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### **Cover Page Footnote**

This article is based on a lecture entitled "When Boston Had Dynasties: Early League Championships, 1871-1918," for the Clement C. Maxwell Library at Bridgewater State College on October 28, 2003.

# Boston Baseball Dynasties

1872–1918

by Peter de Rosa



It is one of New England's most sacred traditions: the obligatory autumn collapse of the Boston Red Sox and the subsequent calming of Calvinist impulses trembling at the brief prospect of baseball joy. The Red Sox lose, and all is right in the universe. It was not always like this. Boston dominated the baseball world in its early days, winning championships in five leagues and building three different dynasties.

## DYNASTY I: THE 1870s

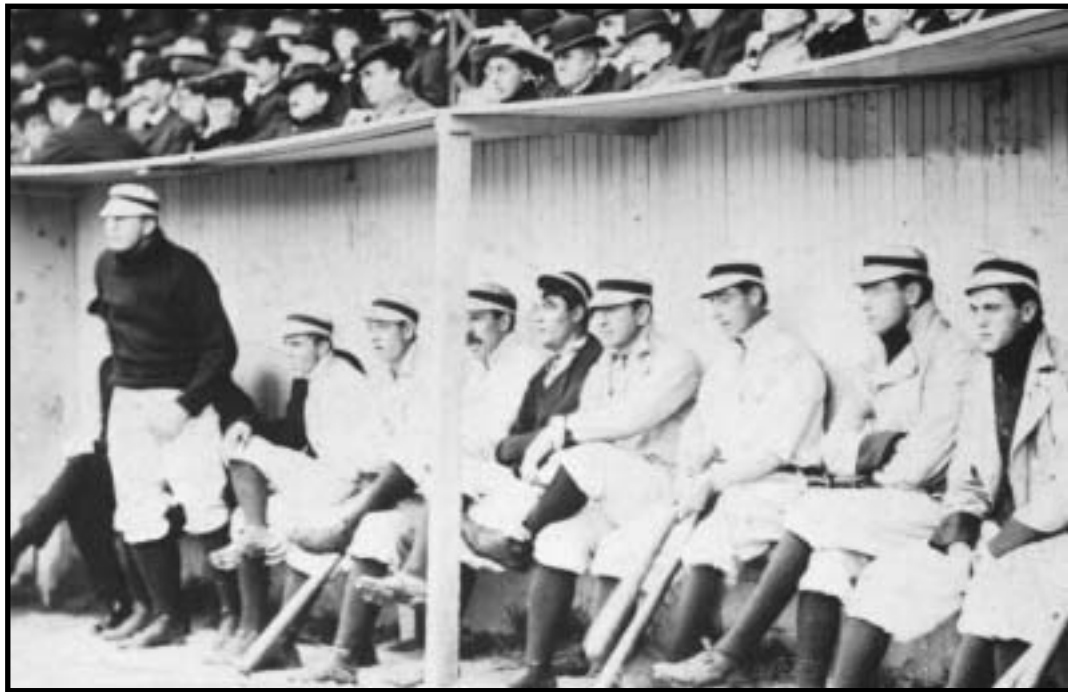
Early baseball evolved from rounders and similar English games brought to the New World by English colonists. Town Ball was the dominant form of these in New England until the New York game, modern baseball's direct ancestor, overtook it in the 1850s. Players competed through amateur clubs formed by social or occupational organizations, thus making baseball in theory a sport of gentlemen.

As the sport spread, the clubs organized the National Association of Base Ball Players in 1858 to standardize rules and competition. Clubs began skirting the rules by paying players covertly or through patronage jobs. In 1866, Harry Wright, an English cricket player, formed the Cincinnati Red Stockings and made them openly professional two years later. In 1869, his club toured nationally, going 56-0-1 and turning a grand profit of \$1.25. Cincinnati toured again in 1870, running its 1868-1870 record to 120-0-1 before losing two games. These losses hurt Wright's team as a gate attraction and his financial backers withdrew. Still, more clubs copied his model and professionalism spread quickly.

