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**Baseball on the Air:
Reinterpretations of the History of Radio Baseball**

Mike Chamberlain

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Communication Studies

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
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ABSTRACT

Baseball on the Air: Reinterpretations of the History of Radio Baseball

Michael David Chamberlain

This study examines the history of the radio broadcasting of major league baseball games. The evolution of the genre is placed within the context of the rise of monopoly capitalism and the establishment of a commercial broadcasting model in the United States. The debate over the relationship between baseball and radio that took place in the 1930s is described, as is the evolution of baseball announcing practices. Finally, the study considers the fan experience of radio baseball as it has been described in poetry, literature, and the movies. Throughout, the study describes discourses around the production and reception of radio baseball and addresses gaps and failings in the historiography of radio baseball.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

...each surge in the coverage of sport has taken place during a period in which the mass media have sharply increased their penetration into the nooks and crannies of American social life.¹

The interwar period in America was one of most profound social, cultural, and economic change. Revolutions in transportation (the automobile) and communication (radio broadcasting) created new social patterns and cultural practices. The bounds of time and space were bent by the automobile and fractured by radio broadcasting. The auto mobilized Americans as never before and enabled them to go out to "discover" America for themselves. Radio brought America and the world into the family living room. New cultural forms took places in the everyday lives of Americans. The institution of the family car arose in response to the marketing strategies of automobile manufacturers. The family radio that took its place in the living room became what Daniel Czitrom calls the ethereal hearth.²

Radio broadcasting penetrated the nooks and crannies of American social life in a radical way. Radio broadcasting profoundly affected the manner in which advertisers could reach audiences by bringing the message directly into the home and reaching all within earshot at the same time. Although many were apprehensive about the effect that broadcasting would have on their daily experience, radio very quickly became a fixture of on the American social scene.³

The radio craze of the early 1920s was a period of chaos, when there was little regulation of frequencies or regard for what little regulation there was.

Radio advertising was at first geared only to selling more radio equipment. By the late 1920s, however, the American radio industry had become organized on a commercial model and the radio departments of advertising agencies were expanding. NBC came on the air in 1926 and CBS in 1927. These two networks dominated the radio landscape with mainly escapist fare such as comedies, variety shows, and sporting events deemed to be of national importance. On the local level, radio stations had to fill up the non-sustaining time with local broadcasts, news, concerts, lectures, and, inevitably, sporting events.⁴

Radio baseball began in the mid 1920s and became a fully commercial enterprise in the mid and late 1930s. Radio stations began selling commercial time on baseball broadcasts as live sports proved to provide an enthusiastic (and largely male, wage-earning) audience to advertisers. Baseball was found to be attractive to local advertisers for several reasons. It is played almost every day. It provides pauses in the game (between innings, during pitching changes) that can be converted into advertising time. It is cheap to produce. And it is generally popular. Baseball clubs, looking for a way to make radio pay for them, began to charge rights fees for the broadcasts in the early 1930s. Until the late 1930s, when the broadcast of a sporting event achieved legal status as property held by the owner of the local team, ball clubs did not have a firm legal basis on which to sell exclusive local broadcast rights, though a number of them did. Once club owners established their legal rights and began exercising them, the basis for the present sports/media relationship was firmly established.⁵

Today, not only broadcasts but also whole series of events are sponsored by large corporations selling everything from soft drinks to cars, running shoes, cigarettes, and beer.

This thesis is concerned with the history of local broadcasting of major league baseball games. This study examines the discourse surrounding the emergence of regular season major league baseball radio broadcasts in the 1930s and relates it to the wider discourse around the place of advertising on the radio in the period before World War II. This study also considers the evolution of broadcasting practices during and since the 1930s, including announcing conventions and commercial relationships among radio stations, broadcast sponsors, and baseball club owners. Finally, the study considers reception practices around radio baseball and looks at some of the meanings that have been attached to the radio baseball experience in the years since the advent of television and the way in which nostalgia is invoked in the mythologizing of the radio baseball experience.

Several questions have guided this project: How does baseball fit into the history of radio broadcasting in the United States? What is the importance of radio baseball in the history of relations between baseball and the media in general? How did the role of the broadcasters become defined by the fans, the media, the advertisers of baseball games, and the owners of major league baseball clubs? What is the aesthetic of radio baseball? How has the fan experience been shaped by baseball broadcasting practices? How does the fan experience fit into the fabric of daily life? The main focus of this study is on

the development of radio baseball in the 1930s, the period during which radio baseball was established as a viable commercial enterprise for advertisers, radio stations, and baseball club owners, although radio baseball in the television age is considered in the sections on announcing and audience practices.

The history of radio baseball has been under-researched. The evolving historical relationship between sports and the media, the spinning of the web that constitutes what Sut Jhally has dubbed the sports/media complex, is a subject that has been far too neglected in the general field of cultural studies. It is not clear on the face of the situation why this should be so. The changes in social patterns created by evolving communications technology, especially technology as seductive as the radio and television, in conjunction with cultural, political, and economic trends of the time, offer rich possibilities for research and analysis. However, most studies of sports and the media focus on television, and it is generally within this context that mention of radio baseball is made. The few works that have dealt directly with radio and baseball display shortcomings. Popular histories include Curtis Smith's *Voices of the Game*, and the autobiographies and biographies of famous sportscasters such as Red Barber and Dizzy Dean.⁶ Smith's work has a wealth of interview material that is somewhat useful for gaining insight into how baseball announcers approach their work, but, like the broadcaster biographies, it is anecdotal and not well-documented.

A number of studies have looked at the history of sporting coverage in America, most notably those by John Rickards Betts⁷ and David Q. Voigt.⁸ Voigt offers a McLuhanesque take on the "changing dimensions" of baseball, which assesses the effect on consciousness wrought by the forms in which the American baseball fan receives his (or her) information. Janet Lever and Stanton Wheeler⁹ survey the relationship between sports and the mass media in America, noting correctly that the impact of broadcasting on sport was presaged by telegraphy. These studies assess radio's impact on sport and society, but the focus is not exclusively on radio itself, nor in the case of Betts and Lever and Wheeler do the studies focus exclusively on baseball. Wayne Towers¹⁰ looks at the coverage of the World Series in the 1920s and relates changes in newspaper practices to the advent of radio, but he does not deal with local broadcasting, or, of course, the 1930s. Robert McChesney¹¹ presents an overview of the relationship between sports and the mass media, ascribing developments in these relations to the rise of monopoly capitalism, but he does not focus specifically on baseball, the 1930s, or the evolution of broadcasting practices as such. Nevertheless, McChesney's theoretical model, which looks at sport/media relations in the United States in the context of the development of monopoly consumer capitalism, provides a useful paradigm within which one can understand the significance of developments in the relationships between sports and the mass media.

In two of the areas of interest for this study, the relationship between advertising and the presentation of sports play-by-play and the organizational

pressures that pertain to the production of mediated sports, very little has been written concerning the early history of radio sports.¹² In both popular and academic work, the commodification of sport is taken as a given. In popular works, the issue of commercialism is effaced. In academic works, the commodification of sport is central to the critique, but little attention is paid to the struggle within sports organizations over relations between sports and the media or to audience responses.

This attempt to place the emergence of baseball broadcasting within both baseball history and the broader development of consumer capitalism in the United States is governed by Raymond Williams' precept that technology precedes cultural form but does not determine it. That is, the fact that American broadcasting assumed a dominant commercial form was by no means inevitable. Radio baseball developed at the intersection of several cultural forces: (1) radio technology, (2) the emergence of mass market consumer capitalism and the rise of advertising, (3) a regulatory and legal environment that favored commercial broadcasting, (4) sports journalism, and (5), the consolidation of major league baseball as a monopoly. Having assumed a commercial form by the mid 1930s, radio broadcasting set the model for the relationship between television and sports after World War II. The relationships among clubs, sponsors, and broadcasters and production practices for radio baseball had crystallized by the late 1940s and the rise of television. Many of television's forms were adapted from radio, although contemporary radio broadcasting practices and commercial arrangements themselves have been

shaped in part by later technological developments, such as the portable radio, the teletype, television, and the computer.

The thesis contextualizes the radio-baseball debate of the 1930s by examining the history of relations between baseball and the media and tracing the early development of radio advertising, which are covered in chapter two. Chapter three describes the radio-baseball debate of the 1930s, when radio baseball was conclusively established on a commercial model. While certain club owners were suspicious of radio because it represented a threat to live attendance, the interest of advertisers in sponsoring baseball broadcasting and their willingness to pay for the privilege eventually won over even the most resistant of doubters. Baseball club owners began to think of radio less in terms of its potential negative effects on attendance and more in terms of its actual positive effect on club revenues. Chapter four examines the evolution of baseball broadcasting practices in the 1930s and beyond. Special attention is paid to the demands on baseball announcers made by club owners, advertisers, fans, and those in the print media. The concept of journalistic objectivity as applied to the practice of announcing baseball games is discussed. The effect of technological changes on baseball announcing will also be examined. Chapter five examines the audience experience by considering some of the ways in which the audience has responded to radio baseball.

The Sporting News from 1930-1940 is the main source for the parts of this thesis that look at how radio baseball was received by the different clubs,

the public, and the press. *The Sporting News* of the time was exclusively a baseball publication, the so-called "Bible of Baseball," and it is by far the best single source of information about the early institutional history of radio baseball. When radio baseball was a novelty and there was still controversy about its utility for the professional clubs, *The Sporting News* reported a lively debate among club owners on whether to allow broadcasters in their parks. There was also frequent editorial comment and a large number of letters from readers on the subject. While the editors of *The Sporting News* were not explicitly interested in charting the development of American consumer culture, the publication contains much information about which companies were sponsoring radio broadcasts and which products were associated with the on-air descriptions of baseball games. This is especially useful given the very small number of recordings of broadcasts of baseball games that exist from the period before 1950, especially since what does exist does not always contain the commercial content along with the play-by-play description. By going to the sporting press and compiling as much information as possible about 1) which clubs permitted broadcasts of games; 2) which stations the games were broadcast on; 3) who owned the stations; and, 4) who sponsored the broadcasts, one should be able to get a good idea of what kinds of corporate power were involved in the process that brought baseball, radio, and mass-produced consumer goods together in the 1930s and 1940s. This material forms the empirical basis of much of the third and fourth chapters of this thesis.

The historical focus of the fourth chapter, which examines the evolution of production practices in radio baseball, is on the pre-television era but includes material up to the present. This is partly because there are few recordings extant of broadcasts from before 1950 and partly because research has revealed that approaches to describing games have remained much the same since the 1940s, except for technical considerations such as the use of recorded commercial messages, television monitors, and computers. In the fourth chapter, observations of and interviews with broadcasters and written accounts by baseball announcers about how a radio play-by-play description of a baseball game is put together are used to describe the historical development of the form of the a "typical" baseball radiocast. Special attention will be paid to how both the Commissioner of Baseball and the editors of *The Sporting News* framed the discussion about the approach that a baseball announcer should take, whether he should be a "reporter" or an "entertainer". The manners in which announcers responded to the demands placed on them by the powers-that-be in baseball and how they came to conceive of their responsibility to the audience are also examined.

Finally, the thesis turns to the fan experience of the baseball broadcast, its aesthetic appeal, its narrative form, its ritual function, and the social practices of the audience. The rise of the commercial broadcasting of major league baseball altered the meanings that baseball had for Americans. For one thing, more fans began to relate to the game as spectators, or at least auditors in the case of radio. The major league game soon penetrated markets that had

hitherto been served by minor league or semi-professional baseball. Baseball, more and more, meant major league baseball. Baseball on the radio became part of the soundtrack of the American summer. Developments in radio technology that made it more portable resulted in more Americans listening to baseball games in their homes and businesses, in their cars, and at the beach. Radio played a critical role in making baseball fandom a communal experience. Fans and baseball journalists have described how Red Barber became part of the everyday fabric of life in Brooklyn in the late 40s and early 50s, how following the exploits of the 1968 Detroit Tigers on the radio papered over some of the racial divisions in that city in the wake of destructive riots in the summer of 1967 and the days following Martin Luther King's assassination in April 1968. Turning from the institutional history of the first three chapters, the thesis examines the function of the baseball announcer as the griot, or the oral poet, of the community.

NOTES

¹ Robert McChesney, "Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States," in, *Media, Sports, and Society*, ed. Lawrence Wenner (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1989), p. 49.

² Daniel Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 60-88.

³ Catherine Covert and John Stevens, eds., *Mass Media Between the Wars: Perceptions of Cultural Tension* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), p. xii.

⁴ Czitrom, pp. 83-86.

⁵ David Klatell and Norman Marcus, *Sports for Sale: Television, Money, and the Fans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 72-74.

⁶ Curtis Smith, *Voices of the Game* (South Bend, IN: Diamond Communications, Inc., 1987). Also see Red Barber, *The Broadcasters* (New York: Dial Press, 1970), Robert Gregory, *Diz: The Story of Dizzy Dean and Baseball During the Great Depression* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), and Ernie Harwell, *Tuned to Baseball* (South Bend, IN: Diamond Communications, Inc., 1985).

⁷ John Rickards Betts, "The Technological Revolution and the Rise of Sport, 1850-1900," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 40 (September 1953): 231-256.

⁸ David Quentin Voigt, *America Through Baseball* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Inc., 1976).

⁹ Janet Lever and Stanton Wheeler, "Mass Media and the Experience of Sport," *Communication Research* 20(1) February 1993: 125-143.

¹⁰ Wayne Towers, "World Series Coverage in New York in the 1920s," *Journalism Monographs No. 73*, 1981.

¹¹ McChesney, "Media Made Sport." Also see Robert McChesney, "Sport, Mass Media and Monopoly Capital: Towards a Reinterpretation of the 1920s and Beyond," Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1986.

¹² Lawrence Wenner, "Media, Sports, and Society: The Research Agenda," in *Media, Sports, and Society*, ed. Lawrence Wenner (Newbury Park: CA, 1989), p. 43.

CHAPTER II: BASEBALL, MASS MEDIA, AND ADVERTISING BEFORE 1930

The rise in the popularity of baseball in the mid-19th century was due in large part to the close relationship between the telegraph and print media and the promotional apparatus of organized baseball. As newspaper circulation increased, newspaper editors devoted more space to the sports pages. This relationship was beneficial to both the newspapers and the sports promoters. The introduction of radio broadcasting in the 1920s challenged the relationship between baseball promoters and newspapers in two ways. First, radio was, in a general sense, a rival to the newspaper for advertising revenue. Second, radio upset the pattern of promotion in the baseball industry, which saw newspapers giving free publicity for baseball. In exchange, the newspapers were supplied with copy that supported approximately a quarter of their sales.¹ It also forced a change in newspaper reporting practices in that the newspaper was supplanted as the first source of baseball information for most fans. This chapter examines the relationships among baseball and the media in the period before 1930. The chapter describes the evolution of the relationship between baseball and the print media, and it also outlines the early history of radio baseball. The development of radio advertising in the 1920s and 1930s is also described. This information will provide a context for the material in chapters three and four.

Baseball Coverage Before 1930

By the time radio broadcasting was introduced in the 1920s, baseball was the pre-eminent spectator sport in America. At the time, basketball was in its infancy, having been invented in 1894, and football was still largely a college game. Professional baseball had been played in the United States from 1869 onward. The National League was formed in 1876 and survived all disputes over players and profits with competitors such as the American Association, the Union Association, and the short-lived Player's League in 1890. The National League monopolized the major league scene until the formation of Ban Johnson's upstart American League in 1901. Relations between the American and National Leagues were normalized after 1904, with eight teams in each league and the first place team in each league meeting at the end of the season in the World Series. The popularity of major league baseball, at least as reflected in attendance, rose or at least held pace with the population increase before 1920. Baseball promoters (sportswriters, club owners, and league officials especially) propagated the widely-accepted idea that the institution of baseball stood for American moral and political virtues and that immigrant boys became American through their participation in baseball, whether as players or spectators.

John Rickards Betts argues that the development of sport as a commercial enterprise in late 19th century America was a direct product of inventions in transportation and communications technology.² Chief among these inventions were the railroad and the telegraph. The railroad permitted fans to travel long

distances to sporting events. It also permitted baseball teams to travel from city to city rapidly enough to make regular schedule-making a possibility. The telegraph, which developed virtually coterminously with the railroad in the twenty years before the Civil War, allowed the rapid dissemination of sporting news across long distances, thus enabling the development of the sports page in American newspapers. In the early days of the telegraph, the high cost of transmission limited telegraph reports of sporting events to brief dispatches.³ However, as early as 1859, spectators would gather around telegraph offices for up-to-the-minute results of important boxing matches.⁴

Telegraphy was used more generally as time went on and more of the country was wired. By the 1870s, many metropolitan newspapers were publishing daily box scores of baseball games sent by telegraph. The newspaper sports page became commonplace by the mid-1880s. Crowds would gather outside telegraph offices and in poolrooms and saloons where Western Union had run wires. Certain newspapers set up boards outside their offices, where running accounts of important matches were displayed.⁵ Well before the development of radio broadcasting, then, reports of sporting events could reach large audiences simultaneously. These audiences gathered in the street or in taverns and theaters, not in the privacy of their homes or cars as they would in the coming broadcast age.

The symbiotic relationship between sports and the print media had crystallized by 1890. Baseball club owners and newspapermen found very early on that increased newspaper coverage tended to stimulate live

attendance at baseball games.⁶ Between 1850 and the 1890s, the number of magazines devoted to sports coverage in the United States grew from 9 to 48.⁷ *The Sporting News*, which became known as the "Bible of Baseball," was founded in 1886. The Baseball Writers' Association of America (BBWAA) was formed in 1887. "Professional baseball teams were becoming recognized as a source of civic pride, and newspapers found it incumbent upon themselves to support their cities' franchises."⁸ Harold Seymour cites the appraisal of the relationship between the major league clubs and the sportswriters in the Reach Guide for 1889:

All sides now recognize that their interests are identical. The reporters have found in the game a thing of beauty and a source of actual employment. The game has found in the reporters its best ally and most powerful supporter. Hence the good feeling all along the line.⁹

In the 1880s the *New York Sun* and the *New York World* began devoting separate sections to coverage of sporting news. When Joseph Pulitzer purchased the *New York World* in 1883, he established what was quite likely the first separate sports department on an American daily newspaper.¹⁰ By 1910 virtually all newspapers devoted a considerable amount of coverage to sports. The 1920s would see an increase in the amount of newspaper space devoted to sports coverage, and the sport section became an indispensable part of the daily newspaper.¹¹ Radio coverage of baseball did not take firm hold until the 1930s. If one takes the 1920s as the Golden Age of Sports, then one must go along with Robert Lipsyte's statement that the Golden Age of Sports was really the Golden Age of Sportswriting.¹²

Early Radio Baseball, 1921-30

KDKA, Pittsburgh, the first Westinghouse station, scored a series of radio firsts in 1920 and 1921. KDKA was the first American radio station to do a national broadcast when it broadcast the 1920 presidential election returns. Later, Westinghouse sent out engineers to broadcast from remote locations, covering concerts, speeches, and sporting events, the first of which was a prize fight from Pittsburgh's Motor Square Garden on April 11, 1921. Reporting scores was a regular part of early radio broadcasting. Frank Conrad of Westinghouse read results of baseball games during the experimental pre-KDKA phase when broadcasting from his home. In the early days of KDKA, Harold Arlin read game results provided by newspapers.¹³ Furthermore, an early form of live radio reporting of baseball was pioneered by KDKA in 1921. A staff member in the last row of the bleachers at Forbes Field (the Pittsburgh Pirates home park) would drop a piece of paper with the score at the end of each inning to a runner who would telephone in the score to the studio, where the announcer would broadcast the news.¹⁴ The first live radio broadcast of a baseball game occurred on August 5, 1921, when Harold Arlin broadcast a Pirates' 8-5 victory over the Phillies for KDKA. Arlin, a Westinghouse employee who tested radio equipment by doing remotes, viewed the first-ever radio broadcast of a baseball game as an experiment.¹⁵ There was no hint then of the commercialism that would come to dominate radio, save for the fact that Arlin was working for a privately-owned station.

On October 5, 1921, the first network broadcast of a World Series game was done from the Polo Grounds in New York City. The broadcast joined KDKA in Pittsburgh with WJZ in Newark and WBZ in Springfield Massachusetts by direct line in the Westinghouse Network. The broadcast was a re-creation. Sandy Hunt, sports editor of the *Newark Sunday Call*, sent play-by-play over telephone from a box seat at the Polo Grounds in New York to WJZ's radio shack in Newark, whence announcer Tommy Cowan reported the game over the air.¹⁶ The broadcast had a small audience, mainly reaching people in western Pennsylvania. In following years, as more people acquired radios, radio networks broadcast the World Series games to all parts of the nation, and these broadcasts became a national institution.

It was a number of years before the arrangements to broadcast the World Series assumed their present form. Until 1939, World Series broadcasts were not assigned exclusively to one network. In the early 1920s, networks for the broadcasts were generally put together as part of last minute arrangements to broadcast the Series. For the 1922 World Series, WJZ (Newark), WGY (Schenectady), and WBZ (Springfield, Mass.) were linked to carry live play-by-play supplied by Grantland Rice of the *New York Herald-Tribune*. RCA-Westinghouse, the owners of WJZ, bought newspaper space to advertise their coverage of the 1922 World Series and offered special prices on RCA radio sets.¹⁷ There was a problem, however. AT&T, the owners of WEA, WJZ's closest NYC competitor, refused to lease long distance lines for the network broadcast. WJZ, WGY, and WBZ were thus forced to use telegraph lines.

These telegraph lines were not suitable for voice transmission because of background hum, so the sound quality was poor.¹⁸ Although people stopped outside retail establishments that set up loudspeakers to bring the games to passers-by, the final two games of the 1922 Series were not broadcast due to a lack of sponsorship.¹⁹ For the 1923 World Series, AT&T, the owners of WEAF, formed a radio network joined by long distance lines. The two announcers chosen were William McGeehan, a sports columnist for the *New York Herald Tribune*, and Graham McNamee, a WEAF staff announcer. By the third game, McNamee had become the sole voice of the World Series. As the *New York Times* reported:

In place of the scorecards and megaphones of the past, amplifiers connected to radio instruments gave all the details and sidelights to thousands of enthusiasts unable to get into the Polo Grounds. Not only could the voice of the official radio observer be heard, but the voice of the umpire on the field announcing the batteries for the day mingled with the voice of a boy selling ice cream cones. The clamor of forty thousand baseball fans inside the Polo Grounds made radio listeners feel as if they were in the grandstand. The cheers which greeted Babe Ruth when he stepped to the plate could be heard throughout the land.²⁰

NBC began regular series broadcasts in 1926, and CBS did likewise beginning in 1928. The announcers were general network announcers, who did not all have backgrounds in sports. McNamee gained acclaim from listeners as a most dramatic recreator of games and criticism from baseball "insiders," that is, sportswriters, for his lack of knowledge of the game. Ted Husing was the principal baseball announcer for CBS from its inception until 1934.

Encouraged by the success of McNamee's presentation of the 1923 World Series, WMAQ in Chicago did the first "regular" broadcast of a regular season game as they presented a game between the Chicago Cubs and the St. Louis Cardinals in April 1924. That year, WMAQ broadcast all the home games of both the Cubs and the White Sox.²¹ Cubs' owner William Wrigley, the man who instituted such promotions as Ladies' Day, encouraged competition between stations, believing strongly in the promotional power of the new medium.²² The more airspace the Cubs could occupy in Chicago, the more fan interest there would be, in his estimation. In 1925, Wrigley invited any radio station who wanted to broadcast games from Wrigley Field, at no charge.²³ By 1929 Cubs games were broadcast on 5 radio stations, and the White Sox were broadcast on 2 stations. This amount of broadcasting apparently did not hurt the Cubs, as they drew over 1 million fans in each year from 1927 to 1929, a feat matched only by the New York Yankees. Even a pioneer like Wrigley did not see the potential of radio in its effect on revenue through broadcast rights; instead, he saw it as having a beneficial effect on ticket sales.

Other clubs began broadcasting games in the mid and late 1920s. Regular broadcasts of games in Boston began in 1925, first over the Colonial and later over the Yankee Network. WTAM in Cleveland started broadcasting regular season games in 1925. Detroit broadcasts began on WWJ in 1927. Early on, St. Louis Cardinals owner Sam Breadon complained that broadcasts from Chicago would hurt attendance in St. Louis, but in 1927 KWK St. Louis began regular broadcasts in the Mound City. KMOX in St. Louis

began regular baseball broadcasts in 1929. In 1929 Cincinnati began broadcasting Reds' games on WFBE.²⁴ In 1930, according to a *New York Times* story that contained at least one notable inaccuracy (Chicago White Sox owner Charles Comiskey was referred to as Charles Cominsky) at least some of the Philadelphia Phillies' home games were broadcast.²⁵ It should be noted that the Philadelphia clubs did not broadcast any home games from 1931 to 1934.

Not all stations broadcast all games, or even all home games, and, until the 1930s, there were no regular baseball broadcasts in New York City, Washington, Pittsburgh, or Philadelphia. A number of clubs that allowed broadcasts place restrictions on the number of games to be aired. In St. Louis, for example, the Cards' and Browns' home games were not broadcast on Saturdays, Sundays, or holidays. Road games were almost always done as recreations from telegraph reports, with the announcer sitting in a hometown radio studio with a Western Union man, who fed him pitch-by-pitch information. The announcer used sound effects to make the broadcast sound as "live" as possible.²⁶ (This practice will be discussed at greater length in chapter four.)

In the early years, the technical limitations of the medium and the lack of federal regulation probably made many people question the viability of broadcasting games on a regular basis, inasmuch as low-powered local stations were all restricted to the 360 meter wavelength according to regulations adopted at the 1923 Washington Radio Conference. The 1923 conference established two other classes of radio licenses: high power, or "clear channels,"

meant to serve large areas and be free of interference, and medium power, on which two or more licensees often shared time.²⁷ This made uninterrupted clear reception of any but the most powerful stations practically impossible. While federal broadcasting policy increasingly came to reflect the interests of A T & T, RCA, GE, and Westinghouse, it was not until the creation of the Federal Radio Commission in 1927 and its subsequent reallocation of radio licenses that club owners could entertain thoughts of selling broadcast rights.

There were those in the baseball establishment who were scornful of radio's ability to inspire fan interest. In a 1925 editorial applauding American League president Ban Johnson's edict against broadcasting games from American League parks, *The Sporting News* was hyperbolic in its denunciation of radio baseball:

Dismissing for the moment any property consideration, any possibility at all of affecting attendance, anything which may have to do with the business end of the sport, we are glad baseball is not to be broadcasted because it is not a broadcasting game. Baseball is more an inspiration to the brain through the eye than it is by the ear. The greatest value of baseball, next to playing it, is to look upon it. There is nothing about it which appears to appeal to wave lengths. A nation that begins to take its sport by ear will shortly adopt the white flag as its national emblem, and the dove as its national bird.²⁸

The editorial equated a radio broadcast of a game with "a succotash party with neither corn nor beans." The fan who chose to listen to a ball game rather than attend one, would, in time, become too lazy to leave the home or office, their minds growing duller and duller. It was much more stimulating to attend a game in person, where one could enjoy the fresh air and the thrill of athletic competition. Broadcasters were also criticized for not paying for a product that

cost others a lot of money to produce. Radio would eventually "have to do business in a business-like way, paying for what it has been inclined to appropriate without asking leave some times."²⁹ Apart from the hyperbole, which tells us more about sportswriting of the time than it does about the appeal of radio baseball, the editorial was prescient on two counts: Its criticism of the debilitating effects of radio listening might have been lifted from a latter-day critique of television, and its insistence that broadcasters should pay for the right to broadcast games presaged what would come to be the underpinning of the baseball-media relationship in the 1930s and beyond.

