

American Hercules: The Creation of Babe Ruth as an American Icon

David Leister

TC 660H

Plan II Honors Program

The University of Texas

May 10, 2018

H.W. Brands, P.h.D
Department of History
Supervising Professor

Michael Cramer, P.h.D.
Department of Advertising and Public Relations
Second Reader

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	Page 3
Introduction.....	Page 5
The Dark Ages.....	Page 7
Ruth Before New York.....	Page 12
New York 1920.....	Page 18
Ruth Arrives.....	Page 23
The Making of a Legend.....	Page 27
Myth Making.....	Page 39
Ruth's Legacy.....	Page 46
Conclusion.....	Page 57
Exhibits.....	Page 58
Bibliography.....	Page 65
About the Author.....	Page 68

“When the legend becomes fact, print the legend”

-The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance

“I swing big, with everything I’ve got. I hit big or I miss big. I like to live as big as I can”

-Babe Ruth

Abstract

Like no other athlete before or since, Babe Ruth's popularity has endured long after his playing days ended. His name has entered the popular lexicon, where "Ruthian" is a synonym for a superhuman feat, and other greats are referred to as the "Babe Ruth" of their field. Ruth's name has even been attached to modern players, such as Shohei Ohtani, the Angels rookie known as the "Japanese Babe Ruth". Ruth's on field records and off-field antics have entered the realm of legend, and as a result, Ruth is often looked at as a sort of folk-hero. This thesis explains why Ruth is seen this way, and what forces led to the creation of the mythic figure surrounding the man.

Ruth was a truly revolutionary baseball player, with a style that transformed the way the game was played, watched, and even designed. Ruth also benefited from playing in the right place at the right time. Ruth's first seasons in New York coincided with the dawn of the Roaring Twenties and the Jazz Age, where rising incomes and more leisure time allowed Americans to consume more media, including baseball. Print advertising was on the upswing as well, with a new invention, radio, providing nation-wide broadcasts of baseball games.

Ruth had the good judgement to hire an agent, named Christy Walsh who helped propel him into a nation-wide figure. Walsh used ghostwriting and print advertising to circulate Ruth's name and face across the country. By the end of the 1920s, Ruth was advertising for almost every product imaginable, appearing regularly in the by-lines of the country's newspapers, and even appeared in a couple of movies. By the end of his career, Ruth's popularity moved beyond baseball and into folklore. His influence even extended beyond his lifetime where the most successful and popular athletes modeled their public relations and advertising careers off of his and Christy Walsh's strategies.

Introduction

The Sultan of Swat, the King of Crash, the Colossus of Clout, and the Great Bambino are not a series of fairy tale characters or the lineage of some conquering empire. All of these epithets were given to one man who played baseball in 20th century America. Though they may just as easily apply to a king or warlord, Babe Ruth earned every one of them. His career, which spanned from 1914-1935, gave rise to a legend which still lives in American popular culture.

Take, for example, *The Sandlot*, a family movie released in 1993 about a group of friends growing up in the 1960s. Much of the story revolves around a baseball signed by Babe Ruth and his status as a folk hero to the characters. After accidentally hitting the ball into a forbidden yard, the kids try everything in their power, even risking life and limb, to recover the ball, just because it was signed by Ruth. At a critical moment in the movie, one character is visited in a dream by the ghost of the Babe himself, who gives the character some advice. At the end of the scene, the Babe leaves with the parting words “heroes get remembered, but legends never die.”¹

Though fictional, the characters and words accurately depict how Ruth was perceived in the 1960s the 1990s. Ruth’s life, personality, and career with the Yankees have endured long after his playing days ended and show no signs of fading to the background. Even today, a young prospect named Shohei Ohtani is referred to as “The Japanese Babe Ruth,”² Ruth’s image and voice appear in commercials, and his name appears in lists of the top athletes of all time.³

It is unusual that Ruth’s fame has had such staying power. Many of his contemporaries, such as Ty Cobb, Walter Johnson, and Lou Gehrig all had storied careers. Later stars such as Joe

¹ The Sandlot 1993

² The Washington Post March 18, 2018

³ <http://www.espn.com/sportscentury/athletes.html>

DiMaggio and Mickey Mantle dominated New York in their time and added their own chapters to the Yankees' history. Most of Ruth's records have been eclipsed as well, including his career home run record, broken twice, leaving Ruth a distant third. Still, rarely do people use the term "Mantlian", and referring to someone as "The Barry Bonds" of something is more likely an insult than a compliment. Unlike any ballplayers that came before or since, Ruth stands alone. Because of Ruth's original use of the home run, combined with the shrewd deal making and publicity campaigns on the Babe's behalf, Ruth became a mythic figure, one who rose from a mere baseball star to the embodiment of a generation and city.

The Dark Ages

In the days before the Babe, baseball was played in a way that would be nearly unrecognizable today. Home runs were exceedingly rare and almost never left the field of play.⁴ The idea of towering moonshots or big hulking sluggers were not even considered. The best homerun hitters were typically reliable contact hitters with great speed, allowing them to hit consistently and round the bases before an outfielder could reach a well-placed line drive. During big games, it was common for fans to sit or stand in the outfield grass, separated from the players by nothing more than a length of rope stretched across the field.

This power outage was a result of both circumstances and philosophy. In the earliest days of baseball, fielders were allowed to “soak” baserunners, what we refer to now as pegging.⁵ This meant that the ball had to be lightweight enough to prevent serious damage or injuries to these being hit by the ball. The lightweight ball made it more difficult to hit with real power or drive, leading to many more ground balls than long flies. When the ball was standardized in the 1870s, this rule was still taken into account, even though pegging was on the decline.

The standardized ball also had to take economic realities of the times into account. Although industrialization was rapidly coming to the forefront in the United States, the budding major leagues wanted to cut down on costs wherever possible, and with thousands of baseballs in play every year, this was a logical way to save money. The National League, the first and most prominent baseball league at the time, specified that the ball be “formed by yarn wrapped around

⁴ In 1913, the year before Ruth debuted, there were a total of 159 home runs hit in the American League, compared with 3170 in 2017

⁵ The Selling of the Babe page 41

a small core...covered with two strips of horsehide or cowhide.”⁶This resulted in a very sturdy ball, one that could be used again and again. With every hit, catch, and bounce of a ball it would scuff and warp, making it “impossible to hit more than a couple hundred feet.”⁷

Shrinking the field to within 200 feet of home plate lead to a shrinking of the game. Small Ball, the idea of slap hitting combined with bunting or base stealing to manufacture runs, was for many years, the only way to play baseball.⁸ Its proponents were esteemed figures such as John McGraw⁹ or Connie Mack¹⁰, men who in many ways built major league baseball and dictated the style of play for over twenty years. Their methods made baseball much more of a team sport, where self-sacrifice for the betterment of the team was more valuable than personal numbers or long fly balls.¹¹ Players routinely laid down bunts or forced themselves into run-downs in an effort to push other runners across the plate.

Even the best and most well-known ballplayers were trapped within the confines of the style of play. Pitchers threw much more often than they do today, sometimes after only a couple of days rest. Bullpens were scarce as well, usually reserved for emergencies, so the best pitchers often played the entire game. This strategy put tremendous stress on arms, and lead to plenty of injuries, ineffectiveness, and short careers. As a result, pitchers were valued for their durability

⁶ The Selling of the Babe page 41

⁷ The Selling of the babe page 42

⁸ This is still a featured in American baseball, but bunting and base stealing have been on the decline recently and are far off of their peaks during the 1910s.

⁹ McGraw played from 1891 to 1906 but earned his fame as the manager of the New York Giants, who he managed for 30 years (1902-1932), winning three World Series in the process.

¹⁰ Mack managed the Philadelphia Athletics for an incredible 49 years (1901-1950), the most in the history of baseball. He amassed 3,731 wins (the most ever) as well as five World Series wins. He also owned the team, and is one of the most influential owners in the history of the game.

¹¹ This style is still in existence in Japan and South Korea, where there is a heavy emphasis on qualities such as base running, smart plays, and bunting. During their all-star games, there is even a showcase, similar to the homerun derby, where players compete for the best bunts. <https://www.mlb.com/cut4/koreas-all-star-festivities-included-a-magnificent-bunt-derby/c-190349428>

and consistency rather than their overpowering stuff. This meant that the pitching stars of the era were workhorses, men like Cy Young,¹² Walter Johnson,¹³ and Christy Mathewson¹⁴ generated a great deal of attention due to their long careers.

Despite the effects of the Dead Ball Era, there were some famous hitters as well. Honus Wagner was a star in Pittsburgh for his defense at short-stop and World Series success. Ty Cobb was considered by many as the greatest ever, with a lifetime batting average of .366, though he was perhaps more famous for his gritty and, some would say, dirty style of play.¹⁵ All of these players became known in baseball circles, but none of them were known for their flash or headline grabbing feats. Instead, they were heralded for their consistency, effort, and willingness to sacrifice to help the team. Still, some were able to earn extra money from advertising and other endorsements, though it was often limited to trading cards packaged with cigarettes or gum.¹⁶

Beyond baseball some other sports figures earned their share of notoriety. One such figure was Jim Thorpe, who began his athletic career while attending a small Native American boarding school. Thorpe played four positions for his college football team and was twice named an All-American as a defensive back while he starred as a track and field athlete at the same

¹² Young pitched 22 years, only twice starting fewer than 30 games a season, both at the end of his career. He is the all-time leader in wins (511), losses (316), games started (815), innings pitched (7356), and complete games (749). These records will never be broken.

¹³ Johnson owns the record for career shutouts, with 110, and ranks in the top 5 in both innings pitched, complete games, and wins.

¹⁴ Mathewson's skill, as well as his status as the ace of McGraw's Giants earned him a considerable amount of press, an early forerunner to Ruth's phenomenon.

¹⁵ Cobb is notorious for the unsavory stories that have come to life after his playing career ended. Most of these are a result of his biographer, Al Stump. By most accounts, Cobb was not a pleasant person to be around, but many of the worst stories, including killing a man during his days in Detroit, have been debunked.

¹⁶ Though limited in scope, this became the basis for the baseball card industry. Some cards, such as Wagner's T206 card (figure 1) became valuable collector's items.

time. His first success occurred in track and field, where he qualified for the 1912 Olympics,¹⁷ winning gold in decathlon and pentathlon. Thorpe followed that up by playing six years in baseball with the New York Giants. However, Thorpe played sporadically, and soon returned to the football field where he played in an early forerunner to the National Football League, where he was eventually elected to the Hall of Fame.

Thorpe's multi-sport success remains unmatched, and earned him praise during his career as a sort of Renaissance man in athletic achievement. Due to his exposure in the Olympics, Thorpe was known internationally as well, though for the wrong reasons. Thorpe had his medals stripped after it was discovered he violated the Olympic rules of amateurism.¹⁸ This made international news, and European as well as American papers covered the story. The decathlon and pentathlon were regarded as some of the most prestigious events, and King Gustav of Sweden reportedly told Thorpe "You sir, are the greatest athlete in the world"¹⁹ as he was awarding him his gold medals, and the barring the world's greatest athlete from the Olympics was a notable event. Fortunately for Thorpe, the controversy resulted in numerous contract offers from professional teams, and Thorpe began his baseball and football careers shortly after.

Perhaps the most famous athlete during this time was Jack Johnson. Johnson was a boxer, a sport so popular it even rivaled baseball in attention during the turn of the 20th century. Johnson was a mountain of a man, standing at over six feet, and had developed a crafty defensive fighting style that wore out opponents. In a time when the sport, as well as most everything was

¹⁷ The games of the fifth Olympiad were held in Stockholm, Sweden.

