

Farewell to the Last Golden Era

*The Yankees, the Pirates
and the 1960 Baseball Season*

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CHAPTER ONE

“As inevitable as tomorrow — but not as imminent”

When it opened on Miami Beach’s famed Gold Coast in December 1954, the \$13 million Fontainebleau was the latest in modern luxury hotels. Designed by the architect Morris Lapidus and built on the site of the old Firestone estate on Collins Avenue, the Fontainebleau was a modernist marriage of form and function, its semi-circular bulk made to capture the cool breezes blowing in from the Atlantic Ocean. Outside, on the fourteen-acre grounds, were other marvels: an Olympic size swimming pool, a smaller kids’ pool, and an ice rink. The inside of the 565-room hotel was done in a French motif, with the furniture French provincial. Luxury suites went for \$175 a night and featured built-in ironing boards as well as bidets. A fake fireplace was installed in the Presidential suite. A staff of 900 people serviced a clientele that ranged from foreign dignitaries and their entourages to the gaggle of tourists taking advantage of package deals. The economic recession of 1958 had put a damper on things, but by February 1959 the Fontainebleau was once again in full swing. Cadillac convertibles were rolling up to the entrance and pampered women were modeling mink stoles in every pastel shade. The management, regretfully, was turning away guests for lack of room.

The growing demand for space had inspired the Fontainebleau’s owner, Ben Novack, to begin building a fourteen-story addition, featuring an auditorium and hotel annex. The annex would increase the total number of rooms to 1000, almost doubling the current capacity. There had been one big stumbling block to these plans. Sunshine was Miami Beach’s most treasured commodity and the projected wing would have cast the Eden

Roc Hotel, located next to the Fontainebleau on Collins Avenue, in shadow by the early afternoon. The Miami City Council came to the Eden Roc's rescue, passing an ordinance requiring hotel wings to be set back so as to protect adjoining properties. The dispute eventually went all the way to the Florida Supreme Court, which overturned the Miami Beach ordinance. The Fontainebleau expansion continued forward.

The question of expansion was also very much on the minds of Major League Baseball executives as they arrived at the Fontainebleau for their annual Winter Meetings in the first week of December 1959. Where and when expansion would occur, however, were questions that neither Baseball Commissioner Ford Frick nor league presidents Warren Giles and Joe Cronin were quite prepared to answer. But it was not a topic they had the luxury of ignoring. You see, like the Eden Roc Hotel, they also had a shadow looming over them.

In 1960, Major League Baseball consisted of sixteen professional teams. The senior circuit, the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs (established in 1876), had franchises in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The junior circuit, the American League of Professional Baseball Clubs (established in 1901), operated in Boston, New York, Baltimore, Washington, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, and Kansas City. Each and every team was located near a major body of water: the Atlantic Coast (New York, Boston, and Baltimore); the Pacific Coast (San Francisco and Los Angeles); the Delaware and Potomac Rivers (Philadelphia and Washington); the Ohio River (Cincinnati and Pittsburgh); the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers (St. Louis and Kansas City); and the Great Lakes (Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and Milwaukee). Major League Baseball had yet to venture into the Arizona desert, the Texas plains, or the Rocky Mountains.

For the first fifty-two years of the modern era, which began in 1901, there had been no teams west of the Mississippi River, or south of the Potomac and Ohio Rivers. This reflected the growth of industrialization and urbanization that occurred in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century. With the exception of the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., the original Major League cities were all, to some degree or another, industrial cities; the industries they supported (oil, steel, automobile manufacturing, textiles, etc.) were located in the Northeast, not in the South or West. So too were the major transportation, communica-

tion, and financial links. As the pace of industrialization progressed, increasing numbers of native-born Americans abandoned the farm for the city, knocking elbows with immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. Baseball provided a pastime for one and all, the ball field's green grasses a wistful reminder of an agrarian past no longer part of their daily existence. In America, the second Industrial Revolution, mass society, and professional baseball grew together, with all its accompanying prejudices.