In 1871, the NABBP reconstituted itself as the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players, baseball's first professional league and one controlled by the play-

ers. Wright moved the Red Stockings to Boston and built the South End Grounds, located at what is now the Ruggles T stop. This established the present day Braves as baseball's oldest continuing franchise. Besides Wright, the team included brother George at shortstop, pitcher Al Spalding, later of sporting goods fame, and Jim O'Rourke at third.

Besides having talent, the Red Stockings employed innovative fielding and batting tactics to dominate the new league, winning four pennants with a 205-50 record in 1872-1875. Boston wrecked the league's competitive balance, and Wright did not help matters by taking his team on a tour of England and Ireland in the middle of the 1874 season. Besides the Boston problem,



**Boston dugout during the 1903 World Series. Cy Young is seen standing at far left.**

Courtesy of Boston Public Library Print Department.

the NA suffered from contract jumping, abysmal finances, uneven schedules, vanishing franchises, and players gambling on games.

William Hulbert, the owner of the Chicago White Stockings (today's Cubs) saved baseball by organizing the owner-controlled National League of Professional Baseball Clubs, after first raiding Boston for players. The NL standardized contracts and franchise rights, banned player gambling, and stabilized club finances. Wright took the decimated Red Stockings into the new league but missed the 1876 pennant. Despite working for cheap owners (players were ordered to go into the stands and fight fans for foul balls), Wright won pennants in 1877, helped by four Louisville players throwing games and the first of three Tommy Bond forty-win seasons, and 1878.

After winning six pennants in seven years, the dynasty ended when George Wright and O'Rourke bolted to the Providence Grays who then captured the 1879 title. Boston took another pennant in 1883, but a new dynasty would not come until the 1890s.

#### DYNASTY II: THE 1890s

By any definition, the 1890s were a bad decade for baseball, but a good one for Boston nonetheless. Besides the solidification of segregation, costly wars with other leagues left only the National League standing from 1892 to 1900. This twelve-team league featured competitive imbalance (the 1899 Cleveland Spiders finished 84 games out), owners with interests in more than one team (trusts were the real American pastime in the 1890s), and a pointless four-year postseason Temple Cup series that many thought was rigged.

The National Brotherhood of Professional Baseball Players, an early players union, opened the decade by launching the Players League in competition with the National League and the American Association. The ensuing labor war decimated the NL and the AA, and destroyed the PL. The PL's Boston Reds were the best team in baseball, winning the League's only pennant, and being one of the few profitable teams. It was of course excluded from the Brooklyn-Louisville World Series but it was able to move to the AA in 1891. It won that league's title too, but could not entice Boston's NL winner to play in the postseason, costing Boston a trolley series.

In all this chaos, the NL's Boston team, now called the Beaneaters, recovered its 1870s glory, winning five pennants in eight years. These teams were run by Frank Selee who had managed several minor league teams, including Easton of the New England Baseball Association. He built a powerhouse around Kid Nichols, a seven-time thirty-game winner, colorful catcher King Kelley, and outfielder Hugh Duffy. The 1891 team had

the most controversial finish despite a late season eighteen-game winning streak. The Beaneaters played four doubleheaders without the required League permission, and clinched the pennant when New York dropped five games to Boston after leaving its best players home. Boston then ignored its American Association neighbor, thereby killing the AA and leaving the National League with a baseball monopoly in an age when monopolies ruled most industries.

The new twelve-team NL used a split-season format in 1892, with the winners of each half playing a championship series. Boston won the first half easily, then coasted while the Cleveland Spiders took the second part. Boston showed its true strength in the playoff, sweeping Cleveland with a 5-0-1 record. The Beaneaters took another pennant in 1893, a year noted for changing the pitching mound's distance from home plate to 60'6". This change benefited hitters greatly. In 1894, Duffy hit .440 while his team scored 1221 runs, both records still.

