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The 2007 All-Star Game

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
The 2007 All-Star Game
JULY 10, 2007

Baseball's All-Star Game is coming up tonight at the baseball facility formerly known as PNC Park, and the home of baseball's current leading villain, Barry Bonds. In a surprise to many, Bonds was voted to the National League starting line-up by the fans, who allegedly are disgusted by the poster boy for performance enhancement. The cheers tonight will be thunderous as Barry is introduced in the only ballpark where he remains a great hero, and even a beloved personage. The cheers will be even louder when baseball honors Willie Mays. These cheers will be echoed across the land for one of the greatest players in the history of the game.

Although the concept of an all-star game dates back to 1858 and a game between all-star teams from Brooklyn and New York, it was seventy-four years ago that the first modern all-star game was held, July 6, 1933. In the seven decades since, this game has become a marvelous showcase for the best baseball talent, the marking point for mid-season, and a great promotional event for the game of baseball. Its appeal in part stems from the fact that in this all-star game, unlike the others of the major professional sports, the style of play will be virtually the same game that is played every night during the season.

The All-Star Game was the creation of Arch Ward, sports editor of the Chicago Tribune, who was able to persuade the owners to hold a game between the American and National League All-Stars in Chicago in conjunction with the Century of Progress Exhibition of 1933. Those who welcomed this game saw it as the dawning of a new age, in which the use of modern promotional techniques had arrived in baseball.

A number of owners objected to it as a distraction from the regular season, an unnecessary interruption of the normal patterns. No doubt, some also objected because they were not going to make enough money from the game, which was being played for charity. Managers objected to the game because it broke up the regular season, although more objections came from those managers whose teams were doing well than those whose teams were struggling.

After the first All-Star Game, the managers were designated as the previous year's pennant winners, but for that first game,

two of the grand old managers, Connie Mack and John McGraw, were given the honor. For the first two years both managers and fans chose the players and then from 1935-46 the managers selected their teams. Beginning in 1947, the selection of the starting lineup passed to the fans, until 1957 when Cincinnati fans stuffed the ballot box and chose Reds for seven of the eight starting positions.

This led to the removal of the fans from the process from 1958 to 1969. During that period major league managers, coaches, and players, made the selections. In 1970, the selection of the starting lineups returned to the fans. Ballot box stuffing and sentimentalism rather than performance continue as problems with this system that now includes on-line voting.

The first contest was dubbed the "Game of the Century," as 49,200 fans packed Comiskey Park and millions listened on radio. Never had there been so much baseball talent gathered in one place. The game featured such stars as Carl Hubbell, Lefty Grove, Earl Averill, Joe Cronin, Frankie Frisch, and Lefty Gomez.

But the star of the first game was Babe Ruth, at age 38, less than two years from retirement still the dominant force in baseball. Over the years, the Babe had developed the uncanny ability to hit home runs for special occasions. Appropriately then, Ruth hit the first home run in All-Star Game history: a two run shot in the third inning giving the American League its third run in a 4-2 victory. In the 8th inning, Ruth put the frosting on the cake making a remarkable running catch in right field off the bat of Chick Hafey to help preserve the victory.

The following year the game moved to the Polo Grounds in New York, where Giant left-handed screwball artist Carl Hubbell was the starting pitcher. In the first and second innings, Hubbell struck out, in order, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jimmy Foxx, Al Simmons, and Joe Cronin. All five of these American League All-Stars were subsequently elected to the Hall of Fame. With moments like these, it only took two years before the All-Star Game was cemented into the pattern of the baseball season. And many more great moments have followed.

This year the All-Star Game comes in the middle of a most interesting season in which Roger Clemens has reached the 350 win plateau, Barry Bonds is about to pass Hank Aaron on the all-time home run list, Sammy Sosa hit his 600th home run, Frank Thomas has hit his 500th home run, Ken Griffey will hit his

600th home run, Alex Rodriguez will hit his 500th home run, and Tom Glavine will win his 300th game.

New stars continue to emerge with Prince Fielder following in his father's footsteps. It is said he hit balls into the upper deck in Detroit when he was twelve-years old. Other rookie all-stars include last year's American League MVP Justin Morneau, J.J. Hardy, Russell Martin, Dan Haren, Cole Hamels, and many more.

Whatever the remainder of this season brings, the All-Star Game remains the All-Star Game, a great showcase for the stars of the national pastime, and a great place for the new stars to be introduced to the nation. The All-Star Game has always counted for that, and no one needs to invent any other reasons to justify its existence.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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