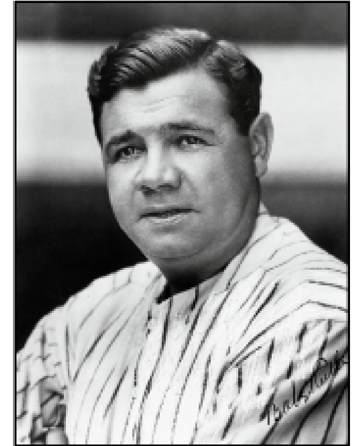
Babe Ruth

7-time World Series Champion
Career Batting Average: .342
Career Home Runs: 714
Career Pitching Record: 94-46
Career ERA: 2.28
1st in All-Time slugging percentage: .690
1st in All-Time OPS: 1.164



2019 Campaign | Edition No. 28 | November 22, 2019

LET THE PREPARATIONS BEGIN!

Thanks to the ~~meddling~~ helpful assistance of ~~that accursed interloper~~ my beloved Brother-in-Law BlowTorch, it now looks like Jim Ed's Coronation will take place either on **Friday, January 31, or Saturday, February 1**, and so please mark your calendars accordingly. Even though the earlier dates announced were much more convenient for the other twelve league members, because we would have been cutting short BlowTorch's multi-week boondoggle to Florida by a couple of days, we will all adjust our schedules to accommodate him and plan on this Night of Nights on January 31 or February 1. Please keep both of these dates blocked on your calendar so that you will be able to attend. More details to come as communications with the Pope (B.T.) permit.

CHRISTMAS LUNCH - DECEMBER 20

Not a single dang one of you has indicated one way or the other whether you are available for the proposed HSL Christmas Lunch at Jam's on Friday, December 20. Nothing like being a voice in the wilderness. Well, hang it all, boys, I will be there with Christmas bells on that day, and if any of you care to join me, I would be honored, particularly if you pick up the tab. But if I have to dine and dash alone, so be it.

THE DRAFT: MARCH 22 IN SCOTTSDALE?

Here again, my exceedingly ~~annoying~~ hospitable Br'er-in-Law has ~~selfishly~~ selflessly agreed to host next year's Draft at his humble abode in Scottsdale on March 22 (or is it 21?). So far, I only count three "takers" on this proposal, and none of them are nick-named U-Bob or Pipsqueak. Not to worry, sayeth Br'er-in-Law, for he has powers of persuasion that go far beyond ordinary mortals, and he insists that he will be able to

convince, goad, hector, chide, humiliate, browbeat, badger, bully and/or ultimately through brute force produce appearances from Bob and Denny for a March 21 or 22 Draft in Scottsdale.

B.T. has offered to have the Lincoln lads, and anyone else who wants to catch a ride, picked up in his Luxury Mobile Wastewater Treatment Van and whisked down through the plains of Kansas, the mountains of Colorado, and the barren stretches through New Mexico and northern Arizona to the destination city of Scottsdale. With any luck, the travel time will be considerably shorter than the last trip to Arizona in 2012 for the Dry Heat Draft, when 2/3 of our Lincoln contingency drove to Grand Island to catch a flight on Despair Air, embarking on a circuitous route from there to Kearney, Sioux Falls, North Platte, Boise, Scottsbluff, Pueblo, CO, Tucumcari, and then Phoenix, *sans* in-flight peanuts and other snacks, but otherwise, so worth it. So let's plan on it.

THE TRIP

There was nothing but Radio Silence in response to my suggestion that the 2020 HSL Trip be to Baltimore on the **weekend of June 5-7, 2020**. Big shocker there. ***PLEASE*** let me know if any of you would even consider attending a Hot Stove League junket to watch baseball at Oriole Park at Camden Yard that weekend.