After World War II, Major League Baseball finally broke out of its northeastern quadrant. In the National League, the Boston Braves moved to Milwaukee in 1953; in 1958 the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants found new homes in Los Angeles and San Francisco, respectively. In the American League, the Philadelphia Athletics abandoned the City of Brotherly Love for Kansas City in 1955. The only exception to this western flight was the AL franchise in St. Louis, the Browns, which trekked in an easterly direction to become the Baltimore Orioles in 1954. These moves were all undertaken by teams located in cities which had traditionally supported two Major League teams. The internal emigration of Americans from cities to the new middle class suburbs in the late 1940s and 1950s, coupled with the advent of television, had resulted in decreased attendance at these urban ballparks. The weaker franchises in these cities (except for the Browns) decided to seek a new fan base, and consequently, greater fortunes in the West. The urban areas on the far side of the Mississippi River, wanting the status symbol of a big league team, eagerly embraced them.

Still, as the year 1960 beckoned, Major League Baseball had not quite caught up with the demographic facts of life. The nation's population had more than doubled since 1901 (from 76 million to 179 million) but the Majors still held at sixteen franchises. To be sure, ten of those teams were located in cities that ranked among the ten most populated urban areas of the United States: 1. New York, 2. Chicago, 3. Los Angeles, 4. Philadelphia, 5. Detroit, 6. Baltimore, 8. Cleveland, 9. Washington, D.C., 10. St. Louis. Milwaukee, San Francisco, and Boston were ranked eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth, respectively. But Pittsburgh, the eleventh largest city in 1900, now ranked sixteenth. Trailing behind were Cincinnati (twenty-first) and Kansas City (twenty-seventh). Meanwhile, Houston, the seventh largest city in the country, had no big league team. Neither did Dallas (ranked number fourteen) or the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul, which together would have comprised the ninth largest metropolis in the U.S. The biggest anomaly of all, however, was New York City. Despite a pop-

ulation of 7.8 million, it had only one franchise; Chicago, with less than half of New York's population, supported *two* Major League teams.¹

But the Major League Baseball executives who gathered for the Winter Meetings had other things on their minds. They strolled through the Fontainebleau gardens, sunned themselves by the pool, and played a round or two of golf. On Sunday, December 6, they met with the major league player representatives, led by the NL's Robin Roberts and the AL's Harvey Kuenn, at the nearby Indian Creek Country Club. It was later described as being "one of the most amicable meetings on record."² The owners agreed to improve ballpark conditions in certain cities, reduce scheduling problems, and hike up the players' meal money allowance to \$10 a day (the owners being fully appreciative of the rising cost of living). The players, for their part, endorsed Commissioner Frick's plans for a new television deal.

For some time now, Commissioner Frick had been urging NL president Warren Giles and AL chief Joe Cronin to come up with plans for adding new franchises. However, as the plenary meetings began at the Fontainebleau on Monday, December 7, expansion remained the object of strong resistance on the part of the Lords of Baseball. Giles declared that the NL had no plans whatsoever in that regard. Cronin refused to commit the AL without some reciprocal action on the part of the senior circuit. The unwillingness of the established leagues to take the initiative on expansion left the door open for other possibilities.

On the afternoon of December 7, a seventy-eight-year-old resident of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, checked into the Fontainebleau Hotel. He was the fabled Branch Wesley Rickey, nicknamed the Mahatma, Major League catcher, manager, and front office executive par excellence, who had invented the farm system with the St. Louis Cardinals in the early 1920s and had brought Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. Rickey had been out of baseball since ceding his post as the general manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates, a club he ran between 1950 and 1955. Now he was back, his arrival in Miami coinciding with the annual Winter Meetings being held at the Fontainebleau. In truth, for the Lords of Baseball, the Mahatma's presence in the midst of this conference was about as welcome as Virgil Sollozzo attending a meeting of the New York five families. The reason for this uneasiness was Rickey's newest venture: a third major league.