That radio was not a significant factor in the economics of baseball is borne out by the fact that at the end of the 1920s baseball was still overwhelmingly dependent on gate receipts, which represented 87.6% of gross major league income in 1929 while concessions were 5.5% of gross income and the rest was from parking and park rentals.³⁰ This is despite the phenomenal increase in the number of radio receivers in American homes between the beginning and end of the decade. In 1922 there were radio receivers in 3 million homes. The sales of radio receivers and accessories in 1922 totalled \$60,000,000. In 1929 the radio industry tallied \$842,000,000 in sales.³¹ Nevertheless, the commercial possibilities of radio had not yet been fully explored or exploited.

Radio, Baseball, and Advertising

Baseball's claim as the national pastime strikes home in ways that go well beyond its alleged connection to a legitimate folk heritage in the play

and games of the American people. The hallowed "American tradition" it more accurately reflected in the formative years of its reputation was the spirit of capitalism.³²

Organized professional baseball was, is, and always has been, organized around profoundly commercial values. This has been true since admission was first charged to a baseball game. Likewise, advertising and baseball have been connected ever since the first business sponsored a team and the first advertising message was placed on an outfield fence. Since the 1890s, popular baseball players have endorsed products meant for a wide market, products like sporting equipment and cigarettes. Players' names and faces appeared in magazine and newspaper ads or on trading cards. It is hardly surprising that the ascendance of the consumer ethic meant that advertisers would seek more and more to identify their products with as dominant an institution as baseball.

The introduction of radio ... marks an important point of departure for the advertising industries in North America and Britain. One of the most successful ventures undertaken by the advertising industry in North America was the selling of radio broadcasting as a commercial medium.³³

In a 1916 memo to the officials of the Marconi Wireless Company, David Sarnoff had proposed a commercial basis for broadcasting. In the years of the first radio boom, however, the American radio system was not established on a strictly commercial basis. Until the late 1920s, even the majority of advertisers and radio executives regarded radio as a medium of cultural uplift, which, because it reached the family circle, should be approached cautiously with regard to permissible advertising techniques. In the late 1920s and the early

years of the Depression, radio advertising techniques became more intrusive. Hampered by federal government regulations that favored commercial broadcasters, non-commercial broadcasters were gradually squeezed out of the radio scene. National advertisers, seeing how radio could reach more consumers than the various forms of print advertising, began to pour more money into radio advertising. The networks ceded control of programming to the advertisers, who supplied the performers and produced the programming. By the late 1930s, advertisers, aided by more and more sophisticated market research techniques, were dividing the program day into segments and supplying programs designed to reach specific audiences.³⁴

Besides broadcasting concerts, lectures, and recitals, radio could broadcast baseball scores and games. However, the commercial possibilities were not readily apparent to all baseball club owners or the broadcasters until the mid-1930s. Until that time, all baseball games were played in the afternoons, the least attractive time for advertisers. In addition, there were operators of radio stations who were ambivalent about the commercialization of radio. For example, until 1934 the Detroit Tigers' station, WWJ, would not accept sponsorship, under the conviction that it was performing a public service by broadcasting the games.³⁵ The Tigers' first sponsor was Mobil Oil. Announcer Ty Tyson would say at the beginning and the end of the game that the game was brought to the listeners by Mobil Oil; that was the extent of the advertising.³⁶ In 1935, the Chicago Cubs' contracts with WBBM, WGN, and WJJD stipulated that there must not be more than 1,000 words of commercial

copy in the broadcast of any one game and that there must not be more than eight commercial announcements during the broadcast.³⁷

Was this apparent reluctance on the part of some broadcasters to use direct advertising or to present an "excessive" amount of commercial copy on baseball broadcasts an anomaly, or was it just one aspect of a general reluctance to commercialize the airwaves? It is generally assumed that radio in the United States commercialized rapidly, especially after the creation of NBC in September 1926 and of CBS and the Federal Radio Commission in 1927. However, most of the increase in gross advertising revenues between 1918 and 1929 seems to have occurred in print rather than in radio, despite the explosion in the sales of radio receiving equipment. In *Advertising the American Dream*, Roland Marchand argues that the relative slowness in the rate of commercialization of radio had to do with the notion of radio as a vehicle of cultural uplift that was held even among advertising people.³⁸

Advertisers, according to Marchand, were wary of radio, even though the new medium surpassed all others as a mass medium and had the potential to reach people in the privacy of the home. This intrusion into the revered family circle made advertisers afraid of provoking adverse reactions. Advertisers had a different attitude toward radio than other media. Radio was approached with reverence while movies were regarded with disdain and tabloids and confession magazines were considered to reveal the public's lack of taste. A possible reason for this attitude lay in the social origins of the movies, (i.e., nickelodeons patronized by the urban masses, many of them immigrants), of

tabloids and confession magazines (directed toward the working class). The ownership of radio sets, on the other hand, spread from the wealthier classes on down, with an initial elite audience. (The average cost of a radio set in 1929 was \$135.)³⁹ This fact reinforced the notion that direct advertising appeals on the radio were an unseemly invasion of the gentility of the bourgeois home. "Radio...reached its audience as individuals, or in small family groups, insulated by the home setting from any of the base passions of the mob."⁴⁰ There was also resistance or hostility to radio as an advertising medium for a more prosaic reason: some advertising agencies were reluctant to enter into radio because of opposition of newspaper owners who viewed radio as their competitors for advertising dollars, as we shall see.

Advertising agency radio departments were small or nonexistent until the late 1920s, at least partly because there was no national network available to advertisers until 1926. Early broadcasting was not as much a commercial enterprise as a merchandising offshoot of the radio manufacturing industry. As such, Czitrom divides the early broadcasters into three classes: those who sold radio sets; those seeking goodwill and free advertising, such as newspapers, hotels, and department stores; and religious and educational institutions.⁴¹ This changed with the success of the first station to charge sponsors for air time (referred to at the time as toll broadcasting), A.T.& T's WEAJ in New York City, which began operation in 1922, and with the adoption of regulations favoring commercial broadcasters at the Department of Commerce's four annual radio conferences beginning in 1923. These led directly to the development of

American radio as a commercial broadcasting system, which was a critical step in the development of a consumption economy in America.⁴² As Czitrom points out:

With the accelerated mass production of consumer goods, advertising began playing a greatly expanded role in American business during the 1920s. Advertisers sold not merely products but a way of life: happiness through buying, personal fulfillment from the purchase. Radio advertising did not become a truly significant fraction of total advertising expenditures until the 1930s, but the swiftness and thoroughness with which commercial broadcasting emerged as the model for radio surely reflected the cultural and economic force of the advertising ethic.⁴³

In 1922, there was almost no commercial broadcasting, and at the 1923 Washington Radio Conference there was much hostility to the notion of commercial broadcasting,⁴⁴ but by 1925, 43 per cent of the broadcasting stations in the United States were commercial broadcasters, including the majority of the more powerful stations.⁴⁵ By 1930, the American broadcasting system was dominated by an alliance of advertisers and commercial broadcasters within a system of national networks. The manufacturing of radio receivers and transmitters was in the hands of a very few large corporations, the federal regulatory system was weak, and there was a wide diffusion of receiving equipment in American homes, where advertisers could send their message into what had been previously unreachable psychic space. As Frank Arnold, director of development for NBC, noted,

For years the national advertiser and his agency had been dreaming of the time to come when there would be evolved some great family medium which should reach the home and the adult members of the family in their moments of relaxation, bringing to them the editorial and advertising message....Then came radio broadcasting, utilizing the very air we breathe, and with electricity as its vehicle entering the homes of the nation through doors and windows, no matter how tightly barred, and

delivering its message audibly through the loudspeaker wherever placed....In the midst of the family circle, in moments of relaxation, the voice of radio brings to the audience its program of entertainment or its message of advertising.⁴⁶

In the mid-20s advertisers began pushing the limits of sponsorship, looking for unobtrusive methods of mixing entertainment and advertising. From 1923 to 1927 the sponsorship only theory of radio advertising predominated the advertising press. The consensus that emerged by mid-decade acknowledged the merits of commercial sponsorship but disapproved of any "direct advertising" of products on the air.⁴⁷ Major corporations rushed to sponsor programs on NBC when it went on the air in November 1926, but NBC's policy was that there should be no direct advertising: sponsors would depend on the goodwill that would accrue from their sponsorship of good programming.⁴⁸ Under guidelines established by the National Association of Broadcasters in 1923, it was deemed that commercial announcements should not be aired between seven and eleven pm, as this was family time.

In spite of these impediments, there were some experiments with direct advertising beginning in 1926. The first radio singing commercial (General Mills for Wheaties) in 1926 was apparently a model of decorum. Advertisers were generally still concerned about an adverse reaction by the public to direct advertising.⁴⁹ But the lure of radio as an advertising medium that could bring messages directly into the home eventually proved too attractive to pass up, especially when corporate sponsors of musical or variety programs would receive thousands of letters of response from happy listeners. The relation of advertising to entertainment began to be posed in a new way as radio

advertisers came to understand that they would have to draw their own audience through providing entertainment that would attract listeners. Barnouw says that the stock market crash of 1929 and the advertising policy of the new Columbia Broadcasting System, which allowed advertisers to go beyond sponsorship announcements in their advertisements, were crucial factors in the erosion of the sponsorship only credo.⁵⁰

One of the leaders in advertising innovation was George Washington Hill, president of the American Tobacco Company, who adopted many new techniques in promoting Lucky Strike cigarettes. In the company's print campaigns, Hill began using the testimonial, a kind of personal approach in 1926, the same year that Lucky Strike began sponsoring a musical variety radio program. Hill also used "competitive copy", the technique of making comparisons between brands or products, which had been one of the advertising trade's most entrenched taboos.⁵¹ A number of ad agencies and trade publications fulminated against the sort of techniques Hill used, but the feeling about this so-called "super-advertising" was not unanimous, especially when it was seen that the American Tobacco Company was profiting quite handsomely.⁵² The president of CBS, William Paley, permitted Hill to mention the price of his products.⁵³ Radio was found to be a good medium for blending the ad into the programming content. The interweaving of radio commercials into scripts or the use of the technique of "overhearing" conversations between members of an audience in which the virtues of a particular product were praised soon became standard practices.⁵⁴

The mushrooming of agency radio departments coincided with the final steps in linking together networks that could provide nationwide coverage. It reflected a growing recognition that, contrary to genteel assumptions about radio, "direct advertising" over the air could produce sales. In fact, ads might not even have to be subtly interwoven. In the fall of 1928, the American Tobacco Company temporarily suspended nearly all other advertising for Lucky Strike cigarettes in order to test the power of radio. Using testimonials taken from its aggressive print campaign, Lucky Strike increased its sales by 47 per cent within two months. Lord and Thomas, the Lucky Strike advertising agency, now proclaimed: "Broadcasting is a profitable advertising medium when used frankly and fearlessly as such."⁵⁵

The "sponsorship only" credo was clearly fading by 1929. Marchand says that the move away from sponsorship only was just the beginning of the transformation of radio into a commercial medium. The pressures of the depression further undermined the "gentility" of radio by 1932. There was more advertising and more intensive advertising on radio in the early 30s. Expenditures on radio advertising grew during 1931 and 1932 while other ad expenditures dropped, such as those for newspapers and magazines. There were still a few who clung to the notion of the gentility of radio, and they preferred to interweave rather than to make direct commercial appeals, but the rest of the industry dismissed radio's cultural pretensions and equated the medium with the door-to-door salesman who already had made it past the door. Sometimes it was found that the most offensive commercials worked best.⁵⁶

What the success of even the most offensive advertising approaches destroyed was the vision that advertising and radio would be used for educational and cultural purposes. Radio became dominated by the view that entertainment time could be sold for profit.

Beginning in 1928, radio networks, advertisers, and ratings firms began dividing the radio audience into two main consumer groups: heads of households and ladies of the house. The first audience measurements were done by Archibald Crossley for the Association of National Advertisers (ANA). He sought to provide advertisers with an idea of audience composition. The first polls of program popularity done by Crossley telephone interviews in 1930 and later in mid-30s showed that most people polled preferred comedy, light drama, and variety shows. As a result, more popular music than symphonies were played.⁵⁷ Broadcasters and advertisers began the practice of dividing the broadcast day into discrete segments that would attract different types of consumers. This also meant that programming began to be divided by genre, with some programs considered women's programs and some considered men's programs. As a result of this conception of the daily schedule, the audience, and the genre, advertisers began to adhere to the notion of buying audiences rather than buying time.⁵⁸

By the second half of the 1920s, national advertising on radio, although well mannered and "institutional" in nature, was catching on and becoming increasingly attractive to potential advertisers. As radio's audience grew, their interest followed. In the larger stations the pattern typical today was already at

work: programming was used to attract listeners who were then "sold" to advertisers.⁵⁹ The Starch study of 18,024 radio homes for NBC in the mid-30s did much to confirm the growing significance of radio listeners as potential markets for advertisers.⁶⁰ Further audience research efforts followed: they detailed the rapid growth of the medium (17 million sets by 1932, up from 12 million in 1929)⁶¹ and the interests and preferences of audiences to guide programming on the networks. The research showed how listening followed daily time curves, with evening audiences different in character and twice the size of daytime ones, how the programming mixes of the networks were establishing different audience loyalties based on programming preferences, and how "program flow" from one show to the next could influence these loyalties.⁶² The research also showed that sportscasts were attractive to large groups of people. A survey done in Philadelphia in 1930 showed that 63 per cent of men regularly listened to broadcasts of sporting events. This was less than the number who listened to music and comedy shows, but more than for news, drama, and religion. The same survey also showed that 30 per cent of women listened to sports.⁶³

The demand to subtly interweave advertising into radio content prompted ad agencies to create or expand radio departments, with the ad agencies themselves assuming more control over program content.⁶⁴

Once programming sponsored by advertisers secured a firm foothold, and networking was a success, the full commercialization of the medium proceeded apace. Individual stations became dependent on the networks for material of sufficiently high quality to draw audiences and on the fast-developing expertise of advertising agencies to secure a stable revenue base. National broadcasting and national advertisers

nicely reinforced each other's interests. In 1922 only 6 percent of all radio stations were affiliated with networks; by 1937 this had risen to 46 percent, and by 1947 to 97 percent.⁶⁵

Network programming from the late 1920s to the start of World War II was controlled directly by the sponsors, who produced the shows, hired performers, writers, directors, and musicians, and leased the production facilities from the networks. "The networks had virtually no control over the programming, and there is no indication that they wanted it."⁶⁶ Still, substantial parts of the networks' schedules were unsponsored. Local broadcasters had to find ways to fill this time with programming that would attract large audiences. Baseball, which was played in the daytime, would prove to be one of the ways that stations could attract advertisers. But first, the broadcasters and advertisers had to overcome the doubts of those baseball people who felt that the broadcasting of baseball games was not in the sport's best interests.

Conclusion

The popularity of organized professional baseball was in large part due to the attention given to baseball coverage in American newspapers prior to the 1920s. The role of the railroad and telegraph were critical in the development of viable professional inter-city baseball leagues in the decades after the Civil War. By the turn of the century, baseball was the pre-eminent professional sport in America. The development of radio provided a means of disseminating baseball information and promoting the game to reach large numbers of people at the same time. However, many in the baseball establishment were wary of

baseball's possible effect on attendance or dismissed the medium's ability to excite fan interest. Furthermore, the commercial viability of radio was not at all clear in the medium's early years. Many in the radio industry had to overcome their reluctance to advertise directly on the radio. This was overcome when it was found that direct advertising did not, as had been feared, alienate most listeners. In the face of the economic crisis of the Great Depression, advertisers became more aggressive in their techniques and turned to radio as the medium that could provide the best return on the advertising dollar. These developments took place within a policy environment that favored commercial broadcasting by equating commercial broadcasting with the public interest and non-commercial broadcasting with special interests. Federal regulators thus favored commercial broadcasters in assigning them the clear channels and permitting them more on-air hours. As we shall see in the next chapter, it was the interest of advertisers in sponsoring baseball games that assured the adoption of radio baseball by all major league clubs in the late 1930s.

NOTES

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²John Rickards Betts, "The Technological Revolution and the Rise of Sport, 1850-1900," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 40 (September 1983), p. 255.

³Betts, p. 238.

⁴Janet Lever and Stanton Wheeler, "Mass Media and the Experience of Sport," *Communication Research* 20(1) (February 1993) p. 127.

⁵Betts, p. 240.

⁶Voigt, p. 187.

⁷Lever and Wheeler, p. 126.

⁸Robert McChesney, "Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States," in *Media, Sports, and Society*, ed. Lawrence Wenner (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 1989), p. 54.

⁹Harold Seymour, *Baseball Volume I: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 351.

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¹¹McChesney, "Media Made Sport," p. 55.

¹²McChesney, "Media Made Sport," p. 55.

¹³George Douglas, *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting*, (London: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1987), p. 113.

¹⁴Wayne Towers, "World Series Coverage in New York in the 1920s," *Journalism Monographs No. 73*, 1981, p. 5.

¹⁵Curtis Smith, *Voices of the Game* (South Bend, IN: Diamond Communications, Inc., 1987), p. 7.

¹⁶Seymour, *The Early Years*, p. 346; Smith, p. 8.

¹⁷Towers, p. 5.

¹⁸Towers, p. 6.

¹⁹Smith, p. 10.

²⁰Quoted in Smith, p. 9.

²¹Both McChesney and Smith date WMAQ's regular broadcasts from 1924. The *Chicago Tribune* makes no mention of WMAQ's baseball broadcasts, either in its sports section or radio schedule, nor does *The Sporting News*. A *Sporting News* article of October 3, 1935, announcing the announcers chosen to broadcast the 1935 World Series, noted that Hal Totten had been broadcasting games in Chicago since beginning with WMAQ in 1924.

²²Smith, p. 12.

²³Paul D. Adomites, "Baseball on the Air," in *Total Baseball*, 3rd ed., eds. Peter Palmer and John Thorn (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 589. In all subsequent references, *Total Baseball*, 3rd ed. will be referred to as *TBIII*.

²⁴Smith, pp. 6-24.

²⁵*New York Times*, September 14, 1930, p. 10 XX.

²⁶Adomites, p. 589; Smith, pp. 6-24.

²⁷Daniel Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 72.

²⁸*The Sporting News*, July 10, 1925, p. 4. In all subsequent references, *The Sporting News* will be referred to as *TSN*.

²⁹*Ibid.*

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³³William Leiss, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising* 2nd ed. (Scarborough, ON: Nelson, 1990), p. 82.

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³⁶*Ibid*, p. 35.

³⁷*TSN*, February 28, 1935, p. 8.

³⁸Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 89-108.

³⁹Frederick Lewis Allen, *Since Yesterday: 1929-1939* (New York: Bantam Books, 1965), p. 5.

⁴⁰Marchand, p. 89.

⁴¹Czitrom, p. 72.

⁴²Ibid, p. 76.

⁴³Ibid, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁴Barnouw, *The Sponsor*, p. 15.

⁴⁵Czitrom, p. 79.

⁴⁶Ibid, p. 77.

⁴⁷Marchand, p. 90.

⁴⁸Barnouw, *The Sponsor*, p. 24.

⁴⁹Marchand, p. 94.

⁵⁰Barnouw, *The Sponsor*, p. 25.

⁵¹Marchand, p. 98.

⁵²Ibid, p. 100.

⁵³Barnouw, *The Sponsor*, p. 25.

⁵⁴Marchand, p. 103.

⁵⁵Ibid, p. 107.

⁵⁶Ibid, p. 110.

⁵⁷Eileen R. Meehan, "Critical Theorizing on Broadcast History," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 30(4), Fall 1986, pp. 402-403.

⁵⁸Ibid, p. 403.

⁵⁹Barnouw, *The Sponsor*, p. 33.

⁶⁰Marchand, p. 108.

⁶¹Allen, *Since Yesterday*, p. 5.

⁶²Leiss, Kline, and Jhally, p. 84.

⁶³Lever and Wheeler, p. 129.

⁶⁴Marchand, p. 107.

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CHAPTER III: THE BASEBALL-RADIO DEBATE, 1931-39

In baseball circles there was a great deal of debate between 1931 and 1939 over the impact of radio on baseball, especially as it might affect attendance. At first, there was little awareness of the possible commercial benefits of radio. As more interest was shown by advertisers in sponsoring radio baseball in the mid-1930s, more teams began to broadcast their games. The first year that all 16 major league teams allowed regular broadcasts of games was 1939. Between 1933 and 1939, the total of rights fees for local radio broadcasts paid to major league teams increased from \$18,000 to \$885,000.¹ When the property status of baseball games, and, by extension, baseball broadcasts, was established in 1938, the pattern was set for the commercial relationship between sports and the broadcast media that has come to characterize our present age.

Radio: Good or Bad for Baseball?

Even though games were being broadcast in St. Louis, Chicago, Boston, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Detroit on a more or less regular basis by 1930, many baseball owners were still apprehensive about radio, while others, such as William Wrigley in Chicago, were enamoured of its potential.

Newspapermen resented the changes that radio brought to their usual practices. Some were afraid that there would be an adverse effect on the sales of afternoon papers, resulting in, as the Baseball Writers' Association of America put it in a telegram to Commissioner Landis, a "curtailment of baseball publicity."² As the public came to embrace radio broadcasts of baseball games,

many newspapermen challenged the expertise of the announcers and questioned radio's effect on attendance. This may have been prompted in part by professional jealousy. In addition, as advertising revenues shrank, newspapers had to cut back, and, in a climate where more and more advertising was going to radio anyway, there may have been an element of protectionism motivating sportswriters' attitudes toward radio baseball.

Radio people and advertisers had their own concerns about the potential size of the audience for radio baseball. The hours at which major league games were played were apparently not conducive to attracting large audiences. Until 1935, when Cincinnati hosted Philadelphia in the first night game, all major league games were played during the day. Games generally started around 1:00 to 2:00 pm on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays and somewhere between 2:00 and 4:00 pm on weekdays, times when many people were at work. There was also not much time during a broadcast that could be allotted to commercial announcements. Baseball games of the time took around 2 hours to play. The breaks between innings were short, about 30 seconds. Given the length of a game, and the apparently small potential audience (Who was at home at those times? Women? Conventional wisdom had it that women didn't know anything about baseball.), and the primitive state of radio advertising techniques, it is not surprising that it took radio, baseball, and advertising interests a while to figure out how radio baseball was going to be profitable for all of them.

There was little or no debate about whether to broadcast the World Series each October. The broadcasts of the World Series were popular from their inception and were regarded as the type of broadcasts that united the American people. But the case of local broadcasts of regular season games was an entirely different matter. Many baseball people had reservations about radio because of what David Voigt has called the two-dimensional presentation of baseball that had existed since the inception of the major leagues in 1876. The first dimension, and most important in the minds of the owners, was the game itself played before paying spectators in parks. The second dimension was less important but useful, and that was the free coverage of baseball given by newspapers. This coverage provided free advertising for baseball and whetted the public's appetite for the game. Rather than seeing the advertising potential of radio, owners were hostile to it because it was potentially more popular than baseball, represented in their minds a threat to live attendance, and upset the traditional pattern of promotion.³ *The Sporting News* noted that the owners regarded their game as a spectacle to be seen and not heard but were concerned that if someone could hear the game for free at home, he would not pay to see it at the park. However, *The Sporting News* also recognized that some might say that the fan would rather pay to see a game than to listen to a radio description full of inaccuracies, as, in the words of the writer, "the pleasure in baseball is more than optical."⁴

Club Owners Discuss the Radio Question, 1931-34

At the annual winter meetings of the American and National Leagues from 1931 to 1934, major league club owners discussed banning radio broadcasts from their parks. In 1931, at a joint meeting of the two major leagues, it was agreed that no clubs would be permitted to sign radio contracts for the 1933 season until the leagues had discussed the question at the 1932 meetings. Such an action was not taken for 1932, as the Chicago Cubs had, at the last moment, signed a radio contract the night before the meetings. Most clubs were opposed to allowing broadcasts, even some who had already experimented with them, like Detroit and Cincinnati. The two clubs in St. Louis, the National League Cardinals and the American League Browns, the Chicago Cubs, and the Boston Red Sox were all in favor of broadcasting. The Cleveland Indians were willing to stop broadcasting if a ban were imposed. According to *The Sporting News*, several National League teams suggested that broadcasting be limited to stations that had a reach of no more than 50 miles. In the end, broadcasting was left to local option for the 1932 season in both major leagues.⁵

In December 1932, club owners came very close to prohibiting teams from broadcasting games on radio at their annual meeting. A number of club owners, most notably Jacob Ruppert of the New York Yankees and Sam Breadon of the St. Louis Cardinals, were in favor of an outright ban on broadcasting by the leagues. This was a reversal of Breadon's position at the previous year's meeting. The strongest proponents of broadcasting were the

Chicago Cubs' ownership, led by William Veeck, and Emil Fuchs of the Boston Braves. They were determined to retain broadcasting. According to John Drebinge's report in the New York Times, the debate was quite lively.⁶ In the end, the owners deferred the matter, as they would in all future discussions, by letting each owner do what he wanted.

The debate over broadcasting revolved around radio's perceived effect on attendance. The 1920s had seen the major leagues attract record numbers of fans. Almost 93 million fans attended baseball games in the ten years from 1920 to 1929.⁷ In 1930, major league attendance went over 10 million for the first time, the highest single-season attendance total of any year before 1945.⁸ The effects of the Great Depression on major league attendance started to be felt in 1931. From 10.1 million in 1930, attendance dropped dramatically for the next 3 seasons, to 8.5 million in 1931, 6.97 million in 1932, and 6.1 million in 1933. Attendance levelled off in 1934 and then recovered gradually through the rest of the decade, getting back to 9 million by 1937, where it stayed until 1940 and 1941, when it climbed to 9.5-10 million.⁹

As attendance dropped in the early 1930s, major league owners sought ways to cut costs and curb losses. In 1930, the 16 major league clubs made a collective profit of around \$1.5 million. In 1931, the clubs made only \$217,000, and eleven of them showed losses. In 1932, they showed a combined loss of \$1.2 million, and only four clubs, including the pennant-winning Chicago Cubs and New York Yankees, showed profits.¹⁰ Most club owners who were in favor of banning radio broadcasts were of the belief that radio, which did not account

for very much revenue, hurt the live gate. In the late 1920s and the early 1930s, revenue from broadcasting was a negligible part of overall club revenue in the major leagues. In 1933, the 16 major league teams made a total of only \$18,000 on the sale of local broadcast rights.¹¹ Almost all the revenues came from the live gate. In the context of falling attendance, then, the pressure to ban broadcasting increased.

