

American League's Best Teams

Chapter Three

The 1916-20 Chicago White Sox vs. The 1920-24 New York Yankees: But For the Greed, They Might Have Delayed the Yankees' Dynasty

By 1919, the team best positioned to replace the Boston Red Sox—winners of three of the last four pennants (and World Series)—as best in the American League were the Chicago White Sox. With two of the very best players in baseball—second baseman Eddie Collins (the first of his stars cast off by Connie Mack in 1915) and left fielder Shoeless Joe Jackson (acquired from Cleveland in mid-1915)—the league's best catcher in Ray Schalk, and a pitching staff featuring Eddie Cicotte (one of the AL's five best pitchers from 1913 to 1920) and Red Faber (one of the better pitchers in the league, even if not among the five best), Chicago had already won a pennant in convincing fashion with 100 wins and a nine-game margin over second-place Boston in 1917, winning 28 of their final 38 games of the regular season to blow the race open, and then went on to beat the New York Giants in the World Series in six games. The White Sox set the stage for that pennant by finishing fast in 1916 to nearly overtake the Red Sox, winning 24 of their last 33 games to pull themselves up from fourth, 6½ behind on August 25, to second by only two games at season's end.

The White Sox' collapse in 1918 to a never-competitive sixth place is largely attributable to the significant hit their roster took because of World War I. Jackson played only 17 games, and other core regulars center fielder Happy Felsch and pitchers Faber and Lefty Williams missed half the season or more in military service or working in the military-industrial sector to support the war effort. Collins also spent time in the armed services. No other American League team—certainly not Boston and Cleveland competing for the pennant—had as many players committed to the American war effort for as much of the time as Chicago. Manager Pants Rowland paid the price for 1918, notwithstanding his diminished wartime roster. Even though he presided over the White Sox' return to pennant contention after six years of mediocrity in his first year as their manager in 1915, and in 1917 led the

White Sox to their first pennant since 1906 and the Windy City to its first World Series championship since the Cubs won it all in 1908—the last for Chicago in the century, as it turned out)—Rowland was often maligned for not being sufficiently tough on his players to get them to play their best. Indeed, his replacement as manager, the fiery tough-minded Kid Gleason, had been waiting in the wings since being put on Rowland's coaching staff by team owner Charles Comiskey in August of 1916.

So if 1918 was the last hurrah for the Red Sox as the AL's most consistent winning team since the 1910-14 Athletics, the White Sox, with everyone back in 1919 and an aggressive new manager, figured to pick up as the best team in the league—and, with the core group of players they had, they figured to be competitive for years to come. Win the pennant they did in 1919, and they were probably more dominant than their final record (88-52) and mere 3½-game margin over second-place Cleveland suggests. It's been said that deep divisions on the team—essentially between those who would become the “Black Sox” and those who were the “clean Sox”—and possibly even pre-World Series consorting with gamblers kept this team from doing better than they did. Maybe so, but after moving into first place for good on July 9, the White Sox sustained a lead of between four and eight games from mid-July till the closing days of the season and were never seriously threatened by the Indians. They led by as many as eight games with eleven remaining. And their dominance might have been even more apparent had Faber not had arm problems that limited his effectiveness and then ended his season. Faber did not appear in the tainted World Series.

The White Sox played just as well in 1920—the 1919 World Series scandal would not break until near the very end of the season—but faced a highly competitive pennant race with both the Indians and Yankees also fighting for first place. Chicago would win 96 games in 1920, comparable to their 88 victories in the shortened 140-game season of 1919. (The major league schedule in 1919 still reflecting wartime contingency, notwithstanding the November 1918 Armistice.) The three competitors jockeyed for first place throughout September, although the White Sox were in first place, tied, for only one day that month. But they swept the Yankees in three crucial games in mid-month to knock New York off the top, and then took two of three in Cleveland to move within one-half game of first with five games remaining. Rumors of the conspiracy to fix the 1919 World Series abounded, but there was nothing definitive. Shoeless Joe Jackson was having the best year of his career since his first three seasons with Cleveland, and the White Sox already had four 20-game winners on their pitching staff (Faber, Lefty Williams, Cicotte, and Dickie Kerr).