¹⁸ Thorpe had been paid to play minor league baseball. In those days, the Olympics had strict rules on competitors maintaining amateur status. Even though Thorpe was an amateur in the events the pentathlon and decathlon, the International Olympic Committee deemed him ineligible because they learned that he had played minor league baseball. His medals would not be reinstated until 1983, after his death.

¹⁹ <http://www.espn.com/sportscentury/features/00016499.html>

segregated, Johnson fought both black and white boxers, and soon became a notable figure. In 1908, he became the first African American to win the Heavy Weight championship, and held the title for seven years, holding off numerous white opponents.²⁰ He was also one side in what was deemed “The Fight of the Century” where Johnson faced former Heavy Weight Champion James Jeffries. Johnson had spent years attempting to lure Jeffries into a fight, and the anticipation and media coverage surrounding the fight enhanced the drama. The bout was even filmed and shown in movie theaters afterwards.²¹

As a black boxer during a time of racial segregation, Johnson became known as a villain in the sport, which garnered him his fair share of press. He appeared in the earliest gossip columns for his rich and controversial style of living. Johnson had a penchant for sports cars, fine clothes, and a reckless lifestyle. He caused national headlines when he married a white woman, which caused an uproar at the time and eventually led to his imprisonment.²² However, his public perception only enhanced his fame, and he was able to secure sponsorships and endorsements, one of the first people anywhere to do so.

²⁰ <http://www.espn.com/sportscentury/features/00014275.html>

²¹ <https://www.pbs.org/unforgivableblackness/fight/>

²² Encyclopedia Britannica

Ruth Before New York

Like all great legends, the future Babe was born George Herman Ruth in an obscure corner of Baltimore, Maryland. His exact birthdate is a little unclear, but the best estimates say that he was born in early 1895. Though Ruth did not grow up in poverty, his family was working class, and Ruth certainly seemed to have grown up in the streets. Like many boys his age, Ruth had a tendency to run wild, and he and some other neighborhood kids spent much of their time outdoors, occasionally getting into trouble and playing games. One of the games Ruth would have undoubtedly played in the streets of Baltimore was baseball, though he wouldn't master the craft there. Ruth proved too much to handle for his parents and was sent to St. Mary's reform school.

St. Mary's is where Ruth spent his formative years, surrounded by other rough children but under the watchful eye of Catholic instructors. It is here that Ruth is first documented with a bat in his hands. By all accounts, he was an instant success, and he soon graduated from pick-up games and informal leagues within the school to the St. Mary's club team, where they played other amateur and semi-pro games in the Baltimore area. Ruth began his competitive career pitching, and he threw admirably, an extremely valuable tool due to his left-handedness. Compounded with his excellent hitting, he became a serious prospect, and signed his first professional contract with the minor-league Baltimore Orioles when he was 19.

Though Ruth played inconsistently early on in his professional career, he held his own. His power translated well in a higher league, though it resulted in more triples than homeruns.²³

²³ This was often the result of ground rules in place at the time, where a ball that hit a certain area of the field, or in some cases cleared the wall was ruled a triple instead of a home run.

However, the Orioles were in financial trouble and faced stiff competition for fans thanks to a new upstart professional league that placed a team in Baltimore. In an effort to keep the Orioles afloat, their owner, Jack Dunn, was forced to sell some of their best players to Major League Teams. Ruth was one of those chosen and he was soon on a train to Boston and the American League.

Ruth struggled in his early days on the Boston Red Sox, and at one point he was sent to Providence back in the minor leagues, home of the Red Sox's farm team, for some remedial baseball. When Ruth returned to Boston for the 1915 season, he acquitted himself well at the plate when he got the chance, hitting .315, but was primarily a starting pitcher. It is ironic that the greatest hitter of all-time would first earn his spot in the big leagues on the mound, but Ruth did just that. At only 20, Ruth established himself as one of the best young arms in the game, throwing over 200 innings en route to the red Sox winning the American League pennant. Unfortunately, the young Ruth would not be able to prove his worth on the biggest stage, as he was limited to a single at-bat, and did not pitch at all, while the Red Sox won the World Series without him.

When the 1916 season rolled out, Ruth went from merely a productive pitcher with a bright future into a dominant ace. Ruth threw an ungodly 323.2 innings that season,²⁴ top three that season. His 1.75 Earned Run Average (ERA) and 6.4 Hits per nine innings were both tops in the American league, as were his 9 shut outs. He finished the season with 10.4 Wins above Replacement (WAR),²⁵ behind only Walter Johnson, himself one of the greatest players of all

²⁴ The days of pitchers throwing 300 innings are long gone. Today throwing 250 innings is a feat of endurance, and a player like Ruth pitching that many innings in his young career would be a death sentence for a manager's career.

²⁵ Wins Above Replacement, or WAR, is a stat that attempts to capture a player's total value on the field. It includes hitting, fielding, base running, and if applicable, pitching stats. Ruth's 10.4 pitcher WAR suggested that he was the second best pitcher in the American League that year.

time. The Red Sox won the AL again, this time with Ruth anchoring the rotation. Though he only started one game, it was a performance for the ages. Ruth pitched the entirety of game 2 of the World Series, going 14 innings, scattering 9 baserunners, and earning a hard-fought win. The Red Sox would reward his efforts by winning the World Series.

Ruth would continue to establish himself as one of the best pitchers in Major League Baseball over the next two seasons. But under the surface, his power brewed. He only had the chance to hit on days when he was scheduled to pitch, and even then, his warmups would focus on his arm, not his swing. Ruth hit extremely well in limited at-bats, hitting over .300 between 1915 and 1917. Most notably, he knocked 9 homeruns in that span as well, including 4 in 1915, a number that put him in the top 10 for the year. Despite his power output, the Red Sox never considered playing him in the field, and it would take a war before Ruth would have the opportunity to realize his full potential.

Though the United States entered the Great War in 1917, the country would not begin to feel its effects until 1918. Many baseball players volunteered or were drafted, leaving holes all across the major leagues. As a way to fill their holes, the Red Sox began to tinker with their lineup and gamble on young or unproven players to produce. One of these gambles was Ruth. Though he started off the year in his same role as a starter, he began to play a little in the field. Though they initially tested him at first base, he was soon moved to the outfield. Even though he was completely new to the outfield grass, his natural athleticism allowed him to play passable defense. What really made him stick in the outfield though, was the value he brought to the plate.

The Inside Baseball strategies which dominated the game at the time of Ruth's arrival were not unlike trench warfare. Scratching out 2 or even 3 runs was seen as an insurmountable

lead,²⁶ and creating those runs was a long, grueling process of timely hitting, sacrifices, and risky base running. Home runs were almost unheard of, and usually the result of poor fielding or dumb luck. In Ruth's rookie season, the all-time home run champion was Roger Connor, who hit 138 homeruns in an 18 year career, all prior to 1900. Even in Ruth's time, one of the most feared sluggers, the aptly named Home Run Baker, topped out at 12 homers during the 1912 season.

It quickly became evident that the Red Sox could not afford to leave Ruth out of the lineup, and he began to play every day. The Red Sox even began skipping Ruth's starts so he would be able to focus more on his at-bats and less about facing hitters. To say the least, the experiment was a success for the Red Sox. Ruth hit .300 while leading the league in slugging percentage. Most incredibly, Ruth knocked 11 home runs, most in the MLB, despite only playing in 95 games. The Red Sox were encouraged by this result, and, again faced with a shortage of worthwhile players, planned to play Ruth in the field throughout the 1919 season.

Ruth's 11 home runs in 1918 were encouraging, but nobody could have expected the 1919 season. Ruth, playing the field every day for the first time, put on a show the likes of which had never been seen. The show got off to a slow start as Ruth started off cold and the Red Sox struggled. Even though they were the defending champions, the Red Sox had trouble drawing crowds, and the lack of success weighed heavily on the Red Sox locker room. Some loudly wondered if Ruth should go back to pitching.²⁷ Though the team never really recovered from their poor start, finishing a disappointing 64-65,²⁸ Ruth began to turn it around in June. By July he was tearing the cover off of the ball, and everyone began to notice. As Ruth racked up the home runs, reporters began to comb through old columns and box scores to find the next record

²⁶ In 1915, Ruth's rookie year, teams scored an average of 3.6 runs per game, compared to 4.3 in 2017.

²⁷ The Selling of the babe page 126

²⁸ Baseball-reference.com

the Babe was up against. The search dredged up some names, including Ned Williamson, who owned the professional single-season home run record with 27, set in 1884.²⁹ All of this searching was futile, as Ruth broke every record fans and reporters could find. When it was all said and done, Ruth finished the 1919 season with 29 home runs, a new record, and his first titanic feat. To put the 29 home runs into proper context, the next highest homerun total was 12,³⁰ and the average MLB team hit 28 home runs that year.

This revolution could not have come at a better time for the sport. The Great War affected many aspects of western society, and baseball was not immune to these changes. With many players entering the service, teams were forced to utilize many players who would not otherwise have belonged in a major league. Though this provided a nice opportunity to those players, the quality of play suffered, and fans took notice. Attendance dropped during the 1918 season, even to the point where some teams, including the Red Sox, became worried about their finances. This problem became all the worse when the Spanish Flu tore through the United States in the spring of 1919. Large public crowds became a dangerous proposition, and even with the end of the war, attendance stayed low.

The sport was also hit with scandal in 1919 as it was revealed that the World Series may have been fixed when it was revealed that gangsters had bet big on the Reds to win it all. In order to ensure their payday, they had bribed some key White Sox to throw the series. The so-called Black Sox scandal resulted in eight White Sox players receiving lifetime bans,³¹ and a black

²⁹ Baseball-reference.com

³⁰ A number owned by Gavvy Cravath, who led the National League that year. Cravath carved out a nice career for himself, and came the close to breaking Williamson's record when he hit 24 home runs in 1915. Cravath was also the active home run leader before Ruth's transition to the field. Needless to say, Cravath didn't hold that title for very long.

³¹ This number includes Shoeless Joe Jackson, one of the famous and most successful players at the time.

mark on the integrity of baseball. Many were unsure of the sport's future if gamblers and crooks could so easily manipulate the outcome of the biggest games of the year.

Ruth's move to New York came right on the heels of this uncertain time. Ruth had played well when Boston visited New York, where he was able to take advantage of the short right field porch at the Polo Grounds to turn even pop flies into home runs. He was traded for productive players and a reported \$125,000, a record sum that elicited many responses, both good and bad from the press. As a result, Ruth's sale to the Yankees brought a mountain of expectations upon him from both fans and media members alike. Ruth received both adulations and skepticism before even putting on a Yankees uniform, and it seemed that the whole city was on edge, waiting to see if this behemoth from Boston was the real deal.

New York 1920

The New York Ruth found after his move in 1920 was a rising city teeming with industry and culture. New York's roots lay in its original settlement as a Dutch port and trading center, and it remained true to that foundation long after the Dutch left. The New York Stock Exchange, which would quickly grow to the largest in the country, was founded in 1792,³² and the city became the country's financial capital soon after. This influence continued unabated throughout the Industrial Revolution. While cities such as Pittsburgh and Detroit became major manufacturing centers, banks and investors in New York backed the industrialists with loans and investments. The success of these industries brought enormous wealth into the city, and cemented New York's position as the most important city in the country to do business.

As a result of New York's strong economy, as well as its advantageous position as an Atlantic port, New York's population far outpaced its rivals. From its earliest days, New York was a magnet for people seeking work from the countryside. New York was the largest city in the country at the time of the first U.S. census,³³ a position it has held ever since. However, during the 19th century, waves of immigrants from across the world poured into New York. This pushed the city's population even higher, and by the dawn of the 20th century, New York was one of the most populous cities in the world.