But the relationship between radio and attendance was far from clear. In his statement accompanying the announcement that a radio ban would be discussed at the 1932 league meeting, American League president William Harridge noted that a number of baseball people believed that radio broadcasts had kept thousands of people away from the 1932 World Series games in New York. This was felt to be especially true of the first game, when rain clouds threatened right up until game time.¹² Apparently, the thinking among the anti-radio faction was that people who might otherwise have decided to go to the game at the last moment and chanced the weather stayed home because they had the option of listening to the game on the radio. Harridge had nothing to say about what the perceived effects of radio on attendance were in Chicago for the World Series, where radio baseball was well-established. Attendance at the games in New York City was much lower than Yankee Stadium's capacity, while the Series drew well in Chicago.¹³

Despite the feeling on the part of a number of club owners that broadcasting hurt attendance, other explanations for the drop in attendance were advanced as well. Philadelphia Athletics' owner Connie Mack, who did

not permit broadcasts of his club's games, stated that Pennsylvania's blue laws preventing Sunday baseball were the reason why the Athletics couldn't make enough money to pay their stars.¹⁴ Even New York Yankee owner Jacob Ruppert, the most resolute opponent of radio, claimed that falling attendance was purely the result of the Depression and the lack of disposable income among baseball fans.¹⁵ Others would have gone along with the fan who said that attendance followed winning. This opinion seems to have been borne out by the fact that the attendance leaders in each league in 1932 were the pennant winning Cubs in the National League and the Yankees in the American League.

The Chicago Cubs' ownership claimed that radio was an integral part of their scheme to raise attendance. *The Sporting News* outlined the Cubs' strategy: First, the Cubs built a strong team, and then, they made Wrigley Field as clean and attractive as possible. Promotions such as ladies' day were introduced. Cubs' ownership felt that radio reached women in the home, that it interested them in baseball and got them talking about baseball to their children, who grew up as Cub fans.¹⁶ The idea that radio educated women to the game and made them into fans was a theme that was to be echoed by other proponents of radio in the 1930s. Radio baseball was said to give women an opportunity to share the baseball experience without going to the ballpark, which had traditionally been a male enclave.¹⁷ This view was upheld in letters to *The Sporting News* from female baseball fans who asserted that radio raised their interest in the game.¹⁸

Fans who wrote to *The Sporting News* were virtually unanimous in their support for radio baseball. In 1932, the paper conducted a fan poll that asked radio listeners to choose their favorite baseball announcer. They also asked fans to say whether they preferred radio baseball to attending games in person and whether they thought that radio hurt attendance. Not surprisingly, the answer to both those questions was negative. One group of fans among whom radio appeared to arouse interest was those in rural areas, who could not normally attend major league games. They believed that radio baseball stimulated interest in the major leagues and led to more rural fans going to games in major league cities.¹⁹

Before the 1933 league meetings, an editorial in *The Sporting News* offered the opinion that the existing situation, in which each club could do what it wanted about broadcasting, would, and should, prevail. This position amounted to tacit support of radio broadcasting on the part of *The Sporting News*, a position that it held throughout the 1930s, a reversal of its views on the subject when radio baseball was introduced in the mid-1920s.²⁰ A 1933 editorial in *The Sporting News* made the following conclusion:

There is considerable public interest in the subject, but it has so many ramifications that any action that might be taken would lead to recriminations, so until more definite conclusions can be reached, perhaps it would be just as well to let the situation rest. However, there can be no doubt that the advantages of the radio as a promotional medium, should not be overlooked, and that these benefits should be stressed, so that magnate, official and player alike will understand that it is a part of their job to make use of radio opportunities.²¹

In the end, that is what the clubs decided to do at the 1933 meetings. As usual, some clubs were in favor of broadcasting, and some were opposed. A few

clubs wanted broadcasting barred on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, and there was some sentiment in favor of requiring payment to the clubs for broadcasting privileges, especially in the cases of commercially-sponsored broadcasts.²²

In 1934, two developments threatened the position of radio in major league ballparks. In St. Louis, management of the National League Cardinals and the American League Browns banned radio from Sportsman's Park, where the two teams played. In New York City, the owners of the New York Yankees, the New York Giants, and the Brooklyn Dodgers signed a five-year agreement to ban all radio, even re-creations, from their ballparks, respectively Yankee Stadium, the Polo Grounds, and Ebbets Field.

The St. Louis experiment with banning broadcasting illustrated the inconclusiveness of the radio-attendance debate. In St. Louis, where baseball was broadcast regularly from 1926, the Browns and Cardinals management, hit hard by the Depression's effect on attendance, rethought their position on broadcasting and decided to experiment by banning it for one year.²³ The Browns and the Cards apparently discussed dropping radio during the 1933 season, but because the stations had contracts to honor they decided to delay action on the radio issue.²⁴ At the league meetings, Cardinals' president Sam Breadon led the 1932 crusade against the "mikes", and in 1933 L.C. McEvoy of the Browns led the campaign for a general ban on broadcasting in the majors. Neither campaign was successful, but on February 3, 1934, the Cardinals and Browns announced that they were banning all radio broadcasts of games from

Sportsman's Park.²⁵ Breadon admitted that in better times radio had been good for the Cardinals, but felt that it was now time to experiment for a year without it.²⁶ The St. Louis clubs went so far as to forbid accounts of games at Sportsman's Park from being sent out over any station representing a visiting club. This meant that no visiting clubs could even do re-creations from St. Louis.²⁷ In the end, the ban's effect on attendance was unclear. The Cardinals drew 70,000 more fans in 1934, but one would have expected a pennant winning team to have drawn better than they did, while the Browns drew better than they had in 1933, (88,000 to 115,000) so it is difficult to draw any conclusions about whether the lack of broadcasting helped or harmed attendance.²⁸

One site of resistance to baseball broadcasting was, ironically, New York City, the communications capital of the world. The New York scene was dominated by newspapers, with 13 English-language dailies in the city in 1936. Except for the first game of the season and occasional games, there were no games broadcast from any of the three major league ballparks in New York City.²⁹ Up to 1934, the ban on broadcasting in New York was informal, but in 1934, the Yankees, Giants, and Dodgers banned all radio, including out-of-town re-creations, from their parks for a period of five years. The ban was instigated by the New York Yankees, whose owner, Jacob Ruppert, remained unconvinced of radio's contribution to home attendance until his death. Horace Stoneham of the Giants was no fan of radio himself, and the Brooklyn ownership was in disarray, with two feuding ownership factions each controlling

exactly 50 per cent of the stock, and they just went along with what the other two clubs did.

Sponsors Become Interested in Baseball Broadcasting

The tide very quickly turned against the notion of banning broadcasting in the major leagues because of the increasing interest of advertisers in the sponsorship of baseball broadcasts. Even in the period immediately following the announcement that the St. Louis clubs were banning broadcasting, *The Sporting News* reported that some advertisers considered baseball broadcasts attractive and that ad rates in Chicago were rising rapidly. It was reported that Walgreen was paying WGN \$45,000 for ads during the 1934 season.³⁰ Pilsener beer reportedly paid WBBM \$40,000 for advertising on ball games.³¹ In Detroit, the White Star Refining Company contracted to sponsor the Tigers' games on Station WWJ. Clubs and stations who had not broadcast games in 1934 announced plans to do so. Station WXYZ came into the broadcasting picture in Detroit in 1934.³² Two stations, WWSW and KQV, announced plans to broadcast Pittsburgh Pirates' road games.³³ WHK, Cleveland, became the second station to broadcast Indians' games. General Mills was reported to be looking for radio stations for whom to sponsor the broadcasting of minor league baseball games.³⁴

The last concerted attempt to have broadcasting banned took place at the American League meeting in December, 1934, when L.C. McEvoy of the St. Louis Browns led another attempt to ban all radio broadcasts from major league parks once existing contracts had expired, but this idea was voted down, and

the local option prevailed.³⁵ That banning radio was becoming less and less a viable option was reflected in *The Sporting News* coverage of the issue. In its reporting on the 1934 league meetings and in the months after, *The Sporting News* devoted far more space to the debate of the night baseball issue than to the debate over radio. In February, 1935, *The Sporting News* published an editorial titled "Radio Staging Come-back." The editorial noted that all the teams that had broadcast in 1934 had announced plans to broadcast in 1935. In addition, though it was not yet official, was the "probable" return of the St. Louis clubs to radio. According to an editorial in *The Sporting News*:

It is evident...that both clubs lost a lot of good-will, particularly in territory outside of St. Louis, which they hope to win back by the return of the play-by-play accounts on the radio. It is significant that the parking spaces near Sportsman's Park did not contain as many out-of-town license plates as in previous years.³⁶

Very soon after, it was announced that both KWK and KMOX were returning to broadcasting games in St. Louis. Kellogg's reportedly paid KMOX \$35,000 to sponsor the broadcasts. General Mills contracted with KWK to sponsor games.³⁷

The return of St. Louis to radio ball in 1935 was part of the trend to increased radio coverage in the major leagues. Cincinnati expanded its broadcasting from less than 20 home games to all home games except on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.³⁸ More and more sponsors were getting involved, some even signing contracts a year in advance.³⁹ In 1935, 9 of the 16 major league teams broadcast their home games. Station WIP in Philadelphia was permitted to broadcast the opening games of the Phillies and the Athletics,

partially lifting the total ban on broadcasting in that city.⁴⁰ It was announced in November, 1935 that the Athletics and Phillies would allow broadcasts of home games in Philadelphia in 1936. In announcing his team's broadcasting plans, Gerry Nugent, president of the Phillies, said, "This is only an experiment. Attendance has been low and we're only trying to gain customers by selling the game over the air." The sponsors paid for the rights to broadcast the games. The amounts were not disclosed, but it was reported that the Athletics had originally demanded \$25,000 a season.⁴¹ Pittsburgh allowed two stations to do re-creations of road games, and in July 1935, the Washington Senators began to permit re-creations of both home and away games. A Washington drug store built a studio for announcer Arch McDonald, complete with seating arrangements for 200, where he did the re-creations of the Senators' games.⁴²

Critical to the development of radio baseball as a commercial enterprise was the interest in sponsoring baseball broadcasts by large national advertisers such as General Mills, Atlantic Refining, Socony-Vacuum Oil, and Kellogg's. Undoubtedly, a certain amount of this increased interest on the part of advertisers must be attributed to the better economic climate following the worst years of the Depression, from 1931 to 1933. At the same time, auto makers were beginning to install radios in cars, giving radio even more reach. (By 1932, there were 250,000 car radios in the United States.)⁴³ Today, much if not most sponsorship of radio baseball is done by local advertisers, but in the mid 1930s, it was the national brand accounts that led the shift from newspapers to radio.⁴⁴

As a result of the increasing interest by national advertisers in sponsoring baseball broadcasts, radio stations were beginning to reap the benefits of bidding wars by rival sponsors. For example, at the end of the 1934 season, WBBM Chicago announced that Kentucky Winner Cigarettes had the first option to sponsor games in the 1935 season and that General Mills had also submitted a bid.⁴⁵ In this instance, WBBM wanted to be released from the option and offered Kentucky Winner's parent company, Penn Tobacco Company, \$30,000 to release the station from Penn's option and allow other sponsors, but Penn refused the offer.⁴⁶ In the end, WBBM was able to get out of the deal with Penn Tobacco, who switched sponsorship to WIND, and WBBM then sold the sponsorship rights to General Mills for a reported \$75,000.⁴⁷

In the next few years, General Mills would become the largest single national sponsor of baseball broadcasts. In 1934, General Mills sponsored broadcasts in 6 minor league cities. In 1935 the company sponsored broadcasts of games in 13 cities, most of them in the minor leagues. In the major leagues, General Mills sponsored broadcasts on WBBM, Chicago, WGAR, Cleveland, and KWK, St. Louis.⁴⁸ In 1936 General Mills expanded its broadcasting agreements, keeping up its arrangements with WBBM, WGAR, and KWK as well as contracting with WJSV, Washington, and the Yankee Network, which broadcast games out of Boston, taking over the contract from the Kentucky Club Tobacco Company.⁴⁹ The company ran an ad campaign in *The Sporting News* in 1936 that tried to counter the notion that broadcasting hurt attendance. The ads encouraged people to go out to the ball games and

the company sponsored an award to the team that showed the biggest increase in attendance as a result of radio coverage. The award was given to Philadelphia.⁵⁰

General Mills leaped into radio baseball with both feet in 1937. Sixty-two major and minor league clubs aired broadcasts sponsored by General Mills in 1937. Only the three New York City clubs did not permit any broadcasts in 1937, and General Mills was active in every major league city that did. General Mills spent approximately \$1 million sponsoring baseball broadcasts in 1937, of which about \$250,000 went to minor league clubs.⁵¹ The company ran another major ad campaign in *The Sporting News* in 1937. Each issue had a corner ad for "Wheaties Champions" that introduced three of the broadcasters who were doing games sponsored by General Mills.⁵² The sponsorship agreements were not exclusive arrangements. Mobilgas, the co-sponsor in some cities, received secondary billing in *The Sporting News* campaign. Other sponsors of note were Kellogg's, Socony-Vacuum Oil, and the Atlantic Refining Company. Atlantic was the second most active sponsor of baseball broadcasts, and, in fact, General Mills and Atlantic had several conflicts over sponsorship rights in two-team cities.

Despite the growing interest of the advertisers and the increase in the number of broadcasts in the mid-30s, many clubs placed restrictions on broadcasting. In Pittsburgh, the Pirates broadcast only their road games. The St. Louis clubs did not permit weekend broadcasts.⁵³ In the cities where there were two teams, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, and Philadelphia, the games of the

home team were broadcast but not the games of the team that happened to be playing out of town if they conflicted with the broadcast of the home team. The rationale was that broadcasts of home games advertised the team but broadcasts of away games might give fans an excuse not to attend the game being played in their city that day. This situation existed until the mid-40s, by which time all teams were broadcasting all of their games, although most road game broadcasts were re-creations.⁵⁴ It should be noted that occasionally, in exceptional circumstances, exceptions to the standard practice of doing re-creations of away games were made. One such example occurred at the end of the 1935 season, when WGN, WBBM, and WMAQ, Chicago, were granted permission by the St. Louis Cardinals to broadcast an important weekend series between the Cubs and the Cards. The Cardinals even permitted the three stations to broadcast the Sunday game.⁵⁵

Broadcasting Rights: Legal Challenges

Discussion after the 1935 season did not revolve around the question of banning games, but rather, was largely concerned with the rights of stations who contracted with clubs to broadcast games and the responsibility of announcers to avoid criticizing the work of managers, players, umpires, and official scorers. *The Sporting News* reported that "through arrangements with sponsors that give clubs substantial sums for the privilege of putting the contests on the air, some previous objections to the installation of microphones have been overcome, the conclusion being reached that if there are any losses

in attendance through the radio they are offset by the revenue received directly from the stations."⁵⁶ From this point forward, the radio question revolved mainly around revenue and rights rather than attendance.

In May, 1935, *The Sporting News* reported that a "curious situation" had arisen in Cleveland, where WHK had exclusive rights to broadcast Indians' home games while WGAR was broadcasting all road games via the telegraph. The Indians tried to stop WGAR from doing the road broadcasts, but were unsuccessful. The club did manage to get Western Union to refuse its service to WGAR. It was not known exactly how WGAR was getting its feed, but conjecture had it that the station either got the telegraph feed over a special AT&T wire or picked up the broadcasts of the home team and then re-created them in a Cleveland studio.⁵⁷ The Indians and Standard Oil, the sponsor of the sanctioned WHK broadcasts, were upset about the money involved. The Indians were reportedly receiving \$20,000 from WHK for the rights, while WGAR was paying the club nothing for the telegraph re-creations.⁵⁸ There was no report of how much General Mills was paying WGAR, but one would have to think that it was less than what Standard Oil was paying WHK. There was no further mention of the Cleveland situation in *The Sporting News* until the report on the winter league meetings, and then the matter was only alluded to, and no mention of how it had been resolved was made. One assumes that the case was resolved in favor of WHK, as WGAR and General Mills did not make a similar agreement in 1936. In fact, General Mills sponsored the broadcasts on WHK in 1936.

In May, 1938, station WICC of Bridgeport, Connecticut was prohibited from carrying Boston Red Sox and Boston Braves games because the station was within 50 miles of New York City. The action was reportedly taken as a result of a complaint by the New York Yankees, but Yankee owner Jacob Ruppert denied that this was the case. Instead, he stated that the action was by agreement of the two major leagues.⁵⁹ This action was taken despite the fact that WICC had carried broadcasts out of Boston for a number of years.⁶⁰

Another issue involving territorial rights arose from the complaints of minor league clubs who claimed that the broadcasts of major league clubs into their territories hurt attendance at minor league games.⁶¹ It was customary for the major league clubs to seek approval for such broadcasts from the minor league club in question and the president of the minor league. Furthermore, some minor league clubs felt that broadcasts of afternoon major league games stimulated attendance for minor league games played at night.⁶² However, there was no formal policy on the question, and the practice by some major league clubs to broadcast into minor league territory was felt to be detrimental to minor league clubs, many of whom were fighting to survive in the Depression.

The issue was first raised formally in 1936. Commissioner Landis prohibited any further radio commitments by major or minor league clubs for the rest of the 1936 season, but no further action was taken at that point because of the contracts that had already been agreed to by the major league clubs, the broadcasters, and the sponsors for the 1936 season.⁶³ George Trautman, president of the American Association, undertook a survey of the radio situation

vis-a-vis the minor leagues with the intention of making recommendations of the National Association of Professional Baseball Clubs at their annual meeting in 1936.⁶⁴ It was reported in June, 1936, that some major league clubs and the sponsors of their broadcasts, anticipating a tightening of regulations that would restrict afternoon broadcasts into minor league territory, were considering new arrangements, whereby games would not be broadcast live, but instead would be re-created in the evening. The re-creation could be boiled down to a 45-minute broadcast. Of course, this move would have adversely affected minor league clubs who played in the evening, but the radio people responded by saying that the minor league clubs had forced the issue by protesting the afternoon broadcasts, so they would have to live with the situation.⁶⁵ In 1940, the major league owners sought to resolve the problem by restricting broadcasts of major league games into the home territory of minor league clubs,⁶⁶ but the rule (Rule 1 (d)) was challenged in the late-forties by broadcasters and eventually overturned under threat of anti-trust action by the Justice Department.⁶⁷

The question of requiring clubs to charge broadcasting rights was brought up at the league meetings in 1933. *The Sporting News* reported "some agitation" for requiring broadcasts to be paid for, especially when commercially-sponsored,⁶⁸ but the question was left to local option until 1936, when the American League adopted the policy that clubs had to charge for broadcasting rights. Of course, many clubs were charging rights fees by 1936 anyway, but in Chicago, the Cubs and White Sox had been allowing free

broadcasting to as many as five stations. The Chicago clubs were not happy about this new regulation nor about the fact that the American League had adopted a policy that forbade announcers criticizing umpires, managers, and official scorers. The four Chicago stations that had broadcast in 1936 sent a lawyer to appear before American League officials to protest and register their intent not to broadcast games under such restrictions. The American League office told the lawyer that the stations would have to live with the regulations, no matter what their feelings. In addition, the league announced that it was appointing L.C. McEvoy to monitor broadcasts and make sure that stations and announcers respected the contract.⁶⁹ The Chicago clubs and radio stations had no choice but to go along with the new regulations. The new rights fees were based on the type of broadcast license held by each station. Class A WGN and WBBM were charged \$7,500 for 1937, Class B WJJD and WCFL \$4,000, and Class C WIND and WAAF \$3,000.⁷⁰ The Cubs announced that the money paid them by the stations would be paid back to the stations in the form of commercials promoting the games.⁷¹

The Cubs were not directly affected by the American League regulation requiring American League clubs to grant exclusive broadcast rights to a single station, but the fact that they were operating in the same radio market as the White Sox, who were, placed the team in a delicate situation vis-a-vis the White Sox, with whom they had enjoyed an amicable *modus operandi* for a number of years. Unhappy with the new American League regulations, the Cubs' management insisted after the 1937 season that the radio lines should be

unrestricted and threatened to broadcast their road games in competition with the White Sox home broadcasts if they were forced to grant exclusive rights. In a compromise settlement, the Chicago clubs were allowed to broadcast on any stations they wished, but under different sponsors.⁷² The rights fees for 1938 increased to a total of \$90,000 for the two clubs. The White Sox broadcast on two stations, with Kellogg's as the exclusive sponsor, while the Cubs broadcast on five stations, with a different principal sponsor for each station's broadcasts. The agreement stipulated that the names of the sponsors could not be interwoven into the accounts of the games.⁷³

In the end, two court cases in the mid-1930s defined the terms upon which the property rights of baseball broadcasts would be based. In February 1936, the trial division of the New York Supreme Court ruled in the case of a complaint against Teleflash, Inc. by the New York Giants. Teleflash, a wired-radio sports service, had stationed an observer outside the Polo Grounds and relayed a running account of Giants' games by telegraph to a subscribing station or stations. The court dismissed the complaint, ruling that Teleflash's actions did not invade any legal rights held by the Giants and that no property rights or unfair competition was involved. According to *The Sporting News*,

The opinion does not cover unauthorized coverage within the park, nor re-broadcasts, but the latter question was partially settled by an ex cathedra decision of the Federal Communications Commission which in granting a license to a station charged with indulging in the practice, held that such action in the future would be seriously considered as abridging the right of a station to apply for a license renewal.⁷⁴

The ruling of the court in the *Teleflash vs. New York Giants* case was that there was no property right inherent in news taken from its source, but if the plaintiff wanted to make the broadcast a "thing of value," he could do so by making it more exclusive. The judgment confined itself to the case in question and specifically noted that it did not apply to the question of the re-broadcasting of games by pirating the description from a competitor.⁷⁵ The court did not specify what a ball club would have to do to make its property more "exclusive," but presumably the decision by the American League in 1936 to oblige clubs to grant exclusive broadcasting privileges was part of an attempt to do just that. In its editorial comment on the ruling in the *Teleflash* case, *The Sporting News* noted that the clubs were "more than ever in the middle" of these disputes among radio stations, telephone and telegraph companies, sponsors, and ball clubs because of the Federal Communications Commission ruling that designated the club, and not the communication companies, as the source of baseball information.⁷⁶

In response to the New York situation, the National League owners took up the question of what to do about the bootlegging of broadcasts at the league meetings in 1936. The owners thought that they could stop the practice in court but were not sure of their legal ground in the matter.⁷⁷ The question of the property rights inherent in the putting on of a baseball game was not definitively resolved until judgment was rendered in a Pittsburgh court in 1938. The Pittsburgh Pirates took an independent broadcaster, KQV Broadcasting Company, to court for not having paid rights fees for broadcasts of Pirate

games. KQV argued that a baseball game was a public event that was visible from posts outside the stadium occupied by their announcers. The sponsor, General Mills, argued that if KQV were allowed to continue its broadcasts, then General Mills would have to cancel over \$1 million in contracts with the NBC.⁷⁸ The court accepted the Pirates' argument that the games were in fact private events, put on by the ball club, open only to those spectators who had paid for tickets and those broadcasters who had permission of the club in the form of an exclusive contract, in this case, with General Mills and the Socony-Vacuum Oil Company. It was ruled that the Pirates owned the news, reports, descriptions, and accounts of the games, and, in association with the advertisers, were using the news for profit. The attempt by KQV to broadcast play-by-play descriptions of the game by means of an observer stationed outside the park, who could not otherwise obtain the information, was thus judged to be unfair competition and a violation of the property rights of the plaintiffs. The judgment also found the defendant in violation of the Federal Communications Act of 1934, 47 U.S.C.A. sec 151 et seq. The judgment went contrary to the one in the case of the New York Giants vs. Teleflash, on the grounds that the District Judge in the New York case had incorrectly interpreted the law as to unfair competition in cases of that kind.⁷⁹

In the same year, in another case, this time involving a broadcaster and a professional football team (Radio Corp vs Chicago Bears), the rights holder was declared to have "right of publicity" for an event. The court decided that the news media had the constitutional right to report on the newsworthy aspects of

an event, but only after the event was over. There was judged to be no unlimited right to provide a running account of a live sporting event.⁸⁰ Since those decisions, reporters and broadcasters have had to get permission from the owners of the sporting event to broadcast or report from the site of the match. This permission comes in the form of a press pass or of broadcast rights.

1939: The New York Broadcasting Ban is Broken

In most accounts of the history of radio baseball, Larry MacPhail's efforts in breaking the New York broadcasting ban are given a prominent place. MacPhail was the first major league executive to hold a night game, to fly his team to games, and to institute a season ticket plan, all of which he did as general manager of the Cincinnati Reds between 1934 and 1936. Although MacPhail has been hailed as a visionary for bringing radio baseball to the New York City area, a closer look at his involvement with radio baseball reveals a certain caution in his initial approach to the medium. It is certain that radio baseball would have come to New York City eventually. If MacPhail had not broken the ban, someone else would have, given the interest of advertisers in the New York City broadcasts. Nevertheless, MacPhail was an aggressive promoter who recognized the possibilities of radio for baseball soon after getting involved with it, and the story of the New York City ban cannot be told without reference to MacPhail's contribution.

Early in 1934, baseball promoter Larry MacPhail was hired by National League officials to take over the bankrupt Cincinnati franchise. MacPhail arranged the sale of the Reds to Powel Crosley, who owned radio stations WLW

and WSAI in Cincinnati. MacPhail had carte blanche to run the Reds but started slowly with radio. MacPhail, not completely convinced that broadcasts would not hurt the live gate, permitted only fifteen or sixteen home broadcasts in 1934, although telegraph re-creations of as many away games as possible were broadcast. In 1934, the Reds broadcast on three local stations, Crosley's WSAI, WFBO, which had been doing game since 1929, and for that year only, on WKRC. The deal with the three stations required each to pay the Reds \$2,000 for the privilege of broadcasting the games. The club also demanded five free announcements between 10 am and 2 pm each day, interviews with members of the Reds and visiting teams, and it reserved the right to say how many commercial accounts could be linked with the broadcasts.⁶¹ MacPhail also hired a 26-year-old sportscaster from Mississippi named Red Barber, who would become the first broadcaster inducted in the Baseball Hall of Fame. MacPhail soon came to see that radio helped both to advertise baseball and to bring in revenue for the club. In subsequent years, more and more home games were broadcast.

Because of MacPhail's success in reviving the Cincinnati franchise, in 1937 National League officials asked MacPhail, who was unemployed after a falling out with Reds' owner Powel Crosley, to step into the situation in Brooklyn, where the Dodgers were facing bankruptcy. It was most likely Ford Frick, the National League president and a supporter of radio baseball, who played the largest part in bringing MacPhail to Brooklyn.⁶² The Dodgers' directors reluctantly agreed to MacPhail's conditions: MacPhail was given "full and

complete authority" over the team, with a salary that was tied to the Dodgers' attendance. Besides cleaning up and installing lights at Brooklyn's Ebbets Field and making some player moves, MacPhail announced in late 1938 that he would not renew the radio ban in Brooklyn imposed by the owners of the Yankees, Giants, and Dodgers in the agreement that had lasted the five seasons from 1934 to 1938 inclusive. There were other reasons for not broadcasting games in New York City, as Barber recalled.

