suspended after eleven innings because of darkness.) A Boston win looked assured in the seventh game, however, because the Sox were sending their ace, twenty-two-year-old “Smoky Joe” Wood, to the mound. Wood had dominated opponents that season, winning thirty-four games while hurling a Gibsonian ten shutouts. Smoky Joe had acquitted himself well in the Series, winning games one and four while striking out a total of nineteen Giants. In game one, Wood was particularly stout, snuffing out a Giants rally in the ninth to preserve a 4–3 win. “I threw so hard I thought my arm would fly right off my body,” Joe supposedly declared in the clubhouse afterward.

President William Howard Taft, cruising off the Newport coast aboard the yacht *uss Mayflower* – a floating Xanadu replete with wine cellar and solid marble master bath – insisted that a naval wireless keep him apprised of game seven's progress. Taft was a huge man and a huge baseball buff. Two years earlier he had become the first president to take part in Opening Day ceremonies. In retrospect, perhaps Taft should have been trolling for votes instead of trolling Rhode Island Sound. In less than three weeks he would lose all but two states to the combined forces of Democrat Woodrow Wilson, the winner, and Bull Mooser Theodore Roosevelt, the spoiler.

Despite the interest evinced by their portly commander-in-chief, Wood and his Red Sox teammates had not been enthused about the prospect of clinching the Series the day before. In fact, quite the opposite: two incidents earlier in the Series had incensed them.

First, baseball's governing National Commission, which served as a rubber stamp for the club owners and league presidents, decided not to share the proceeds of the tied second game with the players. The

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commission reckoned that since there had been no conclusion to the contest, the ballplayers had not earned their stake in the gate.

The other issue that left nerves raw was Boston president James McAleer's insistence that spitballer Buck O'Brien – not the peerless Wood – start the sixth game of the Series. With the Sox holding a three-to-one advantage in games won, Wood was primed and ready to go in game six at the Polo Grounds in New York. But McAleer doubtless wanted the Series to move back to Boston for one more day of big box office. Despite the protestations of Red Sox player-manager Jake Stahl, second-year-man O'Brien started the sixth game and was battered around for five runs in the first inning. The Sox went on to lose 5–2.

As explored in Glenn Stout and Richard Johnson's *Red Sox Century*, the postgame innuendo floating around Boston was that O'Brien didn't know he was scheduled to pitch until he arrived at the Polo Grounds just before the game started. Supposedly nursing a hangover from too much revelry in Manhattan the night before, Buck was in no condition to take the slab. Joe Wood's brother Paul, under the misconception that his unhittable sibling would start, had bet a hundred bucks – a tidy sum in those days – on the Sox in game six. On the train ride back to Boston following the game, Paul Wood was so bent on revenge that he reportedly baited O'Brien into a fight, inflicting a black eye.

It wasn't the first time that Boston's American League franchise had been suspected of postseason shenanigans to hype the gate. In 1903, the year of the first modern World Series, the great pitcher Cy Young and his Pilgrims (as the team was then called) allegedly “threw” game one against the Pittsburgh Pirates to protest the meager financial incentives – and manipulate more favorable odds for the Boston club for the remainder of the postseason. Young got scuffed up in the top of the first inning, his fielders made several embarrassing gaffes behind him, and the Pirates managed to pull off not one but two double steals – all before a peeved overflow crowd in Boston's South End. Boston's players and the club's owner, the story went, had taken full advantage of those more lucrative stakes once the odds evened out following Pittsburgh's victory. Boston fans knew that story all too well – and they thought history was repeating itself.

Another rumor swirling around Boston pubs was that owner McAleer, knowing O'Brien would falter, had wagered a bundle on the Giants in

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game six. Patrons of a Roxbury saloon called “Third Base” (so named because “it was the last place you stop before going home”) were sure that the Red Sox president was larding both pockets.

The sixth game of the '12 Series was knocked off the front page of most newspapers around the country because it took place the same afternoon as the attempted assassination of presidential candidate Theodore Roosevelt. A deluded bartender named John Schrank shot Teddy in the chest as the former president was working his way toward a stage in Milwaukee. Schrank's pistol shot was deflected by Teddy's metal eyeglass case and by a fifty-page speech that was fortuitously folded in his vest pocket. Undeterred, Roosevelt held up his speech text with the bullet hole in it, vowing to the crowd, “I will make this speech or die.” He finished his remarks before submitting to medical attention.

