

Biggest Gambler in Baseball

Joe McCarthy of Chicago Was Never a Great Player Himself. But as Manager He Has Shown His Genius By Staking His Future On Firing a Veteran Star And Whipping a Group Of Diamond Cast-Offs Into a Big League Club



Big Bat Wielder Hornsby and shrewd Manager McCarthy. . . . They get along great together, despite the dire predictions of the wise ones.

By HENRY L. FARRELL

JOE MCCARTHY, the chunky-built and hard-faced manager of the Chicago Cubs, is rated among the baseball people as the gamest man in the game. They say he has great courage. The courage that goes beyond hitting on the jaw a ball player who disputes his authority. His greater courage, it is of record, is in that he has been game enough to stake his good job and his baseball future on a gamble.

He will take a chance on any baseball player.

Just a minor league manager, with a fairly successful record, McCarthy took the job of managing the club owned by William Wrigley, one of the wealthiest men in the country. A big success in commerce, he naturally would demand successful methods from his subordinates in all his enterprises.

On the first occasion he had to show his authority as manager of the Cubs, McCarthy showed his courage and his willingness to gamble. He fired Grover Cleveland Alexander, the best pitcher on his ball club and one of the very best pitchers in baseball.

"Old Pete," as he is known to the ball players and the real customers, is still one of the best pitchers in baseball. The Cubs could profit by his services this year, perhaps, but the fact remains that McCarthy fired a rebel, saved his own job and has a club that is one of the favorites for the National League pennant.

THERE were other managers who graduated from the minor leagues into the handling of a major league club. "Pants" Rowland of the Chicago White Sox was one. And the experiences of all of them were the same. The old hard-boiled ball players on the club considered them as bushers. And respected them as the same. Just as they look upon rookie ball players.

When McCarthy took charge of the Chicago Cubs he found a team of veteran ball players who looked upon him as a busher. He had won a pennant for Louisville, but Louisville, the hard-boiled players thought, was only a bush team in a bush league.

And they went to work on him. And the head worker was Old Pete Alexander. And out the window went Old Pete.

McCarthy says that he didn't put down any stiff training rules for the ball players. He said he was just feeling around to get his own position. He didn't tell the players what time they had to be in bed, how high their stakes could be in a poker game or how long they could shoot craps. He just asked them to be at the ball park in shape to play for the salary they were getting.

Joe's first trouble happened at the ball park. He told Alexander to go to the bull pen and wait for a call. Alex didn't like the order. He said it wasn't his turn to work. McCarthy said he was not working his staff that way. And that if an emergency came Alex and every other pitcher on the staff would have to do his share.

Alex said, in front of all the players on the bench—"That's the way they do in the bushes. They don't do it that way in the majors. We're bigger shots up here than you are."

"And McCarthy, according to the story, said: 'You're gone, old fellow!'"

Alex said in answer: "You'll go before I do. I'm bigger in this joint than a bush manager."

And McCarthy, without any belligerent actions, said: "You're going down the river some place. I'm the boss of the club. If you don't go I'll go and you'll be the manager of the club."

The result was that Old Pete went down the river to St. Louis. There were outbursts in Chicago. The fans raised the devil. But the deal went through. Old Pete left the ball club. McCarthy remained. And all the other ball players on the club took unto themselves a great respect for the manager. This feeling of respect is in no small way responsible for the success of the Cubs.

McCarthy's next test came when he suggested a trade that would bring Kiki Cuyler to the Cubs from Pittsburgh.



Hack Wilson . . . drifted around . . . Then McCarthy gambled on him and won.

CUYLER, one of the greatest players in baseball, was in bad with the owners of the Pirates. They said in Pittsburgh that he was a bad actor and a bad influence on a ball club, that he wanted too much money and that he was a loafer.

When the Cubs started talking business for him, McCarthy was told by friends that he should step in and stop the owners from getting another rebel.

Cuyler is a great drawing card and that will help the box office but it won't help you. He'll ruin your ball club," his friends told him.

And McCarthy told them: "I'm building up a ball club here. We can use an outfielder like that fellow. And I'll tell you more. No ball player is going to break me or my ball club. They'll all play ball for me. Or else."

Coyler joined the Cubs and he didn't have a very good year. He hurt his wrist early in the season and didn't start hitting until past August. There are some experts who say if Cuyler had hit his normal pace the Cubs would have won the pennant last year, but there are none who have said that Kiki didn't try for McCarthy. He didn't try (maybe) in Pittsburgh but he finished the season in form last year and he has been playing great ball this year.

Then came McCarthy's biggest gamble with Rogers Hornsby. The result of this gamble can't be known until fall, but so far it seems certain that the Cubs haven't been hurt by the acquisition of the greatest right-hand hitter and batsman in the league.

Perhaps the story behind the trade for Hornsby can be told now without a violation of confidence. The story is told merely to illustrate the gambling spirit of McCarthy and goes something like this without quoting the exact words:

At the close of the 1928 season McCarthy was talking to a very good friend, a newspaper man.

"**T**HE boss," he said (meaning Wrigley's millions), "is wanting a pennant. I think I could have won it this year if I had a hitting second baseman. I think I can win it next year if I get a fellow on second who can hit. I think I know where I can get one."

