
Selected Significances of The Ellery Clark Collection of Boston Red Sox Letters

by

ELLERY H. CLARK, JR.

United States Naval Academy

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the significance of the author's personal correspondence of 55 years (1923 to present) with Boston Red Sox players, representative of their 78-year history, ranging from Cy Young to Carl Yastrzemski. Attention is focused upon their views on baseball's intangibles and tangibles, sociological aspects, and the author's conclusions.

Players from the early Red Sox (1901 - 1921) showed a broad and optimistic attitude toward life, its different stages and problems, recalled pleasant memories of teammates and successful events and evinced enduring comradeship. Since the life span of almost all of these players is over, this period provides valuable information of an age that is past. This research was aided indirectly by the relative success of these early teams and the presence of several excellent correspondents, chiefly college men. In contrast, the period 1922-1932 was one in which ineffectual Boston individual and team performances were matched by their reticence toward answering inquiring letters. Howard Ehmke was a notable exception.

From 1933 to present the correspondence has been extensive. In all three periods, Red Sox pitchers have been the most frequent respondents. Of the many individuals, Harry Hooper was outstanding in providing engrossing, detailed and sustained commentaries. Each of the main divisions of this paper contains a number of selected, brief direct quotations, informative in the special subjects under consideration. In baseball intangibles, some 16 areas are examined, including admiration, compassion, confidence, dedication, determination, humor, joy, leadership, pride, team unity and influence of tension. Illustrative quotations include Larry Gardner's, "In reality we were a big family," and Edward Lewis, later President, University of New Hampshire, commenting in 1901 after a defeat, "Confidence secret of success in pitching, batting, fielding . . . spitting into a spittoon, in public speaking, in shaving." Lonborg reflected on the 1967 pennant, "I was the winning pitcher and had been carried on the shoulders of some of America's finest fans."

Baseball tangibles focus upon pitching, batting and fielding, with additional remarks on self-instruction, tricks of the game, injuries and veteran players' firm conviction they knew more about the game than their managers (Carrigan an exception). For different and

substantial reasons Cy Young equally honored one game each from personal victory and defeat. Jim Rice selected his 200th hit in 1977 as his most rewarding experience to date. Hooper and Duffy Lewis each described how they taught themselves to play difficult right fields (Huntingdon Avenue Grounds) and left fields (Fenway Park), respectively. Their self-instruction achievements directly contributed, with Speaker's invaluable assistance, to the formation of baseball's greatest defensive outfield to date. Duffy Lewis mentioned when at home and losing in 1910, "Some one on the bench would throw out a clean ball for us to hit and if we were in front . a black ball for the other club to hit." Among the sociologic observations are comments on life at the early players' Boston hotel, conditions on road trips, social service, religion, old age and baseball's probable future. Examples include Hooper's statement on road trips when they traveled from their hotel to the park and "had to keep the taxi blinds down to keep from getting hit by fruit and vegetables." Harry also believed Jesus answered his prayer before the final 1912 World Series games, enabling him to make the Series-saving catch off Doyle. Menosky expressed satisfaction from his social service efforts on Detroit's skid row, following his baseball retirement. Bill Lee is gloomy over the sport's future: "Slow down baseball, get in harmony with natural systems." This Boston Red Sox letter collection provides informative authoritative insights into broad as well as baseball-oriented interests. The paper concludes: "The resultant profile of Boston baseball players they themselves have established by their thoughtful letters should command both attention and respect."