CLOSING THE BOOK: *ONCE MORE*

This Saturday morning past, I finally closed the book on *Once More Around the Park*, having finished with a bittersweet taste in my mouth the sixth[1] and last of Roger Angell's books of collected baseball writings that I have read. I had been both relishing and dreading the moment of completion. Relishing it because I don't like unfinished business, and I have been aiming for years to complete the Angell circuit, and also so I can share a few more mouth-watering plums with all of you. And dreading it because, when it's over, it's over, since Angell at age 99 (DOB: Sept. 19, 1920) is unlikely to publish any more baseball books or articles.

Ever since starting *Once More* in the middle of October, I have essentially been tapping the brakes, spacing my reading of this book out over time so as not to get through it too fast. The book is so agreeably readable that I probably could have finished it off in about three days of bedtime and early morning reading, but like all good things that we don't want to come to an end, I wanted to savor the sweet taste of the Angell prose for as long as possible.

And finally, as I have said, I closed the book on *Once More* last Saturday morning by sipping away at the sweet prose of the final chapter, elegantly titled The Inner Game, the concluding paragraphs of which will follow and conclude this issue. But first . . . .

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[1]

(1972) *The Summer Game*
(1977) *Five Seasons: A Baseball Companion*
(1982) *Late Innings: A Baseball Companion*
(1988) *Season Ticket: A Baseball Companion*
(1991) *Once More Around the Park: A Baseball Reader*
(2003) *Game Time: A Baseball Companion*

How It All Started
(from the Preface)

One more ride on the local brings back for me the precise tone of voice—at once polite and venturesome, weighing and inviting—with which William Shawn, my editor at the *New Yorker*, first suggests that I might want to try my hand at some sort of baseball piece for the magazine. It is the winter of 1962, and in time we decide that I should head down to the spring training camps in Florida and see what I find there. The assignment is vague and I am apprehensive. It has not occurred to me that I am beginning what will turn out to be a longish journey, but for Shawn, I later came to realize, every piece contained boundless possibilities. He never put limits on what one of his reports might discover out there, or how the subject should be attacked, or what length or tone or turn the article would take in the end, or what its writer might wish to look into next. His patience had no boundaries, and his curiosity and passion for facts always seemed to exceed my own. Everyone who was lucky enough to write for Shawn had this same exhilarating and sustaining experience and came to count on it across the years. He was not a baseball fan, I discovered, but that didn't matter. One afternoon after I'd handed in that first piece, or perhaps the one that came next, there was a polite tap at my door and he walked in, with some galleys of mine in his hand. He apologized and then came forward and pointed out a place on the proof. "What's this?" he asked.

I looked and said, "Oh, that's a double play."

"I'm sorry," he said, "but what's a double play?"

I explained, and I can still see the look of barely suppressed excitement in his eyes and the pinkish flush on his cheeks as the news sank home.

"Really?" he whispered. *"Really?"*

I laughed a little when he'd left, but then I stopped and thought about the D.P. again, almost for the first time in years, and saw the wonder of it. He'd set me on my way.

Box Scores — April 1963

Today the *Times* reported the arrival of the first pitchers and catchers at the spring training camps, and the morning was abruptly brightened, as if by the delivery of a seed catalogue. The view from my city window still yields only frozen tundras of trash, but now spring is guaranteed and one of my favorite urban flowers, the baseball box score, will burgeon and flourish through the warm, languid, information-packed weeks and months just ahead. I can remember a spring, not too many years ago, when a prolonged New York newspaper strike threatened to extend itself into the baseball season, and my obsessively fannish mind tried to contemplate the desert prospect of a summer without daily box scores. The thought was impossible; it was like trying to think about infinity. Had I been deprived of those tiny lists of sporting personae and accompanying columns of runs batted in, strikeouts, double plays, assists, earned runs, and the like, all served up in neat three-inch packages from Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, Baltimore, Houston, and points east and west, only the most aggressive kind of blind faith would have convinced me that the season had begun at all or that its distant, invisible events had any more reality than the silent collision of molecules. This year, thank heaven, no such crisis of belief impends; summer will be admitted to our breakfast table as usual, and in the space of half a cup of coffee I will be able to discover, say, that Ferguson

Jenkins went eight innings in Montreal and won his fourth game of the season while giving up five hits, that Al Kaline was horse-collared by Fritz Peterson at the Stadium, that Tony Oliva hit a double and a single off Mickey Lolich in Detroit, that Juan Marichal was bombed by the Reds in the top of the sixth at Candlestick Park, and that similar disasters and triumphs befell a couple of dozen-odd of the other ballplayers—favorites and knaves—whose fortunes I follow from April to October.

