UNDER THE MARCH SUN

THE STORY OF SPRING TRAINING

CHARLES FOUNTAIN

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2009

Contents

Prologue: Under the March Sun 1

1. Myths, Madcaps, and Misbehavior: Spring Training in the Nineteenth Century 10
2. St. Petersburg's Mr. Baseball 22
3. Spring Training Takes Root 35
4. A Sportswriter Helps to End Separate but Hardly Equal 49
5. Mr. O'Malley's Dodgertown 67
6. The Bottom Line Crowds Out the Box Score 78
7. Red Sox Nation Flies South 89
8. "Let the Tourists Put in Their Two Cents" 102
9. Changing the Dynamic: Lee County and the Twins 115
10. Fields of Broken Dreams 127
11. Breathing Braves Air 147

12. The Chief Big Ho and Car Rentals: The Cactus League Comes of Age 163

13. How the Dodgers Almost Left Vero Beach the First Time 177

14. The Oasis League: Las Vegas Ups the Ante 190

15. A Tale of Three Cities 205

16. St. Pete Bids Spring Training Adieu 222

17. Camelback Ranch 233

18. Bottom of the Ninth in Vero Beach 244

Epilogue: "Go Team, Go!" 253

Appendix: Major League Baseball Spring Training Sites, 1901–Present 261

Acknowledgments 275

Selected Bibliography 279

Source Notes 283

Index 313

PROLOGUE

Under the March Sun

On a chamber of commerce February morning in 2005, under a postcard-blue sky, Tommy Lasorda finished a quiet conversation on the sidelines and walked out amid three dozen or so pitchers and catchers playing long toss on Dodgertown's field number 3. The eyes of the fans followed Lasorda across the field. A spring training that had begun with only the snap of ball hitting glove was about to get a new and noisy soundtrack. "You gotta love it boys," Lasorda shouted, his public-address-system voice washing across the grounds like a freshening breeze. "You gotta love it out here! It's the only place to be, boys! Right here! Right here on this baseball field! There are billions of people who want to be where you are right now! Right here on this baseball field! Billions!"

And who would argue with him? Oh, there'll be a bit of amused snickering at the bombast of his "billions"—but there is little quarrel with his underlying thought. Spring training draws us all. The March sun warms and refreshes both body and soul. Nothing in American sport, few things in American life have come to symbolize hope and new beginnings and the possibilities inherent in both. "Spring training is the best event in all of sport," gushed New York Yankee scout Joe Caro in 2005. "Baseball is the only sport I know that begins each year at its peak and goes downhill from there," is how Furman Bisher of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* put it back in 1981.

Spring training is as timeless as baseball itself, and its appeal is as evident as the sun in the sky. Starting a century ago, every year in late February, men left their winter jobs on the farm, or at the lumberyard or hardware store, or driving a cab in the city, and made their way south—to Florida, mostly, though also to Texas, Georgia, or Arkansas. There, under the March sun, they sweat out a winter's lethargy and fried foods, harden once again muscles and calluses that have grown soft, and ready themselves for another season of baseball.

It is the same today—and it is different. They still gather each spring under the March sun. They are millionaires now, fresh off a winter in the gym, tweaking the precise and finely tuned asset that is the modern athlete's body. They arrive in little need of six weeks of conditioning. Indeed, for many, the languid pace of spring training interrupts a rigid training regimen; and these players today work out individually, before and after the public sessions on the field, to guard against the genuine threat of leaving camp less fit than when they arrived. But for six weeks, just as their forebears did, they go through drills and practice games, absorb instruction in fundamentals like bunting and sliding and hitting the cutoff man. And they do it, particularly in the early days of camp, with unmistakable joy. It's how all of the game feels in the spring. Are there any words that are as sweet to a baseball fan as "Pitchers and catchers report in …"?

Spring training is sunshine—therapeutic, inspiring, been-too-long-without-ya sunshine. Major league baseball today is played from southern California through Arizona and Texas and into Florida, and vast numbers of major leaguers today grew up without winter, in places like Latin America and the American Sun Belt. But for three-quarters of a century, when baseball was being woven into the fabric of America, the major leagues were confined to the northeast quadrant of the country. St. Louis and Washington were the game's southernmost outposts, and these are both cities with honest winters. The beginning of spring training each year has always been a moment of hope, a reassurance that the landscape of snow and gray skies and barren trees will soon pass, and the world will again be green.

Spring training is anticipation realized—like the arrival of the weekend after the long workweek. But spring training, too, is anticipation heightened; it is Saturday afternoon with thoughts turned to Saturday night, because for all of the sensory pleasure of spring training itself, it leads ultimately to the climax of opening day.

Spring training is the *game* again, after an off-season during which baseball news is increasingly as dispiriting and confining as winter itself. "Each year, it becomes clearer to me that my purpose in touring the spring-training camps is not to deepen my appreciation of the sport, or to report on teams and trades, phenoms and veterans," wrote the *New Yorker*'s Roger Angell, who's been visiting spring training and giving eloquent voice to its pleasures for more than forty years. "It is to rid myself of the aftertaste of winter baseball news—the bitter flavor of money, litigation and failed imagination."