The tension on the field and in the stands at Fenway got even uglier as the seventh game approached. There was no rest day between the sixth and seventh contests; the players got off the train and – bleary-eyed – were back at Fenway after a short night's rest.

Brand new that year, the ballpark was packed to the rafters as it had been throughout the Series, so crowded that standing-room-only sections had been cordoned off on the field itself. Thousands of people were craning their necks behind roped-off areas in the outfield, barely three hundred feet from home plate. Many of them were bellowing the chants for which Red Sox fans had become infamous. One of them, sung to the tune of a popular ballad called “Tammany,” went:

Carrigan, Carrigan  
Speaker, Lewis, Wood, and Stahl.  
Bradley, Engle, Pape, and Hall  
Wagner, Gardner, Hooper, too.  
Hit them! Hit them! Hit them! Hit them!  
Do, boys, do!

But with the first pitch of the seventh game just minutes away, Boston's biggest cheerleaders were conspicuously absent. They were the self-anointed “Royal Rooters,” a group of several hundred *überfans* led by Mayor Fitz and Ned “Nuf Ced” McGreevey, the proprietor of the Third Base saloon. McGreevey earned his nickname by thundering “Enough said!” when his customers' arguments over sports or politics grew too

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loud or long. Either nervous that the Royal Rooters wouldn't show or acting out of spite – or perhaps both – McAleer's green eyeshade deputy, club treasurer Robert McRoy, sold the Rooters' usual seats to fans queued up outside the ballpark. Since the club had sold Series tickets in strips of three games, in management's view duckets to the seventh game could only be secured on a first-come, first-served basis – a pesky little detail that was never communicated to the Rooters, nor anyone else, for that matter.

A few moments later, waving pennants and accompanied by a brass band, Fitz, McGreevey, and company marched through the then-opening in the center-field bleachers, only to discover that their seats had been bartered out from under them. McAleer and McRoy had relegated the Royal Rooters, whose allegiance went back, literally, to day one in the franchise's history, to standing-room-only in left field. Outraged, Mayor Fitz demanded a huddle with team officials, which took place in front of the pitcher's mound. No soap, His Honor was told: the Rooters were stuck in standing room. After their leader's appeal was denied, many of the Rooters went berserk, knocking over a temporary restraining fence and refusing to leave the playing field. Adding insult to injury, fans seated along the third base line began pelting the Rooters with peanuts, Cracker Jack, scorecards, and anything else they could get their hands on. The situation became so frenzied that mounted police were called in to restore order, galloping headlong into the throng from the open area in center field, billy clubs in hand.

Amid this chaos, Smoky Joe Wood was trying to warm up. In forbidding conditions, the start of the game was delayed for more than a half hour as the police and coaches and players from both teams herded the Rooters behind the restraint in left field. Wood's unsettled warmup and the mayhem all around him could not have helped his frame of mind. Like his brother Paul, Joe, too, reportedly had a confrontation with the hapless Buck O'Brien. The two supposedly had to be separated outside the clubhouse a couple of hours before the ball game started; a bat allegedly had to be wrung out of Wood's hands. O'Brien not only had the misfortune of losing game six, he was guilty of another sin in Wood's eyes. Buck was an immigrant kid and a practicing Roman Catholic, a background and a religion abhorred by Wood and a certain faction of teammates.

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When the game finally started, Smoky Joe Wood was awful. For the only time all season, he got knocked out of the box early. Before being replaced in the top of the second, he threw barely a dozen pitches, giving up seven hits and six runs. Tim Murnane of the *Boston Globe*, whose observations commanded universal respect (Murnane's pronouncements were considered "pretty much ex cathedra," in the words of modern *Globe* sportswriter Bob Ryan), volunteered that Wood appeared to be "cutting the ball over the heart of the plate." With runners at first and second and nobody out, Wood curiously chose to pitch from a full windup instead of the stretch, allowing the Giants to dash off an easy double steal.

Wood's teammates dragged the Sox further into the mire; behind him, one of the finest fielding teams in history made a peck of mental and physical errors. The hijinks didn't stop after Wood left the game. As reported in the next day's *New York Times*, in the top of the second, relief pitcher Charley Hall tried to pick a Giants runner off second base. Hall's throw eluded both the Sox shortstop and its all-world center fielder. It eventually had to be tracked down by Boston's right fielder as the Giants runners sauntered around the bases.

When the game mercifully ended in the cold and mist, it was 11-4, Giants. The Series was now even at three games each. "When he walked to the pitching mound . . . Wood wore a halo," the *Times* asserted. "But before three hours had gone, fickle fandom was looking about for someone else to put on the pedestal."