The box score, being modestly arcane, is a matter of intense indifference, if not irritation, to the non-fan. To the baseball-bitten, it is not only informative, pictorial, and gossipy but lovely in aesthetic structure. It represents happenstance and physical flight exactly translated into figures and history. Its totals—batters' credit vs. pitchers' debit—balance as exactly as those in an accountant's ledger. And a box score is more than a capable archive. It is a precisely etched miniature of the sport itself, for baseball, in spite of its grassy spaciousness and apparent unpredictability, is the most intensely and satisfyingly mathematical of all our outdoor sports. Every player in every game is subjected to a cold and ceaseless accounting; no ball is thrown and no base is gained without an instant responding judgment—ball or strike, hit or error, yea or nay—and an ensuing statistic. This encompassing neatness permits the baseball fan, aided by experience and memory, to extract from a box score the same joy, the same hallucinatory reality, that prickles the scalp of a musician when he glances at a page of his score of *Don Giovanni* and actually hears bassos and sopranos, woodwinds and violins.

The small magic of the box score is cognominal as well as mathematical. Down the years, the rosters of the big-league teams have echoed and twangled with evocative, hilarious, ominous, impossible, and exactly appropriate names. The daily, breathing reality of the ballplayers' names in box scores accounts in part, it seems to me, for the rarity of convincing baseball fiction. *No novelist has yet been able to concoct a baseball hero with as tonic a name as Willie Mays or Duke Snider or Vida Blue. No contemporary novelist would dare a supporting cast of characters with Dickensian names like those that have stuck with me ever since I deciphered my first box scores and began peopling the lively landscape of baseball in my mind—Ossee Schreckengost, Smead Jolley, Slim Sallee, Elon Hogsett, Urban Shocker, Burleigh Grimes, Hazen Shirley Cuyler, Heinie Manush, Cletus Elwood Poffenberger, Virgin Trucks, Enos Slaughter, Luscious Easter, and Eli Grba. And not even a latter-day O. Henry would risk a tale like the true, electrifying history of a pitcher named Pete Jablonowski, who disappeared from the Yankees in 1933 after several seasons of inept relief work with various clubs. Presumably disheartened by seeing the losing pitcher listed as "J'bl'n's'i" in the box scores of his day, he changed his name to Pete Appleton in the semi-privacy of the minors, and came back to win fourteen games for the Senators in 1936 and to continue in the majors for another decade.*

El Tiante[2]

The game[3] was a pippin—a head-to-head encounter between Jim Palmer and Luis Tiant. Each of the great pitchers struck out eight batters, and the game was won by the Red Sox, 2–0, on two small mistakes by Palmer—fastballs to Rico Petrocelli and Carlton Fisk, in successive innings, which were each lofted into the left-field screen. **Tiant, who had suffered through almost a month of ineffectiveness brought on by a bad back, was in top form, wheeling and rotating on the mound like a figure in a Bavarian clock tower,** and in the fourth he fanned Lee May with a super-curve that seemed to glance off some invisible obstruction in midflight. The hoarse, grateful late-inning cries of "Lu-is! Lu-is! Lu-is!" from 34,724 Beantowners suggested that the oppressive, Calvinist cloud of self-doubt that afflicts Red Sox fans in all weathers and seasons was beginning to lift at last.

