

# The Art of Big League Trading

*What I Consider the Essential Features of a Successful Deal  
in Major League Playing Talent*

As Revealed from an Interview with

**JOHN MCGRAW**

Manager of the New York Giants

**L**AST winter was the biggest trading season on record and it looks as though trading would be a prominent part of professional baseball for some time to come. A club is usually pretty well entrenched in its own membership, behind all sorts of barbed wire entanglements of custom and prejudice. But the loss of so many players by draft and enlistment has

demolished most of these entrenchments, just like the fire of heavy artillery, and many clubs have suddenly found themselves out in the open so to speak, maneuvering for position, and willing to trade men wholesale for other players who would strengthen them at critically weak positions.

One of the surest tests of the able

manager is ability to profit by trades. And a big league trade is by no means an effort to sand bag the other fellow, as some of the newspaper boys would like to make out. A baseball trade is precisely on a par with international commerce. The country that produces iron is willing and anxious to trade surplus with the country that produces an over-supply of sugar.

John McGraw has won half a dozen National League pennants largely through engineering successful deals in playing talent



Every club is developing baseball talent of some kind. Every club is signing up young players from the bush leagues, hoping that a reasonable percentage of these players will become Major Leaguers. There is much waste effort here, for nothing is more uncertain than the ability of a youngster who looks good. Time alone will tell the story and the best baseball judgment on earth is frequently at fault in sizing up such ability. This continual effort to develop young players, combined with the continual wastage from the loss of old veterans who have passed along results is an oversupply of talent at some positions and a weakness at others. So the only sane, logical thing to do is to trade the players you don't need, however good they may be, for other players that you do need and must have, although they may not be altogether satisfactory.

A big league trade should result in ad-

vantage to both parties. It is true, no doubt, that a club is apt to rate the quality of the men it has for sale, as high as the facts will warrant but such an attitude is common to all business and is recognized and discounted by anyone with intelligence enough to be in Major League baseball. The point is that both clubs sell their surplus for their necessities, just as nations do in foreign commerce. And both should profit by the transaction.

The public not unnaturally, is often misled about trades because they do not know what the parties in the transaction really had in mind. Where a manager exchanges two .300 hitters for another who can hit for but .260 the public is almost certain to claim that the manager got stung. This does not necessarily follow. The manager might have had half a dozen good outfielders and no dependable shortstop. He might actually benefit from giving two good outfielders for one fair shortstop. It's the same old story of trading what he doesn't need for what he does.

A baseball club is a machine. If you own an automobile it does you no good to have five or six extra tires if your brakes won't work. It does you no good to have three or four promising utility infielders if you are weak behind the bat. Better give away a whole raft of players you don't need for one you do.

And here is where a lot of owners are inclined to take advantage. It is known that a club needs some particular player and must have him. Therefore the owner who has that particular player for disposal, is apt to exact a good round price. But this is all a legitimate part of the business and injures no one provided both parties get the men they actually need.

And there is another angle to big league trades, which is commonly overlooked by the public. The element of time frequently enters into a trade and is its determining factor. Several seasons ago I made a trade with Cincinnati for pitcher Fromme. The trade involved my releasing Groh, one of the best third basemen in the business. Apparently I got stung on the transaction, for Fromme didn't last a great while and wasn't a world beater. But I can assure anyone who wants to know that I was perfectly satisfied. We needed a pitcher badly at the time. Fromme was able to win five or six all important games when I needed them most, and was a decisive factor in winning the pennant. When he had served the purpose for which I secured him, a

temporary stop gap at a critical time in the race, he had repaid me for all he cost. This time element is often the main thing in a trade. The manager wants immediate results. He wants a certain man to do a certain work at a certain time. The time is really the most important consideration of all. I wouldn't have been so anxious to secure Fromme as a regular addition to my pitching staff. But when I got him I needed him, and he came through just as I expected he would. Generally when I make a trade I have immediate results in mind and therefore sometimes give away more value for a certain player than seems justified by his comparative class. But so long as he

