

The Trials of a Baseball Prophet

The Sad Lot of the Scribe Who Picks the Losing Team

By W. A. Phelon

In the following article Mr. Phelon tells in his usual breezy, humorous way, the trials of the baseball prophet whose prophecies have gone wrong. Since the conclusion of the World's Series the office of the Baseball Magazine has been deluged with letters from all kinds and classes of fans who took exception to Mr. Phelon's predictions. Some of these letters have been critical, some humorous, some condescending, but all have been interesting. In so far as the Baseball Magazine was implicated in that article, it is only fair to ourselves to say that we never incorporate the predictions of any of our contributors as a part of the settled policy of the magazine. In other words, Mr. Phelon, not the Baseball Magazine, picked the Giants to win. In fairness to Mr. Phelon, however, we have allowed him ample space to explain his position and argue from his view of the question.

AFTER the World's Series ended, and I had fully realized that I was the goat of 1911, just as a dear old Chicago writing pal had been the goat in 1910, I packed my grips and flew. Flew some, dear brothers, I assure you, for I never dropped anchor till Morro Castle loomed white and glittering on the blue horizon, and I was safely roosting on that hospitable Cuban soil.

I had reason to depart. The ordinary citizen doesn't understand what it is to pick a loser in the World's Series, and to stand forth, silhouetted against the background, as the man who said the Giants would be the winners. Back in my junior days, when I hung around newspaper offices, a cub (not Chance's kind of cub, but just waiting for a chance), I used to give the hootsome giggle to the racing editor. Day after day, the gent who tended to the ponies would corrugate his brow till the wrinkles mixed with the eyebrows and the hair. He would work—oh, how that geek would work—and he would cripple his typewriter showing the certainty with which El Skate would win the first race, while La Mutt had a leadpipe in the second.

Next day angry persons who had bet all of \$2 on the tip would stick their heads into the office, denouncing the racing guy as a son of Ananias and the full son of an Arabian story-teller. Others would call up by phone and tell him what they thought of him. Towards 10 o'clock there would be a stack of letters on his desk, some insulting, some pitying, some questioning his mental condition, and all derogatory. Along about 11, the managing editor would come in and say something about how his wife could stick a hatpin in the entries and pick 'em better. Then I would laugh. Uh, huh. Then I would chortle, and the sound of my ebullient glee would rattle on the window panes.

I am sorry now. My chickens have come home to roost, and I know just how that horse-guy felt when one of his tips was left at the post and another one was detained. If I ever meet that horseman I shall apologize nine ways from the jack—for I, too, have learned what it is to be The Goat.

* * *

The letters I received after the series, and before I left for Cuba? Oh, yes. Two tons. Many people whom I had known for years wrote to me, explaining

how they had risked the family jewels upon the accuracy of my advance information, and how, wandering houseless and loveless, because they didn't dare go home without any money, they were calling down anathema and endless sorrows on my bean. Then there were letters from perfect strangers; oh, a lot of them. They all assumed an air of intimacy and jolted friendship, even if they didn't know whether I wore a red necktie or had four legs. These strangers were of two classes—those who lost, or said they lost, on my advice, and those who had played the string the other way.

The former division said things that had prussic acid on them, and wanted to know what business I had picking winners when I couldn't put my hand in a flour-barrel without skinning my knuckles. The latter brigade simply gave me the exultant snort; but all of them, friends, ex-friends and strangers, combined in a strange unanimity of judgment and decision. They said I was a wart.

* * *

So, finding this monotonous, and seeing no break in the flood of letters and derisive messages, I begged a vacation, packed up, and blew to Cuba, that dear Cuba 'cross the brine. "On the road across the bay, where the flying fishes play, and perhaps a mob of jassaks will not have so much to say." After a somewhat agitated voyage, the ocean at this season being very dusty, I reached Havana, and a delegation of Cubans, baseball editors and plain untamed fans came out in a yacht to greet me. The first one over the rail beamed as he handed me a paper. Across the front of the sporting page, in large letters, was written (literal translation): "Our Distinguished Visitor, Mr. Phelon, the Man Who Picked the Giants as the Winners."

The doctor at the quarantine station felt my wrist, and asked me if I had not been ill since my so-to-be-regretted error in the World's Series. The inspector of customs said that he knew I had nothing dutiable, but that he could not understand why anyone of such knowledge should have been so-painfully-to-be-

mentioned mistaken about the World's Series. There was a hack at the dock, and the cochero, or driver, said the fare would be 25 cents, and that he needed the money because he had followed the advice of the American Senor, and had bet on the Giants. As the hack bowled along through the strange old streets, beautiful women came to the little barred windows and looked out, and said: "There goes the writer Americano, he who became loco, muy loco, and said that the Giants would be victorious. Ah, how we feel for him!"