Only then did Chicago's season come crashing down. News of the World Series fix was trumpeted in the press on September 27 during the White Sox' next-to-last series of the season, two games at home against Detroit; the White Sox ended that series still within half-a-game of the first-place Indians. There was grand jury testimony and indictments were handed down in the days that followed, and the White Sox—now tarred the “Black Sox”—traveled to St. Louis for the final weekend of the regular season, trailing Cleveland by a game-and-a-half. They went to St. Louis without most of their best players because Comiskey banished the notorious eight from the team. The undermanned remaining “clean” Sox lost two of three to the fourth-place Browns, while Cleveland split its final four games that weekend, and the season ended with the Indians first and the White Sox two games behind in second, but one ahead of the third-place Yankees.

And thus began Chicago's long trek of unsuccessful seasons. With two-thirds of their starting outfield (left fielder Jackson and center fielder Felsch), three-fourths of their starting infield (first baseman Chick Gandil, who had in any case not returned after the 1919 season, shortstop Swede Risberg, and third baseman Buck Weaver), and half of their four-man starting rotation (Cicotte and Williams) forever banished from white organized baseball, the run of the 1916 to 1920 White Sox abruptly ended, and what remained of that team plummeted to seventh in 1921. In the next thirty years, 1921 through 1950, the White Sox would have a winning record only nine times. They would finish as high as third place only three times. It would not be until the 1950s that the franchise became competitive again, and not until 1959 that they were once again American League champions, for the last time in the twentieth century, as it turned out. And not until the next century, in 2005, would the White Sox win their first World Series since 1917.

Much has been made since about how good—or even how great—this disgraced White Sox team was. First came the *mythology*, based on their 1917 championship and a player roster starring Shoeless Joe Jackson and Eddie Collins and Happy Felsch and Ray Schalk and Eddie Cicotte and Red Faber, that the 1919-20 White Sox were one of baseball's best teams ever, done in by greed.

There followed much later a *revisionist sentiment* that, while indisputably wrong, tightwad owner Comiskey's miserliness made them do it, and that Shoeless Joe was a naïve pawn who didn't participate in the fix. Payroll ledgers uncovered many years later by Bill Veeck when he owned the team suggested that, however tight-fisted Comiskey may have been and however true it may have been that some of his players—notably Shoeless Joe and Cicotte—were underpaid for their worth as ball players, his players in general were paid fair market value for their talents and services. And defenders of Shoeless Joe make much of how well he and fellow Black Sox third baseman Buck Weaver played in the World Series, particularly offensively. Many subtle things could have been done, and apparently were by both men, to affect the outcome of games—missing hit-and-run signs, for example, or overthrowing the cutoff man, or failing to take an extra base, or stupidly trying for an extra base and being thrown out. Such things were observed at the time, though not understood in context, by scribes in the press box and “clean” players in the dugouts.

And there is the *revisionist history*, currently in vogue and based largely on statistical analysis, that whoever played whatever part in the conspiracy, the 1919-20 White Sox were a good team, but hardly a great team and certainly not one of the best teams in baseball history.

So how do the **1916 to 1920 Chicago White Sox** rate according to my scheme? I'm with the revisionist history school. These White Sox were a good team that barely merit mention for consideration as one of the league's historical best. They were not a dominant team. The White Sox led the league in scoring in their two pennant-winning seasons, but were only third in 1916 and fourth in 1920 during their second-place finishes. Pitching was perhaps a stronger suit over these five years. Chicago never led the league in fewest runs allowed, but gave up the second fewest in 1916, 1917, and 1919 and the third fewest the two other seasons, even when finishing sixth in 1918. The White Sox' defense was the second most efficient in turning batted balls in play into outs in the American League in 1916, 1917, and 1919, and third in 1920. They were second or third in fewest errors every year but 1920, when they were fourth. This was a good defensive team.

Various player accounts from the time suggest that the Chicago White Sox at the end of the dead ball era underachieved for the quality team they had. Some scribes at the time made the observation that when the stakes were high, the White Sox were able to ramp up their play to the level of their talent, but that often they merely went through the motions to stay competitive. In 1916, the White started slowly, were only four games over .500 after playing half the season, and had the best record in the league thereafter—twenty games over .500—to miss out on the pennant by two games. In 1917, their 18-1 surge straddling the end of August and first half of September put the pennant out of reach for anyone else. In 1919, the White Sox—the team considered by many, at least in the first half-century, to be one of the best of all time—were in command most of the way, but in 1920, they did not challenge for first place until August and then stayed close until the very end when their infamous, sullied eight were suspended with just a handful of games remaining, but the pennant on the line.