When the Great War broke out in 1914, New York's progress continued unimpeded and it even accelerated. For the first years of the war, the United States remained neutral and benefited by providing goods, supplies, and credit to the European governments at war. While

³² https://www.loc.gov/rr/business/hottopic/stock_market.html

³³ Source: census.gov

the European powers destroyed each other in the trenches, The United States thrived. When the U.S. Expeditionary Force finally reached France,³⁴ the conflict was winding down, and comparatively few Americans died. The Great War left most of Europe in shambles. Even Great Britain, which escaped the physical impact of war, still lost millions of lives and a fortune in expenses, crippling its economy. New York highlighted this movement of power across the Atlantic when the city overtook London as the most populous in the world in 1920³⁵, the first time a city in the Western Hemisphere laid claim to the title.

This emergence coincided with an unprecedented boom in the economy. The economy had grown before and during the war, but with soldiers returning home to work, the economy took off. Assembly line jobs, perfected by Henry Ford in Detroit, became the standard for production and employment in the 1920s. The Ford Gospel, which preached high wages, low prices, and division of labor,³⁶ increased individual incomes while keeping prices low for consumers. As a result, workers began to have meaningful disposable income, and with the low price of goods, were able to spend their pay on new goods. Credit also became widely available to this new middle class. Individuals were able to buy products and pay in installments or take out loans for larger purchases such as homes, which encouraged more spending.

Many of these new products went from novelty to staples overnight. The most evident was the car. In 1919, there were fewer than 7,000,000 cars in the United States. By the end of the next decade, there were over 23,000,000³⁷ and the automobile rose from a status symbol to an essential method of travel in the United States. The radio became an overnight sensation as well.

³⁴ The United States declared War on Germany in early 1917, but troops did not arrive to the front until later in the year.

³⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/dec/06/world-largest-cities-mapped-through-history-data-viz>

³⁶ Only Yesterday page 145

³⁷ Only Yesterday page 6

In 1920, few people had even heard of radio technology as it was still in an experimental stage. Most stations were limited to amateur technicians talking into homemade devices, usually with no one listening on the other side. The first radio station opened in Pittsburgh in November 1920,³⁸ but in a few short years became one of the most important uses of communication. In 1929 alone, radio sales totaled over \$800,000,000.³⁹ This proved lucrative for the entertainment world and baseball in particular, as people could now follow the games even if they were unable to make it to the park. The World Series was first broadcast in 1921,⁴⁰ and by the end of the decade almost every game could be heard over the air.

Along with cars and radios, dozens of other products hit the markets in the 1920s, creating a fierce competition for customers and profits. As a way to gain exposure, many of these companies began to advertise their products. Advertising existed before the 1920s, but the increased competition for business turned advertising into an industry of its own. Concentrated around Madison Avenue in New York, these firms helped companies come up with ad campaigns to best reach their potential customers. Even the largest and most established companies, such as the Ford Motor Company, used advertising and by 1927, it was estimated that businesses spent over a billion and a half dollars advertising their products and services.⁴¹

Just as the United States emerged as the most powerful country in the world, its people and character was changing from within. The 18th amendment was ratified in 1920, banning alcohol consumption across the country. Though there was wide popular support for prohibition, it did not stop people from drinking entirely, rather it changed the way alcohol was consumed.

³⁸ Only Yesterday page 67

³⁹ Only Yesterday page 142

⁴⁰ Naturally, this series starred Ruth in one of the Yankees-Giants matchups.

⁴¹ Only Yesterday page 148

Instead of going to a saloon or bar to drink, patrons went to dance clubs, theaters, or casinos that would serve alcohol under the table. These speakeasies popularized the idea of doing something while drinking, rather than going somewhere to drink.

Attitudes about and amongst women changed as well. The 19th amendment, granting women the right to vote, passed a few months after prohibition, and represented one of the biggest cultural changes in America, formally integrating women into American society. During the Great War, women took jobs in factories and other industries while men fought overseas. This broke the stigma of working women for the first time, and after the war ended, women continued to work, dramatically increasing America's workforce and productivity. With their own jobs, women attained more freedom beyond the voting booth. Women, both married and single, for the first time had a personal income stream and time outside of home or work. They too began to use these new luxuries, spending money and time in speakeasies, embracing new fashion trends, and purchasing goods and services of their own.

The decline of the Great European nations not only created a political and financial opportunity for the United States, but it was the first chance for American culture to appear on a global scale. American art, architecture, literature, and music came to be widely known and respected in North America and Europe. Musicals and plays, many originating on Broadway, were highly successful and toured in other cities. In Paris, groups of young American writers⁴² hobnobbed with their European counterparts. American music began to spread as well. One genre in particular, jazz, with its odd structure and lively dance qualities, took clubs and speakeasies by storm. Jazz originated in the black communities of the Mississippi River Valley,

⁴² This included Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and several other young writers who would become famous in the 1920s.

but by the 1920s had achieved wide popularity and could be heard in any city in America, enjoyed by blacks and whites alike. Though jazz began as a form of popular music, it proved especially pervasive when composers such as George Gershwin incorporated jazz elements into more traditional classical compositions.

All of these changes occurred nearly simultaneously, which gave the United States a vibrant, exciting, and at times controversial and scandalous atmosphere. At the center of it all was New York, which served as the epicenter for these changes and new ways of life in the 1920s. George Ruth seemed particularly excited to move to the big city and experience the fast paced life there. Almost immediately on moving to New York, Ruth could be seen out on the town everywhere, eating at the best restaurants, driving a fancy car throughout Manhattan, and rumor had it, drinking in the most popular speakeasies of the time. New York embodied the new spirit of the jazz age, and Ruth would take full advantage of the city and use it to help build the legend that would become The Babe.

Ruth Arrives

Ruth's first season in New York was filled with excitement and wonder. On the eve of the Yankee's home opener, the New York Times noted that many fans were "arguing about Ruth's chances of equaling or bettering his own record last season."⁴³ Grantland Rice, one of the nation's most respected sports writers boldly predicted that Ruth would hit 40 home runs in his first year in New York.⁴⁴ Many observers, though impressed with the young stars power, worried about his long term success. After all, no one had ever hit 29 home runs in a season before, and there was a belief that Ruth simply could not sustain that sort of production under the bright lights of the Polo Grounds. For the first month of the season, this argument held water as Ruth struggled to adjust to his new team. Through the middle of May, Ruth was only hitting around .250 and had missed some time due to an injury.

In spite of the slow start, Ruth quickly caught up, and by the middle of May, began to outpace his own homerun record.⁴⁵ Crowds began to form to see the Yankees, particularly Ruth. One article in May notes how a home crowd broke the 1919 attendance record for the Polo Grounds.⁴⁶ The crowd was so large, that police officers were needed to restrain the crowd from flooding the stadium, leaving as many as 10,000 more outside. Another article noted how fans uncharacteristically remained in their seats for the full nine innings in order to see Ruth have one more crack at a home run.⁴⁷

⁴³ New York Times April 22, 1920

⁴⁴ The Selling of the Babe page 238

⁴⁵ New York Time May 18, 1920

⁴⁶ New York Times May 17, 1920

⁴⁷ New York Times May 17, 1920

The intense fan interest caught the eye of the New York Times. In response, they began to run headlines with phrases such as “BABE RUTH BANGS OUT TWO HOMERS”⁴⁸ and “BABE RUTH SLAMS ANOTHER OF THEM.”⁴⁹ The paper also ran an article series entitled “Curves and Bingles,” which served as a roundup of baseball news from the previous day. These articles almost always featured Ruth and his exploits, usually with some memorable quips or quotes. One in particular sums up the fan attitude toward their new star, when the article quotes an unnamed fan who said “Ruth looks great when he makes a homerun” to which another fan said, “Huh, Ruth looks good even when he strikes out.”⁵⁰

Ruth’s 1920 season was a feat of strength the likes of which had never been seen before. Reporters had feverishly covered the record-setting 1919 season, and were whipped into an outright media frenzy during the 1920 season. The combination of heightened fan interest, New York City, and Ruth slugging at a rate never seen before, made Ruth’s 1920 a rare sports spectacle. By the end, Ruth did not simply break his record of 29 home runs in a season, he obliterated it. Ruth hit 54 home runs that season, nearly triple the next highest performer⁵¹. Ruth reached base on over half of his plate appearances, hit .376 and recorded the highest OPS ever naturally produced.⁵²

Naturally, Ruth was the toast of the town. Ruth earned honors and invitations to galas and clubs such as the Knights of Columbus.⁵³ *The New York Times* ran headlines such as “Colossal

⁴⁸ New York Times May 28, 1920

⁴⁹ New York Times June 18, 1920

⁵⁰ New York Times May 26, 1920

⁵¹ George Sisler finished second that year with 19 home runs

⁵² Barry Bonds topped Ruth’s single season OPS record in 2002 and 2004, but is widely suspected of using performance enhancing steroids for much of his career, including the 2002 and 2004 seasons.

⁵³ Ruth identified as a Catholic, and the Knights of Columbus, a social circle of Catholic leaders, were eager to claim him as one of their own. He was familiar with the Boston chapter during his time as a Red Sock, and the interest translated to New York.

Clout of Home Run King”⁵⁴ and “Young Man Named Ruth Saves Game.”⁵⁵ With Ruth leading the charge the Yankees won 95 games, a franchise best. Remarkably, they only finished third in the pennant race, but the city of New York did not seem to care much. Ruth was better than advertised, and at only 25, the Yankees seemed destined for more record breaking seasons.

The tremendous power produced by Ruth sparked the dawn of a new era of Major League Baseball. From slap-hitting, base stealing, and run manufacturing, the sport began to embrace the majestic long fly ball. The anticipation of a towering feat of strength excited the audience and press, and the potential for instant offense proved too tempting to pass up for many players. In 1918 there were 235 home runs hit in the MLB. By 1921, there were 937. Baseball’s attendance figures increased along with the uptick in power. Home runs, especially Ruth’s, were a spectacle, and fans began turning out in figures that surpassed even the pre-war years. Many credit Ruth for saving the game of baseball. After the low quality of The Great War era teams, the shame of the Black Sox scandal, and the fear from Spanish Flu, baseball was certainly at its lowest point. Though there were several factors that played into baseball’s resurgence, Ruth was one of the largest, and certainly the person most responsible for reviving baseball at the dawn of the roaring twenties.

Even after the monumental campaign of 1920, there were a few holdouts who loudly wondered if Ruth’s 54 home runs were a fluke. Ruth immediately set out to prove them wrong. This time there was no early season struggle or need for a midseason adjustment. Ruth came out swinging, going five for five on opening day. He had his first five homeruns by the end of April,⁵⁶ and hit at least ten every other month. For the most part, his numbers were about the

⁵⁴ New York Times May 2, 1920

⁵⁵ New York Times June 28, 1920

⁵⁶ In those days, the MLB season began in mid-April. Opening day 1921 was April 13

same as 1920, but that did not seem to matter much to observers, for/ Ruth had broken the home run record for the third consecutive season, this time swatting 59 home runs. He also surpassed the career home run mark, then 138, officially anointing him baseball's home run king. This performance, a worthy encore to his historic 1920 season, finally established Ruth as the greatest living ballplayer.

Led by Ruth, the Yankees also had a historic season. They won 98 games and captured their first American League Pennant, and faced off in the World Series against their friends from the Polo Grounds,⁵⁷ the New York Giants. This matchup was not only a subway series, but a clash of philosophy and generations. The Giants and John McGraw were the class of the National League, winning their fifth National League Pennant in 1921. The series also pitted McGraw, one of the standard bearers of inside baseball against Ruth, who was the up-and-comer with a radically different style of play. Ruth played well in the series, batting .313 and hitting a home run, but more importantly, he generated crowds. The 1921 World Series broke all time attendance records⁵⁸ with the Polo Grounds packed each game to see Ruth play. The Giants proved too much for the Yankees and won in 8 games,⁵⁹ as well as winning a rematch the next year, but despite the Yankees losing the first two battles, they would win the war for the sport's heart and soul.