To "fickle fandom" – the Red Sox faithful – the whole episode stunk to high heaven. It wasn't just the Royal Rooters who suspected the fix was in; Murnane and other reporters hinted that game seven wasn't on the level. The *Chicago Daily Tribune's* respected baseball seer, Hugh Fullerton, deplored the suspicious turn the Series had taken. "Stamp out gambling and the end of talk of crookedness is at hand," he snapped in a column that week. Many people feared the worst: that the Red Sox had deliberately thrown the game to recover their losses from the "tied" contest. With Wood pitching, the conspiracy theory went, the Giants had been heavy underdogs. If the Sox players had laid money on the Giants, they would have made a killing.

The Royal Rooters felt so betrayed they gathered en masse on Jersey

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Street after the game, singing sarcastic songs of praise to the Giants. Cries of “The hell with the Red Sox!” and “Who gives a damn whether they win or lose!” rang through the Fens. The Rooters’ cause was taken up by an editorial in the next day’s *Globe*, which likened the club’s use of mounted police to Cossacks putting down a Russian peasant revolt.

A coin was tossed to determine the location of the eighth and final game. The Giants’ surrogate called “heads”; it came up “tails.” The clincher would be at Fenway the next day, October 16, 1912.

Red Sox fans were in a tizzy. With many of them convinced that the team’s owner had compromised game six and that their beloved players had thrown game seven, they stayed away from game eight in droves. The Rooters angrily boycotted, with Mayor Fitz leading the catcalls.

Sadly, then, only a half-capacity crowd was on hand to witness the final match-up of the 1912 World Series – one of the best baseball games ever played.

Game eight was everything the previous two contests weren’t: beautifully pitched, taut, gut-wrenching baseball. Joe Wood had thrown only a handful of pitches the day before and could easily have been sent to the mound again. But given Wood’s mercurial behavior over the past forty-eight hours, manager Jake Stahl couldn’t trust him. He turned to rookie Hugh Bedient. Bedient had pitched well as both a starter and reliever during the Series, starting and winning the fifth game, 2–1.

Almost everywhere those seventeen thousand fans looked that day, they glimpsed baseball immortality. Six of the people in uniform were later enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Planted in the Giants’ dugout was their combative manager, John McGraw. The son of an Irish immigrant railroad worker, “Muggsy” McGraw was revered by his players and Giants fans – and reviled by practically everyone else. He taught his charges to play the rugged brand of baseball pioneered by his old Baltimore Orioles teams of the 1890s. Muggsy, Hughie Jennings, and “Wee Willie” (“hit ’em where they ain’t!”) Keeler played baseball with sharp knuckles and sharper cleats. McGraw infused the same spirit in his Giants clubs, winning nine pennants and three World Series championships in his three decades as manager. He courted the Big Apple’s Runyon-esque characters, count-

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ing Broadway stars, bookies, and professional gamblers among his many cronies. Muggsy even owned a casino in Havana, Cuba, which in short order became the wintertime playground of New York's better-endowed hustlers. The considerable girth of McGraw cohort (and some would say past and future co-conspirator) Wilbert Robinson was parked near McGraw in the Giants' dugout. Grantland Rice once wrote of McGraw that "his very walk across the field in a hostile town is a challenge to the multitude." Muggsy reveled in his bullyboy image but despised his bullyboy nickname.

Standing on the mound, in contrast to his profane manager, was the Giants' Christy Mathewson, the former Bucknell University class president whose scholarly demeanor belied a competitive fire. The right-hander was in the middle of one of the most celebrated pitching careers in baseball history. His famous "fadeaway," a screwball that dove away from left-handed hitters, baffled right-handed hitters, too. The "Christian Gentleman," an image he carefully cultivated, captured twenty-three of his 383 career wins that season, compiling an earned run average of 2.12. Mathewson was the closest thing that America had to a genuine folk idol in the early part of the twentieth century – a combination of brains and brawn worthy of the Frank Merriwell books. Writer Jonathan Yardley, in his essay about Matty in *The Ultimate Baseball Book*, called him "the golden god of baseball's true golden age." When Matty died tragically young in 1925, *Commonweal* eulogized him by writing, "No other pitcher ever loomed so majestically in young minds." Chief Meyers, his battery mate for eight years with the Giants, said that Matty's control was so good, "you could sit in a rocking chair and catch him."