That the dominance score for this team according to my methodology is not in the ballpark with the **1912-18 Boston Red Sox** may reflect that the White Sox did not live up to their potential, at least relative to the caliber of their players, but I don't believe so. The White Sox' players score was only marginally higher than that of the Red Sox, and the difference was primarily Chicago having two century-plus legacy players based on their best consecutive seasons including the years under consideration for this team—Eddie Collins and Joe Jackson—compared to Boston's one, Tris Speaker. Besides Collins and Jackson, catcher Ray Schalk was the only other White Sox position player who was the best in the league at his position or in the surrounding decade, and Eddie Cicotte was the team's only pitcher among the league's five best at the time and in the decade. The Red Sox were the better team. That's according to me.

The team against which I would rate the 1916-20 White Sox, with a virtually identical best teams score by my methodology, is the **1907-11 Detroit Tigers**. With overall much better pitching, however, and, in my view, probably an all-around better team, I am inclined to forgive the ChiSox' poor 1918 season, in which many of their most important players missed some or nearly all of the season serving in wartime contingencies, and rate these White Sox ahead of those Tigers. A major consideration in doing so is that the White Sox were the league's dominant team for at least one (1917) and arguably two (1919) seasons, and the Tigers were not, despite winning three consecutive close pennant races. In their three best seasons, 1917, 1919, and 1920, this White Sox team had a better winning percentage than the 1907, 1908, and 1909 Tigers' pennant winners—.634 compared to .615—and did so against better competition; four other American League teams had 90 or more wins (or were on a pace to win 90 games in the wartime contingency season of 1919) during the White Sox' three best seasons, against whom Chicago was 44-44, while Detroit was challenged by only two other 90-win teams, going 17-27, during their run of three straight pennants.

4 BEST AMERICAN LEAGUE TEAMS, 1901-1920

	P-WS	W - L %	Ach	Dom	Play	Total
Philadelphia Athletics, 1910-14	4 – 3	488-270 .644	32	50	31	113
Boston Red Sox, 1912-18	4 – 4	632-409 .607	29	32	21	82
Chicago White Sox, 1916-20	2 – 1	430-296 .592	22	20	24	66
Detroit Tigers, 1907-11	3 – 0	455-308 .596	24	20	23	67

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

“What if” is never an entirely serious historical proposition, but *what if* the “Black Sox” had had personal and professional integrity and *not* conspired to fix the 1919 World Series for gambling interests? Even though history is as history was, this is a question of some interest because the abrupt end of Chicago’s run as the American League’s best team paved the way for the beginning of the New York Yankees’ dynasty.

Adding Babe Ruth in 1920 made the Yankees immediately competitive for the pennant, and they finished only three games behind the pennant-winning Indians. Following their first taste of pennant fever in 1920, the Yankees won three consecutive pennants from 1921 through 1923—making them only the second team in American League history to do so (after Detroit from 1907 to 1909)—before finishing a close second, two games back of Washington, in 1924. While the Yankees beat out the defending champion Indians by 4½ games in 1921 and the surprising Browns by only one game in 1922 before winning their first trademark blowout pennant in 1923 (when they won by 16 games), they did not have to compete against a White Sox team that had won two pennants in the previous four years, might have won again in 1920 but for the scandal breaking in the last days of the season, and which arguably was at its peak and poised to be competitive for at least the next several years—

—After all, the average age of the White Sox position players in 1920 was 29 years, one year older than the Yankees’ average age. Of Chicago’s best players, only Collins (at 33) and Jackson (at 31) would have been over 30 in 1921 and likely on the down slope of their careers. Nonetheless, Eddie Collins was to remain the league’s best at his second base position for another six years, and Shoeless Joe Jackson almost certainly would have had several more great seasons had he not been exiled. According to the wins above replacement (WAR) metric, only Ruth, Speaker, George Sisler, and teammate Collins had a player value than Jackson in 1920. Speaker and Cobb, both of whom were older, would remain outstanding ball players into the mid-1920s, and there is no reason to suppose Shoeless Joe would not have also—especially now that the Ruth-inaugurated hitter’s era had begun. Center fielder Happy Felsch (who was 28) and third baseman Buck Weaver (at 29) were among the best in the league at their positions at the time they were terminated from the game, and probably would have remained so for at least several years. Ray Schalk (who was 27 in 1920) was no longer the best catcher in the American League, or even among the best (catchers got old young back in the day), but his defensive skills and leadership would have

remained a valuable asset, particularly for a team with the strengths the extended 1916-20 White Sox would have had . . . had history been different.

