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Baseball's All-Star Game

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Baseball's All-Star Game is coming up on Tuesday in Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Stadium, one of the old style cookie-cutter ballparks of the early 60's. 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 sixty-one years ago that the first modern all-star game was held, July 6, 1933.

In six decades this game has become a marvelous showcase for the best baseball talent, the marking point for mid-season, and a great promotional event for baseball.

The game itself 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 of the breakup of the regular season, although more objection 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 grand old managers, Connie Mack and John McGraw were given the honor. For the first two years players were chosen by both managers and fans, 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.

The first game was dubbed the "Game of the Century," as 49,200 fans packed Comiskey Park and millions listened to the game 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 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. It is of course the first season under the new structure of three divisions in each league, and one must say that although the jury is still out, it looks to me that this will be a good arrangement.

It is also an interesting season because of the tremendous home run explosion that is taking place, along with the big numbers in RBI's. The single season home run record seems within reach of at least three players, Ken Griffey, Frank Thomas and Matt Williams, while there are several players within striking distance of the RBI record. This means that pitching is in eclipse with ERA's running quite high. Why all of this is happening is not entirely clear, although expansion is generally blamed along with theories about a livelier ball. Neither explanation seems satisfactory.

Finally it is an interesting season because all of these record threatening performances may become a footnote, as a strike now seems nearly inevitable. The owners are ready to force their

agenda onto the players and risk a repeat of the 1981 fiasco.
Maybe the Commissioner will save the day.

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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