Spring training is two middle-aged men playing catch in the parking lot outside Al Lang Field in St. Petersburg as they wait for the gates to open. It is two brothers, maybe four and six, in too-big baseball hats, approaching Rays catcher Dioner Navarro and asking for an autograph in a whisper so soft and nervous it is barely audible. Navarro signs and flashes a 100-watt smile. Fans of all ages get autographs. Very few get smiles. "What do you say, boys?" chides the father after Navarro signs for his sons. "Thank you," they whisper, still staring at their baseballs. Thank yous are even rarer than smiles in the autograph world, but they are far more prevalent in spring training than they are anywhere else.

Spring training is millionaire, rock-star major leaguers playing catch and eating lunch with $1,500-a-month minor leaguers who are hoping to maybe play at Double A, and who may never get any closer to the show than this. The ballparks are small—minor league size—and the crowds, though swollen tremendously since the 1980s, are still only a fraction of those at a regular season game. This gives a proximity that allows for not only autographs and pictures, but eye contact and conversation as well. "Spring training is as human and as close to baseball's core as you can get at the major league level," says Charles Steinberg, the executive vice president of public affairs for the Los Angeles Dodgers. "This is where you come and you gather and you see [the players] up close, and they might sign an autograph. Or they might just high-five you. You know, it's enough if they just look at you, acknowledge you, and smile." This intimacy is much greater in some camps (Orioles, Twins, Pirates) than in others (Red Sox, Yankees, Cubs), and it is vanishing everywhere, year by year. But it is still sufficient to send fans home with the notion that they have made a genuine connection with a player or two, and this will sustain them through a long summer of seeing those players only from the second deck or through a television lens.

Spring training is three generations of one family filling a whole row in the stands in Clearwater, Port St. Lucie, or Mesa. Even more, it is baseball's generational family, gathering every year for one of the game's grand holidays. It is Bob Feller in Winter Haven, once again wearing Cleveland Indians uniform number 19, having a catch along the first-base line minutes before game time, looking at eighty-seven like he's itching to once again take the mound. It is Sandy Koufax in Vero Beach, chiseled and trim at seventy, looking like he absolutely could take the mound. Koufax remains in the background at Dodgertown, keeping a distance from the fans and an even greater distance from the media. He'll have animated conversations with old Dodger-family friends and quiet, earnest conversations with young pitchers. But there's not a soul in the house who is unaware that Koufax is there. His very presence sends a buzz through the camp and brightens everyone's day.

Spring training is eighty-six-year-old Johnny Pesky in Fort Myers, rapping out fungos to Red Sox players young enough to be his grandsons. "I get a little sore now and then," he admits, "because I think I'm twenty-five years old, and I'm not. But that's what spring training does. It makes you believe you are young all over again." It's Yogi Berra and Whitey Ford, enlisted each spring as special coaches, their duties ill defined because their real purpose in camp is to remind players by their simple presence that wearing the pinstripes carries an obligation. Today's Yankees are expected to write the next chapter in the continuum of excellence that runs from the Yankee teams of Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio through the teams of Mantle, Berra, and Ford to the Yankees of Jeter and Rivera.

Will the Hall of Famers in today's game—who play three, four, or five years with one club and then move on, retiring with a closet full of jerseys—feel enough of a sense of connection with any one team to return to spring training when their careers are through? A small matter to fret about perhaps, but spring training gives time to understand that small things are often special things.

Players and coaches, as on the first day of school, greet friends old and new—more new than old, given big league transience—with bear hugs and knuckle-bump handshakes and the resumption of conversations suspended in October. The small irritations that come when men work, travel, and live in close proximity for eight months have been forgotten and will not manifest themselves again for several months. There's little heckling or booing from the stands in spring training; fans have a patience with imperfection in March that will be but a memory in July. Even players and reporters manage to get along in the spring.

During spring training, baseball's history gets told in full again, as ex-players and writers and radio guys sit around bars and restaurant tables and dugouts and tell not only the stories of their youth, but the stories they *heard* in their youth, from those who were old before them. Fans have yesterdays too, of course, and these too come alive in conversations overheard in the stands and along the ropes at the practice fields. "Oh sure. I saw Babe Ruth play many times." "DiMaggio. Now that was *my* guy." "When I played semipro..." "It happened right over there. It was 1956, and I was seven years old. He signed it: Mickey Mantle, #7. And I've been a Yankee fan from that day forward." "I still have my mitt from 1934. It was a Gus Triandos model. He was a pitcher for the Phillies." Gus Triandos actually was a catcher in the 1950s and would have been just four years old in 1934. But does that really matter?

The Grapefruit League. The Cactus League. Even the names have a lyrical quality, not only beautifully bespeaking a sense of place, but also evoking a certain perfume of the outdoors and a freedom from care. In comparison, "American League" and "National League" sound like a day in the office.

Spring training moves at the speed of a bicycle—always figuratively, sometimes literally. For thirty years, Dodger coach Manny Mota pedaled his Schwinn Cruiser from field to field and from dining hall to clubhouse along the paths of Dodgertown in Vero Beach. When they were both with the Twins, pitchers Johan Santana and Carlos Silva, fellow Venezuelans who made their off-season home in the Twins' spring training city, pedaled through the early morning fog of Fort Myers, up the bicycle path along Six Mile Cypress, commuting to work at Hammond Stadium. In Tucson, a couple in their sixties rode a bicycle built for two to a Rockies–White Sox game at Hi Corbett Field.