As for the pitching, Red Faber would be one of the best pitchers in the league in 1921 and 1922 (winning a total of 46 games and leading the league in earned run average both years) for teams that finished seventh and fifth. Eddie Cicotte, although 36 years old in 1920, was still one of baseball's elite pitchers and—despite being at the likely cusp of his twilight years—might have had two or three more productive seasons had he not been banished for his (very proactive) role in the 1919 Series fix. Lefty Williams was 27 years old in 1920, with back-to-back 20-win seasons, and while he was not one of the best at his craft in the league and may have been overrated, there is no reason to doubt he would not have continued to pitch with success had he not been barred from the game. And Dickie Kerr, whose pitching in the 1919 World Series was nothing if not heroic given that half the team behind him was not in it to win, won 19 games in 1921, held out for more money in 1922, and was himself blacklisted in 1923 for playing ball (ironically) against some of his former “Black Sox” teammates to keep in baseball shape during his holdout.

Chicago's 1916-20 team was *not* strong at every position—first base, shortstop, and right field were positions of weakness—but some of the players who became White Sox in the early 1920s would have strengthened the team. Earl Sheely, who took over at first base in 1921, was a substantial improvement over the disgraced ringleader of the plot, Chick Gandil, even had Gandil not been corrupt and played beyond 1919. (I'm saying Gandil would have lost his job to Sheely.) Outfielders Johnny Mostil (a right-handed hitter) and Bibb Falk (a left-handed hitter), also rookies in 1921, would have given the White Sox an all-around better outfield (playing alongside Jackson and Felsch), whether platooned in right field or if either won the job on his own, than the combination of Nemo Leibold and Shano Collins on the 1916-20 team. The same would have been true if Comiskey still traded Leibold and Shano Collins for Harry Hooper in 1921 (as he in fact did), even had none of his stars been blacklisted. Hooper enjoyed four productive years in Chicago before age took its inevitable toll on his career in 1925 (when he was 37). And in 1923, the White Sox came up with Willie Kamm, who—while not a great player—nonetheless quickly became the best all-around third baseman in the American League. Kamm might have replaced Weaver, or one of the two might have moved over to play short (Weaver's original position). Willie Kamm was a substantially better ballplayer than disgraced shortstop Swede Risberg, who surely would have been pushed aside with Kamm's arrival, if not sooner.

Had so many of their core players not been corrupt scoundrels, the 1916-20 Chicago White Sox almost certainly would have extended their run as a perennial pennant contenders into the early-to-mid 'twenties which, had they won another two pennants or so, would surely have boosted their historical legacy as one of the American League's best-ever teams, at least in the first half of the twentieth century. We don't know, of course, and cannot properly speculate on how those pennant races would have turned out had the 1916-20 White Sox continued on (and been strengthened with the addition of players like Sheely, Mostil, Falk, possibly Hooper, and eventually Kamm), but—

—The **1920 to 1924 New York Yankees** did *not* dominate the league the way future Yankee teams made a habit of. We've already observed that they had only one blowout pennant, finishing 16 games ahead in 1923—and they didn't even need 100 victories to win by such a whopping margin (they won 98) because the second-place team won only 83, and moreover

there were only three teams in the entire American League that had winning records that season.

History records that the Yankees won six pennants in eight years from 1921 through 1928, with Babe Ruth the centerpiece of all six of those AL championships, but the 1920-24 Yankees were a fundamentally different team than that most people think about when they think “Babe Ruth’s Yankees.” Fellow Hall-of-Famers Lou Gehrig, Tony Lazzeri, and Earle Combs who teamed with Ruth in the fabled “Murderers’ Row” of the iconic 1927 Yankees were not yet in pinstripes. Instead there was Wally Pipp (whose name is *not* lost to history only because it was *his* sick day that was the beginning of Gehrig’s consecutive games streak) at first; Aaron Ward at second; Roger Peckinpaugh (for two years) and then Everett Scott (for three) at short; Joe Dugan at third (after mid-1922); Bob Meusel in left (he remained to be part of the great Ruth Yankees and he and Ruth actually shifted between left and right depending on ballpark, with Ruth owning right field in Yankee Stadium); Whitey Witt for three seasons in center; and Wally Schang behind the plate. Even with the Babe having three of the six best seasons by a position player in the twentieth century, according to the WAR metric—in 1923, 1921, and 1920—the 1920-24 Yankees were *not* an offensive juggernaut. They led the league in scoring only once, in 1921, and were fourth and third in the league in runs scored when they won again in 1922 and 1923. Among the position players on this Yankee team, only Ruth was among the AL’s 10 best position players in the surrounding decade—he was far and away the best—and Schang at catcher was the only other Yankees’ position player to be best at his position.