⁵⁷ The Yankees played in Polo Grounds as a tenant of the Giants before the opening of Yankee stadium in 1923.

⁵⁸ Only Yesterday page 69

⁵⁹ The MLB briefly experimented with best-of-nine series. The 1921 series is one of only three to last longer than 7 games.

The Making of a Legend

It was during the whirlwind campaigns of 1920 and 1921 that Ruth got his first taste of true celebrity. Ruth was familiar with the spotlight, as his days as a ballplayer in Baltimore and Boston earned him fans both in the city and throughout the league. His record-breaking season of 1919 also made him one of the most well-known players in baseball. It was during his early years in Boston that Ruth first began to dabble in other money-making opportunities. Ruth went through a few agents while in Boston, and they helped facilitate extra work for him. Typically these were exhibition games, but on a few instances, actual advertising. On one occasion in particular, Ruth sponsored a local drugstore, possibly owned by his manager at the time, Bill Carrigan,⁶⁰ and sold cigars from behind the register.

However his notoriety began to skyrocket after his move to the Big Apple. Ruth's name was in the paper after each of his homeruns, which were rapidly becoming daily news. He lived in the center of one of the largest cities in the world, and as such, became a familiar face for many in the city. Whenever Ruth went out, which was often, he was usually recognized. Before long a long trail of fans and admirers followed behind or waited outside his home or favorite restaurants hoping to catch a glance at the homerun king. Ruth was used to crowds and was usually very friendly with them and was happy to sign autographs for kids or shake hands with fans.

Ruth also hit the big screen for the first time in 1920. Almost immediately after his move to New York, the film studios there were looking to cash in on his budding name recognition in the form of a biographical movie. The result was *Headin' Home*, a highly fictionalized account

⁶⁰ Carrigan was Ruth's first manager and reportedly owned a drugstore in Boston.

of Ruth's early life and his success on the baseball field. Deemed as "evidence of the emerging Ruth myth,"⁶¹ this story depicts Ruth as a simple farm boy who rises through the ranks to achieve baseball glory. Perhaps in an homage to George Washington himself, George Ruth even chops down a tree to make his own baseball bat.⁶² It is a curiosity that so much of Ruth's origin story would be fictionalized. The true story of his journey from the streets of Baltimore and a humble orphanage would gain plenty of traction later on.⁶³ It could be that, in order to make Ruth more "All-American" the film studio felt that Ruth should be raised on a farm. The 1920 census was the first in history where more Americans lived in cities than in rural areas, but many still identified with the countryside and thought of Middle America as the "true" America, rather than an eastern port city like Baltimore. Whatever the reason, the movie was not a success, but it did help to further the young star's name recognition, and is one of the first documented myths about Ruth.

With Ruth's smashing and immediate success upon arriving in New York, it seemed that he was destined for greatness on the diamond. However off the field, it was not immediately evident. Ruth had always worked hard and played hard, which could have damaged his reputation. He had found himself in a few embarrassing situations in Boston, but in New York he was under the microscope. Tabloid news was coming into vogue, and Ruth, as one of the most recognizable faces in the world's largest season, was a common subject. Every move he made was seen, and his movements and missteps were always newsworthy. One relatively innocuous event occurred during the 1921 season. Ruth had purchased a car and enjoyed driving as fast as

⁶¹ The Selling of the Babe page 242

⁶² This trope reappears in the *The Natural*. Whether it is a direct reference to *Headin' Home* or not is unclear.

⁶³ Even though Ruth's real story would become public knowledge, it did not stop some from printing more sensationalized versions, such as Ruth growing up an orphan, or homeless.

possible. Over time, he accumulated some speeding tickets, and sentenced to jail. He only spent about four hours there, but he was late for the game that day,⁶⁴ and the incident caused a fair amount of commotion in the press.

Ruth also had a hard time dealing with the throngs of people who wanted his ear. Many saw Ruth as a piggybank, and he was pitched business ideas, money-making schemes, charity, and flat-out handouts. Ruth was never frugal, and had already become famous for his generous tips and donations. Nor was he a financial wizard, so had no way of knowing if many of these ideas were viable or even genuine. Ruth was also a friendly person, and never wanted to leave someone disappointed or sad, so he often agreed to whatever was being offered. As a result, Ruth lost a great deal of money from bad investments and careless spending habits early in his career. He even had to borrow some money from teammates or his owner just to pay his expenses before his next paycheck came.

Ruth had earned some fame and fortune, but he would not be able to maximize both on his own. To do that, he needed an ambitious visionary, and that man was Christy Walsh. Walsh came from a rather obscure background. Walsh began his lengthy career in media as a cartoonist. After some time, he ventured out into ghostwriting, the practice of a professional writer writing an article under the name of someone more famous or noteworthy. During the early 20th century, this was a cash cow for writers and newspapers alike. With the rapid growth of cities at that time, hundreds of thousands of people read local newspapers each day. As celebrities became widely known, newspapers found that the public would pay to read what these celebrities had to say about events that occurred in their profession or area of expertise. However, there were a few

⁶⁴ The New York Times June 9, 1921

problems with this idea. First, many of these celebrities may not have the time nor inclination to write a newspaper article about an event, at least not at the prices newspapers offered. At the same time, many of these celebrities were simply not good writers. This provided an avenue for professional journalists or skilled writers to step in and write their own article, then after paying for a notable name, make a healthy profit.

Walsh's first foray into ghostwriting was with Eddie Rickenbacker. Rickenbacker was a newly minted hero from The Great War, where he shot down 26 planes over France. Being a pilot, Rickenbacker was well-suited for an event like automobile racing, and he competed at a professional level. Walsh tracked Rickenbacker down before he was set to officiate the 1919 Indianapolis 500 and convinced him to lend Walsh his name on an account of the race. Rickenbacker agreed, and Walsh got to writing. Aside from a few minor edits, and his name on the byline, Rickenbacker did nothing, and Walsh sold the article to 37 newspapers, netting both Rickenbacker and himself a profit of \$874 for one day's work.⁶⁵

After this success, Walsh realized the potential ghostwriting prevented for him. After considering other leaders in their fields, including D.W. Griffith,⁶⁶ he settled on sports, and sought out the biggest figure in sports at the time, Babe Ruth. Walsh, always confident in his ability to work his way into a room, took out a loan of \$2000 in order to travel to New York and find the Babe.

Walsh soon ran into a problem however, as he was not the only person who was looking to meet Babe Ruth. Ruth was coming off of the greatest baseball season of all time, and he was

⁶⁵ Big Bam page 128

⁶⁶ Griffith was the foremost Hollywood director of the era, and is still renowned for his epic films *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*.

quickly learning how famous he had become. By this point, Ruth could scarcely walk outside without being mobbed by a horde of fans, and had taken to quieter entrances and exits in order to avoid or delay crowds. Even when he was found on the street, Ruth could scarcely be seen, let alone able to be pulled aside for a business discussion. Ruth had was also beginning to grow wary of men with business ideas, and had begun to avoid them altogether. Walsh was foiled, and had begun to worry about his chances of meeting up with Ruth before he left for spring training.

Then fate intervened. Walsh was waiting in a delicatessen across from Ruth's hotel in New York, thinking of his next strategy. At that moment, he heard the owner complain about how his delivery boy was never around to deliver beer to "Mr. Ruth." Walsh, never a man to pass up a lucky break, volunteered, and the owner agreed happily, and was even happier when he refused payment. Walsh ran up to Ruth's room and made his delivery, then pitched his offer to Ruth.

Ruth was no stranger to ghostwriting. During the 1920 season, he had agreed to write short articles about each of his home runs. Though they started off strong, they grew scant as the season wore on, with Ruth eventually resorting to such short messages as "Unipress NY, Low outside Babe."⁶⁷ When Walsh asked Ruth about them, the Babe replied that he made \$5 a story. Walsh promised him \$500, plus Ruth would not have to bother writing them as Walsh would take care of it. Ruth was intrigued, and after Walsh guaranteed him \$1000 before opening day, Ruth signed a contract. Walsh fulfilled his promise to Ruth by taking out another loan, thereby earning the budding star's partnership and trust.

⁶⁷ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 272

Walsh's first move was to acquire more ghostwriting gigs for Ruth. Luckily, Ruth's words were an easy sell. After his successful 1920 season, all of New York knew who the Babe was, and other parts of the country were becoming familiar with him. Before long, Walsh had too many columns to write himself, and began to hire on additional writers. Walsh and his team began two traditions for Ruth. Each year, Ruth, or at least a writer claiming to be Ruth, would cover the World Series. Whether he was playing or not, Ruth would give detailed accounts of the games, as well as his own opinions of the matchups. Instead of simple recaps, these articles gave readers the game through the eyes of the best ballplayer of the era. Walsh also began writing an article each year which became known as Ruth's All-Stars. In it, Ruth would give his choices for the best players at each position, similar to All-Americans in college football, or modern day all-star games. Even though Ruth did not write these articles, and may not have even seen them before publication, they put his name out there, and newspaper readers got the impression of Ruth as something of a baseball philosopher.

Another early tactic of Walsh's was the old barnstorming tours. Like ghostwriting, barnstorming was nothing new for Ruth. He had spent many off-seasons making publicity appearances away from the east coast. Even spring training, an official MLB event, served at least in part as a semi-professional barnstorming tour, complete with scrimmages and social events in resort towns. Ruth had even gone to Cuba after the 1920 season, where he played games and gambled or spent almost everything he earned on the island.⁶⁸ Walsh was determined to push Ruth's barnstorming to the next level.

⁶⁸ This was a monumental feat, even for Ruth. According to Robert Creamer, Ruth earned nearly \$40,000 dollars in his time in Cuba, compared to his \$10,000 Red Sox salary in 1919.

This would be met with tension though as the major leagues had a rule in place that prevented players under contract from playing exhibition games during the offseason. For years this was more of a technicality, with players, including Ruth, able to play with only the threat of a small fine standing in the way. Normally, this would be brushed off since the fines were far outweighed by the money players could earn on the circuit, and many paid them happily. However, after Ruth's ascension in New York, the American League, led by Kennesaw Mountain Landis, began to crack down on barnstorming. Ruth was rapidly becoming the single biggest ticket salesman in baseball, and if fans were able to see him anytime throughout the year, they may not want to pay top dollar for Yankees or other American League tickets come April or July. Simply put, the American League realized that Ruth had become too successful to let run wild.

Still, Ruth and Walsh, well aware of the potential profit a barnstorming tour could bring, were intent on going forward. Landis, not about to let Ruth undermine his authority, threatened not only a heavy fine, but a suspension. There was also speculation that Landis would ban Ruth from the sport altogether. Though that seems ridiculous now, Landis was ultimately responsible for the lifetime bans of the eight Chicago White Sox who took bribes during the 1919 World Series, including Joe Jackson, so Landis was capable of extreme measures. Ruth and Walsh, concerned about the ramifications both on the field and in the papers, backed down. In the end, Landis, perhaps to send a message, still punished Ruth, fining him \$3362 and the first six weeks of the 1922 season.⁶⁹ It was a serious penalty, but not crippling to Ruth. Walsh was even able to

⁶⁹ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 251

work around the rule. Instead of barnstorming tours, Ruth joined a vaudeville act during the offseason where his weekly salary almost matched his fine.