Maybe most of all, spring training is ritual. It's the newspaper photo of the equipment truck leaving the frosty North for Florida or Arizona, a week or so in advance of the players. The public address announcers at games in Fort Myers, Winter Haven, Lakeland, and elsewhere giving the game-time temperatures not only at the ballpark—generally in the eighties—but back home in Minneapolis, Cleveland, and Detroit as well: seldom above freezing. The local television sportscaster from those same cold-weather cities doing his evening news live shot dressed in shorts and a Hawaiian shirt and standing in front of a palm tree, bantering with the anchors back home, who never fail to tell him how jealous they are.

The ritual includes pitchers' fielding practice—PFP in clubhouse shorthand—particularly the pitchers-covering-first-base drill that's become

almost an opening ceremony for spring training. This is an astonishingly low-tech, plebian drill. Pitchers pantomime a throw to the plate, a coach raps a ground ball fungo to first, and the pitcher breaks for the bag, taking an angle that brings him to the inside edge, on a parallel, not a crossing plane, to the imaginary runner. This is not ballet; it is not even particularly physical—each pitcher's turn comes up every ninety seconds or so and requires just a fifty-foot dash at maybe three-quarter effort. It can be quite stupefying to watch. Yet from Fort Lauderdale to Scottsdale, groups of fans, ranging in size from the dozens to the hundreds, will cluster and sit transfixed for an hour or more as pitcher after pitcher cycles through. To a first-time spring training visitor, this appeal might seem a head-scratcher. The cynic might liken it to sitting in the dayroom at the asylum, staring at nothing for hours on end. The romantic knows it's more like sitting on the beach and watching the waves. Little happens and nothing changes. But it is a pleasing vista nevertheless, and there is an ineffable inner comfort in being there.

Dr. Charles Steinberg is the P. T. Barnum of Dodger Stadium. As vice president of marketing and public relations, he's in charge of the lump-in-the-throat moments, such as the 2008 opening-day ceremony that celebrated the Dodgers' fiftieth anniversary in Los Angeles by bringing fifty former Dodgers back to throw out the first pitch. Before joining the Dodgers, he did the same thing with the Boston Red Sox for six years, and with such enthusiasm and élan that he brought about the seemingly impossible: he helped to intensify the already white-hot relationship between the Red Sox and their fans, which has burned for generations. He is very much of the Field of Dreams, baseball-as-poetry school. "Spring training is the essence of baseball's core," he says. "Baseball itself is pristine and divine. Everything you needed to play baseball was in the Garden of Eden. You had the grass. You had the dirt. You had a branch from a tree to make a bat. There had to be a cow somewhere to give you the ball and the glove. I was telling this story once and some wise guy said: 'Yeah, they even had a snake for the media.' But you had everything you need. Out in the sun. You don't need a manufactured court; you don't need a metal-rim basket. You just need a bat and a ball and the good Lord's earth to play on."

Steinberg switches from the rabbi that he is not to the doctor he is (he is a dentist and was for a time the Orioles' team dentist while simultaneously working in their front office in the 1980s) to explain further. "There is a

biological resonance when things repeat through the years by starting from their original beginnings," he says.

"In medicine it's been pretty thoroughly discredited, but it works here, I think.

"It's called *ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny*, and it's when the human being, in its development, goes through stages similar to the worm and the fish and each level of the animal kingdom—you go back to the single-cell animal and you're ultimately the most complex animal, the human.

"Now that may not be a metaphor or a parallel that's been drawn before," he acknowledges with a smile, as behind him the Boston Red Sox begin to take the field for their first workout of 2006, with more than 2,000 true believers bearing noisy witness. "But it's the same thing with these early days of spring training. They play catch, which is the atom of baseball. A catch is the atom of baseball. These days of baseball start with the players doing that which we could do too. And then as these days reach their finality before the exhibitions begin, they take off. In the first days of spring training, that's where we watch the development of the game from the atom—the cell—to the magnificent art form that is the best in the world."

Those early atom-of-baseball practices Steinberg loves are free. Drive up, park for free, and walk out onto the field to within feet of the players. Listen to the coaches' instructions or eavesdrop on the players' conversations about restaurants and golf.

When the exhibitions start, the ante goes up and the access goes down. Parking is five bucks, a ticket somewhere between ten and twenty. Spring training seats are always close to the players and the action, but there's a wall between fan and player now. The sounds of the game on the field must compete with the public address announcer reminding you to "visit our sponsors" or to visit the concession and novelty stands "located throughout the park for your convenience."

Then, the regular season begins, and parking can be as much as $20 or $30. To sit as close to the action as in spring training will cost $75 or more. The chances of sitting close to the field are slender, however; those seats go to longtime season ticket holders and folks with connections. And come October, even some of the folks with connections and money will find themselves on the outside with their noses pressed against the glass.

In the spring, however, all the chaos, cost, and frenzy seem far away. Spring training is so pleasingly quaint. License plates from around the country fill the parking lots, from Fort Lauderdale northwest to Dunedin, from

Viera southwest to Fort Myers, from Tucson up I-10 to Phoenix. Young families come in rented minivans. College kids on a spring break road trip—baseball and beaches by day, bars by night—come in ten-year-old SUVs. Retirees arrive in Cadillac, Buick, and Chrysler sedans. The baseball they see—perfect weather, friendly gregarious players, games where the outcome can be immediately forgotten because it doesn't count—may be fantasy. But that's just the point. These are baseball theme parks, places of make-believe no less than Disney World—which, not surprisingly, has a spring training complex all its own.