Babe Ruth was, of course, the identity of the New York Yankees, but the foundation for their first three pennants was pitching and defense. With Bob Shawkey, Carl Mays, Waite Hoyt, and Sad Sam Jones pitching for them for at least four of those five years, Bullet Joe Bush joining the staff in 1922, and Herb Pennock in 1923, the 1920-24 Yankees led the league in fewest runs allowed three times and were second twice. Hoyt was one of the five best pitchers in the league from 1921 through 1928 (but not among the five best for the surrounding decade of this team’s achievement), and Pennock (from 1923 to 1928) would be during the years the Yankees next won three pennants in a row—1926 to 1928. Defense accounted for 13 percent of the total WAR value of the Yankees’ position players from 1920 to 1924, and pitching and defense combined for 45 percent. (Babe Ruth by himself totaled 27 percent of the team’s collective WAR for the five years.)

At the beginning of their great dynasty, the 1920-24 Yankees were not yet a great team, only a very good team—and mostly because of Babe Ruth. Other than 1923, all of their pennant races were close fought. Three straight mid-September losses in 1920 to the White Sox before the secret of the previous World Series came out, doomed the Yankees that year. In 1921, winning three of four from Cleveland in a decisive late-September series that began with the teams tied for first broke the pennant race the Yankees’ way. In 1922, fifteen wins in eighteen games in September helped New York ultimately prevail over St. Louis, and in 1924, the Yankees’ bid for a fourth straight pennant came up short in part because they won only 9 of their 22 games against the eventual pennant-winning Washington Senators. This was the only year of the five in which the 1920-24 Yankees had a losing record against one of their competitors for the pennant. What New York perhaps lacked in being as dominant as the Bronx Bombers would soon become, they made up for by playing tough against the teams they had to beat to come in first. New York played five teams that won 90 or more games during these five years—including both Cleveland and Chicago in 1920 (there were none

other than the Yankees in 1923)—accounting for 14 percent of their games, and had a .564 winning percentage (62-48).

The early-1920s Yankees were more successful and did better according to the dominance factors of my methodology, but consider I did whether the **1916-20 Chicago White Sox** were actually the better team. I want to be clear here that I am evaluating now *only* the history that was, wherein the perfidy of so many of their best players destroyed the Chicago team, and not an alternative history in which the White Sox extended their run beyond 1920 as if the Black Sox scandal never happened. This is tricky terrain because one should view with skepticism any argument to the effect that a team was really better than its relative dominance would suggest because they didn't always play their best, but when they did, they could beat anybody. This was in fact the observation of some baseball scribes who saw them play, but there should be no plaudits for being only as good as you want to be when you can be better.

That said, considering the quality of their players and their actual accomplishments and player value as represented by WAR, I conclude that the Eddie Collins-Shoeless Joe Jackson-Eddie Cicotte White Sox probably were, all told, a better team than the all-about-Ruth (with some pitching) Yankees. The Yankees had more success—three pennants in five years compared to only two in five years for Chicago—but the White Sox had two century-legacy players (Collins and Jackson) based on their best consecutive years compared to the Yankees' one (Ruth), as well as four of their players (Collins, Jackson, Schalk, and Cicotte) counted among the league's 10 best position players or five best pitchers in the surrounding decade, according to me based on WAR, compared to the Yankees' one (Mr. Ruth).

The **1907-11 Detroit Tigers**, the only other American League team to have won three consecutive pennants to this point in history, also had two century-legacy players—Ty Cobb and Sam Crawford—compared to the Yankees' all-in-one Ruth, but cannot be considered a better all around team.