* * *

Conjecture thickened through most of the opening game, which was absolutely close for most of the distance, and then suddenly not close at all. Don Gullett, a powerful left-hander, kept the Red Sox in check for six innings, but was slightly outpitched and vastly outacted over the same distance by Tiant. The venerable stopper (Tiant is listed as being thirty-four and rumored as being a little or a great deal older) did not have much of a fastball on this particular afternoon, so we were treated to the splendid full range of Tiantic mime. His repertoire begins with an

[2] It was after Tiant led the Red Sox to a 7–1 victory over the three-time defending World Champion Oakland A's in the playoffs that Reggie Jackson uttered perhaps his most eloquent line of all: "**Tiant**," Reggie Jackson declared in the clubhouse, "**is the Fred Astaire of baseball**."

[3] A late 1986 season matchup against the Orioles.

exaggerated mid-windup pivot, during which he turns his back on the batter and seems to examine the infield directly behind the mound for signs of crabgrass. With men on bases, his stretch consists of a succession of minute downward waggles and pauses of the glove, and a menacing sidewise slit-eyed, Valentino-like gaze over his shoulder at the base runner. The full flower of his art, however, comes during the actual delivery, which is executed with a perfect variety show of accompanying gestures and impersonations. I had begun to take notes during my recent observations of the Cuban Garrick, and now, as he set down the Reds with only minimal interruptions (including one balk call, in the fourth), I arrived at some tentative codifications. The basic Tiant repertoire seems to include:

(1) Call the Osteopath: In midpitch, the man suffers an agonizing seizure in the central cervical region, which he attempts to fight off with a sharp backward twist of the head.

(2) Out of the Woodshed: Just before releasing the ball, he steps over a raised sill and simultaneously ducks his head to avoid conking it on the low doorframe.

(3) The Runaway Taxi: Before the pivot, he sees a vehicle bearing down on him at top speed, and pulls back his entire upper body just in time to avoid a nasty accident.

(4) Falling Off the Fence: An attack of vertigo nearly causes him to topple over backward on the mound. Strongly suggests a careless dude on the top rung of the corral.

(5) The Slipper-Kick: In the midpitch, he surprisingly decides to get rid of his left shoe.

(6) The Low-Flying Plane (a subtle development and amalgam of 1, 3, and 4, above): While he is pivoting, an F-105 buzzes the ball park, passing over the infield from the third-base to the first-base side at a height of eighty feet. He follows it all the way with his eyes.

https://youtu.be/md2k4NdOPmA
(15-second video showing pitching motion)

1986 World Series - Not So, Boston

(Editor's note: The 1986 World Series featured a matchup of Angell's two favorite teams, his long-suffering Boston Red Sox and his beloved (since 1961) New York Mets. In this chapter of *Once More*, Angell includes some wonderful memories of that classic Fall Classic which was won by the Mets in seven games after the infamous Billy Buckner blunder in the 10th inning of Game 6. Here are a few of my favorite passages from *Not So, Boston*.)

Game Five

Hurst's work here in Game Five was the kind of pitcher's outing that I have most come to admire over the years—a masterful ten-hitter, if that is possible.

* * *

It was a great night at the Fens. A gusty wind blew across the old premises (left to right, for the most part), and a couple of advertising balloons out beyond the wall bucked and dived in the breeze, tearing at their tethers. The long cries from the outermost fan sectors (the oddly