In the 1905 World Series against Connie Mack's Philadelphia club, Matty stunned the sporting world by pitching three shutouts in the Giants' drubbing of the Athletics. But in the 1912 Series he was mortal, pitching indifferently in the controversial second game and losing a 2–1 heartbreaker in game five. Mathewson was one of those enviable people who master everything they attempt in life. At a time when the game of checkers was all the rage in clubs and bars throughout the country, Mathewson was the reigning checkers champion in several states, even winning a so-called national competition. He also played a mean game of billiards, bridge, and poker, no doubt sweetening one of the few decent off-the-field incomes from the dead-ball era.

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Sitting in the Giants' bullpen was another Hall of Fame hurler. Debonair left-hander Richard William "Rube" Marquard set a record that season that still stands today: he won a remarkable nineteen games in a row. His twenty-six victories that year made Rube the ace of McGraw's staff. Rube enjoyed life in the limelight. In one of America's first celebrity romances, he scandalously pursued vaudeville star Blossom Seely, who was inconveniently married to someone else at the time. After a torrid courtship, Blossom obtained a divorce and married Rube. She was three months pregnant with Rube's child when they exchanged vows. For several years during Rube's off-season, the lovebirds toured the vaudeville circuit together. Their showstopper was a tune called "The Marquard Glide." Alas, Rube and Blossom ended up filing for one of America's first celebrity divorces.

At first base for the Giants was Fred Merkle, one of the hard-luck characters in baseball history. "Bonehead" Merkle had been tarred with his unfortunate handle four years earlier when, in a crucial late-season game against the Cubs, he neglected to touch second base on what would have been a game-winning hit. Merkle's "boner" ultimately contributed to the Giants' loss of the pennant. In center field was another soon-to-be-bedeveled Giant named Fred, the sure-handed Fred Snodgrass, one of the best outfielders in the National League.

Other notable Giants included John Tortes "Chief" Meyers, the Cahuillan Indian from California's missions who was a steady if slow-footed presence behind the plate; Buck Herzog, the no-nonsense third baseman; and second baseman Larry Doyle, whose .330 batting average that season earned him most valuable player honors in the National League. A few years earlier, "Laughing Larry" had endeared himself to McGraw's acolytes in the press box by uttering one of the most feted – and copied – quotes in sports history: "It's great to be young and a Giant."

The Red Sox were renowned for the best outfield ever assembled to that time – and one of the finest ever. Manning the left side was George "Duffy" Lewis, the fleet-footed Californian who excelled at racing up the odd slope of Fenway's left field, which in those pre-Green Monster days curved upward before meeting the wall. Boston cartoonists liked to portray Duffy as a goat perched on a mountain. In deference

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to Lewis's ability to snare balls off that hillside, Sox fans nicknamed the slope "Duffy's Cliff."

Handling Fenway's cavernous right field was Harry Hooper, who, like Lewis, was both a Roman Catholic and an alumnus of Saint Mary's College in California. Few ballplayers in baseball history have forced a change in the rules, but Harry Hooper did. Hooper had such gifted hands that he would deliberately juggle a potential sacrifice fly with a runner at third base, forcing the opponent to stay on the bag as Hooper inched closer to the infield, patty-caking the ball every step of the way. After witnessing Hooper's juggling act, rule makers determined that a runner could leave the bag after the fielder had made initial contact with the ball, and not wait until the fielder actually controlled it.

In center field for the Red Sox stood a barrel-chested Texan who could be as ornery as the Hill County mules he used to ride as a child. His name was Tristram Speaker and he played baseball with a hell-for-leather abandon that left fans and sportswriters awestruck. In 1912 he was the best ballplayer extant, winning the Chalmers Award (and with it a luxurious nickel-plated Chalmers "30" convertible) as the most valuable player in the American League. He led the circuit in doubles, home runs, extra-base hits, on-base percentage, outfield assists, and put-outs that year. His .383 batting average placed him third in the league behind Detroit's Ty Cobb and Cleveland's Shoeless Joe Jackson.

He was such a hot commodity in New England in the early 1910s that Hassan cigarettes marketed special trading cards depicting Speaker in various poses on the field. Speaker also lent his name to a top-of-the-line straw boater that fetched a full two dollars at finer haberdasheries, plus he shilled for Boston Garters for men. A local jeweler was so taken with Speaker's 1912 accomplishments that he presented the center fielder with a five-hundred-dollar sterling-silver bat.