The market is booming. Spring training games attracted just under 3 million fans in 2007 and 2008, a higher percentage of capacity than for the regular season. Studies by the Florida Sports Foundation put the economic impact of spring training in Florida at more than $500 million annually. That's the equivalent of two Super Bowls and a figure that has doubled in the last fifteen years. The estimated impact on Arizona is smaller—$250 million—but growing swiftly, as the state aggressively pursues teams from Florida. In 2000, twenty teams played in Florida compared to just ten in Arizona. By 2010, the numbers will be fifteen and fifteen.

With so much money at stake, nothing happens by serendipity. Gushers of public money prime this $800 million pump. In Florida, state and local governments have spent more than $300 million in public money since 2000, upgrading existing and building new spring training facilities, in an attempt to keep their big league tenants happy and where they are. But they're finding it hard to outspend Arizona. Since the mid-1990s, when the Cactus League began poaching teams from Florida, Arizona has also spent more than $300 million in public money, building springtime palaces for *its* big league tenants. The story of spring training has always been as much about the host communities as about the baseball teams. National identities and significant economies have come to communities with a spring training connection, and getting or losing a franchise can be a boost or a blow to the local psyche.

Investing in spring training is a mercurial endeavor in the twenty-first century. The lifespan of a complex would appear to be less than twenty years. In 1987, the Texas Rangers moved into a new state-of-the-art facility in Port Charlotte. "They asked what our ideal facility would be," said Rangers general manager Tom Grieve at the time. "This is it." Yet by 2002, the Rangers had left Port Charlotte for a state-of-the-art facility in the Phoenix suburb of Surprise, Arizona. Four years later, Port Charlotte had to commit

$30 million in improvements to the Rangers' old facility to get the Tampa Bay Devil Rays to bring spring training back to town. Four other stadiums built in the late eighties—in Sarasota, Plant City, Haines City, and Port St. Lucie—have been abandoned, razed, slated for replacement, or undergone major renovations.

Baseball old-timers lament the changes. The vulgarity of big-time commerce is stripping spring training of its innocence and its charm, they say. Yet while spring training is decidedly more crowded than ever, and would be unrecognizable to players from the flannel-uniform days, it has changed less than it might appear. Teams have been asking host communities to make improvements to municipally owned facilities since the time of Connie Mack and John McGraw. Spring training is a profit line for major league teams today, where in the past it was always a cost item, but money has always been an overarching concern. The stakes are just higher now. Spring training baseball is now played in the spotlight as well as the sunshine.

In the beginning, it was a much more private affair. More private, but every bit as colorful.

ONE

Myths, Madcaps, and Misbehavior

Spring Training in the Nineteenth Century

Baseball loves myth, and in the absence of fact, myth swoops in to fill the void, then stays for generations, an obdurate squatter with a mulish sense of entitlement.

Spring training myth credits Cap Anson with being the first to bring a team south to sweat out the winter's sins in the warmth of the sun, as he brought his Chicago White Stockings to Hot Springs, Arkansas, in the mid-1880s. Cap Anson was both player and manager, the signature figure of nineteenth-century baseball. It was said in his day that his name was better known across America than that of any statesman or soldier. He played twenty-two seasons—at the time, a major league longevity record—all of them for the Chicago White Stockings, batting .329 and amassing an even 3,000 hits. He was player-manager of the Chicago club for nineteen of those years, 1879–1897, winning five championships and finishing second four times. His most profound impact on the game, however, is not a happy one. More than any other single individual, Cap Anson was responsible for making baseball a whites-only province between 1887 and 1947. He let it be known that he would refuse to take the field for a game against Newark if Newark insisted on playing Moses Fleetwood Walker and George Stovey, its two black players. Anson and money trumped Walker, Stovey, and principle; the blacks did not play. Resistance to black players by both teammates and

patrons had been making team owners nervous to begin with. Anson's open defiance doomed the black players' opportunities and kept major league baseball all white for the next sixty years.

But for all of his real historical relevance, Cap Anson no more started spring training than Abner Doubleday invented the game of baseball. Baseball teams had been traveling south in the spring for at least fifteen years before Anson got the notion. In his seminal study of the game's early history, Harold Seymour claims that newspaper records from 1869 show that no less a figure than William Marcy "Boss" Tweed, the head of New York's Tammany Hall and the man who would come to define political corruption in America, may have been the first to come up with the idea of spring training, when he sent his New York Mutuals, a team of amateurs, to New Orleans to ready themselves for the 1869 season. One year later, the Cincinnati Reds, which in 1869 had become the first fully professional team, began their second season with a spring training of sorts, starting their season in New Orleans and playing their opening dozen games or so across the South. That same year—1870—the White Stockings, six years prior to Anson's joining the team, also began their season in New Orleans.

Throughout the 1870s, any number of teams from the newly formed National League and other professional and amateur clubs started their season with a trip south. Following the lead of the Mutuals, Reds, and White Stockings, other teams flocked to New Orleans; the city remained the most popular early destination, with Savannah and Charleston also hosting early camps. A town in Florida inquired of the Philadelphia Phillies as to their interest in training in the Sunshine State, but Phillies manager Harry Wright judged travel to Florida too expensive and opted for Savannah instead. Trips south were by no means universal, and more often than not, "spring training" in the 1870s and 1880s consisted of gathering the troops a few days before the first game and putting them through a regimen of calisthenics, medicine-ball work, and maybe a game of catch in a local YMCA, armory, or barn. New York Giants teams of the 1880s trained under the wooden grandstand at the old Polo Grounds, suffering the winter temperatures but protected at least from the rain, snow, and wind.

