

Afterword

The End of Best Teams History?

Francis Fukuyama wrote a seminal essay in 1989 in which he argued that the end of the Cold War meant “the end of history” because the classic struggle between competing historical philosophies of political power had come to an end with the uncompromising triumph of free-market democracy over all others as the accepted ideal. This was not to suggest that there would not be evil regimes like Saddam Hussein’s or new insidious forms of power like the rigid theocracy embraced by the Taliban and al-Qa’ida, only that the historical paradigm had fundamentally changed. Democracy had trumped all other ideologies as the most ideal. As major league baseball has transitioned into the twenty-first century, it is fair to ask whether the same is now true for baseball. Three developments that were a long time developing—expansion, free agency, and the more pronounced dichotomy between big market and small market franchises—have had significant implications for pennant races and the business of baseball. Although the expansion era is already fifty years old (and arguably closer to sixty if we trace its beginnings to the relocation of long-established franchises in the 1950s), the free agency era began thirty-five years ago, and there has always been a rich team-poor team divide in major league baseball, it was not until towards the end of the twentieth century that they reached a critical mass sufficient to change the competitive structure of the game from what it had been for nearly all of its history.

Between 1960 and the year 2000, major league baseball expanded from eight teams in each league—which had a constant since the turn of the century back in 1901—to fourteen in the American League and sixteen in the National. Expansion fundamentally altered the concept of the pennant race, particularly with the import of the NFL’s wild card to major league baseball after 1993. Where once there was one pennant race in each league, and then there were two (Eastern and Western Divisions), now there are four—three for the East, West, and Central Divisions, plus the wild card fight to have the best *second*-place record in the league.

And very soon, perhaps as early as next season (2012), there will be two wild card teams entering the post-season for each league. Before, a team had to finish in first place to have a shot at the pennant and the World Series. That has not been true since 1993—the last of the true pennant races where it was finish first or go home for the winter, much to the chagrin of the San Francisco Giants whose 103 wins in any season thereafter would surely have qualified them for the post-season even without finishing first.

Particularly since the advent of the wild card creating an additional Division Series round of post-season play, not to mention the blitz of advertizing dollars compelling the powers-that-be in both Major League Baseball and the enormously powerful (and influential) television sports entertainment industry, the (post) season after the (regular) season has taken on a life and importance that is greater than ever. The ubiquitous “they” increasingly speak of major league baseball in terms of “two seasons,” making consistency and excellence over a long season to get to the playoffs seem less consequential than how well the team does once there. This certainly has been the view of New York media and Yankee fans, who since 2001 have largely discounted the regular season achievements of the New York Yankees whenever they failed to hoist the World Series championship trophy as the last team celebrating. This is despite making the post-season every year but one, because they—like the Atlanta Braves from 1991 to 2005—had so many unsuccessful playoff endings. Now to be fair, as well as accurate, winning championships has always been the cardinal objective for both teams and their fans. However, once upon a time, in the not-too-distant past, and even still for many who love baseball, the regular season had an elegance that seems to have diminished in the hype given to the post-season since it has become a multi-tiered contest for survival of the fittest—

—Not necessarily the best, but the fittest. The best teams these days are judged more by their perseverance and endurance through multiple post-season playoff rounds that, if each series went the distance, could equal nearly 12 percent of the total games played during the regular season. It is perceived to be poor sportsmanship and peddling excuses for any team with a better record during the regular season to claim they are still the better team if they lose a short five- or seven-game post-season series to a team in their league with a worse record, but that argument is not without merit. Prevailing over a long 162-game season by finishing first is its own definitive indicator of which is the best team irrespective of how many short series might be lost along the way, particularly if they finished first by a sizable margin. Indicative of how difficult it has become for the best teams over the regular season to survive even their League Championship Series, only seven of the seventeen American League teams and four of the seventeen National League teams that went to the World Series since the wild card era began had the best record in their league.