4 BEST AMERICAN LEAGUE TEAMS, 1901-1925

	P-WS	W - L %	Ach	Dom	Play	Total
Philadelphia Athletics, 1910-14	4 – 3	488-270 .644	32	50	31	113
Boston Red Sox, 1912-18	4 – 4	632-409 .607	29	32	21	82
Chicago White Sox, 1916-20	2 – 1	430-296 .592	22	20	24	66
New York Yankees, 1920-24	3 – 1	474-291 .620	26	25	18	69
<i>Detroit Tigers, 1907-11</i>	<i>3 – 0</i>	<i>455-308 .596</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>67</i>

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

As long as I introduced one contentious narrative—that were it not for the Black Sox, the Yankees would have a tad fewer American League pennants than they do today—allow me to postulate another: that Babe Ruth was *not* the best player in baseball history.

Ruth, without doubt, is the most *historically significant* player in major league history. He was a driver of revolutionary change—the home run. By virtue of his outsized personality, prodigious production, revolutionizing how baseball was played, and historical timing—on the heels of the Black Sox scandal—Babe Ruth had bestowed upon him a cult of personality that none, even in these much more irreverent and deconstructionist times, has ever dared challenge. He is, simply, the *greatest* player ever, but that doesn't necessarily make him the best.

I believe Honus Wagner and Willie Mays are major league baseball's two best players ever, ahead of Ruth. As I note in *Transparency Annex C*, my selection of the best players in each league in the twentieth century (and beyond) is based on his five or more *best* consecutive seasons—when the player was at his peak—rather than the totality of his career. I used a player value of 5 wins above a replacement-level player, which is defined on the website *baseball-reference.com* as an All-Star quality season, as my baseline for determining best consecutive years, meaning that the best consecutive seasons of players like Ruth, Wagner, Mays, and many others who were exceptional ballplayers for a decade or longer extend well beyond the consecutive years when their player value as measured by wins above a replacement-level player may have been substantially higher. I allowed for one or two relatively mediocre seasons below that standard to be included in their best consecutive years, provided they were the anomaly and not themselves consecutive. By this accounting, Ruth's consecutive best years were from 1919 to 1934, Wagner's from 1899 to 1912, and Mays's from 1954 to 1966.

Ruth's average player value over his 16 consecutive "best years" was 10, Wagner's over 14 years was 8.4, and Mays's over 13 years was 9.4. For over a decade of years, each man had a wins above replacement average higher than a value of 8, which is defined as an MVP-caliber season. Ruth was clearly the better player over the course of their best consecutive years bracketed by a WAR value of at least 5. However, neither Wagner nor Mays had a season in the midst of their best consecutive years that was skewed by an out-of-ordinary poor season. Mays had only one year with a WAR score below 7.5 (6.8 in 1956), and Wagner had only two below 7.1 (6.4 in 1899 and 5.1 in 1910). Between 1919 and 1924 when he averaged 11.7 wins above replacement per year, Ruth had an uncharacteristically low 6.2 WAR value in 1922, less than half the 12.8 WAR he averaged in the other five years of that stretch; his second lowest player value was 10.6 wins above replacement in 1919. And in 1925, Ruth's WAR value was only 2.9—far below All-Star quality.

And therein is my point. In their best consecutive seasons, Honus Wagner and Willie Mays had consistently great years, while Babe Ruth, in the midst of his best consecutive seasons, twice had subpar years, at least for him, including one of relative mediocrity. There were good reasons for both anomalous poor seasons, although they're really *bad* reasons: the Babe played in only 110 games in 1922, partially because he was suspended from the beginning of the season until mid-May for barnstorming after the 1921 World Series against the Commissioner's edict prohibiting such activity; and the Babe played in only 98 games in 1925 on account of missing all of April and May with a mystery ailment said at the time to be a colossal bellyache from indulging in too many hotdogs, and the first week of September when he was suspended by his manager for insubordination until he apologized. The Yankees won the pennant with only a game to spare in 1922, and plunged to seventh in 1925.

Honus Wagner was as dominant in his era as Ruth was in his. Even more so, according to me. In the first decade of the century, Wagner led the league in every

meaningful offensive category that decade—he had the highest batting average, the most home runs, the most runs batted in, the most runs scored, the most hits, and the most stolen bases in the National League during those 10 years. And, despite this being a pitchers' era, his totals in all of these categories (except for home runs) stack up among the best of any position player in any era. And Wagner accomplished this in a decade in which pitchers were clearly dominant over the hitters.