slanting aisles out there looked like ski trails dividing the bleacher escarpments) came in wind-blown gusts, suddenly louder or fainter. The wind got into the game, too, knocking down one long drive by Henderson in the second (it was poorly played by Strawberry) and another by Jim Rice in the fifth, which sailed away from Dykstra and caromed off the top railing of the Sox' bullpen—triples, both of them, and runs thereafter. It was the kind of game in which each player on the home team (in that beautiful whiter-than-white home uniform, with navy sweatshirt sleeves, red stirrups, the curved, classical block-letter "RED SOX" across the chest, and a narrow piping of red around the neck and down the shirtfront) seems to impress his own special mode or mannerism on your memory: Rich Gedman's lariatlike swirl of the bat at his head as he swings through a pitch; Rice's double cut with the bat when he misses—swish-*swish*—with the backward retrieving swing suggesting a man trying to kill a snake; Boggs' way of dropping his head almost onto the bat as he stays down in midswing; Buckner (with that faro-dealer's mustache and piratical daubings of anti-glare black on his cheeks) holding the bat in his extended right hand and, it seems, aiming it at the pitcher's eyes as he stands into the box for an at-bat. And so on. Almost everyone out there, it seemed—every one of the good guys, that is—had his moment in the game to celebrate and be put aside in recollection by the fans: Hendu's triple and double, Marty Barrett's walk and single and double (he batted .433 for the Series), a beautiful play by Boggs on Kevin Mitchell's tough grounder in the second, and, best of all, Billy Buck's painful and comical hobbling gallop around third and in to the plate in the third inning to bring home the second run of the game on a single by Evans. *Buckner can barely run (can barely play) at all, because of his sore back and his injury-raddled ankles; it takes him two hours to ice and wrap his legs before he can take the field. He had torn an Achilles tendon in the September 29th game and was playing in this one only on courage and painkillers and with the help of protective high-top boots. No one wanted to laugh at his journey home after Evans bounced the ball up the middle, but you couldn't help yourself. He looked like Walter Brennan coming home—all elbows and splayed-out, achy feet, with his mouth gaping open with the effort, and his head thrown back in pain and hope and ridiculous deceleration. When he got there, beating the throw after all, he flumped belly-first onto the plate and lay there for a second, panting in triumph, and, piece by piece, got up a hero.*

* * *

Game Six, World Series

The Mets are not loved—not away from New York, that is. When the teams moved up to the Hub, with the Mets behind by two games to none, there was a happy little rush of historical revisionism as sportswriters and baseball thinkers hurried forward to kick the New York nine. Tim Horgan, a columnist with the Boston *Herald*, wrote, "Personally, I don't think anything west of Dedham can be as marvelous as the Mets are supposed to be. I wouldn't even be surprised if the Mets are what's known as a media myth, if only because New York City is the world capital of media myths." Bryant Gumbel, on NBC's "Today" show, called the Mets arrogant, and ran a tape of Keith Hernandez' bad throw on a bunt play in Game Two, calling it "a hotdog play." Sparky Anderson, the Tigers manager, declared over the radio that the Indians, the

traditional doormats of his American League division, put a better nine on the field than the Mets, and a newspaper clip from the heartland (if San Diego is in the heart of America) that subsequently came my way contained references to "this swaggering band of mercenaries" and "a swaying forest of high fives and taunting braggadocio." Much of this subsided when the Mets quickly drew even in the games, and much of it has nothing to do with baseball, of course; what one tends to forget is that there is nothing that unites America more swiftly or happily than bad news in Gotham or a losing New York team. Some of these reflections warmed me, inwardly and arrogantly, as Game Six began, for I was perched in a splendid upper-deck-grandstand seat directly above home plate, where, in company with my small family and the Mets' mighty fan family, I gazed about at the dazzlement of the ballpark floodlights, the electric-green field below, and the encircling golden twinkle of beautiful (by night) Queens, and heard and felt, deep in my belly, the pistol-shot sounds of clapping, the cresting waves of "LETSGOMETS! LETSGOMETS! LETSGOMETS!," and long, taunting calls—"Dew-eee! DEW-EEE!" and "Rog-errr! ROG-ERRR!"—directed at some of the Bosox below: payback for what the Fenway fans had given Darryl Strawberry in the last game in Boston. And then a parachutist came sailing down out of the outer darkness and into the bowl of light and noise—a descending roar, of all things—of Shea. "GO METS," his banner said as he lightly came to rest a few steps away from Bob Ojeda in mid-infield and, encumbered with minions, went cheerfully off to jail and notoriety. We laughed and forgot him. I was home.