Tris Speaker's defensive prowess was already legendary in just his fourth full season in the big leagues. Sportswriter Gordon Cobbledick of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* once mused, "Speaker has been credited with revolutionizing outfield play, but that is less than true. The word 'revolution' suggests followers, and few outfielders were capable of following Speaker's pattern. He played the shallowest center field ever seen before or since his time." Speaker was virtually a fifth infielder. Some six

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times in his career – including late in the seventh game of the 1912 World Series – he recorded unassisted double plays by collaring line drives and beating the retreating runner to second base. He once raced into the infield and served as the second-base pivot man on a double play ball.

Speaker had a sharp and incisive mind, having spent two years studying at Fort Worth Polytechnic after graduating from high school. Later, during World War I, his facility for engineering earned him admission to an elite U.S. Navy aviation program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

His booming Texas twang dominated a clubhouse in much the same way his feet and arm dominated center field. Early baseball chronicler A. H. Spink compared Speaker's baritone to "rumbling thunder" and likened "his softest words [to the] growl of a mastiff." He didn't suffer fools gladly; at that point in Tris Speaker's world, there were a lot of fools. His piercing dark eyes missed nothing on or off the field. Most of his contemporaries – even the acidic Cobb – managed a smile whenever a photographer was around. But almost all the pictures from Speaker's early days show a dour – even snarling – expression, with his jaw set and lips tightly pursed. His nose was flat enough to suggest that it had been on the business end of more than a punch or two. As a child he was so stubbornly determined to become a great ballplayer that when he was thrown by a horse and fractured his right arm and collarbone in several places, he taught himself to bat and throw left-handed.

One play from the 1912 Series captures the fury with which Speaker attacked a baseball game. In the tenth inning of the ill-starred second game, the Red Sox were trailing by one run when Speaker came to the plate against Christy Mathewson. Speaker smashed a drive over Fred Snodgrass's head into Fenway's center field. Watching him fly around the bases, Red Sox fans held little doubt in their minds that Speaker would attempt to score. As Speaker glanced over his shoulder rounding third, Giants third baseman Buck Herzog turned the kind of trick his manager had pulled dozens of times in his playing days for the old Orioles. Herzog threw his hip into Speaker, causing Tris to stagger. Just then, however, substitute shortstop Tillie Shafer dropped the relay throw from Snodgrass, and Speaker resumed his mad dash for home plate. The ball and Speaker's cleats arrived at the dish at the same in-

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tant, but catcher Art Wilson couldn't handle the throw. The ball skittered away.

In the recollection of baseball historian Fred Lieb, Speaker bounced up, retagged the plate to be certain his run counted, then – in a rage – headed back up the third baseline to confront Herzog. Both benches emptied as Herzog and Speaker squared off. By the time umpire Silk O'Loughlin and his partners got everyone settled down, darkness had begun to set in. After one more inning, O'Loughlin declared the game a tie.

The Herzog episode wasn't the first time – and it was far from the last – that Tris Speaker felt compelled to put up his dukes. The nephew of Confederate cavalymen, Speaker didn't hesitate to renew hostilities over what he viewed as the “War of Northern Aggression” whenever a Yankee (on or off the field) or a Catholic or a black person offended his sensibilities. Like many in his generation, the Texas cowboy carried racial and religious prejudices, as well as a healthy chip on his shoulder, through much of his life.

Manager Stahl's gamble to start Bedient in the eighth game rather than Wood paid off. Bedient, a farm kid from Chautauqua County, New York, matched the great Mathewson pitch for pitch. Only in the third inning could the Giants muster any kind of a rally. Red Murray's double over Speaker's head scored Josh Devore from third. The Giants led 1–0.

Harry Hooper saved Bedient from further damage when he made a dizzying catch of Larry Doyle's long drive to right center in the sixth inning. Hooper twisted and turned as he raced backwards, finally diving over the temporary restraint and into the crowd, emerging with the ball in his bare hand. McGraw and his mates howled in protest, but the umpires ruled it a catch.

The Red Sox, meanwhile, could get practically nothing started against Mathewson. In the seventh inning, however, Matty began to tire. Player-manager Stahl's flared single to left and Heinie Wagner's base-on-balls put runners at first and second with two outs. From his perch on second base, Stahl motioned for reserve outfielder Olaf Henriksen to pinch-hit for pitcher Bedient. Henriksen delivered in the clutch, slapping an 0-2 curve ball off the third base bag to tie the game.

Taking Bedient out of the game left Stahl with the toughest decision