The clerk at the hotel said he would give me a room with a shower-bath, and that he always believed the Athletics would win. Then came a messenger from the post office, with a bundle of letters forwarded to me, and said he was glad to do me this favor, but that Connie Mack had a team that could not be beaten. I opened the bundle of letters. All of them were from bugs who wanted to know what right I had to live.

* * *

The Cubans have been very, very kind. They are the best people on this earth today, and when I quit newspapering I want to return to this Havana for the balance of my days. They are very sympathetic, and explain that they all bet on the Athletics, but that they understand that I made the oh, so insignificant mistake. Some of them took me to Cabanas Fort the other day, and as the boat skimmed across the harbor I heard Senor Lopez say to Senor Garcia: "It was, dear friend, no doubt the strain of the long schedule, and our glorious climate will restore his intellect." Over in the fort the dark, handsome Cuban soldiery presented arms and shouted: "Viva Senor Phelon! Viva our benefactor!" That was one ray of relief and pleasure. That gang risked their month's pay coppering my tip, and so I benefacted somebody anyhow.

* * *

Why did I pick the Giants? For several reasons; and, right now, I will say this: Stake them to another seven-game series against the Athletics, and I would pick them right over again. I believed

before the series, and so expressed myself, that the Athletics, in a long series, would win. I thought they had the staying power and the intrinsic stuff to beat anyone on earth in fifteen or twenty games; but I thought that the Giants could get up speed and steam enough to whip anybody in a seven-game dash. I still think so. Given a seven-game set, and dry fields to work on, and the Giants would beat them out. Fifteen games—the Athletics to a certainty. Seven games, the Giants—for the mess of circumstances that crabbed McGraw's game might not occur again in twenty years.

A fast ball club cannot operate in mud. A team of sluggers can. The field conditions in the last four games were infernal beyond all expression, and every angle of the ground conditions worked for the Athletics and against New York.

Baker would hardly duplicate his home run performances again. He might, of course; but, also, he might not. Deduct the home runs of Baker, and where would the Athletics have got off?

Then again, how could any man predict that the Giants would have to work with eight men against ten? No, no, not meaning the umpire for the tenth man. One member of the Giants gave the most pitiful exhibition ever recorded in a championship series, pitiful at the bat and in the field, everything he did operating as directly in favor of the Athletics as though he had been an active member of that club.

It is the fashion to string with the winner. The Athletics won, and straightway a thousand writers volleyed long columns telling what a wonderful ball club Connie Mack possessed, and how real class had won. That is partly enthusiasm and partly plain sycophancy. If a series of bull-luck chances of the cheapest kind had thrown the final glories to the Giants, these same writers would have tried to climb into the bandwagon and call the Giants heroes of the glittering variety. Class? Club superiority? Where was it shown except on the final day, where the Giants, going all to pieces, played a game of ball that

was enough to turn their best friends away forever?

The Athletics are a stronger ball team, intrinsically, than the Giants. That goes, and always went, so far as a series that would bring out the full powers of both clubs might be concerned. As to the recent series: the Athletics were squarely whipped in two keen, finely played encounters. Two of their games were handed them by over-the-fence home runs, and in one game the Giants changed their names to The Muffing Pygmies. Where is there any great superiority of class for a team that is whipped in the two best games of the series and scratches out twice on hits that might, or might not, have amounted to a blamed thing on an open field?

The truth is, in my opinion, that neither team played up to its proper gait in the series, at least as far as batting was concerned.

The best ball team won, yes—but I picked the worse ball team of the two for the seven-game sprint, on the theory that the Giants could get up the steam for just the required distance, nothing more. Seven games are—seven games.

The best proof that the Athletics didn't play up to their proper form is the fact that they didn't climb all over the Giants early in the series. With the Giants playing such unclassy and miserable ball, why didn't the American League champions trim them four straight by average scores like that of the final game?

However that may have been, it's all over now, and a set of game, lovable, honest young fellows won out, playing at the matchless gait that bore them twice to the front of the American League. They are grand boys, a credit to the sport, and the sort of lads who are bringing baseball to the point of flawless, sterling popularity. Come to think of it, there's another way of looking at the series:

If the Athletics, playing below their proper speed, could get away with the series, what would they have done to the Giants if they had been in their August condition? Wow, wow, maybe that's the better way to think it over!