Soon after, the major leagues relaxed the rules on barnstorming, at least partially to appease Ruth. Walsh did not need to be told twice. He immediately took Ruth on a cross country tour. In later years, Walsh also paired Ruth with his teammate and another of Walsh's clients Lou Gehrig. Ruth and Gehrig played exhibitions against each other around the country, showcasing the best talent the Yankees had to offer, earning fans and money at each stop. Their tours became a yearly tradition of sorts, and though the two did not get along,⁷⁰ they agreed to do them year after year. The Babe and Gehrig took trips to the far reaches of the baseball world, playing exhibitions in California, and even Japan,⁷¹ where the Yankees' stars were joined by other American luminaries such as Connie Mack.

Walsh's next task was to negotiate a new contract for Ruth. In the days before free agency,⁷² players were not allowed to shop their services to other teams, but when a contract expired, they were allowed to renegotiate with their current team. After the 1921 season, Ruth's old Red Sox contract finally expired, allowing him the opportunity to earn more. Ruth was already one of the highest paid players in baseball, earning \$20,000 dollars a year. Still, this was the contract negotiated before his feats of strength in New York, and with the amount of money the Yankees were raking in, he felt he earned more. Walsh was able to sit down and negotiate a massive pay raise, to \$52,000 a year.⁷³ This made him by far the highest paid player in baseball,

⁷⁰ Gehrig's quiet and unassuming demeanor clashed with Ruth's more outgoing and abrasive personality. The two were exact opposites, and as such, they maintained a somewhat antagonistic relationship through most of their playing careers.

⁷¹ The Washington Post May 19, 1931

⁷² Free agency would not begin until 1975.

⁷³ The Yankees offered \$50,000 per year, a nice round number. However Ruth's camp bumped it up to \$52,000 because, as Ruth said "I've always wanted to make a grand a week".

even before side his side projects. To show just how large the figure was, Ruth was the highest paid player in baseball for the rest of his career, but that is no surprise. What is surprising is that the highest paid player before him was Ty Cobb, who earned \$20,000 in 1919.⁷⁴ After Ruth retired in 1935, the highest salary in baseball was Lou Gehrig, who made \$30,000. In 1957 Ted Williams, then the highest paid player in the game would have had to earn a million dollars⁷⁵ a year to match Ruth's salary.⁷⁶ Ruth's salary would continue to increase, and in 1930, his salary of \$80,000 was larger than President Hoover's.⁷⁷

Before long, Christy Walsh's role would expand beyond just ghostwriting and salary negotiations. Walsh became Ruth's gatekeeper, managing not just public appearances, but those who were allowed to see him. Walsh managed Ruth's finances as well, and was able to curb some of his more aggressive spending habits. One way was to purchase insurance policies and annuities, which would pay out for Ruth in the event of injury or guarantee income after his retirement. Walsh soon grew to become one of Ruth's close confidants and a personal advisor⁷⁸ who gave Ruth life and career advice. Much like Ruth was baseball's first true power hitter, Christy Walsh was baseball's first true agent, and his advice and shrewd business dealings would serve as a catalyst in the creation Babe Ruth as an icon.

One of Walsh's greatest achievements came early in his tenure as Ruth's agent. Late in the 1921 season, Walsh arranged for a team of doctor's to study Ruth's physical performance after a Yankees game. It had been said that Ruth's feats were superhuman, and now it was time

⁷⁴ The Selling of the Babe page 180

⁷⁵ This dollar amount was not reached until 1980, when the Houston Astros made Nolan Ryan the first million dollar athlete.

⁷⁶ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 255. This was said by Eisenhower's Director of the Internal Revenue Service T. Coleman Andrews in 1957.

⁷⁷ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 351

⁷⁸ Big Bam page 130

to put that claim to the test. Sure enough, after three hours of experiments, the results said that Ruth was in astounding physical and psychological condition. The findings first appeared in *Popular Science Monthly* and was picked up by papers beyond New York. *The Washington Post*, for example, ran the headline “Ruth Hits Homers Because He’s Supernormal.” The tests concluded that his eyes, ears, nerves, and muscles all performed well above average. Overall, they concluded that “Ruth is 90% efficient compared with the human average of 60 percent.”⁷⁹ The actual science behind these findings is a matter of some debate, as are what the study meant by “human average”. The control group was primarily made up of “telephone and telegraph operators,”⁸⁰ and not other athletes, so it is not surprising that Ruth was a better than average athlete. Still, the lab’s findings were backed up by his performance on the field, so it was an easy sell. So easy in fact, that 77 years later Alfred H. Fuchs, a Bowdoin college professor would write in the *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences* “The report that Ruth performed in superior fashion on psychological tests may have accomplished more at the time to validate psychological tests in the popular mind than the tests themselves did to demonstrate Ruth’s demonstrated superiority in the batter’s box.”⁸¹ Simply put, Ruth was becoming such a titanic figure, he was legitimizing psychology itself.

As Ruth’s career matured throughout the 1920s, Walsh began to aggressively promote the Babe. By now, Ruth had become an A list celebrity, and Walsh began to leverage the name of his famous client into more and more publicity and money. Ruth appeared at banquets, did public speaking tours, and of course, was always having articles published in the paper. One of Walsh’s more nefarious tactics, was to have Ruth visit local hospitals to visit sick children. By

⁷⁹ The Washington Post September 18, 1921

⁸⁰ Big Bam page 138

⁸¹ Big Bam Page 138

all accounts Ruth enjoyed meeting his younger fans, and visited many hospitals with no publicity, but Walsh saw it as an easy way to get Ruth some positive press. So, every now and then he would tip off a reporter or two about the hospital, someone would take a picture and it would be in the paper the next day.

Walsh's most ingenious plan was to take the Babe's likeness to billboards across America. In the race to develop the most effective ad campaigns, advertising companies were always looking for popular faces to sell products, and Ruth was a hot ticket. Advertising, like everything else at the time, was centered in New York. Fortunately for Christy Walsh, this was a short cab ride from Ruth's apartment, and everyone in New York knew who Babe Ruth was. It was an easy match. Throughout the 1920s, Ruth appeared all over the country in newspapers, magazines and other mediums. However now he was more than just a story, he was telling a story.

Ruth held endorsement deals for almost every kind of product for sale at the time. He was on ads for underwear, soft drinks, bread, and of course, cigars. Notably, Ruth endorsed Wheaties, a cereal brand that later became famous for its sponsorships with professional athletes. In effect, Ruth became the first athlete on a box of Wheaties.⁸² This steady stream of endorsements made Ruth extraordinarily wealthy, and put his name and face across the country.

While Ruth had many endorsements, he is most associated today with a product that he had no stake in. Baby Ruth candy bars debuted during the 1921, but they claim to have no association with Ruth. Instead, it was named for former president Grover Cleveland's daughter, known as Baby Ruth in the press, who died in childhood.⁸³ The only catch is that Baby Ruth died

⁸² See Exhibit 5

⁸³ The New York Times June 6, 2006

in 1904, while the candy bar appeared during the height of Ruth's days in New York. Though the naming could be a coincidence, the candy bar executives certainly would not have minded the association with the slugger, and may have been able to avoid paying Christy Walsh a hefty licensing fee. Still, it is a testament to Ruth's marketability that products would be attributed to him without him even trying.

In 1927, Walsh decided to give Ruth another run at the film industry. *Headin' Home* was a failure, but, Walsh thought that with better management from Walsh and a real Hollywood production, Ruth could be a success. The original story, while baseball themed, did not call for Ruth to play the leading man. In the search for a leading actor, someone on the production team suggested Ruth, and he was recruited for the role. Ruth agreed and spent the last couple of months before the 1927 season shooting in Hollywood. The result was *The Babe Comes Home*, a remarkably similar title, but entirely different. This was a real Hollywood production, not a quick folk hero story like *Headin' Home*. Ruth's Hollywood adventure was covered exclusively by Marshall Hunt, a correspondent for the *New York Daily News*⁸⁴ and a personal friend of Ruth. His reporting, probably aided by Walsh, drummed up anticipation for the film. It was a minor success when it released, though as a silent film, it quickly lost its buzz when talking movies burst onto the scene later that year.

⁸⁴ The New York Daily News was one of the most widely read publications at the time, with a daily circulations of 1 million readers.

Myth Making

In 1923, the Yankees finally moved into their own stadium. They had been guests at the Polo grounds since their inception, and with their newfound success, it was time for a change. The Yankees chose a spot just across the Harlem River from the Polo Grounds in the South Bronx. The result was Yankee Stadium, the largest and most ornate stadium built up to that point. With a high vaulted main entrance, walking into the stadium was like walking into a cathedral, with the field the altar and Ruth the god. The stadium had seats for 60,000 fans but more often crowded in, watching the games from the outfield bleachers.

Though Yankees ownership paid for it, the Babe was the man most responsible for its creation. Ruth propelled the Yankees from also rans to the class of the American League in just two years. His celebrity drew record crowds for both the Yankees and opposing teams. This enriched the Yankee owners tremendously, and they invested in their ball club by building a new stadium. Ruth had liked playing in the Polo Grounds, and its dimensions suited him well, and the Yankees made sure to tailor their new field to his specifications. Yankee Stadium became famous for its short right field porch, Ruth's favorite area to belt fly balls. The Left centerfield wall was pushed way back, and the area was dubbed 'Death Valley', the place where homeruns died into long fly outs. At the time, it was believed that only Ruth could hit a ball that far, and though others have scaled it in the years since, Ruth was the first to do so. The park was designed so that Ruth, and only Ruth could maximize his power in the park, and over the next decade his feats there earned Yankee Stadium the nickname "The House that Ruth Built."

Ruth's excelled outside the diamond, but his baseball career entered a relative lull following the 1922 season. He was still the best player in the game, but for someone who

produced eye-popping numbers year after year, these seasons were more pedestrian. He still led the majors in OBP, Slugging, and home runs almost every year, but he never approached his 59 homeruns from 1921. That changed drastically in 1927. At age 32, some in baseball circles began to wonder if Ruth, although still great, was on the decline. Ruth played great all year, and though his numbers still did not quite pass their peak during the 1921 season,⁸⁵ he was able to lead the league in many categories, including OBP⁸⁶. But what was truly impressive about Ruth's season, as always, were the homeruns he hit. After hitting 59 in 1921, Ruth levelled off, topping out at 47 homeruns in 1926. In 1927, out of seemingly nowhere, Ruth hit an even 60 homeruns, once again breaking the single season homerun record.

The homerun chase occurred in dramatic fashion. For starters, Ruth's teammate Lou Gehrig had a breakout season. Gehrig was younger than Ruth, and not as well-established but he ran neck-and-neck with Ruth in homeruns for most of the season, finishing with 47. He also won the AL Most Valuable Player Award, a great accomplishment considering Ruth's status and the media frenzy surrounding his 1927 campaign. Gehrig was criminally overlooked for most of the season. This had partially to do with his quiet demeanor, which was quickly overshadowed by Ruth's grandiose style. This was put into sharp display by a New York Times article in July with a headline that reads "Fans Worship Ruth but Forget Gehrig."⁸⁷ The article tells of a game where Ruth played poorly and Gehrig homered. After the game, Ruth was mauled by fans looking for autographs or just a glimpse of the star while Gehrig slipped away unnoticed and walked home.

⁸⁵ Ruth hit .356 in 1927 with a .486 OBP and a .772 slugging percentage all great numbers, but paled in comparison to the .378/.512/.846 he posted in 1921.

⁸⁶ Ruth led the league in runs (158), OBP (.486) and Slugging Percentage (.772).

⁸⁷ The New York Times July 16, 1927

Gehrig would get his time to shine, but while Ruth was in the picture, it was hard to get any attention at all.