The Anson legend has the Chicago player-manager bellied up to a Windy City bar during a February snowstorm in 1885, when one of his pitchers comes in, bursting the buttons on his vest from a winter of living the good life. The pitcher then proceeds to quaff six or eight beers in the presence of his boss, and Anson, it is said, resolved then and there that he

would take his players to the baths at Hot Springs, where he would sweat the winter fat off them.

Anson's boss, Chicago owner Albert Spalding, enthusiastically endorsed the plan. "I have written to a professor down there, and he is making arrangements to build a vat in which he can boil the whole nine at once," Spalding told a newspaper reporter prior to the trip south. "You see, the beauty of this scheme is that I get a brand new nine on April 1. I boil out all the alcoholic microbes, which may have impregnated the systems of these men during the winter while they have been away from me and Anson. Once [I] get the microbes out, the danger of a relapse is slight. If that don't work, I'll send 'em to Paris next year and have 'em inoculated by Pasteur."

Cap Anson did two things that his spring-trip predecessors had not. He won championships in his first two seasons after bringing a team south, which convinced him to make spring training a regular affair. And he brought along a newspaper reporter to publicize the trip. Both played no small part in building the legend that he had been first, a legend that has been kicking around since at least the time of the First World War, competing with another fable that credits the idea of spring training to Ned Hanlon, the manager of the Baltimore Orioles during the 1890s. The Anson story was given permanence in 1936 by Dan Daniel, a widely read and highly influential columnist for the *New York World-Telegram* and the *Sporting News*. Daniel wrote about major league baseball for more than sixty years; he went to his first spring training in 1909 as a cub reporter for the *New York Herald*, covering the Brooklyn Dodgers' camp in Macon, Georgia. The Dodgers were sharing training facilities that year with the Sparks Circus, also readying itself for the coming season, and the irony of the inept Dodgers training side by side with circus clowns was not lost on even a teenaged reporter.

By 1936, Daniel was the "Arnold Toynbee of baseball," a reference to the British historian who was then in the midst of compiling his twelve-volume history of the world. The 5,000 words that Daniel wrote each week in the *Sporting News* delved frequently into the game's history, and in a column calling 1936 "spring training's golden jubilee," Daniel quoted outfielder-turned-evangelist-turned-temperance-crusader Billy Sunday as his source for the Anson legend. The conversation had taken place some years earlier; Sunday had died three months before Daniel wrote his 1936 column. A .248 hitter in eight seasons with the White Stockings, Sunday had apparently been peeved by an article he'd read which had credited Hanlon for starting spring training. "You baseball historians keep insisting that Hanlon was the

first to get the idea," Sunday chided Daniel. "Well, it was Cap Anson, and not Hanlon, and Cap beat Ned to it by a clean ten years. I was with the Chicago club in 1886, and Anson took us to Hot Springs to boil out. It was considered a startling, expensive innovation."

The fact that Anson first took a team south in 1885, not 1886, was a detail apparently lost in Sunday's memory and never checked by Daniel. The word of the outfielder-turned-man-of-God was good enough for Daniel, and the word of Daniel—who sometimes wrote as if he were delivering the Sermon on the Mount—was good enough for everybody else. For the better part of the next forty years, brand-name sportswriters, including Red Smith, Arthur Daley, and John Lardner, echoed Daniel's assertion so frequently and so unquestioningly that it became canon. Any story that delved into spring training's past began with Cap Anson. Harold Seymour was the first to puncture the Anson myth, and a host of historians have subsequently followed. But myths die hard. Google "Cap Anson and spring training" and a host of sites at the top of the list still credit Anson with being first.

By the late 1880s, spring training trips were becoming more common than not. Florida first joined the roster of hosts in 1888, when Washington Senators manager Ted Sullivan brought his team to Jacksonville. One of the most enduring, detailed, and colorful descriptions of early spring training comes from Connie Mack, a twenty-five-year-old catcher with the Senators on that trip, and Mack's account does not suggest the building of team harmony and the development of baseball efficiency that teams were hoping trips south would bring. Sullivan was pinching pennies; he rented seven Pullman berths for the trip, and the fourteen players slept two to a bunk for the two nights it took to get from Washington to Jacksonville. Moreover, the players were rousted out of their berths at seven in the morning and moved to a day coach, so that Sullivan might save a few pennies more. "By the time we arrived in Jacksonville, four of the fourteen players were reasonably sober," remembered Mack. "The rest were totally drunk."

When they arrived in Jacksonville, the players sobered up by schlepping their luggage, on foot, from the train station to the hotel that Sullivan had booked for them. "But the manager was horror-stricken when he found we were ballplayers," said Mack, and turned the team away. They were turned away at other hotels as well, before Sullivan finally found a boardinghouse on the outskirts of town, where, for a dollar a day per player, the proprietor

agreed to provide food and two-to-a-bed sleeping accommodations for the players, so long as they agreed not to mingle with the other guests. The prisoner-of-war-like treatment did not inspire the players to conduct themselves with any degree of decorum. "There was a fight every night, and the boys broke a lot of furniture," said Mack. "We played exhibitions during the day and drank most of the night."