As for Willie Mays, I believe that, based on his best consecutive years, he was the best player the game has ever seen. He excelled in every facet of the game and could hit for average with power. Mays finished his career with 660 home runs, only 54 shy of Ruth's mark, and most likely would have shattered that record had he not lost two years of his young prime to military service during the Korean War, and not be robbed of some indefinable but almost certainly significant number of home runs by the swirling, often gale-force incoming winds at San Francisco's Candlestick Park—as close to a torture arena for right-handed power hitters as there could possibly be. Moreover, Mays established himself as one of the all-time greats at a time when black players were still breaking into the major leagues and having to cope with considerable bigotry and discrimination in surrounding communities (especially during spring training in the south) and often isolation in their clubhouses. Furthermore, about half of Mays's best consecutive years came in *another* pitchers' era in the 1960s, when he had to hit against the likes of Sandy Koufax and Don Drysdale and Bob Gibson and Jim Maloney (but happily not against his teammate Juan Marichal). *And*, if Mays does not approach Ruth and Wagner for league-leading black ink in the record books, consider that he was part of what I would call Major League Baseball's Greatest Generation of Players with peers by the names of Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella and Hank Aaron and Frank Robinson and Duke Snider and Eddie Mathews and Ernie Banks and Ron Santo and Warren Spahn and Robin Roberts (and that doesn't even include Stan Musial of the previous generation, still in his prime into the mid-1950s).

Undeniably, Babe Ruth in the 1920s was the most impressive offensive force in the history of the game, particularly in the first half of that decade when the rest of baseball was just catching on to how he was revolutionizing the game, but unlike Wagner's and at least half of Mays's careers, Ruth played in a hitters' era that he had no small role in establishing. Finally, both Honus Wagner and Willie Mays played much more demanding and defensively important positions—shortstop and center field—and by all accounts each was one of the very best defensively at his position there ever was. Ruth was a good-enough, but not great, defensive outfielder. (Babe Ruth, of course, was also a great pitcher before he became the “greatest player there ever was”—but I'm not persuaded that makes him the best player ever; he was a pitcher for only four years, 1915 through 1918, before playing the outfield became his full-time vocation, so that his prodigiously productive bat would be in the line-up every day.)

TRANSPARENCY ANNEX

CHICAGO WHITE SOX, 1916-1920

2 Pennants (1917, 1919)
 1 World Series Win (1917)

ACHIEVEMENT

1 st place (x 3)	2 nd place (x 2)	3 rd place (x 1)	World Series (x 1)	Score
2 x 3 = 6	2 x 2 = 4	0	1 x 1 = 1	11

ACHIEVEMENT SCORE = 11 / 5 years x 10 = **22**

DOMINANCE

100 Wins	8 Games Ahead	AL1/Runs Scored	AL1/Fewest Runs Allowed	Score
1	1	2	0	4

DOMINANCE SCORE = 4 / 20 (4 x 5 seasons) x 100 = **20**

PLAYERS

CORE REGULARS	WAR 1916-20	BEST at POSITION	Decade 1913-22	1 st 1/2 C	20 th C +
2B Eddie Collins, 1915-26	28.4	1909-26	1913-20	yes	yes
SS Swede Risberg, 1917-20	2.6	no	no		
SS-3B Buck Weaver, 1912-20	12.4	no	no		
LF Joe Jackson, 1916-20 (-1)	26.6	1911-20 (-1)	1913-20 (-1)	yes	yes
CF Happy Felsch, 1915-20	17.8	no	no		
RF Nemo Leibold, 1917-20	4.9	no	no		
OF/1B Shano Collins, 1911-20	4.2	no	no		
C Ray Schalk, 1913-25	10.8	1914-18	1915-22	no	
P Eddie Cicotte, 1913-20	29.3	1913-20	1916-20	no	
P Red Faber, 1914-31 (-1)	11.2	no	no		
P Lefty Williams, 1916-20	11.5	no	no		
TEAM WAR, 1916-20 = 182.5	159.7				
Core WAR= 87.5 % of Team 36.5 Av. Team WAR + 87.5 %	68.4 / 10 6.8	4 / 11 x 10 3.6	4 x 1 4	2 x 2 4	2 x 3 6

PLAYERS SCORE = 6.8 (Base WAR) + 3.6 (Best at Position) + 14 (AL Best) = **24.4**

NEW YORK YANKEES, 1920-1924

3 Pennants (1921, 1922, 1923)
 1 World Series Win (1923)

ACHIEVEMENT

1 st place (x 3)	2 nd place (x 2)	3 rd place (x 1)	World Series (x 1)	Score
3 x 3 = 9	1 x 2 = 2	1 x 1 = 1	1 x 1 = 1	13