Game Six must be given here in extreme précis—not a bad idea, since its non-stop events and reversals and mistakes and stunners blur into unlikelihood even when examined on a scorecard. I sometimes make postgame additions to my own scorecard in red ink, circling key plays and instants to refresh my recollection, and adding comments on matters I may have overlooked or misjudged at the time. My card of Game Six looks like a third grader's valentine, with scarlet exclamation points, arrows, stars, question marks, and "Wow!"s scrawled thickly across the double page. A double arrow connects Boggs, up on top, to Spike Owen, down below, in the Boston second—a dazzling little hit (by Wade)-and-run (by Spike) that set up Boston's second score of the game. Two red circles are squeezed into Jim Rice's box in the Boston seventh—one around the "E5" denoting Ray Knight's wild peg that put Rice on first and sent Marty Barrett around to third, and the other around the "7–2" that ended the inning, two outs and one run later, when Mookie Wilson threw out Jim at the plate. A descendant arrow and low-flying exclamation points marks Clemens' departure from the game after the seventh (the Red Sox were ahead by 3–2, but Roger, after a hundred and thirty-one pitches, had worked up a blister on his pitching hand), and an up-bound red dart and "MAZZ PH" pointing at the same part of the column denote Lee Mazzilli's instant single against Schiraldi, while the black dot in the middle of the box is the Mazzilli run that tied the score. But nothing can make this sprawling, clamorous game become orderly, I see now, and, or course, no shorthand can convey the vast, encircling, supplicating sounds of that night, or the sense of encroaching danger on the field, or the anxiety that gnawed at the Mets hordes in the stands as their season ran down, it seemed certain, to the wrong ending.

The Red Sox scored twice in the top of the tenth inning, on a home run by Dave Henderson ("Hendu!" is my crimson comment) and a double and a single by the top of the order—Boggs and then Barrett—all

struck against Rick Aguilera, the fourth Mets pitcher of the night. Call it the morning, for it was past midnight when the Sox took the field in the bottom half, leading by 5–3. Three outs were needed for Boston's championship, and two of them were tucked away at once. Keith Hernandez, having flied out to center for the second out, left the dugout and walked into Davey Johnson's office in the clubhouse to watch the end; he said later that this was the first instant when he felt that the Mets might not win. I had moved down to the main press box, ready for a dash to the clubhouses, and now I noticed that a few Mets fans had given up and were sadly coming along the main aisles down below me, headed for home. My companion just to my right in the press box, the *News'* Red Foley, is a man of few words, but now he removed his cigar from his mouth and pointed at the departing fans below. "O ye of little faith," he said.

It happened slowly but all at once, it seemed later. Gary Carter singled. Kevin Mitchell, who was batting for Aguilera, singled to center. Ray Knight fouled off two sinkers, putting the Red Sox one strike away. (Much later, somebody counted up and discovered that there were *thirteen* pitches in this inning that could have been turned into the last Mets out of all.) "Ah, New England," I jotted in my notebook, just before Knight bopped a little single to right-center, scoring Carter and sending Mitchell to third—and my notebook note suddenly took on quite a different meaning. It was along about here, I suspect, that my friend Allan, who is a genius palindromist, may have taken his eyes away from his set (he was watching at home) for an instant to write down a message that had been forming within him: "Not so, Boston"—the awful truth, not matter how you look at it.

Schiraldi departed, and Bob Stanley came on to pitch. (This was the Steamer's moment to save what had been an unhappy 6–6 and 4.37 season for him, in which his work as the Sox' prime right-handed stopper had received increasingly unfavorable reviews from the Fenway bleacher critics; part of me was pulling for him here, but the game was out of my hands—and evidently out of his as well.) Mookie Wilson, batting left-handed, ran the count to two-and-two, fouled off two more pitches, and then jumped away, jackknifing in midair, to avoid a thigh-high wild pitch that brought Mitchell flying in from third, to tie it. Wilson fouled off two more pitches in this at-bat of a lifetime and then tapped a little bouncer down toward first, close to the baseline, that hopped once, hopped twice, and then slipped under Buckner's glove and on into short right field (he turned and stared after it in disbelief), and Knight thundered in from around third base. He jumped on home plate with both feet—jumped so hard that he twisted his back, he said later—and then disappeared under an avalanche of Mets.

The post mortems were nearly unbearable. "This is the worst," Bob Stanley said.

"I'm exhausted," Ray Knight said. "My legs are trembling."