- More significantly, of the 34 teams that went to the World Series between 1995, when the wild card was first in play (there being no post-season in 1994), and 2011 (as of this writing), ten—29 percent of the total—were wild card teams. As it happened, three of the wild card teams appearing in the Fall Classic finished second in their division and still had the second-best record in their league, four had the third-best record, and three had their league’s fourth-best record, including the 2011 World Series champion St. Louis Cardinals (although they at least did win 90 games).
- Having to survive a five-game Division Series, in which fate can play particular havoc because these series are so short, and then a seven-game LCS has become so challenging that, as of 2011, only one American League team—the Texas Rangers in

2010 and 2011—has won back-to-back pennants since the Yankees won four in a row from 1998 to 2001, and only one National League team—the Philadelphia Phillies in 2008 and 2009—have done so since the Braves in 1995 and 1996. Moreover, they and the St. Louis Cardinals in the NL and the Boston Red Sox in the AL are the only teams to have two pennants over any five-year period since 2003. All of this makes what the New York Yankees accomplished between 1996 and 2001—five pennants and four World Series championships in six years—all the more remarkable for the context of the times.

Expansion and the introduction of interleague play in 1997 ultimately undermined the symmetry and equity of regular season scheduling for teams competing for their division title. In the one league-one winner format that prevailed until divisional alignment in 1969, each team played every other team in the league the *same* number of times, with an equal number of games scheduled for home and away against each opponent. In the two-division format, each team played every team in their division the same number of times, and the same (but lesser) number of games against each team in their league's other division. This scheduling was fair to all teams competing for a division title because none had either the advantage or disadvantage (whichever it might be) of playing some teams (good or bad) more or less often than their division rivals.

The beginning of the three-division format in 1994 put an end to scheduling equity, and interleague play has exacerbated the problem. It was no longer possible for schedulers to assure that each team in any one division played the same opponents the same number of times. Since 2001, with the intent to stimulate division rivalries and pennant races (which it certainly does), Major League Baseball has used an unbalanced schedule in both leagues where teams play other teams in their own division 18 or 19 times per season and a variable number of games against other teams in the league. But teams competing for first place in their division do not play the same number of games against the same teams in other divisions, nor do they necessarily play the same inter-league rivals (inter-league competition having been introduced in 1997). Rather than symmetry in competition between two teams in a heated race for first place in their division, one might have the advantage of playing more games against weaker teams, which could prove decisive in close division races.

In 2007 in the National League West, for example, the Arizona Diamondbacks, Colorado Rockies, and San Diego Padres fought to the wire for the division title, with Arizona coming out on top by one game over the two other teams (who then played a one-game playoff to determine the NL wild card since they each had the second-best record in the league when the regular season ended). Arizona, however, played fewer games (six each) against the NL Eastern and NL Central Division winners than either Colorado (seven against both) or San Diego, and the Padres were the only one of the three teams to play the eventual NL Central Division winner eight times. Moreover, the Diamondbacks, in total, played four *fewer* games against other teams with winning records than the Rockies and seven *fewer* than the Padres. Given that both the D-Backs and the Padres had losing records against winning teams in a pennant race in which the top three teams were separate by one game, Arizona likely benefited from fewer such games while San Diego—left out of the post-season entirely—was disadvantaged by having to play appreciably more games against winning teams than their rivals for the NL Western Division title. (Colorado, as it happened, played exceptionally well against teams with winning records, with a .563 winning percentage for 59 percent of their games.) Of their inter-league opponents, moreover, the division-winning

Diamondbacks got to play the awful AL East Baltimore Orioles six times on their interleague schedule—winning five—compared to only three times each for the Rockies and Padres. The Padres, however, lucked out by not having to play the Yankees, while the D-Backs and Rockies did.

Not playing the same opponents the same number of times not only can have an unintended impact on close division races, but could significantly affect how one should evaluate the relative dominance of teams—like the 1995 to 1999 Cleveland Indians—that win a weak division by blowout margins of eight-games or more or that win 100 games in a weak division. While 100 victories should be considered a legitimate mark of dominance for the 1995-99 Indians because the AL schedule was more balanced then than now, I would be more reluctant to say so today when between 44 and 50 percent of games are played against division opponents, depending on the division.