By any measure, Ruth had a tremendous year in 1927, but coming into the final series, he was still short of his homerun record, and he needed four in the final four games to break the record⁸⁸. Four home runs in four games is a difficult task, but for the Babe, it was just a chance to add to the theatrics. Ruth hit one in the first game, then in a true feat of strength, broke the record with one game to spare, hitting two homeruns on September 29 to equal his total from 1921,⁸⁹ and broke the record the very next day. On the whole, the Yankees put together an equally fantastic season. The team finished with 110 wins, an American League record that would stand until 1998,⁹⁰ and capping the season off with a clean sweep of the Pittsburgh Pirates in the World Series. The Yankees lineup was dubbed “Murderer’s Row,” and featured four hall-of-famers, including Ruth and Gehrig.

All of the press and publicity began to create a snowball effect for Ruth. Because he was a baseball star he was talked about, and because he was talked about he was famous, so he was talked about even more. Ruth’s appearances in the tabloids never ended, but they grew increasingly innocuous. In fact, many of Ruth’s more controversial pursuits were buried or swept under the rug at the request of Christy Walsh. Ruth was a hero, and it was bad business for everyone if the hero had his reputation tarnished. Ruth’s second marriage was highly publicized, with the Washington Post announcing that “the Nation is invited.”⁹¹ Ruth’s off field scuffles also

⁸⁸ New York Times September 27, 1927

⁸⁹ The New York Times September 30, 1927

⁹⁰ This record would stand until 1998, when it was broken by another Yankees team lead by Derek Jeter, with 114 wins. It would later be surpassed again by the Seattle Mariners, who won 116 games in 2001.

⁹¹ The Washington Post April 17, 1929. The Post also refers to Ruth as the ‘Caliph of Clout’, which is one of the more colorful nicknames Ruth earned in his time.

became regular news. Even one negative story had a happy ending for all. During the magical 1927 season, Ruth was accused of assaulting a handicapped man one night. It wasn't a serious charge, but it still made the papers and Ruth had to appear in court. After a short trial, the judge exonerated Ruth, to the cheers and applause of the courtroom.⁹²

One such story actually caused a minor national scandal. In September 1928, Herbert Hoover, then campaigning for president, visited Yankee Stadium to catch a game. He also wanted to meet Ruth, and went down the aisle to the edge of the field to shake his hand. Unfortunately, no had told Ruth about this, and he refused a meeting with Hoover. Ruth's refusal had nothing to do with politics, but stemmed from a story a few days earlier claiming that Ruth was a Hoover supporter, and Ruth didn't want to give any credence to the rumor.⁹³

The incident caused an uproar, and it became a big story, with the headline "Ruth Refuses to Pose With Hoover."⁹⁴ Republican run media outlets threatening to pull ads or articles featuring the Babe. It is difficult to tell who was worried more from the fallout, Ruth's camp from the potential loss of income, or Hoover's camp worried about the influence Ruth's snub would have on the voters. After all, if the most powerful man in America refused to meet with Hoover, maybe he was not the right man for the job. Financially, this incident worried Christy Walsh, and he scrambled to do damage control. He was able to hash out an apology for Ruth for the misunderstanding, and arranged for Ruth and Hoover to meet and take a photograph. That seemed to smooth things over, and Hoover was "happy to have the photograph."⁹⁵

⁹² The New York Times September 17, 1927

⁹³ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 318

⁹⁴ The Washington Post September 2, 1928

⁹⁵ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 319

Ruth had similarly uncouth meetings with other world leaders. When playing the Senators in Washington, then-president Warren Harding asked to meet Ruth as well. This time, Ruth obliged, but instead of a respectful hello, Ruth walked up to him and said “Hot as hell, ain’t it Prez?”⁹⁶ Marshall Foch, one of the most important generals during the Great War and an international statesman, also went to a ballgame during a tour of the United States. Once again, Ruth was asked to meet with him, which he did so, only this time he was a little more polite, and innocently asked the Marshall “I suppose you were in the war?”⁹⁷ Whether intentional or not, the Babe humbled all who came before him, and everyone soon realized that even the world’s leaders realized that the ballpark was Ruth’s kingdom, and they had to play by his rules.

It was around this time that the legends associated with Ruth began to appear in popular lore. One of these is the story of Johnny Sylvester. The legend goes that Ruth was on one of his hospital visits just before the World Series. When he met Johnny Sylvester, a young patient with a terminal disease. As a way to cheer him up, the Babe promised to hit a home run for him during the series. Ruth did just that, and, against all odds, Sylvester made a miraculous recovery which was attributed, of course, to Ruth’s homerun.⁹⁸ Though the details are stretched beyond reason, there is a kernel of truth to the story. Johnny Sylvester was a real person, and he was badly hurt in a fall just before the 1926 World Series. A friend of Johnny’s father had a connection to the Yankees, and told Johnny that Ruth would hit a homerun for him, which Ruth

⁹⁶ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 319

⁹⁷ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 319

⁹⁸ This is a legend that still persists, and was even satirized on Seinfeld.

did. After the series, the Babe visited Johnny, with the press in tow. Johnny made a full recovery,⁹⁹ and a myth was born.¹⁰⁰

After Ruth's playing career, the Red Sox became the subject of another legend involving Ruth. As fate would have it, the Red Sox, previously one of the most successful MLB franchises,¹⁰¹ would enter a prolonged dry spell after Ruth's departure. Though the Red Sox had great teams, and often came close to championships, they always seemed to lose, sometimes in dramatic fashion. After years of this, an urban legend began to surface, saying that the Red Sox franchise was cursed for trading away the great Babe Ruth to the team that would become their hated rival, and were doomed to watch the Yankees win dozens of World Series titles while the Red Sox suffered. The myth grew in strength after the Red Sox lost after coming within one out of winning the 1986 World Series.¹⁰² The curse was only "broken" when the Red Sox came back in equally dramatic fashion to defeat the Yankees in the 2004 playoffs,¹⁰³ then go on to sweep the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series.

Perhaps the most widely known folk story associated with Ruth is the called shot. The legend is that during the 1932 World Series, Ruth, after going down 0-2 in the count, stepped out of the batter's box and pointed towards centerfield, indicating that he would hit the next pitch out there, and he did. The idea that Ruth was such a prolific baseball player that he was actually in fact prophetic, and could put a pitch anywhere he wanted whenever he wanted was easy to

⁹⁹ Later, Ruth ran into Johnny Sylvester's uncle, who thanked him for visiting the boy and cheering him up. Ruth was very gracious and asked about Johnny. After the uncle left, Ruth turned to one of his friends and asked "Now who the hell is Johnny Sylvester?"

¹⁰⁰ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 327

¹⁰¹ The Red Sox won five World Series before trading Ruth to the Yankees in 1919.

¹⁰² Bill Buckner infamously let a ground ball roll through his legs while fielding the final out in game 6. The Mets would go on to win games six and seven to uphold the curse.

¹⁰³ The Red Sox came back from an 0-3 deficit to knock off the Yankees, the first and to date only time that has happened in American sports.

believe, and made for great press. While the story may never be proven one way or the other, in all likelihood it did not happen the way the stories say, but is no less entertaining.

The most widely accepted theory is this: Ruth and the Cubs had been heckling each other all series, and it only got worse when Ruth came up to bat on the road in game three. Fans joined in as well, and even threw lemons onto the field. Ruth took it all in stride, and he and Cubs pitcher Charlie Root took turns heckling and insulting each other during at bats. In the fifth inning, Ruth came up and watched two strikes go by. After each pitch, Ruth held up one finger, then two, and showed them to Cubs pitcher Charlie Root, in all likelihood mocking the count.¹⁰⁴ Gehrig, who was on deck, heard Ruth say “I’m going to knock the next pitch down your goddamned throat.” The Cubs catcher, Gabby Hartnett, was in the best position to observe and heard Ruth say “It only takes one to hit it.” Naturally, Ruth clobbered the next pitch over the centerfield wall in what was deemed “the longest home run that had ever been hit at Wrigley Field.”¹⁰⁵ Franklin Roosevelt was even in attendance and reportedly laughed over the incident. Whichever version of the story is true, the event was pure theater, with Ruth the star and the field his stage, and it served as a fitting capstone to his storied career.

¹⁰⁴ The Called Shot by Rich Cohen, appeared in the Paris Review October 3, 2017

¹⁰⁵ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 362

Ruth's Legacy

Though Ruth played an extra three years after the 1932 World Series, age was starting to show. Ruth was 37 in 1932, and given his diet and exercise routine, it is a minor miracle he was able to play at such a high level. Though he was still a productive player, Ruth never again achieved the same heights that he had in the 1920s, and after a short return to Boston, this time playing for the Braves,¹⁰⁶ retired in 1935 at the age of 40. Ruth retired as the undisputed king of home runs, with 714 to his name, and held three of the top four spots in the single-season records. Neither of these numbers would be touched for decades after they were set. Even those who came closest, such as Mel Ott¹⁰⁷ and Jimmie Foxx,¹⁰⁸ only did so by using the long uppercut swing that Ruth pioneered.

While the Babe's calling card was always the long ball, he was far more than a one-trick pony. Ruth's early career as a pitcher, though overshadowed by his hitting, showed great promise. Though he only pitched three full seasons, he amassed almost 100 wins, and pitched an MLB leading 35 complete games in 1917. Ruth actually won the ERA title in 1916,¹⁰⁹ and started 3 World Series games, including 1918 when he was the ace of the World Champion Boston Red Sox. Ruth rarely pitched after age 23, and though it is difficult to say for sure, he flashed the ability to be a hall of fame pitcher. Ruth took great pride in his pitching ability, and

¹⁰⁶ The Braves left Boston after the 1952 season, relocating first to Milwaukee, and later to Atlanta.

¹⁰⁷ Ott debuted for the New York Giants in 1926 and hit 511 career homeruns, third all-time when he retired, but over 200 fewer than Ruth.

¹⁰⁸ Foxx played 20 years between 1925 and 1945, hitting 534 home runs in that time. Foxx came the closest to matching Ruth's single season record with 58 home runs in 1932. After Ruth, he was considered the greatest power hitter of all time until the 1960s.

¹⁰⁹ Ruth posted a 1.75 ERA in 1916

even as the Bambino, he never missed an opportunity to remind someone of his skill on the mound.¹¹⁰

After his move to the field, Ruth showed a knack for getting on base in more ways than one. Though he only won one batting title,¹¹¹ Ruth's lifetime .342 batting average ranks 10th all-time, and he nearly hit .400 in 1923.¹¹² Though he had a penchant for striking out, Ruth walked far more often, and led the league in walks almost as often as he did in homeruns. The combination of home runs, walks, and high batting average made Ruth not only a terrifying hitter to face, but one of the toughest outs possible, and his career numbers provide ample evidence.

The rise of advanced statistics have only furthered Ruth's legend on the diamond. In recent years, Wins Above Replacement (WAR) has become a catch-all statistic used to measure a player's total value above the minimum major league level, including offensive numbers, defense, and base running. Ruth ranks first all time with 183.7 WAR, with a large margin between him and second place. Even without taking his pitching stats into account, Ruth ranks first, closely edging out Barry Bonds, who had to chemically alter his body to approach those numbers. Ruth is also the all-time leader in On Base Plus Slugging Percentage Plus (OPS+), an advanced stat that standardizes hitting production across ballparks and eras, with 100 as average. Ruth's career OPS+ of 206 suggests that he was 106% better than the average hitter across major league history. This is 16 points higher than Ted Williams, who sits in second place, a legend in his own right. Weighted Runs Created Plus (WRC+), a measurement created by Fangraphs to

¹¹⁰ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 240

¹¹¹ In 1924, when he hit .378

¹¹² Ruth finished second to Harry Heilmann, who hit a remarkable .403 that season. Heilmann was one of the best pure hitters of the era, winning four batting titles in the 1920s, and was eventually elected to the Hall of Fame.

measure a player's total offensive production, credits Ruth with a WRC+ of 197, once again best all-time.