Ballplayers were unwelcome for reasons other than their reputation for boorish behavior. America was still a country of regions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the Civil War was not long in the past, and in many parts of the South the wounds were still raw. Not a single team in the National League represented a city that had been part of the Confederacy, and players in those early days came predominantly from the Northeast and the Midwest. The reception they received in the South was frequently rude, which was a trigger to more boorish behavior. One season in the early 1890s, the Cubs, told they would be unwelcome in Jacksonville, were scheduled to train in Waycross, Georgia. The townspeople received the northern interlopers coolly and warily, and the players exacerbated the tension with untoward and persistent advances on the young women of Waycross. The players were already in a foul mood because the club refused to spend more than a dollar a day for their accommodations, and, even in nineteenth-century Georgia, a dollar didn't buy much. The ill feelings and frustration came to a head one night as the players stood outside their hotel watching an acrobat get set to perform his high wire act. As the tightrope walker climbed to the top of his tower, something moved Cub shortstop Bill Dahlen—his nickname was "Bad Bill"—to tug on the guy wire, which sent the aerialist tumbling to the street. That brought the cops and the hotel manager, all brandishing their pistols. The Cubs were invited to leave Waycross, not, as it turned out, for the assault on the aerialist—circus performers and actors had no more standing than ballplayers, apparently—but because the hotel manager claimed that his wife had been insulted by the ballplayers. The team left the next morning for Savannah.

The baseball conditions were as spartan as the living conditions in nineteenth-century spring trainings. Southern towns had baseball weather but not always did they have baseball facilities. Teams practiced on whatever open patch of ground they could find; seldom was it actually a baseball diamond. This was less of a disadvantage than it might seem, for early camps were more fat farms than baseball camps. The players of the day were given greatly to off-season dissipation and frequently showed up in the spring

"looking like aldermen." The degree to which the off-season had eroded players' baseball skills was of less concern to managers, owners, and newspaper reporters than the degree to which the winter had eroded their conditioning. "The Men Are All Overweight," read the headline in a *Brooklyn Eagle* story on spring training in 1896. "With their chins crowded into the collars of their heavy overcoats, a dozen members of the Brooklyn base ball club boarded the 3:30 annex yesterday afternoon and their trip to the South was begun." Though there was some throwing and some hitting, much of spring training in those years was given over to long morning hikes of two to seven miles, medicine-ball and Indian-club workouts—an Indian club is something akin to a weighted bat—with maybe some hot baths thrown in to boil out those alcoholic microbes. All of this was exactly what teams had done in the armories and barns back in the North. From the first, club owners pondered whether the baseball value of a trip south justified the expense. Cap Anson's Chicago teams won championships after preseasons in Hot Springs. But Connie Mack's Washington Senators finished dead last after their spring in Jacksonville, and Brooklyn was deep in the second division during the season that the *Eagle* reported the players all showing up fat.

Team owners—*magnates* in the newspaper argot of the day—kept careful track of spring training expenses. And, like good businesspeople everywhere, they looked to cut expenses and squeeze out revenue wherever they could. In 1908, the Boston Red Sox took a young outfielder named Tris Speaker to camp with them in Little Rock. Speaker did little to impress, and when the Red Sox left camp they assigned his contract to the Little Rock Travelers of the Southern League as payment for the rental of the Travelers' field during training camp.

Records from the Philadelphia Phillies' spring training in 1892 showed a bottom-line expense of $469 for the team's month-long trip to Gainesville. Manager Harry Wright left Philadelphia with $200 in expense money. Train fare for fourteen players cost the team $404.60; Pullman berths were another $89. (Unlike the Senators of 1888, the Phillies' players were not forced to share a berth with a teammate.) The tickets were billed to the club; the Pullman berths came out of Wright's $200, as did breakfast in the Richmond train station—seventy-five cents per player for a total of $10.50—and lunch and dinner aboard the train (each meal, fifty cents a player for a total of $14).

In Gainesville, room and board at the team's hotel ran $10 per week per man, a total of $325.64. Wright soon ran out of money, wired back to

Philadelphia, and received an additional $375. Two local exhibitions put some money back in the till. The first of these, against a local team, brought in $17.50 in gate receipts; the second, against the National League's Brooklyn Bridegrooms, brought in $44.80. The only added expense involved in these games was fifty-five cents for groundskeeping. Three games on the road in Florida brought in over $100—$106.97—but room, board, and travel took an $82 chunk of that. The mother lode, insofar as single-game gate receipts were concerned, was an exhibition against the New York Giants in Richmond as the team made its way home. The teams split a gate of $219.25, with each team realizing $95.62 after paying out $20 in advertising, $3 for a license, and $5 for the rental of the field.

When the team got back to Philadelphia for the start of the regular season, expenses had totaled $1,131.78, around $80 per man. Total gate receipts were $662.09 (there had been other exhibitions against the Giants as the teams made their way north) for a net loss of $469.69.

Teams made their spring training plans based on cost. They also made them at the very last minute. In 1900, the Brooklyn club still had no firm plans in place as late as March 1. The team's manager was unconcerned; he planned a trip to Augusta, Georgia, sometime in the next week or so to scout out hotel space in advance of the start of camp, that year scheduled for March 20.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the question of whether a spring trip was necessary—whatever the cost—had been settled pretty conclusively by Ned Hanlon and the Baltimore Orioles. Hanlon had been the thirty-four-year-old player-manager of the Pittsburgh club in 1892 when he snapped a tendon in his leg chasing a batting-practice fly ball on opening day. The injury ended his playing career; Pittsburgh cut him loose, and Baltimore owner Harry Vonderhorst hired him to manage the last-place Orioles. Hanlon kept the Orioles in last place in 1892 and moved them up only a couple of notches in 1893. But he was busy making trades, putting together a starting lineup in which six of the eight position players would ultimately find their way to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Before the 1894 season, Hanlon took the Orioles to Macon, Georgia, and put them through a new and entirely different kind of spring training. For eight hours a day over eight weeks, Hanlon drilled the Orioles in the hit-and-run, the squeeze play, the double steal, and driving the ball into the ground when the defense was playing deep—the hit that would forever after

be known as the "Baltimore chop." Hanlon also drilled his boys in some extralegal ploys, including running across the diamond from first to third when the single umpire's attention was directed elsewhere and grabbing a base runner's belt for a second or so after a ball was hit. He also instilled in the Orioles the notion that they were the toughest sons-of-bitches ever to take the field. "We'd spit tobacco juice on a spike wound, rub dirt on it, and get back out there and play," remembered John McGraw, Hanlon's third baseman and most devoted pupil.