Baltimore took the next three pennants but the Seleemen came back in 1897 and 1898 with the addition of third baseman Jimmy Collins and outfielder Billy Hamilton. Financially-strapped Baltimore sold off key players, relegating that team to second place. An apathetic Boston lost the 1897 Temple Cup series to Baltimore in a poorly-attended contest known mainly for Boston charging reporters admission to the park. With little to recommend it, the Temple Cup idea died once and for all. Afterwards, the Beaneaters began slipping, leaving the new Boston American League entry owning the town.

#### INTERLUDE: 1903

When Charles Comiskey formed the American League in 1900, his strategy involved moving teams from small markets into larger ones, eventually challenging the National League directly in five cities. In 1901, the Buffalo AL franchise moved to Boston, leaving Buffalo without a team for over a century, objectively a situation worse than eighty-six years without a championship. The new team, usually called the Americans, built the Huntington Avenue Grounds near the South End Grounds on what is now Northeastern University property.

Opening on Patriots Day in 1901, the Americans found instant success and outdrew the Beaneaters heavily. They recruited Collins as manager, thus winning over the Irish community, and raided NL teams for talent, snaring Cy Young among others. In 1903, Young, Bill Dinneen, and Tom Hughes each won at least twenty games as Boston coasted to the pennant. Owners Henry Killilea of Boston and Barney Dreyfuss of



**Bill Dineen of Boston talking back to a Pittsburgh cop during the 1903 World Series. Behind him, with cap cocked at a wise-guy angle, is second baseman Hobe Ferris. Members of Boston's Royal Rooters, led by one "Nuf Ced" McGreevey, whoop it up in the background.**

Courtesy of Boston Public Library Print Department.

Pittsburgh agreed to play a World Series, deciding on nine games to maximize gate receipts. The series nearly aborted when the Boston players struck for more money, finally getting a better deal just before the series opened. Killilea's woes increased when he too charged reporters admission and suffered the obligatory bad press. After the series, he sold the team to Charles Taylor of The Boston Globe who needed a job for his son John.

Pittsburgh featured Honus Wagner and Fred Clarke as its stars, and pitching led by Deacon Phillippe. It had won three straight pennants and was favored to defeat the Americans. Pittsburgh took two of the first three games in Boston, winning the third game under odd circumstances. Boston had oversold the game, leaving thousands of fans standing in the outfield before the game started. They mobbed the field until the police, using hastily-grabbed baseball bats, restored order. Most of these fans remained in the outfield throughout the game. Pittsburgh then benefited from a ground rule scoring any ball hit into these fans as a double.

Boston then rallied, winning three out of four in Pittsburgh. The clincher came in Boston as Bill Dinneen won his third game of the series. Boston took a second pennant in 1904, but John McGraw refused to let his NL Giants meet the Americans afterwards. Injuries and age afflicted the Americans over the next few years and Boston fell out of contention until 1912.

#### DYNASTY III: THE 1910s

The third Boston dynasty began with the opening of Fenway Park, the oldest park today, which stabilized the team's finances. Now called the Red Sox, the 1912 team

won the pennant by fourteen games behind Smokey Joe Wood's 34-5 record, and outfielders Tris Speaker, Duffy Lewis, and Harry Hooper. The Sox faced the New York Giants in what is arguably the best World Series ever.

Boston went 3-1-1 in the first five games, three of them one-run decisions. Then Jim McAleers, Boston's owner, ordered manager Jake Stahl to pitch Buck O'Brien instead of Wood in Game 6. O'Brien lost. Next the Royal Rooters, John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald's Boston booster club, caused more trouble in Game 7. Somehow their seats had been sold to others and they rioted after finding this out. Wood's arm tightened during the delay and he lost 11-4, tying the Series at 3-3-1.