Ruth owed his incredible success to his natural physique and style of play. Ruth stood 6'2" and weighed over 200 pounds, a titan for the 1920s. Ruth's weight became a punchline at the end of his time with the Yankees, but through most of his career Ruth was noted for his broad shoulders and athletic physique. His strength allowed him to carry a bat longer and heavier than almost anyone in major league history, giving each of his swings more pop. Stature gave Ruth a natural proclivity for hitting the ball hard, but it was not the only advantage he had over pitchers. Ruth swung with a huge uppercut in an attempt to drive every pitch out of the park.¹¹³ This approach generated plenty of whiffs, and Ruth finished in the top 10 of strikeouts in almost every year he played the field. But every strikeout became well-worth the payoff of another towering Ruth shot. Interestingly enough, this is a part of Ruth's legacy that is only now just being realized. With the rise of sabermetrics in modern baseball, teams and players have learned the value of swinging for the fences. Since 2015, hitters have set MLB records for strikeouts and homeruns by emulating Ruth's all-or-nothing swing.¹¹⁴

By the time he retired, Ruth owned almost every individual hitting record, including career home runs, RBI, walks, strikeouts, and slugging percentage. He had transformed the Yankees from a second rate team into the premier American sports franchise, with seven World Series appearances and four victories with Ruth at the helm. His greater impact on the game is being felt, even today. Every power hitter that has come along since owes a debt to the Babe,

¹¹³ <http://baseball.physics.illinois.edu/BabeAndPhysics.html>

¹¹⁴ <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-new-science-of-hitting/>

whose long, forceful swing created the template every batter followed in order to generate more power.

Even in retirement, Ruth's celebrity endured. Although he was out of baseball, he was still instantly recognizable. Ruth played in a celebrity golf tournament with Babe Zaharias and a couple of other well-known golf figures of the time, which attracted a massive crowd that crowded the fairways and impeded the golfers' movements. On the way back from another round of golf, Ruth was in a car accident. It was a minor incident, but the police had to be called. The other driver, apparently the only one who did not recognize the Babe, was upset and asked Ruth to pay for the damages. Ruth agreed, and the two exchanged information. At this point, the police could not resist, and informed the man who had smashed his car.

In the 1940s, even as Ruth's health declined, he remained active. After Gehrig's death, Ruth was once again asked to act, this time in the Gehrig biopic *The Pride of the Yankees*,¹¹⁵ and Ruth agreed. It is ironic that the most successful and notable movie involving Ruth was not about Ruth at all, but his quiet teammate and occasional rival. Still, Ruth did an admirable job, and the movie's success helped to sustain him in the public eye. The decade was defined by World War II, and Ruth played a role there as well, as he made public speeches for the war effort, raising upwards of \$100,000 in war bonds¹¹⁶ and played in several charity games with other old-timers.¹¹⁷ Ruth also made an appearance of sorts during the campaign in the Pacific when reports surfaced of the Japanese and Americans trading insults across the front lines during a lull in the fighting.¹¹⁸ The Japanese started with saying "to hell with Roosevelt" to which the Americans,

¹¹⁵ Gehrig had died of ALS (commonly called Lou Gehrig's disease) in 1941.

¹¹⁶ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 416

¹¹⁷ The Washington Post January 7, 1947

¹¹⁸ The New York Times March 3, 1944

naturally, responded by attacking Emperor Hirohito. The Japanese, baseball fans themselves, escalated the matter by saying “To Hell with Babe Ruth” which reportedly angered the American troops as something akin to sacrilege. Ruth also made excursions to help pioneer baseball elsewhere. In 1946, Ruth visited Mexico in an effort to help build the Mexican Baseball League. Though he was now 50, and had been out of the league for over 10 years, the Mexican papers still referred to him as “El Rey Jonronero,”¹¹⁹ The King of Home Run Hitters.

Though it may not have seemed that way in 1920 or 1921, Ruth was mortal. By 1947, Ruth was sick. Though he was never told of his diagnosis, Ruth had nasopharyngeal cancer, a rare form that begins at the base of the skull. In those days, cancer was always terminal, and Ruth was not given long to live, but he was still able to achieve one more first. As part of his treatment, doctors began to experiment with treatment that eventually became chemotherapy. Chemotherapy was such a new form of treatment, that Dr. Nadim Bikhazi, who wrote an article on the impact Ruth had on cancer treatment said “It went from mice to Babe Ruth. There was no intermediary.”¹²⁰ The treatment worked, and Ruth showed an improvement. Like all things Ruth, his treatment was well-publicized, only this time he was the subject of a case study presented to the International Cancer Congress.¹²¹ Ruth eventually succumbed to the disease in 1948, but the treatment extended his life, and he was able to return home, to Yankee Stadium, where he was honored by the fans and those who played with him one last time.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 416

¹²⁰ Eleanor Cummins “No One told Babe Ruth he had Cancer, but his Death Changed the Way We Fight it” appeared in Popular Science February 6, 2018

¹²¹ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 420

¹²² Over 58,000 fans attended Babe Ruth Day at Yankee stadium, and at his passing he was hailed one last time, with the Washington Post saying that he was “a veritable Paul Bunyan character in performance”

Long after Ruth's death, his bat and persona cast a long shadow over the world of sports. In baseball, his legend endured and the stories became legends. Just before Opening Day 1950, an article appeared in the New York Times entitled "Why we Worship the Babe Ruths"¹²³ refers to the insults Japanese soldiers shouted to Americans during World War II. "Babe Ruth is a so-and-so" to both the Americans and Japanese, the writer argued, was the worst insult the Japanese could possibly hurl towards the American lines. In 1961, fellow Yankee Roger Maris finally toppled Ruth's single season homerun record, but many were not happy about it. Many complained that Maris did it while playing in more games than Ruth,¹²⁴ and one New York sportswriter, Jimmy Dykes opined "Maris is a fine ballplayer, but I can't imagine him driving down Broadway in a low-slung convertible, wearing a coonskin coat."¹²⁵

Ruth's largest, and most lasting impact on the sports world lies in how he marketed himself. As the biggest athlete of his time, Ruth and Walsh worked to put his name wherever they could. Newspapers, magazines, radio, and street advertising were all ways for Ruth to be noticed and earn money. The wide variety and prominence of advertisements featuring Ruth pushed his fame to new heights for an athlete or public figure. Ruth's fame at the time could only be matched by international heroes such as Charles Lindbergh¹²⁶ or General Pershing.¹²⁷

¹²³ The New York Time April 16, 1950

¹²⁴ In 1961, the American League expanded their schedule from 154 games to 162 as a way to accommodate two expansion teams, the Los Angeles Angels and new Washington Senators. Maris's 61 home runs, still just one more than Ruth, was seen by many as illegitimate, since Maris had 8 extra games to hit. The debate seemingly ended in 1998 when Sammy Sosa and Mark McGwire (the Barry Bonds after them) all topped Ruth's record. However, all three are widely suspected of using steroids during that time. To some baseball purists, Ruth is still the single-season record holder.

¹²⁵ Babe: The Legend Comes to Life page 319

¹²⁶ Lindbergh rocketed to fame even faster than Ruth when he became the first person to fly solo non-stop across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927.

¹²⁷ General John "Blackjack" Pershing, was the commander of the American Expeditionary force in France during World War I.

Many other athletes emulated Ruth's publicity strategies and persona. Even during Ruth's career, Christy Walsh became a favorite of sports stars looing to branch out or cash in on their name recognition. Walsh eventually ran ghostwriting and publicity for such luminaries as Knute Rockne,¹²⁸ Ty Cobb, and John McGraw.¹²⁹ Walsh also managed Gehrig, and after the MLB relaxed the rules on barnstorming, showcased him as often as Ruth, and frequently together. The two would build their own "all-star" teams and compete against each other in cities across the country.

Even after Walsh, players began to take a more active role in their image, and looked to portray themselves in a certain way to the media. Some new stars, such as Mickey Mantle, paid direct tribute to the Babe by playing up their fast lifestyle, making a point to be seen in public, and reveled in the attention they received. Others, either out of desire or necessity took on a more reserved attitude. Ted Williams, the Red Sox's great hitter,¹³⁰ styled himself as one of baseball's great thinkers, a man focused solely on success and a constant student of the game. Jackie Robinson faced with racial prejudice during his time on the Brooklyn Dodgers, knew that what he said would not change his opponents' minds. He would have to earn it on the field, and he did that playing relentless, gritty, and tough baseball.

Though there were many famous athletes after Ruth, no one came close to duplicating his universal notoriety for over 40 years. It was not until Michael Jordan entered the national Basketball Association (NBA) that Ruth had met a worthy successor to his advertising legacy. Jordan was a revolutionary star for basketball in the same way that Ruth was for baseball.

¹²⁸ Rockne was Notre Dame's head football coach during the 1920s and led the Fighting Irish to three national titles in his tenure.

¹²⁹ Big Bam page 129

¹³⁰ William's had a lifetime batting average of .344 ranks seventh all time, and he remains the last players to bat .400 across a full season.

Jordan's tenacious and dominant style of basketball was not a new concept in the NBA, but Jordan made it his own. Jordan's 10 scoring titles and¹³¹ six NBA titles in the 1990s established him as far and away the greatest basketball player of all time. Just as Ruth became identified with the home run, Jordan became associated with the slam dunk, and Jordan's high flying theatrics earned him widespread praise.

Jordan was also fortunate to dominate in an era when basketball was changing dramatically. After recovering from a decline in popularity in the 1970s, basketball soon emerged not just in the United States, but on the global stage as well. The United States, long the uncontested world champions of basketball,¹³² began to lose international competitions to the likes of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. In response to this new competition, the United States elected to recruit NBA players to play in the 1992 Olympics, and their top target was Michael Jordan. Jordan was fresh off of his second NBA championship and was the reigning Most Valuable Player. His performance in the 1992 Olympics introduced Jordan to the world as the best player in the world, and a dominating force even compared to his all-star peers.

Jordan's path to international celebrity, while unique to his era, was paved decades earlier by the Babe and Christy Walsh. Jordan was a true athlete, and earned his reputation as the greatest basketball player of all time on the court, but like Ruth, his enduring popularity did not come on the court, it came from endorsements. In his rookie year, Jordan signed an endorsement deal with an up-and-coming shoe company, Nike. Nike produced a personal line of basketball shoes under the name Air Jordan.¹³³ The shoes were an instant success, and the logo, a silhouette

¹³¹ Jordan's 10 over his 15 year career, the most all time.

¹³² The United States won every gold medal in basketball at the Olympics up until 1972, when it was upset by the Soviet Union in controversial fashion. The team also finished a disappointing third in 1988, the last time college athletes would be used.

¹³³ http://www.espn.com/blog/playbook/dollars/post/_/id/2918/how-nike-landed-michael-jordan

of Jordan mid-flight, preparing to dunk a basketball, soon became as recognizable as Nike's own logo. Almost 20 years after Michael's retirement, Jordan still has the most valuable shoe endorsement contract, earning \$110 million in 2017,¹³⁴ dwarfing the next highest earner.¹³⁵

Just as Ruth played during a time during great changes in media, Jordan played when Television was becoming the most popular way to consume sports. Ruth and Jordan both recognized that these new avenues had great potential, and were able to maximize their value. Jordan's way was to do commercials showcasing his incredible basketball skill. Perhaps the most well-known commercials were a string of ads he did for Gatorade, which showed highlights of Jordan's play with the simple phrase "Be like Mike."¹³⁶ The phrase caught on, and it became a slogan of sorts for future basketball players and even became the title of a movie.¹³⁷ Successful commercials like these ensured that Jordan would be seen on TV even when his team wasn't.

