

No Money, No Beer, No Pennants

CONTENTS

	List of Illustrations	vii
	Prologue	1
Chapter 1	Change of the Guard	5
Chapter 2	Starting to Build	23
Chapter 3	The Vote Is Yes	43
Chapter 4	Trouble Ahead	57
Chapter 5	An Improved Ball Club	79
Chapter 6	A Homegrown Star	119
Chapter 7	Grand New Stadium	148
Chapter 8	The Big Train Comes to Town	172
Chapter 9	Return to 66th and Lexington	200
Chapter 10	Goodbye to Walter	224
Chapter 11	A Teenage Hero	250
	Sources	275
	Index	277

PROLOGUE

It was a brilliant afternoon, just made for baseball. Sure, there had been a small chance of rain, but the temperature stood at a comfortable seventy-nine degrees. The thousands of fans who walked down the new concrete ramps were filled with anticipation of what was going to take place. The long-awaited debut of Cleveland Municipal Stadium was just moments away. Since 1928, city officials and fans had been patiently waiting for the gigantic new facility to become a reality. Now, on Sunday July 31, 1932, it was about to happen.

League Park had been the home of Cleveland baseball dating all the way back to 1891. The seating capacity at that time was nine thousand, quite adequate for the up-and-down Cleveland Spiders. Nearly twenty years later, owner Charlie Somers put a brick-and-steel second deck on the park that doubled the original number of seats. Jim Dunn, who acquired the team in 1916, found a way to push the seating capacity even higher, carving out another seven thousand seats. When the Cleveland Indians made their first World Series appearance in 1920 (and won, 5–2 over the Brooklyn Robins), temporary seats and standing room squeezed another thousand or two fans inside the grounds. Just one more row of seats and the park might have exploded.

With a much-deserved World Championship, the bar had been raised for Cleveland baseball. In spite of its friendly confines and

neighborhood appeal, League Park could no longer deal with the crowds that wanted to see the hometown boys play ball. American League stars like Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jimmy Foxx, Charlie Gehringer, and a host of others generated more ticket requests than could be handled. An alternative to the historic park at 66th and Lexington had to be found.

A combined effort from civic boosters and the city manager's office built the huge stadium downtown, right off the Lake Erie shore. It was their belief that a stadium located a bit north of the business district would be an economic boon for the city. They had no way of knowing in 1928 that the Great Depression was about to paralyze the entire country.

Now, though, the Philadelphia Athletics were in town to christen the new stadium. An incredible crowd of 79,000 was on hand to see Robert "Lefty" Grove match pitches with Cleveland's curveball wizard, Mel Harder. Special trains brought several thousand fans from as far away as Pittsburgh. Athletics owner Connie Mack had put together a champion club with players including center fielder George "Mule" Haas, catcher Mickey Cochrane, left fielder Al Simmons, right fielder Bing Miller, and slugger Jimmy Foxx at first base. This would be a formidable test for the Indians and their new home.

The pregame ceremonies were well planned. The invited guests included the rarely smiling commissioner of baseball Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, American League president Will Harridge, Ohio governor George White, and Athletics owner Tom Shibe. Governor White threw the first pitch to Cleveland mayor Ray T. Miller. A large number of former Spiders, Naps, and Indians were in attendance. They were introduced by another ex-ballplayer, Jack Graney, now the Indians' radio play-by-play man. Graney had a long career in Cleveland baseball, starting with the Naps and lasting long enough to retire as an Indian. He became the first ballplayer to climb into the radio booth and describe the action on a full-time basis. He introduced the old favorites one at a time. There was Cy Young, the great pitching star of the 1890s. Young had been a major factor in bringing home the Temple Cup in 1895. He had won a phenomenal 511 games during his long career. His catcher, Charles "Chief" Zimmer, came out, pleased to be recognized some thirty years later. In his day, Zimmer wore the thinnest of gloves on his catching

hand, nothing like the mitts worn by the current Indians catchers. One could only imagine how he held on to Young's fastballs.

Graney then called out members of the Cleveland Naps. They were led by Napoleon "Larry" Lajoie, the game's finest second baseman. A huge roar came from the crowd when Larry jogged onto the field. From 1902 through 1914 he had been the face of Cleveland baseball; hence the team name, "Naps." Next were Lajoie's outstanding teammates, third baseman Bill Bradley and right fielder Elmer Flick. Both were local products, still making their homes in the Cleveland area.

Graney finished the introductions by calling out three heroes of the 1920 World Series, Elmer Smith, Bill Wamby, and player-manager Tris Speaker. In the pivotal fifth game at League Park, Smith walloped the first bases-loaded home run in World Series history. During that same game Wamby executed a spectacular unassisted triple play, a feat that has never been duplicated in post-season play. Speaker had been the catalyst throughout the entire World Series, making one tremendous play after another. The ovation for the three stars was deafening.

The ceremonies came to an upbeat conclusion and all that was left was to play a baseball game. What a game it was! At this point in the season, the two clubs were fighting hard for second place.

Grove and Harder were untouchable inning after inning. Reporters noted that the center-field bleachers were filled with several thousand men wearing white short-sleeve shirts. They claimed the batters were distracted by the white background and could not see the ball leaving the pitchers' hands. Another factor in the lack of hitting might have been the sizzling fastballs thrown by Grove and the razor sharp curves of Mel Harder.

The Indians lineup did not quite match up to the hard-hitting Athletics. On the other hand, the outfield—local hero Joe Vosmik, Earl Averill, and Dick Porter—could more than hold its own. First baseman Eddie Morgan could hit fairly well, along with shortstop Johnny Burnett. Luke Sewell, the younger brother of former Indians shortstop Joe Sewell, was catching.

With both pitchers on top of their game, the innings piled up with neither team able to score. At one point Harder struck out the side, setting down the A's sluggers Cochrane, Simmons, and Foxx

in order. The game would go seven full innings before the Athletics put a run on the brand new center-field scoreboard. In the top of the eighth, Max Bishop led off with a walk. Mule Haas sacrificed him to second. Then Mickey Cochrane hit a shot up the middle that just got by Harder's outstretched glove and Bishop raced home for the only run of the game. In the bottom of the ninth Eddie Morgan launched a drive to deep right field, but Bing Miller glided back and made the play to end the game. The newspapers would mention that Morgan's drive would have easily cleared the short right-field wall at old League Park.

That was another time, though. A new era in Cleveland Indians baseball had begun.