...a lot of smart fellows in radio and in agencies believed that radio play-by-play could not succeed in a city as large and complex as New York. They said that radio reports of ball games--while popular in small towns would not be accepted in the metropolis of New York. Further, they said that the afternoon soap operas had such a hold on the listeners, nobody would tune in to a ball game.⁸³

This recollection of Barber's, 30 years after the fact, does not appear to be wholly accurate, for when MacPhail came to Brooklyn, General Mills, who had worked successfully with MacPhail in Cincinnati, was ready with sponsorship. Of course, he may have been describing the attitude before General Mills and Atlantic Refining became so interested in sponsoring baseball broadcasts in 1936 and 1937. The Giants and Yankees were not short of offers to sponsor broadcasts themselves.⁸⁴ In 1937, Giants' president Horace Stoneham had turned down an offer of \$1,000 a game from General Mills to sponsor the team's broadcasts. Apparently, Stoneham, impressed by the success of the Jersey Giants' broadcasts in the New York City area on WHN, was quite tempted to accept the offer, but the Yankees and the Dodgers prevailed upon him to uphold the broadcasting ban.⁸⁵ The sponsors' attitudes towards competing with soap operas had changed by the late 1930s, when it was already accepted that

radio baseball could attract large audiences, based on the experiences in other major league cities.

MacPhail's announcement in December 1938 that he would broadcast all of the Dodgers' games in 1939 came as no great surprise to the Yankees and Giants. MacPhail had taken over the Dodgers before the 1938 season. At one point, MacPhail decided that he would broadcast Dodger games in 1938, but under protest from the Yankees and Giants, MacPhail reconsidered his plan. While withdrawing his plan to broadcast in 1938, MacPhail nonetheless indicated that he considered the agreement to ban broadcasts in New York as no longer operative.⁸⁶

When MacPhail announced early in December, 1938, that the Dodgers had contracted with General Mills and the Socony-Vacuum Oil Company to broadcast the Dodgers home and away games, there was speculation that the Yankees and Giants might defer instituting broadcasting for the first year of the Brooklyn experiment, to see how it would go. Any loss of radio revenue relative to the Dodgers would be made up by the fact that both the Yankees and Giants could command higher rights fees than the less-popular Dodgers. It was widely believed that Giants' president Stoneham had received an offer of around \$250,000 to permit broadcasts of Giants' games and that the Yankees had received an offer in the neighborhood of \$200,000.⁸⁷ Considering the amounts of money reportedly offered for broadcasting rights, the Yankees and Giants had no choice but to allow their games to be broadcast. When final arrangements by the Giants and Yankees were made, they shared one radio

station, WABC, and they broadcast only home games.⁸⁸ 50,000-watt New York station WOR would pay \$77,000 for exclusive rights to broadcast all Dodgers' home and away games. The sponsors were Mobil Oil, Procter and Gamble's Ivory Soap, and General Mills' Wheaties. The Dodger announcer would be MacPhail's Cincinnati announcer, Red Barber.

The Brooklyn broadcasts proved to be quite popular. A survey taken during the 1939 season for WOR, Brooklyn showed that 41.1% of portable radios at New York area beaches were tuned to ball games, making baseball the most popular program among portable radio listeners. Dance music was next at 32.8%.⁸⁹ *The Sporting News* reported midway through the 1939 season that, according to a telephone survey of home radio use, baseball broadcasts in the New York area were attracting an increasingly large audience, drawing 60 per cent or more of the afternoon audience for day games and 40 to 50 per cent of the evening radio audience when night games were aired.⁹⁰ As for attendance, the Dodgers increased their total from 1938 by almost 300,000 fans.⁹¹ By any measure, the Brooklyn broadcasts were a success. From 1939 on, all clubs would broadcast their games over the radio.

CONCLUSION

Popular histories of radio baseball tend to focus on the contribution made by Larry MacPhail in breaking the New York City broadcasting ban⁹² and ignore the part played by sponsors such as General Mills, Atlantic Refining, Kentucky Winner Cigarettes, and Socony-Vacuum Oil. Most historians (Voigt, Lever and Wheeler, Benjamin Rader) who cite the interest of advertisers ignore the legal

and regulatory environment that defined the property status of baseball broadcasts. Only Klatell and Marcus acknowledge the importance of the latter in defining the conditions under which the sport/media relationship would proceed after the late 1930s and into the television age. In fact, it was the combination of the interest of the sponsors and the regulatory and legal environment with regard to property rights for baseball broadcasts that played the largest part in determining that radio baseball could be made a lucrative endeavor for major league club owners. Larry MacPhail, contrary to popular belief, was not altogether instrumental in cementing the position of radio baseball by breaking the New York City broadcasting ban. While he was the person who believed that radio baseball could work in the nation's largest media market over and above the apprehension of the doubters, he was certainly no further ahead of his time in the belief that radio was good for baseball than were William Wrigley, Bill Veeck, Sr., or Emil Fuchs. It was these men who first believed in the benefits of broadcasting games and fought to maintain the right to broadcast their teams' games when many others believed that broadcasting should be banned. Of course, their case was aided by the support of advertisers for baseball broadcasts, and it was they who would come to define many of the terms upon which radio baseball was to evolve.

NOTES

¹Ira Horowitz, "Sports Broadcasting," in *Government and the Sports Business: Studies in the Regulation of Economic Activity*, ed. Roger Noll (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1974), p. 287.

²This attitude was felt in New York City as late as 1939, the first year that regular broadcasting was heard in New York City. *The Sporting News*, June 1, 1939. In all other citations, *The Sporting News* will be referred to as *TSN*.

³David Quentin Voigt, *American Baseball: Vol. II*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), p. 231.

⁴*TSN*, December 17, 1931, p. 4.

⁵*TSN*, December 17, 1931, p. 4; *New York Times*, December 9, 1931, p. 36.

⁶*New York Times*, December 16, 1932, p. 26.

⁷Bill James, *The Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract* (New York: Villard Books, 1988), p. 129.

⁸Harold Seymour, *Baseball Volume II: The Golden Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 343.

⁹John Thorn and Robert Tiemann, "Major League Attendance," in *Total Baseball*, 3rd ed. eds. John Thorn and Peter Palmer, (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 145. In all other citations, *Total Baseball* 3rd ed. will be referred to as *TBill*.

¹⁰Charles Alexander, *Our Game: An American Baseball History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991), pp. 158-9.

¹¹Horowitz, p. 287.

¹²*New York Times*, October 20, 1932, p. 29.

¹³*TBill*, p. 370.

¹⁴*TSN*, January 19, 1933, p. 2.

¹⁵*TSN*, January 19, 1933, p. 3.

¹⁶*TSN*, January 12, 1933, p. 4.

¹⁷*TSN*, October 25, 1934, p. 8.

¹⁸*TSN*, December 14, 1933, p. 6, letter to editor.

¹⁹*TSN*, August 25, 1935, p. 5; *TSN*, October 25, 1934, p. 8.

²⁰*TSN*, July 16, 1925, p. 4.

²¹*TSN*, December 7, 1933, p. 4.

²²*TSN*, December 21, 1933, p. 5.

²³In 1930, the Browns' attendance dropped below 200,000 for the first time since the shortened war year of 1918. After drawing between 399,887 and 761,574 from 1926 to 1931, the Cardinals dropped from 608,535 to 279,219 from 1931 to 1932. The situation worsened in 1933. The Cardinals went down only 20,000, but the Browns drew a miniscule 88,113 for 77 home games in 1933, less than 1,500 per game. *TBIII*, p. 145.

²⁴*TSN*, February 8, 1934, p. 1.

²⁵*New York Times*, February 4, 1934, III 3:6.

²⁶*TSN*, February 8, 1934, p. 1.

²⁷*TSN*, July 11, 1935, p. 7. The ban was challenged successfully by station WWSW, Pittsburgh, in July 1935.

²⁸*TBIII*, p. 145.

²⁹WEAF broadcast the first game of the 1924 season between the Dodgers and the Giants. Graham McNamee, *You're on the Air* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1926), p. 184. In the foreword to Red Barber and Robert Creamer, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat*, Robert Creamer recalls that the only baseball broadcasts in New York City were the All-Star Game and the World Series. Red Barber and Robert Creamer, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat*, p. 11.

³⁰*TSN*, February 15, 1934, p. 3.

³¹*TSN*, February 22, 1934, p. 5.

³²*TSN*, April 12, 1934, p. 6; *TSN*, May 10, 1934, p. 5.

³³*TSN*, April 19, 1934, p. 3.

³⁴*TSN*, March 15, 1934, p. 3.

³⁵*New York Times*, December 14, 1934, p. 32.

³⁶*TSN*, February 28, 1935, p. 4. *The Sporting News* was (and is) based in St. Louis, so this observation may have been warranted.

³⁷*TSN*, March 28, 1935, p. 6.

³⁸January 31, 1935, p. 5.

³⁹*TSN*, February 28, 1935, p. 8.

⁴⁰*TSN*, April 11, 1935, p. 2.

⁴¹*TSN*, November 21, 1935, p. 2.

⁴²*TSN*, August 8, 1935, p. 2.

⁴³David Q. Voigt, *American Baseball: Volume II* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), p. 233.

⁴⁴Newspaper advertising, which was dominated by local retailers, dropped 22 per cent in the early years of the Depression, while radio advertising rose slightly. In 1933, food, drug, tobacco, and soap advertising, represented by national brands, accounted for approximately 2/3 of radio advertising. Leiss, Klein, and Jhally, p. 79.

⁴⁵*TSN*, September 20, 1934, p. 2.

⁴⁶*TSN*, October 18, 1934, p. 5.

⁴⁷*TSN*, April 18, 1935, p. 2.

⁴⁸*TSN*, June 20, 1935, p. 2.

⁴⁹*TSN*, January 9, 1936, p. 8.

⁵⁰*TSN*, various issues, 1936.

⁵¹*TSN*, December 24, 1936, p. 5.

⁵²*TSN*, various issues, 1937.

⁵³*TSN*, September 30, 1937, p. 5.

⁵⁴Curtis Smith, *Voices of the Game* (South Bend, IN: Diamond Communications, Inc., 1987), p. 25.

⁵⁵TSN, September 26, 1935, p. 7.

⁵⁶TSN, October 24, 1935, p. 2.

⁵⁷TSN, May 2, 1935, p. 5.

⁵⁸TSN, April 23, 1936, p. 2.

⁵⁹TSN, May 5, 1938, p. 7.

⁶⁰TSN, April 28, 1938, p. 4.

⁶¹TSN, May 2, 1935, p. 5.

⁶²TSN, May 7, 1936, p. 4.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴TSN, May 7, 1936, p. 2.

⁶⁵TSN, June 4, 1936, p. 6.

⁶⁶Benjamin Rader, *In Its Own Image: How Television Has Transformed Sports* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), p. 58.

⁶⁷Ibid; Neil J. Sullivan, *The Minors* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), pp. 237-241.

⁶⁸TSN, December 21, 1933, p. 5.

⁶⁹TSN, December 17, 1936, p. 8.

⁷⁰TSN, December 24, 1936, p. 5.

⁷¹TSN, January 14, 1937, p. 8.

⁷²TSN, December 30, 1937, p. 2.

⁷³TSN, January 6, 1938, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Editorial, TSN, March 12, 1936, p. 4.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷TSN, December 17, 1936, p. 8.

⁷⁸TSN, August 4, 1938, p. 14.

⁷⁹"Pittsburgh Athletic Co., et al v. KQV Broadcasting Co.," No. 3415, District Court, W.D. Pennsylvania, August 8, 1936.

⁸⁰David A. Klatell and Norman Marcus, *Sports for Sale: Television, Money, and the Fans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 73-74.

⁸¹TSN, March 8, 1934, p. 3.

⁸²Red Barber and Robert Creamer, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968), p. 23.

⁸³Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 128.

⁸⁴*New York Times*, December 7, 1938, p. 29.

⁸⁵TSN, May 20, 1937, p. 2.

⁸⁶*New York Times*, December 7, 1938, p. 29.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Smith, p. 40.

⁸⁹TSN, September 28, 1939, p. 4.

⁹⁰TSN, July 27, 1939, p. 14.

⁹¹TBIII, p. 145.

⁹²See Smith, Barber, *The Broadcasters*, and Adomites, "Baseball on the Air," in TBIII.

CHAPTER IV: THE EVOLUTION OF BASEBALL ANNOUNCING

In the 1930s, radio baseball became a permanent part of the major league scene when advertisers found that baseball broadcasts attracted a large enough audience to make them attractive advertising vehicles. Sponsors began paying radio stations more and more money for the right to sponsor their products on baseball broadcasts. Eventually, club owners began charging stations for the broadcast rights, a practice that was made mandatory in the major leagues in 1936. Even those club officials most opposed to baseball broadcasts found it within their economic interests to allow them. It was during this time, within the development of the commercial broadcasting model, that baseball announcing practices evolved to the point where there can be said to have existed an ethic of professionalism among baseball announcers. This ethic was first articulated by baseball announcers in interviews in *The Sporting News* in the 1930s. The development of a professional ethic was part of the process of elevating the baseball announcer to the status of a baseball insider, a status from which he could establish his authority as a knowledgeable and reliable "reporter" of the events of a baseball game.

The announcer's authority is derived from his ability not only to offer a dramatic description of a baseball game but also from his ability to engage the competence of the listener by presenting the play-by-play in a manner that demonstrates his knowledge of the game. But "inside" baseball knowledge alone is not enough to make a man an effective baseball announcer; there have been a number of former players who have not been successful as play-

by-play men. While in the early days of radio baseball announcers thought of their task in terms perhaps more appropriate to newspaper reporting, they also clearly emerged as entertainers in their own right. This was done through the inclusion of detail that would help paint a word picture of the game. It was also done by applying the logic of narrative to the description of a game. Voice effects added to the dramatic tension. Trademark home run calls could serve to distinguish the announcer and provide a sense of familiarity with the listener. It could also serve to advertise a product ("There goes another box of Wheaties!").

In writings about baseball announcing, the announcer's role has usually been conceived as a combination of reporter, entertainer, teacher, and salesman for the game of baseball. In *The Broadcasters* and his other writing about baseball announcing, Red Barber conceives the main function of the announcer to be that of the reporter.¹ On the other hand, Leonard Koppett contests the notion that the play-by-play announcer is a journalist, as he does not have the ability to comment on the essential elements of an event after it happens. In addition, because the radio station pays for the exclusive rights to broadcast the games, the station is a co-promoter of the baseball game. In Koppett's view, the nature of co-promotion means that baseball announcing (or sports announcing in general) cannot be called journalism.² It is this role of the announcer as advertiser or pitchman or promoter (for the sponsor's product, for the home team, for the game of baseball) that has been ignored in most of the writing about baseball announcing. Yet it should be extremely important to

examine this function because of the overtly commercial nature of the baseball broadcast.

This chapter examines the evolution of baseball announcing practices and considers the following questions: Who was deemed to be a qualified announcer? What institutional pressures are placed upon baseball announcers? How has the role of the baseball announcer been defined by sportswriters and announcers themselves? What are the professional practices of the announcer? Under what kind of conditions have announcers operated over the years? How have changes in technology affected the practices of baseball play-by-play? This chapter focuses on the discourses concerning the institutional responsibilities of the baseball announcer and the form of the typical baseball broadcast. The audience experience of radio baseball and the social function of the announcer as a storyteller will be considered in the following chapter.

The Man Behind the Mike

To call sportscasting in the 1920s a profession as it is conceived of today would not be at all accurate. The early sportscasters were general announcers who invented the genre on the fly, often under very trying conditions, with poor facilities in most stadiums, arenas, and ballparks, often with uncertain technical support.³ Writing in 1926, Graham McNamee did not even think it necessary to have an enclosed broadcast booth at sporting events.⁴ In fact, until games were broadcast regularly on a daily basis, a stadium would typically not have a

broadcast booth. For example, because there were only occasional broadcasts of regular season games in New York City until 1939, the broadcasters had to set up in the crowd, with the microphone on a plank set up in front of a box seat behind home plate in Yankee Stadium and the Polo Grounds (the New York Giants home park) even in the late 1930s.⁵ At Wrigley Field in Chicago, as many as five announcers were set up side by side and listeners on one station could hear bits of what was being broadcast on the other stations.⁶ Innovations in broadcasting practices preceded such supportive institutional arrangements for announcers. For example, at least as early as 1926, broadcasters were using crowd mikes to pick up crowd noises and make the broadcast sound more realistic.⁷ But there were no schools to train announcers. Because many radio stations were owned by newspapers and because sportswriters were considered to be the leading baseball experts, a number of sportscasters were drawn from the ranks of sportswriters. The announcers may have been enthusiastic, but not all of them had thought of ways to describe sporting events. There were no representatives of the sponsor or the league to oversee the work of the announcers.

Graham McNamee was the first famous baseball broadcaster. He may be remembered today largely for his work as a sportscaster, but he started his career and did most of his work as a general announcer. What made McNamee so popular with listeners was his ability to convey the drama and excitement of a sporting event. Some sportswriters may have criticized McNamee for not being expert in his knowledge of baseball, but McNamee was most concerned

with trying to make the spirit of the game come alive. One technique that McNamee and his engineer used was to manipulate the sound levels of microphones placed in (or, to be more accurate, above) the crowd to heighten the excitement for the listener by creating the illusion that he or she was part of the live audience. Besides the announcer's microphone and a backup announcer's mike, there were two microphones placed in the crowd to catch applause and other crowd noise.⁸ The engineer would open up the crowd mikes at a signal from McNamee.

And often we would leave them wide open, sending out full throated the shrieks and roars from the stands and bleachers. Again it seemed wise to let just a trickle applause through my own "mike," sometimes even while talking, yet not enough to drown out or blur the voice. Here the listener got the effect of melody and a great accompaniment--the broadcaster explaining that "Pipp singles and Ward starts for home," and the very convincing accompaniment in the roar of the crowd as Ward did run home. It is hard for a man at a distance to feel that he is at a ball game if he hears just a voice talking and talking; but that roar makes him believe it--he can see the figure sliding in under the catcher's outstretched hand--even the cloud of dust as the runner reaches his goal.⁹

McNamee's first baseball broadcast was the 1923 World Series, when he took over from sportswriter William McGeehan, who had been assigned by WEAf to do the broadcasts. McGeehan soon tired of the task, and McNamee, who had been assigned to provide "color," took over the announcing duties. As the 1923 World Series went on, McNamee felt that he was getting more and more into the reporter's field. As he described it:

To the voice qualifications, a sense of order, the ability to harmonize, synchronize, and be on time, the reportorial instinct had to be added. And this means, as I understand it, a quick eye, the instinctive ability to pick out the high lights, the significant thing, and a fertile descriptive power--together, it should be said, with an interest in everyday, common

things, the sports and recreation and work followed by the average man.¹⁰

There are no recordings of McNamee's baseball announcing extant, but according to people who heard him, the most noteworthy aspects of McNamee's announcing style were the way in which he pitched his voice to the level of excitement in the game and the manner in which he filled in the breaks in the action with the description of details like the pitcher wiping his brow or the batter knocking the mud off of his shoes. "He attempted to create an atmosphere of drama, an atmosphere that would make fans feel they, too, were at the ballpark. In essence, McNamee began using the literary devices of rhythm and detail to turn the baseball game into high drama."¹¹ McNamee said that it was not a conscious decision to broadcast sporting events informally, but he felt that in the excitement of a sporting contest it was easy for the announcer to let himself go and get "more honest and down to the skin."¹²

The first wave of radio broadcasters of regular season major league games established conclusively that a broadcast of a baseball game could be a compelling listening experience. It should not have been surprising that many of the early broadcasters had backgrounds in sports, journalism, or both. In some cases, this was because the radio station was owned by a newspaper. Sportswriting was considered a good qualification for doing radio play-by-play in the early days of radio baseball. Of course, a facility with language was a must for a successful radio announcer. The first station to do daily broadcasts of regular season games, beginning in April 1924, was WMAQ, which was owned at that time by the *Chicago Daily News*. WMAQ hired Hal Totten as its first

sportscaster. Totten had played baseball at Northwestern University and had been sports editor of the *Daily Northwestern*. He later joined the *Chicago Daily News*, and they eventually appointed him to do the play-by-play of Cub games for WMAQ. Another sportswriter who became an early baseball broadcaster was Quin Ryan, a sportswriter for the *Chicago Tribune* who did broadcasts in the 1920s for WGN, which was owned by the *Tribune*. Ryan did general announcing as well and came to specialize in sportscasting later on.

In a 1932 profile of Boston baseball broadcaster Fred Hoey, who broadcast ball games on the Yankee Network from 1927 to 1939, *The Sporting News* noted the following:

When John Shepard, III, president of the Yankee network, issued the ultimatum that no major sporting event in New England should be neglected in the broadcasting schedule of that network, he also decreed that each event must be broadcast by a recognized authority in those sports. The latter order established a precedent in radio broadcasting that even the national chains have overlooked, or failed to appreciate as an important factor in presenting word pictures of the major athletic events to a critical audience of fans.¹³

According to the article, Hoey had impeccable credentials, first as a semipro baseball player, then as a Boston sportswriter, a member of the Baseball Writers' Association of America for ten years, and later as an official scorer for the Boston Braves. Given the background in sportswriting of many early baseball announcers, it would appear that criticism of their work by sportswriters was due as much or more to professional jealousy than to legitimate concerns about the baseball knowledge of the announcers.

In the mid-1930s, as more and more teams began permitting broadcasts of games, a second wave of broadcasters began to enter the baseball

broadcasting field. Unlike the first wave, most of whom had a background in sports journalism, the second group came with radio backgrounds. Foremost among this second wave was Walter "Red" Barber. Barber had no experience as a sportswriter and he had not been an athlete before his announcing days, which began at the University of Florida in 1929. When baseball executive Larry MacPhail took over the Cincinnati Reds in 1934, Barber, who was by that time working for 500,000 watt WLW in Cincinnati, was assigned to do play-by-play on broadcasts of the Reds' games. At the time, Barber was not under contract to the ball club or an ad agency. He was a staff announcer for WLW and its sister station WSAI and had many other assignments besides broadcasting baseball games.¹⁴

Other announcers with radio backgrounds came onto the scene during the late 1930s. Albert "Rosey" Rowswell, who became the Pittsburgh Pirates' first regular broadcaster in 1938, had worked in radio since 1921. He had impeccable credentials as a baseball fan, claiming to have missed fewer than six Pirates' home games between 1909 and 1938. Rowswell also claimed to have done the first radio interview of a baseball player, over KDKA in 1921.¹⁵ Mel Allen, who started broadcasting Yankee games as principal announcer Arch McDonald's assistant in 1939 and took over the principal duties himself in 1940, came, like Barber, from a college background, at the University of Alabama.¹⁶ Since that time, most announcers who were not former ball players have had college educations. Many got their starts in college radio. A number of them, including Ernie Harwell and Expos' broadcaster Dave Van Horne,

broadcast for a number of years in the minor leagues before being offered jobs with major league clubs.

Many retired major league players have gone on to careers in broadcasting. The first of these was Jack Graney, a former outfielder with the Cleveland Indians, who started broadcasting games on WHK in Cleveland in 1932.¹⁷ Graney's radio career lasted until the 1950s, and he was well-regarded not only for his dramatic descriptions of games but also for his ability to re-create a game from a telegraphic report.¹⁸ Other former players who successfully made the transition from playing to broadcasting were Harry Heilmann (Detroit), Waite Hoyt (Cincinnati), and Gabby Street (St. Louis). Some former players who were not successful in becoming radio announcers were George Sisler, Walter Johnson, Tris Speaker, Charlie Grimm, and Zeke Bonura. "They didn't have the linguistic gifts but their failures were because of drab on-air personalities. The rule was that if an ex-player understood the game and could come across as colorful or interesting or provocative or funny or likable, it didn't matter what he sounded like. Radio would take him."¹⁹ The most famous (and notorious) of the former players who became announcers was Dizzy Dean, the former pitcher with the St. Louis Cardinals, who started doing broadcasts of Cardinal and Brown games in 1941. Dean achieved notoriety for his fractured syntax, even to the point where schoolteachers protested his presence on the air to the Federal Communications Commission and Baseball Commissioner Landis forbade him to broadcast the World Series.²⁰ In many cases, the player-announcer worked as the number two man

on broadcasts, along with the principal announcer, who was a professional broadcaster.

Red Barber can be considered a pivotal figure in the evolution of baseball broadcasting. He began in the days when sportscasters were general announcers employed by radio stations. When he went to Brooklyn in 1939, he was hired under a new arrangement whereby he was under contract to the ad agency for the principal sponsor of the broadcasts.²¹ For the 1946 season, he negotiated a contract directly with the Brooklyn club, the first time that a club and an announcer had such an agreement.²² Since that time, most announcers have been employees either of the ball club or the ad agency for the principal sponsor rather than employees of the flagship station. Just as important as the manner in which Barber broke ground regarding his contractual relationships was his insistence on the notion that the announcer's first responsibility was to provide an "objective" report of the game for the audience which would be as free from bias and inaccuracies as possible.

Barber admired Graham McNamee for his ability to excite the audience. He respected McNamee for his honesty in dealing with on-air mistakes. But Barber also noted that McNamee's lack of specialized training as a sportscaster made him vulnerable to criticism. Some of the criticism came, Barber felt, from newspapermen jealous of McNamee's popularity, but he also felt that some of it was justified. Barber toned down on McNamee's excesses and strived for accuracy.²³ In his quest for objectivity, Barber was responding to the criticism of announcers such as McNamee, who was said to have sacrificed his role as an

"objective" reporter in favor of creating excitement. The notion that the announcer had to choose between reporting a ball game and building up excitement with histrionics dominated the discourse around the question of what an announcer's role was and who his responsibility should be directed toward: the club, the sponsor, or the fans.

Criticism of Early Baseball Announcers

The approaches taken by McNamee and Ted Husing, who did World Series broadcasts for CBS from 1928 to 1934, won listeners over in the days when broadcasts were a novelty and just being able to hear a game broadcast from many hundreds of miles away was marvel enough for most listeners. However, as regular broadcasting was implemented in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and St. Louis in the late 1920s and as the novelty wore off, listeners began to demand more expert knowledge of baseball from announcers. This demand was played up in newspapers. Many newspapermen felt threatened by radio, and others simply disdained the new medium as inappropriate for reporting baseball.

As the newspaper was the pre-eminent medium for the dissemination of baseball information before radio, sportswriters enjoyed a privileged status as baseball "insiders" or "experts." A number of sportswriters, men like Grantland Rice, Damon Runyon, Paul Gallico, Fred Lieb, John Kiernan, and Shirley Povich, enjoyed national reputations, and these sportswriters went to great efforts to chronicle the history of the game and to place it in the context of the

evolution of American history. However, lesser men among them were reluctant to share their status with radio play-by-play men. Dan Daniel, veteran New York sportswriter and contributor to *The Sporting News*, one of the most vocal anti-radio scribes, expressed this resentment clearly in 1939:

It is strange that a baseball writer may work for a paper for ten years, doing fine work, day in and day out, and yet get only an occasional pat on the back. But a radio announcer, without one-tenth of the writer's grasp of the game, walks into town and is smothered with adulation and fan mail.