Since his retirement, the Mahatma had been observing the progress of Major League Baseball with an increasing sense of doom. "Baseball may

die in the 1960s," he warned. The short-sighted men who ran the game continued to alienate fans by allowing stadiums to deteriorate and refusing to furnish adequate parking facilities. But more than anything else, Rickey claimed, the problem was that the National Pastime was "no longer national." The nation's population had more than doubled since 1900 with no reciprocal expansion of Major League teams. At least 32 cities, he argued, "can and should play."³ Therefore, he had put his considerable fame and prestige behind the new Continental League, projected to begin operations in 1961.

On Tuesday, December 8, the Continental League took center stage at the Fontainebleau. With Rickey at the press conference were the executives representing the new loop's five maiden entries: Jack Kent Cooke of Toronto, Bob Howsam of Denver, Craig Cullinan of Houston, Wheelock Whitney, Jr. of Minneapolis, and Dwight Davis of New York (the Davis Cup in tennis was donated by his family). Also present at the Fontainebleau was the CL's founder and legal counsel, William Shea of New York. But, as usual, it was the Mahatma who was the focus of the press cameras. The cane-thumping, cigar-chomping Rickey waxed forth in the tradition of Daniel Webster, Edmund Burke, and William Pitt. The subject of his oratorical artistry was the strained relations between the new league and the Lords of Baseball.

The Continental League, Rickey told the assembled audience, "is as inevitable as tomorrow — but not as imminent." It was inevitable in the sense that five of the eight cities required to begin operations had already signed on for a projected 1961 start. All had posted the \$50,000 entrance fee (for operating expenses) and had committed themselves to either renovating old stadiums or building new ones, such as the one planned for the old World's Fair site at Flushing Meadows, Queens. At the end of the press conference, the Mahatma surprised the audience by announcing that Atlanta had been admitted as the CL's sixth entry. The league, he said, was considering other possible entries for the seventh and eighth spots, including Dallas, Montreal, and Buffalo. That it was not imminent was due to the machinations of Major League Baseball. The Continental League, Rickey charged, could not round out its full complement of eight cities until Joe Cronin made clear whether the American League was committed to expansion in 1961. Potential entrants, Rickey noted, were holding back in the hopes of securing a franchise in one of the two existing big leagues. The (purposeful) indecisiveness of Cronin had already caused the Dallas



Branch Rickey (left) and Bill Shea, founders of the Continental League, which Rickey said was “as inevitable as tomorrow but not as imminent.” Baseball commissioner Ford Frick agreed with the second part of Rickey’s statement.

group to waver. His thick eyebrows working at their indignant best beneath thick eyeglasses, the Mahatma blasted Major League Baseball as “a monopoly that calls itself the national pastime.”⁴

With that salvo Branch Rickey struck the Lords of Baseball at their most vulnerable spot. Throughout 1959, and for several years previously, the U.S. Congress had been investigating monopolistic practices in professional sports. Baseball, being the oldest and most prominent, received the greatest scrutiny from Capitol Hill. Leading the charge was Senator Estes Kefauver. Mostly forgotten now, in the 1950s Kefauver was a familiar name to Americans as head of a Senate committee investigating organized crime and as the Democratic Party’s vice-presidential candidate in Adlai Stevenson’s failed campaign for the White House in 1956. In February 1959, Kefauver, in his capacity as chairman of the Senate Anti-Monopoly Sub-committee, introduced a bill that would have limited the number of players any one Major League team could control to 80, as opposed to the nearly 450 allegedly under direct, or indirect, jurisdiction. The effect of

this action would be to provide a pool of players for Rickey's new Continental League, which Kefauver very much supported.