- In 2002, the Minnesota Twins won the AL Central Division by 13½ games by winning two-thirds (50-25) of their games against the other four Central Division teams, only one of which had as much as a .500 record. Those 75 games accounted for 47 percent of the Twins' schedule. They were only .500 at 34-34 against the other American League teams, and 10-8 in interleague competition.
- In 2003, the San Francisco Giants won 100 games and finished 15½ games in front in the NL West, a division where the four other teams had the lowest combined winning percentage of any National League division. The Giants were 30 games over .500 (53-23) against their NL Western Division rivals, who they played in 47 percent of their games, but only seven games over .500 (37-30) against NL teams in the two other divisions. (They were 10-8 in interleague play.)

Major League Baseball's decision to transfer the Houston Astros from the NL to the AL beginning in 2013 to create two fifteen-team leagues, which will require at least one inter-league game all season long, could set the stage for a return to a more fair, equalized schedule *where every team in a division plays every other team on their schedule the same number of times—whether in their league's other divisions or within the same division in the other league*. This would be unlikely to happen, however, if MLB continues to rotate interleague division match-ups so that, for example, NL East teams play their AL East counterparts one year, teams in the AL Central the next, and teams in the AL West the year after that, *but also insists on keeping the inter-league tradition of same-city teams playing two series against each other every year*. In the NL East, for example, the Mets' having to play the powerhouse Yankees six times every year while the Phillies, Braves, Marlins, and Nationals do not could put them at a competitive disadvantage with their division rivals in a close pennant race. Even should Major League Baseball take advantage of the new alignment of three five-team divisions in each league beginning in 2013 to establish a competitively equal schedule where each team in a division playing the same other teams the same number of times, this would still not rectify the problem of relative dominance in a very weak division when considered against the league as a whole.

Free agency and the vast differences in revenue available to big market and small market teams have changed the dynamic of building and keeping intact competitive teams. While collective bargaining limitations that do not grant players free agency until six years of major league experience allow for even small market franchises to build teams capable of

competing for the pennant, perhaps even for several years, they have traditionally operated with the disadvantage of not having the level of resources available to big market teams to add impact players in the midst of a pennant run. Moreover, small market teams are unlikely to build even budding dynasties because they don't have the financial resources needed to keep their best players when free agency looms. Some small market teams, the Minnesota Twins and Oakland Athletics being the best examples from the first decade of this new century, are able to maintain their competitiveness through a combination of applying "moneyball" principles to look for unexpected affordable talent, astute trades, and more multifaceted evaluation of collegiate and high school players—but not enough to become dominant over several years or to sustain success over the longer term.

It is important to remember, however, that there have always been "big market" teams with the monetary resources to outspend their competition, even in the decades before free agency. Financially strong franchises like the New York Yankees were able to build productive minor league systems for developing players, spend substantially more on scouting prospects, and leverage the financial difficulties of "small market" teams to trade for or buy the players they needed to win, even to the extent where major league teams like the Kansas City Athletics back in the 1950s seemed like part of the Yankee farm system. There is nothing that much different between how the New York Yankees managed and maintained their dynasty before free agency and how they did so afterwards, except that other teams ultimately fared more poorly in the bargain. The Giants were successful in building winning ball clubs when they had New York-based resources, winning at least two pennants in every decade except the 1940s, but have had much less success since moving to smaller-market San Francisco, where they have won only four pennants in over five decades.

The dynamics of free agency mean that competitive teams, even championship teams, are less likely to hold onto a core group of regulars that define the team for as many years as in the past. This is true not only of small market teams that must anticipate losing the best of their core players to free agency, or trading them for valuable prospects before they become free agents, but even for big market teams that can afford to keep their best players. Part of that is big market teams exercising fiscal restraint (although they have a much higher payroll threshold); part of that is because many veteran free agents who have a big impact when first acquired sometimes grow old soon thereafter and are either not given long-term contracts or lose their effectiveness; and part of that is that big market teams are continually using their financial resources to fill emerging vulnerabilities.

- The big market Boston Red Sox who won two pennants and World Series between 2004 and 2007 were in many ways two different teams. For sure, left fielder Manny Ramirez and DH David Ortiz—possibly the most fearsome three-four punch in baseball history after Ruth and Gehrig—catcher Jason Varitek, and starting pitchers Curt Schilling and Tim Lincecum were cornerstone players on both the 2004 and 2007 World Series champion Red Sox, but center fielder Johnny Damon (especially him), first baseman Kevin Millar, shortstop Orlando Cabrera, starting pitchers Pedro Martinez (especially him) and Derek Lowe, and closer Keith Foulke who also defined the 2004 Red Sox were not around for their 2007 championship.