"As close as we came . . ." whispered John McNamara. "As close as we came, I can only associate it with California."

"It's baseball," said Dave Henderson. "It's baseball, and we've got to live with it."

Questions were asked—they always are after major accidents—and some of them must be asked again, for this game will be replayed, in retrospect, for years to come.

Q: Why didn't Davey Johnson double-switch when he brought in Jesse Orosco to get the last out of the eighth inning? Without an accompanying substitute at some other slot in the order, Jesse was forced

to depart for a pinch-hitter an instant later, in the Mets' half, thus requiring Johnson to wheel in Aguilera, who was a much less certain quantity on the mound, and who quickly gave up the two runs that so nearly finished off the Mets. A: I still don't know, for Davey is a master at the double switch—a textbook maneuver in National League tactics, since there is no designated hitter—and a bit later on he made a much more questionable switch, which removed Darryl Strawberry from the game. It came out all right in the end, but I think Davey just forgot.

Q: Why didn't McNamara pinch-hit for the creaking Buckner in the tenth, when another run could have nailed down the Mets for sure? And, having decided against this, why didn't he at least put the much more mobile Stapleton in to play first base in the bottom half—perhaps to gobble up Wilson's grounder and make the flip to the pitcher? More specifically, why didn't he pinch-hit Baylor, his designated hitter, who batted in the No. 5 slot throughout the regular season and in the playoffs but rode the bench (no D.H.) almost to the end during the games played at Shea? A: Johnny Mack has defended himself strongly against both of these second-guesses, citing Buckner's excellent bat (a .267 year, with eighteen home runs and a hundred and two runs batted in) and Buckner's glove ("He has good hands," he said), in that order. His answer to the Baylor puzzle is to say that Baylor never pinch-hits when the Red Sox are ahead—sound strategy, one can see, until a game arrives when they might suddenly fall behind at the end. McNamara also claims that Stapleton normally substitutes for Buckner at first base only if there has been an earlier occasion to insert him as a pinch-*runner* for Buckner; this is mostly true (it wasn't the case in Game Five), but the fact remains that the Sox did win. My strong guess is that McNamara is not beyond sentiment. He knew the torments that Buckner had gone through to stay in the lineup throughout the season, and the contributions he had made to bring the club to this shining doorstep (he had mounted a seventeen-game hitting streak in mid-September, and at one stretch drove in twenty runs in a span of eight games) and he wanted him out there with the rest of the varsity when the Sox seemed certain to step over it at last.

(Editor's note: As we all know, the Mets came back from a 3–0 deficit in Game Seven to win the game by the score of 8–5 and the 1986 Fall Classic by 4 games to 3, one of the most talked-about Series of all time.)

THE INNER GAME

In the final chapter of *Once More*, Angell talks about the "inner game" of baseball, meant to be enjoyed most and best in the cold off-season. As included in the excerpts which will follow, Angell talks about the *vividness* of his memories about players that he has watched in the near and distant past, and how he can recall perfectly their individual stylistic swings, pitching motions, baserunning movements, and the like, and how this seems to be more true in baseball than in any other sport. I had never before considered this, but I am in wholehearted agreement. As I reflect on this, I can picture perfectly Nomar Garciaparra standing at the pentagon and tugging and pulling at his batting gloves, over and over and over, between each and every pitch; I can exactly reproduce in my mind George Brett crouched down at the left side of the plate, watching intently as the pitches he doesn't want to offer at buzz by, until he spots one that is to his liking and then uncoils his bat for a blue darter line drive; I see Roger Clemens on the bump,

gargantuan in stature, feeling into his glove for just the right grip before going into his windup; and over there across the mound I see Ron Cey, the Penguin, short little arms and short little legs, posturing for the next pitch; and out there in the outfield, I see the spidery Willie McGee, lanky as Ichabod Crane, eyes bugged out, and itchily ready to race across the outfield to snare a ball that seemed destined to fall into a gap.

In your own minds, think about some of the players you have watched, and their own distinctive batting stances, styles and so forth. I'd love to hear about them.