As it struggled to contain the congressional offensive, Major League Baseball was being assaulted on another flank. When the Dodgers and Giants owners, Walter O'Malley and Horace Stoneham, absconded for the West Coast after the 1957 season, New York Mayor Robert F. Wagner appointed Bill Shea, a corporation lawyer, to investigate the possibility of bringing a Major League franchise back to the Big Apple. William Alfred Shea was born in New York's Washington Heights (Giants territory) on June 21, 1907, and grew up the Ridgewood area of Brooklyn. Because his high school Spanish teacher was related to Yankee pitcher Herb Pennock, the young Shea received free passes to games at Yankee Stadium. Educated at Georgetown University, Shea had been associated for decades with the New York law firm of Gould Shea. Shea, however, was no ordinary lawyer. Some quipped that he had no idea where the courthouse was.⁵ His *métier* was that of a power broker, someone who combined charm, street smarts, bluffs, and when necessary, threats, to advance the interest of the powerful and famous.

And so, at Wagner's request, Shea began to recruit a new Major League team for New York. He approached the Cincinnati Reds, Philadelphia Phillies, and Branch Rickey's former team, the Pittsburgh Pirates, but all declined to relocate. So, rebuffed by big leagues, Shea decided to form a third major loop. At New York's Hotel Biltmore on July 1, 1959, he announced the creation of the Continental League. The CL, he declared, would "operate within the structure of organized baseball." Two days later at a congressional hearing in Washington, Commissioner Frick and league presidents Giles and Cronin promised to cooperate with Shea in negotiating player rights, territorial jurisdictions, player pensions, and issues related to minor league farm systems. Major League Baseball had no choice but to cooperate, lest it feel the sting of congressional anti-trust legislation.

As talented as he was at the art of the deal, Shea was trained as a lawyer, not a baseball man. He needed an experienced hand to run the league, someone who could stand on equal par with Frick, Giles, and Cronin. In short, a man who knew where all the bodies were buried. A behind-the-scenes wire puller, he needed a front man in dealing with congressmen and senators in the full glare of the camera lights. Thus, at a news conference at the Warwick Hotel in New York on August 18, 1959, Shea announced that Branch Rickey had been hired as the president of the

Continental League. And so, at the Fontainebleau press conference in December 1959, it was the Mahatma who held Major League Baseball's feet to the fire.

By raising the specter of congressional investigation, the Mahatma was putting pressure on Major League Baseball to declare unequivocally whatever plans it had for future expansion. In truth, Warren Giles disliked the whole idea of expansion, while Joe Cronin had been Hamlet-like on the subject. It was Cronin, in fact, that Rickey was putting on the spot: fish or cut bait. An exasperated Cronin declared that the AL had no plans for expansion in 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, etc. His guarded response was enough to put the CL back on track. Rickey went home to Pittsburgh, and from there flew to Dallas, where on December 22 he announced that Dallas-Ft. Worth would be the seventh member of the new loop. The eighth and final entry, the Mahatma promised, would be announced by January 1, 1960.

As Rickey was sparring with Frick, Giles, and Cronin at the Fontainebleau, a member of the New York Yankees was also making the news. Lawrence Peter Berra — “Lawdie” to his parents and siblings, “Mr. Berra” to Yankee manager Casey Stengel, and “Yogi” to everyone else — was 3,000 miles across the Atlantic testing the European interest in the National Pastime. Yogi, his wife Carmen, and their two older sons Larry (10) and Timmy (8) visited France and Spain before moving on to Italy, which the Yankee catcher had last seen as a Navy seaman during World War II. The visit to Milan was a homecoming of sorts; the Berra family traced its roots to this northern Italian city. In fact, Yogi had grown up speaking the Milanese dialect in The Hill section of St. Louis, but he recognized that it was not proper Italian, and so was reluctant to use it on his tour of Italy. Consuming Italian food, on the other hand, was no embarrassment at all. At one point on the journey when the bus tour stopped for lunch, Yogi put away a plate of macaroni, two helpings of tripe, a salad, ice cream, and half a bottle of Italian wine.

Italian customs officials did not know quite what to make of the assortment of bats, gloves, and balls that Yogi brought over on the Alitalia flight from New York. They promised to release the cargo — donated by an organization billing itself as Baseball for Italy, Inc. — as soon as they figured out what to assess it in custom duties. Not that it mattered much to the average Italian. They had no idea who Yogi was. Soccer (or football

as it is called everywhere else in the world except in the United States) was the national sport, and Italians were not about to spoil their soccer fields to accommodate this strange game. Yogi, always a clever man with a dollar, concluded that professional baseball would have an uphill battle establishing a fan base in his land of origin. Italians, he noted, took a siesta everyday between one and four in the afternoon — not a good thing for the gate given the traditional 2:00 P.M. starting time for day games.