Collectively in their progression, these changes make for a different competitive structure within major league baseball today than for nearly all of the twentieth century, but not to the extent of undermining the basic paradigm of the methodological approach I used in this

analysis for evaluating and ranking the best teams in each league, for each half of the twentieth century and for the full century. The three basic components of my structured approach—a team's record of achievement over at least five years, the extent to which it dominated the league in that time, and the number of core players who were the best in the league in contemporary or historical context during those years—are still valid. Nonetheless, certain adjustments are worthy of consideration as we move forward in the twenty-first century:

- Perhaps *teams should be considered in the context of winning accomplishments over a minimum of three consecutive years, instead of five, to take account of the vagaries of the free agent system that often diminishes how long the core players on any team, even a competitive team, stay together.* Had I used three years instead of five as my basic requirement for consideration as a best team, the 1990-92 Pittsburgh Pirates—my exemplar of a team whose legacy of greatness was cut short by the free or impending free agency of its best players—would certainly have been a candidate for one of the National League's five best teams in the second half of the twentieth century.
- Perhaps *measuring the extent any team dominates its division should take account of the relative strength of that division.* While winning 100 games and leading the league in either scoring or in fewest runs allowed remain leading indicators of a team's dominance of the league, I might discount the value of a strong team finishing first by a blowout margin of at least eight games in a weak division. One option would be for a team winning its division by such a large margin also having to be at least five games better in consolidated league standings than the first-place team in any other division—meaning by definition that team would have the best record in the league—unless the second-place team in its division also won 90 games, a mark of competitive excellence. So, for example, the 2002 Minnesota Twins who won their division by 13½ games over a second-place team with no better than a .500 record (the White Sox who went 81-81) would get either no credit or, to be generous, no more than half-a-point credit, despite winning big because they won nine *fewer* games than both the Yankees and Athletics did in capturing their division titles; the Twins may have dominated their division, but it was a very weak division they dominated.
- And, finally, perhaps *post-season success should be more explicitly recognized in the methodology.* My inquiry into the best teams does take into account the post-season, but consistent with baseball's statistical emphasis on the regular season and the proposition that a comparative analysis of the best teams in baseball history should properly focus on regular-season accomplishments over long seasons, same as for players and managers, I deliberately placed greatest emphasis on finishing first—a value of three points for each first-place finish—with much less emphasis (only one point) on World Series championships. Until 1969, of course, a first-place finish also meant winning the pennant. I did, however, account for the introduction of divisional alignments in 1969 by giving an additional point for each pennant won, meaning that in the division era, winning both the pennant and the World Series are still valued less than finishing first. Moreover, that pennant point was included with the first-place score. A reasonable option moving forward would be that, while the highest single value would remain three points for finishing first (and winning the division), each post-season series victory should count on its own, meaning that a team winning the World Series would earn three addition points for each and every year doing so: one

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for first having to win the League Division Series, a second for then winning the League Championship Series, and the third for celebrating a World Series championship. Although making no difference in the overall “achievement score,” I would now, for perceptual accounting purposes, move the pennant credit into one Post-Season column that includes all post-season series, including the World Series. The post-season would be given greater importance in this option than before because not only will winning the World Series have the same team ultimate value as finishing first, but winning the LCS while failing in the World Series would now count for more (two points—the first of which would be for winning the Division Series) than before.

Those adaptations would be my way forward into the twenty-first century with the structured methodological approach this analysis has used to *inform*, not dictate, my selections of the five best teams in each league for in each half of the twentieth century, and the eight best teams in each league for the full century. The following are my “final standings” of the best in each league:

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| | 8 Best NL Teams, 1901-2000 | |
| | 1906-10 Chicago Cubs | |
| 5 Best NL Teams, 1901-1950 | 1972-76 Cincinnati Reds | 5 Best NL Teams, 1951-2000 |
| | 1991-97 Atlanta Braves | |
| 1906-10 Chicago Cubs | 1949-56 Brooklyn Dodgers | 1972-76 Cincinnati Reds |
| 1941-46 St. Louis Cardinals | 1941-46 St. Louis Cardinals | 1991-97 Atlanta Braves |
| 1904-08 New York Giants | 1904-08 New York Giants | 1949-56 Brooklyn Dodgers |
| 1910-14 New York Giants | 1910-14 New York Giants | 1956-60 Milwaukee Braves |
| 1920-24 New York Giants | 1920-24 New York Giants | 1984-88 New York Mets |

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|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | 8 Best AL Teams, 1901-2000 | |
| | 1936-42 New York Yankees | |
| 5 Best AL Teams, 1901-1950 | 1928-32 Phila. Athletics | 5 Best AL Teams, 1951-2000 |
| | 1969-74 Baltimore Orioles | |
| 1936-42 New York Yankees | 1954-58 New York Yankees | 1969-74 Baltimore Orioles |
| 1928-32 Phila. Athletics | 1910-14 Phila. Athletics | 1954-58 New York Yankees |
| 1910-14 Phila. Athletics | 1926-32 New York Yankees | 1971-75 Oakland Athletics |
| 1926-32 New York Yankees | 1971-75 Oakland Athletics | 1976-80 New York Yankees |
| 1912-18 Boston Red Sox | 1976-80 New York Yankees | 1996-2001 NY Yankees |

Most pundits, researchers, and historians who educate and entertain us with their take on the best players, managers, and teams make no distinction between the two major leagues. I have made that distinction in this analysis. If, however, I were to rank the major league’s best teams in the twentieth century without regard for league, the following would be my list of the twelve best based on my foregoing analysis:

1. The AL **1936-42 New York Yankees**, because no other team in history was as dominant across the board. All six of the pennants they won in seven years were by decisive margins of eight games or more. They led the league in scoring in five of those years, in fewest runs allowed in six of those years, and in defensive efficiency ratio—making outs on balls put into play—in six of those years. Five of their players—second baseman Joe Gordon, center fielder Joe DiMaggio (as one of three outfielders), catcher Bill Dickey, Red Ruffing (as one of five starting pitchers), and fireman Johnny Murphy—were the best at their position for all or the majority of years under consideration for this team; seven—those five, plus left fielder Charlie Keller and starting pitcher Lefty Gomez—were among either the 10 best position players, five best starting pitchers, or the best reliever for their best consecutive seasons in the surrounding decade including the majority of years under consideration for this team; Murphy has a half-century legacy as one of the AL's three best relievers and Lefty Gomez among the AL's 15 best starting pitchers between 1901 and 1950; and DiMaggio, Dickey, Gordon, Keller, and Ruffing have century-plus legacies as one of the 50 best position players or 30 best starting pitchers in American League history, according to me.
2. The NL **1906-10 Chicago Cubs**, who almost never get the credit they deserve because they played in the “dead ball” era. But for how well they played the game in the context of their time, the 1906-10 Cubs were the second most dominant team in history, according to me, and if anything they had tougher rivals for their pennants than the 1936-42 Yankees. This team has the highest combined percentage of games played against 90-win teams and winning percentage against those teams of any team over a minimum five year-period in the modern era since 1901. They had six players who were the best at their position—first baseman (and manager) Frank Chance, second baseman Johnny Evers, left fielder Jimmy Sheckard (as one of three outfielders), catcher Johnny Kling, and pitchers Three-Finger Brown and Ed Reulbach. Chance, Evers, shortstop Joe Tinker, Sheckard, Brown, and Reulbach were all among the NL's best players or pitchers in the surrounding decade, with Brown and Evers each having a century-plus legacy for the National League, and Reulbach a half-century legacy, according to me.
3. The AL **1928-32 Philadelphia Athletics**, who also do not get the credit they deserve, perhaps because their three consecutive pennants from 1929 to 1931 were bracketed by the Ruth and Gehrig-powered Yankees. Their three straight pennants, however, were all with 100 or more victories and decided by blowout margins of at least eight games. While my first two selections were relatively easy, rounding out the top five was more difficult because of where to place the 1972-76 Cincinnati Reds relative to the 1928-32 Athletics and the 1969-74 Baltimore Orioles. This Philadelphia team, however, with four AL twentieth century-plus legacy players—first baseman Jimmie Foxx, catcher Mickey Cochrane, left fielder Al Simmons, and starting pitcher Lefty Grove (all of whom, not surprisingly, were the best at their position)—and George Earnshaw joining Grove as one of the league's five best starting pitchers in the surrounding decade, were a better all-around team than the Reds with Morgan, Rose, and Bench, according to me, primarily because they had superior pitching.
4. The AL **1969-74 Baltimore Orioles**, also a better team than the Big Red Machine because of *their* superior pitching. They rival Atlanta Braves from 1991 to 2002, the