This piques the writers. They don't know how to account for this psychology. With pardonable pride, they figure that the reader accepts fine work as something to be taken for granted, but receives a good job on the air with surprise. Some writers also feel that there are two distinct publics. In any event, the writer is human and he likes appreciative readers....²⁴

The editorial stance of *The Sporting News* was to distance itself from the sniping between newspaper reporters and radio announcers, which appeared to flow in one direction, with criticism directed at the radio men. After a spate of badmouthing of baseball announcers by New York based sportswriters Stanley Woodward and Dan Daniel in early 1939, *The Sporting News* came to the defence of the broadcasters. *The Sporting News* regarded the "must" and "must not" rules of radio broadcasting as a "natural" result of the situation wherein a sponsor pays the club for the "privilege" of broadcasting the games. *The Sporting News* did acknowledge the necessity of certain restrictions on play-by-play reports, but did not elaborate on what these restrictions should be apart from upholding Commissioner Landis's view that second-guessing of umpires and managers did not constitute good reporting. The editorial invoked the right of the listening public to "authentic" and "impartial" reports of ball games, but

stressed that they must not be unduly restricted, for this would render them unentertaining.²⁵

While Graham McNamee's excesses and lack of "expert" knowledge of the game disgusted some sportswriters and fans, there was a clear recognition that the distinction between radio announcing and newspaper reporting was recognized even as it developed.²⁶ Graham McNamee himself recognized early on that there were things that worked in print that did not work on the air, and even a good newspaper reporter would not necessarily be able to focus on the details that would come across best on the air.²⁷ Still, sportswriters occasionally mocked the baseball announcers, ridiculing their lack of knowledge, their mistakes, and their commercial announcements within the play-by-play.

According to George Douglas, the radio audience appreciated Graham McNamee's work. McNamee received many letters in praise of his sportscasting, and few of the letters criticized him for inaccuracies.²⁸ However, this view must be weighed against the observation in *The Sporting News* that criticism of baseball announcers peaked at World Series time, when network announcers like Husing and McNamee, who did not do baseball on a regular basis, did the national broadcasts. Letters to the editor reflected the dissatisfaction felt by many fans such as this one, who wrote complaining about "know-nothing" sports announcers following the 1931 World Series:

Pity the poor unfortunate fan far from the scene of battle, who must through necessity receive his ball game via remote control as it was digested for him. With the series as closely drawn and tense, as that just finished, between the nerve-wracking closeness and the pitter-patter of a

peewee golf shooter, the fan at the close finds himself wholly exhausted and ready for the bughouse."

The letter writer complained that the game was "massacred" by someone "who probably only sees games at World's Series time," and wondered why, when a former player like Tris Speaker, "versed in the fine points of the game, is available, why turn it over to rah-rah, gallery-playing posers."²⁹

In response to such criticism, Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis was considering exercising jurisdiction over the choice of network broadcasters for the World Series by 1931. This idea was supported editorially by *The Sporting News*, which cited a "deluge" of complaints about World Series announcers from fans, some libelous in their condemnation. *TSN* acknowledged publishing one letter, but said that no more would be because of "space restrictions." *TSN* echoed the complaints expressed in the letter:

Baseball cannot afford to have such haphazard broadcasts as have been furnished in World's Series games this past few years. All the real fans are experts--they cannot be fooled--and when they hear announcers talking about Texas Leaguers whistling through the pitcher's box, fouls landing between first and third base, fielders making diving catches at their shoe tops of pop flies, and similar absurd statements, they have every reason for doubting the accuracy of other details that go through the microphones.

If the chain organizations [radio networks] won't hire experts to report these games, the commissioner has it in his power to compel them to do so. The baseball public is fed up on word artists trying to cover up their ignorance with a lot of verbosity. The game's the thing, not the golden tongues that reproduce them."³⁰

The Sporting News appealed to the competence of the baseball fan who knew his baseball and would not accept second-rate accounts of games. The writer questioned the competence of the announcer for his ignorance of standard

baseball terminology. Such an announcer could never be considered a baseball insider. Sportswriters and fans alike demanded inside knowledge of the game from the announcers.

The Sporting News, as the so-called "Bible of baseball," played a critical role in the elevation of baseball announcers to the status of baseball insiders. That the announcers who did regular season broadcasts were becoming accepted as competent baseball reporters was signalled by *The Sporting News*' annual contest, beginning in 1932, to pick the "best" announcer in the major and minor leagues. Receiving an award from *The Sporting News* was like receiving the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval as a legitimate baseball insider. However, in its 1932 fan survey, *The Sporting News* asked fans whether they preferred "straight matter-of-fact" accounts of the games, "dramatic presentations," or accompanying facts and figures concerning the players.³¹ That an announcer might incorporate elements of all three approaches in his style was not apparent to the editors of *The Sporting News*. This view, it appears, was shaped in part by the attitudes of many sportswriters and "expert" baseball fans toward the work of Graham McNamee and Ted Husing, who, it was felt, had sacrificed "objectivity" for dramatics. It was also shaped in part by notions of what constituted objective reporting held among newspaper journalists of the time.

Objectivity and the Baseball Announcer

The issue of baseball announcers adding editorial comment to play-by-play descriptions was one that vexed sportswriters, many of whom aspired to

the ideal of objectivity in newspaper reporting. It was an ideal that most baseball announcers would come to aspire to in their approach to describing games. However, while objectivity as an ideal in journalism as articulated by Walter Lippmann and others was a reaction to the skepticism of the age,³² the objectivity aspired to by the announcers was a throwback to the naive realism of the 1890s and a concession to baseball promoters and program sponsors.

The mid-1930s was a pivotal period in the establishment of broadcasting standards for baseball. During the 1934 World Series between the Detroit Tigers and the St. Louis Cardinals, Ted Husing made some derogatory remarks about the quality of the umpiring. In 1935, Commissioner Landis barred Husing from the series broadcasts. Before the 1935 Series, Landis met with the announcers and laid down the ground rules for the broadcasts. Red Barber was doing his first World Series broadcasts. In his autobiographical writing, all of which occurred 30 to 40 years after the event, Barber accorded central importance to the meeting that Landis held with the announcers before the 1935 Series. In that meeting, Landis reminded the announcers that they were the best in the business at what they did. He also reminded them that the players, managers, and umpires in the World Series were the best in their business. Landis told the announcers that they would have the full support of the Commissioner of Baseball in carrying out their announcing duties; no one would be allowed to interfere with the broadcasts. No players, managers, or umpires would be allowed to tell the announcers how to do their jobs. Equally, however, the announcers were not to tell the players,

managers, or umpires how to do their jobs. They were to report on what they saw, without offering editorial comment. The announcers were not to second-guess players, managers, or umpires, not to say what they thought should have been done. They were to report.³³ Landis stated his view on the role of the announcer in an address to baseball announcers before the 1936 All-Star game:

If you see men putting up a gallows in center field and then see them lead me out to it and hang me on it, why, go on and describe it into the microphone. But don't you question the justice of the hanging. Understand?

When you broadcast baseball, let your hearers have it just as it is, but don't umpire the game! Don't decide controversies. It's different with the baseball writers. They're privileged to have their opinions. They can criticize an umpire. Don't give a reproachful name to an umpire over the air. And don't say anything that would indicate you favor either team. Your medium is different from the newspaper writers'. I'm not saying which is best, nor making any comparisons. It's just a different medium, that's all.³⁴

The objectivity that Landis wanted baseball announcers to aspire to was shaped first and foremost by the status of the broadcast as advertising for the game of baseball. One of the cardinal rules of baseball announcing is not to "knock" the product by drawing attention to poor playing, managing, or umpiring. Major league baseball's popularity is in part due to the fact that it is considered the best baseball in the world. When a fan buys a ticket to a baseball game, he or she is assured of seeing the best entertainment of its kind anywhere. Of course, this is an ideal situation, and it may not be the home team that is the best in the league. Every fan knows this, but it is still the job of the baseball announcer to sell the baseball game itself as an entertainment dollar

option. If he questions either the quality or integrity of the product, he is acting counter to the interests of the club owners.

Another way that objectivity has been defined by baseball announcers through the years is by reporting the events of the game without editorializing or second-guessing those who make decisions on the field. This practice is appreciated by baseball people.

Fred [Hoey] attributes his popularity with both the players and the umpires in both the American and National leagues, in part, to the fact that he has never criticized a player, or umpire, in his broadcasts--and his mail from fans keeps the postman loaded down.³⁵

The practice was appreciated so much by baseball people that, following the 1936 season, the American League took action to ensure that second-guessing of umpires, managers, and official scorers would not take place. This was done by drawing up a uniform radio contract for all clubs with a set of guidelines for announcers. The League appointed L.C. McEvoy of the St. Louis Browns to oversee the work of the announcers and ensure that they abided by the league guidelines.³⁶

“Objectivity” has also been taken to mean impartiality to one team or the other. After 1934, the Commissioner of Baseball was given the final say in who did each year's World Series broadcasts. Just before each year's World Series, network representatives would meet with the Commissioner. The networks submitted a list of announcers, but the Commissioner could disallow anyone he wanted.³⁷ Until 1944, the Commissioner of Baseball was Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, an imperious figure who was not afraid to exercise his power to permit or deny certain broadcasters from appearing on the national

broadcasts. For example, in 1934, when the Detroit Tigers met the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series, Commissioner Landis forbade Tiger announcer Ty Tyson from appearing on the national broadcast because he felt that Tyson would be partial to the Tigers and present a biased report. Many Detroit fans wrote letters of protest to the Commissioner's office. Landis compromised by allowing Tyson to announce the games on a special network that served the Detroit area and Michigan state. Another announcer who was not permitted on the national broadcasts was Cleveland announcer Jack Graney, a former player with Cleveland. Landis banned Graney on similar grounds as he did Tyson: he felt that because Graney had played in the American League that he would be too partial to the American League representative. Graney wrote Landis a letter to complain about this treatment. In the letter, he declared that his playing days were over and that he was now a sportscaster and should be regarded as such. When CBS asked Graney to appear on the 1935 Series broadcasts, Landis relented and allowed Graney to do so.³⁸

Apart from the examples cited above, there were other times when the principle of impartiality was seen to be valued. For example, while Barber was asked to broadcast a number of World Series games in which his home team was not involved, Harry Caray, an unabashed "homer," (one who openly roots for the home team) has only broadcast World Series games in 1964, 1967, and 1968, years when the St Louis Cardinals appeared.³⁹ (The White Sox and Cubs have not appeared in the years that Caray has broadcast for them.) While the Commissioner's Office might not have appreciated Caray's biased

approach, Caray won *The Sporting News*' announcer of the year award for the National League 7 times during the approximately 20-year period in which it was handed out.⁴⁰ Pittsburgh is another city where the earliest longtime radio announcer, Rosey Rowswell, was an unabashed homer. His approach was adopted by his successor, Bob Prince, who had been Rowswell's assistant before Rowswell's death. One possible reason why the more even-handed approach was favored in a place like New York was because of the number of people from other parts of the country who lived there and did not want to hear announcers who described a game as if the visiting team did not exist. Another reason may have been the fact that with each broadcast sponsored by a different brewery, the sponsors would not want to alienate potential customers because of bias on the part of the announcer.⁴¹

The actions taken by Landis in the 1930s to regulate the work of the baseball announcers won approval in the press and from fans. After the 1936 World Series, *The Sporting News* noted that "the majority of listeners" had considered that year's broadcasts to be the best that had ever been put out. The paper attributed the success of the broadcasts to the fact that most of the broadcasters had worked in previous series and that there were no play-by-play announcers without baseball backgrounds. France Laux, who was a regular season announcer in St. Louis, was singled out for praise as having given a "matter-of-fact account of the play, supplying a true picture of the action, without growing excited or striving for dramatic effect." One unnamed announcer was criticized for over-dramatizing long foul balls and then trying to cover up by

estimating in feet or inches how far foul they were. "Many fans dislike such attempts at the dramatic and easily see through the subterfuge employed to explain why the drives were not safe." Several others, again unnamed, it was noted, had mixed up the identities of players making plays, but it was also pointed out that nobody had made the mistakes of past years in wrongly calling plays or saying that Texas Leaguers had whistled through the infield.⁴² In 1937, the work of the World Series announcers was again praised:

Coverage of the World's Series games by radio reached a new high level this year and the staffs of the three chains--Columbia, National and Mutual--acquitted themselves well. Broadcasting the Series has become so established that this was to be expected, but the choices of announcers seemed particularly happy this year and the air reporting generally was accurate and adequate.

Notably absent from this year's broadcasts were commercial announcements, although it must be said for the Ford Motor Company, which sponsored previous World's Series airings, that they never permitted advertising angles to become too blatant. The only offensive note introduced into some of the microphoning was the tendency of the announcers to do much back-patting of each other. They might have left that to the audience, which, usually, is not backward in letting them know whether they are good, bad or indifferent.

In several cases, the announcers might well have brushed up on their knowledge of past events in the game, especially those who insisted on repeating that no freshman pitcher had ever won a World's Series game, in speaking of Cliff Melton. They would not have been compelled to go further back than the 1934 series, when Paul Dean won two games, and if they had delved a little deeper, others would have been found.

However, as a whole, the broadcasts were well received by the fans in the hinterlands, who know their baseball, and it is estimated that millions listened in who had neither the time nor the money to go to New York for the series, but still retained their interest in the sport, even though it was an all-Gotham affair.⁴³

As can be seen, the notion of the baseball announcer as "objective" reporter was becoming dominant at this time. There was no criticism of verbal excesses

or lack of knowledge of the game, except for the lack of research into major league history. *The Sporting News'* editorial stance with regard to advertising during games is made clear: it pays the freight, but it should not be blatant. Blatant, however, is not defined. As in other commentary on announcers, dating back to the early 1930s, the final arbiters of the quality of the broadcasts in the view of the editorial are the fans in the hinterlands, "who know their baseball," and thus are the best judges of what constitutes a good description of a game.

The Professional Ethic

There are very few recordings of pre-World War II baseball broadcasts in existence. One that does exist from the 1936 World Series demonstrates why many considered Red Barber the best early baseball announcer after McNamee. Barber filled in the pauses between pitches with a steady stream of information about the hitters, pitchers, and position players. He described the scene in vivid detail and never let the audience lose track of the narrative thread of the game. In contrast, his cohorts on the broadcast, Tom Manning and Ty Tyson, were almost telegraphic in their descriptions of the game, providing little of their own color commentary. (In those days, the play-by-play was handled by one announcer at a time.) When Larry MacPhail decided to broadcast all of the Dodgers' games in 1939, he persuaded the ad agency handling the Dodgers' radio account to hire Barber from Cincinnati to do the Brooklyn broadcasts. Barber very quickly established himself as a favorite in Brooklyn. He worked almost all of the World Series radio and television broadcasts from 1935 to 1953, when he finally declined to do the Series broadcasts because he was not

happy with the financial remuneration.⁴⁴ From 1946 to 1955, Barber was head of radio sports for CBS, and his influence as a respected announcer can be felt indirectly even today. He helped to train young announcers like Ernie Harwell and Vin Scully, both of whom came on in the late 1940s, are still broadcasting, and are in the broadcasting wing of the Baseball Hall of Fame. They are generally regarded as two of the best baseball announcers currently active.

In an article in *The Sporting News* in 1939, and in his 1970 autobiography and tribute to early baseball announcers, Barber elaborated on what can be called his philosophy of broadcasting. Barber talked about a sports announcer acting as a reporter and needing to remember the what, why, when, who, how, and where of any happening. The six "serving-men" for a play-by-play man, he said, are preparation, evaluation, concentration, curiosity, impartiality, and imperturbability⁴⁵ While Barber recognized the differences between newspaper reporting and doing radio play-by-play, his language to an extent reflects the influence that ethics of professionalism in newspaper journalism had on baseball announcing.

Barber considered an announcer's preparation most important. Barber felt that a baseball announcer should be familiar with the body of sports literature. There are certain essential record books that should be on hand for every broadcast. The announcer should take the time if necessary to look up a fact in the book before making an error in an effort to appear glib.⁴⁶ The announcer should read the whole morning newspaper, not just the sports section. He should arrive at the ballpark about 2 hours before game time in

order to find out the lineups for the day, if anybody's wife had had a child, who the next day's pitchers are, any new injuries, and so on. The advice covered more mundane matters too, such as eating a light meal before the game and visiting the washroom before the game.⁴⁷

By evaluation, Barber essentially meant that it was necessary for the announcer to find a dramaturgical hook for the narrative of the game that day. He must decide what to tell the audience that would focus its interest on that day's game. To do so, the announcer asks himself certain questions: What is at stake in the game? Is first place on the line? Is anybody trying for a record or a personal milestone? Is anybody making his first appearance in the majors, or is anybody coming back from an injury? This is often done during the pregame show, when the announcer can "headline" the game. In addition, the announcer must be alert to new situations as they arise during the game.⁴⁸

Barber felt that concentration was essential if the announcer was not to make gaffes. "There is no eraser on a microphone...no rewrite man on the news desk."⁴⁹ Unexpected occurrences must be accounted for. The accumulation of runs, hits, walks, errors, etc, must be constantly updated and re-checked. The score must be given regularly for those who might have just tuned in. There are many distractions created by people working around the announcer, but they must not be allowed to intrude on the broadcast. The announcer must leave his personal problems out of the broadcast booth. In the event of illness, he must decide before the game whether he is well enough to do the broadcast or not. If he is too sick, his concentration might suffer.⁵⁰

According to Boston announcer Fred Hoey, who broadcast games beginning in the late 1920s, concentration was the one faculty that was discounted even by most announcers in the early days.

Commenting on many articles he has read on broadcasting, Hoey remarked recently that he has yet to read where concentration is a vital part of the work. Reading from a script, he avers, is not so difficult, but to the announcer who ad libs the broadcast requires concentration on the subject, which is a severe strain not only on the eyes, but on the nerves.⁵¹

Curiosity for a baseball announcer as Barber saw it was closely related to concentration. While Barber felt that an announcer should not care who won the game, he had to be curious as to how it would go, and he had to know or try to know the "why" of everything that happened in a game.⁵²

The listener wants to know why without thinking why. The announcer should find out why, or know why. Realistic humility works. When a why situation arises, one that is not apparent, the announcer should routinely tell the audience he doesn't know why, but he'll find out, and when he does know why, he'll broadcast it. The associate announcer, or the statistician, should then get on the proper inside-the-park telephone and find out why. The broadcasting booth should be the headquarters of a broadcast team that works together to get the work done...to find out the whys.⁵³

Finally, Barber felt that a baseball announcer should be impartial.

Barber conceived his role essentially as that of a reporter. Ernie Harwell feels that the baseball announcer must be a combination reporter, entertainer, and teacher of the game, with the reporter role paramount. [Harwell interview, February 18, 1994] Ken Coleman, a broadcaster with the Boston Red Sox in his book, *So You Want to Be a Sportscaster*, sees the job in much the same way:

Basically the announcer works for the fan. In some cities he is hired by the baseball club, in others by the station, and in still others by the advertising agency that represents the sponsor. Generally, the team, while it may not make the selection, will have the choice of final approval. In the many years I have been broadcasting I have never been told by an official of a team what to say regarding play-by-play work. Teams do have places during each game in which promotional announcements are scheduled, and they will provide you with the copy....I have always taken the position that the job of the play-by-play man is to report the action on the field. He is not hired to manage, to second-guess, or to comment on the validity of the moves. He should give credit where credit is due on both sides. It is inevitable in baseball reporting, when you cover one team all season long, that your personal feelings will come to the surface occasionally. A fellow would have to be a pretty cold fish to live and work with a team, to get to know the executives, the manager, the coaches, and the players and not want to see them win.⁵⁴

The question of a baseball announcer's impartiality has been a matter of contention among announcers and fans since baseball broadcasting began.

Red Barber believed that a baseball announcer should be as impartial as possible. For the most part, that is the approach favoured in New York City and in those cities where announcers influenced by Barber have worked. Ernie Harwell in Detroit is the classic example of an impartial baseball announcer. Harwell was influenced by Barber more in terms of his work ethic,⁵⁵ but he takes an even-handed approach. At the other end of the spectrum is someone like Harry Caray, the long-time announcer for the St. Louis Cardinals, Chicago White Sox, and Chicago Cubs. Caray is a true homer, but he will criticize players on the home team who do not play well.

My whole philosophy has always been to broadcast the way a fan would broadcast. I'm so tough on my guys because I want them to win so much. I've often thought that if you gave the microphone to a fan, he'd sound a lot like me. The disappointment, the hurt, the anger, the bitterness, the love, the ecstasy--they'd all be there."⁵⁶

Whether a particular announcer adopts the stance of a “homer” or a more or less impartial “reporter,” he is still constrained by his obligation to present a clear, exciting, and accurate description of a baseball game that pleases the club owner, the sponsor, the print media, and the fans. Red Barber, Ernie Harwell, and Vin Scully adopted impartial attitudes and impressed fans with their baseball knowledge and erudition. Harry Caray, Dizzy Dean, Rowsy Rowswell, and Bob Prince created excitement with their dramatic flair for outrageous statements and identification with the attitudes of the fans. The former have traditionally been accorded more respect from the baseball establishment, especially sportswriters and league officials, but the latter have also been able to provide compelling listening experiences that attract listeners and also keep club owners and sponsors happy.

Announcers and Sponsors: The Provigo Home Run Inning

Clearly, it is in the best interests of both the sponsor and the ball clubs to have their products associated with what they consider to be entertaining and informative broadcasts that are as free as possible from gaffes. One of the most important, but seldom discussed, responsibilities of the baseball announcer is to promote the advertiser's product, and an important part of the announcer's job is to read ad copy between innings or during breaks in the action. Russ Hodges recalled being afraid that he would fail the audition for his first major league announcing job in Chicago in 1935 because of his lack of facility in reading advertising copy.⁵⁷ As many announcers were hired by ad agencies

from the late 1930s on, the ad agencies themselves exercised a certain amount of control over the production of the broadcast. Meetings of a sponsor's announcers before the season began taking place as General Mills, Atlantic Refining, Kellogg's, and others moved heavily into baseball broadcasting. At these meetings, the sponsors would acquaint the announcers with the policies of the sponsor and the announcers themselves would share experiences that might help in presenting more effective broadcasts.⁵⁸ Another form of control over the announcers was exercised by Knox Reeves, the head of the advertising agency that handled baseball broadcasts for General Mills. He would travel to major league cities to check up on the work of the announcers, arrive unannounced and stay in the city for several days before making his presence known.⁵⁹

Many promotions were, and still are, tied into the actual play-by-play. The report of out-of-town scores are usually sponsored, as are pitching changes. One inning might be designated for a contest in which names are drawn and the prize awarded would depend on whether the batter hit a single, a double, a triple, or a home run. If the batter makes an out, the contestant wins a gift certificate from the sponsor of the contest. Many announcers have their own distinctive calls for home runs. Montreal announcer Dave Van Horne calls an Expo home run with "It's up, up, and away," a phrase inspired by the popular late sixties song by The Fifth Dimension. There is Harry Caray's trademark, "It could be. It might be. It is! A home run!" and Russ Hodges' "Bye-Bye Baby." In some cases, however, the advertiser would have the announcer use a "product

call" on home runs by the home team. In Brooklyn, when Old Gold cigarettes sponsored the broadcasts, Red Barber would call a home run an "Old Goldie". The hitting of an "Old Goldie" caused a carton of tobacco to slide down the screen behind the plate to the hitter as he crossed home plate.⁶⁰ Mel Allen would call a Yankee home run a "White Owl Wallop" (for White Owl cigars) or a "Ballantine Blast" (for Ballantine beer).⁶¹ Another practice less common today than in the 1930s was the interweaving of commercial copy into the play-by-play of the game, a practice encouraged by the ad agencies. For example:

Ad Liberties, a publication issued by Knox-Reeves Advertising, Inc., Minneapolis, Minn., for announcers broadcasting games in behalf of General Mills, Inc., and Soconoy-Vacuum Oil Company, offers a \$2 cash award for every ad lib commercial submitted by a sportscaster and printed in the periodical. During the present season, the agency has awarded \$182 to announcers for a total of 91 winning ad lib commercials published in Ad Liberties. Example is: "He scooped up that sizzling grounder like a kid scooping up a spoonful of that good 'Breakfast of Champions.'"⁶²

Sponsors exerted their influence over in a number of other ways. Red Barber was harassed in his days with the Yankees in the mid-1950s for wearing a beret on television because the main sponsor was a brewery and berets are supposedly associated with wine drinking.⁶³ The sponsors even had some influence over who would broadcast the games. When General Mills and Soconoy-Vacuum Oil attempted to relieve Boston announcer Fred Hoey of his duties in 1937 because they felt that Hoey's voice was too closely associated with the previous sponsors, Kentucky Club tobacco and Mobilgas, in the minds of the audience, fans wrote letters of protest, and Hoey's cause was taken up in a number of newspaper columns. The campaign was successful, and Hoey

was retained in 1937 and 1938.⁶⁴ However, when the Atlantic Refining Company began sponsoring the Boston broadcasts in 1939, Hoey was replaced, despite a campaign by Boston fans that produced a petition with a reported million signatures.⁶⁵ In this case, Hoey's dismissal might have been caused as much because of a fondness for drink as the desire of the sponsor to replace an announcer too closely associated with a rival company. Apparently, Hoey, emboldened by the fans' successful campaign two years earlier, went to John Shepard of the Colonial Network demanding an increase in pay. Shepard fired him, and did not bow to protest.⁶⁶ In this instance the sponsor's influence can be seen, but in the end, it is the club owner who has the final say on who broadcasts the games.

The Baseball Announcer: Reporter or Promoter?

Although baseball announcers employ journalistic practices in their everyday work, the role and function of the sportswriter and baseball announcer are not the same. The announcers prepare for a broadcast in much the same way that radio, television, and newspaper reporters do, except that because they travel with the club, stay in the same hotels, and eat in the same restaurants, they must maintain a certain degree of friendly relations amongst the players, management, players, and club owner. They are deeply implicated in the social aspects of the production of baseball as entertainment. As a result, they can have a much less critical relationship to what they are reporting. This undermines their pretensions to journalism.

Leonard Koppett notes that radio has one problem that the print media does not: the need to get and hold the attention of a large audience. Where the reader can skip around the newspaper, choosing what to read, the radio listener is a "prisoner" of sequential presentation.⁶⁷ The advertiser must hope that listeners will stay tuned long enough to listen to the commercials. Broadcasters must rely on show business techniques, such as hyperbole and artificial excitement, to make the listener feel that this game, this inning, this at bat, is worth staying tuned to.

...play-by-play, strictly speaking, isn't journalism at all. It's better. It's a window to the real thing as it happens. In television play-by-play, the real reporter is the camera rather than the commentator. In radio, it's the announcer, who is skilled at description (far more skilled than most newspapermen) but is denied the essence of journalistic judgment, which is to collect, sift, rearrange, and make coherent only the essential elements of what went on, after the outcome is known.⁶⁸

The truth of this was not recognized by most sportswriters in the early days of radio baseball. On the other hand, despite the aspirations of baseball announcers to be considered "objective" journalists, they were and are, constrained by their functions as promoters of the game and of sponsors' products.⁶⁹ Radio stations buy exclusive rights to present play-by-play broadcasts from the promoter, who is the club owner. This makes the station a co-promoter of the event to a far greater degree than a newspaper. "And while co-promotion can be a thoroughly honorable, laudable, socially valuable activity, it cannot be called objective journalism."⁷⁰

Baseball announcers do use news values in deciding what baseball activities deserve comment during their play-by-play broadcasts. However,

Koppett is right in the sense that, although journalistic news-gathering techniques are a part of the day-to-day work of baseball announcers, announcers cannot be so critical as to question the quality of the product or the illusion that the outcome of the game actually matters.