As Yogi and his family completed their tour of Italy, American-style football was on display at Yankee Stadium. On Sunday, December 6, a crowd of 68,496 was on hand as the New York Giants crushed the Cleveland Browns, 48–7, winning their second consecutive Eastern Division championship, and third in four years. The game almost ended in a forfeit. Delirious Giants fans spilled out on the field 113 seconds before the final gun sounded, tearing down one goal post before stadium security restored order. Returning to work on Monday at his office at 745 Fifth Avenue, Yankee general manager George Weiss was more concerned with a wreckage of a different sort at the “House That Ruth Built.”

The proud Yankees, the team of Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio, winners of seven pennants in nine years under Casey Stengel, had finished a disappointing 79–75 in 1959. Their record put them a distant third behind the pennant-winning Chicago White Sox and the second-place Cleveland Indians. Personnel changes obviously were in order. After weeks of fruitless trade talks with several National League teams, on December 11 Weiss concluded a deal with the Kansas City Athletics. He traded outfielders Hank Bauer and Norm Siebern, pitcher Don Larsen, and first baseman Marv Throneberry to the A’s for outfielder Roger Maris, shortstop Joe DeMaestri, and first baseman Kent Hadley.

Weiss had now made fifteen deals with the Athletics, involving fifty-nine players, since the ballclub had moved from Philadelphia to Kansas City in 1955. All of these deals had vastly improved the Yankees at the expense of the A’s and the rest of the league. Other American League club officials were outraged, especially Cleveland Indians general manager Frank Lane who had traded Maris to Kansas City for Puerto Rico-born first baseman Vic Power in 1958. But that mattered little to Weiss. Bauer, a mainstay in all of Manager Stengel’s pennant-winning teams, was, at thirty-seven, clearly over the hill. Siebern was a left-handed hitter with some power, but he hit mostly to the opposite field. In Maris the Yankees were acquiring a consummately talented outfielder, who could run, throw, and

hit with power. Moreover, with his pull-hitting left-handed stroke, Maris, unlike Siebern, was expected to take full advantage of Yankee Stadium's short right field porch.

For all of his protests, Lane — “Trader Frank” as he was called — wasn't exactly standing pat. A few days before the Maris deal, the Cleveland GM had negotiated a transaction with Chicago White Sox owner Bill Veeck. Lane packed off outfielder Minnie Minoso and three throw-ins to the White Sox in exchange for catcher John Romano and third baseman Bubba Phillips. Lane, who had acquired Minoso from Chicago two years earlier, was now sending him back to the Pale Hose in order to fill gaps behind the plate and in the infield in preparation for another pennant run in 1960. Minoso — *Orestes Miñoso* to Latin American fans — is perhaps best known today for being the only Major Leaguer to have played in six different decades. But that was basically a publicity stunt which hardly does him justice. In the black Cuban, Veeck was re-acquiring a power-hitting outfielder who hit .302 with 21 homers and 92 RBIs the previous season. The “Go Go Sox,” who had won with speed and brilliant fielding in 1959, had now added hitting punch in their attempt to repeat as champions in 1960.