The results of Hanlon's innovative spring training were immediate and decidedly dramatic. The Orioles opened the 1894 season against the New York Giants, sweeping a four-game series and bedazzling the Giants by successfully executing thirteen hit-and-runs over the four games. "It's a new game they're playing," acknowledged New York manager Monte Ward. "It's just not baseball." Playing their brand of what would come to be called "inside baseball," the Orioles won the 1894 pennant and the next two thereafter. The swagger and the precision teamwork that marked their game was something all clubs now began imitating. It was the tacit consensus of magnates and managers alike that the place to make this happen was training camp in the spring.

In the years subsequent to Hanlon and the Orioles, no one epitomized the Hanlon philosophy more than John McGraw. Spring training stories in the first quarter of the twentieth century invariably featured McGraw front and center. He took over as manager of the New York Giants in 1902, transferring that old Oriole swagger to Broadway, where his star would quickly eclipse not only that of his mentor (who'd moved to the Brooklyn Dodgers) but that of everyone else in the game. McGraw was the face and the personality of baseball until Babe Ruth emerged after the war. McGraw told everyone who would listen—and he was never without an audience—about inside baseball and the Oriole way. His spring trainings were every bit as long and as disciplined as Hanlon's. But while he worked his charges just as hard as his mentor had worked him, he also treated them like the kings he expected them to be. McGraw made spring training a spectacle. The players loved it; the press waxed poetic. All of baseball and no small number of southern towns and cities benefited, as America grew more intimate with spring training and the places that hosted it.

Prior to McGraw's arrival, the Giants had always trained at home—the farthest they'd traveled was to the Jersey shore for a couple of years in the 1890s. McGraw took them to Savannah. After the Giants defeated the

Athletics in the 1905 World Series, he moved the Giants' camp to Memphis, in part because he had persuaded a high-end Memphis hotel to house his players. The Giants' boardinghouse days were over, and the boardinghouse days for the rest of major league baseball were numbered. That 1906 Memphis camp marked the beginning of spring training as the spectacle it remains to this day. McGraw arranged for the Giants players to be driven from their hotel to the practice field each morning in open coaches drawn by horses draped with yellow blankets with the words "World Champions" embroidered in blue. He boasted to the reporters that the team would repeat as World Series champions in 1906, and it was all dutifully and breathlessly reported to the snowbound newspaper readers back in the North. McGraw understood that, while spring training was an opportunity to prepare a team to play baseball on opening day, it was also a place to sow the seeds that would allow the ticket office to be in full flower by opening day. "You can't expect a man in New York with his nose in his coat collar to get excited about baseball overnight," he said. Dan Daniel explained John McGraw's marketing genius this way: "The fan, no less than the player, must be prepared for the major league championship season," he wrote. "The turnstile-clicker must be warmed up after the long winter. [The fan's] baseball appetite must be whetted afresh, his curiosity intrigued.

"Years ago [Daniel was writing this in 1947], before baseball went in for this annual springtime enterprise, the pennant campaign was at least three weeks or a month old before the fans began to show signs of real interest. Now your customer comes into the opener agog and aglow."

McGraw drove his troops in spring training because he also understood the box office importance of a quick start to the season. "You have to get that money in the till before the Fourth of July," he said. "If things go badly after that you're at least sure to break even. But if you go badly in the first half and lose those early big attendances, there's absolutely nothing you can do in the second half to get it back."

McGraw took the Giants to Memphis just that one year; in the years following, he would take his teams farther south and west—to Marlin and San Antonio, Texas; to Gainesville and Sarasota, Florida; and across the country to Los Angeles. But Memphis, together with Marlin, Texas, remains the city most identified with the John McGraw Giants. Every year, wherever he trained, McGraw would invariably bring the Giants to Memphis on their way back to New York, stopping for at least a weekend and sometimes for a week or longer. Memphis was a good exhibition town; the games the

Giants played there, be they against another major league club or the hometown Memphis Chicks, generally put a lot of money in the till. Second, an extended stay in one town got the players out of their Pullman berths and into a comfortable hotel. The norm in those days was to travel to the next town by train overnight as teams barnstormed north, arriving on a siding in the early morning—and reaching home and the start of the regular season exhausted and irritable from living on a train for two weeks. McGraw sought to break that up. Finally, he thought that Memphis's climate provided the ideal transition from the March warmth of Florida or Texas to the April chill of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago. "If the weather [in Memphis] was warm, it wasn't as warm as it had been where the Giants had trained," explained Frank Graham, the New York columnist who covered the Giants for virtually all of McGraw's thirty years with the team. "And if it was cold, it wasn't as cold as it would be . . . wherever they were going to open the season."