Another thing that Angell talks about is how there is always something new to learn and appreciate about baseball. He talks about his father's favorite team, the Cleveland Naps, and their Hall of Fame outfielder named Elmer Flick, whose name I had not before heard. Looking him up, I found that he played for the Cleveland franchise in the American League between 1900 and 1910, and that his lifetime batting average was .313. I then learned (or re-learned?) that the Cleveland professional baseball club in 1900 was known as the Lake Shores[4], but after luring star second baseman Napoleon Lajoie away from the Philadelphia A's, the Lake Shores became known as the Naps. Other fun facts about this team are that it had two fairly decent pitchers on its staff, Addie Joss and Cy Young,[5] as well as Heinie Berger, Cy Falkenberg, Bob Rhoads, Glenn Liebhardt, Carl Sitton, Harry Ables, Harry Otis, Lucky Wright, Jerry Upp, Willie Mitchell, Red Booles, and Fred Winchell.

The Inner Game

> *This inner game—baseball in the mind—has no season, but it is best played in the winter, without the distraction of other baseball news. At first, it is a game of recollections, recapturings, and visions.* Figures and occasions return, enormous sounds rise and swell, and the interior stadium fills with light and yields up the sight of a young ballplayer—some hero perfectly memorized—just completing his own unique swing and now racing toward first. See the way he runs? Yes, that's him! Unmistakable, he leans in, still following the distant flight of the ball with his eyes, and takes his big turn at the base. Yet this is only the beginning, for baseball in the mind is not a mere returning. In time, this easy summoning up of restored players, winning hits, and famous rallies gives way to reconsiderations and reflections about the sport itself. *By thinking about baseball like this—by playing it over, keeping it warm in a cold season—we begin to make discoveries. With luck, we may even penetrate some of its mysteries. One of those mysteries is its vividness—the absolutely distinct inner vision we retain of that hitter, that eager baserunner, of however long ago.*

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[4] After their founding in 1894 as the Grand Rapids Rustlers, the team moved to Cleveland in 1900 and became known as the Cleveland Lake Shores. The team played in the then-minor league Western League, which Van Johnson soon changed to the title of the "American League." In 1901 Cleveland renamed itself the Bluebirds when the American League broke with the National Agreement and declared itself a competing Major League. The Cleveland franchise was among eight charter members of the fledgling AL.

The Cleveland franchise was owned at that time by coal magnate Charles Sommers and—in what seems like an odd bed partner—a tailor by the name of Jack Kilfoyl. Sommers, a wealthy industrialist who was co-owner of the Boston Americans, lent money to the other team owners, including Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics, to help keep them and the struggling new league afloat.

The Cleveland players did not like their new nickname, the Bluebirds, shortened by many sportswriters to the "Blues," in part because of their all-blue uniforms. The players reportedly did not like the Blues sobriquet either, and consequently tried to change the team name to the "Broncos," but it never really caught on. Then, in 1902, they became the namesake of their star hitter, Napoleon Lajoie.

[5] Although Cy Young was clearly running on fumes at the tail end of his remarkable career.

The last dimension is time. Within the ballpark, time moves differently, marked by no clock except the events of the game. This is the unique, unchangeable feature of baseball, and perhaps explains why this sport, for all the enormous changes it has undergone in the past decade or two, remains somehow rustic, unviolent, and introspective. Baseball's time is seamless and invisible, a bubble within which players move at exactly the same pace and rhythms as all their predecessors. This is the way the game was played in our youth and in our fathers' youth, and even back then—back in the country days—there must have been the same feeling that time could be stopped. Since baseball time is measured only in outs, all you have to do is succeed utterly; keep hitting, keep the rally alive, and you have defeated time. You remain forever young. Sitting in the stands, we sense this, if only dimly. The players below us—Mays, DiMaggio, Ruth, Snodgrass—swim and blur in memory, the ball floats over to Terry Turner, and the end of this game may never come.

And so, with that, we close the book on Roger Angell's *Once More*.

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Thanks for listening. Have a great turkey day holiday next week!

Skipper