"When I was in Boston on the last trip a fellow came over to me, he was a player, too, and told me that the boss had given him permission to talk with any club he wanted to join. He said the boss couldn't stand the pay jolt and told him to go and look for a good spot for himself."

"He came to me and explained the circumstances. He said he liked our club better than any other club and, that, in a business way, he felt we could meet his contract."

"The fellow you're talking about is Hornsby, eh?" the newspaper friend asked.

"Well, that's the fellow," McCarthy replied.

"Yes, I think you're a sucker," his friend went on. "Hornsby will ruin your ball club. He's a great hitter but he can't field like Maguire. He's a swell fellow with the newspaper men but he doesn't get on with the players."

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"Old War-Horse" Stephenson. . . . McCarthy took a chance on him . . . brought him back from the minors.



Chunky, hard-faced Joe McCarthy. . . . He scrapped a dugout full of big-shot Cubs, and built a better club of baseball orphans.



Grover Alexander . . . the fact that he was the Cubs' ace hurler didn't keep McCarthy from "sending him down the river."



At this conference McCarthy (right) made a fighting Cub of Kiki Cuyler. . . . "He'll ruin your club," the wise ones said. . . . Instead he's playing great ball.

"The Cards had trouble when he was with them. Yes, I'll agree he was the manager of a pennant winner, but they let him go and it wasn't because of dough. He went to the Giants and almost won a pennant for them when McGraw was sick and he was placed in charge of the team."

"But the Giants let him go and he went to the Braves and he showed Jack Slattery, a local favorite, out of the management."

"Listen, Joe," his friend said, "if you get that fellow you might just as well look for another job. He'll be starting after your job from the first day he's in there."

And the reply of McCarthy was something like this: "I need a hitting second baseman and that fellow can hit and he's not going to ruin my ball club. If he shows himself to be a better manager than I am he can have the job. If I am a punk manager I'd get the air anyway."

"But I know fellows and I know that Hornsby is not going to bother my ball club."

"Well," his friend said, "you will have some trouble keeping the other fellows from getting mad. Hornsby is getting \$42,000 a year. Your other ball players will get mad at their small dough and they will not like it when Hornsby tells them how to play their positions or when he walks over and tells the pitcher what to pitch."

McCarthy relieved himself of a big sigh and stopped the conversation with this:

"Joe, himself, me personally, is going to run this ball club."



"McCarthy's Murderers" . . . they call them now, but every one was a gamble. . . . Left to right: Stephenson, Grimm, Wilson, Hornsby and Cuyler.

If it sinks, I'm sunk. But I'll tell you that no one ball player is going to sink this ball club."

"I told the boss, when he asked me, that I wanted Hornsby to play second base and that if I got him, even for all that dough, I thought I could win the pennant."

"Hornsby will play ball for me. I know he will."

THIS conversation all happened last winter before the Cubs had made the deal for Hornsby. Against all the advice of his friends McCarthy took on the alleged disturber and a few days ago he said:

"This stuff about the bad acting Hornsby is the bunk. He is the first man in bed at night. He is the first man on the field for practice and he is the last man in the club house after a game. He lives baseball. That's his life and his ambition. I have a lotta guys who just live for the dining room."

took charge of the Cubs. That it was a wise move can be seen from the fact that "Old War-Horse" is regarded as one of the greatest hitters in the game today and a fielder who is not the worst by any means.

Wilson's case seems almost parallel. He tried out with the New York Giants but was allowed to drift away. And the Cubs grabbed him. For the past two seasons he has been one of the National League's leading home-run hitters and he, like Stephenson, is one of the great batters in the majors.

Besides cast-offs the ball club with which McCarthy is making a strong bid for the pennant this year is composed largely of men who had been released from other clubs with the reputation of being hard to handle.

Five of the players, among the best on the club, were formerly with the New York Giants. They are Mike Gonzales, catcher; Percy Malone, pitcher; Hack Wilson, outfielder; Art Nehf, pitcher, and Hornsby, a second baseman, if you must know.

THE original theme that McCarthy is the greatest gambler in baseball might be disputed. There has been no greater gambler in baseball than John McGraw, manager of the New York Giants. McGraw has released more young ball players who turned out good than any other manager in baseball. And he has bought back, for fancy prices, more of his cast-off players than any manager in baseball.

But the difference is this: McGraw did his gambling when he was an established manager of great reputation. And the vice president and stockholder of the club.

McCarthy, when he did his gambling (and now that he is yet gambling), was only a hired manager on trial, at a small salary. He staked everything he had. He had the courage to go or sink on his own judgment.

The Cub manager was never a great ball player. That is, in the sense that he never was an outstanding major league player such as Cobb, Speaker and some of the other stars who became managers. His record doesn't show as much as Bill McKechnie's and that former manager of two championship clubs was never regarded by the players as a great ball player.

McCarthy is 44 years of age and his middle name is Vincent. He was born in Franklin, Pa., and his first real baseball experience was with Toledo where he stayed from 1908 to 1911. He then was sent to Indianapolis and was sent to Wilkes-Barre where he became the manager of the club. He then toured through Memphis and Buffalo and jumped to the Brooklyn Feds when the outlaw league was organized.

When the peace agreement was signed with the organized leagues he was sent to Buffalo and from there he went to Louisville in 1916 where he remained as the manager from 1919 to 1925. He won the American Association pennant in his last year at Louisville, then went to manage the Cubs.