John McGraw was an odd mix of Marine drill sergeant and fraternity prankster at spring training. If he felt his players were loafing or underperforming, he wouldn't hesitate to keep them running drills for an extra two or three hours. If they displeased him on the field, he could unleash a stream of epithets and insults so blue it made ordinary ball field vulgarity sound like prayer. What seemed like slave driving was part motivation, part cunning. At day's end, he wished to leave his players too tired for carousing. "Sure, [a player's] afternoon workout will not be as lively as his pre-luncheon drill," he said. "But an alert manager will keep his players on the move and get them into a mood for bed long before the midnight curfew."

But for all of the discipline of McGraw's days, he is also remembered for the decidedly different bent he brought to his nights, keeping the Giants loose over the long weeks of spring training with practical jokes and steady carousing. One spring in San Antonio, he traveled with a wildcat kitten he named Bill Pennant, carrying it into hotel lobbies in a small cage and setting it loose and laughing as the other guests fled in horror. Sometimes, the writers who traveled with the club were his victims; sometimes, they were his confederates. He delighted in spending the evening drinking with the writers and then feigning ignorance and innocence when the writers would stumble back to their rooms to find all of the furniture piled on the bed.

During the ten years that the Giants trained in Marlin, Texas, before World War I, McGraw would barhop at night with a four-piece band in tow. At evening's end, he would pay off the band with all of the change and loose

bills he had in his pocket, invariably a good night's pay for the musicians. One night, he instructed a writer to turn off the light as he paid off, and in the darkness he slipped the trumpet player a nickel, three pennies, and some folded paper. When the lights came back on, he retreated to a dark corner to watch the trumpeter try to explain to his mates that eight cents was all he'd been given. "Don't tell us that's all he give you," shouted one. "Mr. McGraw ain't cheap. He give you plenty." And with that, he cracked the trumpeter on the head with a bull fiddle, setting off a melee that destroyed all of the instruments by the time it was over and tickling McGraw's misshapen funny bone no end. He and his rather dark sense of humor no doubt felt the amusement well worth the price of the instruments, for which he reimbursed the band the next morning.

The Giants players lived in such fear of their manager that he was seldom the butt of any jokes himself. But nobody who instigated as much as McGraw did could get away without at least some retaliation. One year in Marlin, the Giants jury-rigged a steam room in a hotel bathroom, plugging the gaps in the doors and windows with towels and running the bathtub's hot water to create the steam. They'd sit on the hot radiators, protecting themselves by laying towels on top. As McGraw came in and blindly made his way through the clouds of steam, someone removed the towels from the radiator and McGraw sat down, "wearing nothing but perspiration." He howled in pain and threatened vengeance upon the perpetrator. Suspicions always centered on pitcher Bugs Raymond, but, knowing McGraw always meant what he said, the players with knowledge of the incident took the secret to their graves.

McGraw visited most of his pranks upon writers, locals, and other hangers-on, like the unfortunate band; he seldom directed pranks at his players, which was almost certainly by design. Like Ned Hanlon with the old Orioles, McGraw instilled an us-against-the-world ethos in his players. He alone would mete out discipline. The result was that the Giants players came to fear McGraw and nobody else, knowing their manager had their backs. One year in Marlin, pitcher Rube Marquard, another of the Giants' blithe spirits, got the notion to shoot up a burlesque-show billboard within sight of his room with a handgun. The gunfire greatly unnerved the locals, and the Marlin constabulary came for Marquard's head. McGraw said he'd handle the discipline, but the local sheriff insisted on arresting Marquard. "Dammit, we put this town on the map," roared McGraw, "and we can just as quickly put it off by leaving." Marquard never left his room, and the Giants stayed

in Marlin for ten years. The town had great appeal for the Giants players. The burlesque show whose sign Marquard had shot up was only one of several in the town; there were also a great many saloons and gambling halls during the pre–World War I decade when the Giants wintered there.

McGraw's Giants camps were probably no more rambunctious than any other. Spring trainings during the prewar years tended to be madcap, undisciplined affairs, filled with snipe hunts, food fights, water balloons tossed from hotel windows, sneaking in after curfew, then playing with a next-day hangover, and other benign and time-honored misbehavior. One of the most famous spring training stories from the twentieth century's early years involves Philadelphia Athletics catcher Ozzie Schreck, who grew increasingly frustrated with the poor quality of the steak he was served at the team's hotel and with the hotel's seeming indifference to his complaints. Somewhere along the way, he secured a hammer and nails, and when another steak displeased him, he rose from his table and nailed the steak to the dining room wall.

McGraw's spring trainings were the best chronicled, and that is perhaps the reason for the enduring quality of the stories and for the profound influence he had upon the practice of taking a team south. When McGraw took the Giants to Los Angeles in 1907, the trip captured the imagination of all of baseball. As the colorful, competitive New York newspaper writers spread the legend of McGraw, other team owners and managers sought to create the same buzz around their spring trainings. Sports editors took note of the circulation potential of spring training stories, and soon every American newspaper covering major league baseball was sending a reporter south in March.

Local mayors and chambers of commerce took note of what a month's worth of national datelines could mean for a city's burgeoning hotel and tourism business. Baseball players were no longer seen as the incorrigible degenerates they had been in the 1800s. Now, they were celebrities of the first order, and as America returned to business after the Great War, southern cities began clamoring to keep company with these new celebrities and grabbing for themselves a bit of the money to be had by being a part of baseball's spring training.