The play-by-play announcer is a representative of the club or league, and is accepted as such by athletes being covered and by the bulk of the audience. That's his proper role, and his appeal. This doesn't mean he doesn't call an error an error, or lies about who won; it just means he loses his effectiveness if he is persistently critical of the event in progress."⁷¹

In the words New York Yankees President Dan Topping, "We own our announcers."⁷²

Effects of Technological Developments on Baseball Announcing

Baseball broadcasting practices have not changed very much since the late 1930s, but changes in technology have affected certain of them. First, we will look at the practice of re-creating baseball games on the basis of telegraph reports, a practice that ended in the mid-1950s, by which time all clubs were broadcasting their home and away games live from the site of the contest. Then there will be an examination of how the increasing number of games broadcast on television and the variety of camera angles and techniques (slow motion, stop action) have altered the way that announcers deal with the issue of questionable umpiring and poor play.

The first radio broadcast of a World Series game took place in 1921. The game was sent live to Pittsburgh, but the other broadcast destinations, Newark, New Jersey, and Springfield, Massachusetts, received a re-creation. Not-quite-

live radio re-creations of baseball games were to become a genre unto themselves in the early days of radio baseball. This was out of economic necessity. Ball clubs, advertisers, and radio stations found it cheaper to pay Western Union for the telegraph feed than to send announcers to games and pay the long distance phone rates. Later, in the mid-40s, the New York Yankees became the first team to send their broadcasters to all of the team's away games. The other fifteen major league clubs followed suit, and by the mid 1950s, all clubs were broadcasting all of their games live.

In the case of the first World Series broadcast, the re-creation was a result of a combination of technical limitations and AT&T's refusal to lease a direct line from the Polo Grounds in Manhattan to WJZ's transmitter in Newark, New Jersey. The games were broadcast live to Pittsburgh on KDKA and were re-created in the New York City area and Springfield, Massachusetts.⁷³ The telephone company refused WJZ announcer Tommy Cowan's request for a wire between the Polo Grounds and WJZ's transmitter in Newark, but agreed to install a phone in a private box seat in the Polo Grounds. WJZ had to use second-person announcing because the technology for direct amplification of a telephone message over the air was not available.⁷⁴ From his box seat at the Polo Grounds, *Newark Sunday Call* reporter Sandy Hunt sent his description of the game over the telephone to Cowan at the WJZ transmitter in Newark. Cowan repeated what Hunt said over the microphone. He did not have time to write everything down, so at the end of the game he did not know what the score was. This communication went only one way, for Cowan could not

interrupt his broadcast to ask Hunt to repeat himself. After the first game, Cowan was outfitted with headphones, so that he was not made so uncomfortable by having to hold a telephone in one hand for the duration of the game.⁷⁵ Few people owned radio receivers in October, 1921 and the broadcasts themselves must have sounded rather crude, but WJZ reportedly received more than 4,000 pieces of mail congratulating it for its World Series broadcasts.⁷⁶

The re-creation stretched the announcer's talents as an entertainer. Some stations, like WHO in Des Moines, Iowa, did nothing but re-creations. From 1949 to 1952, the Liberty Network, based in Fort Worth, Texas, made a lot of money out of doing re-creations for areas that did not get live broadcasts of major league games. Before teams sent their broadcasters on the road, many of them broadcast re-creations of their road games. Western Union had exclusive rights to telegraph reports from major league parks. Newspaper writers filed reports from the park with the help of a Western Union operator. Western Union also had a service called "paragraph one" that they would sell to any buyer. Paragraph one was a pitch-by-pitch description of the game sent by a Western Union operator from the originating ballpark. Another Western Union operator would receive the report at any venue that wanted it delivered. This could be a bar, a newspaper, or a radio station. The receiving operator would write down the message that came in for the announcer. He could break in on the transmission to ask the sending operator to clarify any part of the report.⁷⁷ The announcer would then turn the Western Union reports into a play-by-play

description of the game. The whole arrangement depended on a sending Western Union man who knew the game.⁷⁸

In these telegraph-based re-creations, the announcer would receive a skeleton outline of the game. He would be told who was up to bat and would receive a description of each pitch: "Lombardi up...S1C (for strike one called)...B1L (for ball one low)...Out...high fly to short right. Mungo coming in to pitch for Brooklyn....Frey up...B1W (for ball one wide)...DP (for double play)...Reese to Herman to Camilli."⁷⁹ There were several ways to handle this information. First, the announcer had to decide whether or not to tell the audience that the broadcast was not a live description. Some announcers used sound effects to make the broadcast sound live. Others would stand with the mike close to the telegraph ticker and let the audience know that they were listening to a re-creation.⁸⁰ Sometimes the telegraph feed would be interrupted, leaving the announcer with no idea what was happening in the game and time to fill. Some announcers would pretend that there was a rain delay at the ballpark or they would have the batter foul off pitches until the feed was restored.⁸¹ To prevent this from happening, some announcers kept their description one inning behind the feed. For announcers who wanted to make the audience believe that it was a live broadcast, sound effects like crowd noises and a bat hitting a ball were used. In most cases, the announcer would add more than the bare bones account that came over the wire by describing the actions of the players, the pitcher wiping his brow, the batter taking his

position in the batter's box, in the same way that an announcer live at the game would.

Some announcers, such as Jack Graney in Cleveland and Arch McDonald in Washington, were considered masters of the re-creation, and these were done at times as public performances. Graney would sometimes do the re-creations from an auto dealership,⁸² and MacDonald did his first year of re-creations in 1935 from a studio set up in a drug store in Washington, complete with stands for spectators.⁸³ On the other hand, France Laux in St. Louis, although he won several announcer-of-the-year awards from *The Sporting News*, was not suited to doing re-creations, because of his dry delivery.⁸⁴ It is doubtful that many announcers mourned the passing of the re-creation, even one such as Graney, who would wake up from dreams in which he had made mistakes on a re-created broadcast.⁸⁵

Two other technological innovations affected the announcer's relationship between the clubs, the sponsors, and the fans. The first was the development of magnetic recording tape, which freed the announcer from having to read commercial copy between innings. Although announcers still do "live read" promos, the vast majority of the commercials during a baseball broadcast are recorded on 8-track cartridges and controlled from the home studio by a producer. This means that the announcer does not have to stay on the air without a break for 2 1/2 hours or more. It also means that the announcer's voice is not associated as closely with the principal sponsor's product, as it was until the mid 1950s.

Many more games are now broadcast on television than ever before. Announcers doing the radiocast of a televised game now work with a monitor in the broadcast booth, to which they can refer. The introduction of multiple camera angles, slow motion, and stop action has meant that announcers are now free to point out errors on the part of players and umpires, a practice that was discouraged in the pre-television era. However, the practice of not criticizing umpires for questionable calls persists on broadcasts of non-televised games. In these cases, the announcer will say that the batter or pitcher is not happy with a call, but he will not, in most instances, say that the umpire made a bad call.

The Form of the Broadcast

Today, there is a fairly standard format for baseball broadcasts. There is a pregame show that sets the narrative frame for the broadcast. Then there is the broadcast itself, which, when done by a skilled announcer, unfolds as a story. Finally, the postgame show recaps the game story and sets the stage for the next day's game. This section describes the form of the broadcast, emphasizing the techniques that the announcers use to create an interesting and compelling listening experience.

The Pre-Game Show

The announcers arrive at the ball park about three hours before the start of the broadcast. They go to the radio booth or their team's clubhouse, where they peruse newspapers and the daily press releases handed out by each

team. They examine the past records of the two teams against each other and the recent performances of the starting pitchers and position players. They note any trades and transactions that have taken place since the previous broadcast. Information on player injuries is updated. After deciding which players, coaches, or managers to interview, the announcers go to the clubhouse or onto the field to conduct the interviews.

Once the interviews are recorded, the pregame show is taped. This is done 90 minutes to two hours between the start of the game with the help of the producer. Taping the pregame show takes about 45 minutes (the show itself runs slightly less than a half hour). Once the pregame show is taped, the announcers eat the dinner served in the press area. Only the final few minutes of the pregame show are done live.⁶⁶

In the pregame show, the narrative frame for the game is set up by the announcers. The weather conditions, the starting pitchers, news of injuries, trades, the significance of the game for the pennant race--all are described in the pregame show. The recent exploits of the home team are placed within the context of the course of the team's season, history of the team and the state of Major League Baseball.

The sponsors are announced off the top of the broadcast and the segments of the pregame show are punctuated by commercials. Commercial copy may be woven into a segment, by a simple announcement or according to a script. The announcement of the lineups and batting order for the game may have a sponsor's name attached to it. (The major sponsors are generally

national advertisers, but the station depends on local advertising contracts as well). The property rights of the broadcast are made explicit, and the announcers adhere to standard news values in setting the scene for the game. The pregame show leads up to the first pitch.

The beginning of the live part of the broadcast is preceded by a rundown of the principal sponsors. In the case of the Expos announcers, Ken Singleton, a former player with the Expos and Baltimore Orioles who has been the second announcer for the last five years, talks about the starting pitchers and then introduces the "Voice of the Expos," Dave Van Horne, who settles into his seat in the broadcast booth just as the pitcher is readying himself for the first pitch of the game. Singleton's introduction of Dave Van Horne is sponsored by one of the principal advertisers.

The Game

Van Horne, who has been doing the Expos broadcasts since the team's first game in 1969 and is referred to as the Voice of the Expos, has a standard opening. "Thanks Ken, Hi again everybody, glad to have you aboard for tonight's game." Then he starts to call the play-by-play. "Martinez gets the first one over for a strike, low on the outside corner." Van Horne sets the defensive alignment between pitches to the leadoff hitter. He tells who the umpires are. He describes the season that each batter has had so far and what he has done lately, against this team, this pitcher. Singleton contributes additional information about the players and offers his own commentary on the action. At

the end of each inning, Van Horne (or Singleton) gives the total of runs, hits and errors, and succinctly recaps the scoring or significant occurrences of the half-inning just completed. ("The set by Pedro. The pitch is hit in the air and popped up to short center field. Going back is Grudzielanek, and he's going to make the play. Gregg Zaun is popped out. And the Marlins get a leadoff walk, and once again, for the third time in the game with a leadoff walk they do not score a run. They leave a runner. We've played four. One-nothing the Expos lead. This is Labatts' Expos baseball." Cut to commercial.)⁸⁷ Following the 2 1/2 minute commercial break between half-innings, one of the announcers comes back with a quick summary of the game highlights, and, if necessary, introduces his partner, who will do the play-by-play for the next inning or two.

Ken Singleton: Top of the fifth inning, the Expos leading the Marlins 1-0. The Expos getting their run in the second inning, a base hit by Darrin Fletcher delivering Henry Rodriguez, who had doubled. A two-out hit for Fletcher, a clutch hit. Fletch will be leading it off for the Expos here in the fifth. Here to tell you all about it, a man who lives in South Florida. He's kinda home. He'll be leaving home to head for Chicago after the game. Here's Dave Van Horne. David.⁸⁸

The announcers work with the producer of the broadcast, who sits in the broadcast booth, takes care of the taped material, and switches the feed from the booth back to the studio between innings. When the booth mike is live, a light that sits on the announcers' console is turned on. At the end of each inning, the producer switches the feed back to the network of stations carrying the broadcast. Each station on the network runs its own local ads between innings. The producer keeps a supply of cassette tapes on hand. Each one is labelled with its own number. Whenever there is a scoring play, the producer

takes the cassette that is recording the broadcast out of the tape machine, notes the details of the scoring play and the number of the tape in a notebook, and then saves it for use on the post game show, on which the highlights of the game are replayed.

Van Horne calls the play-by-play for the first two innings, and Singleton provides color. At the beginning of the third inning, Van Horne gives a capsule summary of the game so far and then introduces Singleton, who does the play-by-play alone for the next two innings. Van Horne handles the duties alone for the fifth and sixth innings, Singleton for the seventh, and for the eighth and ninth (and any extra innings), the two announcers work as they did in the first two innings, with Van Horne doing the play-by-play and Singleton providing color. This is not the only way that broadcasting duties are shared. In some cities, there may be three or four announcers for a broadcast who switch back and forth between calling play-by-play for television and radio. In a few cities, there is one crew for radio and one for television. In Detroit, for example, longtime announcer Ernie Harwell did no television broadcasts from the early 1960s until his retirement from daily broadcasting in 1993. In Montreal, Van Horne and Singleton are the principal play-by-play announcers, and they do the television broadcasts on the Canadian stations with which the Expos have contracts.⁸⁹ A second pair of announcers handles the radio broadcasts when Van Horne and Singleton are doing television. Another approach is taken by Vin Scully, who does his radio broadcasts alone but works with a partner on television.

On the console between the announcers sits a laptop computer that feeds the lineups, starting pitchers, scores, and summaries of other major league games in progress. The announcers also have a television monitor to which they can refer on replays. A public address system in the press box relays the official scorer's rulings to the radio booth.

Van Horne and Singleton root for the Expos, but they are well-versed in the strategy, history, and lore of baseball and grant credit to the opposing team when it is due. A listener can tune in on a game and know within five minutes what the score is and what is relevant about what is happening in the game at that moment. Between the pitches, they not only describe things like the positioning of the defence and the possible strategic moves, but they also discuss news of the day in baseball and tell anecdotes about games they have seen or participated in and players and managers they have known, all leavened with a gentle sense of humor that does not go beyond what are generally accepted boundaries of good taste. An example of this humor comes from Ken Singleton talking about former teammate Andy Mora: "When you hit the ball over the wall, that's a Mora."⁹⁰

As the game progresses, player exploits are related to similar feats in the history of baseball. For example, a player may hit a grand slam home run. If he comes up to the plate later in the game with the bases loaded again, the announcers may go to the record book and talk about players who have hit two grand slam home runs in one game. A lengthy consecutive game hitting streak by a player will be compared with other hitting streaks that season, in the

history of the player's team, or in the history of major league baseball. A book listing baseball records is kept close at hand by the announcers. The announcers also reminisce about remarkable feats they have seen. Whether the facts and stories come from the record books or the memories of the announcers, the announcers must introduce this material as seamlessly as possible.

A secondary function (at least as far as the fan is concerned) of the announcer is to insert advertising copy at specified points in the broadcast. Although the between-inning commercials are recorded, the announcers are responsible for conducting the home run inning contest, the hit-for-the-cycle contest, and other such promotions, all of which are sponsored. The rundown of the out-of-town scores and the pitching changes are sponsored. ("The out-of-town scores are brought to you by Gibby's." "This is Labatts' Expos baseball.")

The course of a nine-inning baseball game consists of several movements; in fact, the nine innings are called the early innings, the middle innings, and the late innings. In the early innings, the pitchers, on whom much depends, establish a rhythm for the game. If one of the pitchers is not on his game, the contest might be one-sided, depending on the opposing team's ability to exploit his weakness. If neither pitcher performs well, and the hitters take advantage of the situation, the game turns into a "slugfest." If both pitchers perform well, and runs are hard to come by, the game may become a tense, dramatic affair. In any case, because a team can score at any time that it is at bat, every at-bat is important, and the game is not over until the last batter is out.

In the middle innings, the pitchers start to become tired. Poor performance, injury, or strategic demands lead to player replacements. In the late innings, especially if the game is close, the managers employ more relief pitchers and pinch hitters. A well-played close game may lead to a climax with a top relief pitcher trying to protect his team's lead against a dangerous hitter with an opportunity to win the game for his team on the last at-bat. It is at moments like this that the high drama of baseball is experienced most keenly. It is in part by his ability to convey the drama and the tension in a game that an announcer's worth is measured.

Early announcers and those who did re-creations were often criticized for injecting hyperbole and false drama into a game, so it is not generally considered the announcer's task to overdramatize the description of the contest, but to express genuine excitement and tension in his game call. It is at all times the announcer's responsibility to make the fans aware of exactly what is at stake in every situation and of the options open to the players and managers. There is a flow to every game, and the announcer must understand, describe, and interpret that flow. Dave Van Horne's play-by-play is a good example of this:

Dave Veres comes on to do the pitching for the Expos. Pedro Martinez went seven innings, gave up two runs on six hits. He struck out nine batters, walked five, gave up a two-run home run in the fifth inning to Gary Sheffield, and that is the story of the game for the Marlins right now. They lead 2-1. Dave Veres comes on to do the pitching, and it's his sixteenth appearance, a 4-3 record, 4 saves, a 4.52 earned run average. Dave Veres, and he'll face Devon White, Gregg Colbrunn, and Kurt Abbot. Devon White, a switch hitter, batting left against Veres.⁹¹

Announcer and former player Joe Garagiola called baseball “drama with and endless run and an ever-changing cast.”⁹² It has been compared to a soap opera:

Baseball is the best sport to cover because it's *daily*. It's ongoing. You have to fill the need, write the daily soap opera.⁹³

Sportswriter Peter Gammons speaks here about the work of the newspaper beat writer, but his sentiments apply to broadcasters as well. The announcer, however, does not have the luxury of time for reflection before offering his interpretation of the action on the field. Gammons is correct in comparing baseball to soap opera; following a team's fortunes is for the baseball fan like following a soap opera is to the soap addict. (It is somewhat ironic that in the 1930s there were broadcasters and advertisers who were concerned that radio baseball would not attract a large audience because so many listened to the afternoon soaps.) It is the task of the announcer to describe and interpret each episode of the soap opera and to place the outcome of each day's game into the context of the team's season and its place in the pennant race.

Announcers are expected to perform many functions, for the team, for the advertisers, and most of all, for the fans. They are expert reporters, rooters for the home team, historians, storytellers, and pitchmen. They are also guests in the home, the car, the office, and at the beach or the campground. They are part of the baseball fans' daily lives.

Conclusion

The baseball announcer stands at the nexus of the various relationships that have come to inhere in the structure of major league baseball, and, as such, is subject to a mixture of demands and expectations that come not only from the other producers of the broadcast but also from the fans who listen to the broadcasts. Since the late 1930s, when baseball announcing achieved a truly professional status, most baseball broadcasters have self-consciously aspired to the standards of what they consider to be objective "reporting." There might indeed be tensions among the interests of the ballclub, the sponsor, the league, and the announcer. The success of the announcer has depended, in part, on the extent to which he is able to negotiate those tensions and adhere to what he thinks is the best approach to giving the audience an honest, interesting, and believable description of a baseball game.

The conventions of baseball announcing have remained relatively unchanged since the late 1930s, except for practices that have been altered by the elimination of telegraph re-creations and the use of television during radio broadcasts. Although general announcers on early World Series broadcasts were criticized for their lack of knowledge of baseball rules and terminology, announcers who did regular local broadcasts were generally well-accepted by fans. These announcers were drawn from the ranks of sportswriters in the early days of radio baseball. Baseball announcers with radio backgrounds and former baseball players were hired to do major league broadcasts beginning in the 1930s. Until the late 1930s, announcers were hired by the radio stations

who did the baseball broadcasts. Then ad agencies handling sponsors' accounts began entering into contractual arrangements with the announcers. Club owners began employing the announcers in the mid 1940s. In whatever case, it was the club owner who retained final say over who would broadcast the games.

Fans and sportswriters could not exercise direct control over the work of the announcers, but baseball officials and advertisers could, and did. The Commissioner of Baseball began exercising his authority over the choice of announcers for the World Series in the early 1930s. He also told announcers that their role was to report the action but not to criticize players, managers, and umpires. Beginning in 1937, the American League attempted to control second-guessing of umpires and managers and criticism of players by appointing an official to monitor the broadcasts. Advertisers started holding preseason meetings of announcers in the mid-30s and monitoring the work of the announcers during the season.

At the same time that fans, sportswriters, baseball officials, and advertisers were putting pressure on announcers to produce consistently accurate and entertaining broadcasts of baseball games, announcers themselves responded to criticism and institutional pressures by adopting a professional ethic. Their conception of their work was influenced by journalistic notions of objectivity. In this case, "objectivity" referred to both a type of naive realism and an attitude of impartiality toward the fortunes of either team. Although most, if not all, announcers adhered to the first sense of the term,

inasmuch as they refrained from adding editorial comment to their descriptions of the game, not all announcers have been totally impartial in their attitudes toward the teams on the field.

Because many of the early announcers began their careers as sportswriters, and also because of demands from sportswriters and baseball officials that a good announcer should function in a manner similar to a reporter, many announcers, Red Barber foremost among them, have adhered to the notion that a good baseball announcer is first and foremost a good reporter. Despite the conception in the minds of many that an announcer must choose between being an entertainer or a reporter, the best announcers have realized that there is no contradiction between the two roles. In fact, the announcer's job is often conceived as being a combination entertainer, reporter, teacher, and promoter. Critics such as Leonard Koppett maintain that the announcer's role as promoter of the game and pitchman for the sponsors' products renders pretensions to journalism by announcers invalid.

Technological developments have had the greatest effect on announcing practices since the late 1930s. The New York Yankees were the first team to send their announcers to all of the team's road games in 1946. By the mid-50s, all major league teams were doing the same. This put an end to the practice of re-creating road games from telegraph reports. The development of magnetic recording tape has freed announcers from the responsibility of doing all commercials as live reads. Television replays have made it possible for announcers to criticize the work of umpires with impunity.

Up to this point, this study has considered the institutional history of the development of radio baseball and its attendant announcing practices. The aesthetic dimension of the baseball broadcast and the ways in which the fans respond to radio baseball have not been considered. It is to these considerations that we now turn.

NOTES

¹Red Barber, *The Broadcasters* (New York: Dial Press, 1970), pp. 77-83, 225-235.

²Leonard Koppett, *Sports Illusion, Sports Reality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), p. 120.

³George Douglas, *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting* (London: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1987), pp. 114-116.

⁴Graham McNamee, *You're On the Air* (New York: Harper, 1926), p. 73.

⁵Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 28.

⁶Russ Hodges and Al Hirshberg, *My Giants* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), p. 31.

⁷McNamee, pp. 54-55.

⁸McNamee, pp. 53-54.

⁹McNamee, pp. 54-55.

¹⁰McNamee, p. 60.

¹¹Wayne Towers, "World Series Coverage in New York in the 1920s" *Journalism Monographs*, No. 73, 1981, p. 15.

¹²McNamee, p. 64.

¹³*The Sporting News*, February 11, 1932, p. 8. In all subsequent citations, *The Sporting News* will be referred to as *TSN*.

¹⁴Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 67.

¹⁵*TSN*, April 20, 1939, p. 14.

¹⁶Curtis Smith, *Voices of the Game*, (South Bend, IN: Diamond Communications, Inc., 1987), pp. 54-57.

¹⁷Ted Patterson, "The First Player-Broadcaster," in *Insider's Baseball: The Finer Points of the Game, As Examined by the Society for American Baseball Research*, ed. L. Robert Davids (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), p. 148.

¹⁸Patterson, p. 144.

¹⁹Robert Gregory, *Diz: The Story of Dizzy Dean and Baseball During the Great Depression* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 363.

²⁰Gregory, pp. 369-370.

²¹Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 161.

²²Barber, *The Broadcasters*, pp. 164-165.

²³Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 25.

²⁴*TSN*, June 1, 1939, p. 4.

²⁵Editorial, *TSN*, June 15, 1939, p. 4.

²⁶Towers, p. 16.

²⁷McNamee, p. 62.

²⁸Douglas, pp. 122-123.

²⁹*TSN*, October 22, 1931, p. 4.

³⁰Editorial, *TSN*, October 29, 1931, p. 4.

³¹*TSN*, July 28, 1932, p. 2.

³²Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), pp. 121-159.

³³Barber, *The Broadcasters*, pp. 77-83.

³⁴*TSN*, July 23, 1936, p. 3.

³⁵*TSN*, February 11, 1932, p. 8.

³⁶*TSN*, December 17, 1936, p. 8.

³⁷*New York Times*, various dates, 1934 and later.

³⁸Patterson, pp. 144-148.

³⁹Smith, p. 458.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹Smith, p. 75.

⁴²*TSN*, October 15, 1936, p. 8.

⁴³*TSN*, October 14, 1937, p. 8.

⁴⁴Barber, *The Broadcasters*, pp. 181-182.

⁴⁵Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 225.

⁴⁶Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 226.

⁴⁷Barber, *The Broadcasters*, pp. 228-229.

⁴⁸Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 229.

⁴⁹Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 230.

⁵⁰Barber, *The Broadcasters*, pp. 230-231.

⁵¹*TSN*, February 11, 1932, p. 8.

⁵²Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 232.

⁵³Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 233.

⁵⁴Ken Coleman, *So You Want to Be a Sportscaster*, p. 30.

⁵⁵Interview with Ernie Harwell, February 18, 1994.

⁵⁶Smith, p. 459.

⁵⁷Hodges and Hirshberg, p. 29.

⁵⁸*TSN*, April 8, 1937, p. 4; *TSN*, April 7, 1938, p. 10; *TSN*, April 4, 1940,
p. 2.

⁵⁹*TSN*, June 18, 1936, p. 2.

⁶⁰Paul Dickson, *Baseball's Greatest Quotations* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 186.

⁶¹Dickson, pp. 185-186.

⁶²TSN, September 23, 1937, p. 4.

⁶³Barber, *The Broadcasters*, pp. 174-175.

⁶⁴Smith, p. 23; TSN, December 31, 1936, p. 2; TSN, January 7, 1937, p. 8.

⁶⁵TSN, April 20, 1939, p. 11; TSN, April 27, 1939, p. 8.

⁶⁶Smith, p. 24.

⁶⁷Koppett, p. 120.

⁶⁸Koppett, pp. 120-121.

⁶⁹Koppett, p. 121; Ira Horowitz, "Sports Broadcasting" in *Government and the Sports Business*, ed. Roger Noll (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1974), p. 321.

⁷⁰Koppett, p. 121.

⁷¹Koppett, p. 123.

⁷²Horowitz, p. 321.

⁷³Smith, p. 8.

⁷⁴Douglas, p. 118.

⁷⁵Towers, p. 5.

⁷⁶Douglas, p. 118.

⁷⁷Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 107.

⁷⁸Red Barber and Robert Creamer, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat* (1968), pp. 32-36.

⁷⁹Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 108.

⁸⁰Barber, *The Broadcasters*, p. 109.

⁸¹Smith, pp. 27-28.

⁸²Smith, p. 27.

⁸³Smith, pp. 32-33.

⁸⁴Smith, p. 97.

⁸⁵Patterson, p. 145.

⁸⁶Much of the material in this section of the thesis is made on the basis of field observation of the work of the Montreal Expos announcers done in the spring and summer of 1993.

⁸⁷Radio broadcast of Montreal Expos vs. Florida Marlins, September 8, 1996, CIQC, AM 600, Montreal. Used without permission.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹In June, 1996, Singleton started working on Fox 's weekend television broadcasts. The Expos decided that he should no longer do television broadcasts for them, as he was no longer able to make a full commitment to the club. Singleton continues to do radio for the Expos, although his contract expires at the end of the 1996 season.

⁹⁰Radio broadcast, Montreal Expos at Los Angeles Dodgers (in Vero Beach), CIQC, AM 600, Montreal, April 16, 1995.

⁹¹Montreal Expos at Florida Marlins, CIQC, AM 600, Montreal, September 8, 1996.

⁹²From Joe Garagiola, *Baseball is a Funny Game*, quoted in Dickson, p. 148.

⁹³Peter Gammons, quoted in Dickson, p. 148.