ACHIEVEMENT SCORE = 13 / 5 years x 10 = **26**

DOMINANCE

100 Wins	8 Games Ahead	AL1/Runs Scored	AL1/Fewest Runs Allowed	Score
0	1	1	3	5

DOMINANCE SCORE = 5 / 20 (4 x 5 seasons) x 100 = **25**

PLAYERS

CORE REGULARS	WAR 1920-24	BEST at POSITION	Decade 1917-26	1 st ½ C	20 th C +
1B Wally Pipp, 1915-24	12.9	no	no		
2B Aaron Ward, 1920-25	11.8	no	no		
LF Bob Meusel, 1920-29	14.2	no	no		
RF Babe Ruth, 1920-34	59.7	1920-33	1919-26	yes	yes
C Wally Schang, 1921-24	10.3	1919-24	*	no	
P Bob Shawkey, 1916-24	20.2	s/o	no		
P Carl Mays, 1919-22	14.3	(1915-21)	no		
P Waite Hoyt, 1921-29	16.2	1921-28	no		
P Sad Sam Jones, 1922-26	6.5	no	no		
TEAM WAR, 1920-24 = 224.1	166.1				
Core WAR= 74.1 % of Team	78 / 10	4 / 9 x 10	1 x 1	1 x 2	1 x 3
44.8 Av. Team WAR + 74.1 %	7.8	4.4	1	2	3

* Schang's best consecutive years were from 1917-22, only two with the Yankees.

PLAYERS SCORE = 7.8 (Base WAR) + 4.4 (Best at Position) + 6 (AL Best) = **18.2**

BEST PLAYERS IN SURROUNDING DECADE

(based on best consecutive years, informed by wins above replacement)

1916-20 WHITE SOX		1920-24 YANKEES
10 BEST AL POSITION PLAYERS, 1913-22		10 BEST AL POSITION PLAYERS, 1917-26
Tris Speaker, OF, 1913-22		<i>Babe Ruth, OF, 1919-26</i>
Babe Ruth, OF, 1918-22		Tris Speaker, OF, 1917-26
Ty Cobb, OF, 1913-19		Ty Cobb, OF, 1917-25
<i>Eddie Collins, 2B, 1913-20</i>		Harry Heilmann, OF, 1921-26
<i>Shoeless Joe Jackson, OF, 1913-20 (-1)</i>		George Sisler, 1B, 1917-22
George Sisler, 1B, 1917-22		Eddie Collins, 2B, 1913-20
Bobby Veach, OF, 1915-19		Joe Sewell, SS, 1921-26
Wally Schang, C/OF, 1917-22		Bobby Veach, OF, 1917-22
Frank Baker, 3B, 1913-18 (-1)		Ken Williams, OF, 1920-24
<i>Ray Schalk, C, 1915-22</i>		Wally Schang, C/OF, 1917-22 *
		* Only last two of Schang's five best consecutive years were with 1920-24 Yankees.
5 BEST AL PITCHERS, 1913-22		5 BEST AL PITCHERS, 1917-26
Walter Johnson, 1915-19		Stan Coveleski, 1917-22
Stan Coveleski, 1917-22		Urban Shocker, 1919-23
Carl Mays, 1917-21		Walter Johnson, 1917-24
<i>Eddie Cicotte, 1916-20</i>		Carl Mays, 1917-21
Bob Shawkey, 1916-22 (-1)		Eddie Rommel, 1922-26

BEST AT POSITION

1B	McInnis-----→Sisler-----→Gehrig-----→(37)
2B	(09) E.Collins-----→Lazzeri-----→(32)
SS	(09) Bush-----→Peckinpah-----→Sewell-----→
3B	(09) Baker-----→Gardner-----→Kamm-----→
OF	(07) Cobb-----→Ruth-----→(33)
OF	(09) Speaker-----→Goslin-----→(30)
OF	Jackson-----→Heilmann-----→
MP	(09) Hartzel---→Ruth, P-OF-----→Dykes, IF-----→
C	Schalk-----→Schang-----→Cochrane-----→(35)
P	(08) Johnson-----→Grove-----→(40)
P	(09) Bender----→Mays-----→Rommel-----→
P	(10) Wood-----→Coveleski-----→Pennock-----→
P	Cicotte-----→Hoyt-----→
P	Leonard-----→Shocker-----→Lyons-----→(30)
RP	Marberry-----→
	11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29