Still holding a grudge, the Rooters spent the next day marching and urging fans to boycott Game 8 in an early version of the sports talk radio mentality. They missed an incredible Boston comeback. With New York leading 2-1 in the bottom of the 10<sup>th</sup> inning, Sox shortstop Clyde Engle flied to Giant outfielder Fred Snodgrass who then dropped the ball. This went down in history as The Snodgrass Muff, and was even duly headlined in his 1974 *New York Times* obituary. Despite Snodgrass's brilliant catch on the next play, Boston rallied to win the game and the series.

Injuries hurt the Sox's 1913 and 1914 efforts, but the 1914 Miracle Braves consoled Boston. They went 68-19 to win the pennant after being 15 1/2 out in July, then swept the Philadelphia Athletics in the World Series. The Red Sox stormed back in 1915, this time relying on pitching from Rube Foster, Dutch Leonard, Babe Ruth, Ernie Shore, and Wood. Bill Carrigan's team beat the Philadelphia Phillies 4-1 in the Series even without using Ruth and Wood.

## New England Teams

Team	League	Nicknames	Parks
Boston	NA	Red Stockings, 1871–82	South End Grounds
	NL	Beaneaters, 1883–1906	" (plus Congress St. and Dartmouth Grounds—1894)
		Doves, 1907–10	"
		Rustlers, 1911	"
		Braves, 1912–52	South End Grounds to 1914
		Fenway Park, 1914–15	
		Braves Field, 1915–52	
		Unofficially known as the Nationals, Red Caps, Reds, Sealemen and Triumvirs.	
Boston	AL	Somersets, 1901–2	Huntington Avenue Baseball Grounds
		Americans, 1903–7	"
		Red Sox, 1908–	Fenway Park after 1912
		Braves Field 1914–15	
		Unofficial nicknames included Beaneaters, Collinsmen, Pilgrims, Plymouth Rocks, Puritans, and Speedboys.	
Boston	UA	Unions, 1884	Union Park and Congress Street Grounds
Boston	PL	Reds, 1890	Congress Street Grounds
	AA	Reds, 1891	"
Hartford	NA	Dark Blues, 1874–75	Hartford Ball Club Grounds
	NL	Dark Blues, 1876–77 (Team played one game in Hartford in 1877 before moving to Brooklyn)	"
Middletown	NA	Mansfields, 1872	Mansfield Club Grounds
New Haven	NA	New havens, 1875	Brewster Park
Providence	NL	Grays, 1878–85	Messer Street Grounds
Springfield	NA	no team but hosted NA games as a neutral site	Springfield Track
Worcester	NL	Ruby Legs, 1880–82	Agricultural County Fair Grounds
		Unofficial nicknames included the Brown Stockings and the No-Names.	

The least likely title came the following year. Tris Speaker was traded to Cleveland after a salary dispute, and injuries ended Wood's career. Pitching again carried the team and it won the league by two games. Boston then went 4-1 against Brooklyn for a fourth Series title. The final glory came in 1918 under manager Ed Barrow in a season shortened by World War I. New owner Harry Frazee bought several players to replace ones lost to the draft, helping Boston edge out Cleveland. In the World Series, Boston triumphed over the Cubs, and both teams have been waiting ever since for a rematch.

## CONCLUSION

What did these teams do right? First, start with the owners. Good, if flinty, owners contributed to these teams. Even the much-reviled Frazee played a constructive role before his finances sank the team. Conversely, inept or broke owners have reigned since. Secondly, they had extremely competent field managers. The Red Stockings had Harry Wright, a seminal figure in the development of professional baseball, and the brilliant Frank Selee. While Red Sox winners had no managers in the Wright-Selee stratosphere, all could run a team well. Finally, these teams all featured strong pitching. Subsequent teams have emphasized hitting instead of pitching with predictable results. Should the combination of strong ownership, managers, and pitching reappear, a new dynasty could arise. Whether that would be a good thing is a different matter.

—Peter L. de Rosa is Visiting Lecturer of History

*This article is based on a lecture entitled "When Boston Had Dynasties: Early League Championships, 1871-1918," for the Clement C. Maxwell Library at Bridgewater State College on October 28, 2003.*