1951-55 Cleveland Indians, and the 1906-10 Cubs for having one of the best starting rotations in baseball history. Baltimore's top three starters—Jim Palmer, Mike Cuellar, and Dave McNally—count among the league's five best pitchers in contemporary context, according to me, and Palmer has a century-plus legacy. The 1969-74 Orioles also had Frank Robinson anchoring a strong, although not great, core of offensive players when they won their three consecutive American League pennants from 1969 to 1971, after having to first win the AL Eastern Division title, each time with more than 100 wins and by a decisive margin. That the Orioles had only one position player, first baseman Boog Powell (through 1972), who was the best at his position in contemporary context understates the excellence of this team. Second baseman Bobby Grich (beginning in 1972), third baseman Brooks Robinson, and right fielder Frank Robinson were among the AL's 10 best position players in the surrounding decade, and Grich's best consecutive years give him a century-plus legacy for this team. Frank and Brooks also have century-plus legacies, but not for best consecutive seasons that include at least half the years under consideration for these Birds.

5. The NL **1972-76 Cincinnati Reds**, whose National League dominance was primarily offensively driven with quite possibly the most dynamic combination of speed, power, and average of any team in history. The Big Red Machine had three players with NL century-plus legacies for their best consecutive years including the majority of seasons between 1972 and 1976: second baseman Joe Morgan, catcher Johnny Bench, and Pete Rose, who shifted from the outfield to third base in 1975. Besides their also being the best at their positions for all or the majority of seasons under consideration for this team, so too were first baseman Tony Perez (although as a multi-position regular from 1969 to 1974, having shifted from third base in 1972), shortstop Dave Concepcion, and reliever Clay Carroll. Had putative aces Gary Nolan and Don Gullett been healthy for all five years of the Big Red Machine's run, they might have given this Cincinnati team the high quality pitching that would have had me rank them as high as the third-best major league team of all time, and perhaps even challenging the 1906-10 Cubs as the best National League team of the twentieth century.
6. The NL **1991-97 Atlanta Braves**, who thoroughly dominated the National League during their seven-year run. I am not holding the fact that they won only one World Series against them. This was not an offensively dominant club, but with Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine, and John Smoltz, the Braves had the most sustained run of superior pitching of any team in history, going well beyond 1997. They had no position players who were the best at their position or among the 10 best NL position players in the surrounding decade. Maddux and Glavine, however, have century-plus legacies for these Braves, and Smoltz's century-plus legacy overlaps this and the **1998-2005 Atlanta Braves** team. *That* team, by the way, would rank just ahead of these Braves as the sixth-best team in the modern era, dating to 1901, *if this analysis was not specifically limited to the twentieth century*. The 1998-05 Braves may have failed to win a single pennant despite their eight straight division titles—extending Atlanta's string to fourteen straight before their dynasty finally ran out—but they rarely failed to be the best team in the National League during their time. They still had excellent pitching, at least until the final three years of their run, but was much better balanced overall, with a more imposing offense, than the 1991-97 Braves. Third baseman Chipper Jones, center fielder Andruw Jones, and Maddux had century-

plus legacies based on best consecutive years for the 1998-05 Braves, and they were joined by teammates Glavine and shortstop Rafael Furcal as the best at their positions.