Six days after the Maris trade, “Trader Frank” was in action once again. He dispatched second baseman Billy Martin, pitcher Cal McLish, and first baseman Gordy Coleman to the Cincinnati Reds for second baseman Johnny Temple. The stocky Temple was a perennial National League all-star who had had his best season in 1959, hitting .311. He was expected to provide hitting and fielding artistry as well as fiery leadership; TV broadcaster Joe Garagiola selected Temple as the second sacker for his “Best Fighter in a Brawl” all-star team.⁶ Martin, a famous brawler himself and former Yankee World Series hero at second base, was by this time a sad facsimile of his former self. The real catch for the pitching-starved Reds was Calvin Coolidge Julius Caesar Tuskahoma McLish, who was 19–8 with Cleveland in 1959. The thirty-four-year-old right hander had come up with the Dodgers in 1944 as one of Branch Rickey's “war babies.” McLish, who hailed from Anadarko, Oklahoma, and was part Choctaw Indian, thus found himself traded from the Tribe (as the Cleveland club was affectionately known) to the Reds. For George Weiss, Lane's latest trade was sweet indeed: a player he hated (Martin) and one he feared (McLish beat the Yankees six times in 1959) had been banished to the National League.

At Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a walk-out by trolley and bus workers

of the Pittsburgh Railway Company had stranded 160,000 daily commuters in early December. Still, despite the transportation woes and “slippery” weather conditions, city residents went about their Christmas shopping. Rosenbaum’s on Liberty and Sixth had hung up a going-out-of-business sign, but sales were brisk at Gimbels and Kaufman’s. Meanwhile, two miles east of the downtown area, known locally as the Golden Triangle, the Pittsburgh Pirates forty-one-year-old general manager, Joe L. Brown, was doing some Christmas shopping of his own.

The Pittsburgh Pirates had finished a surprising second behind the Braves in 1958, the first fruit of Branch Rickey’s rebuilding program. But the Bucs (or Corsairs as the Pirates were also known) slipped to fourth in 1959, with a 78–76 record. Brown knew that the team could not afford to stand pat in the trading market if they were to return to the top of the first division of the National League. The Los Angeles Dodgers, who defeated the White Sox in six games in the 1959 World Series, made no major winter trades, since their farm system was deep in talent. The second-place Milwaukee Braves, who finished the season tied for first but then proceeded to lose both games of a best-of-three playoff series to the Dodgers, also made no major deals. But the Braves were expecting the return of their second base spark plug, Red Schoendienst, after a year-long absence recuperating from tuberculosis.

This year, for the second time in a row, the interleague trading period was in force. Between November 20 and December 15, players could be moved from one league to the other without having to clear waivers in their own loop. The third-place San Francisco Giants, who had been in contention until the final week of the season, took full advantage of the interleague trading period. They bolstered their pitching staff by sending Jackie Brandt, a Gold Glove-winning outfielder with some power, and right-handed pitcher Gordon Jones to the Baltimore Orioles in exchange for left-handed pitchers Billy O’Dell and Billy Loes. Formerly one of Branch Rickey’s Dodger farmhands, Loes was a well-known flake who had once claimed to have lost a grounder in the sun during a World Series game. On December 15 the Giants completed another trade, this time sending shortstop Daryl Spencer and outfielder Leon Wagner to the St. Louis Cardinals for second baseman Don Blasingame. A twenty-seven-year-old Mississippian, “Blaze” (who hit .289 in 1959) was expected to help tighten what had been a porous Giant middle infield.

Like the Giants, the Pirates had also been active in the inter league

market. Two days prior to the Roger Maris trade, Brown concluded a deal with the same Kansas City Athletics, acquiring catcher-third baseman Hal Smith for pitcher Dick Hall and minor league shortstop Ken Hamlin. In Smith, the Pirates got a player who would become part of a catching platoon with veteran receiver Smoky Burgess. He might even take over the starting job if the portly Burgess carried out his threat to retire. Long-time Pirate observers, however, considered the trade as merely a “second class deal.” Bob Prince, the Bucs television and radio voice, dismissed it as swapping “one athletic supporter for two.”⁷ What the club really needed most desperately, it was generally agreed, was a power hitter to complement their up-and-coming slugger, first baseman Dick Stuart. Brown, in fact, had almost clinched a deal that would have brought Maris from Kansas City to Pittsburgh for shortstop Dick Groat. Brown consulted with manager Danny Murtaugh — who said, “I don’t like it” — and at the last moment walked away from the table. George Weiss and the Yankees ended up with Maris instead.⁸