CHAPTER V: RADIO BASEBALL AND THE FAN EXPERIENCE

No runs, no hits, no errors, nobody left on, and the seventh inning stretch and they're roaring. [sustained roaring of crowd 5-6 seconds]. Well while the fans are out here are taking that stretch, it's a mighty good time for you to take a quick trip to the refrigerator for a bottle of Ballantine beer. If you're listening in at your favorite tavern, don't just say, "One up," but be sure to ask the man for Ballantine. Enjoy the two B's--baseball and Ballantine. As you linger over that sparkling glass of Ballantine beer, as you feel it trickle down your throat, you'll say, "Ahhhhhhh man, this is the life! Baseball...and Ballantine beer." And while we're on this pleasant subject, folks, I'd like to remind you that it's a smart idea to keep plenty of Ballantine on ice at home at all times. To serve at mealtime, to enjoy during leisure hours. So at your dealer's, be sure to look for the three rings, ask him for Ballantine beer. [crowd roaring 4-5 seconds] Getting ready for the last of the seventh inning, it'll be Coleman and Rizzuto coming up."

[Mel Allen, broadcasting from Yankee Stadium, site of one-game playoff between the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox to decide the American League pennant, October 2, 1949]

The announcer makes up the game as he goes along.
His all the heroes who slug homers or steal home.
Acts as if he doesn't know the outcome,
but of course, he does.
Plays dumb.
Done, dumps fans and players and umps into his pockets,
folds up the stadium, shuts his mouth.

"The Announcer," Austin Straus¹, from "Innings and Quarters,"
Newalliance Records, 1992.

Baseball is a game that lends itself to a telling and a retelling. While you're lying in bed at night listening to a crackling radio, the game unfolds: a story told by a trusted friend who can find a compelling way of making it seem both new and familiar. This friend will describe the action, both internal and external, and place it in history--its relationship to the week, the month, the season and the years past, where it fits in relation to our tribe and other tribes. Like all forms of storytelling, it is just a story, meaning nothing, yet meaning everything.²

The nature of radio broadcasting changed the relationship between the audience and the sporting event in a way that newspapers and the telegraph

did not. The home audience was able to feel a part of something that was happening many miles away--at that moment. The roar of the crowd, the crack of the bat, the umpire's call came through the radio, and the home audience was granted a sense of immediacy that was lacking in even the telegraph account of the game. Radio made possible a new kind of baseball experience and resulted in the development of new practices by fans. The medium shattered the bounds of time and space, thus allowing large numbers of people in many different places to have the same aural experience of a baseball game. Radio baseball became part of the domestic space. It exposed an immediate, if not direct, experience of the major league game to vast numbers of new fans, especially women and children. Moments in baseball history that were broadcast over the radio became part of the history of the American people: Babe Ruth's called home run in the 1932 World Series, Lou Gehrig's farewell at Yankee Stadium in 1939, Bobby Thomson's "Shot Heard Round the World" in 1951.

In the view of baseball fans and commentators on or historians of baseball broadcasting, the status of the broadcast and the role of the announcer lies somewhere on a line that sees, at the materialist end, the broadcast as an advertising tool and the broadcaster as shill, and at the mythic end, the broadcast as a magical experience and the announcer as a kind of shaman, or oracle. Chapter four examined the ways in which the announcer's role has been defined by broadcasters, sportswriters, advertisers, and club officials in terms of its institutional exigencies. This chapter considers the audience

experience of radio baseball--how it has been described in poetry, literature, and movies, where we can find traces of the fan response--and addresses some of the difficulties in assessing the meanings of a form that serves both as an advertising vehicle and a shared cultural experience that brings great enjoyment to baseball fans. The chapter deals with the ways in which radio baseball has been mythologized and how it evokes nostalgia in the popular mind. The film treatment of baseball announcers is also considered. The chapter begins by looking at the centrality of the announcer to the radio baseball experience and the role of the announcer as storyteller.

The Announcer and the Game

Baseball and the radio proved to be a good fit between technology and cultural form. Baseball, with its standard alignment of players, its repetition of the elemental confrontation between pitcher and hitter, is well-suited to play-by-play description on the radio, in a way that a "flow" game like hockey or basketball is not. The audience can easily visualize the announcer's description in the mind's eye. The drama in a baseball game hinges on the myriad possibilities inherent in any game situation. The radio announcer's use of techniques of narrative heightens the sense of drama. A baseball game as described on the radio can be easily visualized, and the time gaps between the action allow the contemplation of strategy and the imparting of baseball lore.

F. Scott Regan says that the lack of a clock in baseball, where time is measured by innings and outs, shapes the baseball announcer's task, making

him far more important to the broadcast than are announcers in other sports. The time between pitches must be filled up ("It's what happens between the pitches that counts."), and it is within this time that the announcer entertains and provides contextual significance that establishes a sense of communion with the listener.³ Because baseball is practically a daily activity from April until October, there is a need for storytelling between the games. Moreover, each game contains all the elements of theatre: drama, comedy, and tragedy. The pauses in the action and the slow pace of the game are put to the announcer's advantage. As Regan puts it:

This slow pace, a seeming detriment to the announcer hoping to entertain the listener or viewer, becomes an asset when placed in the hands of an artist. The reporter must transform himself into a storyteller, using the pauses to entertain and to provide contextual significance, to create a sense of communion between the event and the listener....The sensitive storyteller can find in the familiar unfolding of the game the humor, irony, suspense, and tragedy that sustains the audience over the long season and from season to season.⁴

Although television, especially since the cable explosion since the 1970s, is the primary means by which most baseball fans receive their baseball information, there is a widely-held view that radio, because it allows for a free play of the listener's imagination, is a better medium than television for apprehending baseball. In this view, radio is better because it works on the ears, and leaves the listener's imagination to fill in the blanks. This permits the listener to fantasize, and baseball's heroes become larger-than-life. Television, because it can only show part of the field at a time, fragments the baseball experience. In addition, the players, reduced to tiny, photographically accurate images, are diminished, no longer objects of hero-worship.⁵ Ernie Harwell,

longtime announcer for the Brooklyn Dodgers, New York Giants, Baltimore Orioles, and Detroit Tigers, has done only radio broadcasts since 1964. He describes why he thinks radio is a better medium than television for broadcasting baseball in the following way:

Imagine a basketball game on radio and the announcer says, 'And he scored on a twelve-foot jump shot.' Try to visualize that in your mind's eye--it's hard. You don't know where he shot it from on the court, what kind of motion he used, you don't now who was around him. Same for football. The action's jumbled in your mind. But baseball is perfect--sitting home, you can imagine it all. Everyone knows where first, second, and third bases are, where a shortstop plays for a pull hitter. The game is linear. The bags, the positions, the batter, the pitcher--they're all definite designations. You start with the bare bones, and your creativity fills in the rest. [Smith--And the announcer too, if he's up to it.] Exactly, which is why I think the announcer matters more in baseball than in any other sport. But television is just the opposite. Unlike radio, which allows your mind to see everything, TV doesn't show you nearly enough. See, television accentuates the people, the individual--close-ups, for instance, of a hitter or a pitcher mopping his brow. But there's so much more to baseball than just the hitter-pitcher duel. The problem is that it's a small screen, it's a large area to cover, and the players are so far away from each other--TV can't show you the sweep of the field.

Say you're sitting in the park and a guy lines a double to left-center and a runner scores from first. At the ball park, we see it at once--the runner tearing around the bases and the batter going for two, the fielder chasing the ball, the shortstop going out for the relay throw, the catcher getting ready for the peg--you see it as it's happening. But with TV, all you see are an individual succession of shots. It reduces baseball, makes it smaller than life, less exciting than it is.⁶

To paraphrase poet Donald Hall's felicitous phrase, baseball is played in the green fields of the mind. The fact that radio allows the mind free play in a way that television does not makes the aural experience of a baseball game as described by a gifted storyteller a source of great pleasure to the fan.

The Announcer and the Audience

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, sportswriters and baseball officials (especially Commissioner Landis) felt that it was the announcer's job to "report" the game, not to editorialize or overdramatize. They seemed to feel that there was a contradiction between factual reporting and entertaining the audience. However, as radio baseball became established and announcers became acknowledged as baseball "insiders", it was recognized that the announcer had to entertain as well as describe if he were to attract and maintain an audience. Longtime Pittsburgh Pirates broadcaster Bob Prince describes the approach of Rosey Rowswell, Pittsburgh's first play-by-play man:

The guy could have been a novelist, he had the imagination for it.... You know, I was born in California, went to school in Oklahoma and a couple other places, then on to Harvard before I dropped out of law school--in other words, before deciding to go into baseball, I'd been around--and I'd never heard anything like it. Remember, our teams were almost always lousy, and we'd get way behind in the second inning, and Rosey'd just start talking about poetry and these crazy sayings of his--they all came from his head--and it was like a little kid who gets wound up when he's tired and off he went.

I used to call it a "Rosey Ramble."...I mean, he'd be chirping about the "doozie marooney" and the "dipsy doodle" and about the weather and art. *Anything* but the game. I used to ask him, "Rosey, how can you *talk* about this stuff?" And he'd come back, "Bob, we have sponsors that deserve fans, and we've got listeners that deserve a show. Now if I just sit up there and talk about the facts, we ain't gonna have either." And, Jesus, he was right. You can't just ho-hum it; you have to *entertain*. "It's not just play-by-play that matters," he'd say. "It's what you say between the pitches that counts."⁷

John L. Greenway and F. Scott Regan have both written about the role of the announcer as a storyteller. In this anthropological view, the baseball game functions as a kind of tribal ritual, and the announcer/storyteller functions in the

Homeric tradition, as a storyteller who is also a poet and historian.⁸ Regan stresses the role of the announcer in creating a sense of identification between the community and the team, while Greenway focusses on the announcer's use of narrative in making the ritual of the sporting contest meaningful by relating the past to the present.

Regan likens the role of the baseball announcer to that of the griot, or traditional storyteller, in certain African tribes. Regan contends that the baseball announcer must perform the four functions that folklorist Kathleen White says that the traditional griot was expected to perform: 1) know and share tribal history; 2) sing songs of praise; 3) represent traditional values; 4) entertain. While acknowledging that the griot has no direct counterpart in American culture, he draws parallels between the role and function of the griot and that of the baseball announcer:

When Tiger broadcaster Ernie Harwell reminisces between pitches about the first player to wear shin guards, is he not providing us with tribal history? When Harry Caray leads the crowd in singing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," is he not functioning as a baseball griot, singing songs of praise? When Dizzy Dean warned us "Li'l Leagas" about the evils of "those bases on balls," was he not providing a code of values? When Vin Scully poetically describes the sunset over Dodger Stadium, is he not fulfilling the role of entertainer?⁹

Regan notes the deep connection between fans and announcers, citing Vin Scully's being voted the most memorable personality in the history of the LA Dodgers' franchise, the protests by Detroit fans when Ernie Harwell was fired in 1990, the 600,000 letters of protest from Detroit fans when Ty Tyson was not permitted to do the national broadcast of the 1934 World Series, and the successful campaign by Boston fans in 1937 to keep Fred Hoey on the air.

"These examples of loyalty to the announcer suggest a powerfully significant bond between the announcer and the community."¹⁰ Loyalty to the announcer is also demonstrated by the large numbers of fans who listen to games while at the stadium. "Somehow, they must feel that they wouldn't be getting the full experience without their friend the announcer being there with them."¹¹ Long-time announcers can become so closely identified with their cities and their teams that they become known as the "Voice of" Mel Allen was the Voice of the Yankees (Curtis Smith, who grew up listening to Allen in upper New York State, calls Allen simply, "The Voice"). Dave Van Horn has been the Montreal Expos English-language since the team's inception: he is known as the Voice of the Expos. When Red Barber went to the Yankees after broadcasting fifteen seasons for the Brooklyn Dodgers, some fans regarded it as though a star player had been traded to a hated rival.¹²

The voice of the announcer gets taken into the language of the people of the radio summer night. The voice of the announcer is respoken through the local vernacular, the local oral tradition. Take, for example, southerner red Barber's expressions ("Barberisms") such as "Tearin' up the pea patch," or "Sitting in the catbird seat," southern expressions which became part of the Brooklyn speech pattern in the 1940s. Likewise, Dizzy Dean's malapropisms and tortured syntax achieved a legendary status in the 1940s and 50s. It is not uncommon for fans to imitate the voice of their favorite announcer while calling imaginary games.¹³ Regan calls the home run call a kind of ritualized chant-- knowing what the announcer will say at certain junctures in the game helps

bond the listener to the community. In Pittsburgh, Rosey Rowswell would warn a fictional Aunt Minnie who lived across the street from the ballpark that she should open the window because the ball was coming toward it. Invariably, "Aunt Minnie" wouldn't get the window opened in time. Rowswell's assistant would drop a tray of ball bearings on the floor of the broadcast booth to simulate the sound of glass breaking.¹⁴ Rowswell essentially created an imaginary community that he mediated between the team and the fans.

Regan questions the importance of baseball and wonders whether the telling of baseball tales can be as significant as the griot who functioned as the oral historian for the tribe. He answers the question with his observation that baseball is regarded by Americans as a kind of tribal ritual that defines American culture. And what is the role of the announcer in this tribal ritual? The announcer must have a thorough understanding of baseball rules. He must be able to explain not only the official rules but also the unofficial rules of decorum and strategy.

The announcer who can convey the subtleties of player and managerial strategies not only enhances the listener's appreciation but makes the listening fan feel like a member of the team, as well. The listener is pleased when he or she can anticipate the action via the announcer's analysis....This anticipation brings the fan closer to the action and reinforces his or her identity as a spiritual member of the tribe....as the griot transmitted tribal history, so the team announcer enhances his description of the game with legends, lore, and parallels to past seasons.¹⁵

Similarly, Greenway sees the announcer's function as comparable to that of the oral poet, who makes the heroic act intelligible by putting the present act in the context of archetypal achievements¹⁶ The announcer must have a firm

grasp of historical statistics, which not only measure how well a player is doing but also connect the exploits of contemporary players with the feats of past generations of players. As Regan puts it:

When we listen to the announcer who is steeped in tradition and history, we are listening to the "memory of mankind" and the game takes on a richer meaning. Tennyson wrote, "I am part of all that I have met," and the great announcer can help the fan meet those parts of the game that have become its history.¹⁷

Thus, besides being a reporter, educator, and pitchman, the announcer must also be a poet and historian who binds the community together through his interpretive description of the baseball game.

Radio Baseball and Popular Memory

Popular historians of baseball have regarded the radio announcer as being tied to memories of youth and the passing of generations, occasioning nostalgic reminiscences intimately connected to the domestic space of the middle-class American family. Warren Goldstein's history of the early days of baseball deals with the notion of baseball history and popular memory. In setting out to write a history of baseball that considered both the history and the experience of the game, he was looking for a method that could grasp structural change and development and also account for and assess the significance of the intense and similar emotions expressed about the game at different times.¹⁸ To do so, he posits two kinds of history, one linear, chronological and cumulative, and the other cyclical, generational, and repetitive.

Feeling many of the same excitements, fears, and ambivalences that fans and players have been feeling since baseball began, each participant in

the game is also in a relationship with every other participant in the game throughout its history.¹⁹

Goldstein maintains that it is the combination of unresolvable tensions between the game and its commercial nature as well as the generational turnover of fans that exercises a stabilizing influence on the experience of the game. He observes that baseball memories typically originate in the very recent or the very distant past, illustrating how difficult it is for fans to engage memories and experiences drawn from the time when they lost their innocence.²⁰ Goldstein's baseball history is about what he calls the adolescence of baseball, the time when it became dominated by professionals. This account of the history of radio and baseball can also be viewed as a history of lost innocence, when baseball became irrevocably implicated in the consumer society.

Goldstein offers a useful framework for viewing the meanings that baseball holds for its fans. However, the notion of linear and cyclical time can be extended by attending to the fact that while cyclical time can be seen to link baseball's present to its past and to place its participants (both players and fans) in relation to all other participants at all other times in baseball history, the cycle does not return to the same place. The cultural context in which the popular memory of baseball operates changes over time. We see this in the case of radio baseball. What was an exciting novelty in the 1920s became a possible threat to baseball in the 1930s in the minds of many. Radio baseball became established in the late 1930s and in the period immediately following World War II, and as it did, it interrupted what Voigt calls the linear sense of baseball history and created the impression that baseball history began with the

radio age.²¹ With the rise of television, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the context of the rise of an oppositional youth culture, baseball became a symbol of the establishment, and so did radio baseball. In the 1980s, as Ronald Reagan appealed to the nostalgia for a mythical, earlier, simpler time, baseball flourished as a spectator sport, despite the unease felt over grossly inflated player salaries and drug and sex scandals involving players.

It is perhaps no accident that the most extensive history of baseball broadcasting, *Voices of the Game*, was written by a former senior speechwriter for Reagan. Curtis Smith (who was born in 1949), writes of the baseball announcers he heard in his youth in mythic terms. In his mind, they constituted the greatest array of announcers working at any one time—men like Red Barber, Mel Allen, Dizzy Dean, Curt Gowdy, Vin Scully, Bob Prince, Lindsey Nelson, Bob Elson, Jack Brickhouse, etc.—better than either their predecessors or successors. Smith's book is more a memoir than a history, and he admits it. He does, however, make an important point when he says that the announcers he heard and admired in his youth were “not giants, exactly or even only, but as friends are around the dinner table, almost family.”²²

Radio Baseball and the Fabric of Daily Life

Whether radio baseball functions as a conveyor of consumer values, an advertisement for major league baseball, or a repository of so-called “traditional” patriarchal values, the most important impact that it has had on American life is felt in terms of its place within the fabric of daily life, in the ways

it has been incorporated within domestic space and the types of practices that it has engendered. Many, many writers speak of radio baseball in terms of where they first heard it in their youth—in the family living room, in the family car, or under the bedclothes late at night.

The experience of radio baseball is intimately connected to developments in radio technology. Broadcasts in the early 1920s were as likely to be heard in a public place, a theater, a bar, as in the home. This was in part because most American families did not yet own radios. It was also due in part to the nature of radio technology of the time. Getting clear reception was often difficult, and owning a radio set required at least one member of the family to have the technical knowledge to adjust the batteries, vacuum tubes, and crystals to obtain clear reception.²³ In the early 1920s, radios were manufactured to obtain the best long-distance reception, but as the decade went on, more attention was paid to the appearance of the radio set, the sound quality, and the ease of use. Receivers that operated on electric current rather than batteries were introduced on the market in 1928.²⁴ Auto makers began putting radios in cars in the early 1930s, and portable radios were in use by the late 1930s, allowing Americans to listen to baseball games in the family car and at other places outside the home. In the 1960s, the introduction of transistor radios made it possible for fans to take their radios to the ballpark, where they could follow the narrative thread of the game more closely than they could without the radio.

Proponents of radio baseball in the 1930s, when discussing the promotional benefits of the new medium, often said that radio educated fans who might not go to baseball games, but would develop a taste for it because they could hear the broadcasts at home. The notion that announcers educated legions of new fans, especially children and women, may be seen as self-serving rhetoric, particularly when one considers the way in which educational broadcasters were left out in the cold by the Federal Communications Commission in the 1930s. However, there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that this notion has some truth in it. Robert Creamer, in his foreword to *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat*, describes what it was like to grow up in Brooklyn in the 1940s, when Red Barber was calling the Dodger games on WOR:

Lord, those years were exciting. Everybody talked baseball. If a million people went to Ebbets Fields to see the Dodgers play, ten million listened to Red broadcast their games. I was a Yankee fan in those days--I rooted for the Yanks when they played the Dodgers in the 1941 World Series--but I never listened to the Yankee ball games. I listened to Barber and the Dodgers. Everybody did. In the summer of 1941 you did not need to own a radio to hear Red broadcast. You could walk up a street and hear the game through one open window after another and never miss a pitch. You could thread your way through the crowd on a beach and get the game from a dozen different portables. In traffic you'd hear it from a hundred different cars.

Barber's impact on New York was extraordinary. Everybody knew who Red Barber was, even my maiden aunt--literally. The language he used in his broadcasts became part of everyone's speech. James Thurber used some of it in a memorable short story that was later made into a motion picture. Much of it sounds dated now--sittin' in the catbird seat, tearin' up the pea patch, walkin' in tall cotton, we got a rhubarb growin' in the infield, that bases are FOB: full of Brooklyns--but a cliché is essentially a phrase that is so good everybody keeps repeating it. And Barber was good. Mixed in with all that southern corn were felicitous phrases like "advancing to third on the concomitant error," which flattered his ever-more-knowledgeable audience, an audience that was ever more knowledgeable primarily because of him.

He created fans. They learned about the game of baseball by just listening to the old redhead sitting in his catbird seat tearing up the pea patch. I remember so vividly the mother of a close friend of mine, a lady whose practical knowledge of baseball before Barber was about the same as my present understanding of the political situation in Upper Volta. My friend and I were listening to a Dodger game one afternoon as Red described a play in which the opposing team had a man on first base with no one out. The batter hit a ground ball to shortstop. Pee Wee Reese took it and tossed it to Billy Herman at second for the forceout, but the batter beat Herman's relay to first. The crowd yelled when the double play seemed imminent--the roar of the crowd at Ebbets Field was always shaking the radio--and my friend's mother came hurrying in from the kitchen, carrying a half-peeled potato and a paring knife. Paying no attention to us, she cocked her head to listen. Then she muttered, "Oh well. We got the front man," and trotted back into the kitchen.

Red Barber did that. He did it to me, too, and I thought I knew baseball. He did it by reporting the game--colorfully, brightly, excitingly, and always factually. He loved Brooklyn, but on the air he was a reporter. He told you about the *game*. He told you about it fairly and accurately, and he interpreted it, and in doing so he set standards of excellence that have never been surpassed, and seldom, if ever, equaled.²⁵

Likewise, poet Donald Hall, who has used baseball themes extensively in his work, remembers his first experience of baseball as being connected to the voice of Red Barber:

It began with listening to the Brooklyn Dodgers, about 1939 when I was ten years old. The gentle and vivacious voice of Red Barber floated from the Studebaker radio during our Sunday afternoon drives along the shore of Long Island Sound. My mother and my father and I, wedded together in the close front seat, heard the sounds of baseball--and I was tied to those sounds for the rest of my life.²⁶

Like Creamer and Hall, announcer Ken Coleman's associates his early memories of baseball with the voice of the announcer of his youth:

My generation grew up with radio. People outside of New England may never have heard of Fred Hoey, but he was the voice of my youth. Hoey was a pioneer in New England baseball broadcasting.

A friend tells me that instant nostalgia for him is walking past someone's house on a summer's day and hearing the faint sound of a ball game coming from a radio inside. In a flash, he's back to the days of Jimmy Foxx, Doc Cramer, and Eric McNair. And Fred Hoey.

Many young baseball fans have told me they followed the progress of the 1967 pennant race by listening to Ned Martin and me on transistor radios at the beach.²⁷

And in this way, Coleman the fan, his memories, and his relationship to the history of baseball, are connected, through time, and the experience of radio baseball, with the memories of younger fans, the mythos of the 1967 American League pennant race, and his role as the bard of the Boston Red Sox.

We see in the accounts by Creamer, Hall, and Coleman how the experience of radio baseball is tied up with memories of the domestic space in which radio baseball appears. Hall speaks most eloquently of the ways in which the baseball radiocast serves as a soundtrack for the baseball fan's summer:

All summer the radio kept going. I wrote letters while I listened to baseball. I might not have known what the score was, but the sound comforted me, a background of distant voices. If rain interrupted the game, I didn't want to hear music; it was baseball radio voices that I wanted to hear.

Baseball is a game of years and decades. Al Kaline's children grew up. Rocky Colavito was traded, left baseball, became a mushroom farmer, and came back to baseball as a coach. Jim Bunning turned into a great National League pitcher and retired. Norm Cash had a better year at thirty-five than he had had in nearly a decade. And Al Kaline kept on hitting line drives.

And Jane and I met, and married, and in 1972, the sound of baseball grew louder; Jane loves baseball too. The soft southern sounds of announcers--always from the South, from Red Barber on--filled up the house like plants in the windows, new chairs, and pictures. At night after supper and on weekend afternoons, we heard the long season unwind itself, inning by inning, as vague and precise as ever: the patter of the

announcer and, behind him, always, like an artist's calligraphy populating a background more important than the foreground, the baseball sounds of vendors hawking hot dogs, Coke, and programs; the sudden rush of noise from the crowd when a score was posted; the flat slap of a bat and again the swelling crowd yells; the Dixieland between innings; even the beer jngles.

We listened on the dark screen porch, an island in the leaves and bushes, in the faint distant light from the street, while the baseball cricket droned against the real crickets of the yard. We listened while reading newspapers or washing up after dinner. We listened in bed when the Tigers were on the West Coast, just hearing the first innings, then sleeping into the game to wake with the dead gauze sound of the abandoned air straining and crackling beside the bed. Or we went to bed and turned out the lights late in the game, and started to doze as the final pitches gathered in the dark, and when the game ended with a final out and the organ played again, a hand reached out in the dark, over a sleeping shape, to turn off the sound.²⁸

The sounds of baseball through the radio serve as a backdrop to the small details of daily life, connecting memories through the years. In 1987, *Sports Illustrated* published an issue devoted to a photographic record of one day in the life of baseball. One of the pieces dealt with radio baseball. Titled "How Sweet It Is," the piece pictured Baltimore announcer Jon Miller at work. On the facing page, there was a photograph of an old man sitting in a rocking chair on the porch of a wood frame house. There was a flag on the porch, and the man was holding a transistor radio to his ear.²⁹ Here we see radio baseball wedded to iconic images of patriotic American values—the flag, the frame house, the old man rocking on the porch—that connect with idyllic notions of a simpler time in the nation's history.

Nostalgia

As the originary moment of radio baseball faded into distant memory, it became part of the mythologized history of the game, an occasion for nostalgia. This nostalgic view tends to efface the close relationship between commerce and the radio baseball experience. However, even within the description of such a momentous and exciting event of the one-game playoff between the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox at the end of the 1949 season, pleasure and commerce are inextricably connected, as we hear in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. The play-by-play description and the commercial copy are broken by the sound of the crowd, crowd mikes turned up. The sounds of the crowd lend a sense of immediacy, putting the radio audience there with the crowd, through the announcer's description. The listener becomes part of the crowd, and his experience of the game, whether at home or at the tavern, is validated through its association with the beer and the baseball experience. The product Ballantine is tied to baseball as one of the two "B's", baseball and Ballantine. The roaring of the crowd is a mnemonic, "here's the game." The commercial copy portrays the broadcast as a pleasant diversion in leisure hours and constructs the listener as a male consumer of the sponsor's product.

The nostalgic view also elevates the mythos of radio baseball while ignoring or even falsifying the historical record. In an audio cassette titled "Baseball's Greatest Moments," the introduction states, "Baseball and the radio have always been connected. Whether you listen on Dad's car radio,

Grandpa's tabletop, or your own transistor under the pillow, nothing can capture baseball's best moments like radio."³⁰ As we have seen, not everyone was always of the view that radio and baseball belonged together, and certainly the fact that radio was invented long after baseball was puts a lie to the first statement. But no matter, for the idea behind such a production as "Baseball's Greatest Moments" is to forge a connection between today's baseball fan and the experiences of past generations of baseball fans and the exploits of the heroes of the past. The familiar themes of the domestic experience of listening to radio baseball and the connection that baseball has for succeeding generations of males are neatly dovetailed in this introduction. In addition, some of the items on the cassette are re-creations, but they are not billed as such. For example, there is a radio call of Babe Ruth's 60th home run in 1927. The historical record shows that neither the Yankees, nor their opponents, the Washington Senators, permitted broadcasts of their games in 1927.