7. The NL **1949-56 Brooklyn Dodgers**, another team with only one World Series championship to show for all their regular season excellence. I could just as easily rank the Dodgers behind—or anywhere among—the the 1954-58 Yankees, 1910-14 Athletics, or 1926-32 Yankees, and felt comfortable doing so. It was not just that the Dodgers dominated the National League—winning five pennants in eight years and never finishing worse than second—that I choose to consider them better than those teams, but the contemporary and historical legacy of their core players. First baseman Gil Hodges, second baseman Jackie Robinson, shortstop Pee Wee Reese, center fielder Duke Snider (as one of three outfielders), catcher Roy Campanella, and starting pitchers Don Newcombe and Preacher Roe (among five starting pitchers) were all the best at their position *and* among the NL's 10 best position players or five best starting pitchers in the surrounding decade, according to me. Robinson, Snider, and Campanella all have century-plus legacies. Those three other American League teams that could plausibly be considered better than this Brooklyn team may have been more dominant in their time, but none come close to matching the collective player legacies of the 1949-56 Dodgers.
8. The AL **1954-58 New York Yankees**, whose second-place finish in 1954—ironically, the only time the Stengel-era Yankees won 100 games—cannot be faulted for not giving this storied franchise 10 consecutive pennants between 1949 and 1958. Three of their four pennants were won by decisive margins, which picked up the Yankee tradition established on a consistent year-in, year-out basis by the 1936-42 Yankees after the five-and-five-in-five 1949-53 Yankees had won four of their five consecutive pennants in down-to-the-wire races. With Mickey Mantle and Yogi Berra both in their prime and with century-plus legacies for this team, the Yankees led the league in scoring four times in five years. First baseman Bill Skowron and multi-position infielder Gil McDougald were also among the best at their position during all or the majority of these years. McDougald's best consecutive years of 1951 to 1957—including four for this team—merit him as one of the AL's five best multi-position regulars of the twentieth century, according to me (see the last page of *Transparency Annex B*). As was typical of the great Yankee teams, the 1954-58 Yankees also had strong pitching, even if there was little stability on the staff over the five years. Whitey Ford, this team's premier pitcher, was one of the five best pitchers in the league and earned a half-century legacy for his best consecutive years on the mound between 1953 and 1958, according to me.
9. The AL **1910-14 Philadelphia Athletics**, who might have laid claim to the beginning of an extended dynasty—with the 1928-32 Athletics the other bookend—were it not for financial considerations causing owner-manager Connie Mack to disband this great team and spend more than a decade managing one of the worst teams in history before rebuilding another powerhouse. First baseman Stuffy McInnis, second baseman Eddie Collins, third baseman Home Run Baker, and pitchers Eddie Plank and Chief Bender were the best at their positions in the AL during these years; Collins, Baker, shortstop Jack Barry, and Plank and Bender were among the AL's 10 best positions players or five best pitchers in the surrounding decade; and Collins and Baker have century-plus legacies for this team. Plank's best consecutive years in the

surrounding decade would have earned him a half-century legacy, according to me; he has a century-plus legacy for an earlier Athletics team.