is frequently ignored. The manager may need some one or two particular players to round out an otherwise strong club and make it a winner. The difference between a winning club and an also ran is usually due to weakness in one or two positions. The manager, if he is on the job, knows those positions and also knows the precise men he would like to secure, to round out his club. At any time during the season, when he has a chance to get these needed men for his club, he is justified in doing it if he gives three men for one on the trade. Naturally trading in the Major Leagues is a hazardous business. Pure luck is so big a factor in deals of this kind that it is impossible to guard against it. The

most disappointing deal I ever made was when I exchanged Demaree and Stock for Lobert. And yet it was luck that wrecked the deal from my standpoint. Lobert was incapacitated by sickness and injuries almost as soon as he joined our club. Naturally this condition offset all the advantages I expected to gain from the transaction. But I do not claim to have second sight. I could not foresee the physical condition of Lobert. And I had to accept the result as one of the breaks of the game which every manager gets accustomed to, in time.

On the other hand the best deal I ever made was away back in 1904. I let Babb go for Bill Dahlen and Dahlen proved to be just the man we needed to round out one of the best clubs I ever managed. In fact, with the Giants, he had the best seasons of his career.

The recent deal by which I allowed Roush to go to Cincinnati, has caused a good deal of comment. It is true that I let Cincinnati have a grand good player. But why didn't some of the other owners get

after Roush when he was on the market? I didn't pay very much for him, as prices go, when I secured him from the Federal League. No other owners seemed to want him until I had him. And I had no real use for him. I had Burns and Kauff and Robertson. Burns was a fixture. I would have been crazy to think of such a thing as benching Burns to give a youngster a show. Robertson looked like the best natural player in the National League. He was, so far as playing ability is concerned, and I shall never admit otherwise. I couldn't foresee that he wouldn't live up to my expectations. Kauff, in addition to being a capable player, which he has proved himself to be, was the best ad-

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### TRADING MAXIMS OF JOHN MCGRAW

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The element of time frequently enters into a trade. The manager wants immediate results. He wants a man to do a certain work at a certain time.

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does the special work I want him to do, I am satisfied.

The manager who has a wrecked ball club on his hands must, of course, follow different methods. He is building for the future. His trades are generally based on what he considers comparative ability. If he can trade one man who hits .260 for another just as good who in addition hits for .290, he has profited by the transaction. Connie Mack for three years, has been engaged in this kind of slow building, trying to create a winning club in place of a wrecked organization. Most of my trades however, have not been made according to this system. I have generally had immediate results in view.

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vertised star in the Federal League. The public had a great curiosity to see what he would do on the National Circuit. In addition to his value as a player, he had genuine merit as a drawing card. The public has some rights in such matters. The public would surely have roasted me to a finish if I had benched Kauff and played Roush in his place.

As it was I had no immediate use for Roush while Cincinnati wanted him as a regular outfielder. So I let him go and do not consider that I used bad judgment when I made the transfer.

I believe the trade I engineered last winter was a good one. I have no wish to comment on the Herzog affair. He was a valuable man for us when we secured him from Cincinnati. You may remember that the club came through with twenty-six straight victories after he joined us, and would have won the pennant handily had we begun earlier. As it was the trade was negotiated a little too late.

But it is equally clear, I believe, that Herzog had outlived his usefulness with the Giant club.

Just now the Giants are going very well indeed. I hear constant criticism from many people that we are making a run away race of it. No doubt we have a good lead at present. But no manager in baseball ever had a lead big enough to satisfy him at this season of the year. Too many things can happen in baseball, to count pennants in May or June. The wise manager wins every game he possibly can, well knowing that anyone of a half dozen things which may happen, will make him need everyone of those victories before October. I have seen the Giants burn up the circuit in the early weeks and then crumple badly in mid-season, too often to be confident of the showing they may make while the season is young. The year that we won seventeen straight victories on the road and followed it up with twenty-six straight victories later in the season still found us in fourth place at the end. You can't tell anything about a club's prospects from what they do early in the season and I am making no pennant predictions now or at any other time.