On December 21, Brown swung another minor deal, trading pitchers Ron Kline and Tom Cheney to the St. Louis Cardinals for outfielder Gino Cimoli. The right-handed pitching Kline hailed from Callery, Pennsylvania, once a major junction on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, but by 1960 a town of barely 500 people. Along with Vernon Law and Bob Friend, the Callery Kid had been one of the pitching finds of Branch Rickey during his tenure as Pittsburgh GM Kline, ever the victim of poor run support, was 11–13 in 1959. Cimoli, by contrast, was a big city boy, a native of San Francisco (the newspapers of the time readily revealed this information — it was important to know where somebody was from). Gino had come up through the Dodger farm system, so he like Kline was a Rickey discovery. As with Brown’s earlier trade, this transaction was not received with much enthusiasm by either the Pittsburgh press or Pirate fans. By dealing Kline to St. Louis, it was noted, Brown had left his team minus a fourth starter.

The departure of Kline put additional pressure on the remaining starters, such as Bob Friend. Born on November 24, 1930, at Lafayette, Indiana, Friend was one of those rarities in organized ball: a college graduate. He held a BS degree in economics from Purdue University, the alma mater of his father, five brothers, and sister. He also studied the piano for eight years. The story goes that Branch Rickey was at first reluctant to use Friend in a game. Manager Fred Haney, however, had great faith in him and waited for a Sunday to pitch him, knowing that the Mahatma (whose

strongest swear words were "Judas Priest") was always in church on the Sabbath.⁹ Haney's instincts proved correct; Friend quickly won a spot in the starting rotation. In 1958 the burly right-hander tied Milwaukee's Warren Spahn for the league lead with 22 victories. Like Yogi and Carmen Berra, Friend and his wife Patricia were touring Europe in early December. While in Rome, the Friends participated in a mass audience with Pope John XXIII at the Vatican. Did the Pontiff say a little prayer on the Corsairs' behalf?

With the Major League Baseball meetings over, a slew of trades completed, and the Continental League apparently in full swing, the National Pastime seemed to be what it had been for over fifty years, the center of the sports universe. As the major leagues bedded down to await the New Year, it was professional football that captured the last sun rays of the waning 1959. On Sunday, December 27, the Baltimore Colts defeated the visiting New York Giants before a crowd of 57,545 at Memorial Stadium (the precursor to Camden Yards) to capture their second consecutive National Football League title. The Colts, behind the passing of Johnny Unitas, scored twenty-four points in the fourth quarter to clinch the victory. Afterward, a gracious Frank Gifford admiringly referred to Johnny U as "a burglar." Unitas, said Gifford, could steal a game before there was an opportunity to call the cops.¹⁰

Johnny Unitas, a twenty-six-year-old product of the Pittsburgh sandlots, was, in retrospect, but the ring leader in a larger case of grand larceny. While the Lords of Baseball dawdled, professional football was stealing a march on the National Pastime. The NFL was enjoying unprecedented success, buoyed by the Unitas-engineered, sudden-death victory by the Colts over the Giants in the 1958 championship game. In 1959 when the league broke attendance records for the eighth year in a row (surprising even its commissioner, Bert Bell), the television networks were more interested in professional football than ever before.

That kind of success would tempt others. On November 30, 1959, Joe Foss, ex-governor of South Dakota and World War II flying ace, was hired as the commissioner of the new American Football League. It was set to begin operations in 1960. There were as yet no players or coaches, but eight cities had already signed on: New York, Los Angeles, Buffalo, Dallas, Houston, Denver, Boston, and Minneapolis. Senator Estes Kefauver promised to ensure a level playing field. Together, the NFL and the

AFL promised to extend the boundaries of professional football to the northern-most reaches of the Mississippi River, the Rockies, and the Lone Star State. Major League Baseball, concerned with the shadow cast by the Continental League, may not have noticed, or cared much, about the larger cloud approaching. In any case, for big league baseball executives, managers, and players, the winter was a time for celebrating the glories of the previous season — not for forecasting the future.