10. The AL **1926-32 New York Yankees**, whose terrific 1927 season is still considered by many to be the greatest single season in baseball history (although I would go with the 1998 Yankees). That season and the presence of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig bias their historical legacy to one of greatness that I believe they did not quite live up to over a five-year period. After winning three straight pennants from 1926 to 1928, they took a back seat as Connie Mack's best Philadelphia team ran away with the next three pennants, although the Yankees returned with a vengeance in 1932. Only three Yankees on this team—Gehrig at first, second baseman Tony Lazzeri, and Ruth as one of three outfielders—were the best at their position for all or the majority of years under consideration. Ruth, Gehrig, Lazzeri, and center fielder Earle Combs were among the 10 best AL position players in the surrounding decade, but only Ruth and Gehrig have a century-plus legacy for the 1926-32 Yankees. Powered by Ruth and Gehrig, and indicative of their nickname, New York's Bronx Bombers led the league in scoring six times during these seven years. These Yankees also had strong pitching the first three years of their run, when Waite Hoyt and Herb Pennock were both still among the five best pitchers in the league (according to me), less so afterwards.
11. The NL **1941-46 St. Louis Cardinals**, whose excellence is undervalued because of the diminished quality of play from 1943 to 1945—when they won two of their four pennants—resulting from many established major league players doing their part for the US effort in World War II. These Cardinals, however, were a great team whose dominance of the league was nearly equal to the 1906-10 Cubs; I have no doubt they would have dominated the National League even if there was no world war to deplete major league rosters. The 1941-46 Cardinals' 606 victories is more than won by any team other than the Chicago Cubs from 1906 to 1911 in any six-year period, and that includes any six consecutive years you choose to take for the 1936-42 Yankees. These Cardinals led the league in scoring three times, and four times in fewest runs allowed. Indicative of their style of play, the 1941-46 Cardinals were a team whose whole in achievement and dominance was greater than the sum of its parts. They have the lowest "players" score (tied with the 1910-14 New York Giants) of any of my eight best teams of the twentieth century in either the National or the American League, according to my methodological approach. Stan Musial was the only player on this team with a century-plus or even half-century legacy. Musial, right fielder Country Slaughter (who missed three years due to World War II), and pitchers Mort Cooper and Harry Brecheen were the best in the league at their positions and in the surrounding decade for this team, and Marty Marion was the NL's best shortstop when Pee Wee Reese was off to war.
12. The AL **1971-75 Oakland Athletics**, who were widely acknowledged as a dynasty-quality team and would have scored higher on my "dominance" factors had they not been contemporaries of the 1969-74 Orioles. What the Oakland A's accomplished in becoming the first team to win three consecutive World Series in the division era is all the more remarkable given open feuding on the ball club and interference from their mercurial owner, Charles O. Finley. Since the expansion era—which substantially increased the number of major league players—began in 1961, the only teams with a higher "players" score by my methodological approach are the 2002-06 Yankees, the 1972-75 Reds, and the 1998-2005 Braves. Of the A's core regulars, shortstop Bert

Campaneris, third baseman Sal Bando, right fielder Reggie Jackson (as one of three outfielders), Catfish Hunter (as one of five pitchers), and relief ace Rollie Fingers were all the best at their positions and among the league's 10 best position players, five best starting pitchers, and best reliever in the surrounding decade. Jackson and Bando both have century-plus legacies, according to me, and Hunter a half-century legacy as one of the AL's 18 best starting pitchers between 1951 and 2000 for this team.

**FINAL STANDINGS
BEST MAJOR LEAGUE TEAMS OF THE 20TH CENTURY
(ACCORDING TO ME)**

12 BEST MAJOR LEAGUE TEAMS, 1901-2000

| | D-P-WS | W - L % | Ach | Dom | Play | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|------------|------------|-------------|--------------|
| New York Yankees, 1936-42 | 6 - 5 | 701-371 .654 | 34 | 78 | 51 | 163 |
| <i>Chicago Cubs, 1906-10</i> | 4 - 2 | 530-235 .693 | 32 | 60 | 33 | 125 |
| Philadelphia Athletics, 1928-32 | 3 - 2 | 505-258 .662 | 30 | 45 | 39 | 114 |
| Baltimore Orioles, 1969-74 | 5 - 3 - 1 | 586-374 .610 | 38 | 58 | 24 | 120 |
| <i>Cincinnati Reds, 1972-76</i> | 4 - 3 - 2 | 502-300 .626 | 41 | 35 | 32 | 108 |
| <i>Atlanta Braves, 1991-97</i> | 6 - 4 - 1 | 651-417 .610 | 39 | 43 | 22 | 104 |
| <i>Brooklyn Dodgers, 1949-56</i> | 5 - 1 | 767-466 .622 | 28 | 31 | 37 | 96 |
| New York Yankees, 1954-58 | 4 - 2 | 486-284 .631 | 32 | 45 | 31 | 108 |
| Philadelphia Athletics, 1910-14 | 4 - 3 | 488-270 .644 | 32 | 50 | 31 | 113 |
| New York Yankees, 1926-32 | 4 - 3 | 677-400 .629 | 29 | 43 | 27 | 99 |
| <i>St. Louis Cardinals, 1941-46</i> | 4 - 3 | 606-319 .655 | 32 | 50 | 21 | 103 |
| Oakland Athletics, 1971-75 | 5 - 3 - 3 | 476-326 .594 | 44 | 20 | 29 | 93 |

National League teams in italics

D = Division P = Pennant WS = World Series Ach = Achievement Score
Dom = Dominance Factors Score Play = Players Score Total = Total Score