Many athletes today follow Michael Jordan's model and indirectly Ruth's as well. For many athletes, especially those in individual sports or the NBA, choosing the right sponsor is as important as choosing the right team in free agency, or hiring an agent. For many top athletes, the money earned from endorsements far outpaces what any athlete can earn in salary from their team or league. LeBron James, for example, earned \$86 million during the 2016-17 NBA season, but only \$30 million came from his actual salary.¹³⁸ The lion's share of his income came from endorsements with Nike, Sprite, and several other large companies. Basketball in particular has

¹³⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2017/06/09/the-nbas-biggest-shoe-deals/#545250051520>

¹³⁵ LeBron James earned \$30 million dollars on his own Nike deal, an incredible amount, but not even a third of Jordan's contract.

¹³⁶ http://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/17246999/michael-jordan-famous-mike-gatorade-commercial-debuted-25-years-ago-monday

¹³⁷ The movie, *Like Mike*, released in 2002, is a story that bears a lot of resemblance to some of the Ruth myths. An orphaned boy discovers a magical pair of shoes once owned by Michael Jordan, which provide him with Jordan's talents whenever he wears them.

¹³⁸ <https://www.forbes.com/profile/lebron-james/>

seen a rise in shoe branding, where each of the top stars sign with a shoe brand, and act as a representative on the court. When these players face off in the NBA Finals or playoff game, it is as if the two companies are engaged in battle.

Conclusion

Even though Ruth has not hit a home run in over 80 years, he lives on in our public consciousness. He was a revolutionary talent in a revolutionary time, and he alone was able to harness the power of the press and publicity to maximize his exposure as a celebrity athlete. With the help of Christy Walsh, Ruth transcended the source of his fame and became a full-fledged American icon.

His work and lifestyle, both the good and bad, proved influential for both athletes and other celebrities in the decades that followed his career. Even today, star athletes follow the format Ruth and Walsh created to leverage their successes on the field to advertising revenue and exposure outside their individual sport. Still, like many greats, Ruth is often emulated, but never imitated, and he remains uniquely positioned in our collective conscious as the symbol of both baseball and the jazz age.

Exhibits

1. An example of baseball advertising before the 1920s. This Honus Wagner baseball card was slipped into cigarette packs as a way to encourage purchases. Wagner disliked having his likeness used and had the card pulled from production. As a result, only a handful of cards were produced, and it is now the most sought after baseball card in the world.



Source: <https://www.cardboardconnection.com/card-t206-honus-wagner>

2. The American League Home Run leaderboard from the 1920 season.

Rk	Name	Tm	G	AB	HR
1	Babe Ruth*	NYN	142	458	54
2	George Sisler*	SLB	154	631	19
3	Tillie Walker	PHA	149	585	17
4	Happy Felsch	CHW	142	556	14
5	Shoeless Joe Jackson*	CHW	146	570	12

Source: <https://www.baseball-reference.com/leagues/AL/1920-standard-batting.shtml>

3. 1932 American League Home Run Leaders. In a little over 10 years, the number of players hitting 12 home runs or more tripled.

Rk	Name	Tm	G	AB	HR
1	Jimmie Foxx	PHA	154	585	58
2	Babe Ruth*	NYN	133	457	41
3	Al Simmons	PHA	154	670	35
4	Lou Gehrig*	NYN	156	596	34
5	Earl Averill*	CLE	153	631	32
6	Mickey Cochrane*	PHA	139	518	23
7	Charlie Gehringer*	DET	152	618	19
8	Smead Jolley*	BOS	137	531	18
9	Eric McNair	PHA	135	554	18
10	Goose Goslin*	SLB	150	572	17
11	John Stone*	DET	145	582	17
12	Bill Dickey*	NYN	108	423	15
13	Tony Lazzeri	NYN	142	510	15
14	Bruce Campbell*	SLB	139	593	14
15	Heinie Manush*	WSH	149	625	14

Source: <https://www.baseball-reference.com/leagues/AL/1932-standard-batting.shtml>

4. One of Ruth's earliest promotional jobs: selling cigars in front of a drugstore. This picture was taken in Boston shortly after his trade to the Yankees in 1920.



Source: <http://www.pophistorydig.com/topics/tag/babe-ruth-advertising/>

5. An example of an advertisement targeting children and their admiration of Ruth.



Source: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug02/yeung/baberuth/ads.html>

5. Another example of Ruth endorsing a product, this time with his wife Claire. This ad was published in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1938, three years after Ruth retired.



Source: <http://www.pophistorydig.com/topics/tag/babe-ruth-advertising/>

6. Ruth sold everything, even Girl Scout cookies.



Source: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug02/yeung/baberuth/ads.html>

7. A poster for *Babe Comes Home* cheering Ruth for finally appearing in the movies.



Source: IMDB.com

8. The best evidence available of Babe Ruth's called shot. A video still from the game shows a grainy Ruth pointing at something. Whether he's pointing to centerfield or Charlie Root is in the eye of the beholder.



Source: <https://nypost.com/2014/02/01/chicago-journalist-debunks-babe-ruths-called-shot/>

9. Fans applaud Ruth one last time at Babe Ruth day in Yankee Stadium, April 27, 1947.



Source:

http://web.yesnetwork.com/news/article.jsp?ymd=20150613&content_id=130395632&fext=.jsp&vkey=news_milb

Bibliography

The New York Times. Accessed 2018. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/publicationbrowse/news/false?accountid=7118>.

Various articles 1920-1950

The Washington Post. Accessed 2018. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/hnpwashingtonpost/news/fromDatabasesLayer?accountid=7118>.

Various articles 1921-1937

Burns, Ken. "Unforgivable Blackness." PBS. Accessed April 30, 2018. <https://www.pbs.org/unforgivableblackness/fight/>.

Allen, Frederick Lewis. *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-twenties*. New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1931.

Arthur, Rob. "The New Science Of Hitting." *FiveThirtyEight*. August 18, 2016. Accessed April 28, 2018. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-new-science-of-hitting/>.

"'Babe' Ruth Only Gets Five Hits." *The Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1921. Accessed April 5, 2018. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/docview/160867409/A5E9CBDD4C6F4BE4PQ/13?accountid=7118>.

Badenhausen, Kurt. "Michael Jordan Leads The NBA's Biggest Shoe Deals At \$110 Million This Year." *Forbes*. December 12, 2017. Accessed May 01, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2017/06/09/the-nbas-biggest-shoe-deals/#4a9cdbca1520>.

"Baseball Statistics and Analysis | FanGraphs Baseball." *Baseball Statistics and Analysis | FanGraphs Baseball*. Accessed May 02, 2018. <https://www.fangraphs.com/>.

Chad, Norman. "Perspective | It's Hard Not to Be Excited about Shohei Ohtani, the 'Babe Ruth of Japan'." *The Washington Post*. March 18, 2018. Accessed April 26, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/its-hard-not-to-be-excited-about-shohei-ohtani-the-babe-ruth-of-japan/2018/03/18/1b72a330-2a4e-11e8-b79d-f3d931db7f68_story.html?utm_term=.10d0033eaf4e.

Cohen, Rich. "The Called Shot." *The Paris Review*. October 03, 2017. Accessed April 28, 2018. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/10/03/the-called-shot/>.

- Creamer, Ribert. *Babe: The Legend Comes to Life*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1974.
- Eig, Jonathan, and Lou Gehrig. *Luckiest Man: The Life and Death of Lou Gehrig*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2006.
- Flatter, Ron. "Thorpe Preceded Deion, Bo." ESPN. Accessed March 9, 2018. <http://www.espn.com/sportscentury/features/00016499.html>.
- Flatter, Ron. "Jack Johnson Lived, Boxed on His Own Terms." ESPN. Accessed April 30, 2018. <http://www.espn.com/sportscentury/features/00014275.html>.
- "Forbes Athlete Profiles: LeBron James." Forbes. Accessed May 01, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/profile/lebron-james/>.
- Galka, Max. "From Jericho to Tokyo: The World's Largest Cities through History – Mapped." The Guardian. December 06, 2016. Accessed April 28, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/dec/06/world-largest-cities-mapped-through-history-data-viz>.
- "History of the New York Stock Exchange." History of the NY Stock Exchange: (Business Reference Services, Library of Congress). Accessed April 19, 2018. https://www.loc.gov/rr/business/hottopic/stock_market.html.
- Hodges, A.L. "The Physics of Baseball Alan M. Nathan University of Illinois." Babe Ruth Physics. Accessed February 7, 2018. <http://baseball.physics.illinois.edu/BabeAndPhysics.html>.
- The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Jack Johnson, American Boxer." *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
- "MLB Stats, Scores, History, & Records." Baseball-Reference.com. Accessed May 02, 2018. <https://www.baseball-reference.com/>.
- "MLB Stats, Scores, History, & Records." Baseball-Reference.com. Accessed 2018. <https://www.baseball-reference.com/>.
- Source for most statistics
- Monagan, Matt. "Korea's All-star Festivities Included a Magnificent BUNT DERBY." MLB.com. Accessed April 05, 2018. <https://www.mlb.com/cut4/korean-baseball-organization-holds-bunt-derby-at-all-star-game/c-190349428>.
- Montville, Leigh. *The Big Bam: The Life and times of Babe Ruth*. New York: Broadway, 2007.
- Nodjimbadem, Katie. "Babe Ruth Hit a Home Run With Celebrity Product Endorsements." Smithsonian.com. August 10, 2016. Accessed April 26, 2018.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-babe-ruth-hit-home-run-celebrity-product-endorsements-180960038/>.

"Population of the 24 Urban Places: 1790." Census.gov. Accessed May 02, 2018.

<https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab02.txt>.

Rovell, Darren. "How Nike Landed Michael Jordan." ESPN. February 15, 2013. Accessed May 1, 2018. http://www.espn.com/blog/playbook/dollars/post/_id/2918/how-nike-landed-michael-jordan.

Rovell, Darren. ESPN. August 09, 2016. Accessed May 01, 2018.

http://www.espn.com/nba/story/_id/17246999/michael-jordan-famous-mike-gatorade-commercial-debuted-25-years-ago-monday.

Stout, Glenn. *The Selling of the Babe: The Deal That Changed Baseball and Created a Legend*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martins Press, 2016.

The Sandlot--electronic Press Kit. Directed by David Mickey Evans. United States: 20th Century Fox, 1993. DVD.

"Vaudeville: Babe Ruth's Price." *Variety*, August 26, 1921. Accessed April 5, 2018.

<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/docview/1475704113/A5E9CBDD4C6F4BE4PQ/12?accountid=7118>.

YouTube. October 23, 2006. Accessed May 1, 2018. https://youtu.be/b0AGiq9j_Ak.

Chicago/Turabian formatting by BibMe.org.

About the Author

David Leister is a proud son of Beaumont, Texas, where his love of baseball first began. From his humble beginnings as a member of the Orange Tops, to his triumphs on legendary teams such as the Longhorns and Storm, David spent nearly a decade playing at West End Little League, culminating in an all-star selection in 2007. Throughout his time in the league, David met many friends, family, teammates, and coaches, all of whom helped ignite David's knowledge and passion for the game.

When he was not on the diamond, David spent his summer nights in Section 106 of Minute Maid Park. Watching greats like Craig Biggio, Greg Maddux, and Ken Griffey Jr. cultivated his interest in the rich history the sport had to offer. Although David enjoyed spending time at the ballpark, as an Astros fan, the final joy of victory eluded him until the Astros finally won the World Series in 2017, and David was lucky enough to witness a historic Game 5 in the same stadium where he was raised.

After five years at the University of Texas, David will graduate with a degree in Plan II, with a degree in finance to follow shortly thereafter. Although he will soon take a day job, David will continue to write on a wide range of subjects, including history, sports, China, geopolitics, and Texas.