Such anachronisms can be seen in other media. It is a measure of our expectation of having the events of a baseball game described to and interpreted for us that biographical film treatments of baseball players have used the stock figure of the announcer even when the historical record shows that they were not present at the events in question. One example of this is from the movie "The Babe." In a scene near the end of the movie, Babe Ruth, played by John Goodman, hits three home runs in a game. The actual event occurred in May, 1935 in Pittsburgh, when Ruth was playing out the end of his career for the Boston Braves. In the scene, there is an announcer in Forbes Field calling

the play-by-play. The device is employed to build up the drama of the moment. In fact, the only radio broadcasts being done from Pittsburgh in 1935 were recreations, not live broadcasts.

Radio Baseball in the Movies

Contemporary baseball movies have used the announcer as both interpreter of the baseball action for the film audience and as a comic foil by playing with generally-accepted notions of the professional responsibilities of the announcer. Apart from bio-pics (*The Babe*, *Cobb*, *The Monty Stratton Story*, *Fear Strikes Out*, *Pride of the Yankees*) and histories (*Eight Men Out*), most baseball movies are comedies, often with an element of fantasy involved. Some of the more popular baseball movies of the last ten years are *Bull Durham*, *Major League*, *Field of Dreams*, *Rookie of the Year*, and *Little Big League*, all but one (*Field of Dreams*) of which are comedies. Only *Bull Durham* does not include fantasy as a plot device. In all of the movies that deal with the fortunes of a major or minor league club in the story line, there is a radio announcer, whose commentary is used to narrate the game events. In contemporary baseball movies, the figure of the radio announcer is usually treated in a comic fashion, where the character's mannerisms play off against generally-accepted notions of the role of the baseball announcer.

The announcer is generally a minor character. In *Rookie of the Year* (1993), John Candy plays an excitable announcer given to forgetting that he is on air at times, criticizing the Cubs, and destroying his equipment when he is excited. Wally Holland, the announcer in *Little Big League* (1994), is rather

colorless himself, but the comic relief comes from his statistician, a whacked out looking slacker who feeds Holland some very esoteric statistics:

There's Jerry Johnson, celebrating his eleventh season with the Twins. He's had a rough go of it so far, his batting average .194. That's nearly 80 points below his career average. Strike one. Oh boy, he sure looked bad swinging at that pitch. Last year, though, he was sixth in the American League at hitting right handers he was facing for the first time after the seventh inning at home. So that's something to keep in mind.

Even though baseball is a game of statistics, there is a point at which an announcer can get carried away with using statistics, and he especially must be careful to use meaningful statistics rather than the kind in this exaggerated example.

Real-life announcer Bob Uecker plays the role of the announcer in *Major League* (1989). The plot line revolves around the attempt by the team's owner to field the worst team possible so that attendance will fall to such a level that she can get out of the stadium lease with the city of Cleveland and move the Indians to Miami. Uecker's character, stuck with describing the follies of a team of talentless misfits, deals with the situation by getting drunk during every broadcast and telling the audience how lousy he thinks the team really is, sometimes using rather profane language. This is an obvious take-off on Harry Caray, an announcer not above criticizing the home team. He is well-known for consuming a significant amount of the sponsor's product in the broadcast booth or when he joins the Wrigley Field bleacher bums in the stands during the broadcast.

Angels in the Outfield, a 1994 remake of the 1951 original, is one movie in which the announcer has a more prominent role. In the movie, George Knox,

the unpopular manager of the California Angels, starts receiving messages from angels through a young fan. This leads Knox to make some rather unorthodox managerial decisions, such as substituting the team's worst hitter for the team's best hitter. Knox has a feud with the team's radio announcer, the egomaniacal Ranch Wilder, dating back to their playing days, when Wilder injured Knox in a collision at home plate, ruining Knox's career. Wilder is a despicable individual and flouts most of the conventions of baseball announcing: he refuses to allow his color man to talk ("Less is more, Roger."), drinks in the radio booth, never has his broadcast well-prepared, and criticizes Knox on the air. He does everything in his power to malign Knox and undermine his authority, including revealing to the press that Knox is basing some of his decisions on what the angels tell the young boy. This leads to Knox's having to explain his actions to the press with his job and baseball career on the line. The moment is saved by the foster mother of the young boy, who invokes the age-old saw of the underdog: "You gotta believe." Ranch Wilder gets his comeuppance in the end. The final straw comes in the ninth inning of the championship game. The angels have told the young boy that they will not interfere in a championship game, so the players are on their own. They also tell him that the pitcher, Mel Clark, will die within six months. With the Angels up by one run with the bases loaded and the Chicago White Sox most powerful hitter at the plate, Knox leaves the tiring Clark in the game. Clark has nothing left and wants Knox to take him out. The young boy tries to inspire Clark by standing in front of the dugout and waving his arms in a flying motion. Everyone in the stadium does

the same. When Wilder refuses to go along with the magic of the moment, calling the strategy of leaving Clark in the game the stupidest thing he has ever seen, the owner of the club loses patience with Wilder's antics. When Clark manages to get the final out, Wilder exclaims that he cannot believe it. The club owner walks into the radio booth and fires Wilder on the spot, and the color man takes over the mike. This time, he gets to tell Wilder to be quiet, that less is more.

It is interesting to note that in the film treatments of the baseball announcer, the scriptwriter adopts a critical attitude toward the conventions of baseball announcing insofar as they relate to the description of the game and notions of on-air decorum, but there are no examples where the role of the announcer as pitchman for the sponsors' products is lampooned. It should also be noted that in *Bull Durham* (1988), the announcer does the Durham Bulls' road games via telegraph reports, a device that invokes nostalgia for the past. In this most realistic of baseball films, it is somewhat ironic that a less-critical take on the baseball announcer should be taken than is seen in the more lightweight baseball comedies cited above.

Conclusion

There are several main themes that run through popular cultural views of radio baseball. First, we see the announcer described as a storyteller, or perhaps more accurately, an interpreter of the action on the baseball field. F. Scott Regan and John Greenaway regard the announcer as analogous to the African griot or the Homeric bard. The identification with the announcer rather

than the form of the broadcast in commentaries or popular cultural treatments of radio baseball has to do with the importance of the announcer to the broadcast itself. This occurs mainly because of the slow pace of the game and the responsibility of the announcer to fill up the space between the pitches. This is done by not only describing the alignment of the players on the field and outlining the strategic possibilities in the game situations but also by imparting history and lore and by contextualizing the events of the game within the events of the season and the course of baseball history. As a result, many fans have come to identify deeply with the announcer as the voice of their teams.

Popular history tends to mythologize radio baseball, celebrating the announcers and bathing the whole enterprise in a haze of nostalgia that obscures the historical record and ignores the commercial nature of the broadcast. Popular memories of radio baseball tend to focus on the connection between the announcer and the fans, early memories of baseball fandom and the educative role of the announcer, and associations with the domestic spaces reached by the broadcast--the car, the living room, the beach, under the bedclothes, on the front porch.

NOTES

¹Austin Straus, "The Announcer" in "Innings and Quarters," Newalliance Records, 1992.

²F. Scott Regan, "Baseball, Time, and the Storyteller" p. 219.

³Regan, p. 214.

⁴Ibid.

- ⁵David Quentin Voigt, *America Through Baseball*, (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976), pp. 193-195.
- ⁶Curtis Smith, *Voices of the Game*, (South Bend, IN: Diamond Communications, Inc., 1987), p. 242.
- ⁷Smith, p. 76.
- ⁸Regan, p. 213; John Greenway, "Ritual and Narrative in the Sports Spectacular" *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 19, #3, Winter 1985, p. 59.
- ⁹Regan, pp. 212-213.
- ¹⁰Regan, p. 215.
- ¹¹Regan, p. 216.
- ¹²Harvey Frommer, *New York City Baseball: The Last Golden Aged, 1947-1957* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p. 43.
- ¹³Voigt, *America Through Baseball*, pp. 194-195.
- ¹⁴Smith, p. 77.
- ¹⁵Regan, p. 218.
- ¹⁶Greenway, p. 57.
- ¹⁷Regan, p. 218.
- ¹⁸ Warren Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 2.
- ¹⁹Goldstein, p. 2.
- ²⁰Goldstein, p. 3.
- ²¹Voigt, *America Through Baseball*, p. 195.
- ²²Smith, p. 575.
- ²³Daniel Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 73-74.
- ²⁴Czitrom, p. 78.
- ²⁵Red Barber and Robert Creamer, *Rhubarb in the Catbird Seat* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 12-13.

²⁶Donald Hall, *Fathers Playing Catch With Sons: Essays on Sport [Mostly Baseball]* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), p. 9.

²⁷Ken Coleman, *So You Want to Be a Sportscaster* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973), p. 7.

²⁸Hall, pp. 10-11.

²⁹*Sports Illustrated*, July 6, 1987.

³⁰"Baseball's Greatest Moments" Worldwide Entertainment Marketing, Gary Kreissman, producer, 1991.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The interwar period in the United States was characterized by profound social and cultural changes. These changes were wrought by the ascendance of consumer capitalism and the development of technology, most notably the automobile and radio. The family car permitted Americans to “discover” the country, and radio broadcasting brought both culture and commerce (in the form of advertising) into the family home. However, these new cultural institutions were not the accidental or natural results of the union of capitalism and technology. The developments of the institutions of the family car and radio broadcasting were also shaped by marketing strategies and social policy and legislation.

One area of the social history of the interwar period that has been under-researched is the development of the cultural institution of radio baseball. This institution had its beginnings in the mid-1920s, but firmly established itself only in the mid-to-late-1930s, when advertisers and broadcasters found that radio baseball attracted an audience large enough to justify paying baseball clubs for the right to broadcast baseball games. Academic works on the relationship between sport and the media have examined the influence of technology on the rise in popularity of sports, the sports/media relationship as a product of monopoly capitalism, and the transformations of sport by broadcasting technology, especially television, but there has yet been no comprehensive examination of the evolution of radio broadcasting of baseball that incorporates elements of all three of these approaches.

Radio baseball is an interesting area of study for several reasons. First, radio was the first broadcast technology, and its development as a vehicle of commerce reveals a great deal about the development of consumerism in America. Second, baseball was the dominant spectator sport in the 1920s and 1930s, and baseball was the first major sport to be broadcast extensively. Third, there was a great deal of debate in the 1930s over the effects of radio baseball on attendance at baseball games, and the terms and direction of that debate reveal a lot about the concerns of sports promoters (club owners, baseball officials, and sportswriters) and the evolution of the institutional relationships that characterize today's sports/media complex. Finally, it has often been asserted that radio baseball exemplifies a perfect fit between technology and cultural form. Why is this so? How have announcing practices been shaped? Was that fit obvious at first, and how is it regarded today? All of these questions appear to offer rich possibilities for research and analysis.

Chapter one sets the parameters of the project, outlines the questions that guided the research for this thesis, and establishes a methodology. The topic is the local broadcasting of major league baseball games. The 1930s was chosen as the focal time frame because that was the period when radio baseball became firmly established and a set of professional standards around announcing practices evolved. Because announcing practices have evolved around developments in technology such as television, magnetic audio tape, and the computer, the time frame extended beyond the 1930s in chapter four, which also described the contemporary form of the baseball radiocast. Chapter

five, which examined the fan experience, also drew on contemporary sources and responses.

The following questions guided the research: How does baseball fit into the history of radio broadcasting in the United States? What is the importance of radio baseball in the history of relations between baseball and the media in general? How did the role of the broadcasters become defined by the fans, the media, the advertisers of baseball games, and the owners of major league baseball clubs? What is the aesthetic of radio baseball? How has the fan experience been shaped by baseball broadcasting practices? How does the fan experience fit into the fabric of daily life? These are questions that have not been adequately addressed in histories of radio baseball to this point.

The material in chapter two is drawn from histories of broadcasting, advertising, and sports and the media. Most of the material in chapters three and four comes from *The Sporting News*, the foremost baseball journal of the 1920s and 30s. The reports of the league meetings dealing with the radio baseball debate, the editorial comment on the issue, and the reports on broadcasting arrangements reached by ball clubs, advertisers, and broadcasters provided a wealth of detail about these developments not found anywhere else. The attitudes of fans and sportswriters to the work of the announcers expressed in *The Sporting News* provided a discursive frame within which professional standards for baseball announcers evolved. Material from poetry, literature, popular baseball history, and contemporary baseball films were the source material for chapter five, which deals with the fan

experience and responses to radio baseball. In chapters three, four, and five, much of the concern was with describing the discourses around radio baseball, and the source material was chosen with this in mind.

Radio baseball emerged in the 1920s, at a time when baseball was the dominant professional sport in the United States, having achieved its status as America's national pastime by the 1890s. The popularity of organized professional baseball was in large part due to the attention given to baseball coverage in American newspapers prior to the 1920s. The role of the railroad and telegraph were critical in the development of viable professional inter-city baseball leagues in the decades after the Civil War. Radio provided a means of disseminating baseball information and promoting baseball to large numbers of people at the same time. However, many in the baseball establishment were wary of baseball's possible effect on attendance or dismissed the medium's ability to excite fan interest. Furthermore, the commercial viability of radio was not at all clear in the medium's early years. For one thing, many in the radio industry had to overcome their reluctance to advertise directly on the radio. This was overcome when it was found that direct advertising did not, as had been feared, alienate most listeners. In the face of the economic crisis of the Great Depression, advertisers became more aggressive in their techniques and turned to radio as the medium that could provide the best return on the advertising dollar.

These developments took place within a policy environment that favored commercial broadcasting by equating commercial broadcasting with the public

interest and non-commercial broadcasting with special interests. From the time of the first Washington Radio Conference in 1923 to the establishment of the temporary Federal Radio Commission in 1927 and the Federal Communications Commission in 1934, federal regulators favored commercial broadcasters in assigning them the clear channels and permitting them more on-air hours. By the mid-1930s, American broadcasting had become established as a commercial system in which advertisers controlled most of the programming.

It was ultimately the interest of advertisers in buying air time to broadcast baseball games that would overcome the doubters in the baseball establishment who feared radio. At first, there was little awareness of the possible commercial benefits of radio for baseball club owners. However, as more interest was shown by advertisers in sponsoring radio baseball in the mid-1930s, more teams began to broadcast their games. Eventually, club owners began charging stations for the broadcast rights, a practice that was made mandatory in the American League in 1936. Even those club officials most opposed to baseball broadcasts found it within their economic interests to allow them. The first year that all 16 major league teams allowed regular broadcasts of games was 1939. It is a measure of the increasing importance of broadcasting to major league revenues that between 1933 and 1939, the total of rights fees for local radio broadcasts paid to major league teams increased from \$18,000 to \$885,000. When the property status of baseball games, and, by extension, baseball broadcasts, was established through two landmark court

decisions in 1938, the pattern was set for the current commercial relationship between sports and the broadcast media.

Baseball announcing practices were defined in relation to standards of contemporary sports journalism, the demands of the club owners and advertisers, and the form of the game itself. Consequently, the baseball announcer stands at the nexus of the various relationships that have come to inhere in the structure of major league baseball, and, as such, is subject to a mixture of demands and expectations that come not only from the other producers of the broadcast but also from the fans who listen to the broadcasts.

Since the late 1930s, when baseball announcing achieved a truly professional status, most baseball broadcasters have self-consciously aspired to the standards of what they consider to be objective "reporting." In addition, the success of the announcer has depended, in part, on the extent to which he is able to negotiate the tensions that might exist among the interests of the ballclub, the sponsor, the league, and the announcer and adhere to what he thinks is the best approach to giving the audience an honest, interesting, and believable description of a baseball game.

The conventions of baseball announcing have remained relatively unchanged since the late 1930s, except for practices that have been altered by the elimination of telegraph re-creations and the use of television during radio broadcasts. Although general announcers on early World Series broadcasts were criticized for their lack of knowledge of baseball rules and terminology, announcers who did regular local broadcasts were generally well-accepted by

fans. These announcers were drawn from the ranks of sportswriters in the early days of radio baseball. Baseball announcers with radio backgrounds and former baseball players were hired to do major league broadcasts beginning in the 1930s. Until the late 1930s, announcers were hired by the radio stations who did the baseball broadcasts. Then ad agencies handling sponsors' accounts began entering into contractual arrangements with the announcers. Club owners began employing the announcers in the mid 1940s. In whatever case, it was the club owner who retained final say over who would broadcast the games.

Although it was shown that fans and sportswriters took part in the discourses that shaped announcers' approaches to broadcasting games, most evidence shows that baseball officials and advertisers had the most influence on shaping announcing practices, apart from the formal demands of the game. For example, the Commissioner of Baseball began exercising his authority over the choice of announcers for the World Series in the early 1930s. He also told announcers that their role was to report the action but not to criticize players, managers, and umpires. Beginning in 1937, the American League attempted to control second-guessing of umpires and managers and criticism of players by appointing an official to monitor the broadcasts. Advertisers started holding preseason meetings of announcers in the mid-30s and monitoring the work of the announcers during the season.

Announcers themselves responded to criticism and institutional pressures by adopting a professional ethic. On one level, their conception of

their work was influenced by journalistic notions of objectivity. In this case, "objectivity" referred to both a type of naive realism and an attitude of impartiality toward the fortunes of either team. Although most, if not all, announcers adhered to the first sense of the term, inasmuch as they refrained from adding editorial comment to their descriptions of the game, not all announcers have been totally impartial in their attitudes toward the teams on the field. On another level, many announcers have adhered to the notion that a good baseball announcer is first and foremost a good reporter. However, despite the conception in the minds of many that an announcer must choose between being an entertainer or a reporter, the best announcers have realized that there is no contradiction between the two roles. In fact, the announcer's job is often conceived as being a combination entertainer, reporter, teacher, and promoter. Some critics maintain that the announcer's role as promoter of the game and pitchman for the sponsors' products renders pretensions to journalism by announcers as invalid.

Several technological developments have affected announcing practices since the late 1930s. By the mid-50s, all major league teams were sending their announcers on the road to do live broadcasts of games. This put an end to the practice of re-creating road games from telegraph reports. The development of magnetic recording tape has freed announcers from the responsibility of doing all commercials as live reads. Television replays have made it possible for announcers to criticize the work of umpires with impunity.

An examination of the form of a typical baseball radiocast show that the announcer's task is determined by four main factors: the structure of the game, the status of the broadcast as an advertising vehicle, the need to describe the game accurately, with a deep knowledge of the rules and game strategy, and the need to entertain the audience by conveying the excitement and drama of the contest and by filling in the pauses in the action with anecdotes, humor, and a contextualization of the game within the course of the season and the history of baseball.

The audience experience of radio baseball as expressed in popular histories of radio baseball, meditations on the game, and movies usually focuses on the fans' identification with the announcer and memories of the spaces in which radio baseball is heard. The formal aspects of the baseball game, with its slow pace and pauses in the action, places demands on the announcer that other sports do not. This creates a sense of identification between the announcers and the fans. If a sporting event and the broadcast of that event is a type of tribal ritual, then the announcer can be likened to the griot, the African storyteller. He functions like an oral poet who imparts lore and history, represents traditional values, celebrates achievements, and entertains. Examples of fan loyalty to announcers can be seen in the designation of some announcers as the voice of their teams, the protests over the firings of Fred Hoey and Ernie Harwell, and the Los Angeles Dodgers' fans voting Vin Scully as the most important and popular figure in franchise history. The speech mannerisms of announcers can also be seen to be taken into the local

vernacular in the form of Red Barber's sayings and the speech of young boys as they imitate the announcer's voice in calling imaginary baseball games.

Developments in radio technology that made radios portable and easier to use made it possible for fans to listen to baseball games in a variety of domestic settings besides the family living room--the car, the cottage, the beach, and under the bedclothes at night. Many fans even listen to transistor radios in the ballpark. The reminscences of baseball fans and their early experience of baseball come back time and again to the theme of radio baseball as intimately connected to memories of domestic space.

These types of memories are in part responsible for the mythologization of radio baseball, its history, its experience, and its relation to baseball history. Popular histories of radio baseball focus on the announcer, the voice of the historian's youth. The reassuring and familiar voice of the announcer creates the notion of a dream world that conjures up nostalgic memories of a simpler time, before television brought greed into full focus. Radio is thought of as having always been connected with baseball, though the historical record shows otherwise. For many fans, it is as if baseball history began with the advent of radio in the 1920s.

Finally, two themes emerge in an examination of the film treatment of the baseball announcer. Our expectation that the action of the game should be interpreted by an announcer has led makers of movie biographies of baseball players to place an announcer in some scenes where the historical record shows that there was no announcer at that game at that time. The stock role of

the announcer in baseball comedies uses the announcer to interpret the action in the game sequences. These movies usually give the announcer's role a comedic aspect, in which the character's foibles play against broadly accepted notions of the professional ethic of the baseball announcer--no swearing, no criticizing, no overuse of statistics, and so on.

This thesis has looked at radio baseball from a number of angles, attempting to address gaps in other treatments of the history of the genre. There is not a single underlying theme to this project, but for the notion that the evolution of a cultural form comes out of a series of discourses about that form. We see this in the debate about baseball and attendance that took place in the 1930s. It is not surprising that several treatments of the sports/media relationship (Betts, Lever and Wheeler, Voigt) have to do with the effect of the media on the *popularity* of sport. The original discourse of the club owners to a large extent determines the terms of the inquiries by academics. One other problem emerges in a study of this sort. The baseball historian inevitably bumps up against the mythology of the game as expressed in popular baseball history. It is easy to fall into the trap of viewing developments in baseball history in mythic terms, in terms of heroic deeds, where one or several men made outstanding and decisive contributions to the course of baseball history. In the standard accounts of the history of radio baseball, the figures of sportscaster Graham McNamee and club executive Larry MacPhail loom large. McNamee became famous for his descriptions of World Series games in the 1920s and 30s, and while he was the first person to exploit the dramatic possibilities of a

baseball broadcast, his contributions must be weighed against the criticism that he was not as accurate a “reporter” as he might have been and that it was, in fact, the broadcasters who described baseball games on a daily basis who were most responsible for turning on fans to the possibilities of radio baseball. MacPhail is given great credit for consolidating radio’s function as a medium for the promotion of major league baseball, but the record shows that he was at first cautious in his use of radio and that it was due more to the efforts of advertising executives and club owners such as William Wrigley and Emil Fuchs that the doubters of the efficacy of baseball broadcasting were overcome. The part played by the legal and policy environment, which favored the commercial broadcasters and determined that the sport promoter (club owner) properly held the broadcast rights, is ignored altogether in the popular histories.

One observation about the popular memory of baseball broadcasting needs to be made. Once the commercial basis of baseball broadcasting was established by the late 1930s, baseball announcers were compelled to weave advertising announcements into the broadcast. While this did not serve by itself to corrupt a sport that has been associated with commerce since the first time admission was charged to view a game, it did further implicate the sport in the consumer ethic. Thus, the form of the baseball broadcast cannot be viewed in isolation from its function as an advertising vehicle. The very experience of the game for the radio listener was indelibly associated with consumer products that had little to do with the game itself but very much to do with the image of the citizen as consumer. As has been seen, however, popular memories of radio

baseball tend to focus on a close identification with the announcer and nostalgic remembrances of the place of radio baseball in the domestic space, and the commercialism of the broadcast is placed very much in the background.

This thesis has attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of the history of radio baseball that addresses some of the inadequacies of other treatments of radio baseball. On the one hand, it does not merely view the baseball radiocast as a form of entertainment shaped by commercial considerations that simply reflect the dominant relations of monopoly capitalism. Such an approach ignores the evolution of institutional relationships that have come to inhere in the production of radio baseball, including the development of a set of announcing conventions and the aesthetic dimension of the broadcast. On the other hand, the history of radio baseball is more than a chronicle of the careers of the famous announcers, for this approach does not adequately contextualize radio baseball within the history of American broadcasting, including the legal and policy environment and the history of radio advertising. It has tried to show that the debate over the relationship between radio and baseball that took place in the 1930s and the eventual shape that that relationship took was influenced by considerations other than those of club owners, broadcasters and advertisers. This relationship was determined in no small part by legal decisions that deemed the baseball game as a private exhibition put on by the sports promoter, who then held the rights to the broadcasts, which he could sell to the highest bidder. These legal decisions laid the basis for the lucrative arrangements that exist between sports

promoters, advertisers, and announcers today. Contrary to the view that sees television as the medium that has profoundly changed the relationship between sport, the media, and the fan, this view sees radio, the first broadcasting medium, as having ushered in the current era in sport/media relations, for better or for worse.

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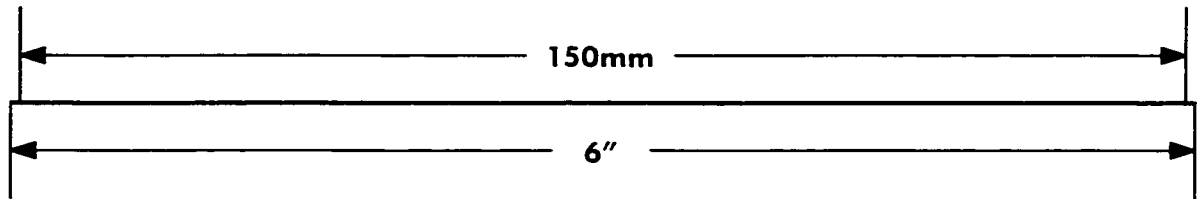
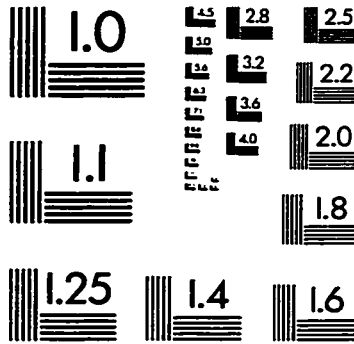
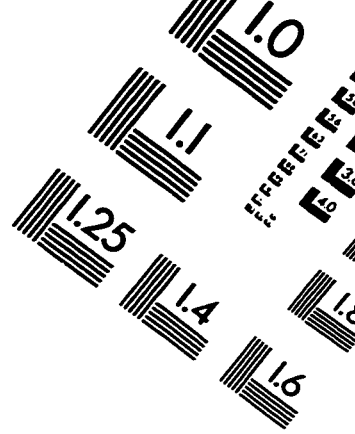
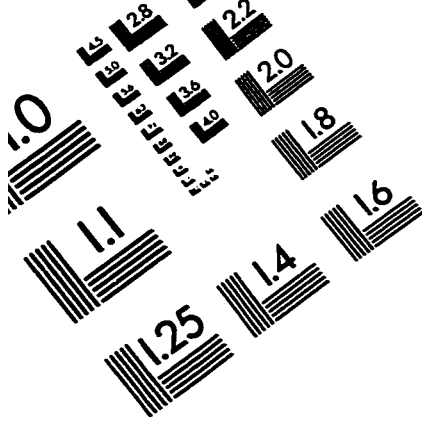
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